A Refraction of Light

by matchstick_dolly

Summary

The Sinnerman's legacy lives on in the LAPD as a new street drug is tied to a string of heinous murders. While Lucifer and Chloe struggle to solve the mystery plaguing Los Angeles, they discover they're stronger together than apart.

In Hell, Cain climbs his way to the top.

Notes

I've chosen not to list content warnings in the AO3 system, but for those who feel they need them, here's a vague warning that won't spoil anything for anyone else: There will be blood and darkness and grit because that's how I roll. My little black heart can't help it. The darkness—particularly in Hell—may or may not include gruesome descriptions of violence, explicit sex, depression or suicide, drug use, and putting a truckload of money in the swear
jar. On the upside, I believe in happiness and the power of love, so there are usually lights at the ends of these tunnels. Usually. If you have questions, you can email me at matchstickdolly@gmail.com.
"It's all true," Chloe breathes, her eyes wide.

"Detective?"

"It's all true." She shuffles back, stopping only when a boot heel collides with the bottom-most stair.

Lucifer steps forward, a hand outstretched in concern—and this is when he sees it, the telltale crimson. His very own Mark of Cain.

"No," he croaks, his hands flying up to his cheeks. Why now? "Detective, I would never hurt you."

Chloe stumbles back, draping herself on the stairs. She never takes her eyes off him as she leans farther away. Farther from him.

"You're—"

"Terrifying?" He drops his hands back to his sides, giving up all pretenses of normality.

"—the Devil."

Emphasis on the. The one, the only, please give a round of applause for.
"I have always told you the truth."

"You don't lie," she agrees, trembling.

"Now you're getting it." A grim smile twists his monstrous mouth.

This is wrong. Even though she's somehow able to form complete sentences—how? it took Linda a week—this is still so very wrong. Assuming there was ever any good way to reveal himself to her, it was decidedly not in a broken room, standing next to her ex-fiancé's cooling corpse.

He knows how it looks, what he looks like and in fact is: a sanguine grotesque in Italian wool. For so long, he's reveled in this face, all the power it affords him, especially among mortals. After all, if he's to be the poster child of evil, why not be it in spades?

Now, though, deep shame gnaws at his insides as he scrambles to stuff the monster back into Pandora's pretty little jar. Again and again he tries, but just as his wings have grown and regrown of their own accord, the leathery, red skin now persists. Here I am, it says. Take a damn good look at my sins.

A small voice whispers inside of Lucifer, What if it never goes away? After all, he's killed Cain, a human.

What a punishment that would be. Like something straight out of his own toolbox in Hell.

They stare at each other in a wild-eyed standoff, spiraling down their own living Hell loops. They breathe raggedly, as if there's not enough air in the cavernous room, as if gale-force winds aren't blasting through the floor-to-ceiling window he's blown to bits.

Chloe breaks the silence, surprising him. "I'm not afraid of you."

"You're an awful liar."

She surprises him again as she forces herself to stand, arms folded over chest, fingers white-knuckling elbows. "I'm not lying." She breaks their hypnotic staring contest and takes in the surrounding room, the chipped columns and destroyed mezzanine. "This is bad."

Welcome back, Detective, he thinks. If he could forget what face he is wearing, the exchange would almost feel normal.

"There's a lot to explain," she says.

Too much, really. For example, the unexplainable: a Hell-forged blade, enough feathers to build a divine goose from scratch, not to mention Satan himself, letting it all air out. The whole bloody trifecta.

She looks at Cain with a thousand-yard stare. "Is that one of Maze's knives?"

"It is, actually." And how did crafty Cain come to have it, Mazikeen? It certainly can't go into evidence. "Right," he sighs. "You're taking this far better than you should, so, in for a penny, in for a pound. I suggest you look away, Detective. I'm about to disturb the dead."

Without further preamble—because, really, how can he smooth over desecration with a face like this?—he bends and yanks the blade from Cain's chest. The depth of the wound and the force of the tug lift Cain's torso off the floor. The body falls back with a heavy thud that's music to his ears. Ding-dong, the bastard's dead. Only took thousands of years and a trail of bodies.
Chloe watches without blinking or commenting.

There’s nothing to do about the remaining knife wound or the feathers, except to call in favors later that will make such problems go away.

It’s possible Amenadiel is taking calls and would feel inclined to pop in for a time-bending cleanup session. Unfortunately, Amenadiel’s abilities come as part of a package deal that includes meandering theological discourses Lucifer has no stomach for today. There’s also the chance that Chloe would lose what is left of her mind if she had to deal with two supernatural beings right now.

Lucifer scratches at his face, grinds his teeth. His devilish skin remains locked in place. "Well, it would seem I’m stuck. This has never happened before."

"You...you can control it, usually?"

"Well, I don't bloody well go walking about like this all the time, do I?" he snaps, and immediately regrets it when she flinches. More gently, he adds, "Nobody would have a thing to do with me, Detective, least of all you."

She draws an unsteady breath. "I know this isn't you, Lucifer. And, well, even if it is, it's only one side of you. Right?"

"How do you not get this?" he laughs. "This. Is. Who. I. Am. What will it take for you to see that?" He scoffs, "You won't see it even when it's staring you in the face."

"I—"

Sirens wail, interrupting her. The warped bubble they've found themselves in bursts.

"Chloe... I don't want to leave you, but I..." Lucifer indicates his face with a disbelieving huff.

She nods. "Go."

"I'll make this right. You have my word."

"It's okay," she says, and gives him a watery smile.

Lucifer knows it's not, but he flees the scene. A concrete stairwell spits him out into a back alley that smells of motor oil and rotting cabbage from the rubbish of an adjoining Korean restaurant. Stumbling to a shadowed space between two close-set buildings, he leans against a graffitied wall and tries one last time to put the Devil away. But Cain is right. He can't outrun what he's done. He's been a fool, believing he could be anything else.

Police cars surround the block, their sirens screaming, and, well, that’s that. He must go. With a muffled cry, he unfurls his broken, bleeding wings and soars high on a lightning strike of pain. Loose feathers drift to the ground behind him.

The air thins above the sprawling, sun-kissed streets of Los Angeles. He zigs and zags low over the city, lower than he should in these days of planes and drones and zoom lenses. It's all his battered wings, all the ache beneath his ribs, will allow.

Soon, his building comes into view. He dives forward, aiming for the penthouse balcony until he remembers Dan and Ella may be inside with Cain's underling. Slowing his descent with a groan, he changes course for the rooftop. When he lands, it's on tiptoes, and his knees buckle beneath him. He collapses onto the hot concrete and stays down, panting as he draws his wings in one last time.
Before darkness consumes him, he crawls into the shadows. There, he cries softly and wonders if, like so many things in this endless existence, Chloe Decker's presence in his life has come to an abrupt, unsatisfying end.

Chapter End Notes

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There is only one law God built into his creation: kill or be killed. Hunt the lion before he eats you. Destroy your neighbor before he makes war. Smash your brother's skull before he slits your throat.

Cain aims and squeezes the trigger. This is his calling, to raise the sword and axe, to blow the dart, to strangle with rope and pummel with rock. Thousands of years, hundreds of weapons, the same end result. Time and again.

The world slows as first one, then two bullets exit the chamber. The projectiles spin, piercing the air in endless pirouettes as they hunt their target. The archangel Amenadiel, afflicted with divine hubris, never sees what's coming, never thinks to be aware of his surroundings. But his companion, Charlotte Richards, knows evil. She looks. She sees.

She does not sit idly by, and this changes everything.

The bullets meant for God's favorite son sink into human flesh. A mistake, a simple mistake, one of many, but how far will these ripples spread? Will this be his undoing?

The ground swallows him. He's born again into a black room. No walls, no floor, no ceiling. A void.

Chloe Decker stands before him, naked. She holds out her hand, a diamond engagement ring resting on her palm. "I can't marry you, Cain. I'm sorry."

She never suspects the depths of his evil, but the brightness in her shines on the dark truth that is in him. Her allegiances lie elsewhere. A pentagram is carved above her left breast. Fresh blood drips from the star-shaped wound, which is backlit by fire.

The gun is still in his hand, and, suddenly, his arm has a mind of its own. "No!" he screams. He uses all his strength to try and stop it, but his arm raises straight and true. His hand turns the gun sideways. Chloe begs for her life as he presses the muzzle between her blue eyes.

"He can't have you," he growls. "You were supposed to fix me."

Cain squeezes the trigger, and Chloe crumples, blood and bone exploding from her head. This is his calling.

There is only one law God built into his creation: kill or be killed. Hunt the lion before he eats you. Destroy your neighbor before he makes war. Smash your brother's skull before he slits your throat.

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Cain aims and squeezes the trigger.

This is his calling.
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Chloe is naked, or, at least, that's what it feels like when she hands over her badge and gun.

"See you in ten days, Decker."

"Yeah. Ten days," she echoes, shoulders slumping.

Rodney Garcia, the bald, hulking Latino who's serving as acting lieutenant, shrugs behind his desk. "Consider it a vacation. You know this shit always blows over."

It certainly did for Dan after Palmetto Street, but then Dan's Dan, and Chloe's...well, Chloe has never been one of the boys.

_They're threatened_, she remembers Lucifer saying, on the very first day they met. _You're clearly smart and have notable instincts._

That's still probably one of the nicest things anyone has ever said about her skills as a cop. Does the meaning change, knowing it was said by the Devil? Don't think about it, she chastises herself.

She makes her way through the bullpen. Even in her current fog, it's impossible to miss the stares and stage whispers. She's back to being the precinct's favorite pariah.

_Ignore them_, he'd said. _Trust yourself._

Oh, but it's hard. And it's not as if she doesn't deserve _some_ side-eyeing this time. She disobeyed a ton of protocol, going in that place "alone." Worse, her story, that Pierce and his men turned on each other at the most convenient time possible, is flimsy—ludicrous, even. Especially since it's coming from Pierce's ex. Especially since Dan and Ella just happened to bring in Pierce's lackey, John Barrow, on the same exact day.

Barrow. She hates knowing she'll never get to question him, or better yet, watch him squirm under Lucifer's mojo. And his statements may yet prove detrimental to her career.

The only thing keeping the suits from making an example out of her is the baseball-sized bruise that's blossomed two inches below her collarbone, a souvenir from being shot. Again. Making an example out of a cop is one thing. Making an example out of a cop who got injured in the line of duty is another. Getting shot is something all cops fear and grudgingly respect.

Thank God for Kevlar—well, thank _someone_. Probably a wild-haired inventor in a basement somewhere.

And thank the Devil. She's no idiot. She may not remember everything that happened, much less _how_ it all happened, but she knows Lucifer is the only reason she's alive.

Why does the Devil keep saving her life? As he's told her many times before, he's immortal. The concept alone boggles the mind. He can't honestly care about one little human, can he? And if temptation's really his angle, well, what a long game this has all been.

Chloe scoffs at what her life has become and jabs at the elevator button for the first floor. Now
She's thinking about the metaphysical again, which, no, just no. She needs a break. She already
spent all night contemplating her place in the universe while cuddling Trixie.

She's always been a both-feet-on-the-ground kind of woman. If she couldn't see it, couldn't gather
enough evidence to support it, it wasn't real or it wasn't worth her time. No exceptions. Now there's
evidence of the divine within driving distance. Huge ecclesiastical questions plague her at every
turn.

Heaven and Hell, God and the Devil. Angels, demons, and who the hell knows what else. All real.

What bothers her most is how she is both surprised...and not surprised at all. All the baffling things
Lucifer has said and done during their partnership click into place like LEGO bricks. The
complaints about his otherworldly family, the magnetic charm and hypnotism, the sleight of hand,
the endless wealth and questionably-legal wheeling and dealing, the superhuman strength.

It all seems so obvious that she wonders if she should just do the LAPD a huge favor and tender
her resignation. How is it that the Devil has been strolling around L.A., solving crimes by her side?
Why does he own a nightclub? Most importantly, how is it that she's never seen him for what he is,
even when all the signs have been there, even when he's told her the truth every day?

How on earth did he become her best friend? At least... He was her best friend. Now, who knows?
Is it really possible to be friends with the Devil? What are the eternal consequences of that?

In the lobby, she stops beside a trash can. Her constitution has been pretty touch and go. After not
eating for nearly twenty-four hours, the coffee she forced down her gullet this morning is
threatening to revolt one way or another.

Breathe, she tells herself. Nausea and cramps roll through her for several long moments before
blessedly subsiding.

A "vacation" is the very last thing she needs when her mind is racing like a hamster on a wheel.
The thought of sitting at home with all these thoughts and fears... Forget food. A stop by a liquor
store is in order. She'll take a page out of Lucifer's book and subsist on stimulants and depressants.
Caffeine, alcohol...calories are calories.

Outside, she climbs into her car, cranks the engine, and dares to merge into L.A.'s clogged arteries.
She drives even more carefully than usual. One bad accident could throw her into an eternity she
never believed in before now. Worse, without more answers to Life's Biggest Questions, there's
really no telling where she's headed in the afterlife.

What does it take to get into Heaven, to be relegated to Hell? She's fired her share of bullets over
the years, disobeyed her parents, lied; let her eyes wander when she was married, even if she never,
ever considered acting on those feelings. Oh, and Hot Tub High School looms, topless as always.
Ugh.

She falls behind a red Honda Civic that's seen better days. Lucifer's crimson skin swims before her
mind's eye, making it difficult to focus. Memory or dream? It's almost hard to be sure. Almost.

The Devil, it turns out, is more and less disturbing than Hollywood imagines. Hornless, still
standing tall and proud in a man's lithe body, in that damn tailored suit, Lucifer wasn't nearly so
alien. Instead, it's the memory of the pain carved into his flesh that troubles her. He looked like a
scarred burn victim whose only treatment had been sunshine and saltwater. Who had no hope of
healing.
Does his face feel as raw as it looks, or is it an illusion? A visual representation of what Lucifer has always said Hell is: endless torture, agony without panacea. Et cetera, et cetera, ad infinitum.

Though she didn't grow up in a religious household, culture has nonetheless taught her the gist of the Biblical Fall. That there was an angelic rebellion, that pride cometh before. Though she has witnessed his violent outbursts, she can't imagine Lucifer leading a rebellion, even if she knows firsthand how stubbornly proud he can be.

But even assuming a Heavenly bloodbath, she struggles to see how eternal punishment could ever be fair, which is worrying when she considers some of the killers she's helped put away over the years. She's not sure anyone, even Warden Smith, who killed her father, deserves eternal damnation.

Lucifer's existence is proof of God, but his existence also raises many questions about God. Questions, such as, Is God good and just?

What does it mean if the answer is no?

At home, it's so quiet that she doesn't know what to do with herself. Maze is still gone. Trixie is at school. She's never been one to sit around, but she also can't go far because the precinct may call her in at any time for more questioning during the investigation into Pierce's crimes and death.

No. No, not touching that today, either. Every time she thinks about how she had sex with him, how he is literally Cain, the world's first murderer, she wants to claw her skin off in a hot shower.

She pours a glass of cheap wine and glances at the door, half expecting Lucifer to waltz in and scold her for having poor taste. He certainly could bypass her deadbolt if he wanted. It wouldn't be the first time. What does a little lock mean to the Devil? No wonder stopping him from doing inappropriate things has always been like trying to hold back a tsunami with a fishing net.

Did he make it back to Lux? What face is he wearing now?

Biting her lip, Chloe grabs her phone. There's nothing wrong with checking up on him, is there? But of course I'm fine, she imagines him crooning. I'm the Devil, darling. I'm immortal.

She shudders and unlocks her phone, only to cringe when she sees she has new messages from Dan and Ella. From Dan, a simple "Call me." From Ella, a plaintive "Heyyy, let me know when you're around." They have questions—lots of them. Some of them she can answer, but most she can't, or at least won't, not yet. Not until her head is clearer.

They barely managed to get their stories straight before they gave their statements. Chloe knows it was easier for her than it was for them, though they all received ten-day suspensions. Easier for her, because she knew what was truly at stake.

"You can't tell anyone Lucifer was there."

And they didn't. Whether they lied blatantly or by omission, they obstructed justice for her. If there's one good thing that's come from her warped love life and the unrest at the LAPD, it's been finding out who will "ride or die" with her. It's a small list of people, but a damn fine one.

She will talk to Dan and Ella. Soon. For now, she taps on Lucifer's cheeky grin in her contacts. Their message history is long, amusingly mundane, and laden with more innuendo that she cares to admit—and not all of it Lucifer's, either. Few days have passed in the last two years when they
haven't teased each other or shared something funny, although the messages turned far more curt and coolly-professional during her ill-fated relationship with Pierce. Chloe scrolls up to simpler times.

_**Chloe:** Mind gracing us with your presence? We have a case._

_**Lucifer:** Be there soon. Gluttony called and I of course answered._

He'd attached an image of an open box of a dozen assorted doughnuts. One long, slender finger pointed to the powdered, lemon-filled doughnut at the center of the box. Her favorite.

A small thing, but Chloe's heart squeezes at the memory, which conjures several others like it. How bad can the Devil be if he remembers your favorite doughnut? Sure, he sometimes has selfish, ulterior motives, but not always. Sometimes he slow dances with you simply because you missed out on prom.

_Hey, are you okay?_ She sends the message before she can overthink it.

And then she waits. And waits. And waits.

On the third day of her suspension, Chloe stares blankly at the Bible in front of her, unable to focus on the dull cadence of Deuteronomy's endless _shall_ s and _shalt not_ s. It's her first time reading the holy book, and so far it's both a drag and an acid trip that can't possibly offer much insight into the truth. Right?

Unable to cope with the boredom of suspension and the thoughts rattling around in her brain, she's given into studying, or at least trying to. Anyone who sees her now might think she's dived headlong into church life.

Stacks of religious tomes, apologetics, literature, and academic ponderings tower on her kitchen table, most courtesy of the Los Angeles public library. She can't help but notice the majority of the books are in excellent condition. No one ever borrows them.

Unfortunately, studying religion feels a lot like doing paperwork, perhaps worse, and she finds she has nearly the same attention span for tedious reading in her thirties as she did when she barely got a C in English literature in high school.

She can almost hear Lucifer: _"Why waste your time on that rubbish when you can go straight to the source?"_ How apocryphal.

Even if she's ready for that—and it's hard to say if she is—two days have passed and he still hasn't responded to her messages. Is it wrong or stupid for her to worry?

Could he have been injured without her realizing it? For all his claims of immortality, she's seen him get hurt. He bleeds like any other man.

"I don't wanna go to school."

Chloe blinks out of her trance. She's slipped down another rabbit hole, and her coffee's grown cold beside her copy of the King James Bible.

She opens her arms for her daughter. "Why not, monkey?" she asks as neutrally as possible. The past few days haven't been easy for Trixie, who's had to learn that both Charlotte and Pierce are dead, not to mention the PG-rated version of her own mother's latest brush with death.
Trixie weasels onto her lap, all gangly limbs and warm, reassuring weight. Chloe buries her nose in her daughter's hair and breathes deep. It won't be long before Trixie doesn't want to climb all over her like this.

"Brayden's being mean to me."

Brayden, Brayden, Brayden... Try as she might, Chloe can't remember the boy's face, and wonders if that makes her a bad mother.

"What's he doing, baby?"

"He told everyone you're not a cop anymore because you..." She whispers, "Because you killed somebody. That's not true, is it?"

"I didn't kill anyone." Not for lack of trying, but still. "But I'm on a little break during the investigation. Tell you what, I'll talk to Miss Rawlins about Brayden when I pick you up this afternoon."

"I want Lucifer to do it."

Chloe frowns. She can imagine how Lucifer might "talk" to Rachel Rawlins, who is pretty, perky, and barely old enough to drink. She refuses to think about why that bothers her so much.

"Baby, Lucifer can't—"

"But he always fixes it."

That stops her short. "Since when?"

Trixie gasps and throws her hands over her mouth. "It was supposed to be a secret," she says through her fingers.

"Well," Chloe starts, eyes narrowing, "there aren't any secrets between Lucifer and me." She's such a liar, but Trixie hasn't figured that out yet. "So you can tell me."

Burying her face into Chloe's shoulder, Trixie mumbles against her neck, "He sometimes talks to the other kids for me. I'm not good at it."

That...can't be right. Lucifer hates children and only tolerates Trixie because he grudgingly respects her burgeoning negotiation skills. The thought of him speaking to other children on Trixie's behalf... Well, she isn't sure whether to cackle or cry.

"I tried texting him, but he didn't reply," Trixie adds morosely.

Chloe's dumbfounded again. Since when do Trixie and Lucifer text one another? She really should be more diligent about monitoring cell phone use.

Suddenly, she's desperate to see Lucifer, even knowing what she knows. And what's stopping her from going to Lux, anyway? Her gut decides it for her. She'll see him. No more hiding, no more agonizing. Grow a pair, Decker.

"I'll talk to him, monkey, see what he can do. But you're going to school, okay?"

"Okay," Trixie grouches.

"Go on. Get dressed or we'll be late."
Hopping down from her mother's lap, Trixie makes her way back to her bedroom. At her doorway, she turns and points a small finger. "He owes me a favor." At that, she disappears into her room.

Jesus, her daughter's been making deals with the Devil.

After dropping Trixie off at school, Chloe navigates to Lux, her hands clammy against the wheel. She calls Lucifer on speakerphone, but the connection rings several times before going to voicemail.

"Hello," the latest version of his answering message purrs, "I'm rather busy at the moment, but do feel free to tell me what it is you desire."

Chloe rolls her eyes. That recording isn't any better with context.

"Look," she says, her voice high and nervous, "you can either talk to me now or in twenty minutes. I'm on my way over."

He doesn't answer or return her call, but she stays the course. A strange sort of anger builds in her chest as she nears Sunset Boulevard. The situation—this whole Lucifer Morningstar is literally Satan thing—is no reason for him to ignore her and leave her assuming the worst. That is not what partners do.

Still, that sentiment doesn't stop her from groaning and lightly bashing her forehead against the steering wheel in the parking garage below Lux. What is she doing here?

But, then, somewhere deep down, she knows, doesn't she? If she plucks at that dark part of her soul, she knows exactly what has drawn her. Lucifer has been the biggest mystery of her life, and she loves a good mystery, will dive headfirst into danger for the sake of solving one. And now that she's so close to understanding him... Well, there's a lot she's willing to risk.

A gun and a badge do not a detective make. Instead, as Lucifer tends to suspect, the key ingredient is desire. Good detectives desire to know the truth, no matter what it is. That's either in your blood or it's not. It has always burned in Chloe Decker, and so she finds her bravery and climbs out of the car.

"Hey, Detective Decker! That you?"

Chloe turns. One of Lux's bouncers, a big teddy bear of an old white guy named Henry, waddlemarches across the lot. Eager to be on her way, she smiles tightly. "Hey, Henry."

"Mr. Morningstar's closed everything up for the week."

"Oh, I'm not here for the bar." Her brow furrows. Shutting down Lux isn't like Lucifer.

Henry stops a few feet away and clears his throat. "No private visitations, either."

"Private visitations" is very loaded, but the rejection stings a little, especially after years of easy, line-skipping access to the building. But then she rolls the idea around in her mind and decides refusing all guests makes sense if Lucifer looks anything like he did a few days ago. He wants to run a nightclub, not a haunted house.

Maybe the edict isn't meant to include her, and maybe it is. It doesn't really matter. She's here now, feeling ballsy enough to look the Devil in the eye. She's not in the mood for his bullshit.
Digging into her back pocket, she produces her parking ticket and waves it. "No problem. Can you validate my parking before I leave?"

Henry's immediately sympathetic to her plight. *Got him,* she thinks, and feels only slightly guilty for the manipulation. The flat thirty-dollar fee to park under this building is a crime against humanity, especially when you consider Lux has a cover charge and overpriced drinks.

"Sure thing," he says, and takes the ticket. "I'll be back in a minute."

She watches him retreat. When he's halfway across the lot, she turns and bolts for the elevators. Her heeled boots pound on the concrete, echoing loudly.

"Hey!" Henry shouts. "Stop!" He breathes out in giant puffs as he gives chase.

"Sorry!" she cries, slapping the elevator call button with the flat of her hand. "I promise I won't let him fire you!" A hysterical laugh bubbles out of her as she wonders if the Devil might actually be able to fire someone quite literally. Who knows? Anything seems possible now.

By some stroke of luck, the elevator is already on P1, so the doors open immediately. She throws herself inside, heart racing. Henry is a mere fifteen feet away when the doors slide closed.

Using the small panel above the building's generic floor buttons, she punches in the four digits that will carry her to the penthouse. In recent months, and for reasons known only to him, Lucifer changed the PIN from the intentionally insecure and widely known 0000 to something more exclusive and difficult to remember. But Chloe knows the number by heart, and the elevator jerks skyward.

"Oh my God," she laughs, collapsing against the back wall. "Oh my God." Busting in like the Kool-Aid Man isn't part of her usual repertoire. If this were any other situation involving any other people, Lucifer would be cheering on her temerity, but it's only her and her resolve comes and goes in sickening waves.

The elevator shakes to a stop, and the doors open with a *ding.* No going back now. She steps into the penthouse.

"Lucifer?" she calls quietly. "It's me."

Sweat beads at her neck, and gooseflesh prickles across her arms. She's not sure what she should expect, but is relieved to find no white sheets covering the furniture. Maybe she's crazy, but the thought that Lucifer might leave has been more terrifying than the truth of who he is.

She looks left and right, taking in the extravagant bar, piano, library, and living area. Recent discoveries put the penthouse, with its numerous Old World artifacts, in a different light. Suddenly, it looks far less like expensive replicas and far more holy-shit-authentic. Just look at those old books, at that stained glass leading into the bedroom. Wow.

Chloe rounds the tan, leather sofa and freezes, holding back a gasp. Lucifer lies flat on his stomach in nothing but black boxer-briefs. His skin is still that unnatural, ruinous scarlet, from his eerily bald head, to his bare feet. Dark veins twist beneath the surface, and bright red, braided cords of scars layer his back, shoulders, and thighs, as though he's been whipped many times.

He is the definition of a monster, but knowing this doesn't diminish the strange sense of protectiveness that grabs hold of her lungs and tugs. "Lucifer," she whispers, and steps closer. His face is turned toward the back of the sofa, nearly buried into the crevice. "Are you okay? Are you awake?"
Empty scotch bottles are strewn about the floor. Orange pill bottles and drug paraphernalia litter the glass coffee table: half-smoked joints, pipes, and what looks suspiciously like the biggest brick of heroin she's ever seen. Just laying right out there.

Any other time, she'd be appalled. But nothing here reminds her of Lucifer's hedonistic benders. This reeks of self-medication.

Whether he's asleep or deep in narcosis, he doesn't stir. Far from being terrified of the Devil, she is terrified of his stillness and the dried bloodstains that have soaked into the fine leather. Now that she knows who he is, what could possibly reduce the force of nature that is Lucifer Morningstar?

She kneels beside the sofa, careful not to disturb the glass bottles. "I'm going to sit with you, okay?" She considers turning him over and checking for wounds, but worries she might do more harm than good. What does she know about supernatural injury or pain?

Her palm damp and fingers trembling, she places a hand on Lucifer's bicep, careful to avoid what looks like a half-healed knife wound. The muscle twitches, startling her, then settles. His devilish flesh is rough, feverishly warm, and granulated, like fruit leather or animal hide.

"Please be okay," Chloe murmurs.

She doesn't move for a long time. Her feet fall asleep beneath her. As she watches the shallow rise and fall of Lucifer's maimed back, she is strangely out-of-body, everywhere and nowhere.

As she waits, she has time to think again about all the signs there have been over the years, all the clues. A mantra cycles through her brain: He's the Devil, the Devil, the Devil. But somewhere else, somewhere deeper, she thinks it doesn't matter, that maybe she has always known he was telling the truth. He is more than the stories others have made up about him. He is more than his hair-raising family. He deserves someone on his side. Why not her?

Shadows shift beyond the penthouse, until high noon arrives and devours them. Sometime later, Lucifer stirs and releases a deep, troubled groan.

"Shh, shh, shh," Chloe hushes, like she does when Trixie's sick and buried beneath blankets. "I'm here."

Lucifer mumbles incoherently. And then, "De-Detective?"

"I'm here," she says again, caressing his rough skin.

Lucifer breathes quietly. She thinks he's fallen asleep again, until he says, "I don't want you to see me like this." His words are quiet and thick, but intelligible.

"Too bad," she whispers.

"This face isn't meant for you."

"I can handle it."

Slowly, careful not to move his body, he turns his head. She forces herself to look at him, and he regards her with eyes lit by dancing hellfire. As much as he may say he doesn't want her here, there's a challenge in his gaze that she thinks he wants her to meet. He expects her to run away, screaming, but he hopes she doesn't, too.
"Why are you here?" he rasps.

"Because you're my best friend." Chloe dares to touch his bare head. The burnt flesh there is uneven and shifts disconcertingly under the weight of her hand. "I told you. You don't scare me."

"But how?"

She shrugs, a tender expression softening her. "I know you." Swallowing hard, she blinks away tears. "Why didn't you tell me you were hurt? I would've come sooner."

"I'll be fine. I'm just...healing slowly."

"Are you supposed to heal fast?"

"I wouldn't have been the lord of Hell for long if I'd ended up like this every time some upstart tried to off me."

"Right," she breathes, trying desperately to keep from falling down that rabbit hole. Of course there's violence and politics in Hell. Lots of politicians, too, no doubt. "What do you need me to do?" She glances around his apartment, as if by looking she might conjure a hospital room and doctor schooled in the supernatural. "I know some first aid."

"I'm all right. Go home, Detective."

"And leave you all alone? Not a chance."

"Don't be stubborn. Maybe I won't look like...this, next time you see me." He flashes her a fragile, awkward smile that sends a chill down her spine. "There's no denying I'm much more dashing normally."

"I couldn't care less what you look like right now," she admonishes, her voice sounding unnervingly like her mother's on the brink of meltdown. "I just want you to be okay."

He searches her face. "You're not lying, are you?"

"Of course I'm not lying," she retorts.

"Fine." Rolling a shoulder, he winces. "Light a joint for me, will you?" He squints. "Take a drag while you're at it."

Chloe turns to the coffee table, flicks open a nearby Zippo lighter, and brings one of the half-smoked blunts back to life. She doesn't hesitate to take a puff before handing it to him. Twenty years have passed since she last smoked up—once, back in her acting days. Her throat and lungs burn with a vengeance until she hacks into the crook of her elbow.

The sofa shudders beside her. It takes her a moment to realize Lucifer is laughing. It's a chilling sight in his devil face.

"You're an asshole," she sighs, and then laughs, too. This situation couldn't be anymore bizarre. If she looks too closely at it, she fears she might fall apart.

"I'm going to sit up," he says.

He waves her away when she leans up on her knees to help him. Her heart lurches when she realizes he was warning her, not requesting assistance. As if she's a deer that might dart away from any sudden movements. He may be right.
Sitting on his sofa in nothing but his underwear, the Devil is somewhere between larger-than-life and so oddly incongruous as to be cartoonish. His long legs settle beside her, where she still kneels on the floor. She doesn't miss how he digs his toes into the plush rug to hide charred-black nails.

Lucifer affects sobriety. Forced as it is, he does look more whole for it. There are no gaping wounds on his torso, no signs of where all the bloodstains have come from. So, where is he injured?

The room begins to smell of marijuana, thinly-veiled with vanilla. He expertly puffs smoke rings before offering the joint to her again. "No, thanks," she says. "I drove here."

He refrains from poking fun at her, like he normally would. "Henry wasn't supposed to let anyone in," he remarks. "You weren't even supposed to make it into the garage."

"Don't blame Henry. It's not his fault I made it up."

"That I don't doubt," Lucifer sighs. "I should've changed the code, but I didn't think—" He looks out the window, smoke billowing out his nose.

"You didn't think I'd come see you," she finishes.

They're quiet for several moments before Chloe puts a hand on his knee, which is endearingly knobby in a way that helps her accept the color of his skin. He twitches, his eyes darting to the point of contact, but he doesn't move away. "Let me help you," she pleads.

"I told you, Detective. You can help me by going home." But when he leans back against the sofa, a barely-controlled panic contorts his already-warped features.

Her fingers dig into him. "What's wrong?"

He hesitates before admitting, "My wings. It's always the bloody wings."

"Your..." She frowns. "Your wings?"

If he has any, Chloe doesn't see them, but even so, more LEGO bricks snap together. All his complaints about his wings these past few months... Oh, and the loft. In her eagerness to put that day behind her—and her inability to think of much other than Lucifer's face and Pierce's corpse—she somehow forgot about all the feathers.

She sits back on her heels, her jaw slack. "We flew, didn't we? Up to the rooftop. Those were your feathers."

"Yes."

"You saved me."

"No, I brought all of this into your life," he corrects.

What a ridiculous belief. "Just let me see them."

As uncomfortable as he is, her bossiness seems to amuse him. "Detective," he chuckles weakly, "at least buy me a drink first." The skin where his brows normally are lifts high on his forehead. Licking his thumb and index finger, he snuffs out the remaining nub of cigarette and tosses it back onto the coffee table.

"I'm not going to let you sit here in pain when you saved my life."
"Do you think you owe me?" he snaps. "Because you most certainly do not. Anyway, don't you suppose you're getting enough of an eyeful as it is? Let's not push it, shall we?"

"I'm looking right at you, aren't I? And I can handle your wings. I already saw the replica, remember?"

"It isn't the same. I've no desire to turn your brain into mush."

"Don't flatter yourself."

He snorts, taken aback. Despite his fiery gaze, he regards her coolly, hunting for some sign of weakness. "Very well," he acquiesces a moment later, and pushes to his feet with a grunt. "It's your own mind, I suppose. Stand back, please."

Chloe rises and takes several steps back. When he's satisfied with her distance, he bends and grips his knees, his shoulders rolling. A gruesome crack resounds, and he lets out a string of curses.

One minute, the Devil stoops, dark and snarling. In the next, Chloe shrinks away from the explosion of raw matter that has taken shape. Her ears lightly pop around a soft flutter.

Lucifer was right. No replica could ever prepare her for his true wings, which span at least ten feet on either side of his body. The pale feathers, though coated in a layer of dust, catch all the light in the room, reflecting it back with a warm glow. Heat rolls off him in waves, as if he's burning some fuel from within.

"Happy now?" he quips.

"Holy shit."

"Literally that, yes." He flashes a grin before his head lolls and his wings droop.

Chloe rushes forward, snagging him around the waist as he topples. She's unable to ignore the cat-tongue roughness of his skin as his size and weight draw her down to the sofa with him. He moans in agony as his wings are crushed beneath them. His body gives one last defiant twitch before going slack.

Scrambling away, she openly gawks. There's nothing remotely human about the devil-angel hybrid before her. It's almost impossible to see the man she knows beneath all these layers. Yet, isn't this exactly who he's always said he is, deep down—the Devil, a punished and punisher angel?

Awe wears off in increments, until she can finally recognize how damaged the feathers actually are. What a second before looked like pink and red patterns in his feather vanes is now obviously dried blood.

Circling him, she finds the source of at least some of the blood, where his wings peek up above the back of the sofa. These are not just any wounds, either. She knows a gunshot wound when she sees one, even among all the plumage.

What she can see of his back is a minefield of dried blood and torn and blown out feathers. The wounds have clotted, but the surrounding flesh, which is clearly meant to be pale white, is nearly as angry and red as the skin on the rest of his body.

It's only now that she realizes how dire the situation with Pierce was, the great price Lucifer has paid for her life. He used his own body to shield her. It's the ultimate gesture a cop's partner can make on the job. Tears sting her eyes.
"How could you be so stupid," she chides, unsure whether her ire is directed at herself or the unconscious angel.

Cleaning these wounds will be a very big job, one that's she's not at all equipped to handle, even at the best of times. But who else does he have? Who else knows the truth—and, more importantly, believes it? She glances at a clock on a nearby wall and feels like she's being torn in two. Trixie's school will let out soon, and there's still Brayden to deal with.

She rounds the sofa again and leans forward to touch Lucifer's shoulder, which she carefully shakes. His eyes snap open immediately, and she stumbles back, her calves bumping against the coffee table. They stare at each other.

"I have to pick Trixie up," she says, apologetic. "I'll be back as soon as I can."

Lucifer, eyes half-lidded, looks away. "There's no need. As I've explained, I will heal."

"But you'll heal faster if I help you, won't you?"

He grimaces, but doesn't lie. "The bullets are a problem. But—"

"No buts." Chloe can tell he's mere moments away from banning her return altogether. "Can we make a deal?" she blurts out.

Even if he knows she's playing him, he can't help perking up. She barely contains her shudder as his red eyes swivel back to her. The way his wings splay around him, it almost looks like he sits upon a throne, a red lord of otherworldly origins. How she ever missed the authority built into his bones, she'll never know.

"You have my attention, Detective. What is it you desire?" He quirks one of those hairless brows. "Do you have something to offer in exchange?"

The question makes her shiver. "I'll clean you up if you'll do whatever it is you do for Trixie at school."

He snorts, disappointed. "That's hardly your desire. In fact, I believe I already owe your offspring. More importantly, why hasn't she learned to keep secrets? No one likes a gossip."

How is she having this conversation with Satan?

"She's ten, and I'm her mom."

"Yes, well."

"She's having trouble with a boy named Brayden." Oh, God, is it wrong to bring down the Devil on small children?

"Ah, yes, Brayden McNeil. A repeat offender." Chloe feels less guilty now. "Foolish boy, but then he is the son of a rather spectacularly immoral solicitor, so what can one expect? Say no more."

"So, it's a deal?"

"It's a deal," he affirms. "Tell Beatrice it will be taken care of by tomorrow. Remind her I will not owe her after this."

"There's no rush."
"You've my word, Detective. Now, be a dear and fetch me another Dalmore before you go."

As she hands him his absurdly expensive whisky, she forces herself to stare into the yawning abyss of his eyes. It's getting easier to do. "You have my word, too," she says. "I'll be back tonight."

Lucifer raises the bottle at her snidely. He doesn't believe her at all.

Chapter End Notes

Fic Recs • My Fics, Categorized • My Fanvids on YouTube • Tumblr
Cain aims and squeezes the trigger.

Cain aims and...a man takes the gun away.

The man's slender form towers, so that Cain must look up into his eyes—one crystal blue, the other a black abyss. He is disconcerting to look at: pale white and bald, his arms far too long for his body.

"I am Balor," the man, the creature, says. He grins, revealing broken, yellowed teeth. "Do you wish to be free, child?"

"Free?" Cain asks. "Free from what?"

Balor, who is dressed in nothing but tattered corduroys, lifts a skinny arm, indicating the world around them. It's nighttime, and they're deep in Griffith Park, at an overlook of Los Angeles. Behind Balor, Cain can make out the archangel Amenadiel, where he sits upon a park bench.

"I need to kill him," Cain growls, grasping for the gun Balor has taken.

Balor laughs, snatching the weapon out of reach and holding it high. "You have killed him before, many times. This world is a lie."

To prove it, Balor rests the gun on his palms and whispers a guttural word. The weapon fades into nothingness, there one second, gone the next.

Cain takes a step back, the hairs on his arms standing to attention. "How did you do that?"

"I am the archdemon who rules over this corner of Hell," says Balor. "I do as I please."

"I'm dead?" Deep in his gut, Cain knows it's true. Panic seizes him. It wasn't supposed to be like this. "I can't be in Hell!"

"Oh, but you are." Balor offers Cain his hand, mismatched eyes gleaming. "Come, child. I will free you from this nightmare."

Cain hesitates, sensing the gravity of the decision. He's so certain he's never been here before, but something gnaws at him, some sneaking suspicion that he no longer knows himself. Perhaps... Perhaps Balor knows best. They stand there for what may be minutes or hours, until finally Cain puts his hand into the thin man's waiting grasp.

"Yesss," Balor hisses, his uneven grin euphoric. He clamps cool, spindly fingers around Cain's wrist. With an unnaturally strong pull, he yanks Cain off his feet and begins to drag him across the dirt, toward some unknown destination.

Cain cries out, his shoulder burning in protest. He scrabbles against the ground, kicking up dust as he tries to regain his footing, but Balor is strong and doesn't slow enough for him to gain traction.

"You are mine now. I do as I please with you."
A giant, wooden door stands beside a dry shrub, walled in by nothing. Balor holds up his free hand, palm facing outward, and the door bursts open with a resounding crack. Searing heat blasts through the doorway, taking Cain's breath away and drying out his eyes. Balor drags him into a world made gray by smoke and falling ash.

"Where are you taking me?" Cain asks, and chokes on the cloying scent of rotten eggs.

"You may call me Master," Balor responds.

"I am not your slave!" Cain yanks his arm back with all his might and manages to pull free from the other man's grasp. He scurries backward, putting distance between them.

Balor leaps through the air like a frog, closing the gap in an instant. He grips Cain's shoulders and draws him close, until the shorter man is at his mouth, smelling his putrid breath. "You have no bargaining chips here, sweet. This is my domain, and you belong to me. You took my hand. We made a deal."

"I didn't know it was a deal! Put me back," Cain pleads. "Please, put me back."

But Balor keeps him.

"Welcome home!" Balor announces.

The tall man has alternately dragged and yanked him along for what feels like days, only to bring him to a cave tucked into a black mountainside. The room within is appointed with a lone cot and table—and four chains, one for each limb, bolted into the surrounding rock.

There's a tussle as Cain fights with the strength of one who fears for his life. But, as clever as Cain is, Balor is older and shrewder.

Giggling, Balor puts his hands around Cain's neck and squeezes. Cain claws at Balor's fingers, but it's useless. The inescapable sulphurous scent dissipates as no air is drawn into his lungs. The world goes black.

When Cain wakes, he's naked and chained, his wrists and ankles stretched so wide that he looks like a starfish. He leans into the cuffs, swallowing around the pain of a bruised windpipe. He needs a plan, any plan, but eons of clever maneuvering on Earth have not prepared him for Hell.

Balor pulls a knife from his pants pocket. Its sharp edge gleams. Hell-forged.

"Please, let me go," Cain whimpers hoarsely. "We can make another deal."

Instead of replying, Balor touches the blade to Cain's chest and begins to carve. Cain screams, while Balor hums a merry, off-key tune.

When the engraving is done, Balor leans forward and licks the blood away. "Your pain is beautiful," he says, rangy fingers caressing the planes of Cain's body. "Think of all the lovely things we'll do together."

It's hard to read the sloped letters upside down, but Cain eventually makes out what has been carved into his flesh: SINNER.
Demons visit the cave, having their fun. They delight in torture, pricking with needles, paddling with wood boards, drawing blood with dull knives, and still they come for more because there is always more to destroy in him. His body heals from any injury not done with a Hell-forged blade. His mind, though... Oh, they come for that, too.

It's worst when they pet him like an object and laugh when they turn his body against him. He rides waves of pain and waves of unwanted pleasure, his psyche adrift.

In these moments, long-repressed memories from his earthly life resurface. His mother's face, how she smiled at Abel most. Abel's blood, drying beneath his nails. The beat of Amenadiel's wings as he cornered him by the river and laid God's curse upon his life. And, later, watching his loved ones die, watching their children die, their children's children die. And on and on.

He remembers wars and plagues, the rise and fall of empires. The horror of the atom bomb, and the wonder of Armstrong stepping onto the dusty face of the moon.

Balor kisses his mouth, leaving behind fetid spittle. "I'm so glad I freed you."

Chapter End Notes

Fic Recs • My Fics, Categorized • My Fanvids on YouTube • Tumblr
Chloe kneels and hugs Trixie. "Be good for Dad, okay?"

"I will."

"And brush your teeth before you go to bed."

Trixie scrunches her nose. "Okay." She smiles, waves, and mumbles a "Bye, Mom" before dragging her backpack into Dan's apartment. A moment later, there's a cry of "Cake!", and Trixie can be heard running.

Chloe straightens. "You're going to ruin her dinner."

Grinning, Dan leans against his mauve doorframe. "Calories don't count at her age."

"Thanks for taking her on such short notice. I know, with Charlotte and everything..."

Dan shrugs a shoulder. "Trixie's a great distraction. Anyway, you know I never mind."

It's true, he doesn't. Dan is a much better single father than he ever was a partnered one. He shows up, usually on time, no excuses or complaints. It's a fact that sometimes makes Chloe's heart hurt, and at other times makes her want to spit in his face. Why was he so bad at those things when they were married? What is it about her that inspired such mediocrity?

Not that she wishes they were still married. They're better as friends, and, as much as the word makes her want to gag, co-parents. There are whole days that pass where Chloe forgets, or at least doesn't quite acknowledge, that she created a new human with the man. The thought of having sex with him now is a little too weirdly incestuous.

He's made a life for himself in a one-bedroom apartment situated in Ocean Park. He pays too much for too little space that needs renovating, but it suits him, and Trixie returns to Chloe with tales of Xbox sessions, friendly street vendors, and sand castles on the beach.

Dan clears his throat. "Hey, I know it's none of my business, but this last-minute schedule change, it, uh, doesn't happen to have anything to do with Lucifer, does it?"

She stands a little taller and adjusts her shirt, preparing herself for the argument that's brewing. "I'm going to see him, yeah."

"Right," Dan grunts. "Think he'll explain why he left you high and dry and expected the rest of us to lie for him?"

"Is this why you've been calling me?"

He shrugs. That's a yes.

"You don't know everything that's going on." And can't. He'll never believe it. Just, she thinks, like she never believed it. In that way, she and Dan are alike: to see is to believe. If there's nothing to see, de facto atheism, it is.
"Enlighten me." Stepping out of the apartment, he shuts the door behind him. "We've known him for almost two years, Chlo, and while I know he's done some good work, and, hey, he can be an okay guy sometimes, he also does shady shit. Never been able to prove it, but we both know it."

Lowering his voice, he hisses, "That crime scene was a goddamn mess, there's a murder weapon missing, and now, like some stupid rookie, I've committed a felony. For a guy I don't even always like. And-and if he hadn't lied to us, Charlotte would still be here."

She almost pours salt into old wounds. Almost. Almost asks how covering for a man who's had her back more times than she can count is worse than stealing evidence or gaslighting your wife until she thinks she's crazy.

Instead, she puts a soothing hand on her ex-husband's arm. "All I'm going to say is he saved me. Again. And now he needs me, so I'm going to be there for him."

He sighs. "I get it. He's your partner, and you've got this...weird thing together. Just be careful. You know, Pierce—"

"Lucifer is nothing like Pierce," she snaps.

Dan lifts his hands in surrender. "Sorry."

"It's fine. Look, I'll pick up Trixie from school on Monday, okay? Don't forget she has a spelling test tomorrow."

Then she turns on her heel and leaves.

"Back already?"

Chloe pulls a box of medical supplies from the back seat of her car. Banking it against her hip, she smiles at Henry sheepishly. "I promise I'm supposed to be here this time."

"Mr. Morningstar texted me."

"Great. Sorry about earlier."

"Part of the job," he says, shaking his head. "You wouldn't believe the crazy things people do to get into that penthouse."

"I bet," she says dryly, and heads toward the elevator.

The penthouse's living room faces east and is dim when she enters, lit only by the glow of afternoon in the distance. She sets the box of supplies on the bar and turns on the overhead light. Lucifer has vacated the bloodstained sofa, having managed to move to his bedroom, where he again lies face down, sound asleep. This time, his battered wings are unfurled and drape down to the floor on both sides of the bed. The tip of his right wing spreads out so far that it touches the top step of the small set of stairs that lead into his bedroom.

Chloe tiptoes around the feathers carefully. Turning on his bedside lamp, she takes a moment to assess the damage. His skin is as scorched as before, still red, still raw. But his wings... As broken as they are, they're breathtakingly beautiful, stretched out like this. She can see how they might be powerful and deadly when whole, but right now it looks like a harsh wind could strip him bare.

It's far worse than she thought. Single, bloodied points of entry, damage done by pistols, pale by
comparison to the ghastly scattershot patches left by rapid-firing submachine guns. Lucifer's body is riddled with lead.

Because of me, she thinks.

As if sensing her presence, Lucifer blinks awake. "You're here."

She hates how surprised he sounds.

His flaming eyes are bright in the low light of the room. Strange how quickly they've come to seem normal, just another part of Lucifer, who Chloe has always known was more complex than his rich playboy trappings. Not that she ever could have guessed he was this complex.

"Detective? Why are you crying?" he asks, his head raising an inch from a black, silk pillowcase before dropping back tiredly.

Chloe wipes at her face. "It's really bad, Lucifer."

"I do feel a bit like swiss cheese," he jokes.

If only. That'd mean the bullets went through. As it is, she can tell they're embedded, deep. Getting them out is going to be ugly.

"Is there no one better who can help?"

"Well, Mazikeen might have helped once, but I don't feel inclined to trust her with sharp objects right now."

"Oh," she says, a little faint as realization dawns. "Maze really is a demon."

"Yes," he replies, oblivious to how unsettled she is. "And, well, there's only one doctor who knows what I am, and she's made it abundantly clear she's not helping with this sort of thing anymore. Not after last time."

After last time? "Who?" Chloe asks, curious.

"Doctor Linda, of course."

"Wow." Old conversations with her therapist friend take on new meaning in her head. "Okay. I'm just worried I might... make things worse."

"Oh, you will," he says in that sarcastically-cheery way of his. "The pain is excruciating around you, but you are right, the wounds need cleaning if I'm not going to walk around with heavy metal for an age. And I can't bloody well reach the buggers myself."

She frowns, mindful of his feathers as she steps closer. "What do you mean 'the pain is excruciating' around me?"

He smiles bitterly. "I once told you that you make me vulnerable. I meant that quite literally. Under normal circumstances, I'm nearly invincible. With you by my side, I'm almost as meaty as any other human."

"Is that... Is that why you were so surprised that you bled when I shot you?"

"One of the greatest shocks of my life."
Chloe leans against the bedroom wall. "So, I'm basically the worst person for the job."

"You don't have to do it," he says, his voice soft.

She swallows and pushes off the wall. "I just don't want to hurt you." An apparent impossibility.

"I'll be fine. You'll find I'm very good at handling pain. But I won't fault you for backing out." He tilts a wing back with a grunt and reaches a hand toward her. Seeing his inflamed skin, he grimaces and lets his arm drop.

"I brought supplies," she says awkwardly, and slips out of his bedroom.

When everything she bought is set out on the floor beside the bed, she wonders if she has enough rubbing alcohol. Enough of anything.

Lucifer seems to follow her concerns and snickers. "You and your plans," he teases. "Everything will be fine. I will have a few of those Percs I see there, though. You may make me bleed, but, never fear, you do wonders for my highs, as well."

"I think they're expired."

"Don't care."

"They're leftovers from a back injury Dan had." She shakes two pills from the bottle into his hand. He flexes his fingers greedily until she adds two more to his palm. "I'll get you some wat—" she starts, then sighs when he downs the pills with scotch from his bedside table.

"Judge not, Detective."

Standing at the foot of the bed, she stares at the carnage. "I'm not sure where to begin," she admits.

"Wherever inspiration strikes. It's all going to bloody hurt."

Knowing this, Chloe works left to right across his body, weaving back and forth to give him small breaks. She plucks loose feathers, cleans exposed flesh, digs into torn tissue with forceps, sweat dripping down her back and beading across his. When she reaches for the sewing kit, Lucifer stops her, his eyes glassy and wild.

"It'll heal," he croaks.

"You're losing a lot of blood, Lucifer." As though they're in some grindhouse horror, it's begun to seep into her jeans and drip onto the floor. Discarded feathers drowned in it.

"Leave it. Please. I can't take it."

She works more quickly then. The blood flows freely to the tune of Lucifer's agonized moans and the tink of bullets dropping into the Pyrex dish she found in his kitchen cabinet. Twice, she changes sterile gloves when they become too slippery.

Hours later, when what she believes is the last bullet fragment joins the others in the glass dish, she leans back from where she sits across his bare, red thighs and tears off her gloves. His wings, the feathers painted a scarlet that matches his skin, look worse than when she began. Her face is wet with sweat and tears.

Rising, she goes to the side of the bed and kneels by Lucifer's head. His eyes are screwed shut, and he breathes hard and fast, as if he's in shock.
Chloe touches his cheek, and he opens his Hell-filled eyes. "I'm so sorry."

"It's all right," he whispers between shivers. "I... Thank you."

It's so strange, hearing and seeing that dulcet voice come out of this ravaged version of her partner. He speaks to her in the tone he reserves for their most quiet, intimate moments: soothingly, gently. It helps her see past the nightmarish visage, to whatever it is in him that always calls to her. His soul, maybe.

Because souls are real.

She slowly leans forward and presses her lips to the too-warm, leathery skin of his forehead. When she leans back, he searches her face, and she smiles at him softly. "What are partners for?"

Chloe watches, spellbound, as his devilish form fades and melts into his body, leaving smooth, pale olive skin in its wake.

"Oh," she breathes. "There you are."

Lucifer gives her a bemused expression, then looks at his hand. Relief smooths some of the lines in his face. "It would seem you took the red right off the Devil. I was afraid that killing..."

"That was self-defense."

"No, it wasn't. It was—"

"For me," she whispers. "It was for me. Thank you."

He says nothing in return, only reaches out and tucks a stray strand of hair behind her ear.

She's a cop and not supposed to feel so comfortable with extrajudicial killings, but there's always been a barbaric protectiveness between them, a willingness to wipe out each other's enemies, as if they are threats to themselves. It started with the record producer Jimmy Barnes, and she doesn't suspect it will end with Pierce. It should frighten Chloe, this connection they have, but it doesn't. Not at all.

Shaking herself from her thoughts, she considers Lucifer's wounded wings. Just because he looks more like himself doesn't mean he's out of the woods yet. "You said you're vulnerable only when you're around me. Does that mean it'll help if I leave?"

He takes some time to answer her, but finally sighs, "It would."

"Okay." She stands and begins cleaning up the mess she's made. The bloodied floors beneath his flagging wings will have to wait.

Lucifer grabs the bullet-filled Pyrex from where she left it on his nightstand. He gives the contents a rattle. "Fancy a pair of earrings?"

Clutching at the necklace that's found its way back around her neck, she looks at him like he's grown another head. "What I want is for you to never be shot again, by me or anyone else."

He lets the dish fall back to the table with a clunk. "Good thing we don't go rushing into harm's way all the time, then, isn't it?"

Chloe huffs tiredly. "Can I get you anything before I go?"
Lucifer sighs into his pillow. If she ignores his wings, he's very easy to look at now, all deep, dark eyes, black wavy hair, and thickening scruff. Tempting might be the word, and Chloe realizes she and most of the metropolitan area might be forgiven for thinking it. He wouldn't be much of a devil if he didn't inspire things he shouldn't. She averts her eyes.

"Will you..." he begins. "Will you return tomorrow?"

"Of course. Okay, well, take it easy tonight."

She turns to leave, but he calls her, "Chloe." She turns back. "You've taken this better than I could have ever hoped. I'm not entirely sure how to tell you... Well, how grateful I am."

"Yeah, well, don't get comfortable yet. I have a lot of questions that need answers."

Lucifer hums in agreement, already sinking into sleep.

It's almost eleven when Chloe parks in her assigned spot outside her complex. The nearest street lamp is several buildings away, which means the path to her complex is bathed in long shadows.

She hesitates outside her car. Even as a child, she was never afraid of the dark or of monsters under her bed, but the dark is different when you know supernatural beings roam the Earth, when there's no Glock resting at your hip.

Holding up her phone, she pierces the darkness with her flashlight. One deep, fortifying breath, and she makes a mad dash for her front door. She laughs nervously when she fumbles and drops her keys.

Inside, Chloe secures all the locks—for what little good they can do—turns on all the lights, including the one in Trixie's room, and turns on the television. A news anchor says the words "Marcus Pierce," and though she should probably listen to the segment, she flips channels until she finds a buxom woman kneading dough. Baking is about as much excitement as she can take right now.

And then, suddenly, she's running into the bathroom to throw up. She's not been eating enough, and bile comes out, then dry, acidic heaves that make her throat burn. She gasps raggedly, pressing her forehead against the cool porcelain of the toilet seat.

Learning and accepting the truth hasn't been easy, but today was too much, too real, too fast. She can still feel the warmth of Lucifer's blood through the nitrile gloves, the wet, spongy sounds his flesh made as she cut and dug. Despite the Percocet and alcohol, he was awake for it all, as evidenced by his moans and the way his feathers twitched, fanned, and contracted around her hands. Living parts on a living man.

To see the divine, to touch it, is overwhelming enough. But to carve into Lucifer? It was like carving into herself. Even if it was what had to be done, it makes her sob now.

When her stomach settles, she peels off her blood-soaked jeans and sweat-dampened top. After changing into pajamas, she wraps herself in a blanket and returns to the living room. Beneath the yellow glow of lamps and the blue light of the TV, she sleeps fitfully.

The *Los Angeles Telegraph* headline fills a third of her mobile screen. Bleary-eyed after a rough night on the couch, Chloe reads through the steam coming off her coffee.
Olivia Monroe, the LAPD's former lieutenant and L.A.'s first female chief of police, is out. The former deputy chief, a man by the name of Ezra Mitchell, is in, having been promoted. A new deputy has been instated. Garcia has officially replaced Pierce.

Other changes are rumored to be afoot, with the journalist writing the article calling it a case of "administrative musical chairs." Yesterday, activists held a demonstration outside City Hall, where they clogged up Spring Street as they demanded explanations.

When Dan calls, Chloe answers on the first ring. "Have you seen The Telegraph?" he asks.

"I was just reading it. Looks like Monroe had to fall on her sword." Chloe sighs, "I never liked her, but she wasn't the problem."

"Yeah," Dan agrees. "You notice how there's no mention of the FBI or DOJ getting involved?"

Chloe frowns. "You're right." Something is very suspect about that. Pierce's network of minions stretched far beyond the walls of the LAPD, and with John Barrow in custody, there should be something to go off of. "No way there's no corruption case here." The feds should be crawling all over it.

"Robbie says they're smoothing everything over, that it'll be like nothing's happened when we get back."

"But the evidence—"

"Might be getting destroyed while we're stuck on asses at home."

"You think the mayor's involved?"

"Anybody could be involved. I'm not even talking to most of the guys until we know more. We gotta keep our heads down, Chlo."

"And let Pierce get away with everything?" Chloe sputters.

"That asshole didn't get away with anything. He's dead," Dan says firmly. "But there may be a power vacuum in the Sinnerman's wake. We have no idea who we're up against. Maybe we'll get lucky and nobody will take his place."

Neither of them believes that, in which case it will be hard to know who to trust when they return to work.

A knock on the door startles Chloe so thoroughly that she nearly spills her coffee. Setting the mug aside, she stands and tiptoes to the front window, where she peeks around her curtains.

To her surprise, Lucifer waits at her doorstep. He's his usual sharply-dressed self, lean body neatly tucked away in a crisp, white shirt and black three-piece suit. No red skin, no wings. Save for a little paleness that makes the skin beneath his eyes appear darker, he is the picture of health. She's almost sick with relief herself.

"Hey, Dan, I gotta go," Chloe announces, and hangs up before he can say goodbye.

She opens the door. "You've gotten a lot better about knocking."

Lucifer folds his hands in front of him, at least somewhat contrite. "Yes, well, in light of recent
events, it seemed appropriate."

"I was going to come see you." She's shocked he's out of bed. She hasn't even showered yet. Then again, it's almost ten, so that's on her.

"Right. But why bother when I can save you the trip? Unless..." He looks distraught. "Do you not want me here, at your home? I can leave."

She waves him in. "What? No. Don't be stupid."

If the Devil ever wanted to do her harm, there were a million times he could have done something. Not that he looks like the Devil now. He's just...Lucifer, and the warm familiarity of him makes her want to wilt.

Closing the door, she turns to him, her eyes narrowing, as if squinting might help her find the Devil and angel beneath his skin. He leans back and regards her in return, brows raised in question.

"Detective?"

"You really do heal fast." Understatement of the century.

"Of course." He smiles, relaxing. "It helps that I was in very capable hands, as well. Though I do hope the next time we play doctor, it's under different circumstances."

The casual innuendo sucks the air out of the room.

Pointing a finger skyward, Lucifer pleads for patience. "To my credit, I realized as I was saying it that you would find it inappropriate."

Chloe's snort is loud in the room. "Do you want breakfast?" Suddenly starving, she turns and heads into the kitchen.

Lucifer stays where he is. "Actually, I'm only here to make sure you're all right."

"Why wouldn't I be?" she asks, ignoring how her pulse leaps into a gallop. "I wasn't the one bleeding out."

"Yes, but even you have to admit there's been a lot to take in. I mean, all women must admit that about me at some point, but still."

He must be feeling better.

Rolling her eyes in mock dismay, she pulls a cutting board and paring knife out of a drawer. She plucks an apple from the fruit bowl and begins slicing it into eighths. "So, you think I should be freaking out."

She is, at least about the implications of his familial connections, but she's not going to admit it to him. If there's one thing she understands, it's that you don't get to choose your family.

Lucifer's face lights with amusement as she hands him an apple slice. "Freaking out does tend to happen when one eats from the tree of knowledge." He bites into the fruit with a devious grin.

Chloe waves her knife at him in conversation. "The Bible doesn't say it was an apple that"—oh—"that you tempted Eve with."

"Mm, it wasn't. It was a pomegranate. And tempt is a very strong word. Adam was always dead
from the neck up. I brought Eve a basket of fruit, and she threw herself at me. Really, I'm the victim in that whole fiasco." He steals another apple slice and looks pointedly at her kitchen table. "Been doing some light reading, I see." He huffs in disgust. "Is that the *Divine Comedy*?"

"So Eden was real?"

"Hmm?" He turns back to her. "Oh, not exactly, though the people were very much real. Not made of dust, though, I can tell you that, and the dinosaurs were long gone by then." He hesitates, eyeing her carefully. "Do you remember what I told you about Pierce, Detective?"

Chloe doesn't want to talk about this, but knows they must.

"About *Cain*," she says tightly, nodding. She leans back against the edge of the sink. This, far more than anything having to do with Lucifer, she's been trying to avoid. "I didn't believe you."

"No one ever does," Lucifer says with a sad smile. "Not since the Age of Enlightenment, anyway."

"How was I supposed to believe you, Lucifer? You've always said the strangest things. It just seemed like you were making up some story about him because you were—"

"Certifiably insane?"

"Jealous."

He pauses. "Be that as it may, I didn't lie to you."

"No," she agrees bitingly, "but you didn't do anything to make me believe you, either. You know I need proof."

"Well, how the bloody hell was I supposed to give it to you?" he snaps. "I didn't have my devil face until I pierced Pierce."

"You had your wings, though! That's all you've complained about for months. Why didn't you just show me them? I would have believed everything you said."

A dark expression pulls at his mouth. "The wings aren't me—or, well, I didn't believe them to be. I haven't always considered them mine, exactly. As I told you in the past, I cut them off. But they were pinned on me again by my father, or maybe for some other reason having to do with my own ridiculous beliefs. At any rate, it didn't feel right to show them to you. It would have felt like a lie, and for the millionth time, I. Don't. Lie."

"You really cut them off?"

"Oh, several times. I was a right feather factory for a while there."

The thought is horrifying after the trauma of last night. "Don't you ever do that again," she admonishes. "They're a part of you."

Lucifer looks uncomfortable. "I plan to keep them now. They've proven useful."

She nods, knowing this is the most she'll get from him on that subject. "Why do you think it would have been a lie to show them to me?"

"I'm no angel," he tells her, shrugging.

"I just wish you had shown me," she repeats quietly.
"Yes, well, I do, too, now, don't I?" he replies, crestfallen. "Would've apparently saved us a great deal of bloody trouble. Figuratively and literally."

"I just..." Chloe fidgets, balling her hands into the old, stretched Lakers shirt she slept in. "I just don't get how you could let me be with him."

Tears well and spill over. She's beyond tired of crying, but she doesn't try to hide her pain. There's a fragile part of her that feels betrayed, not by an angel or the Devil, but by her best friend, by someone who, at times, has felt like so much more. And she realizes she desperately needs him to understand this. Needs him to know that all the miscommunication and secrets pale by comparison to this: that he didn't protect her heart when he could, when, at some unknown point, she very foolishly gave it to him for safekeeping.

Lucifer rounds the counter and stands before her, his face tight. "I drove you to him," he despairs. "And then you were...happy."

"But it was a lie."

He winces. "He was a very good liar, good enough to trick the Devil. For a while, I thought—Actually, I thought I saw myself in him. Which is precisely what he wanted me to see."

At her bemused expression, he continues, "You have to understand, Cain murdered his brother, which was evil, certainly, but then my father punished him for thousands of years. Deserving or not, a punishment of that length will...change a man, turn him into something he never expected to be.

"He was the Sinnerman, but then, I am the Devil. And, well, he met you. And I thought he was changing, that you were changing him, because, whether you realize it or not, Detective, you do have that effect on people. It seemed wrong of me to judge him when...when a second chance is all anyone wants. I wanted to believe a man like Cain could deserve a second chance." He frowns. "I should have known better."

They're quiet, then, as the confession settles over them, reshaping their perceptions. Chloe wonders how much of Lucifer's understanding of Cain was pure projection. He is always searching for, and sabotaging, his own redemption.

"I apologize for any hurt I caused," Lucifer says. "It was never my intention to—I would never hurt you, if I could help it."

"I know that." He has a funny way of going about it sometimes, but Chloe knows it's true. She draws in a deep breath and scrubs at her face. "At least we don't have to worry about him anymore."

"I almost wish I was back in Hell," Lucifer rumbles, and a chill skitters down Chloe's spine. A moment later, he clears his throat. "Well, despite the drama I've brought into your life, you seem to be of sound mind and body, so I should be on my way. Lux has a shipment of—"

"Do you have to be there for it?" Chloe interrupts. Giving into impulse, she reaches forward and grabs his hand.

"No," he answers quickly, looking at their fingers.

"Then let's do something together."

He lifts a suggestive brow. "Such as?"
"I don't know," she laughs, feeling shy. "I'd just like to get to know you. No more secrets."

"No more secrets," he ponders. "I think I'd like that, Detective."

There are no stars over L.A., or at least not any that can be easily seen. The sky is a dull, mud-mottled purple. Instead, L.A.'s twinkling stars are its lights, which spread for miles to the north, south, and east. To the west, the Pacific is cold and black.

On the rooftop of Lucifer's building, Chloe leans back in a plush lounge chair, breathing in the night air, her hair shifting in the breeze. Beside her, Lucifer reclines similarly, his long legs stretched out, ankles crossed.

The day has gone well, even if it has been emotionally and mentally draining. For the first time in a long time things almost make sense to Chloe. Maze is a demon. Lucifer's brother Amenadiel is an angel. Charlotte Richards, for a time, was a literal goddess. (Talk about a notch in Dan's bedpost.)

She's not that bothered by the truth, crazy as it is. Knowing is better than not knowing.

That doesn't mean it isn't a lot to take in, but she's managing. After years of compartmentalizing Lucifer's, well, *Luciferness*, it's not so hard to compartmentalize more. Lucifer's the Devil? Sure, let's throw in her former roommate, a demon, while we're at it. Why not?

Of course, as much as they started the day with the goal of "no more secrets," she also senses they've barely brushed the surface of what there is to know. With basic facts covered, they stuck to illuminating, but rather safe, topics, like how on Earth Lucifer has been solving crime in his own, devilish way all this time. Cleverly, it turns out, but also fiendishly. Maybe a little illegally. Or a lot.

It should bother her more than it does.

"Ah, someone needs a top-up." Lucifer leans over and whisks her wine glass out of her hand before she can protest. He fills it to the halfway point, then shrugs, tips the bottle back, and chugs the remaining contents.

Chloe watches his throat as he swallows. Even after everything that's happened, she's still attracted to him, and the liquid courage flowing through her veins makes her open to acknowledging it, at least to herself. If his devil form was supposed to throw a wrench into her desires, it didn't work. That wasn't him, not really. *This*, the Prince of Drunken Revelry, this is Lucifer. He's always been a questionable choice she knew she was going to make. Is it any different now, really?

"No more. I've had enough," she says, her words bunched close together. But she accepts the glass without further comment and finds herself sipping the heavy Merlot again. It's good, very good, and no doubt costs a small fortune—which, she thinks, means it costs more than it should. She doesn't have it in her to be a snob over such things, but she is amused by Lucifer's snobbery.

"Doctor Linda would be very proud of us, Detective," says Lucifer. "Well, me especially, but you, too, I imagine."

"Oh?" she snickers. "How come?"

"Well, it may be hard to believe," he starts, his tone jocular, "but I've not always been very good at expressing myself, and yet here we've gone a whole day baring our souls to each other. I believe she would call this a breakthrough."
Chloe laughs before sobering slightly. She understands Lucifer in a way that she has, heretofore, assumed to be impossible. More than anything, she now understands how he can be so world-weary and clever, but also youthful to the point of naiveté.

Lucifer is many things: charismatic, overly confident, ingenious, funny, and purportedly devilishly good in the sack. But he is also stunted from eons spent in Hell, a place she can't think of as anything other than cruel and unusual punishment. It's one of several subjects he's been circumspect about today.

And even though it's a little terrifying to think she might be going against the Almighty Himself by aligning herself with the man beside her, she knows she's still Team Lucifer. God's never spoken her, and so remains a touch unreal, but the Devil almost never shuts up, and well... He gets a bad rap.

She watches as Lucifer's eyelids droop under the influence of alcohol and no doubt some lingering physical exhaustion from yesterday's bastardized attempt at surgery. The same protectiveness she felt when he lay red and broken has only grown as they've spent the day together, untangling the past. It's far from perfect, but it's real and theirs, and it's a start.

They roamed the city on foot, talking as they toed through sand and slipped down alleyways. They stopped for burgers at a food truck, and then ice cream, when the sun was high. On a street corner, they watched a young woman strum her guitar and sing "Rocket Man." Lucifer thanked her and stuffed several hundred dollars into the hat at her feet.

It was the most time Chloe ever spent with Lucifer outside work, and she regrets how she waited so long to do it. He's easier to talk to than she imagined. Or perhaps it's that his lips are looser now that he can speak the truth and she has the ears to hear it.

By the time they arrived at his penthouse, wine and pizza box in hand, Chloe felt good, deep in her bones.

"I can hear you thinking from over here."

Chloe stirs from her thoughts. She almost makes a joke about Jedis, but there's something in his tone that suggests he's worried about what's on her mind. "I enjoyed today," she says sincerely.

Lucifer sinks into his chair a little more, his eyes crinkling at the corners with his grin. "And how do you plan to enjoy tonight?"

She laughs. Now he's teasing her; there's no heat behind his words. "I—" Her phone rings. She grabs it from her back pocket. "Trixie," she announces, showing him the screen.

"And I thought I was the Devil," he murmurs. "Your offspring has positively evil timing."

She snorts and answers the call. "Hey, Trixie-babe! How'd you do on your spelling test?" For the next several minutes, Trixie's chatter washes over her, and she supplies all the requisite oohs, ahs, and questions.

"Dad says you're with Lucifer."

Chloe glances at him. "I am."

"Can you put me on speakerphone? Please?"

Chloe takes the phone away from her ear and looks at Lucifer pointedly as she says, "All right,
monkey, *I've got you on speakerphone.*

Translation: Behave, Satan.

"Hello, urchin," Lucifer says into the night.

Trixie giggles delightedly. "Hey, Lucifer! Thanks for taking care of Brayden for me."

"No thanks required. Only remember we're even...unless you have a new deal in mind."

Chloe's eyes widen. *Taken care of* is a terrifying phrase. "What happened to Brayden, Trixie?"

"He's moving next week!"

"Huh," Chloe says, squinting at Lucifer. "How...sudden."

After she ends the call on a river of *goodnights, sleep tights* and *I love yous*, she turns to Lucifer, who looks disturbed by the open affection. "What did you do?"

At this, he smirks. "The Decker women made a deal with the Devil. Services were rendered. Neither of you ever said *how* they should be rendered. In the words of Sinatra, I did it my way."

"Trixie said you *talked* to her bullies."

"The unrepentant require special treatment. Surely you can appreciate that."

"Did you pay the McNeils to leave L.A.?"

Lucifer scoffs. "Darling, you have a lot to learn about favors. If I paid money to everyone I wanted something from, I'd be a poor man, and"—he waves his wine glass around, indicating the rooftop —"I am certainly not that. Likewise, if I only ever demanded money in return for favors, I would be wealthy, but powerless. But, don't worry, nothing too illegal transpired."

"Too illegal," she echoes.

"Kidding," he says, dark eyes twinkling. "A prestigious law firm in Chicago offered Brayden's father a position."

Cain wasn't the only one with far-reaching connections.

"I'm guessing that was no coincidence."

"You guess correctly."

"Great, so you unleashed an 'amoral' lawyer on Chicago."

"Uh, yes. It's Chicago. He'll be welcomed with open arms. Though I don't imagine it will be a very permanent position. I may have gotten him in the door, but his ineptitude will have him out on his arse within a year."

There's a lot that's bizarre about this conversation, enough so that Chloe suddenly bursts into laughter and struggles to stop.

"Are you all right?" Lucifer asks, but he knows she is, and he's chuckling, too.

Wheezing another laugh, Chloe says, "You'll have to explain this favor business to me one day. I
feel like I'm sitting with L.A.'s biggest mob boss."

"Oh, my ledgers would scandalize you." He grins. "The mob bosses owe me."

"I'm a cop," she laughs into her hands. "You have the right to remain silent, you know. I shouldn't know this stuff."

"Say the word, and I'll open my books. I'm not one to hide my sins." He folds his hands primly over his crossed knees and leans toward her. "And I always comply with law enforcement."

"Bribes don't count." She holds up a hand. "Okay, seriously. Don't tell me if you've ever successfully bribed a cop."

"Why, bribing isn't necessary. I have an in with someone at the department."

"Oh? And what if your connection stops putting up with you?" The grin on her face makes her cheeks hurt.

"Well," Lucifer says, his voice rich like warm honey, "if she wants to cuff me and punish me, I won't deny either of us the pleasure."

Chloe exhales shakily, suddenly aware of how close they are. She hears the blood rushing through her veins, feels the flutter of her heart. Her gaze settles on Lucifer's parted lips. What would it be like to throw caution to the wind and kiss him, now that she knows the truth, now that she's seen his darkness and his light?

But Lucifer suddenly breaks the spell, clearing his throat and leaning away. "Right. Shall I drive you home?" he asks, tugging on his sleeves.

She blinks at him and sits back, feeling as though he's thrown her into a vat of ice water. She's not sure whether to feel bereft or grateful. Maybe they are moving too fast, all things considered. Of course they are. What's wrong with her?

It's just...it feels so good to know more. Between that and the wine, it's clouded her judgment. Yeah. That's it.

"It is late, I guess," she says.

Lucifer's up so fast, striding toward the stairwell, that she has to jog to catch up.

Chapter End Notes

Fic Recs • My Fics, Categorized • My Fanvids on YouTube • Tumblr
In the cave, Cain loses all sense of time and place and self. He is no longer Cain, Earth's first, accursed murderer. He is Sinner, Balor's most-prized toy. His world is small, and he says little, speaking only "yes," "thank you," and "Master."

A favorite among Balor's demonic horde, he is rarely without visitors. Some who come to play with him look like men, and some look like women, but they could never be mistaken for human. They have claws for hands, exposed muscle and tendon, organs that sit outside the body. He has kissed fork-tongued mouths and stared into the slit pupils of feline eyes.

And, oh, how he loves what they've made him into—because what else can he do, but embrace his fate? How they cut into his flesh and use his body, then soothe his pain so they can do it again. "Thank you," he says, as Balor has instructed. "Thank you."

Years pass, and Balor releases Sinner from his chains. The sensation is so foreign that he gasps and falls to his hands and knees. He trembles under this new, terrifying freedom.

"How lovely you are," Balor coos, running bony fingers through Sinner's hair, which is long and stringy. "You'll stay here for all eternity, won't you?"

"Yes, Master. Thank you."

For the first time in a very long time, Balor leaves him alone and no one visits. Whether it is a test or not, Sinner doesn't know and doesn't care. He simply sits, watching the ash fall beyond the mouth of the cave. The world outside is endless. The cave is familiar and safe.

Many days later, a demon he's never seen before climbs through the entrance, her white-blond hair cascading over her shoulders. When she stands and faces him, the braided cords of a cat o' nine tails rustle by her side. She holds it with a skeletal hand.

"Your master has left you unattended," she observes.

"Yes." 

"And unchained."

"Yes."

"I don't serve your master," she tells him, and leans in to caress his face with the whip's handle. "You would look better in my collection. How do you feel about a change of scenery?"

Sinner doesn't have the words to respond to such a question. What does he want? He has no wants other than to please Master.

When she drags him from the cave, he weeps. Oh, how angry Master will be, how disappointed. Sinner cannot disappoint Master. He won't.

At the foot of the mountainside, he finds enough strength in his agony to tug himself free from the demon's grasp. She stumble...
for resistance.

"Stop!" she commands.

But she is not Master. Dropping low, he seizes a large stone from the ground and raises it above his head with a roar. Her whip strikes out, but he ignores the stinging pain and smashes the rock into her face with the momentum his larger body affords him. Her head snaps to the right with the impact, but she is strong and stays on her feet. She rounds on him with a snarl.

The weight of the stone wakes something in Sinner, an old, old memory. He has been here before, in another time and place, with another person. With many other people. This...this is his calling.

The demon lunges at him, but he uses his size against her, bringing down the stone again and again and again. It is nearly impossible to kill a demon, but it can be done—temporarily—with enough force and repetition, enough will. When his arms grow tired, he pants and gazes upon the pulpy mess that remains of her face. She won't be getting up any time soon—days from now, maybe.

"Sinner!" Balor barks.

Sinner’s head jerks up, a shiver of anticipatory pleasure and pain rippling through his body. Balor’s gangly arms swing wildly as he marches forward, bare feet kicking up ash. His eyes are narrowed in suspicion.

When Sinner, and later Cain, looks back on these moments, he will never know what compelled him to raise the stone against his master. Muscle memory developed over thousands of years, perhaps, or that boundless human drive to stay alive, even on a plane made for the dead.

Maybe it’s just how God made him.

After years of captivity, he is weak, but acutely motivated. Adrenaline floods his veins, giving him strength he will pay for later.

It takes hours, but he incapacitates Balor, using rocks and fists and teeth and nails. Panting, he stands, triumphant, over the two battered bodies, one petite and blond, the other long and misshapen, wearing only corduroy pants. Blood and sweat cut through the ash that is caked on his body.

With Balor incapacitated and caught in some deep sleep for bodily repairs, a spell is broken. It is in this moment that Sinner—Cain—is hauled away by some invisible rope. He stumbles along, helpless and unable to ignore the pull.

Although Balor had frequent visitors, they came from far away. As Cain is driven forward, he sees no souls or demons roaming the barren landscape. Only ash heap after ash heap, one dark mountain after another, until he finds himself in a rocky passageway filled with doors.

He hisses. Even after all this time of losing himself in pain, the large wooden door ahead is unmistakable.

"No!" he cries for the first time in many years, the word strange on his tongue. But still he staggers forward.

The door flies open, and a vortex draws him in, to Griffith Park and Amenadiel and Charlotte Richards and Chloe Decker. A gun appears in his hand. Cain aims and squeezes the trigger.
Chapter End Notes

Fic Recs • My Fics, Categorized • My Fanvids on YouTube • Tumblr
Morning light filters through closed blinds, bathing Lucifer in thin bars of rose gold. Stretched out on Linda's couch, he searches the popcorn ceiling for pornographic patterns in an effort to ignore the heavy weight resting beneath his breastbone.

After seeing Chloe to her home, he tried calling Linda for an emergency, late-night session. Unfortunately, the doctor has developed a nasty habit of putting her phone on silent after ten o'clock. It's as if she doesn't care about her clients at all, really.

He nearly went to her home, but a brief spark of empathy made him realize this would not please Linda. Excepting their brief stint as lovers, she tends to keep her private life separate from her professional life. She may delve into the lives of others, but she rarely volunteers information about herself—her deepest, darkest desire, to give a famous, inspirational TED Talk, being a natural exception.

And so, he has waited, albeit impatiently, whilst grappling with an eternity's worth of disturbing thoughts. It doesn't suit him. Self-flagellating, retrospective nonsense is more Amenadiel's jam. Lucifer chases highs and thighs to avoid thinking about his feelings or the past, but lately...

Well, lately the distractions haven't exactly worked, have they? Not since Cain got in the way, and certainly not since Chloe saw his true form—devil face, angel wings, and all. And now the detective is acting strange, the complete opposite of how she should behave, and... He draws in a shuddering breath. Can the Devil have a nervous breakdown?

A few minutes after eight, the office door swings open, and the doctor is in. Linda struts to her desk in cream-colored stilettos, ever a fellow paragon of good fashion sense.

He claps his hands together and sits up. "Finally!"

"Oh my Lord!" Linda cries, a stack of binders flying from her hands as she spins to face him. Lucifer catches a folder before it slams into his face. "Good morning, Doctor. No need to call me lord, you know."

Linda holds a hand to her heart. "Lucifer, what are you doing here? You missed your last session, and then you didn't reschedule. I don't even make appointments this early. I've not had my coffee yet." She stares at the floor. "I need coffee for this, don't I?"

"Mm, well, I wouldn't be here if it weren't a bit of an emergency, so can we get on with it? I'll pay you double. Bring you coffee after? How's that sound?"

"That's not what—" Sighing, Linda falls into the chair across from the couch, scattered binders forgotten. "Okay. Fine." She draws in a deep breath through her nose. "What seems to be the problem, Lucifer? I was worried about you when you didn't show. You didn't return any of my texts, either."

"I've been a bit busy." He tilts his head. "Have you seen the news recently?"

"I saw that Lieutenant Pierce—Cain—died." She narrows her eyes. "Do I want to know the whole
"I bloody well killed him."

"Ah, you—" She looks taken aback before forcing a more neutral expression. "Okay. I thought you weren't allowed to kill humans."

"I'm not, am I?" he laughs, somewhat unhinged. "But I suppose some rules are made to be broken. He tried to kill me and, more importantly, the detective. What's that rubbish you Yanks say?" He affects an American accent and says, "I stood my ground."

Whether Daddy dearest sees it that way or not, only time will tell.

"Are we talking self-defense here or something a little more...sinister? Actually, don't tell me. Um, so, you're feeling...residual guilt, then? Maybe?"

"What? No, no, no, I'm not here because of Cain. The detective knows, Doctor."

"Oh!" Linda says, surprised and struggling to keep up. "Oh, you told her!" She scoots to the edge of her seat.

"Not exactly. More like my devil face came back at the crime scene and got stuck."

"Stuck. Wow, okay. I can see why you missed your appointment. Thank you for...not subjecting me to that. Again."

"Mm. Think you're supposed to call a doctor if it lasts for more than four hours, but not many specialize in celestial cockups, now, do they?"

Ignoring his evasive humor, she says, "So. How's Chloe?"

"That's just it," Lucifer grouses. "She's fine and dandy. Saw my burnt arse, bloody wings, and everything. Patched up my wounds, even, and that was a right grisly affair, believe me. And then"—he leans forward, as though he's about to reveal a secret—"yesterday, she spent the entire day with me."

"Oh. Well. It sounds like...like she accepts you. That's wonderful, Lucifer."

He falls back against the couch again, his expression skeptical. "But why?"

"Why not? You've been friends for a long time now. And you're a charming fellow. Handsome. Funny. You can be thoughtful."

"Yes, but none of that works on her, does it? Not really." Sometimes he believes it does, but mostly he sees how often he fails her, both as a partner and as...well, whatever they sometimes seem to be. "Also, I'm the Devil. Bit of a mark against me."

"Yes, that's...a lot to take in. But from all of our sessions together, it's never sounded like Chloe wasn't open to knowing the real you. In fact, it often seemed like that was exactly what she wanted. You were afraid of sharing yourself until very recently. It's okay to discover your fears weren't warranted. It's okay to feel happy about that."

"But what does it all mean?"

"Only Chloe can answer that question. But, what do you hope it means?"
Lucifer looks down at his hands. "Well, I suppose I hope... Well. But I'm left wondering again: Can she really control what she's feeling, or is it a manipulation?"

"We went over this, Lucifer," Linda reminds him gently. "You can't know what your father's plan is for Chloe or for you. Who's to say there even is a plan! Maybe Chloe was placed in your path, or maybe she's here to be used against you, or perhaps you were brought here for her."

What a load of bollocks.

"You don't know," Linda stresses. "You may never know."

"It's just Dad's not exactly a big advocate of consent, now, is he?" Lucifer laments.

"You want to be sure Chloe's feelings are real, that she has free will."

"That's the idea." It's a point of pride for the Devil, that all in his company enthusiastically choose to be there.

"Okay, are you willing to entertain a scary idea for a minute?"

"What could possibly scare me?"

She looks at him doubtfully. "For just a moment, let's imagine Chloe has been placed here for some reason, that she doesn't have complete control over the situation or her feelings. Have you ever considered that that might still turn out okay? That it might not even conflict with her free will?"

"I don't bloody well see how," he seethes.

Linda raises a placating hand. "Free will is very important to you, I know, but it's also a very tricky subject. Sometimes what we believe we're choosing, our minds and bodies have chosen for us before we ever became conscious of our decision. Is that still free will?"

"I don't bloody well see how," he seethes.

Linda raises a placating hand. "Free will is very important to you, I know, but it's also a very tricky subject. Sometimes what we believe we're choosing, our minds and bodies have chosen for us before we ever became conscious of our decision. Is that still free will?"

"Where are you going with this, Doctor?"

"Let me put it this way: We don't choose to sleep. We're built to sleep. Now, we can choose to deprive ourselves of rest for a time, but not forever, and that's okay. That's a constraint, not the complete absence of free will. It just means we work within the context we've been given. If Chloe is truly made to be a certain way, Lucifer, that is real for her, just as real as needing sleep.

"And that's where you may need to be careful with her. If she's here for a reason—whatever the reason—contradicting that to soothe your own philosophical conundrums may not help her. It may actually hurt her, just like forcing her to stay awake for days on end would."

"So I'm damned if I do, damned if I don't. As always."

"I didn't say that. But, what's the harm in not worrying until you need to, until you have more information? What's the harm in...accepting her acceptance?"

Lucifer is quiet as he considers her words. "So, tell me what I should do next."

"I think you need to tell Chloe what you know, which is that Amenadiel blessed her mother so she could conceive. Leave it at that. Let Chloe draw her own conclusions and make her own judgments. But don't hold back if she asks questions."

"And if she wants nothing more to do with me after this?" he asks ruefully.
"If that happens, I'll be here. It's not something you would go through alone."

Lucifer clears his throat. "Right. Thank you, Doctor." He rises to leave, his chest hollow. He'll never admit it aloud, but he knows nothing, no amount of therapy, liquor, or easy lovers, would ever mend the damage Chloe Decker might yet do.

"Lucifer?" Linda calls before he leaves her office. He turns from the hallway. "Have you spoken to Maze?"

"No." He narrows his eyes. "Have you?"

"Oh, nope." Interesting. She's lying. Horribly. "No, just wondering if you had."

"Mm. Well, if you do happen to see Mazikeen, tell her to be very careful, would you? I am still the Devil, and she's earned a reckoning."

There's no parking available on Chloe's narrow street. There never is if you don't hold a permit; sometimes there isn't, even if you do hold a permit. Building a city where cars are a necessity, but then not bothering to offer enough parking: a very special corner of Hell, that. No wonder L.A. feels like home.

Lucifer blocks a driveway with his Corvette and gets out of the car. Bending, he peeks at himself in the side mirror. His hair sits at odd angles on his head, curling up, out, and away. Dark circles surround his eyes. His suit is a mess of wrinkles. "You look bloody knackered," he tells his reflection. Why didn't he stop by the penthouse?

But, he thinks with a sigh, this can't wait. He won't let this be another secret revealed at the worst possible time. Fingering a cufflink, he cuts his eyes up to the blue sky, whether out of defiance or wariness, he's not sure.

At Chloe's door, he's just raising his fist to knock when it swings open, leaving him knuckling air. Ella Lopez stops short on her way out. "Oh my God," she gasps.

Lucifer sighs. "The Devil, Miss Lopez."

She sputters nonsensically.

Chloe peeks around Ella's head. "Lucifer. Now's really not a good time." She squeezes Ella's shoulders. "It's all right. Come back inside." She gives Lucifer a pointed look, which he chooses to ignore.

An awed, slack expression paints the typically bubbly forensic scientist's face. He'd know that look anywhere, but he rarely sees it without purposely revealing divinity. It's a look of complete recognition.

"Well, well, well." Grinning, he tilts his head and stuffs his hands in his pockets. "You've figured something out, haven't you, Miss Lopez? Good for you! Maybe you should be a detective. I'm sure I could make a few calls and get you Daniel's job."

"You're...not a method actor."

"Goodness, no. Just the Devil. And a consultant for the LAPD, of course."

Ella shakes her head, as if she might dislodge the truth. "Holy shitballs, I made you go to church."
"You what?" Chloe laughs.

"She did indeed," Lucifer confirms. "Don't worry, though. All is forgiven. Your church was absolutely crawling with deviants. I had a wonderful time."

"This. Is. Crazy," Ella exclaims, her hands animating her thoughts. "Like, I've been praying for proof, right? My whole life. And I know God works in mysterious ways and all, but, uh, you're not exactly the sign I had in mind, you know? No offense."

"None taken! Let me guess, I'm more handsome than you expected? Better-dressed?"

"More like a narcissist," Chloe interrupts. She tries to drag Ella away from the door, but the smaller woman digs in her sneakers. "Just give her a break, Lucifer. No—"

"Devil business?" he quips. "Tell me, Miss Lopez, what's made you a believer all of a sudden?"

Ella raises her right hand, in which she clutches a plastic evidence bag. The single feather within catches the light, its long, translucent quill poking against one corner of the ziplock. "I found this at the crime scene before they suspended me. I...took it home. And looked at it under a microscope. Thought about it. Like, a lot."

"First cars, now evidence. Whatever will you nick next?"

"I couldn't help myself! But, here, do you...want it back?" asks Ella, holding it out to him.

He snorts. "I've no use for the thing, but..." He grabs the bag and unzips it to remove the feather. "Put it in something nicer, would you? Something silk, preferably in black."

"Uh, okay. Is that important?"

"Good taste is always important." He twirls the feather between his thumb and forefinger, his expression thoughtful, before handing it back to her.

"Oh," she exhales. "I hadn't touched it before now. It's so soft."

"Keep it on you at all times. If you're ever in a bind, it may prove useful. It's good for healing life-threatening wounds—one-time use, of course."

"Wow. I—" She blinks and then stops speaking, her eyes glued to the feather.

"Oh, dear," Lucifer sighs. "I suppose touching it directly is a problem."

"What did you do to her?" Chloe asks, her nose scrunched. She gives Ella a small shake, which goes unnoticed.

"It would seem I've rendered another woman speechless," Lucifer replies. "Oh, don't worry, Detective. She's just a bit high on divinity. Should right itself in a few hours."

"High on divinity." Chloe frowns. "That didn't happen to me."

"Yes, well, we've already established you're a freak." Saying as much reminds him of his reason for visiting. Taking Ella by the shoulders, he guides her out of the apartment. "Right. Time to be on your way, Miss Lopez. Enjoy the prezzie."

"She can't drive like this," Chloe protests.
"Very well," he says, fishing his cell phone from his breast pocket. "I'll organize an Uber. Do you have her address?" Chloe searches her own phone before rattling it off.

In a daze, Ella gazes up at him. "Thank you, Lucifer."

"Er, yes, you're quite welcome. Perhaps it's best if you—" He reaches out and tucks the feather inside her jacket, then presses her arm toward her body to hold it in place. "Can't go about, showing it to everyone."

"When will I see you again?"

"As soon as the detective has a poor soul for you to pick at, you little vulture." He gives her another gentle shove. "Trevor and his blue Prius will be here for you soon!" The door swings shut.

"Will she be okay?" Chloe worries. "She's been...existential for the last hour."

"Oh, she'll be fine. It's not like she saw my wings...or my face. One little feather won't fry her."

"Aren't you concerned that she knows?"

"Whatever for? I go about telling everyone the truth all the time. It's refreshing to have a bevy of believers for once. Perhaps I'll start a proper cult for once. How novel."

"You could have believers any time you wanted, if you went around showing people the truth."

"That's how you start a religion," he says with distaste. "I prefer the intimacy of a cult or nothing at all."

Chloe looks him up and down. "You're wearing your clothes from last night."

"Uh, yes." He pats at his suit, then runs a hand through his hair. "It was a long night."

"Does this have anything to do with why you freaked out on the roof?"

"I did not freak out. I was merely concerned for your well-being." Timidly, he puts a hand between her shoulders and guides her to the couch. "But there is something else you need to know."

"Hah, great." Chloe laughs nervously as she sinks into the cushions and draws a pillow to her chest. "What, is a plague coming?"

He pauses, considering. "Probably not."

"Probably not," she echoes.

"That was more Mum's doing. Dad's very fond of you lot. Except for the whole Flood thing. And, as you're about to learn, he still occasionally tinkers with Creation, as he sees fit, so you can't say he's lost interest yet."

For a moment, they don't speak. Then Chloe reaches across the cushion between them and takes his hands in hers. "It's okay. Whatever it is."

"You don't know that," he scoffs. As if she should be comforting him. Sighing, he says, "This isn't about me, Chloe."

"Then who's it about? Your...dad?" He can see how much Dad = God bothers her. That makes two of them.
"Actually, it's about you."

"Me? What about me?" Her hands break into a sweat around his.

"What do you know about your conception?"

She makes a small sound of amused disgust. "Not much, I guess. Thankfully. Why?"

He forces himself to look her in the eye. "Your parents struggled to conceive."

"Did they? They never told me." She tilts her head. "How do you know that?"

"Because my father," he says, "took a special interest in their woes. He sent Amenadiel down to bless your mother, your mum and dad shagged, and, bam, Penelope Decker became Mama Decker."

Chloe takes her hands away from his, leaving him cold. "Is that something that's done?" she asks. "Like, some sort of supernatural IVF?" Her joke falls flat over both of them.

"To my knowledge, it's never happened before or since. You are...a miracle."

She snorts. "That's what my mom always called me when I was little." Her mouth forms a hard, stubborn line. "But, no, I'm not. And even if I am technically, I don't know what to do with that information."

"Neither do I," he admits, taking some comfort in that, as Linda keeps suggesting he should.

"You think I'm here for a reason?" she asks.

"Who bloody knows what Dad's on about?"

She frowns. "Well, if I am, I don't know what it is. Do you have any ideas?"

Oh, how he wants to lie. But he doesn't. "Nothing concrete," he stalls.

Chloe squints at him. "Just spit it out, Lucifer."

"I don't want to say anything," he says tightly, "because, as has been pointed out to me, I have no evidence to support any claims. You're always telling me not to come to hasty conclusions, Detective."

"Okay, sure, but humor me, just this once."

He swallows hard and wishes his flask weren't bone dry. "There are several possibilities. The timing is suspicious, what with our crossing paths during my retirement." He reaches for the most positive assumption. "It's possible there's a reason I'm here for you, that there's something important you must do that I can help you with."

"Uh-huh. My own personal Devil support system." Chloe folds her arms over her chest. "And what are the other theories? The opposite of that, I'm guessing? That I'm here, for you?"

"Well, you are quite the curveball, aren't you? What with how I can be mortally wounded in your presence. Perhaps Dad's trying to off me once and for all."

"That's... I know he's God, but if that's true, or could even be true, that's not okay." She glances up at the ceiling in concern.
"Yes, he's a right tosser."

"But there's no evidence for any of this?" she says, and he can sense her pinning items to a mental investigation board.

"None other than knowing Amenadiel blessed your mother."

Chloe blows out a long breath and shrugs. "Okay."

"Okay?" Bloody hell.

"Yeah. Okay. What else am I supposed to say? It's like Hell. I get that that's a...real place now, but it's not like I understand it personally. This is no different. What's it mean to me that Amenadiel blessed my mom? I'm here. That's all there is to it. I'm still me."

Lucifer throws his head back and laughs. It's a high, tired sound that matches his rumpled clothing. "Here I've been fretting over telling you this, over what it all means, and you..." He shakes his head. "You simply accept it and move on."

Perhaps she's here to drive him insane. That would be quite the warped punishment.

"I guess that's just part of being human." Chloe shrugs. "We wrestle with huge, unanswerable questions, and we don't have the luxury of time to get any answers."

Lucifer studies her face. "You know, you're very strong. Headstrong, too. Part of the appeal, really.

"Thank you." She sweeps her hair over her shoulder. "Is this... This is everything?"

"Everything of note. Oh! Actually, I suppose Candy's related to all this, so let's hash that out, shall we?"

Chloe's eyes narrow. "The stripper you married."

"One," he says, lifting a finger, "not a stripper. Owns a lovely little nightclub and occasionally dances exotically."

"Of course, how could I be so wrong?"

He raises a second finger. "Two, that whole thing was annulled, so we were never married." Chloe scoffs as he lifts a third finger. "Three, I did all of that for you. My mum was here at the time and up to her usual manipulations. And I was worried your feelings weren't yours, that Dad was making you feel a certain way."

"So, you forced yourself to plow into a hot blond for me. Gee, thanks."

"We had a business arrangement," he insists. "There was no sex involved, I assure you." Though it had certainly been on the table. No need to mention that.

She laughs. "You'll forgive me for not believing that."

"She was merely there to help cool things down between us and help me figure out what my mum was up to. I don't lie to you."

"No," Chloe growls, and stands suddenly. "You don't lie, but you...you dance around the truth." Her hands land on her hips, and Lucifer doesn't know whether to be worried or turned on. "And I
don't know if God can manipulate my life and feelings, but you did by marrying her."

He deflates. "I suppose I deserve that."

"Yeah, you do. Now, I need you to leave."

"Detective?"

"Go. I need some space."

He staggers to his feet. Of all the things he thought might upset her, Candy was very low on the list. "I didn't—" he starts.

"No, you didn't," she snaps, shoving a finger into the middle of his chest. "Didn't talk to me, didn't let me make my own decisions. Nope, none of that. The usual."

"As if you would have believed me!"

She closes her eyes and takes a deep breath. "Sometimes you really piss me off."

"Oh, what? Because I'm right?"

"Don't push it." But she smiles faintly.

Ah, a smile. There's hope yet. "I propose we make a deal," he says, a beat later.

"And what deal would that be?"

"I'll refrain from marrying strippers for you, if you'll refrain from marrying absolute knobheads for me."

"So, you admit she was a stripper. And I didn't marry Cain."

"I didn't marry Candy, either," he says gleefully. "But Cain was a knobhead, wasn't he?"

Chloe snorts. "Fine. Deal."

"Come now, Detective, you have to do it proper." He holds out his hand.

They shake on it, holding a little longer than necessary.

The next day, Lucifer finds himself loitering on the veranda outside Montgomery Funeral Home, a cigarette wedged between his lips. It's a warm, sunny Friday, perfect for happy hours and sex-filled siestas, so of course the humans are set on ruining it with pointless death rituals.

Charlotte Richards was well known and controversial. Her visitation has brought out the masses. He doesn't count himself among them. He's only making an appearance because Linda nagged him to do so.

"It's important to the people in your life," she told him in a phone call.

And, bloody hell, he sure has people in his life now, doesn't he? Chose them of his own free will and everything. A true earthside experience. Not exactly how he always imagined it would be. Far more inconvenient, far less naked calisthenics.

He watches as people dressed in shades of black and gray file in and filter out, some to grieve, most
to rubberneck, and a few to no doubt spit at the foot of Charlotte's solid mahogany casket. No good lawyer goes to the grave without her share of admirers and enemies. Charlotte was a very good lawyer.

As earthly as a funereal experience may be, it's making Lucifer feel fidgety and more removed from this plane than he has in a while. They're like ants, really, rushing about their business, utterly incapable of seeing how limited their perspective on the universe actually is.

Before the detective, he would have had some fun with these grieving fools. He wants to laugh at them openly, make them face the reality of their inevitable afterlife. A hundred billion souls have come before you, he would shout. What does this one little soul matter when your own mortal coil is desperately trying to unwind with each passing second? Carpe diem, for Dad's sake.

And what's with Charlotte's made-up, chemical-bloated body? That isn't her. Even the humans can't quite pretend it is. It's expensive refuse slated to be chucked in the ground because it no longer sparks joy.

Lucifer scowls at a smarmy man as he enters the building. He may yet burst in and make a scene. It's very tempting. But even he knows that's poor timing so close to revealing himself to Chloe, thus his restrained loitering and contemplative chain-smoking.

As if she's sensed him thinking about her, there the detective is, finding his eyes from thirty feet away. Actually, all "his" humans are there. Three lovely women and a cake-obsessed imp, all flitting about Daniel as if he hasn't only recently learned how not to be a complete douche.

And what a sad sack Daniel is today. Lucifer would openly sob, too, were he dressed in that off-the-rack suit. But, my, what a support system he's got in spite of it. Chloe is pressed up against her ex-husband's left side, his arm thrown over her shoulder. Trixie follows along on Chloe's left, clutching her mother's black dress, her concerned gaze fixed on her parents. Ella is pressed against Dan's right, that silly crucifix back around her neck. And walking in front of them all, as if she might bat away anyone who dares interfere with the grieving process, is Linda, her chin held almost as high as her heels.

Lucifer's chest spasms uncomfortably at their united front. His family doesn't rally like this, never has. Although, perhaps Amenadiel, of all angels, might be on his side now.

With Trixie near, Lucifer drops his cigarette to the ground and stamps out its embers. He steps forward to join them, but Chloe shakes her head before refocusing on her ex. Lucifer remains in place, frowning. Is she still angry about Candy? He thought she was over that.

Chloe, Daniel, Trixie, and Linda enter the funeral home, but Ella hangs back. She meanders over to him, a sad smile on her face. "Hey, Lucifer."

"I'm sober enough to drive," she assures him. She nods to a coworker from the precinct before saying, "Bet all of this seems really dumb to you, huh?"

That's a trap of a question, if he's ever heard one. "I can't say your rituals aren't...puzzling." He waves a hand. "All this is for the living, who collectively pretend it's for the dead. Now, the Vikings, with their pyres and feasts and drinking... That was a party I could get behind. God behind quite a few Vikings, too, actually. None of this dour bollocks."

"Come on," she says, nudging his arm with her shoulder as she leans against the veranda's railing.
beside him. "You gotta feel a little sad. You liked Charlotte."

Lucifer gives a long-suffering sigh. "She's not gone, Miss Lopez. She's relocated. You'll see her one day."

"It doesn't feel that way to us. I mean, I've always believed in Heaven, and"—she glances at him meaningfully—"now, more than ever. But life is looong, dude. I know eighty years is nothing to you, but to us, it's everything. It sucks that we can go decades without seeing someone we love because of some freak accident or cancer or diabetes or some other BS. And, then, I mean, not all of us...go to the same place."

"Never waste your time on guilt. You'll go to Heaven. You'll see her. It's that simple."

"I hope so. I'm aiming for it, or I'll die tryin', right?"

He smirks, sharing in her gallows humor. "But what does any of this have to do with such a costly charade?"

"People just wanna say goodbye. Whether they think they're saying it for forever or just for a little." She looks out toward the rolling hills of the connecting cemetary when she says, "It's gonna be pretty hard for you to see Charlotte again, isn't it?"

"Try impossible," he answers with false amusement.

"That blows. Well, maybe you should say goodbye, too. Could be cathartic. You never know." Standing straight, she claps a hand to his shoulder. "I'm gonna head in. Let me know if you wanna come say goodbye and need some moral support. I know how you feel about all the"—she lowers her voice—"G-O-D stuff. I totally get it now." She winks dramatically.

He watches her walk away and marvels at how he has not one, not two, but three humans who know and accept him, the real him, to varying degrees. What is happening?

When she's gone, he turns and rests his elbows on the white railing. He resumes his chain-smoking and stares at the rows of stone teeth that are occasionally broken up by garish statues and obelisks. He's made his appearance. Chloe's seen him. He should go. But he lingers, some part of him troubled by Ella's words, by the absurd finality of it all. Just more of Dad taking the piss out of his creations.

A gentle tug on his pants leg makes him twitch.

"Can I stand out here with you?"

Lucifer sighs and tosses his cigarette. "Really, I just lit this, child."

"Smoking causes cancer."

"So does the sugar in chocolate cake. But still we have our vices, don't we?"

As usual, the detective's daughter doesn't mind his prickliness. And, if he's honest, he doesn't mind her presence. She's clever, much like her mother. How she's made up of fifty percent of Daniel, he'll never know. Broken clocks and all that, he supposes.

"I don't like funerals," Trixie gripes.

"What's to like? They're boring, earthly affairs, urchin."
She leans half her weight against his leg, and hangs the rest of it over the railing, much like, well, a monkey. "Charlotte was nice."

"She did have her moments." Once the fear of Hell was in her.

"I think my dad wanted to marry her."

"Well, your father does have a track record of marrying above his station, doesn't he?" They're silent for a moment, until suddenly Trixie begins to sniffle. "Dearie me," Lucifer sighs, "let's not bring Niagara Falls into it. You couldn't have even known her that well."

"Mommy's always getting hurt," Trixie sobs, her little, round face scrunching. "I don't want her to die, too."

Oh. Oh. Lucifer's world tilts alongside Trixie's as he imagines Chloe's body lowered into a hole in the ground, her soul forever beyond reach. His heart stutters. But she's alive now, he reminds himself. That has to be enough.

In one smooth movement, as if he's done it a million times before, he lifts the little girl onto the railing to face him. Her black dress swishes and bunches around her. Holding her arms tight, his long fingers stretching all the way to her bony shoulder blades, he bends and looks her in the eye.

"Beatrice, listen to me. So long as it's in my power—and I've a great deal of that, never you fear—your mother will live long and well. She will watch you drive a car and graduate and kick some undeserving wanker to the curb. Do you understand? I will upend Hell before I allow your mother to die an untimely death."

"But I don't want you to die, either," she wails.

How strange. He clears his throat uncomfortably.

"No need to worry about that." Not now that he has his wings back. Probably, anyway. "I came back last time, didn't I?" he challenges quietly, daring to remind her of Malcolm and her kidnapping. "Only died a bit."

Trixie hiccups and nods, but the tears still flow. Exhaling shakily, Lucifer yanks his purple pocket square free and shoves it at her face. "There now," he says. He hands her the square. "I believe you can blow your nose for yourself." She honks into the fabric, then has the gall to offer it back to him. He grimaces. "No, no. That belongs to you now."

Sighing, Trixie throws her arms around his neck. Lucifer shudders, trying not to think about the snotty fabric trailing down his Prada, but he also makes no move to untangle himself from the child's embrace. Instead, he pulls her closer and palms the side of her head.

"Can I tell you a secret?" Trixie asks, her voice wobbly with fatigue.

"Of course." He strokes her hair. "I do love a good secret."

"You look different from how you used to," she whispers. "More like Mom."

Lucifer's brows furrow as he looks down at her head. Aren't children supposed to speak less obtusely by this age? "Whatever do you mean by that?"

"Your light," she says, as if this explains anything.
Before he can quiz her any further, Chloe rushes up to them, a look of relief, then shock, on her face as she takes in the sight of them together. "Trixie! I was looking everywhere for you! You were supposed to stay with Dad." She looks up at Lucifer, suddenly flustered. "You didn't have to — You could have brought her to me."

"Ah, well," Lucifer says, putting distance between himself and the little girl. "We were perfectly fine, Detective." He glances at Trixie pointedly. "We have mutual interests."

"That so?" With a groan, Chloe picks Trixie up from the railing and puts her back on her own two feet. "Have you been crying, baby? You're really gonna miss Charlotte, huh?"

Trixie sighs. "I'm okay now." Then she grins up at Lucifer fondly. He forces himself not to return the smile. He has a reputation to keep. The Devil doesn't smile at children, no matter how precocious.

Chloe clasps one of Trixie's hands in her own, and then touches Lucifer's wrist. He looks down at her, surprised. "Thank you," she says, and does the unthinkable as she rises to tiptoe and kisses his cheek.

He clears his throat, confused, but pleased. "If I'd known this was the reaction I'd get from embracing your offspring, I'd have done it ages ago. What do I get for a piggyback ride?" He shudders at how eager Trixie is about the prospect.

She laughs softly. "Do you want to come back with us? Have some lunch, maybe?"

Lucifer would like nothing more, but he shakes his head. "I think I... Well, I might need to go say goodbye. To Charlotte."

"Oh. Okay. Well... You'll be at the precinct when I start back?"

He pauses. Even after the day they spent together, even after she welcomed him back into her home, he hadn't dared hope for this much. "You need the eggs?" he says quietly.

"That," she admits, "and my partner." She smiles. "Don't be late."

Lucifer watches them leave. He feels things he is too frightened to give words to, even deep in his own mind.

When he finally enters the funeral home, visitation is nearly over. Save for a few clusters of softly-speaking humans, he is alone. There's Daniel, too, sitting in a chair off to the side, staring blankly at the floor. Charlotte's ex-husband and children left long ago.

Lucifer stands before the casket and looks at Charlotte Richards' pickled body. A violent burst of anger rushes through him as he takes in her golden hair. Charlotte, oh, many of these humans will see her again. But Mum... Mum, who'd used this shell to walk and talk and embrace him with? Bloody gone forever. By his own hand.

He holds the edge of the casket, struggling not to crush the wood. The depth of his bitterness is shocking, even to him. How could he possibly care after all these months? It's not as if Mum were some shining example of motherhood. She was a manipulative, all-powerful bitch. And, he thinks, his teeth setting in a snarl, she tried to kill Chloe.

And yet she also held him, many, many eons ago, when she was pure light, and he was a winged boy, a light-bringer, who took after her. Always playing pranks on siblings who liked him well enough, but never quite understood him. Always bending rules and incurring his father's wrath.
How many times did she intervene on his behalf? Often, as far as he can remember, and perhaps more than he knows.

He hasn't forgotten what she told him, that he was only sent to Hell because of her pleas, that his father intended to destroy him. Maybe it's the truth. She seemed to believe it was. But he'll never know now, will he?

"Hey, man," Daniel says, tearing him from his thoughts. "I'm surprised you came. I know you didn't always get along with Charlotte. Must've been weird having her for a stepmom."

Poor sod. Always so dreadfully out of the loop.

"Yes, well, I'm realizing I may actually miss her." He swallows. "More than I expected." In his mind's eye, he sees his mother pulled apart, her shining light drawn into that other place and time, a place he hopes she has made her own. He feels the weight of Azrael's blade, the burden of free will and responsibility.

"Charlotte had a bigger heart than a lot of people gave her credit for," Daniel says. "Maybe she didn't always know how to show it, but I'm sure she loved you, man."

She did. She loved her children fiercely, if imperfectly.

So few have loved him.

Lucifer can't speak, can barely breathe, around the knot in his throat. Blindly patting Daniel on the shoulder, he turns away, taking long strides out of the funeral home. His hands fumble in his suit jacket for his flask, cigarettes, and lighter—anything, anything, to turn off these ghastly emotions.

Chapter End Notes
Charlotte Richards dies a thousand times, a million, then more. Every time, Cain is eaten by guilt. Until...he isn't. He isn't at all.

He aims and squeezes the trigger. Charlotte guards God's favorite son with her life. She collapses to the ground, bleeding. And Cain throws his head back and laughs. Because who gives a fuck about Charlotte Richards?

Hell is a well-oiled phantasmal machine. It runs on autopilot, adapting to guilt and fear with the finesse of an experienced, attuned lover. When Cain no longer feels guilty for taking Charlotte Richards' life, Hell doesn't implode. It merely yanks on a pulley and pushes at a lever, extracting from his Hell loop that which no longer torments. It isn't personal. It's how the infernal algorithm works.

Whether by nature or nurture, Cain has always kissed the edge of a psychopathic spectrum. He doesn't feel guilty about much, or for long. But Hell searches the Rolodex of his dark heart and finds one deep regret, a what if involving a homicide detective on the earthly plane.

What if he hadn't ordered his men to shoot her?

Could she have forgiven him?

What if he'd been a better lover?

Could she have turned against the prince at her heels?

What if he'd accepted mortality by her side?

Could she have made him whole?

Hell leaves him in the void with Chloe, her simulated face soft and open, her flesh on display, a diamond ring in her outstretched palm. She dies many millions of times more than Charlotte Richards. Each time, remorse and uncertainty plague him.

If he had been different, if he had loved her right and true, she wouldn't have his symbol carved into her flesh. He wouldn't feel the immense personal loss as he squeezes the trigger.

His hand turns the gun sideways. Chloe begs for her life as he presses the muzzle between her eyes. He practices this move again and again and again.

Until, he wonders...

What if he doesn't have to shoot her?

What if he could have her still?

What if it doesn't have to be this way?
Hell is calibrated to house tortured souls, freewheeling demons, and creatures of the night. It is not intended for souls who break free from their loops. Because no human soul ever has. Billions have never even tried.

Cain is a bug in the system that Hell struggles to function around. His soul has known limbo for too long. It is neither a human soul nor that of an immortal. It is merely Cain's.

His internal questions are the beginning of the end. Unbeknownst to him, his soul is playing a game of chess against the machine. Each time he makes an unexpected move, the machine tries to adapt and learn, but with every new move, he introduces entropy.

The machine hands him a gun, but he doesn't raise it.

The machine places a diamond ring in the detective's palm, but the sheer force of Cain's will slides it on her finger.

The machine stamps her with a five-pointed Mark of the Beast, but Cain sees only a lopsided incision that matches his own: SINNER.

The machine shuffles and reshuffles the simulation, searching for a possible move, a way to right the game. But it's too late. There is too much entropy, too much noise in the signal, for it to hold Cain.

Chloe Decker stands before him in an endless void, and he realizes she isn't real, that none of this is real, that he feels no remorse whatsoever.

*Checkmate.*

He turns. The large, wooden door stands afloat in the pitch black. It's unlocked.

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**Chapter End Notes**

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The bullpen is a living creature. It has a sound and flow that Chloe feels in her gut. This is how she instinctively recognizes the changes to the precinct, even before she's able to catalogue them more consciously. Certain voices are missing from the usual din, and an undercurrent of distrust sours the room.

She passes fellow officers on her way to her desk. For every "welcome back" murmured, three other officers follow her silently with their eyes. She raises her chin higher, trying to tap into a well of confidence she fears has run dry. She survived Palmetto and Warden Smith, she can survive Pierce.

At least, she hopes she can. There's still no way to know who here might have been in the Sinnerman's pocket. No way to know, yet, if his criminal organization has collapsed.

Chloe sinks into her office chair and boots up her computer. A stack of folders has been left on the corner of her desk in her absence. There's always more paperwork—and paperwork for the paperwork. Digitization is a slow process here, and there's lots of redundancy.

An hour later, Lieutenant Garcia exits his office and makes a beeline for her desk. He waves a case file in the air. "Ready for your welcome back present, Decker?"

Anything to pretend things are normal. Anything to put off paperwork.

"Yes, sir," Chloe answers eagerly, rising and rounding her desk. "I'll get in touch with Lucifer and be on my way."

Gripping the file folder in one hand, she whips out her cell with the other. She's just typed We've got a case! when she feels the flow of the bullpen shift again. She looks up and locks eyes with none other than Lucifer himself. His lips pull back in a mischievous grin as he strolls her way.

Does he notice how people turn a little towards him, as though they're compass needles and he's true north? He must. Sometimes the repositioning is conscious, followed by a friendly smile or leering appreciation, but often it's not. Often, it's only a small turn toward his magnetic pull. And is she so different? So often, she gets pulled in, too.

"Speak of the Devil," she laughs when they face each other.

"And he shall indeed appear," he finishes. "Is that a case I see?" He rubs his hands together.

She grins with him. "It is."

"Well, what are we standing around here for? Lead the way, Detective."

Nothing will ever really be "normal" again, now that she knows the truth. But as they fall into what they know best, it's easy to leave the difficulties of the previous week behind. It's easy to pretend nothing's changed at all.

Dan and Ella are already on the scene when they arrive at Cedarwood Heights. Dan glances up as
they duck under the crime scene tape and enter the dim, one-bedroom apartment. Dark circles surround his eyes.


The dank living room is furnished only with a TV and a torn, plaid recliner. The place smells of mold, fish, and decomposing body.

"Not one for personal cleanliness, was he?" Lucifer tsks.

"Dude had serious problems," Ella agrees, staring at the victim.

David Yates, pudgy, pasty white, and already balding, sits stiff and cold, a precarious tower of dirty dishes on the stained carpet beside his recliner. Clothed only in threadbare briefs that he soiled in death, the dozens of shallow, horizontal cuts that cover his arms, legs, and torso are on full display, each mark one to two inches long. The cuts oozed blood before he died, leaving him and his underwear painted with streaks of red and pink.

Chloe swallows back the memory of Lucifer's blood-tinged feathers as she bends to take a closer look. "Self-mutilation?" she asks.

"Oh, yeah. Big time." Ella points her pen at the dish tower's topmost plate, where there rests a razor blade in a pool of dried blood. "But COD is—"

"The bloody ginormous butcher's knife sticking out the poor sod's middle?" Lucifer guesses.

"Well, yeah," Dan answers. "No fingerprints on the murder weapon, by the way. Time of death estimated to be 16:00 on Monday. Neighbor called in the smell this morning."

"Any leads?" Chloe asks.

"Other than the neighbor—he only had the one on his right—not really. We caught her before she left for work, but she claims to have never talked to him outside of a hello in the hallway. My bet is the guy was a total recluse. Landlord's coming in for a statement later today, but it didn't sound like she knew much, either."

"Next of kin?" Chloe asks.

Dan shakes his head. "Only child, mom died last year."

"And no girlfriend or wife?"

Lucifer scoffs. "As if this wretched chap brought any girls to the yard."

"None that we know of," Dan answers more diplomatically, while shaking his head at Lucifer.

They wander the compact apartment, weaving around the other officers and techs on the scene. Bills, most stamped with past due and late notice, are laid out on the kitchen counter. More plates tower in the sink, but the cabinets, fridges, and freezer are empty, save for red pepper flakes in the former and a few beer bottles in the latter. The trash can overflows with paper cups, takeout boxes, and wrappers from fast food joints.

Ella hovers around the trash can. "If you're wondering where that fish smell is coming from... Looks like Yates was a big fan of Poke'n Around."
"Ah, the poke bar near the Orpheum," Lucifer says. "It's very good. We should pop in for lunch, Detective."

Dan looks at him incredulously. "Man, how can you think about eating right now?"

"It might not be a bad idea," Chloe says absently. "Maybe someone there knew Yates."

In the bedroom, they find a urine-stained mattress on the floor. No sheets. No clock or lamp.

"Super depressing, right?" Ella remarks.

"Yes, our little drug dealer partook in his product," Lucifer says with discordant cheer. "Classic heroin addict Hell loop."

Chloe makes a choked sound as she lifts one corner of the mattress with a gloved hand. She'll ask about "Hell loops" some other time, when her brain can afford to accommodate more supernatural madness. Maybe Lucifer will even be willing to talk about it.

Dan rolls his eyes. "We haven't found any evidence of drug use."

"Aaactually," Ella starts, "we don't know if he used recently or not because of all the cuts to his arms and legs. Coroner will be able to tell us."

Lucifer spreads his arms wide, as if to say, Look around, douche. Is this not evidence enough? Aloud, he says, "Well, he'd already used everything he had, hadn't he? That's why David was such a sad sack."

Chloe tunes out their bickering and drags Ella back into the living room, leaving the two men to trail behind. Ella and Chloe stand in the doorway into the apartment and stare at Yates from a distance. It's always worth trying a new perspective.

"Hey," Ella whispers with a nervous glance around, "we've got a problem." Chloe looks at her. "Things, uh, have gone missing. From evidence." She holds up her hands and flaps them like wings. Lucifer's feathers.

"Dan was worried more evidence might be tampered with in...that investigation." Though something tells her he wasn't exactly thinking of feathers when he was talking about it.

Ella nods. "He told me to keep an eye on it. I thought you should know and maybe tell Lucifer. I didn't know if that would be, like, a sensitive topic or whatever."

As if she knows herself, and that's after plucking dozens of loose feathers from him. "I'll talk to him."

A moment later Dan and Lucifer enter the room. Ella tilts her head. "There's no sign of struggle," she says, interrupting whatever their current back-and-forth has devolved into.

"Maybe he was too intoxicated to know what was happening," Chloe guesses.

Ella shrugs. "Tox screening should be interesting."

"It will confirm heroin," Lucifer says with confidence. Dan grunts in frustration.

Yates looks strangely relaxed, despite the full-body cuts and the butcher knife protruding from his gut. Both feet are flat on the floor, and his arms rest gently at his sides, palms up, fingers curled in a combination of repose and rigor mortis.
It's lunchtime, and Poke'n Around is so packed it might be violating safety codes.

"Popular place," Chloe sighs, eyeing the line of people stretching outside the trendy, teal-stucco eatery.

"I did say the food was excellent, didn't I?"

"This is going to take forever," she grumbles, as they fall behind the last person in line. She peels her black shirt away from her waist. June gloom has passed, and now it feels as though an especially warm summer is ahead of them. "How are you not dying in that suit?" she continues. "You're not even sweating, are you?"

Lucifer glances at her, amused. "Wool breathes, darling. That, and you do tend to build up a tolerance to heat in Hell."

Chloe lowers her voice to ask, "So, it's actually hot there?"

"Mm. Pervasively so, and not in a good way." Clearly eager to change the topic, he nods his chin at the line of people in front of them. "What good is your badge if you won't speed and can't cut lines?"

"I could since we're here on business, but I hate being that cop."

"Oh, live a little." When she doesn't move, he rolls his eyes. "Right. Fine. Lucky for you I'm not opposed to a bit of queue-jumping."

And off he goes.

"Lucifer," she hisses, grabbing for his arm. His long stride immediately puts him just out of reach. Cursing, she follows him into the restaurant. "Sorry, sorry," she mutters to the irate people they leave behind.

Inside, modern swing music lilts in the background, all peppy, jazzy horns and upbeat piano. She grabs onto the back of Lucifer's suit jacket. "What are you—"

"Lucifer!" a giant Hawaiian man booms from behind the counter. His round face lights up with a cheeky smile. "Here for the usual?"

"Double it if you would, please, Will. And well done on the crowd! Is business always so good these days?" A devious smile lights his face.

"It's all thanks to you," Will gushes, and Chloe gets the distinct impression he's a little bit in love with the Devil. Like thirty percent of L.A. Maybe more.

Will spots her at Lucifer's side. "Hey! Is this the detective?"

Her eyes widen. "I— Uh..."

"Indeed, it is," Lucifer says, placing a hand on the small of her back to push her forward. "Detective Chloe Decker. You can rest easy knowing she's after L.A.'s miscreants. Like a pitbull with a tiny woodland creature, this one. Doesn't give up until the job is done."

A laugh bubbles up out of Chloe, coupling uncomfortably with the hot burn in her cheeks. Tamping the hysteria down, she reaches across the counter, offering her hand. "Nice to meet you, Will." They shake, and she feels a little more in her element, instead of like she's been pulled into
the unpredictable currents of Hurricane Lucifer.

"Do you have time to answer some questions about"—she brings up Yates' license photo on her phone—"this man? We think he was a regular here."

"Uh, sure, of course." Will glances at the photo. "Can't say I remember him, but let me get your food, and we'll talk."

Several minutes later, the three of them are seated outside, under a navy-and-white-striped umbrella. Lucifer digs into his poke bowl with gluttonous abandon, fork in one hand, flask in the other. The food is delicious, but Chloe finds the faint smell of fish off-putting after the crime scene, and only picks at the ahi to be polite. It was free, after all.

She shows the photo to Will again. "This is David Yates. If you or any of your staff can tell us anything about him, what he was like, when you last saw him, that'd be great."

Will stares at the photo for several long seconds. "I have the memory of a goldfish. And so many people come through..." He flashes another grin at Lucifer.

"What about security cameras? Any watch the register?"

The big man shrugs apologetically. "I've been meaning to install one... Theft isn't a big concern for a small restaurant like mine." He pats the table with a hand. "Tell you what, let me get Theresa. She's at the register most." He rises and claps Lucifer on the shoulder. "I've gotta get back in. Come by any time. And good luck with the case. Nice to meet you, Detective." He turns and reenters the restaurant.

With Will gone, Chloe smacks Lucifer's side. "Is this another of your favors?"

"Such abuse I suffer," he says, rubbing his ribs. "But of course. Will needed the real estate to show off his culinary talents, and in exchange I get poke whenever I want. And the playlist is mine." He lets out a particularly pleased moan around his fork. Several patrons at nearby tables turn to look at him, some with far more interest than is appropriate. "Love me some poke salad."

She scowls at him. "Obviously."

A young, red-haired woman whose pale white skin is smattered with freckles steps up to their table. "Hi, I'm Theresa. Will said I should talk to you?"

"Detective Decker, LAPD," Chloe introduces herself. She nods to her left. "Lucifer Morningstar, my associate."

Theresa smiles familiarly at him. "Hi, Lucifer."

"Why, hello again, darling," he purrs.

Though she doesn't mean to, Chloe bristles. "Theresa. Have a seat. We're investigating a murder. Do you recognize this man?"

Theresa sits primly, takes one look at the license photo, and grimaces. "Oh, yeah, I know him. He came here often. Total creep."

"Always go with your gut," Lucifer says sympathetically. "Chap was deep into blood play."

"Notice anything about him?" Chloe continues. "Anyone he ate with?"
"Nah. He was a loner. Always ordered the same bowl and a California roll. Sat by himself. Was pretty obsessed with his phone when he ate here, which he only did sometimes." She shrugs.

Interesting. They found no phone at the crime scene.

"Eating alone while using your phone isn't a crime," Chloe says, just a tad too defensively. Lucifer snorts.

"Oh, no, I'm on my phone all the time," Theresa admits. "But he watched porn. I had to ask him to leave a few times when he wouldn't keep the volume down."

"Oh. Yeah. That's different."

"Exhibitionism is far more common than you humans think." Lucifer drops his napkin into his empty bowl and leans back. "What did he wear typically?"


Grinning at the compliment, he grabs Chloe's unfinished food and digs in again. "Long-sleeve or short-sleeve?"

"I don't know. Short-sleeve, I think. When it was warm enough."

"Anything else you remember about him, in particular?" Chloe adds quickly, "Other than his...sexual proclivities, that is."

"Honestly, he didn't stand out from the crowd otherwise. He just had horrible manners. It's not like he's the only one, even." She shrugs. "Sorry, I don't really know anything about him."

"He wore foul manties," Lucifer reveals. "Best of luck excising that from your brain."

They thank Theresa for her time and leave. When they're seated inside the squad car a few minutes later, Chloe cranks the air conditioning up all the way and leans against the steering wheel, waiting for it to kick in.

"What was with all the fashion questions?"

"Merely trying to determine whether our David was a cutter. Most of that lot hide their scars."

Chloe nods. "So maybe the self-harm was a recent development." She sighs and edges out of their parking spot. "No witnesses, no loved ones, no social life."

"Explains all the self-hate and self-love," Lucifer quips.

"Feels like we're hitting a dead end."

Those are the truly sad cases, the ones where bad people literally get away with murder because their victims live lonely existences. No one misses these people when they're gone because no one even knows they're gone in the first place. David Yates clearly had problems, but that doesn't mean he couldn't have gotten help and turned his life around. Now, there's no chance of that.

"You'll figure it out, Detective."

"We don't find every killer," she argues. Glancing at him, she adds, "And there's a lot right under my nose that I never see."
Back at the precinct, David's landlord, an overly-Botoxed baby boomer named Jessica Plant, proves to be another dead end.

"I haven't interacted with him since he signed the lease. I own the building, but, well, you saw it's not in the best part of town. I only visit once or twice a year. And I bring my Taser."

"He did quite a bit of damage to your awful nest egg, didn't he?" Lucifer taunts. "Were you having trouble evicting him, perhaps? Found a more expedient way to do it?"

Chloe doesn't bother pointing out a butcher's knife to the gut isn't exactly expedient.

"Look, in that dump, I was just glad he paid his rent on time most months. No one ever complained about him, and I had no idea what kind of shape he'd let the place get in. Those apartments are old, but they're not rundown. I'll have to tear out all the carpet." She shudders. "And thoroughly fumigate."

"Any cameras in the hallways or parking lot?" Chloe asks.

"This isn't some luxury apartment we're talking about. There are a couple outside, but there's a huge blank spot between the parking lot and David's door. I'll send over what I have, though. Hopefully it will help. I'm never going to get full rent on the place until you catch the killer."

After Jessica leaves, Chloe sits at her desk with a sigh. "We're off to a great start."

Lucifer steals a nearby chair and sits beside her. "It felt good, otherwise, didn't it? Everything's back to normal."

They're both trying to figure this out, trying to determine what they can keep of their relationship, versus what they've lost. It's too early to know what they've gained.

He looks so worried and hopeful at the same time. She touches his wrist, her fingers sneaking beneath his shirt cuff to find skin. "This isn't normal. We're not normal. But maybe that's okay? At least we're working on it." He relaxes. "Hey," she says, looking around the precinct and lowering her voice, "you didn't do anything to any of the...um, more awkward evidence from the loft, did you?"

He leans back in his chair and snorts. "I bloody well tried, didn't I? But this corrupt little organization of supposed justice beat me to it. The LAPD is filled with greedy imbeciles, darling."

"So someone took your..." She swirls a finger over her shoulder.

"Mm. Not ideal. No telling where they are now. Do you know, the last time I lost a few feathers in America, some Iroquois bloke got hold of them right before your country's not-so-Civil War. Couldn't even be mad. Looked better on him, really." He frowns, thoughtful. "Wonder whatever happened to that headdress..."

Chloe stares at him. "Somehow, I don't think I've really thought about how old you are until this exact moment."

"I prefer experienced." There's no mistaking what "experience" he's referring to.

Clearing her throat, she returns to the matter of his stolen feathers, saying quietly, "I don't know who to trust here."

"Me, of course."
"Other than you," she laughs. "And Dan and Ella."

"Are we sure about Daniel?"

"This is serious, Lucifer. Cain's enterprise may still be up and running."

"Yes, well, I may already have some people looking into that," he admits guiltily.

"Good." She learned long ago to accept at least some of his private scheming. "And can you trust them?"

He barks a laugh. "No, they're scoundrels, the lot of them, but they're not foolish enough to cross me." He stretches. "Well, enough of this boring nonsense. We're not figuring any of it out tonight."

"You're right," Chloe sighs.

"Hmm? Say that one more time?" He touches an ear. "I must be going deaf in my old age."

As they make their way to their cars, Lucifer flashes a roguish grin that seems more forced than natural. "You know," he says, his voice turning to honey, "Lux is reopening on Friday. You should put on a slinky dress and join me."

"I'd really like to," she starts, and means it. "But I can't. You probably don't know, but today was Trixie's last day at school. Summer vacation has officially started. I told her we could stay up and watch movies on Friday."

A look of wistfulness passes over his face. He really did enjoy Monopoly, of all games, didn't he? And he held Trixie at Charlotte's funeral. Somewhere along the way, her monkey weaseled her way into the Devil's life. It was hard to know whether to feel proud or worried. The teen years were going to be interesting.

"If you think Lux can run itself, you could join our party at some point," she says, smiling. "There'll be pizza and Zootopia. Probably some nail painting." She wags her fingers. He's comfortable enough in his motley sexuality that she can already imagine him with at least black nail polish.

Instead, his open expression hardens. "Sounds like a terrible way to spend a Friday," he bites out, and turns toward his car.

"Hey!" she calls, her voice echoing. He glances at her from the driver's seat of the Corvette. "Don't do that. Don't act like movie night with my kid isn't part of who you are. It is."

Maybe. She hopes.

But all he does is grunt and crank the engine to life before tearing out of the parking lot.

Chapter End Notes

Huge thanks to puerile for keeping the LAPD in line. I'm learning a lot about police work. Should help me avoid getting caught, or at least make a quick escape.
Fic Recs • My Fics, Categorized • My Fanvids on YouTube • Tumblr
Cain roams Hell, hunger chewing at his belly and hatred burning in his veins. This world is misery come to life, and the Devil alone is to blame for why he's here.

Time is strange in the underworld. There is no sun or moon, no rain or birdsong. There exists nothing by which to count the days or months or years, and he has seen no one since escaping his loop. But he senses years have passed. Many.

There is only grim silence and dull, inescapable grayness. Gray sky, gray smoke, gray ash. He is naked, as Balor left him so long ago, and even his light skin and blond hair are gray, coated in a thick layer of ash and grime. If not for the occasional tangerine lake of bubbling, molten lava, he might believe himself color blind.

Hell's landscape is equal parts flat and mountainous. In clear areas, he can see for miles, but as often, the flatness is interrupted by tall, black peaks, some with the telltale puckered mouth of a volcano.

It's within these dark ridges that the doors are wedged. They rattle ominously against their chains, churning their recurring nightmares.

Wandering these door-filled passageways, Cain feels both claustrophobic and lonely, much like when he was a cursed man on Earth. So many souls. Millions, billions. Everyone who has ever died with guilt. All untouchable, all alone. So self-absorbed that they will never know they are part of a crowd.

Perhaps it is this loneliness that leads him to try opening one of the doors. Perhaps, deep down, he has begun to wonder about the door he left behind. Surely it, like all the rest, was chained closed? And yet he opened it, and before him, Balor opened it. What makes him different?

Eager as he was to escape the loop, he never thought to examine his prison on the way out. Now, he can't imagine he will ever find it again. Direction is meaningless here.

The first door he tries to open is heavy and ornately Gothic, all twisting, thorn-covered roses etched into iron. Cain inhales sharply when the heavy chains crisscrossing its face shimmer and disappear beneath his touch. An illusion, one of Hell's many parlor tricks, or something else?

He opens the door. Color and light blind him. Verdant, tall grasses; bright sunlight; a sea salt breeze; fresh air. How is paradise tucked into Hell? He crosses the threshold, wondering if it's possible to become sucked into another soul's misery, but too curious to care. Besides, he'll break free, if he needs to.

When the wind blows a certain way in this false world, he can hear a girl keen. He doesn't have to go far to find her, which makes him realize how small these simulations are, how narrow, but all-encompassing, the torture is.

Down a meandering trail against a craggy cliff face, he comes upon a slip of a girl standing knee deep in the ocean. The bottom of her rose-colored dress floats around her legs, turning dark crimson in the water. Her face is upturned to the sky as she wails, the white bonnet on her head set askew.
He nears her, stepping out onto the sand, and then into the water. It's only when he is close, when he can see around the undulating fabric of her dress, that he spots the infant, bobbing, face-down, like a blue-skinned apple in the barrel of the sea.

Cain opens other doors. Each loop is unique, specially crafted for the soul imprisoned. Though patterns of human behavior quickly emerge, the details surrounding the sin can include anyone from anywhere and anywhen.

Most loops contain one of two sins: murder or rape. But the tortured aren't always who Cain expects. Sometimes, it's not the perpetrators the loop torments. Sometimes, it's the victims. Hell isn't a place of justice. It is a machine that punishes guilt, whosoever feels it.

Of course, the list of things humans can feel guilty about is endless, and no guilty person is safe. Paupers and princes alike are tortured.

There are couples shouting over divorce papers. Brides and grooms weighed down by the gold on their ring fingers. Gay men fathering children with women they've married, lesbians having children with their husbands. Infidelity cleaving homes in two.

Women crying in abortion clinics. Women crying over children they didn't want. Men fathering and leaving children. Men fathering and bitterly caring for children. Siblings at each other's throats, as Cain had once been at Abel's, vying for their parents' affections.

Addicts giving in to drugs, to alcohol, to sex, to porn, to love, to binging, to purging, to gambling, to fame and fortune, spiraling on and down until lives are ruined. There's sex wanted and unwanted, all of it tainted by shame. There's the pain of awkwardness, of jilted lovers, of the bullies and the bullied.

There are men and women who failed themselves and others. Faith healers, midwives, beak-nosed plague doctors. Parents and grandparents and priests and teachers. Politicians, lobbyists, bankers.

All the while, the suicidal kill themselves over and over and over again, that brief flash of regret prior to death amplified and lengthened for maximum agony. If only the noose weren't so tight, if only the blade hadn't cut so deep, if only the bridge were closer to the water, if only the gun had misfired, if only, if only, if only.

God's creation is no longer young. There is nothing new under the sun—just new spins on old tales. Every possible regret is housed here and played on repeat.

How long Cain visits these nightmares, he cannot say. But when he closes the last door he ever intends to open, he vows to himself that he will never be as weak as these fools again.

Guilt is useless. Embracing every desire, every action, without regret, that is power. With that knowledge, he will rise, not only out of his Hell loop, but higher and higher still, perhaps out of Hell itself.

He knows what it will take to do that. Somewhere here, there is a crown to claim.

Chapter End Notes

Fic Recs • My Fics, Categorized • My Fanvids on YouTube • Tumblr
Since accepting the truth, restful sleep hasn't come easy to Chloe. Most nights, she climbs into bed, only to pick apart the past. All the clues she missed, all the lingering confusion and misunderstandings. All the hurt, both felt and caused. 

For every answer she's gotten in the last two weeks, more questions have surfaced. It isn't that life made perfect sense before—in her work, she’s always asking herself why people do the things they do—but there’s no denying life made more sense. 

Trying to understand the complexities of the afterlife and immortal beings is akin to staring into a bottomless pit, hoping to find solid ground. During the day, she sets it all aside to focus on Trixie and work, but at night everything resurfaces as a headache felt right behind her eyes. 

Already, she's given up on the religious studies. When the texts aren't boring, they're too hard to understand. And when they're understandable, they're boring. Mostly, she just doesn't believe the old men who wrote them knew what they were talking about. 

Nearly all of them think the Devil is evil. She knows better. 

She wants to grill Lucifer more, wants to dive deeper into who he is and What It All Means, but the timing is never right. They've found some weird equilibrium since she extracted bullets from his wings, shared pizza with him on his rooftop, and mostly forgave him for his stupid, pointless marriage to Candy. 

Okay, she's still working on that one. 

How healthy this equilibrium is, she doesn't know. They're doing what they do best: dancing around each other, working cases. They don't talk about the rest, unless it's couched in wit and sarcasm. In some ways, it was easier those first few days, when the truth was fresh and bold, red and winged, and they had to address it head on. Now, they each have their own space, and neither is willing to encroach on the other's. It's very polite, as elephants in rooms tend to be. 

The red numbers of her bedside clock read 2:00 a.m. 

Linda would know what to do, how to slow this racing hamster wheel, but she's avoided her friend, even at Charlotte's funeral. At first, Chloe thought it would be good to talk to her. She's known the truth longest, picked at Lucifer's impossible brain more than anybody else. 

But Chloe is a little afraid of being analyzed herself, of having to face all the uncertainties and truths lurking deep inside. Linda is a therapist in the same way Chloe is a detective. Even when they're out for drinks and fun, neither of them quite turns off their professional selves. 

Groaning, Chloe turns over and yanks the sheets over her head. 

In the morning, with only a few hours of sleep to tide her over, her body is a livewire, running off adrenaline and caffeine as she launches into The Routine. Get up. Shower. Look presentable. Feed Trixie. Make sure Trixie is dressed. Send Trixie to school. Drive without getting herself or others killed. Check emails. Return calls. Power through paperwork. And on and on.
An hour later, mere seconds before falling asleep at her desk, a coffee cup plunks down before her. She startles and looks up.

"One tall, nonfat almond milk latte, with sugar-free caramel drizzle," Lucifer says. "Disgusting, just the way you like it. I've not even turned it Irish." He frowns. "Though you look like you could use it."

He's one to talk. Though dressed impeccably, he also appears frazzled, a hair off-kilter in a way she can't quite place. Maybe he didn't like how they left things yesterday, either. Or, well, she tries not to think about all the other ways his sleep might have been disturbed.

"Thank you," she says, hands folding round the hot paper cup. "If we weren't on the clock, I'd take you up on the whisky."

Lucifer grins and leans forward, one hand flat against her desk, the other slipping inside his suit jacket. "I won't tell if you won't, Detective."

Despite her amusement, she forces herself to give him a disapproving look.

"Hey, Decker—" Ella comes to an abrupt stop as she rounds the corner. "Whoa. Oh, man, I'm interrupting something, aren't I?"

"What? No," Chloe says, the din of the bullpen rushing back into her head. She shoves away from her desk and Lucifer, who shrugs and resettles his flask in his jacket pocket. She clears her throat. "Is the toxicology report in?"

"Uh, yeah," Ella replies, drawing them into her lab. Dan is already there, leaning against the central station. Ella grabs a tablet from a desk and announces, "We found heroin in David's system."

"Why, Daniel, isn't that what I said would happen?" Lucifer taunts.

"Whatever, man." Dan shakes his head. "You couldn't know."

"We also found trace elements of some other substance."

Chloe pipes up, "His heroin was laced with something?"

" Probably not intentionally. It really is just a trace amount—maybe some material from the manufacturing process." Ella shrugs. "That part came back inconclusive." She sets the tablet aside and raises a gloved finger in the air. "But! I did find something else." She turns to another table. "Drumroll, please!"

Lucifer obliges, rapping his forefingers on the edge of the lab station.

When Ella turns back, she holds high one of the dirty plates from Yates' apartment. "Ta-da!"

The drumming peters out. "That's it? We've already seen his filth and appalling taste in china."

"Yeah, but did you see what he was eating, like, all the time?" Ella brings the plate close to her face and breathes deep, ignoring the horrified groans the others make. "Smells like my abuelita's cooking. You know, if it was scraps that had been left out to rot for weeks."

Dan rubs a hand over his face. "So, he liked Mexican food. Welcome to L.A. What about the butcher's knife?"

"No bueno. It's your garden-variety, made-in-China Walmart buy," Ella says, shrugging. "You
probably have one in your kitchen."

"I most certainly do not," Lucifer says, offended.

"Okay, maybe not you. But, you know, everyone else."

Chloe frowns. "David's trash didn't contain any wrappers or receipts from Mexican restaurants, did it? It looked like he mainly ate at Poke'n Around."

"Exactly!" Ella howls, pointing at Chloe. "That guy loved his poke. But he also ate a lot of Mexican food, which he didn't seem to buy out. And he wasn't one to cook, either."

"So, someone brought him food," Chloe says. "A lot."

"Someone old is my bet," Ella adds. "This dish design is straight outta the seventies."

Lucifer scowls at the offending pattern of yellow flowers. "Something went terribly wrong with that era." His lips lift suddenly. "Freddie was a delight, though."

"Freddie Mercury?" Ella exclaims. Lucifer looks at her with a smug, arched brow.

"Why do you guys encourage him?" Dan sighs. "I'll call Jessica Plant. See if she knows of any kind old ladies who'd have taken pity on Yates."

Chloe smiles, relieved. "Thanks, Ella. Looks like we're finally getting somewhere."

Maria Rosales lives in a west-facing apartment on the first floor of Cedarwood Heights, placing her at the opposite end, and three floors down, from David Yates. But Jessica Plant is sure she's the most likely candidate for neighborly cooking. Most of the complex's tenants are young families or single moms, too busy or poor to be handing out food to questionable neighbors.

Chloe knocks on the woman's door while listening to the Spanish blaring from a television within. When no one answers after a few moments, she calls out, "Ms. Rosales, we're here with the LAPD. We just want to talk."

A moment later, the television quiets and the door opens a crack. They look forward, then down, on Maria, who is in a wheelchair. She fumbles awkwardly with the door, trying to wheel backwards. Depending on her disability, it's unlikely she makes trips upstairs, Chloe thinks. There are no elevators at Cedarwood Heights. Maybe David came to her.

"What do you want?" Maria barks, her accent thick. She manages to shift back enough to swing the door open wider, revealing a full, heavy-jowled frown. Maybe not the kind old lady they were expecting.

Chloe answers, "We'd like to ask you some questions about your upstairs neighbor, David Yates."

"Didn't know him. Heard he got killed. Didn't murder him." She indicates her wheelchair wryly.

"Yes, yes, quite the alibi," Lucifer says. "So you just happened to shower a stranger with food?"

"Is that a crime?" Maria challenges. "You gonna arrest me?"

"Yes," Lucifer says at the same time Chloe says "no."

Chloe glares at Lucifer before reiterating, "We just want to talk."
"Fine," Maria grumbles, and wheels into her living room, leaving them to follow. "So talk. But make it quick. My show's on soon."

Maria's home is like most any other grandmother's: dated, adorned by knick-knacks, religious kitsch, and photos of grandchildren. Chloe elbows Lucifer when he snickers at a figurine of the Virgin Mary and baby Jesus.

"Thank you for talking to us," Chloe says after they've sunk deep into a lumpy, canary yellow loveseat that presses them hip to hip. Sometimes it's best to start with thank you.

Maria settles in an adjacent corner of the room that is clearly her spot. She eyes the Mexican soap opera playing on the muted television before folding her hands on her ample belly and regarding them shrewdly. "Didn't know my neighbor," she states again, "but my grandson did."

Chloe nods, pen scribbling. "And what's your grandson's name?"

"Eduardo Rosales, but he goes by Eddie." Her thick wrinkles twist with her grimace.

"How did Eduardo know David?" she asks, making a point to use the name Maria prefers.

"Think they met at a baseball game."

Lucifer leans forward, homing in like a shark. "Now, now. No need to be dishonest, Ms. Rosales."

Maria narrows her eyes, one hand gravitating to the saint medal hanging around her thick neck. "I'm not lying. Said I think they met at a baseball game."

"Okay," Chloe placates. "So, they were friends?"

"Yes."

"Did your grandson happen to share your cooking with David?"

"Yes." Good, at least they have the right person.

"Where might we find Eduardo today? We're hoping he can tell us about what was going on in David's life more recently."

"He works at Dalton Paints and Hardware down the road."

Before Chloe can ask another question, Lucifer stops her with a hand on her wrist. He leans forward even more, catching Maria's gaze. "What is it you're hiding, Maria?"

"I'm not—"

"Oh, but you are," he says with a wolfish grin. "What do you desire, right this moment?"

Chloe watches, mesmerized, as Lucifer works his magic, which turns out not to be magic at all, but some innate snake-charmer quality belonging to the Devil. He's done this by her side countless times before, and she's not above admitting she's come to rely on it in a lot of their work. But this is the first time she's watched him do it with the full knowledge of who and what he is.

She knows she should have her eyes on Maria, but she can't look away from Lucifer's face. Tempting humans must be easy when you can crack them open like books and riffle through their pages to find the juicy bits. But it must also be isolating.
Not for the first time, she's glad he can't open her book. What would he learn, if he could? What would she learn about herself? Facing his mojo would be far worse than talking to Linda.

"I don't..."

"Go on," Lucifer coaxes, his fingers twitching against Chloe's wrist.

"I don't want you to catch Eduardo," Maria gasps. "He won't always sell drugs. He's promised me." She deflates when Lucifer releases her from his mental grasp. "Dios Mío, what have I done? What have I done?"

"Trust me when I tell you Dad doesn't care one whit."

"It's okay," Chloe soothes. "We're not after your grandson. We just want to talk to him. David's death is our priority."

"Eduardo didn't kill him!"

"And we're not accusing him of murder." Not yet, anyway. "Do you know if he sold drugs to David, or if he had David sell drugs for him?"

"No. I don't know. He doesn't tell me anything," Maria whispers, no longer the grouchy powerhouse they first met. "But Eduardo's a good boy."

"Well, he's certainly providing a valuable service," Lucifer says. "Where would the world be without drug dealers? Far more boring."

Chloe narrows her eyes at him. Pointing her pen at the row of family pictures displayed on the table next to Maria, she asks, "Are these recent? Can you show us what Eduardo looks like?"

With trembling hands, Maria picks up one of the framed photographs and hands it to Chloe. "Thank you," Chloe murmurs, as she stares into warm brown eyes.

Eduardo Rosales has a charming smile, but he's also a walking stereotype of a Mexican drug dealer, all tattoos (including on his sweet baby face), tight tank, low-riding jeans. The kind of guy who loves his abuela's cooking, sure, but also likes making a quick buck off the never-ending Drug War.

She hands the photo back to Maria. "Okay, I think that's enough, Ms. Rosales. Thank you for helping us."

When they're at the doorway, the old woman says quietly, but loud enough for them to hear, "Be good to my Eduardo. Even if I can't keep an eye on you, don't forget God sees all!"

"Nope, nope, nope," Chloe mutters, shoving Lucifer outside before he can open his big mouth. "Thank you!" she calls again, and slams the door shut behind them.

"So pushy," Lucifer teases, straightening his suit jacket. "I like it."

She laughs. "Just get in the car, Lucifer."

Dalton Paints and Hardware is a mere four blocks south. Wedged between a pawn shop and a payday lender, the store is a relic of a more prosperous yesteryear and one of the last businesses on the street that isn't part of a national chain. It's a miracle it's survived.

A bell rings as they open the iron-barred door. Though Chloe has never set foot in Dalton Paints,
the sheets of plywood, cans of paint, and hanging tools drown her in nostalgia.

"What is it?" Lucifer asks, sensing the change in her mood.

She shakes her head. "Just thinking of my dad. He used to bring me to a store like this on the weekends."

"What, as punishment?"

"No," she snorts. "When Mom bought the beach house—the one I was living in when you and I met—it was really rundown. On his day off, Dad was always fixing something. He'd bring me along on his errands to places like this."

She remembers trailing behind him, babbling on like Trixie does now, brandishing a paint stick as though it were a lightsaber. How he'd look back at her and wink or tug on her ponytail. How she'd hang off his arm, and he's swing her down the aisle and call her a monkey.

"So, it's a good memory," he clarifies.

"It is," she says, and smiles.

Sometimes she wonders what her dad would think of Lucifer, if he were alive. He'd probably hate him. At first. But the Devil grows on you, once he lets down his more repulsive façade, which is thankfully more emotional shield than reality.

A scrawny young black man clears his throat from behind the register. "Can I help you guys find something?"

Chloe smiles, glancing at his name tag. "Hi, Anton, we're with the LAPD." She flashes the badge at her hip and introduces herself and Lucifer. "Is Eduardo—Eddie—Rosales here? His grandmother told us he works here. We'd like to ask him a few questions."

Anton's eyes widen. "I'm sorry, but Eddie didn't come in today."

"Likes to play hooky, does he?" Lucifer asks.


"Chill. Right." Lucifer nods knowingly and puffs an imaginary spliff.

"I don't know nothin' about that," Anton says, expression neutral.

"Did he call in sick?" Chloe asks, ignoring Lucifer's antics.

"He didn't even reply to my texts. But I know his girlfriend's in town." Anton shrugs. "He's never himself when she's around."

Sounds like a healthy relationship.

"Okay, well, do you have his address?"

"Uh, yeah. Wait here a sec." He wanders into the back of the store.

Lucifer removes his flask and takes a long swig of its contents before going to prowl the narrow aisles. He touches at least half of what he sees. Chloe watches him, amused and unable to shake how much he looks like a lion trapped in a cage. He's never going to be good at this part of police
work—the standing around and waiting. Unfortunately, that's what a lot of police work is.

When they first met, she thought Lucifer was impatient because he was an eccentric and coddled trust fund baby, used to getting whatever he wanted, whenever he wanted it. She knows better now. It isn't that he's used to the world handing him things, although it certainly does that sometimes. It's that he's used to shaping the world as he sees fit. He holds back that part of himself around her, letting her take the lead, but she sees how the tedium of protocol drives him mad.

Though she'll never admit it, she gets it. There are many times she would like to do things his way, if only to get the job done faster. He thinks she loves protocol, but she doesn't. A lot of it seems pointless, even to her. It's just adherence isn't optional.

She remembers that first case they worked together, back before they were partners, when his friend, the pop singer Delilah, was killed. No matter what lead Chloe followed, Lucifer was one step ahead of her, thanks to some devious shortcut involving money, favors, threats, or something much darker, or maybe, come to think of it, redder.

The memory of Jimmy Barnes slamming his head into the psychiatric prison's Plexiglas floats to the surface of her mind.

*He's the Devil! He's the Devil!*

He really is. And while she's sure that was a bloodcurdling revelation for Jimmy, right now the Devil's holding bright orange plastic funnels up to his chest and chuckling to himself.

"Lucifer," she sighs, mostly to hide her mirth.

"Look, Detective," he says, beaming, "I'm like a virgin."

"More like a walking, talking STD. Can you put those down?"

Lucifer's on his best, cop-like behavior when Anton returns a minute later.

"Here you go," Anton says, handing Chloe an old, misprinted receipt. On the back, Eddie's address is scribbled in slanted block letters. "Anything else I can do for you?"

Chloe looks at the address, her brow furrowing. "Wait. He lives in *Palos Verdes Estates*?"

Lucifer snatches the slip of paper from her. "Well, well, Eddie's doing very nicely for himself, isn't he?"

An understatement. Homes on the peninsula start at two million. They also happen to be a half-hour, to hour, commute away from Rancho Dominguez, where Dalton Paints and Cedarwood Heights are located. While it might make sense for the citizens of Rancho Dominguez to commute to Palos Verdes for work, the reverse makes no sense at all.

Anton laughs. "Yeah, Eddie's got it made. Some aunt left him that house."

"Bit gullible, aren't you?" Lucifer shakes his head.

"Hey, I'm just telling you what he told me."

Before he can reveal too much about their case, Chloe thanks Anton and grabs Lucifer by the elbow. "Give us a call if you see Eddie," she says.

Anton holds up a hand in bewildered farewell. "Sure thing, Officer."
It's late afternoon when they park on the street outside Eddie Rosales' house. Lucifer lets out a low whistle as he eyeballs the red Lamborghini in the driveway.

"Seems our devious dealer has good taste."

"Yeah, and just look at the house."

Although Eddie's home maintains the neighborhood's cookie-cutter style of cream-colored stucco and terracotta roof tiles, it's one of the more sprawling, ostentatious properties on the street. Impossible to miss, by design, in the way of all things new money.

Chloe shakes her head. "Why's Maria stuck living in Cedarwood Heights when Eddie lives here? So much for being a good grandson."

"He hasn't exactly shared the wealth, has he?" Lucifer agrees. "But then there's no end to what you humans will do for money." Chloe's agitated look makes him snort. "Present company excluded, of course."

She leans over to peer up at the second story, where wrought iron balconies jut off from what are probably bedrooms as large as her apartment.

"Dispatch said there's nothing on Eddie in the database."

"You think there should be."

"I don't know," she admits. "But if this is Eddie's house, it isn't the house of a small-time drug dealer. Narcotics usually has guys like this on their radar. Apparently, they don't know anything about him."

"Or perhaps they do," Lucifer says dryly.

"Yeah."

When Chloe entered the force, she always knew she'd meet some dirty cops, the so-called "bad apples" that make a sizable percentage of the public hesitate to call for help during an emergency. She also knew the boys in blue were part of a brotherhood—with less than twenty percent of the force made up of women, it's never a sisterhood—and that the brotherhood didn't turn on its own, even when it should.

If she ever had rose-tinted glasses, they were smashed to pieces several scandals ago. After Palmetto, Deputy Warden Smith, and " Marcus Pierce," Chloe knows anything is possible.

"Detective?"

"I'm okay," she says, puffing out a breath. "I just didn't expect this case to escalate." Whatever happened to a crime of passion over good old fashioned infidelity?

"Well, shall we pay dear Eddie a visit then?" Lucifer nods to Rosales' front door, which is painted a bold burgundy. Perhaps the paint came from Dalton Paints.

"Yes, but one more thing before we go: No breaking and entering if he's not home or won't answer his door."

Lucifer pouts. "But that's how you and I solve cases. You play good cop. I play Devil cop who doesn't mind massaging the rules a little."
"Yeah, okay, but we're not going to do that this time. We go through the proper channels and get a warrant if Eddie's not home. We're being watched—I'm being watched—after what happened at the loft. And unless you want to be stuck on desk duty with a ton of paperwork..."

"Very well," Lucifer huffs, and climbs out of the car.

The threat of paperwork is real, even if he'd never be the one to do any of it. He's smart enough to know the more she's stuck at her desk, the less they get to drive around L.A., catching bad guys.

Three knocks to the burgundy door later, it's obvious no one's going to answer. Worse, if there's any movement inside, it can't be heard over hysterical dog yapping. They peek into the windows nearest the door, past gaps in the curtains.

"More expensive tastes," Chloe remarks over the barking. Angling in such a way that she can see the living room past the foyer, she spots what looks to be a real oil painting mounted above a sleek leather sectional. She leans back. "Dalton Paints must be Eddie's cover for—"

She gasps when a small dog slams into the window nearest Lucifer, who only laughs. A black, curly-haired poodle dances on hind legs, head jerking left and right as it snarls.

"What a menace," Lucifer says brightly, bending to stare the miniature poodle in the eye. "What is it, girl? Has Eddie fallen down a well?"

The dog rams the window again, but this time its muzzle and paws discolor the curtains and smear red across the glass.

“Oh-ho, I don’t believe that’s tomato sauce.”

"Oh, God," Chloe mutters.

Lucifer cuts his eyes up at her before straightening. "You do know who you're with now, don't you?"

Ignoring him, she calls for backup and an ambulance. This is all the time Lucifer needs to be his usual self. She watches as he puts a hand on the door knob and taps a finger against the keyhole. There's an audible *snick* as the door comes unlocked.

Well, that answers a few questions—and raises hundreds of others.

"Lucifer, we agreed to no B&E!" Chloe hisses before he can open it.

"Ah-ah-ah," he says, wagging a finger at her. "The door is unlocked, isn't it? No breaking required, Detective. Entering is just a bonus. Besides, looks like poor Eddie could use our help."

Then he waltzes inside like he owns the place, like there couldn't possibly be a killer lying in wait. Yanking her pistol free from its holster, she raises the weapon before following. "*Lucifer,* stop acting like you're bulletproof. You're not, remember? I just got those bullets out of you, you idiot."

He grins at her cheekily. "While I appreciate the concern, there's no one here. Who would live in this mess?"

"Assumptions like that can get you killed."

"Mm-hmm," he responds dismissively as he snaps his fingers at the dog nipping at his dress shoes. The poodle instantly calms and sits back on its haunches, pink tongue flopping past bloodied
chops.

She's still reeling from the magical lock picking, and now he goes and charms a dog like it's nothing. This level of openness is going to take some getting used to.

"Since when is the Devil a dog whisperer?"

"Since Dad gave all his children and notably bipedal hominids dominion over Earth's pesky beasts. How else do you think Noah got even a fraction of them on that Bronze Age yacht of his?"

Sure. Okay. She'll think about all that later.

"Don't step in the blood," Chloe instructs. It's not an easy task. The dog has spread it all over the house.

"Right, or any of the other fluids." Lucifer sidesteps a large yellow stain.

Soon, it really does become obvious no one else is in the house. No one who's alive, anyway. There's no mistaking that smell, not to mention the signs of a pet left to its own devices. Still, Chloe keeps her gun held low in both hands. What she told Lucifer is true: sloppiness gets you killed.

They clear the first floor methodically, passing from one room to the next, the poodle traipsing blood behind them. Upon closer inspection, the house contains more expensive pieces, but is overall less spectacular than she expected. And far emptier.

"Not much of a den of sin, is it?" Lucifer says, echoing her thoughts. He turns up his nose at what really is a sad excuse for a game room. A pool table stands in the center of the room, clearly unused, as evidenced by the thick layer of dust that sits atop its cover. No pictures adorn the walls. It might as well be a show house.

They ascend the stairs to the second story. It's there that they find Eddie in the master bedroom, his body crumpled at the foot of the bed, dressed in jeans and a plain white T-shirt. The cause of death isn't immediately apparent, largely because his face and hands have been gnawed clean to the bone, which itself presents chew marks. His body is haloed by bloody paw prints.

"Had a bone to pick with him, did you?" Lucifer jokes, looking down at the obedient poodle. "Bad doggie."

Chloe holsters her weapon and digs into her back pocket for nitrile gloves. As she pulls them on, she squats next to Eddie's corpse and tilts her head one way and then the other. If she looks past all the carnage, she can make out a single, straight line visible on the side of Eddie's neck that the poodle hasn't completely destroyed.

"See here?" she asks Lucifer, pointing to the red cut. "Somebody slit his throat."

"Doesn't seem like something our furry friend would do."

But how does this fit into the Yates case? Does it at all? Here's another knife wound, and Eddie had access to drugs, some of which he may have sold to David. But it could also be a coincidence. Just because Rosales is their only lead for Yates doesn't mean he had anything to do with Yates' death, or that talking to him would have gotten them anywhere on that case.

Lucifer wanders the spacious room while she continues to inspect the body, careful not to touch it until backup and the forensics team arrive.
"Oh, hello." Chloe looks up in time to see Lucifer's bare hand hovering over a bedside table.

"Whatever it is, don't touch it!"

"I haven't," he whines as he straightens, as if he wasn't mere nanoseconds away from doing just that. "But look what I found."

Chloe joins him. He points to the phone still connected to its charging cable. Chloe picks it up and turns it on, only to sigh. "Password protected." Lucifer makes a frustrated sound. More waiting.

Before giving up and putting it back on the table, she picks at the edge of the phone case. Sometimes important notes or even items, like keys, are hidden between a phone and its case. After a couple of tries, the case's edge peels back, and she's able to dislodge the phone. Two small, thin ziplock bags fall to the floor.

Lucifer grins. "Well done, Detective."

Each bag is printed with a squat, red-winged insect on the outside. One contains a sliver of white powder. The other is empty, but a white, dusty residue clings to the inside of the plastic, suggesting it contained the same substance. Lucifer bends to pick up the empty bag. She grabs hold of the back of his shirt collar and reins him in.

"If you want to touch something, we're taking pictures first, and you're wearing gloves."

"This is starting to sound very kinky." He snickers. "Fine, give me gloves."

She smacks a pair into his outstretched palm. While she snaps a picture with her cell phone, he makes a big fuss about dragging them on. "Can't you carry a larger size?" he complains.

"Do I look like a purse? I've already told you I'm not carrying gloves for your hands. You have pockets." The very thought of it seems to offend him.

"Happy?" he says a moment later, waving blue jazz hands.

"Thrilled. You've done the bare minimum."

He picks up the empty bag. Before she can even think to stop him, he opens it up and stuffs his nose inside.

"Your nose isn't any better than your hand, Lucifer!"

"Do you want it inspected or not?" He sniffs.

Ugh. Fine. No going back now. The evidence is already tampered with. Why not dig her professional grave a little deeper by letting Lucifer be Lucifer? At least she might learn something.

"Well?" she prompts.

Frowning, he sniffs again before making a sound of disgust. "What is that?"

"So much for your career as a drug-sniffing dog," she says wryly. "It looks like heroin."

"Heroin has no odor. When it's pure enough, anyway. This..." Grimacing, he holds the bag out to her. "What is that smell? It's familiar."

"Are you crazy?" Yes. Yes, he is. "I'm not sniffing that. It could be whatever was in Yates' system,
assuming Eddie is even where David got his drugs. Or maybe it's laced with fentanyl and you'll drop dead in a few minutes."

"I bloody love fentanyl," Lucifer cheers, and stuffs his nose into the baggy with renewed interest. "Does a bang-up job of getting even me high."

"Okay, that," Chloe says, pointing a finger, "that's something you're never going to say at the precinct."

Hours later, the house is crawling with cops and technicians. It's all hands on deck for a place of this size, for a crime this gruesome, in a neighborhood this affluent. Even animal control is called for the poodle.

"Man's best friend can really turn on him, huh? Like this dude didn't have it bad enough, getting a knife to the throat," Ella says, miming the gruesome murder over Eddie's mangled corpse. "It's like we're in a Stephen King novel."

Lucifer grins at the forensic scientist. "Think our killer is a man in black who's fled across the desert?"

"I love The Dark Tower series," Ella gushes.

"Can we focus?" Chloe snaps, unable to quell her irritation, or apologize for it. The afternoon has stretched into night, and there's more work to be done yet.

They find no murder weapon in the house, which is little more than a lightly, if expensively, furnished shell. Cabinets, closets, and drawers are empty. There are no trash cans, no paper trails; the mailbox only contains advertising. No one's been able to crack the cell phone password yet, so it's headed to cyber.

There's no strong evidence Eddie or anyone else ever lived here for any significant length of time. None of the neighbors knew him, not even the busybody HOA president.

But they do find a few of what look to be Eddie's hairs on a pillowcase. And there are two sets of fingerprints on nearly everything—light switches, faucet heads, door handles. One set they confirm is the same as the fingerprints on Eddie's phone case. The other set isn't in the database, but could possibly belong to the girlfriend Anton mentioned.

When the evidence is bagged and tagged and Ella has left, having already worked well past her shift, a team from Narcotics arrives to throw their weight around. Upon hearing the familiar, booming laugh of one of her least favorite people in the LAPD, Chloe steps out onto Eddie's balcony in search of solace.

Even out here, though, she's caught in a texting war with Trixie's babysitter, who is pissed that it's going to be another late night. Chloe's pissed it's another late night, too. Not that she was likely to sleep through much of it.

"Are you okay, Detective?"

She looks over her shoulder at Lucifer. He's silhouetted by the golden light spilling from the bedroom.

"I'm fine." When he doesn't join her on the balcony, she nods to the space beside her in invitation. "You could go home, you know. We can't do much else until tomorrow. I have to talk to the
Narcotics team, though. It's a task she's dreading.

"I'll stay, if it's all the same to you."

"I could use the company," she admits.

Something in her cases, knowing he'll remain. Typically, Lucifer makes a quick exit as soon as the excitement dies down. He bounces from cases to parties and women and men and drugs and alcohol.

But something has calmed in him since she saw his burned skin. He's still wild in a way she suspects he always will be, but, paradoxically, he's also more grounded and consistent. He sticks around, mostly, unless something scares him off—that something usually being when she pokes at his thick armor.

What has his father, what has God, done to him? What has God planned for her? Does God even make plans?

Wind blows from the west, tossing her hair. She shivers, and Lucifer drifts nearer, his arm hesitantly settling around her shoulders.

"Is this all right?" he whispers. For one who's always stumbling into a new person's arms, he's often strangely uncertain about physical affection with her.

In reply, she huddles closer, one hand sliding inside his suit jacket, to grip the vest underneath. He draws in a small, shuddering breath.

"You're so warm." Being against him is like curling toward a crackling fire, and she marvels again at how he's not been miserable during the heat of the day. "Is that because of..." She hesitates.

"Because of Hell?" he says. "No." He doesn't elaborate, and she knows to drop the subject, at least for now.

"Hey, Decker! When you're done eye-fucking Richie Rich, why don't you come do your job?" The "joke" is followed by several officers' barked laughs.

Chloe jerks from Lucifer's embrace and turns toward the house. Narcotics Detective Matthew Morrison stands just inside Eddie's bedroom, a smirk peeking out from his thick, salt-and-pepper beard.

The nearly all-male Narcotics team is prone to such comments, and Morrison is the worst offender of them all. He leers or sneers at all the women in the LAPD, even Monroe, when she was chief of police. There are rules against sexist behavior and sexual harassment, but, really, who watches the watchmen?

Damned if she doesn't feel she needs to prove herself to this asshole, though. Prove she isn't weak, isn't leaning on L.A.'s notorious playboy, like some foolish, besotted girl. Even when she was married to Dan, she kept a wall between them at work to be taken more seriously by men like Morrison.

"Be right there," she says, and feels dirty for being agreeable.

Lucifer straightens his vest, looking more than a little irritated as they reenter Eddie's home. Some officers stop what they're doing to watch them as they pass.
"He's a right wanker, isn't he?" Lucifer doesn't bother lowering his voice.

He has no idea.

They find Morrison downstairs, at the dining room table, several file folders spread in front of him. The table is large and obviously expensive, being made of solid wood, but the room is under-decorated and unused, like so much else in the house.

"More paperwork," Lucifer admonishes. "The LAPD is personally contributing to climate change."

"You brought him?" Morrison says, one bushy brow raised. He's old school and a boy of the brotherhood. "Civilian consultants" don't jibe with him.

Chloe sits in the chair across from the middle-aged detective, her spine rigid. "He's my partner. Lucifer, this is Detective Matthew Morrison." Lucifer remains silent as he settles in the chair beside her and turns a fierce grin on the other man.

"Uh-huh." Morrison sifts through the papers until he finds one in particular. "All right, tell me about the paint store."

"There was nothing too special about it. I mean, there aren’t many Mom and Pop stores like it anymore, but it’s what you’d expect." She describes its layout and location, and Anton, the one employee they met.

Morrison nods. "Gonna see if we need to go undercover there. Trying to figure out if Eddie used them for money laundering."

"Are you mad?" Lucifer barks a laugh. "You don’t launder money through a shop like that. It’s not a bloody strip club or bar." Chloe eyes him suspiciously. "I’m just saying."

"Sounds like you know a whole lot about it," Morrison drawls. "Hey, don’t you have a club? Maybe we should be looking into you, Mr. Morningstar."

"You can look all you like," Lucifer says serenely.

"With all due respect," Chloe jumps in, "I think we should focus on Eddie Rosales. The job at the store was probably a cover. Once we get into his phone—"

"Well, with all due respect, you’re not in Narcotics, are you, Decker? We’re looking at the big picture here."

The way he says it, it’s heavily implied she doesn’t have the capacity to see the big picture.

Beneath the table, Lucifer’s hand clamps down on Chloe’s thigh, sending a pleasant shock through her system. He leans forward and hooks Morrison like a fish.

"What is it you want most in life, Matty?"

Morrison relaxes into his chair. "I wanna retire early."

"Naturally. You deserve to retire early, don’t you?" Morrison nods. "And what are you doing to ensure your early exit?"

"I’m playing both sides," Morrison giggles as much as a thick-bodied brute can. "I seize and I sell."

"Ooh, got your hand in two cookie jars, have you?" Lucifer laughs. "Naughty boy. Very risky, you
know. And very illegal, isn't it, Detective?"

Chloe nods, her mouth agape. Morrison just went from disgusting to dangerous in the span of thirty seconds.

Morrison shakes himself free of Lucifer's charm. "What the fuck?" he growls.

Lucifer bares his teeth in a grin. "A hypocritical narc. Who could have ever guessed?"

"Eddie Rosales couldn't have been an informant," Chloe says, pushing past her shock. "You told dispatch that Narcotics knew nothing about him. But you could have known him."

Is Morrison buried under a pseudonym in Eddie's contacts? Where is this case taking them?

"I may take advantage of a few loopholes—"

"Is that what you call stealing and selling evidence?"

Morrison laughs. "I call it a loophole," he repeats. "Works about the same as a woman your size miraculously surviving a knife fight with Marcus Pierce, I'd guess." He leans forward and sneers, "Where is that knife, by the way?"

"Careful," Lucifer warns, his voice dark and low.

"Now, I didn't fucking know Rosales," Morrison says, ignoring him. "And I'm not suspected of anything, Decker, so save your third degree. You and I, we're on the same team, and don't you forget it. All I wanted to know was what the store was like. Guess me and my guys will figure it out for ourselves."

Why has she ever wanted this man's approval? The world, the universe, is bigger than she ever imagined, certainly bigger than Matthew Morrison. The Devil's sitting right beside her, for crying out loud.

"You do that," she says, and pushes away from the table. "Just keep in mind Eddie was a possible suspect in another homicide case of mine."

"Hey, don't step on my toes, and I won't step on yours. Fair?"

With Lucifer on her heels, Chloe leaves the house and goes straight to the driver's seat of the squad car. The Devil rides shotgun, and she's very grateful for it.

"That...took a turn," she says, her voice wavering.

"Mm. If the Sinnerman's operation is still kicking, I'm guessing Matty there could be involved, wouldn't you agree?"

"Did Cain peddle drugs, though?" She makes a U-turn on Eddie's street, happy to put distance between herself, the crime scene, and Morrison.

Lucifer shrugs. "Cain was in the business of favors, at least before he met you. Trust me when I say it's very difficult to avoid drugs when you're working in the shadows."

Chloe grips the steering wheel a little tighter than necessary. "I take it you don't avoid them?"

"Darling, the Devil loves a good time, and no matter what D.A.R.E. taught you in school, drugs are a very good time. Pop a Molly with me someday, and I'll prove it." He licks his bottom lip
suggestively. "But I do try to be careful with cartels and such. There's quite a nasty overlap between trafficking drugs and trafficking people. One is the epitome of free will, which I wholeheartedly support; the other is slavery, which I abhor."

"Drugs hurt a lot of people, Lucifer."

"As I told your spawn, so does sugar."

"You were talking to Trixie about drugs?"

"Only if you consider tobacco a drug," he defends. "You'll be pleased to know she told me smoking causes cancer."

"It does."

"Not if you're immortal."

"Well, she's not, so can we uphold the narrative?"

"Right, of course. More commandments with which to bore everyone to death. Drugs are bad. Nicotine is bad. Alcohol on the clock is bad. Sex is bad."

"I never said sex is bad."

"Well, it's very good with me." Lucifer grins when she snorts. "Speaking of, you've seen me at my worst now, and somehow managed to come out the other side. You should try me at my best, too. Seems only fair."

"Lucifer, I'm not having sex with you." Though the thought alone seems to wake her up more than all the caffeine she's had today. "There's a lot we still need to talk about."

"I can think of much better ways to use my mouth."

Chloe nearly runs a red light. Nearly. Instead, she slams on the brakes so hard that they both jerk forward—Lucifer more so, since he refuses to wear a seat belt.

"Would you please buckle up?" she snaps, flustered.

He laughs as he complies. "Struck a nerve, did I? Maybe several, south of the border?"

"If you're horny, I'm sure there's someone who will keep you company. Or several someones."

Lucifer is quiet for a long moment before he says, "My bed has been cold for weeks."

She glances at him. "I'm sure it didn't have to be."

"No. It didn't." He fiddles with a cufflink. "Well, other than when I looked like the devil I truly am."

"So, what's changed?"

"Me, I suppose," he answers, and sounds surprised, and maybe a little disturbed.

Chloe doesn't reply as she pulls into an empty parking spot next to Lucifer's Corvette. She turns off the engine and shifts her body in the driver's seat, so she can look at Lucifer straight on. He shifts his body toward her as well.
"You know I'm not...trying to, I don't know, cramp your style, right?"

It's the right thing to say, but she's lying. Oh, how she's lying. She's always felt more possessive of him than she had any right to, and she's honestly thrilled to hear his bedroom has become as boring as her own. If he picks up on the lie or the underlying personal conflict, he doesn't say anything.

So, he must not pick up on it.

"The only thing you're bloody well cramping is my hand." The joke surprises Chloe, and her laugh is jarringly loud in the car. "Oh, yes, laugh at my carpal tunnel. I haven't had this long of a dry spell since the Fall."

Chloe gets out of the car, still laughing, her heart floating in her chest. A lot's gone wrong today, but it's easy to forget that as she looks at her partner over the roof of the squad car.

"Good night, Lucifer."

His smile is easy. "Good night, Detective."

Chapter End Notes

HUGE thank you to puerile for answering mundane questions about policery. You rock, lady. Also, thanks to Miah_Arthur for coming up with tools/items Lucifer might play with in a hardware shop. In another universe, I have written a raunchy tool belt scene and brought out the bondage ropes.

I did more research for this chapter than I care to admit. For the record, Chloe's frustration over the lack of women in the police force is based on reality. The LAPD is less than 20% female, but it has more women than many departments in the nation (the average is 12% or so). Our detective is a trailblazing badass.

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Twisted manifestations of storied beasts hide in the shadows and burrow beneath the ash, lying in wait. Familiar spirits appear as wild dogs with needle teeth and squealing pigs that sport half-human faces. Wraiths dance atop the lakes of fire, and bloodthirsty locusts swarm past Hell's black peaks, searching for flesh.

But Hell is a large and ever-expanding plane. It is possible to go many days or months or years without seeing any one of these creatures, without even seeing a demon.

For years, Cain has traversed the ashen lands, seeing no one, save for the lost and tortured souls behind the innumerable doors. Despite his best efforts, he has yet to figure out how to navigate the underworld and sometimes suspects he's going in a giant circle. He will never rule here if he can't find his way around—or anybody to rule.

How did Balor and his demonic minions travel this place? They seemed to have no trouble.

Puzzling over this question changes everything, though indirectly. One minute, Cain is wondering about the power of blood—if there is power in blood here that can be used—and in the next, he missteps and falls, slipping down a steep mountainside, tumbling left and right and heel over head.

The foot of the mountain, hard and punishing, rises to meet him. Cain lands in the dirt with a thud, air blowing out his lungs. Ash flies up around him and fills his mouth. He coughs dryly, wincing at the sharp, pinching pain that runs along his spine. For a moment, he lies there, feeling the ache in his bones, accepting defeat and the stench of spoiled eggs that forever sits at the back of his throat.

When he overcomes his self-pity, he tries to sit up, but he's too weak. He collapses back to the ground with a groan. Closing his eyes, he rests, waiting for his body to heal.

At first, he believes he's hallucinating. The white-skinned hag approaching him can't possibly be real. For so long, he's been the only person, only creature, walking this godforsaken place.

She doesn't walk, however. Where her legs should be, she glides on a swirling coil of ebony smoke. White, wavy hair floats around her head like Medusa's snakes, and the torn rags she wears flap as she careens left and right on her legless body. A long, droopy breast is bared to the world, the nipple hideously long and black.

"Hello," the hag purrs. She leans over Cain's prostrate form, her head tilting so far to one side that it's as if her neck is broken.

Distant memories of Balor flash before Cain's eyes. He scrambles on the ground, attempting to rise, but whatever has happened to his back hasn't yet healed. Again, he collapses into the ash.

The hag wheezes her laughter, as though she has a smoker's lungs. "I've been watching you, Son of Adam."

"I won't make any deals," Cain growls.

"You remind me of another who haunted my doorstep. So full of wrath," she moans in pleasure.
"But he was still filled with light," she says with distaste. "You are only shadows."

Cain's heart pounds in his chest. "Who?" he croaks. "Who came to you?"

"Oh, it was more of a fall, really," she says. "Perhaps you've heard of him. When he first arrived, he was called Samael. He has had many names since. Some he has even earned."

Samael. Lucifer.

The hag grins. Unlike Balor, who had yellow, broken teeth, hers are simply missing. "You hate him, don't you?"

"Yes," Cain breathes, burning under the fire of his animus.

"And what price will you pay to destroy the Lightbringer?"

As frightened as he is of deals made in the bowels of Hell, he doesn't hesitate. "I'll do anything." He will survive torture, enslavement, anything for a mere hint of revenge.

The hag leans closer. The irises of her eyes are white, the pupils large and black. "I can give you great power, Son of Adam. Enough that you might rule the demon hordes and defeat the false Prince of Darkness."

"What do you want in return?" Nothing in Hell is free.

"Your heart," she says, as if it's nothing. "I am hungry."

"How can I survive without a heart?"

"I will make you a creature of darkness, so that your body is aligned with your soul," the hag promises. "You will not need the heart."

Cain is silent for the space of six heartbeats. "You can have it," he says.

Quivering with anticipation, the hag carries Cain into her house made of bones.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks, as always, to puerile. :)

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Ella hands Chloe a printout across the lab station. "Eddie's heroin and David's heroin? Same exact stuff."

Lucifer leans over Chloe's shoulder, eyeing the report. She glances at his stubbled chin, never certain how she should interpret the way he invades her personal space, if he even realizes he does it, or knows how it affects her.

He's the Devil, she tells herself. He's had thousands of years to perfect his "game." Of course he knows. She feels her face grow hot.

"But what is it laced with, Miss Lopez?" he asks.

Okay, maybe he doesn't know.

"Still trying to figure that out," Ella answers with a shrug. "But there's not really enough of anything that could taint the product. It's definitely smack."

"It reeked of impurities," he insists. "Shouldn't you be able to toss the sample in one of those machines of yours and have it tell you what it is?"

"Eh, sorry, bud, doesn't work like that. Anyway, shouldn't you be able to do some heavenly sleuthing of your own?" She wags her eyebrows up and down.

"I beg your pardon? I haven't been in Heaven for an eternity."

"Come on, you've gotta have some tricks up your sleeve, right? X-ray vision, superhuman hearing —ooh, telekinesis? Oh, man, could you throw me across the room with your mind?" She says it like she hopes he'll try.

"Oh, what, being able to suss out desires isn't cool enough for you now?"

Chloe watches them, envying their easy banter over his otherworldly origins. How is Ella able to do that without Lucifer clamping up? Is it because she hasn't seen more than a feather?

Setting aside the drug analysis, she says, "Okay, so, what are we missing? Eddie either sold David this drug, or he gave it to David for him to sell, but then David used it."

"Or David stole it," Lucifer suggests. "Addicts tend to develop rather sticky fingers when they need to support their habit. And he certainly didn't have much to sell."

"Or he stole it," Chloe agrees, thinking of the pile of late bills in David's kitchen. "Then what? David didn't have a lot in his system, so Eddie killed him over, what, maybe a dime bag? Seems unlikely."

"Still doesn't answer who killed Eddie, either," Ella says.

"Right. Or why, on all fronts." Chloe picks up a photo of the heroin they found in Eddie's phone case and frowns. "Narcotics said they didn't know Eddie. What about the logo?"
Ella reaches over and turns the photograph. "I think it's supposed to be a firefly. See the bottom of the bug's body? It's a slightly different shade. Like it's lit up."

"Well done, Miss Lopez."

"Morrison says they've never seen it," Ella adds.

"Of course he did," Chloe says, her tone dry.

"Whew, sensing some animosity, Decker."

"Perhaps because Morrison's selling evidence," Lucifer quips, shaking a small jar of orange-colored solution. Chloe snatches it out of his hand and returns it to its original place.

Ella's eyes are wide. "Uh, that's super illegal."

"Shh, keep your voice down," Chloe instructs.

*I seize and I sell*, Morrison revealed. From David, from Eddie, from someone higher up? And to whom? Too many pieces are missing from the puzzle.

"We gotta tell Lieutenant Garcia." Ella makes for the lab door, but before she can exit, Lucifer grabs her by the elbow.

"Ah, ah, ah, far be it from me to remind a reformed thief that snitches end up in ditches, Miss Lopez, but, really."

"We can't tell anyone," Chloe says. "For all we know, Morrison has stepped into the Sinnerman's shoes and has a crime network at his beck and call. And how well do you know Garcia? He joined the force last year."

"Yeah, okay. You're right." Ella frowns. "You guys, both of them sometimes had lunch with Pierce."

"See? Not exactly a ringing endorsement, that," Lucifer says.

The door to the lab swings open beside Ella, and Dan pops his head in. "Good, you're all here." He slips inside and shuts the door behind him. Shoving his hands in his jacket pockets, he nods nervously. "Bad news," he says. "Barrow's skipped town."

"What?" Chloe pales. "How?"

Lucifer's brows raise. "Yes, I thought he was in custody."

"He was," Ella replies, "but a guy named Juan Otero posted his bail last week."

"And none of you thought to tell me?" Lucifer gripes.

"What would you have done?" Daniel asks. "Besides, he was supposed to be under surveillance."

Lucifer glares at him. "I bloody well could have done quite a bit more than you." He turns to Chloe. "Why didn't you tell me?"

She glares at him, not appreciating his accusatory tone. What was she supposed to do, cross one of the invisible boundaries they've erected and ask for the Devil's help? One, she's not even sure what that entails. Two, those walls have helped them pretend everything's gone back to normal, even
though it hasn't and can't possibly.

Instead of replying to Lucifer, she asks Dan, "Did we ever find out who Otero was?"

"He's not in the system, and now we can't find him, either," he answers. "But I'm looking into it. He's gotta be another one of Pierce's. Bail was set at half a million. Not just anyone has that kind of money." He glances at Lucifer skeptically.

"No need to start a class war with me, Daniel. I'd sooner burn hundies in a roaring hellfire than see that degenerate freed. He did lead the Detective and me into a trap, if you'll recall."

"Yeah, one you somehow left unscathed."

Lucifer scoffs in disbelief. "I hardly—"

"You know, none of this would have happened if you'd just told us Pierce was the Sinnerman, right?"

"This again," Lucifer groans. "You think I'm an absolute nutter, Daniel. As if you'd hear a word I said to you!"

Chloe touches Lucifer's side and feels his muscles relax beneath her fingers. "Dan, remember what we talked about?" Lucifer looks between them.

Dan relents, taking a step back from Lucifer. "Fine."

"It's like Pierce is still screwing us from beyond the grave," Ella laments. "This place is getting crazier than Detroit. Do you guys know the kinda stuff I saw in Detroit?"

"Lots of hookers and gangbangers?" Lucifer suggests, his ire already softening.

"Sometimes one in the same, dude. That, and a ton of crumbling infrastructure."

"Do we know if Barrow was involved in any drug rings?" Chloe asks, tapping the photo of Eddie's heroin.

"We don't know anything," Dan complains. "We were holding him on conspiracy charges, and he wasn't talking."

Chloe rubs her temples as a familiar ache pulses behind her eyes. "Okay, well, let's try to find him. Quietly."

"There's an APB on him already, but, yeah, I've got a few guys we can trust on it, too," Dan says. "Hey, Lucifer. you know where Maze is? We could use her bounty-hunting skills. I messaged her, but she didn't get back to me."

"Leave Mazikeen to me, Daniel. She may not be the best fit for this assignment."

"Uh, sure."

_Wrath_ isn't a word Chloe has ever associated with someone, but it crosses her mind as Lucifer speaks about his oldest friend. She remembers the bitter twist of his scarlet mouth as he yanked Maze's knife from Cain's chest. Maze betrayed them, but _how_ and _why_ are questions left unanswered.

For once, she has no intention of getting in Lucifer's way when he doles out his punishment. She
hasn't forgotten how eager Maze was for her to marry Cain. The thought of Maze pushing her toward him, with full knowledge of the danger it might bring into Trixie's life... Lucifer isn't alone in his anger.

Is that hypocritical? She wonders. Hasn't she brought the Devil into her daughter's life? But she knows it's different, that Lucifer would move mountains for her urchin.

When she thinks of Lucifer in Trixie's life, it's not his burned skin or questionable choices that come to mind. It's a unicorn painted on his cheek. It's him staring down tween bullies and encouraging ultimately harmless mischief. It's his hand, which she's seen lift grown men by their throats, cradling her daughter as though she's made of fine crystal.

"So, what do we do if we get to Barrow first?" Dan asks, drawing her back into the room.

Lucifer's teeth bare a sharp grin. "Why, you let the Devil have a turn with him, of course."

In the past, Chloe would have rolled her eyes, as Dan does now, but this time she shares a look with Ella and feels the ghost of a smile tug at her own mouth.

The walls of Cedarwood Heights are so thin that Maria Rosales' weeping can be heard outside her apartment.

"Would you listen to her," Lucifer tuts. "Should we pop back in and tell her Eddie was a selfish git not worth the waterworks?"

Chloe grabs him by an elbow and pulls him away.

Death notifications are one of the worst parts of being a homicide detective. Chloe can look at a thousand dead and disfigured bodies and feel sorry for what the victims went through, but it's the living who walk around with person-sized holes in their hearts, who suffer long after the dead are given a proper burial. She should know.

At least, that's what she's always believed. Before. When she thought this life was it, here and gone. When she believed she would never see her father again.

Now, she stops so abruptly in the parking lot that Lucifer, busy as he is toying with his cell phone, runs right into her.

"Bloody hell!" He penguin-waddles around her legs and grabs hold of the back of her shirt to steady her. "A little warning with the brakes next time."

"Is Eddie in Heaven or...?" she blurts out, stumbling as she turns to face him. "Is David?" It's just hit her, in a very real way, that the living aren't the only ones who can suffer.

Lucifer smooths nonexistent wrinkles from his suit. "There's no way for me to know here."

"Here? As in, you only know if you're..." She points at the ground. "Down there?"

"Hell isn't down anywhere," he grunts. "Not really. But, no, I don't happen to know the fate of every soul on the planet, Detective. Would be rather tiresome, don't you think?" Jamming his cell phone into a pocket, he brushes past her and stalks to the squad car.

"Wait, are you mad at me?" Chloe asks, following him. "It was just a question."

"I'm not mad at you. Don't be absurd." He yanks the passenger door open and stares at her over the
roof of the car, his expression guarded. "Honestly, Detective, it would be good if you could focus. We've a killer to punish, potentially two." At that, he slips into the car and slams the door hard enough to shake the vehicle.

"Right," she mutters, eyes narrowed. The King of Distraction is telling her to focus. What she really hates is she can't argue with him. Murder cases grow colder by the hour. Worse, Eddie and David's cases are chock-full of dead ends, some probably manufactured by corrupt cops.

Dropping into the driver's seat, she cranks the engine and redirects the air vents. Lucifer makes a show of fastening his seat belt.

"Well, chop-chop," he says, and she has to resist the urge to smack him. "We'd be there by now if you'd let me drive."

"Only because you'd break the law."

"All for the greater good."

Gripping the uncomfortably hot steering wheel, she pulls onto the road. "What you're doing right now isn't working, by the way."

"Oh? What is it you think I'm doing?"

"Trying to avoid a difficult conversation."

"I am not," he scoffs. She looks at him askance.

"Has it occurred to you that you're not exactly ready for Hell 101? Being able to say the word Hell happens to be a prerequisite." He has a point, but she's not about to admit it. "Then again, Hell's irrelevant. I'm retired. I don't see how picking apart my past counts as our moving forward."

"Being able to talk openly is moving forward, Lucifer. We can't walk on eggshells forever."

"Oh, don't be dramatic," he snickers. "It's been two weeks since you saw my true face. That hardly counts as forever. Trust me on that."

"That wasn't your true face," she argues.

"And how would you know?" he sneers.

Chloe chews on her lip, supposing she doesn't know, but believing she does. "You've always told me to follow my instincts."

"Well, it would appear I was mistaken, wouldn't it?"

She knows Lucifer well enough to know all the humor, bravado, and rudeness cover up fear. He is terrified of who and what he is—or at least was. Terrified of how she'll react to the truth. The burned skin was bad enough, he seems to imply—dare they rock the boat by exploring what lies beneath?

What does lie beneath?

She wants to reassure him, but maybe she isn't ready to learn the intricacies of Hell or his time there. Something tells her Guantanamo Bay might seem like a vacation getaway compared to the
torment the Devil knows.

But, as horrible as the truth may turn out to be, she wants to know him.

Not that Lucifer's talking now. When they arrive at Dalton Paints and Hardware, he unbuckles his seat belt and launches himself out of the squad car before Chloe even finishes parking. She sighs and watches his long, black-suited legs eat up the short distance between the car and the store. He turns at the last minute, deciding to wait for her, a frustrated scowl pulling at his mouth.

"Chicken," she murmurs, removing the key from the ignition.

The bell above the door rings as they enter the store a minute later. Anton steps out of the backroom, a tentative smile on his face. "Hey, Detective Decker, I told Grandpa to come like you asked. Come on back." He nods to the room behind him.

Chloe and Lucifer round the register and follow Anton to the back of the store. The space is cramped, little more than a large closet. A squat mini fridge, piled high with papers and magazines, stands between a desk with an astonishingly ancient CRT monitor and a table with three chairs.

Seated in one of the chairs is Robert Dalton, who looks like a much, much older version of Anton. Dressed in brown slacks and a plain white button-down, he glowers beneath a Vietnam War veteran cap, his lips set in the flat, smooshed way of one who has few, if any, teeth left.

"Grandpa, these are the officers who were looking for Eddie yesterday," Anton announces.

Chloe smiles, while trying to ignore Lucifer's amused grin. "I'm Detective Decker. This is Lucifer Morningstar. He's not an offi—" At their disinterested looks, she sighs, giving up. "He's my partner." Lucifer's so charismatic nobody cares about his job title. "Thanks for seeing us today, Mr. Dalton."

The old man shrugs a bony shoulder. "What's this about?" he rasps, as though he's smoked for seventy of his eighty-odd years.

"We're here to ask a few questions about your employee, Eddie Rosales."

There's something awkward about a table with too-few chairs. While Lucifer has no problem making himself comfortable in one of them, Chloe stands at the back room's doorway, board-straight, her arms hanging stiffly at her sides. Worse, Lucifer notices and, judging by the way the corners of his eyes crinkle, delights in her discomfort.

She asks, "How long has Eddie worked for you, Mr. Dalton?"

"Three years, give or take. I'm guessin' he's gone and done something stupid."

"Ooh, he's very close," Lucifer says to Chloe.

She counters Robert's question with one of her own. "In that time, do you ever remember seeing this man visit your store?" She shows both Dalton men David Yates' license photo.

Robert shakes his head and looks to his grandson. "Anton runs this place more'n me now. You seen this man?"

"No, sir," Anton answers from where he stands next to Chloe, clearly troubled by the same chair dilemma she is. The perils of not being a dick.
"I saw you have security cameras," Chloe says. "Do you mind sharing your footage from the last week?"

Anton gives his grandfather a perturbed glance. "We have them, but they don't work. Grandpa's too cheap."

"We only need a deterrent," Robert argues. "Nobody's gonna steal from me."

"Okay. This is David Yates," Chloe sighs, showing them David's photo again. "He was a friend of Eddie's. David was found dead in his apartment at Cedarwood Heights a few days ago."

"You can't think Eddie killed him," Anton sputters in disbelief.

"Boy, you be quiet," Robert chastises in his broken growl. He narrows his eyes at Chloe. "Ask your questions. But I know my rights."

"Of course," she soothes. "So, you know I have to ask: Where were you and your grandson on Monday afternoon?"

Anton answers despite his grandfather's command, "We closed the shop. We were at Kayla's softball game." He smiles fondly. "Kayla's my baby sister."

"We done now?" Robert queries.

"What's the rush?" Lucifer purrs.


"Oof, that old chestnut again—or golf ball, as it were. Frequent complaint. You can blame Dad for the dodgy design."

Robert looks at Lucifer like he's got a screw loose. "Just you wait until you're old," he says, pointing a slightly arthritic finger. "Balls down to Mexico, and you'll be getting up all night, tryin' to piss."

"Thankfully not a problem I'll ever have," Lucifer says.

"Just a few more questions, Mr. Dalton," Chloe promises before things can get any further out of hand. "What about later that night? Where were you both then?"

"Me and my parents went out for pizza with Kayla's team," Anton says. "Grandpa went home."

"I go to bed at eight," the old man explains with a smack of his lips. "My wife Clara can vouch for me."

Chloe nods. "And were either of you aware that Eddie sold drugs?"

"Goddammit," Robert says. "I told that boy no bullshit when I hired him."

"Did you have reason to believe he was involved in something he shouldn't have been, either before you hired him, or when you hired him?"

"He has face tattoos," Robert says, as if this is evidence enough.

"It does scream poor life choices, doesn't it?" Lucifer muses.
"Where is he now?" Robert asks. "You already book him?"

"Would you believe a poodle got to him first?" Lucifer says.

Chloe clears her throat. "I'm afraid we found Eddie dead yesterday in his home."

Anton reels back. "Eddie's dead, too?"

"He is, indeed," Lucifer responds. He shifts to the edge of his chair, and Anton falls into his dark gaze. "What do you really think of that, hmm? Perhaps you desired to work alone?"

"I liked Eddie," Anton says in that relaxed, sleepy way Lucifer's victims do. "I'll miss him."

Lucifer lets him go with a bored sigh. Robert squints at him suspiciously.

"Do you know of anyone who would want him harmed?" Chloe asks.

"No," Anton says, blinking out of his stupor. "Nobody."

"Anton didn't know him outside work," Robert adds quickly. "Did you, Anton?"

"No, sir. Only saw him here."

"Yesterday you said his girlfriend was in town," Chloe prompts. "Did Eddie ever tell you her name?"

"Shay, I think."

"No last name?"

The younger Dalton shakes his head, shrugging apologetically.

"You made it sound like they had a rather stormy relationship," Lucifer says. "Think Shay might have had it in for Eddie? Bit of a lovers' quarrel gone wrong, perhaps, with a little too much knife to the throat, not enough hot makeup sex?"

"Oh, God, somebody stabbed him?"

"Don't expect my father to tell you who did it."

Chloe closes her eyes, searching for patience. "Please, answer the question, Anton."

"I don't know. It did seem rocky. He'd sometimes come in angry over her. But he was pretty quiet about his personal life."

"We know why now," Robert says dryly. Using the table for support, he pushes to his feet. "All right. We've told you all we know." The dismissal is obvious.

Chloe backs down, not wanting to sour the relationship. "Thank you both for your time. We'll be in touch if we have any further questions."

Lucifer trails behind her as they exit the store. "No need for a more thorough interview with Robert?" he asks, brows raised. "Though I think the only thing he desires is serviceable plumbing."

"I think we've worn out our welcome for now. Besides, I can't think of a motive here, can you? I'm guessing their alibis will check out."
Before Lucifer can reply, Chloe's cell phone rings. She holds up a finger. "Decker," she answers.

"Hey, it's me," Ella says on the other end.

"Let me put you on speaker."

"We've got a name," Ella says a beat later, her voice tinny, "but you're not gonna like it."

"What do you mean?"

"The house we found Eddie in? Turns out...not his house."

"Well, at least that makes more sense," Lucifer says.

"Did it belong to someone named Shay?" Chloe asks hopefully, while climbing into the squad car.

"Nope. Try Victoria Imler."

"Victoria Imler?" Chloe frowns. "What have we got on her?"

"Not much. Probably 'cause she's been worm food for eight years. The Lamborghini was Eddie's, but there's a white Honda with an expired registration belonging to Imler at that address, too. We've put out a BOLO on it."

After relaying to Ella what little additional information they've come by, Chloe ends the call and leans her head back against the headrest. Cool air conditioning filters across her face.

"So, if that wasn't Eddie's house, maybe Morrison wasn't lying. Maybe Narcotics wasn't aware of Eddie. And maybe Eddie wasn't a big-time dealer." She rubs at her temples.

Lucifer watches her closely. "You know I'm all for punishing those who deserve it," he says, "but you're looking quite burned out. All work and no play makes for a dull detective."

"I just got back from being suspended."

"And did you go anywhere during your alleged time off?"

She turns her head toward him. "You know I didn't." Couldn't, really. For lots of reasons.

"Not exactly a vacation then, darling. Especially what with your being knee-deep in celestial rubbish."

"I didn't mind," she whispers.

He hums noncommittally and asks, "When was the last time you traveled somewhere for fun, because you desired to?"

Chloe chuckles. "You're not going to believe it."

"Please tell me you've left L.A."

"Does Big Sur count?" she baits.

"It most certainly does not," he answers, appalled.

"But it's not in L.A." She grins.
"Fine. Outside California is more what I had in mind, you pedant."

She snorts. "Well, I've been to Mexico."

"Potentially respectable, assuming you didn't merely cross the border for cheap dental work."

"It was before Trixie was born. Dan and I went to Mexico City for our honeymoon."

He grimaces. "Bloody hell, that long ago? No wonder you're so boring," he teases. "You know, I could take you anywhere you like, any time you want."

She rolls her eyes at the double entendre, and a grin stretches his mouth wide. "Okay, I'll bite. If I said, I don't know, let's go to...Japan, you'd—"

"Have tickets booked within the hour. You'd be drunk on sake and belting Aretha in a karaoke box in less than twenty-four hours."

"You're crazy."

"That's what uptight people call anyone who dares to enjoy living." His expression turns serious. "My father's done a lot of things wrong, Detective, but, on the whole, this planet isn't one of them. You've all too little time here," he says, his voice thick. "If you're not experiencing pleasure every day, you're doing it wrong. See the world. Go get absolutely sozzled. Have a snog in a dark corner that leads to a dirty weekend—preferably with yours truly. Regret nothing."

"You know I'll never really be Lucinda, right?"

He smiles faintly. "She's in there somewhere."

Chloe feels herself retreat behind her own walls. He has no idea how much she sometimes yearns to get caught up in his storm.

She would never, ever trade Trixie. Not for anything or anyone. But what might life have been like if she had met Lucifer years ago, when she was young and less afraid of the wildness in her heart? The wildness that wants fast and fun and free, and isn't afraid to run with the Devil?

It's still there, beneath the surface, a beast yanking on its chain. But the chain is strong and old and braided in a layer of fear.

"But is partying enough?" she asks, crashing back down to Earth, as she taught herself to do from a very young age. "Is it meaningful?"

"Sometimes," he answers, more thoughtfully than she expected. "With the right people."

"I like my job." She shrugs and finally drives out of the depressing strip mall that contains Dalton Paints. "I get tired or frustrated sometimes, and want a break, but I don't mind spending my time on it. I like helping people."

"Well, you're very good at it," he compliments. "But, truly, don't forget to live a little, Detective."

"I won't." She smiles. "Movie night with Trixie, remember?"

"Ah, yes, the height of entertainment in the Decker household."

Her smile falters. After the way he shot down her invitation, she's not sure if he's making fun of her or not. "What about you?" she asks, unwilling to start a feud. "Got big plans for Lux's reopening?"
She doesn't ask about all Lux represents in his life: the endless parade of alcohol, drugs, and sex.

"Of course. I always know how to have a good time." He speaks easily, but she can't help but notice his tone rings strangely hollow.

"Can we watch *Moana* next?" Trixie asks. "Pleeease? It's only nine!"

"I said you could stay up, didn't I?" Chloe laughs, pulling at one of Trixie's pigtails. "Go ahead and get it started. I'm just gonna clean up a little."

She wanders into the kitchen, two plates balanced atop an empty pizza box. After loading the dishwasher, she pours the final dregs of pinot into her wine glass. Elsa may "let it go" by singing to herself, but Chloe needs a little help tolerating hours of Disney.

As she's rinsing the wine bottle for recycling, a knock sounds at the door.

"Who's that?" Trixie sits up on her knees and leans over the back of the couch. During the day, she's a brave, outgoing girl who runs to greet visitors. At night, she's learned to be more cautious. There are people she can't trust in the dark. People who've taken her and hurt her mother.

Chloe feels on edge herself, though she hides it beneath a layer of practiced nonchalance. "I'll get it, Trix. You stay there, okay?"

For some reason, she imagines opening the door onto Cain, allowing his calculated machinations into the heart of her home and the warmth of her bed. She still hears his whispered promises of love and family and safety. Everything was an ugly lie she should have seen through. Disgust and self-loathing ripple through her as she opens the door.

Of course, it isn't Cain haunting her welcome mat. It's Lucifer who stands on the other side, a paper grocery bag in his arms. Chloe stares at him, all fear and thoughts of Cain vanishing.

"I thought you were busy with the reopening."

"I made an appearance. Everything's running smoothly."

"Uh-huh." Agitation stirs to life in her gut. "So, now you think you're going to come here, to have a —what was it you called it?" She lowers her voice. "Oh, yeah, a terrible time?"

"I—"

"Is that Lucifer?" Trixie calls.

Chloe turns. "Hold on, baby. I'll be back in a second." Shoving Lucifer back a step, she moves outside and shuts the door. She crosses her arms over her chest, hyper-aware of the fact that she's trying to be taken seriously in a *Star Wars* parody t-shirt. "Why are you here?"

There are so many things she wants him to say. None of them are what he actually says.

"Well, it seems I may be more of a shoe than I realized," he answers. "I'm as surprised as you are. No doubt a nice Louboutin, of course, not some coal miner's rank work boot."

"If that's supposed to be an apology, and I don't even know if it is, I don't accept it."

He huffs. "Must we analyze my every behavior?"
"Believe me, if I were to pick apart your behavior, we'd be here all week."

Lucifer grins coyly. "Can't help that you find me so interesting." She rolls her eyes. "Fine. I suppose when I said what I did, I was letting others—my reputation, if you will—define me. I believe it's a bit of an old habit I didn't realize I had developed."

"You've been talking to Linda."

"I may have had a session, yes."

"So, what you're saying is the Devil shouldn't want to spend his time like this, but maybe you want to?" She frowns. "That's never stopped you before." If she discounts all the innuendo, he's spent countless downright-wholesome hours in her home.

"It's different now." He swallows hard. "Before... Well, before, you didn't know everything. You thought I was...well, a normal man."

"Did I?" she huffs, posing the question to both of them.

A part of her wants to argue. And she doesn't know everything, and worries she won't ever make sense of his life, especially if they're both going to keep avoiding the difficult subjects. But she also understands this. Whatever is between them is more real now. They're both struggling to figure out who they are and how they fit into this new world they've stumbled upon.

"You're afraid," Chloe says. He scoffs, but doesn't refute it. She frowns and taps her bare foot until finally she reaches for him, her fingers closing around his wrist. "You need to work on your apologies, but apology accepted. Come inside, Lucifer."

When Chloe opens the door, Trixie stumbles backward and grins up at them guiltily, hands behind her back. "Hi, Lucifer."

"It's not nice to listen in," Chloe reprimands, wondering what all her daughter has just heard or understood.

"At least learn how not to get caught," Lucifer says, shaking his head. Chloe looks at him disapprovingly, and he arches a brow. "Oh, pot, meet kettle. She gets her curiosity from you, not Daniel."

"What'd you bring?" Trixie asks, and Lucifer gives Chloe a dry, amused look, as if to say, See? Your offspring.

"Ingredients," he answers.

"Ingredients for what?" She grabs hold of his arm in an attempt to bring the bag down to her eye level. He doesn't budge.

"Ingredients for nothing if you don't unhand the Burberry."

Trixie lets go of him, her grin undiminished. "Are you here to watch movies with us?"

"Something like that."

Chloe smiles and pulls Trixie away. "Give him some space, monkey. Go watch your movie."

Sighing a world-weary sigh, Trixie trudges over to the couch and collapses dramatically on the cushions.
Lucifer sets the grocery bag on the bar and reaches inside. He lifts a bottle of bourbon with a grin. "Better than your swill."

"Perfect," Chloe laughs, taking the bottle from him. "I'm out of wine." She rounds the countertop and pours him a generous glass of the amber liquor. After she hands it to him, she drags the grocery bag closer and peeks inside.

Oh.

"This is what you need for a chocolate cake," she whispers so Trixie won't hear.

"Right in one, Detective," he replies, just as softly.

She looks up at him, her heart beating fast. He appears to be as nervous and eager as she feels. "I'm glad you're here."

Lucifer nods and raises his glass to her. "Right, then," he says, raising his voice. "Who's up for chocolate cake?"

Chocolate cake is to Trixie as blood is to sharks. "You brought chocolate cake?" she exclaims, skipping into the kitchen, Moana forgotten.

"Please." Lucifer rolls his eyes. "I do nothing by halves, child. No, I'm going to bake a chocolate cake." He begins emptying the grocery bag.

"Won't that take a long time?" Trixie whines.

Chloe watches a little too closely as Lucifer removes his suit jacket, rolls up his sleeves, and dons the blue, cliched "Kiss the Cook" apron that he thought to bring with him. "I assure you Devil's food is worth the wait," he replies.

Shrugging, Trixie climbs onto a barstool. "Can I help?"

"Is that something she's actually capable of?" he asks Chloe, and Trixie giggles.

Chloe pulls a bowl and two round cake pans out of a cabinet. "You can mix, can't you, Trixie-babe?"

"Wash your hands," Lucifer demands, holding out liquid soap.

The night reshapes itself around them, finding room for one more in the Decker household. Chloe sits beside her daughter at the bar, sipping wine, and then bourbon from Lucifer's glass, which never runs dry. The room becomes warm and soft around the edges.

Lucifer makes a mess of the kitchen as he measures flour and sugar and chats amiably about a Brazilian cocoa farmer who owed him a favor. When he calls for Trixie to toss him eggs, she obliges with a squeal, and he snatches them from the air with ease. He makes a show of juggling several before cracking two on the edge of the mixing bowl. A moment later, he slides the bowl toward Trixie and urges her to stir everything quickly. He watches her handiwork with a skeptical eye, but seems satisfied.

When the cake pans go into the oven, it's ten, and Trixie retires to the couch and the final scenes of Moana. Like all growing children, she refuses to acknowledge or accept her tiredness, but falls asleep within seconds of making contact with a pillow.
The credits roll, and a peaceful silence settles over the apartment. Chloe rests her chin on the heels of her hands and watches Lucifer clean. He's extraordinarily fastidious, moving canisters aside to wipe at back corners no flour has touched. Honestly, there's probably a ton of dust back there.

"Surprised you know how to clean," she teases, her words slurred together.

"Hmm?" He looks up suddenly, as if he's somehow forgotten where he is, or that she's here with him. He chuckles and shakes his head. "You're the messy one. Besides, haven't you heard? The Devil's in the details."

"But don't you pay people to do this sort of stuff?" If she was wealthy, she'd never do another load of laundry, ever again.

He rinses the washcloth and wrings it out. "I do." Turning, he leans against the sink, crossing his legs at his ankles. "I find it...relaxing, though."

"Really?" She turns up her nose and sips more bourbon from their shared glass. "I hate chores."

The only time she really likes to deep clean is when she's angry. There's enough to do between work and Trixie, and she's been known to live out of the dryer for weeks. Has she even washed her sheets this week? How many pairs of underwear are left?

Lucifer stares at his purple-socked feet, having kicked off his Oxfords some time ago. "In He—"

He glances at the living room and frowns. "Where my father sent me, it was very hard to keep clean."

The confession is difficult to grasp, but feels important. Even in her current state, Chloe knows he's in a confessing mood only because she's drunk.

Frowning, she stumbles down from her bar stool and goes to stand before him. Reaching up, she cradles his face in her palms and caresses his stubbled jaw. His tremulous expression makes her heart ache. It's terrifying, that look. Maybe because of who he is, or maybe because of who she is when she's with him. Whatever the truth, it skates across the alcohol in her veins, hopelessly elusive.

"Thank you," she whispers.

"Whatever for?" he asks, his voice rich and low.

The thought slips. Sighing, she drops her forehead to his collarbone. "I don't know."

He chuckles. "You're such a lightweight."

Chloe relaxes, leaning her weight on the warm length of his body. It feels right, like it always has, and isn't that strangest thing? As his fingers thread through her hair soothingly, she breathes in the faint, sylvan notes of his cologne and the bite of cigarette smoke.

Slowly, she looks up again, finding his dark eyes. Bracing herself on his chest and lifting up to tiptoe, she presses her mouth to his. He tastes like bourbon and chocolate, or maybe they both do. And this feels right, too, even after all that has happened.

Lucifer lets out a quiet groan as she runs her tongue along his lower lip. He pulls away reluctantly, and she sighs in frustration. "How can this be what you desire?" he whispers.

She takes a long time to answer, choosing her words carefully through the fog. Finally, she says,
"It's not *this* I desire. It's *you*.

A ragged breath escapes him, and for a moment, she thinks he may cry. She wonders if she's strong enough to handle the colossal burden buried deep in his immortal soul. Because who is she? A speck along an endless stretch of unfathomable time.

Chloe waits for the first tear to fall, her fingers stroking gently above his heart. Waits, until suddenly the oven timer sounds, its loud, repetitious beep piercing the silence.

"*Ugh,*" Chloe sighs.

Lucifer draws in a sharp breath and pushes her back gently. Turning, he stops the timer and opens the oven door. A blast of heat rushes into the kitchen as he uses a faded dish towel to pull the cake pans from the center rack. The cake is perfect: soft, smooth cocoa brown. He sets the pans atop potholders and turns to her with an amused smile.

"I believe the urchin's breakfast is taken care of."

The room spins slightly as Chloe shakes her head. "Probably." She shouldn't give in to such requests, but it's hard not to with Trixie, especially after everything that's happened these last couple of years. She's always trying to compensate.

"You're giving new meaning to the term legless," Lucifer teases, a hand on her shoulder steadying her. "Go sit down."

"Come with me?" she asks, then snorts loudly. "Not *come* with me." She covers her face, hiding from his grin. "Just...you know what I mean."

"Well, I do have to wait for the cake to cool before I frost it..." He smirks at her. "I'll come with you."

She grabs his arm, and pulls him along as she stumbles to the couch. Sitting in the middle of the three-seater, she yanks Lucifer down on her left and draws Trixie's legs across her lap.

Lucifer stretches his arm along the back of the couch and lets out a long, deep breath that contains multitudes. Chloe wants to ask him about it, ask him about everything, and she almost does. Almost, but the words stick on her tongue as she closes her eyes and sinks into his side. She sleeps well for the first time in weeks.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks, as always, to puerile.

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Cain thought he knew suffering. On Earth, he died thousands of times—by the snarling maw of a wolf, in the hot belly of a volcano, under the chipper teeth of a chainsaw. In Hell, he was a slave, raped by sneering demons. On both planes, he recovered and transformed into something harder and stronger. This is his calling, too.

What physical pain, what anguish, could be alien to the world's first murderer? He has seen, committed, or survived all of mankind's most evil acts. Pulled the trigger, took the bullet.

But the hag is old and clever, predating Cain and even bright Lucifer's fall. When she pries open Cain's breastbone like a clamshell and splinters his ribs in half, she takes something more, something deeper, that invisible, but tangible breath God has bestowed upon all Adam's descendants.

Blissful darkness never comes to relieve him. Cain is awake for it all. He screams and pleads, and the hag writhes in pleasure on her tail of ebony smoke, beneath her roof made of bones. She claws at his muscles, shredding them to ribbons, and shoves aside his lungs until his screams turn to breathless whistles. Blood pools and overflows, making wet, sloshing sounds as it spills out his destroyed chest cavity onto the ash-covered floor.

How does this not annihilate him?

She finds his heart and drools onto his face in her hunger. Her fingers close around the organ, and she begins to chant in a language he has never heard, but immediately knows to fear. It is a Making language, and an Unmaking language, too. In another mouth, it might be beautiful, but it is perverse on her foreign tongue.

"St-stop," he wheezes, for Cain is always trying to take back that which he cannot.

The hag smiles and pretends not to hear him, the words flowing past her lips in a susurrus of tonal inelegance. And she pulls, pulls, pulls, floating high above his body until she is all he sees. Arteries and veins stretch, then pop wetly, and tear free, where they dangle like spider silks.

He is cursed to survive.

"I have waited so long for a heart like this," the hag moans, and yawns her mouth around the muscle.

She does not savor her meal. She wildly slurps and sucks and gums and picks apart with fingers trembling in ecstasy. When she has devoured every last fiber, she belches and drags a hand across her mouth, smearing crimson.

Leaning over Cain's broken body, the hag smiles close to his lips. "A deal's a deal, Son of Adam," she says, and he smells the metallic tang of his own lifeblood.

Again, she chants, and Cain must accept her depraved prayers, for there is no going back.

The change begins as a tingling sensation deep in his head, near that lizard brain modern man has come to call the amygdala. The crawling sensation spreads outward, down into his eyes and along
his spine. And still the hag chants.

Then comes the fire. It burns through him, as though his blood is gasoline and his muscles are kindling. And for a short time, by Hell's standards, Cain ceases to exist. But the hag chants and honors her word and Makes him into something new.

"Rise," she commands an indeterminate time later. Days, maybe, but who can know here?

Cain sits up from where he lies on her skeletal table made sticky by his blood. The inferno has disappeared as quickly as it came upon him. He feels...different now. Sturdier. Slowly, he brings a hand to his chest, only to find a baseball-sized hole where his heart and flesh used to be—no blood or exposed muscle or bone, just a cavern.

"What—"

"I made you into a creature of darkness, as was our deal. Do not expect to be a man."

Fair enough. "Why did you help me?" he asks, even as he realizes help is a strange word to use.

"I was hungry," she answers, shrugging a shoulder. "For now, I am not."

"Who are you?"

"Those who survive me call me Grandmother."

He has no intention of calling her anything. "Why do you hate Samael?"

"So many questions, but I'll play. He wouldn't feed me when I was hungry, and then," she hisses, "he restricted my feedings." She pitches from side to side in her anger. "He was a boring, tyrant king. You will be more interesting, especially if he returns to reclaim the throne. My bones say he will."

"Not if I get to him first," Cain snarls. Lucifer won't return to Hell unless Chloe sends him packing.

"We will see what happens, Son of Adam." She holds out a bloodstained hand. "Come."

When he stands, his legs obey him. He feels no fear as he takes the hag's hand and follows in her trail of smoke. She draws him into a bedroom, to an oval-shaped glass. It's been so long since he saw a mirror outside a Hell loop that he forgot they weren't mere fantasy.

He walks to it. His old face stares back at him, round as always, but his eyes are now a solid black midnight that has transformed his appearance. He touches the hole in his chest and has no strong feelings about the man he sees, other than to think this body will be more advantageous than the last.

Maybe it should be disturbing, but it's not. Cain never has been one for deep introspection. This is simply who he is now, who he must be if he is to exact revenge.

"Do you feel pain in your back?" the hag asks.

"I—" He frowns. "Yes?" He has always been a man of few words; fewer still in Hell.

Her discolored gums show as she smiles. "Good. Imagine taking hold of it and dragging it away from yourself. Remove it like a splinter."

Cain closes his eyes and focuses on his breathing and the pain buried in his shoulder blades, which
is less pain than aggravating itch. He follows the hag's advice and imagines tweezing it out from his skin.

A leathered flap sounds in the room. The still, rank air stirs, and the ash shifts at their feet. And Cain opens his eyes and sees.

Black, batlike wings rest behind him, the hidden metacarpals crowned by clawed thumbs. Below, the finger bones within the swooping leather wing membranes are finished with four more claws on each side. He is no angel, bastardized or otherwise. He is a creature of the night.

"I... I can fly?" Briefly, he remembers being human, the first time he flew in a plane and saw the blue-and-green Earth below. He always loved the sky.

"You are made for battle," the hag answers, and the memory fades. "Flight is useful for that here."

He struggles to command his new limbs, but after several minutes, he is able to spread the long fingers of his wings. His full wingspan stretches out, pressing against walls made of pelvises and rib cages.

"The Son of Adam is dead," the hag proclaims, her wiry white hair shoved to one side by the sheer power of his unfurling. "Behold, the true Prince of Darkness."

Chapter End Notes

Fic Recs • My Fics, Categorized • My Fanvids on YouTube • Tumblr
Chloe sits up slowly, a pale yellow blanket falling to her waist. Squinting, she looks around the room and frowns. She slept on the couch? And, wow, her head...

Oh. That's right. The night before comes flooding back, the memories warm and rich.

The sound of a fork scratching across a plate draws her attention to the kitchen. Trixie is at the bar, her beanpole legs kicking from where she's seated on one of the bar stools. She sits at an angle, giving Chloe a direct view of the gargantuan piece of chocolate cake she's diligently working her way through.

"Hey, monkey. I see you're enjoying your cake," she says wryly.

Trixie flinches and looks over guiltily. "Sorry I didn't wait until you were up."

More like, I wanted to finish this before you caught me.

"It's Saturday," Chloe absolves, feeling magnanimous. This week, even she has Saturday off. "But only one piece, okay?" She rises from the couch and stretches, feeling well-rested, even if a little dehydrated. "Did you see Lucifer this morning?"

"Uh-uh."

Chloe grapples with her disappointment. It's silly, but she expected him to be here—wanted him to be here. But what did she think? That he'd sleep on the couch, too? She rolls her eyes at herself.

In the kitchen, she stares at the perfectly frosted, layered Devil's food cake, which is now missing an eighth. She could eat a piece of fruit. She should eat a piece of fruit. Even highly-processed cereal would be healthier. But...that cake.

Sure, he didn't tempt Eve. Right.

Sighing, she cuts a thin slice and slides it onto a plate. When she takes a bite, her eyes fall closed. It's the richest, darkest chocolate cake she's ever tasted. Not too sweet, the texture perfect, the frosting thick and smooth, the cocoa strong on her tongue. Wow. So this is what happens when you have ages to perfect things. She goes to cut a larger piece.

"It's really good, huh?" Trixie says, grinning around a mouthful. "I drew him a thank-you picture." She reaches to the other side of the counter, to where her colored pencils have exploded across the Formica. She snags the lone sheet of paper and presents it to her mother. "Think he'll like it?"

Chloe takes the drawing and struggles not to laugh. While Trixie's handwriting is sloppy and a point of frequent complaint among her teachers, she's gotten very good at drawing in the last year. The lines in her art are crisp and sure, the colors bold and whimsical, like those in children's books she's outgrown. She's good enough that there's no mistaking the slightly misshapen, aproned man haloed by golden lines. There's also no mistaking the chocolate cake displayed on the counter in front of him. Or the red pentagram Trixie added to its round top for a bit of flair.

"This is amazing, Trix." Her daughter smiles widely. "I'll give it to him as soon as I see him."
Someone knocks on the door.

"I'll get it!" Trixie shouts, though she's right next to Chloe and only a few feet from the door.

Dan is waiting on the other side. He lifts Trixie to him, hugging her tight and swinging her, side to side. She giggles loudly, her legs swaying. She's grown taller, and her toes hover more closely to the ground than they used to.

"Go get your stuff, kiddo," Dan tells her.

"Mom, can I take some chocolate cake?" Trixie asks first.

"Sure. I'll pack some for you."

Dan notices the cake plate. "Wow, where'd you get that?"

"Lucifer made it!" Trixie yells, running to get her bag.

"He made that?" Dan says, his skepticism obvious. "Sure he didn't buy it?"

"He baked it here last night," Chloe says, her lips pulling upward. She feels oddly proud.

Dan narrows his eyes at her. "Okay. Well, I want a piece, too."

"To make up for all the lost pudding?" Chloe teases, shifting cake into a glass container.

"He owes me a whole cake for that. Joke's on him, though. I've started bringing a cooler and keeping my pudding in my desk drawer."

Chloe snorts, wondering how long it will take Lucifer to find his secret stash. Not long, probably. He eats that pudding just because it's Dan's. Glancing at her ex-husband, she asks gently, "How are you?"

"Uh, I'm okay. Getting better." He's almost convincing, but anxious tics give him away. "I'll be glad when we catch Barrow and know things have cooled off at the precinct." He says it like he believes it'll happen naturally. "What about you?"

Dan doesn't know half of what's been going on in her life. "I'm fine."

"That bad, huh?"

"No, really. I'm fine." What other option is there?

"Uh-huh. Well, let me know if you want to talk about it."

Not gonna happen, she thinks, but hums in agreement because he means well.

When Trixie returns with her backpack, Chloe hands Dan the dessert container and hugs and kisses her daughter goodbye. After they leave, she sits and finishes her piece of cake, her eyes glued to Trixie's artwork. Whenever Trixie draws Lucifer, she throws in some devilish symbol—or, more blatantly, a red, horned devil. Sometimes Chloe wonders about that, but right now her head has no room for speculation.

In the shower, she leans against the tiled wall, enjoying the pinprick of hot water. She's procrastinating. When she dares to hand over case files for a day off, it's never to take an actual break. Any open cases stay rattling around in her brain, and there are too many chores and errands
to catch up on for her to relax. Today, she doesn't feel like facing any of it.

So don't, she hears Lucifer say, as if he's by her ear. Live a little, Detective.

Chloe breathes unsteadily, one hand sliding over her breasts, down to the apex of her thighs. Lucifer's ego would be entirely unmanageable if he knew how often she thinks about him in the shower and late at night, how long ago this near-ritual began. At least it's easier to hide with Maze gone. The demon had a sixth sense for masturbation. Chloe closes her eyes and summons the echo of Lucifer's mouth, the heat of his body.

**How can this be what you desire?**

At the memory of his despair, her arousal screeches to a halt. She draws her hand away, her fingers slick. Lucifer has no idea how much she wants him—all of him, every light and dark thing. It feels wrong to enjoy the memory of him, when she knows he has such a warped perception of himself and her feelings.

She thought the truth would set them free, that, in knowing it, she could protect and heal him, maybe even save him from himself. But the truth is bigger and stranger than anything she could have imagined. It's changed everything—and nothing, too. He still thinks he's a monster, and she still knows he's not. Not really.

Chloe towels dry and stares at herself in the mirror. Subtle lines have begun to crease the corners of her eyes, and three gray hairs peek out from her scalp, but this is just natural aging. It's the scars lying beneath the surface that tell the whole story. In that, she and Lucifer are alike, despite the impossibly vast difference in age. Which, for now, she chooses not to think about.

There's only one way forward. If she wants to know Lucifer, wants to really know him and his past, he needs to see what's under her skin, as well. All the fear and pain and loneliness. All the want and hope.

The only problem is, she's guarded her heart, too.

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A wide-mouthed staircase leads into the old, brick Willox Medical Building. Chloe jogs up the steps, her sandals slapping against concrete. Having always avoided therapy on the principle that it's better to move forward than dwell on the past, she feels a little like Rocky before the big fight. But it's occurring to her that sometimes the past gets its claws in, without you even realizing it, and won't let you move forward.

Cool air embraces her as she enters the building. Because of a hill, the lobby is on the second floor, while Linda is on the first. Chloe punches the elevator call button in the narrow, sparsely-furnished lobby that probably hasn't seen a renovation since the early nineties.

Moments later, the elevator shudders to a stop and the doors slide open. Chloe strides forward, only to collide with a tall, black-clad body.

"Bloody—Detective?"

"Lucifer?" she gasps. His hands settle on her shoulders, steadying her.

"What are you—" they both start.

"—doing here?" Lucifer finishes. He's disheveled, still wearing his suit from last night. His eyeliner is smudged, and his hair is a curling mess she wants to touch.
"I— Hah." Blood rushes to her cheeks. "Uh, lunch? With Linda. You know, some girl time."

And for some cringe-worthy reason, she waves her hands and arms like she's dancing. Because that's what you do during "girl time," right?

"Oh, really?" Lucifer's mouth twitches as he leans away and stuffs his hands in his pockets. "Seems you're a bit late. I just watched her eat a rather unimaginative salad."

Chloe swallows. "Oh?"

"Give the Devil his due, hmm? No need to lie. You're here because it's finally cracked you."

"What?" She frowns.

"What else? All this divine baggage," he says, grinning falsely as he indicates to himself with his hands. "It was only a matter of time, really."

She looks at him like he's insane, which he is, in a way, even if his metaphors have turned out to be less metaphorical than expected. "We've seen each other almost every day for two weeks," she reminds him. "Worked together for the last several days. I think I'm putting up with your divine baggage just fine."

"And still you're here."

"Not everything's about you."

"Only the stories worth telling." He sniffs. "Right. Well, I'll be off then. If you're anything like me, you'll need a stiff drink after she's done with you."

At that, he draws out his flask and makes to brush past her, but she grabs hold of his arm, staying him. She's so tired of the hot and cold between them. "What's with you today?" They were so close, only hours before. "Why didn't you stay last night?"

"Your sofa is dreadfully small for a man of my stature," he evades. "My bed's much more comfortable."

Knowing he's actually the Devil, Chloe has discovered she's able to read him better. He isn't putting on one long, uninterrupted performance, as she once believed, nor is he hiding trauma behind metaphors. He really is this prickly and clueless and immature. And sometimes very wonderful.

"Stay next time," she says. Though the words are there, waiting on her tongue, she isn't brave enough to remind him she has a bed, too. Though it's definitely not as comfortable. She can admit that.

Lucifer's face takes on that mystified expression it sometimes does, his guard faltering. "Very well," he replies quietly. "If that's what you desire."

"That, and more cake." She smiles, attempting to lighten the mood.

He returns her smile. "Liked it, did you?"

"Oh, yeah. We'll see what my hips think in a day or two."

He quirks a brow, glancing down. "Far be it from me to argue against perfection, but there's nothing wrong with a little extra to hold onto, either."
Chloe laughs, flustered. "Anyway... Everything's okay," she says, a beat later. Or will be, she hopes. "You know that, right? I'm not going anywhere, if you're not going anywhere."

"I already told you I'd not run off and marry another stripper." He kicks back his flask.

"And you'll stay," she presses, making sure there are no loopholes. "You won't run away at all."

He holds her gaze. "You've my word."

That's good as gold. Better, maybe.

Still, when Chloe watches him leave, her stomach is in knots.

Moments later, she walks through Linda's open office door. "I think I need help," she says.

There, a bold, brave start on the path to mental well-being. Well done, Detective.

Linda looks up, startled. "Chloe? Are you okay?" She waves a hand. "Come in."

Chloe swallows, her bravery vanishing as she stares at the hot seat that is Linda's couch. "I— Actually, no, you know what? I shouldn't barge in like this. I'm so sorry."

"You're not interrupting anything. I don't have clients on Saturdays. I'm just here to organize notes and deal with insurance claims."

"But Lucifer..."

"Ohhh. You bumped into him. Yeah, the thing about Lucifer's sessions is about half of them aren't scheduled at all. Trust me when I say you're not the one who barges in."

"I really shouldn't be here, though. You're my friend, not my therapist. And you're—you're Lucifer's therapist." Her eyes widen. "Last time I roped you into trying to break into his safe with me."

"That was pretty fun," Linda says.

She smiles and nods, even as she begins backing away. "We'll, uh, get a drink sometime, right? You know, Ella, you, me—I guess not Maze since she, you know, almost got Lucifer and me killed. Okay, great. I'll just—" She points behind her with her thumbs. "I'm gonna go."

"Chloe. Wait." Standing, Linda holds up a calming hand. "Slow down. Why don't you have a seat? Would you like some water?"

"I don't think I can sit." Suddenly accepting that she's no longer leaving, Chloe begins to pace. "I'm sorry I've been avoiding you. I just—"

"Didn't want to be psychoanalyzed?" Linda chuckles. "It's okay. I know how I am. I've missed you, but you don't need to be sorry. You've been going through a lot and needed to work through that at your own pace. It looks like you're still going through a lot."

"Yeah," Chloe agrees, nodding. "You would know how that is, though, right? How did you even do this by yourself?"

"Well, it was..." Linda blinks, shaking her head. "Let's just say those were some dark days. But, you know, you've been handling things by yourself, too. And it's different for you."
She can't think about how it's different for her right now. "We're not alone," she says. "Ella knows."

"Oh? Lucifer hasn't mentioned... Huh, maybe she doesn't know that I know. So, she's seen his—" Linda points to her face. "Is she okay?"

"No, she just saw his feathers at the crime scene." Because, hah, *Lucifer has feathers*. Because that's the world she lives in now. "She just... put it all together from that." Chloe laughs a little hysterically. "I guess she's just always been a believer at heart. That's her baseline." She pauses, nodding. "Not like me. Or not like I was." The pacing starts up again, and this time it's even more ferocious. "It came so easy to her."

"Do you think you should have known sooner?"

Chloe's hands gravitate to her hips. "I don't know," she huffs. "The first time Lucifer and I worked together, Lucifer got shot and—and it didn't even hurt him. I was hit, too—he probably saved my life—and I told myself that I dreamed it all before I blacked out. That, of course he didn't get shot. Or he was wearing a vest. 'Cause, how could he get shot *multiple times to the chest* and not die? But I knew he was shot, deep down. I just *chose not to know.*"

"And then when I went to see the man who shot me, or us, he'd gone totally crazy. Wouldn't stop screaming about the Devil. And I know what made him lose his mind now," Chloe says, her hands gesturing wildly as she imagines scarred, crimson skin. "And the thing is, shortly after that, *I saw it, too—*"

"Wait. His devil face?" Linda's brows draw upward. "*Really?*"

"Yeah. In a reflection."

"Did it scare you?"

"I nearly wet my pants," Chloe breathes out with a laugh. "I had nightmares for weeks."

"Yep. Yep, it's scary."

"And I knew, as soon as I saw it, something wasn't— He wasn't..."

"Human."

"Yeah. But then, right after, *I shot him*, because he just kept going on and on and *bloody on* about it, like he *does*. So, I did it! I shot him. And he bled, and I thought, well, *of course* he bled, you idiot.

"So then he had to be some kind of eccentric, rich stage performer, right? This *is* L.A. Because what else could he possibly be?" She stops pacing and turns to look at Linda, her face screwed up in anguish. "But then I saw him get shot again," she says, breathing hard. "When he came for me and Trixie. And he bled out. *I know* he didn't make it. But he came back."

Linda nods cautiously. "Yes."

"Where'd he come back from?"

They stare at each other knowingly.

"I just—I just moved on. Trixie was a mess, and I had to be there for her. My marriage was falling
apart. And then there was my dad's case and that bimbo Candy, and more recently all this stuff with Lucifer's wings and Cain..." She realizes her face is wet. At some point, she started crying. "But he died, right? Because of me? Just like he got hurt in the loft, for me." Her heart pounds in her chest. "And then what? He went to... And he came back?"

Linda hesitates. "Chloe, I know it's hard, but I think some of these things you need to talk to Lucifer about. I don't even have all the details, and even if I did it's not my story to tell."

Putting her hands on top of her hand, Chloe lets out a frustrated groan. "He won't even talk to me about that awful place."

"About Hell?" Linda says, encouraging her to say the word.

"Yes, Hell," Chloe snaps, and drops her hands. "Not that half of this matters now, right? So much of this was ages ago. And now all this time has passed; all this other stuff has happened. I didn't believe him or anything I saw." She sighs. "So, all Ella needed was a pretty feather, but I needed—"

"You needed solid proof. That's okay. I did, too. And it's okay that Ella has faith. Lucifer knew you needed more proof. He just hasn't always known how to give it to you."

"Well, I have it now, don't I?" Chloe laughs harshly. "But what do I do with it? How do we fix all this? Lucifer's dad is God. What does that even mean?"

"So it seems."

"And," Chloe adds, looking to the popcorn ceiling, "he's a dick."

"Mm, well, consider your source for that."

Chloe's face turns hard. "These are my thoughts," she says, slapping a hand to her chest. "I didn't believe in God or Heaven or Hell because how could there be a creator who cared so little? And the Bible wants to call us his children?" She laughs in disbelief. "Like I'd ever treat Trixie this way." Her tears are fueled by anger when she lashes out, "Lucifer's father lets horrible things happen to good people, and good things happen to horrible people."


"It's unfair," Linda agrees.

"You're damn right it's unfair."

She sees Lucifer cradling Father Frank's dead body, rocking back and forth. Sees him standing among would-be worshipers, shouting, That is not what I stand for! What does God stand for—anything?

They're quiet for a moment, and Chloe scrubs at her face under Linda's watchful gaze.

"I don't know what to tell you about God," Linda admits. "I hope he's misunderstood, like Lucifer." She smiles faintly. "And what about Lucifer, Chloe? How are you taking—"

"That my...my best friend's the Devil? That I'm the world's worst detective?" Chloe laughs. "Oh," she gasps, suddenly feeling breathless and dizzy.
Linda rushes to her side. Wrapping an arm around Chloe's shoulders, she guides her to the couch. "Come on. Let's just sit for a minute." They sit together, Linda breathing more deeply and loudly than necessary to help Chloe find her way back to calmness.

It helps. A little.

When Chloe's breathing is even again, Linda says, "You're not a bad detective. I was his personal therapist, and I never in a million years could have guessed he was telling the literal truth. Not until he showed me." She pats Chloe's shoulder. "But how have things been, really? Lucifer says you're still working together."

Chloe bends at the middle, elbows going to knees, face going into her palms. "They've been good," she mumbles.

"You don't sound too certain," Linda observes. "Or happy."

"I don't know. It's just... What am I thinking?" Chloe counters, looking up. "He's the Devil."

"Do you not want to be friends with him anymore?"

"He will always be my friend," she says firmly, knowing it's true. "But..."

"What is it?"

Chloe hesitates. There have been times she's hinted at the truth, but that was before, when she thought the biggest marks against him were slow-to-improve mental illness and substance abuse. The truth is both better and worse. "I think," she starts, her voice small and shy, "I think I want...more. Still."

She's crazy. She has to be.

"More," Linda repeats. "As in, a romantic relationship?"

"It's stupid, right? It's totally stupid. How is it even supposed to work?" There are some basic rules in the universe. You brush your teeth to avoid cavities, you don't turn tigers into pets, and you don't date the Devil. "He stands me up on dates," she sighs, hating how lovesick she sounds. "And women show up to his apartment to do things with him that not even pornographers have names for. He runs off and gets married. He's...he's just so..."

"Lucifer? Yeah, he makes some pretty interesting choices sometimes," Linda interrupts, proving she missed her calling as a U.S. ambassador. She pours two glasses of water before rising with one and moving to the chair across from the couch. "But I don't think Lucifer's the same man he was when you first met him, or even last year, or last week. Do you?"

He's not a man, Chloe almost says, and feels awful for dehumanizing him, even in her own mind. He is a man. In a way. He's just a little more, too. A lot more, darling, she imagines him correcting her, and nearly rolls her eyes.

"No, he's changed," she agrees aloud, her shoulders drooping. She stares at the floor for several long moments. "Even if it could work out between us," she starts, feeling that small swoop in her stomach at the mere thought of it, "he's not exactly stepdad material, right?" And he's immortal. She can't even bring herself to talk about that part of it. "And I'm definitely not going to see a white picket fence."
Linda snorts loudly, then looks horrified when she realizes her professionalism has slipped. "Sorry." She tilts her head. "But, seriously, is that what you want from Lucifer?"

"You mean," Chloe says, slipping into her awful British accent, "Is it what I truly desire?" Now, she really does roll her eyes.

"It's not the worst question."

Sinking back into the couch cushions, Chloe groans.

"Trixie already has a dad," Linda says, her voice gentle. "Lucifer won't and can't replace Dan."

"I know. You're right."

"And I think if you wanted a picket fence... Well, something tells me you'd have one by now."

It's true. Chloe knows it is, because, honestly? She could have had that with Dan—Dan, who thinks he loves strong women, but really just wants to see them melt in his arms. She wasn't docile enough to fill that position, and though she'll never, ever say it, she knows Charlotte Richards wouldn't have been, either. Dan's the one who wants the picket fence.

Ten years ago, when they saw Trixie's sweet, squished face for the first time in a 3D ultrasound, he begged Chloe to leave the force, to become a stay-at-home mom "just for a little while" or to embrace the desk job the precinct assigned her to during her pregnancy. To him, it seemed only natural. After all, he loved his work as a detective, and she, of course, being a woman, would love being a mom.

She'll never forget winning that argument, weeks after it first began. How she stood on her toes and got in his face, as close as she was able with a belly rounded by seven months of pregnancy. How she hissed like a mad woman, "I will not be the barefoot and pregnant wife who stands behind her man." And then how she packed a bag and slept three nights in the nicest hotel she could afford, crying and ordering room service, and getting fatter, all while feeling like a weight had been lifted from her.

Because, as much as she loves Trixie, as much as she wanted to be a good wife, as much as she doesn't begrudge any woman who chooses a life vastly different from her own, there are mysteries to solve, adventures to go on, people who need a detective in their corner. She wants it all. She is Trixie's mom, and she loves being so with every fiber of her being, more than she could have ever imagined, but she's her own person, too.

Sometimes she feels guilty about that. About the broken home she feels it's created, all the babysitters and late nights away. About the scars that paint her body, that seem to grow in number with each passing year. Even if the Devil was evil—and she's sure he's not—how much more drama could he possibly bring into Trixie Espinoza's crazy little life? At least he shoos away her bullies and bakes her cake.

And still Chloe never considers changing professions. Can't bring herself to. And isn't that just like Penelope Decker? Ugh.

"I feel like I should want it," Chloe says, thinking of the idyllic fence. In her mind, it looks an awful lot like it contains a prison yard, rather than some suburban paradise.

Linda lets out a thoughtful breath. "Is that what you hoped Marcus could give you?"

Chloe looks down at her hands, to the edge of her left thumb, which she's taken to chewing on in
the last month. The skin is red and peeling and catches on fabric. Really goes well with her disheveled chic and the bags she's been carrying under her eyes.

"I thought I could have it all with him," she says. "Everything I should want, and someone who believed in my work."

Dan never did, not while they were together, anyway. But Marcus had called her his best detective by day and made promises by night. In hindsight, she sees how empty that compliment and those promises were, how he played her masterfully.

"I'm really sorry he hurt you, Chloe."

"I just hate that I slept with him," she says, and feels the urge to take another boiling hot shower.

Linda nods. "If it makes you feel any better," she chuckles, "I have a list of men I regret sleeping with, too."

Not Lucifer, I bet, Chloe thinks, and loathes the jealousy that burns in her gut.

"But is that really all there is?" Linda continues. "You almost married him. The betrayal has to hurt."

"I guess." Unable to look her friend in the eye, Chloe takes to staring at a potted plant situated atop a set of filing drawers. "I feel like something's wrong with me," she confesses. Linda is silent while she gathers her thoughts. "Everyone eventually leaves me or turns on me."

"What makes you think that?"

"My dad died," she starts, ticking him off her pinky finger. "I mean, he was murdered. It's not like it was his fault, but—"

"You needed him."

"Yeah." Especially after Hot Tub High School, when, overnight, guys stopped seeing her as Chloe Decker and instead knew her as that chick who took her top off in that movie. Worse, the more objectified she felt, the more her mother called the role her "big break."

"My mom... She does her best, I guess, but she was always gone or wrapped up in some new role. Dan was so sure he handled things right in the Palmetto case that he manipulated me until I thought I was crazy. Everyone turned on me at the LAPD, and they've never really liked me since. They hate me even more since Pierce. Maze knew the truth about him, about Cain, and tried to push me toward him. And Marcus—"

"He seemed safe. At first."

She laughs humorlessly. "I sure read that one wrong, huh?" She licks her lips and swears she tastes bourbon and chocolate and something wild and free and fun. Her heart aches. "More than anything, I think Marcus was there when I wanted to stop wanting things I shouldn't," she admits.

"Like Lucifer?"

Shrugging a shoulder, she nods and chews on the corner of her thumb until she notices she's doing it. She sits on her hand. "I thought... I thought, 'Here's a man who has it all together. Good job, willing to at least try to work on his personal issues, seems to like me and my work and Trixie.'"
"Compared to Lucifer, who stands you up and runs off and gets married," Linda summarizes, repeating Chloe's words back to her.

It hurts to hear someone else say it. To be reminded of how much trusting others has cost her. Once, she told Lucifer that she felt comfortable being vulnerable with him, that maybe that was okay. But many times it hasn't been. Not at all.

"I want to know him," she tells Linda. "And I know he needs me to make the first move because of all that's happened to him. I know he's letting me call the shots. But I don't know how. I don't—"

"You don't want to be hurt again."

Chloe nods, hunching her shoulders and leaning into the arm of the couch, as if she might curl around the knots in her stomach.

"Chloe, can I speak to you more as your friend?"

"Please."

Pursing her lips, Linda seems to struggle with something within herself. "What I'm about to say is highly unethical, but I don't know what else to do. And, who am I kidding? It's not like my relationship with Lucifer started out professionally. It didn't.

"That was wrong of me. I've tried to make up for it, but there are some things I can't make right. It's gotten harder over time, too, as Maze and Amenadiel and Charlotte, and now you, have needed me. You've all been my friends, and I'm caught wanting what's best for each of you. In more normal circumstances, I would never, ever provide therapy to a friend, much less all of my closest friends at the same time."

"I'm sorry," Chloe says.

"No. No, you don't have to apologize. It's just the situation we're in." Linda shakes her head. "But because of our situation, I can't be impartial, and I make mistakes. Lots of them. In particular, there are things I shouldn't say, but do, including this: Chloe, if you truly want Lucifer, I don't think he will reject you or betray you. But he won't be perfect. Far from it. He, well, he is the Devil. You can be sure he'll make boneheaded mistakes and have unique problems. A relationship with him would take lots of work and would never be conventional. But things are different, now that you know the truth. I think he'd be willing to put in the work, if you asked him. And that's all I'm going to say about that."

Hours later, Chloe retreats to the beach after taking a page from Ella's book and hugging Linda tight. She walks barefoot through sea foam, her sandals dangling from her fingers. She feels...tired, but calm. Maybe there's something to therapy, after all.

Briefly, she wonders if everything that's happened, even this feeling, is by design, if Lucifer is right, and they have no control over anything, or are constantly trying to wrest control from God. Maybe, grotesquely, her affection for the Devil is her "destiny."

But there's no way of knowing if God is a demented puppet master, so she sets the concern aside. It's enough to feel she's spilled her heart out to a friend and come out the other side of it, at peace. Feeling strong enough to take a risk on what her heart desires.

Her heart has always known.
Ocean waves peak and crash, immense and infinite, and she thinks about how much Lucifer has been through and seen, how much he must know. How often has he come to Earth? How does he leave Hell? What's his favorite dessert? Somehow, there are as many little things she doesn't know as there are big things.

So many questions. She's decided to start asking them tonight. No more avoiding each other. No more pretending the truth isn't exactly as it is.

When she's had enough of the sun and sand, she returns home, takes a nap, and rises to agonize over her closet. She's never been a partier, even back in her acting days, more because she didn't know how to be than because she didn't want to be. Motherhood, and then her promotion to detective, have made her even less inclined to cut loose. She does have a few dresses, most of which Lucifer has seen over time, but they all feel wrong for what she's about to do.

In the end, she can't be anyone but who she knows best to be, so she dons black jeans, a baby blue button-down, and her block-heeled boots. She pulls free the top three buttons of her shirt to display the bullet at her throat.

The temperature inside Lux rivals the temperature outside. It's only nine-thirty, but the club is filled to bursting with scantily-clad bodies and a bluesy bass beat that's bone-rattling enough to register on a seismograph. Strangers grind on the dance floor, their inhibitions lost either to alcohol or the far more illicit substances Chloe pretends aren't sold by the bartender.

The thought gives her pause. Is she that much better than Morrison? Worse, here she is, about to lay her heart bare to the man who's no doubt taking a cut, not to mention occasionally imbibing himself.

Well, he is the Devil, she reminds herself.

Descending the staircase into the heart of the club, she spots Lucifer almost immediately, where he weaves through the crowd. People tilt and turn toward him like schools of fish swept by a strong current. An expert host, he stops where he knows he's wanted, a smile here, a touch of the shoulder there, a casual comment. He doesn't linger, but everyone who desires to be seen feels seen. The world is fortunate Lucifer Morningstar wants to own a den of sin, rather than be an autocrat.

He looks up suddenly, and their eyes meet. The smile that lights up his face softens his features.

"You survived Linda!" he shouts over the music when they're face to face near the bar.

"So did you!"

"Yes, well, she's been probing me for quite some time, and not always how I like! I've learned to grin and bear it!"

Chloe's head falls back as she laughs, and Lucifer grins cheekily, standing a little closer. Leaning over the bar, he snaps his fingers at a bartender, and then points toward the floor several times. The bartender scurries off, and seconds later, the music drops to a level that is far less likely to damage hearing.

"Now, that's better, isn't it?" Lucifer says, pouring two glasses of whisky. "So, to what do I owe the pleasure, Detective? It's not like you to visit my humble abode on a Saturday night."

It's not is it? Not like her to visit on her days off at all. She regrets that, realizes she's lost time without meaning to. Her fingers curl around her glass, but she's careful not to drink. She's a woman
on a mission. She needs a clear head. But getting the words out...

"I wanted to see you," she says, going for honesty.

He looks at her sidelong, intrigued. Turning, he leans against the edge of the bar. "Well, here I am, darling. You can look all you like. Or more."

Yes, here he is. Exactly as he wants to be seen: the beautiful, rich playboy, suited to the nines, hair perfectly coiffed, eyeliner black as night. He's disguised as an object of desires.

Her heart thumps hard in her chest as she asks, "Can we go upstairs?"

Lucifer's brows shoot up high on his forehead. She hasn't been in the penthouse since the day after she cleaned his wings. For some reason, as time with the truth has passed, it's felt acceptable having him invade her space and home, but his? Not so much. His has secrets. He may hide them in plain sight, but they're secrets, just the same, because no one ever asks him about them. But Chloe might.

"Very well," he says after a moment, and downs the rest of his drink in three swallows. He slams the glass on the bar and guides her with a light touch to her back.

Revelers openly leer at him when they pass, but Lucifer pays them no mind as they wind their way up the staircase and into the elevator.

It's the longest elevator ride of Chloe's life, maybe even longer than when she gave Henry the slip to come see Lucifer two weeks ago. Now, Lucifer stands beside her, his posture rigid.

When they arrive on the top level and the doors slide open with a cheery ding, Lucifer stays rooted to the elevator floor, his expression troubled. He knows she hasn't come for sex.

Chloe grabs his elbow gently and pulls him to the leather sofa. Whether some poor cleaner was assigned the grizzly task or Lucifer bought an entirely new and identical sectional, there are no signs he ever bled here. She sits, her hand slipping from his arm in the process.

"Can I get you a drink?" Lucifer asks, suddenly reanimating.

"Lucifer, sit."

"Right." He sits at once and white-knuckles his knees.

"Would you calm down?" Chloe complains. "This is hard enough without you making me nervous."

"Sorry." He glances back at the bar. "If you'd just let me have a drink—"

"I want us sober."

"I assure you, my metabolism—"

"I don't care. No drinking."

His mouth snaps closed in a petulant scowl.

Chloe shrugs off the purse she brought and digs inside. Her hand resurfaces with the rolled sheet protector she placed Trixie's drawing in. She holds it out to Lucifer. "Trixie wanted to thank you for the cake."
Lucifer takes hold of the drawing with great care, as though it might disintegrate in his hands. "I wish I'd thought of the pentagram," he says, a fingertip brushing across the cake. "Beatrice shows great potential. You have every right to be proud."

"Admit it. She's grown on you."

"She is highly tolerable."

"So are you," Chloe says, bumping his bicep with her shoulder. She smiles down at Trixie's drawing. "This is how I see you, you know." Lucifer remains silent, his brows furrowing. "You're funny and sweet. And you're good."

He scoffs. "I'm not."

She takes the drawing back and places it on the coffee table. Grabbing his hands, she argues, "You are. I wouldn't want you if you weren't."

For a moment, he's unnaturally still.

"You..." His dark eyes search her face. "You want...me? Even after...?"

She nods, her cheeks warm. "And," she laughs, "just so we're clear, it's you I want, not just"—she allows herself to look him over brazenly—"not just all of that. Not that I'm complaining. At all. I just, I want it all, okay? I don't know how we make it work. I don't know anything. But I wanna try if you're willing."

There. A leap of faith. She might throw up.

"Detective, you can't possibly..." Lucifer shakes his head.

"Why not?" she challenges gently.

"You've seen why."

"What I've seen is you have a lot of pain."

"Do you ever consider I might deserve it?" he asks, pulling free from her touch.

"I know you believe that, but it can't be true."

"No," Lucifer says. "No, on this one point, Cain was right. I can't outrun what I've done. What I am. I can't simply believe it away—or if I can, I shouldn't. I'm the Devil. Simple as that."

"But you're not evil," she insists. "You punish evil. That's what you've always told me."

"At some point, it's all the bloody same!" he shouts, jumping to his feet. She stands with him, and he stumbles back, as if intimidated. "You can't fathom what I've seen," he says, "what I've done. But that face—my face—is all the evidence you could ever need, Detective."

"So, help me understand," she pleads, her fingers closing around his forearm. "Tell me about—about Hell."

"Don't ask that of me," he whispers. Tears well in his eyes but don't fall. "Please."

He said "please" to her once before in this room, shortly after they started working together, when her fingers graced the ragged scars left by his wings. Sometimes she wonders what might have
happened if she had pressed him that night, if she had said to Hell with Carver Cruz and instead tried to unravel the mystery that is Lucifer. Probably nothing would have happened—or at least nothing good. They were different people then.

They're different people now, too, which is why she doesn't let the subject drop this time. "What are you afraid will happen if you tell me?"

Lucifer tilts his head, his breathing ragged. "Well, I'll lose you, won't I," he says. Not a question. A statement, a certainty.

"No," she says, shaking her head and stepping closer. "No, you won't."

"You can't know that."

"Have faith in me."

Lucifer breathes out a disbelieving laugh. "You're asking the Devil to have faith?"

"Try."

"Fine." He pulls away, putting distance between them. She watches as his expression hardens and his tears dissolve, and she thinks...this is what he's had to be, to survive. Unfeeling. He relocates to one of the leather chairs, where he sits and crosses his legs. And there he is, that creature she's only seen a few times before: the Lord of Hell.

"What shall I tell you about first, hmm?" he asks, drawing his cigarette case from his suit jacket. "The genocidal despots, the cannibals, Jack the Ripper? Pick your poison, Detective. I've drunk them all."

Chloe sits at the edge of the sofa's chaise piece. He's trying to scare her, but in his own fear he's forgotten all the horrible things she's seen as a detective. "Start at the beginning," she says.

"Bloody hell," he swears, "I need a drink."

"Fine," Chloe sighs, rising to go to the bar.

"Don't bother," Lucifer says, when her hand closes around a glass. Shaking her head, she carries over the bottle. "Cheers," he jests, his hand shaking as he unscrews the cap and brings the bottle to his lips.

Chloe sits again and looks at him expectantly.

"Dad didn't tell me what to do when he threw me into Hell," Lucifer starts, taking a drag from his cigarette before gulping more whisky. "That's a common theme, by the by. Dad says bugger all, but woe unto you if you cross the omnipotent bastard."

"So he's abusive," Chloe says. Just what you want to learn about God.

"Well, he certainly hasn't won Father of the Year yet." He blows out a smoke ring and cuts through it with a finger. "For context of my brilliant fall... You can think of Heaven as a kind of"—he waves his cigarette in thought—"celestial city and suburbia, if you like. Clean to a fault, lots of petty cliques, as boring as an HOA meeting. Hell is—well, more than Heaven's polar opposite."

"Did God create Hell?"

"Darling, my father created everything worth knowing about," he chuckles, "or was at least the
catalyst. The initial lot of star stuff, including my siblings and me, Mum was involved in all that. But the rest of it? Dad's doing. Couldn't stop creating, if he wanted to."

"But why would he—"

"Well, he needed a place to store the rejects, didn't he?" he laughs.

"The rejects?"

"Your Bible leaves that one out, doesn't it? The whole universe simply *must* revolve around humankind." Lucifer smiles wryly. "Do you honestly believe humans are his first creation, his only one? Far from it." Chloe swallows back her discomfort. "There have been other creations. Other creatures. Some, he made too powerful, too headstrong. They tried to turn against him or nearly killed each other off. So, he cobbled together Hell in a pinch and chucked the lot of them there. You might say it's a dirty, stinking rubbish heap filled with misfits playing at war and torture."

"There's fighting?"

"Depends on who's ruling—if anyone is. There were no wars during my reign," he says with some pride. "But there's never any peace, regardless. Peace is more than an end to bloodshed."

Lighting a second cigarette off the remnants of the first, Lucifer launches into the basics of Hell's landscape and the simulated rooms of torture he calls Hell loops. Chloe struggles to keep up and take him seriously, even knowing who is and that he isn't lying. He might as well be recounting details about Hogsmeade or, maybe a little more accurately, Mordor.

"So, God felt you...disobeyed him, and he cast you into Hell."

"That's the gist of it."

"And then what happened?"

"Well, let's see... He shot me into the sunless space above Hell, for starters. Important detail. Normally wouldn't have been an issue, what with the wings and the way our bodies work, but, you see, he crippled me on my way out the heavenly gates. Made it so I could only slip between Hell and Earth, couldn't breach the heavenly gates, couldn't fly above planetary atmospheres. So, being far above Hell as I was, I burnt my winged arse to a bloody crisp on the way down; took a nosedive straight into the ash."

Like Icarus, Chloe thinks.

"I'm sure Dad thought something in Hell would finish me off. He nearly wasn't wrong. Before my wings healed, I got myself into a right mess. Landed in the backyard of some barking mad bird who likes to eat hearts and collect bones. She fancied having a pair of wings for her mantel.

"By the time, I got free of her, there was a whole host of creatures waiting to have a spot of fun with me. For a time, they had the upper hand, simply due to the sheer number of them that came running when they sensed something angelic. Slavery, by the way? I rate that negative one thousand out of ten, and they couldn't even hold me that long."

"Lucifer," Chloe gasps, her eyes filling with tears.

"Save your pity, Detective." He drinks. "I get my revenge, rest assured. We're just getting to the best bits."
But Chloe can't take it. Leaning forward, she rests a hand on one of his knobby knees. "You survived Hell, Lucifer. I don't care what your father thinks you did, it couldn't have been so bad that you deserved all that misery."

"Yes, well, worrying about who deserves punishment is my jam, Detective, not his." He snorts. "But of course I survived. I'm immortal. And you can go ahead and disabuse yourself of my innocence. I was no benevolent leader. I made Hell as much as Dad did, really. What he began, I perfected." He leans forward, until only a small space separates their faces.

His breath smells of smoke and whisky when he says, "He wanted me to be a punisher all along, so a punisher I became. First, I fought my way to the top—didn't take long, once my wings mended. Helped that I had no qualms destroying whatever got in my way. And then when the first human souls began arriving, well, I made sure to spice things up a bit, didn't I? As I said before, the Hell loops are automated—and where's the fun in that? Quite a clever torture device. But there's something to be said for taking pride in your work and doing things by hand, the old-fashioned way."

"You tortured souls." He's always said as much. Jokes, she once believed.

"I did," Lucifer confirms with a nod of his chin. "And I loved it. At first." He pulls on his cigarette, the ember burning bright in the dimly lit penthouse. And Chloe watches as his eyes, and then his skin, burn brighter, too.

He doesn't realize what's happened.

Don't be afraid, she commands herself, schooling her face. It's Lucifer.

But inside, she trembles for a little while.

"I walked into loops and terrorized the guilty," he says, his crimson lips smirking. "There were so many evil people to choose from—no end to the brokenness of humanity. I let demons have their way with the rapists of Nanjing. I drowned kiddie-fiddling priests in their precious holy water. I flew little, power-hungry lordlings high into the sky and dropped them, and caught them, and dropped them, until I didn't catch them and they plummeted. And they healed. And I did it again."

He tilts his head, looking alien. "Do you know how many bones you can break before a man tends to pass out? I do. Do you know what a spine feels like in your hands? I do because I've pulled a few out. I've bathed in a river of blood—no metaphor there, either, Detective. Every horrible, grotesque thing you can imagine, I've seen it, I've done it, or I've commanded another to do it in my stead."

Chloe swallows hard. "Like Maze."

"Oh, yes. Mazikeen is very creative. Gets right to the heart of your fears and insecurities and uses them against you. When I got tired of doing things myself, I let her take over the show." He smiles coldly. "You're free to leave whenever you want, Detective."

"I'm not leaving."

"Then you're as mad as I am."

Chloe forces herself to look into his red eyes. "Something must have changed over time. All of that... That's not who you are anymore." She points to Trixie's drawing. "That's who you are."

"You think I'm reformed," he scoffs.
"You know you're different," she argues. Treading carefully around the minefields of his past, she adds, "I believe you've been hurt and have done things you regret. But, Lucifer, soldiers do horrible things in war, and prisoners do horrible things to each other when the system isn't managed well."

"Who do you think managed the system?" Lucifer chuckles in anguish. "I was the warden," he stresses, hitting his chest. "You can't forgive me anymore than you can forgive Perry Smith for murdering your father."

Chloe goes very still as the words settle upon her. What if he's right? What if she can only forgive the Devil, if she first forgives the sins of one she truly hates? Whether she should be or not, she isn't that big of a person. She knows she isn't. If Perry Smith is rotting in Hell, she isn't sure he deserves an eternity of torture, but she certainly doesn't mind that he's suffering for now.

Plagued by the quandary, she yanks the liquor bottle from Lucifer's grasp and tips it back. To Hell with sobriety. The whisky sets her throat on fire. Lowering the bottle, she coughs and stares at Lucifer, at his resigned posture and the bitter set of his jaw. He won't meet her eyes. Even in this raw, scarred form that's driven men insane, it is far easier to see he has been abused than it is to imagine him ever being an abuser.

But he doesn't lie. He was a torturer.

Where is the justice in what's happened?

Slowly, she realizes the difference between Perry Smith and the Devil is that Perry Smith lived in a time and place filled with goodness and softness, luxuries and laughter. A world that had love. What has Lucifer known, other than that the home of his birth, his father, his siblings, have wanted nothing to do with him? Even Amenadiel, she remembers, has assaulted him, manipulated him, has been called the favorite. What has Lucifer learned, other than goodness and softness lead to destruction?

But he is good, deep down. She knows it.

Chloe sets the nearly-empty bottle on the floor and stands. Lucifer looks up. He expects her to walk away, but she moves closer, her heart hammering beneath her breast. Sitting carefully on his lap, she pulls the latest cigarette from his fingers and shoves its glowing head into the ashtray on the side table.

"Detective?"

She takes his face in her hands, her thumbs caressing uneven, leathery skin. "You're nothing like Smith. Or Cain. They didn't care what happened to people, whether those people were good or evil. It didn't matter. They didn't care about anything but themselves. Maybe you've done monstrous things in Hell, but that's not like you at all, not here, where you have the chance to be who you want to be. You choose goodness and kindness all the time, Lucifer."

Gently, she takes his hand and uncurls his long fingers, opening his palm. He jerks in surprise when he sees his crimson flesh. "Forgive me," he says, trying to pull away.

"It's okay," she says, holding tight. "You don't scare me, remember?"

"But—"

Leaning forward, she presses her cheek to his. "Whatever you've done, whatever you think that makes you, it's over, Lucifer." His past, her past. It's over.
He shakes his head and despairs, "Dad's toying with us. With me. You can't possibly feel this way."

"What is it you're always saying?" she says. "God's got nothing to do with it?"

"How can you be sure?"

She can't be, she supposes, but neither of them needs that uncertainty looming over them.

"I just am," she says.

Pulling away slightly, she steels herself and catches his mouth with hers. He sucks in a shocked, pained breath. His lips are rough and taste like liquor, salt, and smoke; and he's warm, too warm, magnificently warm. All of this is a part of him, and she accepts it wholly, as he has accepted strange parts of herself she has only shown him.

It's as though a dam bursts when he begins to kiss her back, softly at first, then hungrily, his scarred hands buried in her hair, tugging on strands. And she feels, rather than sees, when his beauty returns, how softness melts into his body as he draws her closer.

When he pulls away, his smile is cautious, but hopeful. Endearingly boyish. "I'll find a way to be worthy of you," he promises.

"You already are," she tells him.

Chapter End Notes

Huge thank you to puerile, NotOneLine, and DifferenceEngineGirl. This one took a village.

Fic Recs • My Fics, Categorized • My Fanvids on YouTube • Tumblr
The Silver City never sleeps. Day or night, there is always some project, some creation, blooming to life. A new tower of marble, ivory, or glass is erected in mere weeks by tireless cherubim who delight in advancing God's wonders. Seeds are planted, and new growth sprouts from rich soil within days. In the hanging gardens, sweet-scented flowers blossom in perpetuity, and fruits—ever abundant, ever perfectly ripe—wait to be picked from the trees that dot the city and flourish in the lush outer countryside.

Clean, crisp rivers wind through the metropolis. Elsewhere, fountains surge high, the water fanning, twirling, jetting; a cool mist kisses the air around them. No trash litters the streets, no homeless souls wander the alleys in search of comfort. Everyone here has a home and food. Entertainment is...less varied, but a far cry from illiberal.

In a word, paradise. So, why does it feel wrong?

Amenadiel walks Heaven's gleaming, white marble pathways, warm lantern light reflecting off his bald head, which is bent in deep thought. After so many months in soft cotton henleys, hoodies, and jeans, the coarse material of his heavenly vestment chafes his skin. Everything is chafing.

"Feeling down, brother?" a voice queries from above.

Amenadiel glances to his left as one of his many younger siblings lands on leather sandals. "Barachiel."

The angel flashes a mischievous smile and falls into lockstep beside him. "I heard you'd returned," Barachiel says. His cream-colored wings fold neatly at his back, contrasting against his bright auburn curls. "Had to see it myself to believe it. You were gone quite a long time, Meni! There were rumors you wouldn't be coming back at all, that you were...less yourself."

To fall from grace: the angelic equivalent of *can't get it up*. The trite punchline in countless celestial jokes.

"Hate to break it to you, but I'm the same as always."

A blatant lie, and distantly, he can hear Lucifer's barking laugh. Amenadiel's world hasn't been the same since he realized Father gifted his children—all his children—with self-determination. No different from humans. It's a truth he wishes to shout from the Silver City's highest tower—and a truth he wishes to hoard, too. For, what does it truly mean? And when did this happen? When did Father relieve them of their divinely scripted duties?

"Do you really have them now?" Barachiel taunts, reaching over to poke between his shoulder blades. "Surely you're not walking by choice."

"Like humans, you mean," Amenadiel says, jerking his shoulder away.

"Like Father's smelly little pets, yes."

Amenadiel remains silent. Is that how he spoke of God's earthly children? Silence is the best approach to Barachiel, at any rate. As the family gossipmonger—"confessor," Barachiel would
"Where are you headed?" Barachiel asks. "Want me to tag along?"

"No."

"Hmm, well, I guess I wouldn't like to keep going in this direction, anyway."

Amenadiel stops and turns to his brother with a scowl. "Then leave me."

"Keep your priorities straight, brother," Barachiel warns, his green eyes narrowed in accusation and morbid delight. "Don't be tempted like Samael." He grins. "Oh, and how is old Sammy, by the way? Still lying with demonic pigs and coming up smelling of brimstone?"

"You know he goes by Lucifer now."

"Who cares what he goes by?"

"I do," Amenadiel says, unable to mask his anger as he forges ahead.

Barachiel laughs behind him. A soft snap sounds as his wings unfold and he takes flight. "Your time among mortals changed you, brother!"

Turn a corner, and there's the ghetto. The moniker, an old angelic snub that stuck, sits uneasily with Amenadiel. The human district of the Silver City is no less a paradise, though it is certainly segregated like a ghetto—one with a mostly-respected no-fly zone and skyscrapers reminiscent of those found on Earth.

Humans brush past him on the street, talking amongst themselves in the temperate night. They all appear whole and hale, as they did on Earth during their prime, whatever age that may have been. Moreover, the infirm walk, the deaf hear, the blind see; prostheses were left at the proverbial Pearly Gates. The humans' many tongues—English, Chinese, Hindi, and all the dead languages, too—are gone, as well. Or, not gone, but translated by the very air they breathe, so that an Olmec might speak to a Swede.

With his wings tucked away, Amenadiel can pass for human, even in their neighborhood. After all, angels don't come here. But Amenadiel does. Now, at least. He never visited in the many millennia that came before.

He makes his way to Building 591, where he steps into a glass elevator. The view beyond the elevator, and then beyond the floor-to-ceiling glass in the forty-second floor's hallway, is spectacular, one deep blanket of blue-black night, brilliant stars, and glowing lantern light. But it's not exactly real. There's a visual trick these buildings employ to thwart division among the human masses. No two views are exactly alike, but every view is beautiful, be it at ground level or the uppermost floors. This is despite the district's compact urban planning. Somehow, no one ever faces the dismal wall of an adjacent building.

Tired of your view? You're free to move, of course. Want to holiday to a mansion in the countryside? Speak to your local cherubim.

Paradise. Why does it feel wrong?

Amenadiel knocks on a pale gray door. When it opens, a more youthful version of Charlotte Richards beams at him, relieved, and waves him inside. After months spent seated at the bar in
Lux, he accepts the glass of wine she hands him more out of habit than interest. Alcohol isn't common in the rest of the Silver City, where absolute control over one's faculties is valued to a militaristic degree. A throwback to Heaven's civil wars, in the days before God's creations were numerous enough to keep all his children too busy to incite conflict.

"Sorry I couldn't visit sooner." She shrugs him off. "How are you settling in?" he asks, falling into one of the soft, white chairs in her apartment.

Charlotte's eyes dart left and right as she thinks. "I feel like I...cheated. Maybe. Just a little." She holds her thumb and index finger close together.

"You deserve to be here. You sacrificed yourself for me. That is the most selfless act a human can commit."

"Yeah, but I still felt guilty when you brought me here. You had to argue for my right to stay." She takes several long swallows of wine and shudders. "It's like I still have one foot in Hell. What was it your brother said? I reek of the underworld? That's a new one."

"Don't mind Michael. He isn't known for his tact," Amenadiel says. "He's a sword and not much else. The stench isn't that strong on you anymore—only an angel would notice—and you're here now. To stay. That's all that matters."

"Right," she sighs unsteadily. "I guess I should go to the—what did you call it?—Hall of Records, to find my relatives." She frowns. "Some of them, anyway. Probably a lot of them are in Hell, actually." More drinking.

Amenadiel has never been to Hell and never given it much thought until Charlotte returned earthside. Oh, he's flown to the gates at the portal and given the spiritual lock a good rattle, he's shoved Lucifer back into place over and over, but he's never passed to the other side himself. He always believed his brother was exaggerating about the awfulness of Hell. It wasn't like Luci didn't exaggerate about a lot of things, even if he wasn't exactly prone to outright falsehood. Hell couldn't be that bad because, if it were, that might bring into question God's infinite wisdom, a truly unthinkable heresy.

Self-determination seems a gift of great importance, but is there really no plan, much less a good one, to go alongside it? What about Chloe? Why did Father have him set her birth in motion if he didn't have a plan?

"Are you okay?"

Amenadiel blinks up from his wine glass. "Sorry. I came here to make sure you were all right, and I can't even hold a conversation."

"It's fine. It's just nice to see a familiar face."

Charlotte smiles gently, and Amenadiel struggles to imagine she was ever a mean-spirited lawyer. He feels sorry for Daniel, suddenly, knowing it will be a long time before he sees her again. Assuming Daniel has no significant regrets that will send him to Hell. The thought nags at him uncomfortably. Daniel is his friend. He's a good man. What if none of that matters in the end?

"It seems you're having just as hard a time adjusting as I am," Charlotte says.

"Everything here looks different now. I was with your kind for a long time."

Very little time, actually, in the grand scheme of immortal existence, but the time on Earth
was...memorable. His lips twitch as he thinks of Linda's fiery brilliance. She made him into something better, something more whole.

What afterlife awaits her?

"You know," Charlotte starts, setting her empty glass aside, "I lived in France for a few years. Right in the heart of Paris. And when I went back home... It didn't even seem like the same place. It wasn't just that I no longer heard French when I walked down the street, or that I had to drive everywhere again. It was...the culture. Americans like it fast and hard," she chuckles, her brows raised suggestively. "The French take their time."

"But you stayed in L.A."

"I stayed in L.A.," she agrees with an elegant nod. "I liked fast and hard, in the end. But, well, look where it landed me. Anyway, experiences like that change you, but you adjust and get used to being home again."

"But should I?" he asks, and a chill runs down his spine to vocalize such uncertainty. Charlotte looks equally distressed as she glances around the room, as if she expects Michael to burst forth and cart her off to Hell.

"I—I'm sorry, but please don't talk like that."

He nods. "Of course. I shouldn't have—"

"Let's play a game. I bought—" She revises her statement. There is no money in Heaven. "I was granted a deck of cards."

Amenadiel stands in the Great Tower's round waiting room, bored to the point of irritation. Living alongside Lucifer for so long, he's come to expect debauchery or calamity—or, more often, some combination of the two—around every corner. If he were his brother, he would have burst inside some time ago.

Expectations for entertainment aside, it is odd that he's the only one in the large, low-ceilinged hall. This room was built precisely because the lines to speak to Gabriel, Father's most trusted messenger and intercessor, were once formidably long. Fights used to break out between the siblings about who was next in line—an impossible thing to determine when flight makes three dimensions come into play. Airborne fighting tended to upset the inhabitants of the ghetto, which in turn upset Father. Thus, the construction of this waiting room and its purposely low ceilings.

Of course, Amenadiel hasn't been here for many years, either. There's no need. Gabriel sends daily memos by cherubim to all God's angelic children. There's even an empyrean newsletter of sorts, which no one reads. The truth is, he and his siblings, as highly-specialized, purpose-driven creatures, don't care about each other's works. Why worry about gifts of memory if your gift and purpose is planetary soils?

The one exception, of course, is any task having to do with Samael, and all those tasks have fallen on Amenadiel's shoulders for divine reasons unknown to him. Those are always the talk of the town. After such a long absence, the others have harassed him for stories. And, oh, the stories he could tell about their fallen brother—about their mother, too. But he says nothing. Mom fell from grace long ago, and if they care so much about Samael, they can go see him for themselves.

Only poor Uri seemed to take a real interest, believing, perhaps without any evidence, that God sent him to right a wrong. The rest don't care that much, of course. It's only that Samael makes for
interesting gossip. The fallen brother, the traitor who would not completely fulfill his divine directive: Where is he now? The general consensus is that he should be in Hell.

What must be hours later, the door between the Great Tower and the waiting room opens. Gabriel walks through, his face soft and beatific as always. His pale blue wings shift with each step. Vitreous, brown eyes sweep across the hall and jerk to a stop on Amenadiel.

Gabriel blinks, swaying on his feet. "Amenadiel the Firstborn of Our Holy God the Father?"

"Uh, yeah." Amenadiel nods awkwardly. "Hello, Gabe."

"Why have you come calling?" Gabriel asks, and spins in place, a whirling dervish, his wings folded around his body.

The glory of God does strange things to those who behold it. As the sole angel who sees Father on the regular, Gabriel is forever drunk on the source of all divinity.

"I've come to petition Father."

"You've questions about your most recent missive?"

"No. I only—"

"Father is busy."

"Of course. But I—"

"No guests in the Tower of the Lord."

Amenadiel frowns. His chest puffs out proudly as he states, "I am Father's firstborn, his favorite son. I demand you let me see him."

"And I am Gabriel, the ears and tongue of the Most High. This is the Lord's message: There are to be no guests."

Gabriel makes to leave, his white robes flowing behind him. Amenadiel rushes forward, one hand outstretched. "Gabriel, wait! When was the last time Father saw one of us? How long has it been?"

His brother pauses at the connecting doorway. "Father sees me every day," he says, and shuts the door behind him.

Amenadiel stares, his questions haunting him.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks go to puerile for all the late-night brainstorming sessions. Thanks, as well, to TheYahwehDance for telling me all about Heaven in the comics, so I know exactly what I'm doing by not following it.

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It's too hot, Chloe thinks, stretching beneath silken sheets. She blinks awake and stills, her breath catching in her throat.

Lucifer's wings have unfurled in the night. He rests on his side, one wing bent, tucked close to his back, the other folded over his shoulder and draped across the bed. It lies heavy on her body, like a weighted, electric blanket of pristine, pearlescent feathers. He sleeps, unaware of his own divinity, his lips parted as he breathes deeply.

Ever curious, Chloe gently untangles a hand from the sheets and reaches out to touch the arc of his wing. The luminous feathers call to her, so different from the fractured, gory mess she extracted bullets from. Her fingertips barely brush the soft, fanning vanes before Lucifer's eyes snap open. His hand darts out, fast as a cobra strike, and closes around her wrist. She lets out a small, surprised gasp.

"Detective." His grip loosens as recognition dawns. "Chloe."

"I'm sorry."

He scowls at the wing draped over them. "I've sprouted wings, and you're apologizing?"

"I should have asked. Just because I helped you before doesn't mean—"

"You—" he interrupts, then swallows, his thumb sweeping across her pulse point. "You can touch me anywhere you desire." Normally, he delivers such lines with a salacious smirk, but this is something deeper and stated as simple fact.

"Do you like being touched there, though?"

"I don't know."

She squints at him. "Someone has to have—"

"I told you I'm like a virgin," he jokes.

"Right," she snorts, letting him evade for now. "So, I can...?"

"Yes."

Cautiously, her eyes on his, she reaches up again. His fingers slide away from her wrist as she caresses the nearest slanted row of feathers. His wing twitches slightly, shifting across her body.

"Sorry," he murmurs.

"Was that bad?"
"It...tickles," he huffs.

"Oh." She increases her pressure, digging past vanes, barbules, and quills, to the warm flesh underneath. "Better?"

He hums his affirmative.

Having lived her life as an atheist, Chloe has rarely experienced that strange mixture of wonder and trepidation called **awe**, but she feels it now, for who is Lucifer, except one of God's first sons? And who is she to touch him? But then Lucifer lets out a long, pleased sigh, sounding only like a relaxed man, and the moment of doubt passes.

"I—" He sucks in a shuddering breath several moments later. "I'd like to put them away now."

Chloe nods and withdraws her hand. A look of concentration passes over Lucifer's face. The wing across her body pulls back suddenly, retreating to his shoulders and slipping out of sight in mere seconds. She feels a little bereft without them, if she's honest.

"Wow." It's no less astonishing seeing them disappear than appear. "How does that work?"

"How much do you know about string theory?"

She squints skeptically. "How much do **you** know about string theory?"

"Not a bloody lot, but what I lack in technical knowledge, I make up for in God-given talent."

Chloe rolls her eyes, though she's not sure how much of what he said is a joke.

No longer hindered by his wings, Lucifer turns and rests on his back. He stares at the ceiling. Chloe folds her arm under the side of her head and looks at him.

"I like you in my bed," he comments, glancing at her.

"I like being here," she whispers.

"I thought there'd be more moaning."

She snorts. After their confessional evening, they stayed in the living room for a long time, silent and cuddled close. **Mending.** Though it was never addressed aloud, they both concluded she should stay. And so they stepped into his bedroom, and he handed her a dress shirt to sleep in, and that was that. They lay close in the night, their hands full of soft touches that held no fire.

Now, though, desire blazes to life in Chloe's veins. She shifts closer, her fingertips falling to Lucifer's chest. Sensing the shift in mood, he stares at her, unblinking, a hungriness about him that echoes in her body.

"We could, you know, change that," she says.

Then her phone rings.

"Oh my God," Chloe groans.

"Yes, it would be like Dad to interrupt our fun. Let it ring through."

"It could be about Trixie."
"It might not be."

"Just hand me the damn phone."

"Very well," he sighs.

Turning, he leans over to his bedside table, where they left her phone charging. He grabs it and looks at the screen. "Oh, I've been wanting to do this for ages," he laughs and swipes to answer the call.

"Lucifer, what are you—"

"Hello, Daniel."

Chloe makes a strangled noise and tries to snatch the phone away from him, but Lucifer holds her at bay with a long arm that's far stronger than it looks.

"Of course she's fine. She's here. In bed. With me. Oh, really? First time for everything, I suppose. I'll tell her that. Cheers." He ends the call and turns on his side to face her. He lets the phone drop to the sheets between them. "You're late for work, you truant."

"Wait, what? What time is it?"

"Ten," Lucifer laughs.

"Ten!" She scrambles out of the bed, kicking black sheets as she goes.

"Apparently this has never happened before," Lucifer marvels. "They were going to send in the cavalry. Dearie me, you really are boring, Jane."

"I am not, and don't call me by my middle n—" She stops and stares. The sheets have dragged down to his thighs, revealing his obvious arousal.

"Sure you don't want to stay?" he teases, folding his arms behind his head. The smug bastard.

She considers it, for far longer than she should, but then shakes her head clear and wriggles into her skinny jeans. Lucifer watches in amusement, unmoving. "Well, are you coming?" she snaps, and immediately regrets it.

"Alas, no," he sighs. "Stay in my bed, though, and we'll see what happens."

She laughs, "This is about getting ready, isn't it? How long does it take you, anyway?"

"You can't rush perfection, Detective."

Rolling her eyes, she hesitates only for a moment before leaning across the bed and kissing him lightly. His seductive air slips as a small look of wonder relaxes the muscles of his face. She smiles and combs her fingers through the soft curls above his forehead. She's always loved touching him, always loved how he lets her pull him along—loves it now, especially, knowing it's always been his choice to follow. This kind of touch, though, is something new that's also natural and effortless.

"See you at work?" she asks.

"I'll bring you coffee."
At the precinct, Dan pulls Chloe into an empty interrogation room mere seconds after she's put her things down at her desk.

"What the hell are you doing, Chloe?"

What the Hell, indeed. She holds back an inappropriate laugh, suddenly understanding why Lucifer relishes flaunting the truth. She could spout off any number of facts about Hell and the Devil right now and her ex-husband would become apoplectic over her unwillingness to take things seriously. It's a little tempting, honestly.

"Can we be adults about this?" she pleads instead. "Not that it's any of your business, but nothing even happened. I stayed the night at his place. That's it."

"Okay, can I remind you that you were just engaged to a criminal mastermind?" Dan says. "Pierce's body isn't even cold yet."

"It's not like I knew Marcus"—she almost says Cain—"was the Sinnerman."

"Yeah, because you got engaged two minutes after you met him." He throws his hands up in frustration. "I had to date you for two years, Chlo."

"I may have jumped the gun, but...I had my reasons. Why do you even care?"

"Because it affects Trixie!" he explodes.

She wilts. "I know that."

"Do you?" he scoffs. He sighs and rubs a hand over his face. "Look," he says, his tone gentler, "I don't know what it's been like, having to face what Pierce did—it's been hard enough facing what he did to Charlotte—but you haven't been yourself since you and Lucifer survived his trap."

Gee, wonder why?

"I know, I'm sorry."

"Have you thought about...talking to someone?" He grimaces. Like her, he's always been skeptical of counseling.

"I did. I'm okay now, really." With a shock, she realizes she's not just saying that. She does feel okay today. A little stressed by work and Morrison, worried about Trixie, but steady overall. For the first time in weeks, it feels like her head's on straight.

"Do you really want to be with a guy who knew who Pierce was, and didn't tell you?"

"He tried to tell me," she says.

"No. Oh, no. You're not going to rewrite what happened. You said Lucifer told you Pierce was immortal." He laughs, shaking his head. "I know you care about him—he's stupidly charismatic for an asshole—but he's kinda a nutjob, Chlo. Years of therapy don't seem to be helping."

She looks away, feeling hurt on Lucifer's behalf and ashamed of how many times she, too, believed he was crazy. As for him being an asshole...well, there may not be much that can be done about that. Arrogance likely comes with angel of God territory.

"He's grown a lot. And he's less crazy than you think."
Dan's hands go to his hips. "Don't tell me you're getting wrapped up in his bullshit stories." He grins and laughs. "He's the Devil, right?"

"It's not like that." They aren't stories, after all. "I just like him. I have for a long time."

"That's fine. Your business, so long as it doesn't affect Trixie. But what's the rush? It's not like you to be so impulsive."

As if he knows her. She almost laughs. It's moments like these that their divorce is least surprising.

The door swings open before she can reply. "Hey, Decker, you in—" Ella stops and looks between them. "Uh, sorry to barge in, guys..."

"It's fine," Dan says. He points at Chloe. "Think about what I said." Shaking his head, he exits the room. Frowning, Ella watches him leave.

"What's up, Ella?" Chloe sighs.

"Oh! We just got word that Imler's car was found yesterday."

Chloe perks up. "Really? Where?"

"Just south of Fresno."

"Please tell me it's being towed here."

"It's not. But, hey, just think of all the, uh, fun adventures you'll have in Hayford."

"Hayford. Great." She's never heard of the place, probably for a reason. "I'm sure it'll be a blast."

Chloe moves to leave the interrogation room, but Ella stops her with a hand on her shoulder. "Hey, everything okay? Things looked pretty intense in here."

"Oh, Dan? Yeah, it's fine. He's just upset because—" She stops, uncertain if she should say more. Uncertain if she's ready to.

"You don't have to tell me if you don't want," Ella says. "Buuut, if you wanted to, I'm a really good listener. Sometimes I think I should have been a therapist, but, I don't know, I really like using microscopes."

"I think I'm dating Lucifer," Chloe blurts out.

"Whoa. Both did and did not see that coming."

"Yeah."

"Well, hey, if you're happy, I'm happy, Decker. And, you know, I really admire your optimism."

"Th-thanks?"

"Getting over Pierce, finding out God's real, going for what you really want, even though he's an immortal who's probably seen and done it all. Like, that'd totally intimidate me." Chloe nods along with her words, her eyes a little wide. "I mean, what's it gonna be like, when you're eighty and limping around with a cane, and he's still in his prime?" Ella shakes her head. "Oh, well, I'm sure God's got it all planned out."
Okay. She's a little less confident about the day now.

They exit the interrogation room, and Chloe feels that familiar, undulating shift in the bullpen. Seconds later, she sees Lucifer, weaving through all the unis and other personnel. He's dressed in his wine-colored three-piece, not a button or hair out of place. It's difficult to remember she saw his devil face only last night. It's...less difficult to remember him nearly naked in bed.

When he's beside her, he hands her a coffee cup and looks around, perplexed. "Gosh, it's busier than Grindr at a Republican convention." Chloe lets out a loud, undignified snort. "What's going on here?"

"The heatwave."

"Heatwave?"

She looks at him, more amused than disturbed. "Yeah, it's really hot outside, in case you didn't notice."

"And so...the cops...stay in...to avoid...heat stroke?" He shakes his head, confused.

"It means there's more crime. More homicides. All hands on deck."

"Ah. Well, you humans do get quite upset over a little heat. Does this mean we've a new case?"

"Nope, there's been a break in the Rosales case," Chloe says, grabbing her laptop bag from her desk. "Feel up for a road trip?"

"Ooh, where are you taking me?" he asks, his tone suggestive.

"To scenic Hayford," she says, starting for the exit.

He follows at her heels. "Is that as boring as it sounds?"

"It's near Fresno, so yeah."

"Right. We're taking the Corvette. If we can't enjoy the destination, let's at least enjoy the journey, shall we?"

She glances back at him, a mischievous glint in her eye. "Will you let me drive?"

"Really?" He stops in his tracks, and she stops and turns to him, smirking. "Who's dislodged your stick from the mud?"

"I like to have fun," she protests.

He narrows his eyes. "Will you drive the speed limit?"

"I'll go ten over."

"Twenty."

"Fifteen."

"Fine." He pulls his keys from his pocket and dangles them in front of her face. Her hand flashes out to grab them, but he lifts them high above his head with a laugh. "Actually, darling, how badly do you want this? Maybe we should make a deal."
Chloe jabs a finger into his stomach hard. He bends forward with a grunt, and she jumps up, snatching the keys from his fingers. "I win," she laughs, walking away.

"I'd have made the deal worth your while!" he grouches.

The Corvette devours the I-5 like the gas-guzzling, steel-bodied beast it is. Classic rock blasts from a bass-heavy, state-of-the-art music system, and before Chloe knows it the needle of the speedometer kisses eighty-five. Beside her, Lucifer taps his foot in time with the beat, a relaxed smile pulling at his mouth.

Chloe's glance is only that—a glance—but her want returns like a tangible thing. It's like knowing the truth and being open to what they could be has struck a match and set her aflame. She keeps her eyes on the road, her fingers clasped tightly around the steering wheel's black leather encasement. But her mind is somewhere else, on all that bravado he may actually be able to back up. Clearing her throat, she rolls her shoulders and lifts her chin higher.

Lucifer reaches over and turns down the music. He shifts sideways and stares at her, his head tilted.

She glances at him again briefly. His relaxed smile has turned devious. "What?" she asks, but she already knows. Somehow, he knows.

"You want me."

While she finds it heartening that he's back to no longer doubting it, now really isn't the time. "I'm driving."

"We could stop for a few hours."

A few hours.

"No."

"Suit yourself," he sighs, settling back in his seat. "If you change your mind..."

"You'll be the first to know." He reaches for the volume knob, but she stops him. "Wait, can I ask you something?"

"Anything."

"Are we—" She frowns, struggling to get the last word out. "Are we dating?" Chloe feels, more than sees, how he stills. "We don't need to label it," she adds in a rush. "If there's an it. I just, I mean, it's okay."

"That's what you truly desire?"

She gives him an annoyed look. "Is it what you truly desire?"

"Dating is a very human concept. I'm not human."

"Sure." This is all fine and normal. Not at all a bad idea.

"But there's no one I like spending time with more," Lucifer muses aloud, and he doesn't seem to understand the sweetness of what he's said, which makes it only sweeter. "I want to make you...happy."
"I want to make you happy, too."

And, really, isn't that what a relationship is, no matter what you call it?

She looks at him in time to see him swallow hard and turn his head away. Letting up on the accelerator, Chloe returns to the speed limit and takes one hand off the steering wheel. Reaching across the console, she threads her fingers with his. He strokes her knuckles and looks at their hands as if he can't believe his luck.

Victoria Imler's 2007 white Honda sedan may have outlived her, but it's seen better days. Chloe rounds the scratched and dented car in the impound lot, taking pictures with her phone camera. Lucifer, having already grown bored, wanders some distance away, nosily peeking inside the other towed vehicles. A bag crinkles, and he begins loudly crunching on chips. Chloe pauses and stares. She has no idea where he got them.

The Devil is weird sometimes.

When she opens the car, acrid cigarette smoke hits her hard enough that she leans back and coughs. Whoever's been driving this car, Eddie's girlfriend Shay or someone else, is on the fast track for lung cancer. She opens all four doors to let the vehicle air out.

There's nothing inside. Nothing hidden in the visor, center console, or glove compartment. She runs gloved hands along the seat backs and the leather interior, finding no obvious false compartments. There aren't even any hairs stuck to the seats or headrests. It's all clean, too clean. Hopefully the surveillance footage the local PD has agreed to email her will reveal something about that.

Having documented what she can without climbing inside, she sits behind the steering wheel and adjusts the seat, dragging her hand underneath. Her fingers snag on the custom, rubber floor mat, which she grabs and lifts. There, buried beneath it, is a business card for a computer repair shop.

As if sensing her elation, Lucifer reappears beside the car. She holds up the business card triumphantly. "Could be a lead," she says.

He returns her wicked grin. "Well done, Detective."

They drive three towns over, to an even smaller village with a population in the low thousands. It's the kind of place that only has a couple of bars, but fifteen churches, half of them competing to have the cleverest weekly sign.

I HATE THIS CHURCH. —SATAN

"Well, they're not bloody wrong, are they?" Lucifer vents, waving a middle finger as they pass. Chloe laughs freely.

The GPS leads them to an old, but pristine minimall. Settled next to a grocery store, Bits & Bytes Computer Repair's darkly-tinted windows advertise a motley of technical services, from computer, phone, and gaming console repairs, to data recovery and website design.

"Imagine all the fetish porn this chap's seen," Lucifer says as they climb out of the Corvette.

"Gross."

"Everyone has their kinks," he admonishes, shrugging a shoulder. He looks at her, curious. "You'll
not be an exception, I'm sure." Chloe feels her face burn as her brain very unhelpfully summons memories of clichéd, horn-filled dreams. "Ooh," he snickers, "what dark desires are lying under that look?"

"Can you shut up?" she complains, avoiding his probing gaze. "Let's just talk to the manager and get out of here." Lucifer laughs and follows her as she enters the building.

A middle-aged white man at a raised desk looks up and smiles as they enter. "Dropping off or picking up?" he asks, setting aside a screwdriver.

"Neither," Chloe says, flashing her badge. "Is your manager in?"

"You're looking at him," the man chuckles. "I do it all." He steps up to the counter and stretches out a hand. "Name's Sean."

Chloe shakes his hand and introduces herself and Lucifer. "Do you have time to answer a few questions, Sean? We may be looking for one of your clients."

"I'd love to help," he answers, "but I won't let you search anything without a warrant."

"Of course," Chloe replies. "Can you tell us if you've ever done any work for a woman by the name of Shay?"

"Shay what?"

"We don't have a last name yet."

"That's...not a lot to go on. Doesn't ring any bells, though."

"Could we have a peek at your books? I'm sure you keep a log of your clients."

Sean hesitates. "Just for a name? I...don't know."

"Sean," Lucifer interrupts, leaning forward. "Maybe you need a little incentive. What is it you desire?"

"I want..."

"Yes?"

"I want to open a pot shop. If I have to tell one more person to try turning it off and on again, I'm going to murder someone."

"Huh, well, don't do that while the Detective's in town. You'll get caught." Lucifer grins and leans back. "As it is, though, it's your lucky day, Sean."

"Lucifer..." Chloe cautions.

"I know just the people," Lucifer continues. "They'll handle licenses, growers, lawyers, you name it. Just give us a gander at your books, and I'll make sure you're up and running in no time."

"Lucifer," Chloe growls more firmly. Grabbing his hand, she says to Sean, "Excuse us a moment."

She pulls him outside. "Whatever you're doing, stop. We can't—"

"No, you can't because of your pesky little oaths. But you need the eggs, don't you?"
She purses her lips and says nothing.

"Well, these are the eggs, darling," he says, spreading his hands wide. "This is what I do."

"I know," she says. "It's just—"

"I hid it from you before," he finishes.

"Yeah."

"Do you want me to do that again?" he asks.

The way he asks this is so odd that Chloe stands still and studies him, her brow furrowed. It's an honest question, and it's clear he won't judge her for saying yes, that he'll do exactly as she asks. And there's something very sad about that, because, in a way, he's asking a different question: Should I hide myself from you, to be more palatable?

"You don't have to hide anything from me," she answers, touching his waist.

"Lovely," he says, clapping his hands together.

In less than five minutes, Chloe's seated at a desk, sorting through Sean's client database. She does her best to tune out Lucifer as he explains the nature of California's burgeoning, legal marijuana market. This is almost as bad as when she found him at the Firehawk Ranch, high out of his mind on a horse.

There's a good chance Sean's database won't even turn up anything. She searches for Shay, and several alternate spellings, and comes up empty. Victoria Imler isn't to be found either. In the end, she resorts to scrolling through thousands of names.

"Any luck?" Lucifer asks several minutes later, coming to stand behind her.

"None. Do you think he'd let me take a copy?"

"If you want a copy, you'll have a copy. Don't worry about Sean."

What a moral gray area. Not that she hasn't operated in them before...

"You're really very useful." She grabs a nearby USB cable to connect her phone to the computer.

"I aim to please," he purrs.

As the database copies to her phone, she glances out one of the tinted floor-to-ceiling windows. The sun hangs low in the sky. "I think we have to stay here tonight. I've still got to go through the surveillance footage the Hayford police emailed me, and now there's this database. It's going to take a while."

"You want to stay here?"

"Well, here or Hayford—Fresno, if we can be bothered driving."

"There's nothing to do here," he complains.

She looks away from him, back at the computer. "I'm sure we can think of something."

If Lucifer catches her drift, he doesn't say anything about it. Instead, he says, "Fine, but we're not
"Palm Tree Suites?" Lucifer splutters, as Chloe turns off the highway and parks beneath the hotel portico. "You can't be serious. If this is about what the LAPD will pay for, bugger that. I've money. And dignity."

"Yeah, well, good luck finding a place you're willing to stay at, Your Highness. There aren't exactly any luxury hotels nearby."

She wonders, in passing, if he wouldn't want to fly elsewhere, but considering his complicated feelings about his wings, she keeps her mouth shut.

Lucifer scowls as they enter the lobby. "That's fake crystal," he sneers, gazing up at a garish chandelier like it's a bad omen. And maybe it is. There's one, queen-sized bed left because of a local church event that has drawn in out-of-towners. Maybe that church really does have it out for Satan.

Ten minutes later, Chloe pushes open the door to their room and flips the light switch. Lucifer has complained nonstop since they arrived, and he doesn't let up now.

"Oh, no, this won't do at all."

She can't quite contain her own grimace. "It's not that bad."

"No, it's worse."

There's a click behind her. A round purple light draws her attention to the floor. She looks back at Lucifer, confused. "Why are you traveling with a black light? When did you even have time to get one?"

"The real question is why don't you have one?" he asks, shining the light onto her left breast, then her right.

"Because I'm not insane," she says, slapping at his hand.

"I don't want to sleep in filth, and I'm the crazy one?" He shines the black light over the bedspread, which lights up like uranium ore. "Look at these stains."

"Oh my G—goodness. Why is that so high up on the wall?"

"Stuff of nightmares, isn't it?"

For all his love of partying, sloth, and shortcuts, never let it be said the Devil can't get a job done if he puts his mind to it. Chloe lounges beside the old outdoor pool, fast-forwarding through surveillance footage from a laundromat while thirty feet away Lucifer barks orders at hotel personnel. At some point, delivery trucks squeal into the parking lot. A new mattress and TV are lugged inside. What on Earth is happening?

Luciferness, Chloe decides, and refocuses on work.

She's nearly fallen asleep out of boredom when Lucifer looms over her, dark and lanky. "These people know nothing about hospitality," he says in a snit. "But we should be able to sleep here now."

"I could have slept here before," she says through a yawn. "Okay, maybe not after you brought out
the black light."

Lucifer shudders and offers her a hand up from the lounge chair. "I've had quite enough of Hell, thank you. I make it a point not to live in it on Earth."

His words make Chloe feel sad. She slips her arm around his waist as they walk back to their room. He stiffens at first, then relaxes. "You don't ever have to go back there," she says.

"Dad might disagree with you, I'm afraid."

"Well, we'll just have to fight him on it."

Lucifer stops hard and turns to her, real fear in his dark eyes. He takes hold of her shoulders, his fingers digging into her muscles. "You're never to fight my father, do you understand? Never, Chloe. The game's rigged, and I can't have him sending you to Hell."

"Okay," she says, her fingers stroking his arms. "Okay."

He nods, satisfied, and lets go. And, quietly, Chloe dislikes God a little more.

The hotel room doesn't look like it could possibly be the same room as before. Every surface is spotless, and all new furniture and linens fill the space, though notably there is still only one queen bed. There's even new artwork on the wall. A sandalwood-scented candle burns on the round, glass table set by the sole window.

"How did you do this?" She glances at the time on her phone. "This only took you, what, an hour—two, tops?"

"I know every language," he brags, "but money speaks loudest."

"Wait, what do you mean you know every language?"

"Just what it sounds like. I have always told you I'm very good with my tongue."

She narrows her eyes. "Say something in Arabic."

He speaks in a string of guttural, flowing sounds. He smirks at her when he's finished. He definitely said something dirty.

"That sounded fluent," she says.

"That's because it was."

"Okay, smart-ass, what about Latin?"

"Which form? Old, Vulgar?"

"I don't even know why I'm asking you. I can't speak any of it."

"Voulez-vous coucher avec moi?"

"Okay, I know that one," she laughs.

Chloe kicks off her boots and collapses back onto the bed with her laptop. Lucifer joins her and turns on the widescreen television, flipping through channels until he stops on what can only be described as a very low-budget action film.
"I've ordered pizza," he says, off-handed, showing her his phone.

"Thanks," she says, somewhat absently. Sometimes she gets so wrapped up in work that she forgets to eat.

The linens and mattress hug her softly as she scrolls through Bits & Bytes' client database. Soon, she's barely paying attention. There's no in-between with evidence. Either there's too much or too little. And Sean has built this database for the last ten years. There are thousands of names.

"Stop," Lucifer says.

Chloe snaps to attention, blinking. "What'd you see?"

Lucifer drags his finger across the touchscreen, scrolling up. "There," he says, selecting an entry. "Juan Otero."

"That's..." Chloe sits up straighter, her mind struggling to bring all the pieces together. "If that's the same Juan Otero—"

"What are the chances it's not?"

"—he posted John Barrow's bond."

"So, Eddie Rosales and Barrow are connected," Lucifer says, frowning. "Which means these are Cain's men. Or they were."

"Maybe," Chloe answers, always hesitant to jump to conclusions. "Maybe we're not looking for Eddie's girlfriend, after all... Sean has Juan's phone number here." She runs a search for it online, locating a white pages entry that may or may not be up-to-date. "Address in Colinda. That's not far from here. I'll make some calls to the local police in the morning, see if we can't pay Juan a visit. We might need backup."

"You're traveling with the Devil," Lucifer laughs. "We could go now. It's only nine."

"You bleed just like I do, so no running in like an idiot. Besides, I don't want to get into anymore trouble, and we'll be able to see more during the day."

Chloe closes her laptop and sets it on the new, glass side table. On the television, a thickly-muscled man shoots up a warehouse full of vaguely-Russian enemies. Bored with the movie, she becomes keenly aware of Lucifer's long legs and the heat of his body, which she's always noticed in passing, but lately can't seem to ignore.

"I'm going to take a shower," she announces. As much as she hates the thought of putting on last night's clothes again, she needs to cool down.

As if sensing her dismay, Lucifer says, "There are clothes by the sink."

"What?"

"Clothing for you to wear. By the sink."

She can only imagine what he's picked out. "You can't know my size."

"Care for a wager?" he retorts, one brow lifting.

She retreats into the bathroom without a word. It's cramped—not even cold, hard cash could
True to Lucifer's word, two neat piles of folded clothes are laid out next to the sink. Nothing outlandish in her pile, either. A soft, gray T-shirt and jeans, all in the right size. Oh, but that little scrap of lace is barely a thong. Atop it all rests an extra dress shirt, definitely not in her size. It's likely it's never been worn by Lucifer, but Chloe touches the cotton gently, recognizing the sentimental gesture for what it is.

The shower heats the small room and fogs the mirror. And she wonders...what's stopping her from inviting him in? She's wanted him all day. He's wanted her. They're here, together. Sort of dating. Maybe they're not in some fancy-schmancy hotel like he'd prefer, but he's certainly made it cleaner and more comfortable.

She strips down and stares at the door while chewing at the edge of her thumb. Come on, Decker. Just rip the Band-Aid off. Dive in. She yanks open the door and strides into the bedroom.

"Don't tell me there's no hot water," Lucifer gripes. Wine glass in hand, he looks up from the pizza box he was opening and stares. "Chloe?" His Adam's apple bobs as he swallows. "Is everything all right?"

"Do you... Do you want to join me?"

"Oh." He blinks. "Oh. Yes, of course." He stands quickly, setting aside the wine, loosening shirt buttons, yanking free his belt.

He isn't suave in this moment, and Chloe feels herself grinning. When he stands before her in nothing but boxer briefs, she takes his hand and draws him into the tiny bathroom.

"Are you sure you this is what you want?" he asks.

She almost laughs, except she knows his reservation comes from fear. Lucifer isn't this cautious with anyone else. Instead of speaking, she hooks her thumbs under the elastic of his boxers and drags them down. As she kneels before him and he steps free, she keeps her eyes on his face.

"What a temptress," he whispers, touching her face. "I'd eat any fruit you gave me right now."

Chloe stands and drags him into the shower. There's hardly enough room for the two of them, and only one of them ever gets any water at all.

"This would be much better at the penthouse."

"Next time," Chloe promises, and reaches up to touch his face, her thumbs following his jawline. He breathes loudly, his hands at his sides, his erection wedged between them. "You can touch me, you know," she says, because she senses he needs to hear it. "You don't have to wait for me to give you permission all the time."

"I don't want you to regret—"

"I won't." He studies her face, searching for falsehood. "I won't," she insists. "I want to be with you."

"Very well," he says.

And then he's on her, one hand cradling her head, his tongue in her mouth. He presses her close, his fingers trailing the vertebra of her spine as hers follow the muscles of his chest and the ridges of
his ribs. Chloe's never been with a man who was very vocal, but Lucifer moans wantonly across her lips, making her feel wanted and powerful.

"Hot Tub High School didn't do you justice, darling," he says, cupping her breasts.

She rolls her eyes, then groans as his thumbs drag across her nipples. "I hate that movie."

"We could make our own," he offers, one of his hands dropping down. His fingers slide between her legs, spreading her open, exploring. "You do want me," he says against the shell of her ear. "I always knew."

"Shut up," she laughs, and then sighs in pleasure.

"Oh, no, I think I'll bask in this for a moment. In being right." Leaning back, his eyes on hers, he lifts his hand and draws his finger into his mouth. He raises his brows at her.

Two can play at that game, she thinks, wrapping a hand around him and starting a gentle rhythm. His head falls back, and water runs down the long column of his throat. She works him slow, her lips dragging across his skin. Some minutes later, he stumbles rather inelegantly, falling back against the wall of the shower.

"Why's this so bloody different?" Lucifer gasps, his tone almost accusatory as he stills her hand.

"Because I've seen everything, and I'm here to stay," Chloe says.

"Are you?" he asks softly.

"Yes."

Their hands return to each other, exploring, sliding, gripping. Below, their legs tremble against each other, and Chloe wonders if it's so smart for them to be standing.

But, oh, she's too far gone to care. She's not sure she'll ever admit it to him, but the damn braggart has a right to brag. There's no fumbling, like there has been with other men. No awkward search for her clit or even the slightly more elusive G-spot. He brings her close and pulls back expertly, over and over, and she hears herself make sounds she's not sure she's made before.

When she falls apart, her mouth full of his name, he has to hold her upright against his body. And, then, as if the sight of her own unraveling is too much, she feels him twitch beneath her fingers. She moves her hand more slowly, watching the way the milky fluid drips down her knuckles.

They descend from their high, and he kisses her lazily. "I always knew we'd be amazing together," he says, brushing wet strands from her face. "Imagine what it's going to be like when I'm in you."

"When are we doing that?" she asks, too addicted to care how pathetic she sounds. Tonight? She wouldn't say no. She thinks, he did say he was like walking heroin.

His head tilts as he thinks. "I'll admit I feel a little like I'm going in blind without being able to tap into your desires."

That was going in blind? Heaven help her.

"So, let's say we'll have sex when you beg me for it," he says, his tone casual and amused. "It's really the only way I'll know for certain it's what you desire."

"That's not happening." She has a sneaking suspicion she's lying. She lifts her chin. "Maybe you'll
be the first to beg."

"We'll see," he says, and she's pleased when a look of uncertainty crosses his face. He grabs shampoo from a shelf. "Now, turn around, you rascal," he commands, gathering her hair in his hands.

The next morning, Chloe gets the go-ahead from the Colinda PD to visit the address associated with Otero's phone number. They drive westward, into the township of fifteen thousand, then keep going, deep into the rocky scrub of Fresno County.

In what's a true testament to the heatwave ravaging most of the Golden State, the Corvette's convertible top is up, and the air conditioning is set to high, but still struggling to cool the car. Lucifer wears only navy dress pants and a white shirt, and periodically shoves his sleeves closer to his elbows. Even the Devil thinks it's too hot.

Chloe melts in the passenger's seat, and the discomfort reminds her of when Lucifer waltzed into the precinct, insisting he had been kidnapped and left in the desert. She frowns, thinking. "Cain was the one who hired Snatched to kidnap you, wasn't he?"

"He was, indeed," Lucifer says, his tone cheery, even as the steering wheel creaks beneath in his hands.

"Lucifer... I'm so sorry. I never would have dated him if I'd—"

"Well, and I should have had the balls to ask you out. But, alas, as you've seen, I'm really quite average in that department." He grins cheekily. "But no need to feel guilty. Justice was served. That murderous little maggot is rotting in a Hell loop like he deserves."

They turn off Highway 198, onto a narrow, single-lane road, and Chloe feels herself go on high-alert. Even under the clear, blue sky, the space has an almost claustrophobic quality, caged in as it is by clusters of rocky hillsides. Then, seconds later, the landscape changes, yawning open, wide and flat. Rock faces and flat scrub, back and forth. More desert than developed land.

Wood posts for useless wire fences tilt precariously in the dry earth. Beyond them, dilapidated and abandoned houses and trailers dot the countryside in a classic game of "Is it poverty or is it crime?" And, of course, sadly, it's often both.

"Nice area," Lucifer quips. "Okay, Google," he commands, "play 'Dueling Banjos.'"

"Please, no," Chloe snorts, stopping the track before it can start.

The GPS announces their arrival a minute later. Lucifer pulls off to the side of the road.

"This can't be right." Chloe looks around, hoping to spot a dirt road or mailbox. She sees neither.

They climb out of the car, holding up hands to shield their eyes.

"There's a house in the distance," Lucifer says, pointing south.

"I don't see it." She squints. "Is your eyesight better than mine?"

"Do you know, I've never thought about it. It'd be just like Dad to cripple you needlessly, though. But, well, the world's not flat, either, and you're short," he teases. "Want me to hold you up? Can settle the pesky sight question now."
"You're so funny," she bites back, marching ahead in the direction he pointed. Her hand hovers over her holster. "I don't like how open we are here. If this is Otero's home, he clearly doesn't want visitors."

"We can head west to those boulders and come around the back," Lucifer suggests.

It's a long walk in the noonday sun. The brush crunches beneath the soles of their shoes, and once Chloe sees a kingsnake dart away in fear. When they reach the tan rock face, they stop for a rest, mainly for Chloe's sake.

"No vehicles," Chloe notes. "Surely no one's living here." The small house, which is now only a few hundred feet ahead, leans slightly on its foundation, its yellow paint faded by the sun. "Ready?" she asks.

Lucifer touches her back. "Lead the way, Detective."

She creeps toward the house, mindful of every rock and twig under boot. Lucifer stalks behind her.

They start at the back of the house, looking for signs of life or other disturbances, and finding neither. There are no windows, only four concrete steps leading up to a lone door.

Chloe rounds the house, her heart pounding. She knows full well she's breaking the law. The local police gave her permission to question Otero if he was home, not to walk his perimeter, peek into his house, or have the Devil voodoo locks open.

But if Otero is connected to Barrow, that means he might have been connected to Cain, too. They can't trust any of the Sinnerman's network will be caught unless they handle it themselves. Internal Affairs failed the LAPD. The FBI and DOJ, if they were ever even notified, backed off before Chloe's suspension ever ended. If there are clues here, Chloe has to find them.

They step up onto the front porch and lean close to the two windows set on either side of the door, attempting to peer around thick, blue curtains.

Lucifer whispers in annoyance, "I can't see a bloody—"

A bullet smashes into the front door. Splinters burst out from cracked wood.

"Down!" Chloe screams, reaching across the punctured door to yank Lucifer to the porch floorboards.

Three more shots *pop-pop-pop* in the distance, and three more bullets eat into the small yellow house. Lucifer scrambles, low to the ground. His wings unfurl in one mighty snap, covering them. History is repeating.

"Do you trust me?" he asks.

"Yes."

Chloe becomes a living rag doll as Lucifer lifts her, twisting her in his arms as if she weighs nothing. He leaps out of a squat off the porch steps, and they rocket high into the air, soaring dozens of feet in mere seconds. Her ears pop, and all around her is light, the light of the sun, the light of Lucifer's feathers set aglow.

Bullets whiz past.
Until one doesn't.

Until one hits.

Chloe feels when it makes impact with Lucifer's body. He lets out a strangled cry, and she screams with him as they begin to drop. Hard. Spinning sideways and end over end. She feels his panic, sees the way his wings flap erratically, how his right wing barely moves at all.

In the end, he gives in to the fall. With a howl, he cocoons her. His left wing wraps around her body. His right tucks close, but flutters slightly to the side, sounding like a torn tarp blowing in the wind.

They collide with the earth, Lucifer's spine taking the brunt of the force. There is a distinct and meaty *crack* as air bursts out of their lungs in one great, unified gust.

For a moment, Chloe lies on him, dazed. But then she scrambles away, shoving back a heavy wing. "Wh-What do I—"

"Shoot me...hide," he wheezes. "Will...come back." He gives a lopsided, red-toothed grin. "Promise."

"I'm not gonna shoot you! And you're *not* going back to Hell," Chloe growls, and another shot sinks into the house. "If-if I leave, you'll heal. Find me when you can."

"Detective," Lucifer groans. Wild, dark eyes search for her, unseeing. He's dying. He can't die. He can't go back to that place. Not because of her. Not even for a little while.

Chloe jumps up on unsteady legs, her ribs and left hip screaming in protest. Ignoring the pain, she begins to run, weaving left and right to avoid sniper bullets. She must get far away—how far, she doesn't know.

She curses God as she runs.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to puerile for answering dumb legal questions, brainstorming with me in the wee hours of the morning, and yelling positive things at me in all caps. Thanks also to ObliObla for "freelance IT," which gave me Bits & Bytes Computer Repair. Close enough.

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The underworld is a flat plane that steadily expands to accommodate exponential occupancy requirements. As a result, most of Hell is barren outside of the macabre loops it constructs for human souls. It is only at its center that there beats a dark heart, a sprawling, bustling city that's had many names. Youdu. Dis. Naraka. Ignis. Pandemonium. In recent eons, it is simply called Nox.

A city of millions, Nox is cosmopolitan by nature, teeming with demons, changelings, and other creatures of darkness. It is an improbable city, cobbled together by sheer force of will. Arguments, many of which come to blows or all-out war, are common between the different factions, but so, too, is commerce, bawdy laughter, gambling, and the occasional orgy.

In the heart of Hell's heart, the Black Tower stands tall, its spires reaching toward the muted, gray sky. The tower could have been hideous—and long ago it was—but the hellstone has been polished smooth over time, into a black glass that mirrors the surrounding city. It is the only structure in Hell that might be called beautiful, if the word beautiful were used in Hell at all.

The residents of Nox have nothing positive to say about the tower in their midst, but they also never damage it in times of discord. This alone is enough to make Cain want to destroy it. Instead, he must live with it, and in it. For now.

When Cain woke in his new body, Hell was no longer directionless. He knew, instinctively, where its four corners lay. As soon as he could fly, he flew to the two giant, spiked doors that serve as Hell's gates. They were barred and locked, but not like the doors into Hell loops. When Cain shoved at them, they held. The Goddess had managed to escape, he knew, but his form is too corporeal. Lucifer comes and goes as he pleases, but God must have given him keys.

Cain would have to find another way out, and so he flew to Nox, Hell's pulse point.

Anarchy flourished there in the Devil's absence. When demons did dare sit upon the Black Tower's black throne, others usurped them within days. Creatures of darkness revel in chaos and do not take kindly to a yoke around the neck—though they do enjoy yoking others.

Taking the throne wasn't easy, as such, but it wasn't Cain's first time threading a needle. He took Nox and the Black Tower's throne the way he learned long ago to take anything else he might want: by questioning strengths and emphasizing weaknesses, by whispering a poisonous thought here and making an accusation there. Divide and conquer. Sun Tzu knew it. Adam's scorned son knew it first.

Cain gambled favors and flooded the streets with Hell-forged metal, and then he let the chips fall where they might. When war came to Hell's one and only city, every combatant was already wounded, internally, where it always matters most.

Even Hell's creatures have a sense of self-preservation. Naturally, the only end to the bloodshed, to the dire extermination, was to instate a ruler, one strong enough to restore and maintain order. They didn't want him. They needed him.

As the only powerfully-winged creature in Hell, Cain's advantage is as much symbolic as it is
physiological. Out with the old wings, his presence suggests, in with the new.

Still, there's no escaping the long shadow of the retired king. Lucifer's fingerprints are pressed upon every part of this loathsome city because he was its architect. He is in the streets and marketplaces, the currencies and gambling halls. There are stories about him, some true, most not, but then truth doesn't matter here.

In every alleyway, in every bar, in every tower spire, Cain smells the Devil's weakness: that effeminate desire to please, to build, to be good, even in Hell itself. Cain suffers from no such weakness.

Might is right in Cain's kingdom.

Lucifer's fingerprints may be found throughout Nox, but evidence of his soul is in the Black Tower. No ash enters the black, windowless structure, which is filled with many rooms, all made for torture or pleasure, or some wicked combination of the two. At one point, hundreds must have lived, played, and squabbled here. Now, Cain orders all stragglers to leave and destroys those few who refuse.

The Black Tower is ground zero, the key. It holds secrets. It must.

He searches each floor. How might Lucifer hide something? Surely in plain sight. He studies every room; pushes against walls, stomps on floors, rattles chains, lifts torches. Nothing. He grows impatient.

But then, he realizes, of course the tower holds secrets...in places others can see, yes, but never reach. He returns to the Black Tower's topmost floor, which he knows belonged to Lucifer, though others have come and gone since his reign. Hubris wouldn't allow Lucifer to have any other room.

Like the Devil's penthouse on Earth, the topmost floor is large and open. Unlike his penthouse on Earth, it is filled with torture devices: a rack, a wheel, a Judas cradle, a knee splitter, an iron maiden, and all manner of pointed pokers, serrated knives, and pliers.

That raised a red flag the first time Cain entered this room. Thorough by nature, Cain kept tabs on the Devil for the last thousand years he was alive on Earth. If Lucifer popped up for a debauched weekend, Cain knew about it within days; knew, too, how Amenadiel inevitably forced Lucifer back to Hell. For quite some time the rumor had been the Devil no longer handled torture in Hell, didn't have the stomach for it, and instead left it to Mazikeen of the Lilim, who always delighted in pain.

So, if this room truly belonged to Lucifer, why are these torture devices here? It's the high, domed ceiling that draws Cain's attention now. Deep inside the tower, it's easy to believe the spire ends where this ceiling begins, but that could be an illusion. There are no windows, after all. Climbing up to the ceiling would be difficult, but flying? Flying would be easy.

Cain takes to the air, his black wings carrying him high. When he reaches the ceiling, he hovers in place like a long hummingbird, running his hands over the shining, black surface, hunting, as always, for weakness.

*There.* A line in the smoothed hellstone. Cain presses above it. It's heavy, even for this much-improved body, but the squared, convex door eventually gives, sliding to the right on a track.

"Yes," Cain breathes, gripping an exposed handle to draw himself inside.
The room he enters is pitch black and musty, and it's in that familiar, earthy mustiness that Cain knows what lies within before he even flies out and returns with a torch. He laughs loudly when the room is lit.

If the Devil was ever the Dragon some called him, well, here is his lair and his hoard. The hidden room is filled with earthly treasures. Soft cushions and blankets. Shelves overflowing with everything from priceless, leather-bound books, to cheap paperbacks and gossip rags. Artwork, most of it stolen or believed to be lost on Earth, adorns the walls. Black garment bags hang from a long rack; the metal rod bends at its middle, sagging under the weight. Beneath this, polished dress shoes from several centuries. In one corner, a hand-crank gramophone and hundreds of records.

It will take a small age to explore this room, but Cain believes it will be worth it. There must be something here that will get him out of Hell or teach him how to unlock its gates.

Because, the problem—for Lucifer, not him—is that the Devil, Beelzebub, Samael, has always cared too much. About what God thinks. About what humans do. About what Chloe Decker wants. And with all those desires comes fear, too. Fear of loss, fear of being burned. Wherever fear exists, there are always secret contingency plans.

Cain opens a book and tears through its pages.

Chapter End Notes

Puerile and ObliObla are the cool kids who beta'd this chapter.

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Chloe runs, scrambling over desert brush. How far did she go when she chased Professor Carlisle—who many blocks? Uncertain, she runs harder, farther, until she loses track of time and distance. There is only her ragged breathing, the dry crunch of the earth beneath her feet, and the merciless sun bearing down from above. Only her silent rage against an even more silent god: Why would you send your son to Hell?

When she can't run anymore, she drops to her knees in the middle of a vast, scrubby field. Her left hip and ribs ache from the crash landing, she may have a concussion, and now her ankle won't stop throbbing. Her heeled boots were definitely made for walking, and she vows to toss them into the back of her closet as soon as she's home.

Shelter. She needs shelter. Already, she's dehydrated and sunburned.

Another outcropping of rocky hills lies some two hundred feet away, providing a sliver of reprieve from the sun. She forces herself to stand and limp forward.

Not good, she thinks, once she's settled in the cool shade. Adrenaline has worn off, and she's begun to tremble. She almost feels cold, though she knows it must be one hundred degrees out.

She's a little lost, but the sun suggests she ran southeast. Even if she knew exactly where she was, though, her ankle won't survive long distances. Already, she's removed her boot to relieve the painful swelling. She has no phone—likely, it slipped from her back pocket as they spun toward the earth—no watch, and most importantly, no water. In the California desert during a heatwave. Good job, Decker.

But Lucifer will come for her, when he can. She knows that, deep in her bones. Hopefully she won't die stupidly before then.

Hours later, Chloe feels herself being lifted from the ground. Her body gives a great jerk that yanks her from fitful sleep. Arms tighten around her, and she looks up into Lucifer's concerned face. Behind his wild curls, purple streaks the blue sky during sunset.

"You're safe," Lucifer says, his voice gentle. "I've got you."

She touches his face, feeling the coarse stubble, marveling at his wholeness. "You didn't go back?" Her throat is so dry, the words come out as little more than a rasp.

"No. I stayed."

"Good."

"Got to stay awake for the entire healing process, even." He grimaces. "Can't say I recommend being shot in the spine. Paralysis was bloody inconvenient."

She almost laughs. Paralysis. Inconvenient. She wriggles in his arms. "Would you put me down? I can walk."
"Can you? Ankles aren't supposed to look like grapefruits."

Anchoring herself on his shoulder, she leans forward to look at her foot and groans. She'd forced her boot back on before lying down. Even unbuckled, the edge of the leather warps around the swelling.

"Yes, that's what you get for running a marathon," Lucifer says. "Made yourself a right needle in a haystack to find, too."

"I didn't know how far to go."

"I know," he says, and there's a catch in his throat. "At any rate, should probably get that seen to. Which reminds me, you weigh nothing to me, and I can walk us back to the Corvette, but...well, flying would be far faster." He looks at her uncertainly.

Chloe swallows hard. She's never had a fear of heights, but she might have developed one today. Before deciding how she feels about angelic transportation, she asks, "Did you find the snipers?"

"They stopped shooting once you left." He frowns. "I was worried they were going to follow you, but I've checked the area. There's no sign of them. They were long gone by the time I could move again."

"We need to go through Otero's house, see if there's anything he was hiding there or if the whole thing was just a trap." And if it was a baited trap, how did their assailants know they were coming when they did?

Lucifer is incredulous. "The only place you're going is a hospital. I'd offer you a feather, but they take their toll. Best for mortal wounds."

"It's just a sprain," she argues. Unconvincingly, judging by his expression. "Really. Let's go to the house. We can...we can fly."

"You're in no shape to go walki—"

"It's what I desire."

"That's low."

"But is it working?"

"Mostly," he says, eyeing her in amusement. "But only because it would be just like you to have a desire that pedestrian. Fine. We pop in, we pop out, and then we're done with this Dad-forsaken place."

"Agreed." The last thing she wants is to get stuck here all night.

He adjusts his grip on her. "Close your eyes."

She obeys, and although she smiles when she hears the rustle of his wings, she doesn't open her eyes again until they touch solid ground.

"A little help?" Chloe twists the locked doorknob at the back of the old yellow house. Lucifer sighs dramatically, waves her aside, and wraps his—for once, gloved—fingers around the metal. She gets a little thrill when she hears the lock snick free. "How do you do that, anyway?" she asks.
Lucifer places a hand on her shoulder, stopping her from entering the house. Contrary to how they usually operate, he steps inside before her and quickly wanders through the dwelling. When he returns, he lends her his arm to help her make the last step into the house.

"With the locks, let's just say I can tap into things you can't," he answers.

"Like, molecules?" she asks dully, squinting at him.

They enter a small kitchen. The walls are covered in a white-and-blue, grossly faux-Parisian wallpaper that's yellowed after what smells like decades of indoor smoking—not unlike the overwhelming smoke scent found in Imler's car.

"This is like trying to describe color to a blind man," Lucifer gripes.

"Try, anyway?" Chloe says.

Using the countertops for support, she eases around on one leg, opening cabinets and drawers, only to find them filled with typical kitchen sundries. It's a very lived-in space—a safe house, it looks like—though there's no fresh food in the fridge to indicate how recently anyone has lived here.

Lucifer leans against a wall, looking disheveled, but still far more attractive than he has any right to after the exhausting day they've had. It's only when he turns, revealing the disturbingly bloodied back of his white dress shirt, that the image truly falters. Chloe can only imagine what she looks like.

Finally, he says, "There are things in your world—nay, in the universe—that humans have tools to detect and change, but I can detect and change simply by virtue of being myself. You might think of me as your friendly neighborhood conductor. Not the musical kind, though I'd be quite good at that, too."

She rolls her eyes. "Okay, so you can...sense and change the properties of some things?" Turning on the tap at the sink, she leans sideways and drinks as much water as she dares. She's still thirsty when she backs away, but any more, and she might throw up.

"That's probably as much as your human mind can fathom." She glares at him as she hobbles into the tiny living area, where she begins pulling cushions from a tattered, beige loveseat. "What?" he says indignantly from where he hovers nearby. "It's not my fault Dad didn't give you lot the same abilities. If it's any consolation, I'm sure he was rather surprised when you made it to the moon."

"Whatever. So, what about your desire"—she waves a hand—"thing?"

"Closely related to photoconductivity."

Chloe blinks at him, then shakes her head and continues into the lone bedroom. She's tired, her body hurts, and she can barely follow a word he's saying. All she wanted to know was how he unlocked doors. She wasn't prepared for physics.

"Look, you read Genesis, didn't you?" Lucifer asks as she pokes her head into the closet.

"Kind of," she calls out, because already she's forgotten huge portions of what she read.

"It really is dreadfully boring, isn't it?"

She peeks her head out of the closet. "It totally is." They grin at each other.
Men's and women's shoes line the floor of the closet. Sneakers in a size twelve, and two pairs of women's leather biker boots in a size eight. If they had a working phone between them, she'd take pictures, but as it is, she'll just have to remember as much as she can and note it down later. Or they'll have to get a warrant, somehow, and come back. Unfortunately, she has a sneaking suspicion they would return to an empty house.

"That book's an atrocious retranslation of a retelling of an approximation of events, I assure you, but there are bits of truth here and there."

"Like Cain," she says, and points to the mattress.

He lifts the mattress for her. "Yes, like He Who Must Not Be Named." His lip curls. "Anyhow, do you remember when Dad said, 'Let there be light'?" She waves for him to drop the mattress again.

"Uh-huh." She nudges past him, finally stumbling her way to the bathroom. "And God saw the light, and it was good," she quotes, rolling her eyes. It was all so simplistic.

"Yes, well, who do you think carried out the task? Like all tyrannical bastards, Dad delegates more than he actually does."

Her hand freezes above the bathroom light switch, so that she stands halfway in darkness, and halfway in the light of the living room. Lucifer's voice has taken on a strange quality—not arrogance, but affected arrogance. His body language suggests something entirely different as he stands with his side facing her, his shoulders rolled forward, as if he's ready to protect himself from some onslaught. She feels drawn to him, but also can't bring herself to move. He's about to tell her something big.

"So, the whole...Light Bringer thing? I saw that mentioned a few times in the books I checked out. That-that's true?"

He looks away. "After a fashion, yes."

Chloe's heart races as she slams into more evidence of his otherworldliness and agelessness. "Are you saying you... You can't be saying you made the stars. Can you?" She digs her nails into the palms of her hands. "Did you?"

"Long ago," he whispers, and she struggles to breathe. "Before Dad more or less clipped my wings for being a naughty boy."

"Even our sun?"

"Not bad work, is it?" She leans into the door frame for support, and he regards her once more with a sad smile. "Do you know the origin of the word desire?"

This topic seems safer, and she feels herself unknot, if only a little. "Should I?"

"It's simple Latin, really." He shrugs and stuffs his hands into his pockets. "De sidere," he says, pronouncing the words in a warm, fluent way. "It means from the stars. In the admirable pursuit of knowledge, humans have forgotten it's all related. Your Carl Sagan was right. You really are just star stuff—energy that can be pushed and pulled at. And that's still my domain, to a degree."

"So, if it's just a matter of, I don't know, chemicals or photons or whatever, why can't you do your thing on me?"

"That," he says, "I have no answer for, but it makes you very fun and very frustrating to be
around."

"I'm so glad I entertain you," she jokes. The awkwardness between them dissipates, and she flips on the bathroom light. She looks straight into the mirror above the sink, her jaw going slack. "Oh my God."

Lucifer leans his head in behind hers, making her less-than-stellar appearance that much more obvious. "You do look a bit like a tomato," he says, grinning, and for once letting her mention of his father slide. He pushes back stray curls of hair and rubs the line of his jaw, looking mostly pleased by what he sees. "Between your face and your ankle, you're a right cornucopia today."

She glares at him. She has white, raccoon-like circles around her eyes, where the sun—Lucifer's sun, apparently—failed to burn her. Yanking her hair free from her ponytail holder, she struggles to regather it with her gloves on before giving up altogether, and letting it fall in unkempt waves. Some days, you just can't look your best.

The mirror has a medicine cabinet behind it, which she opens. Inside, the shelves are mostly empty. Two toothbrushes, floss, perfume, some basic over-the-counter pain meds. Sighing again, she slams the cabinet shut.

"Now, wait one minute," Lucifer says, nearly elbowing her face as he reopens the cabinet. "Are you really going to overlook that Chanel, Detective?"

"It's expensive, right?" She shrugs. "So are the leather biker boots in the closet."

"You honestly don't know anything about luxury, do you? This isn't some plebeian Chanel. No, this little bottle is a limited edition that costs more than five grand."

"Seriously?" Chloe looks at it in disgust. "How do you even know that?"

"I know about a lot of things," he huffs. Like the sun, she thinks again, and struggles not to freeze up. How can he be billions of years old? Why would he want to be with her?

Don't think about it, she tells herself.

"Okay, so, what's a perfume like that doing here?" she says.

"Precisely. Perhaps Otero was with Eddie's girlfriend, Shay? That would explain dear Eduardo's irritability at his day job, and the house in Palos Verdes did suggest expensive tastes, even if it was un-lived in. If one or all of them is near the top of a drug enterprise, money would not be hard to come by." He glances around the bathroom. "Although, that leaves one to wonder why they wouldn't at least renovate."

"Maybe, but we need evidence, and we still haven't figured out who Shay actually is, much less if she's involved in all this." She scowls. "We need fingerprints. Maybe we can find a match with those in Imler's house."

"We could pinch something small for Miss Lopez. No one would notice."

She closes the cabinet again and looks around the bathroom and the connecting living room. "I can't even log any of this officially." She stares blankly at the small TV set across from the loveseat. "We're here illegally. What am I thinking, dragging us here?"
"Well, I flew us here, but what's the harm done? At least you're breaking the law for a good cause, unlike several of your colleagues."

"The law only works if those tasked with upholding it obey it, too."

"Newsflash, darling, they don't." Lucifer smirks and taps her nose with a gloved finger. "And neither do you, not all the time. Let's not pretend otherwise. You get the job done, which is what I quite like about you. And Miss Lopez cut corners, as well. Certainly Daniel does. You're delightful miscreants. Take it from the Devil, very little in life or death is clean if you want to get the real work done."

"And what is the real work?"

"The same as always, Detective. Punishing those who deserve it."

This overly simplistic moral philosophy doesn't sit well with Chloe, but that doesn't stop her from leaving with a pen they find in the kitchen.

It's half-past nine when they enter L.A.’s city limits. All Chloe wants to do is go home and sleep, but the sooner Dan and Ella know what's happened, the better. Certainly, the precinct can't know the real story, which means they'll need to get their stories straight again.

"Dan says they just made it to your place," Chloe announces, staring at the screen of her new phone as they turn onto Sunset Boulevard. They managed to find her old phone thirty feet away from the safe house, the screen smashed to bits. Luckily, she was able to retrieve all her files and photos from it.

"Lovely. Tell Daniel to pour me a drink, would you?"

She doesn't.

Lucifer parks in his reserved spot below ground. Chloe smiles when he rounds the Corvette to lend her his arm. They bypass the steady thumping of Lux's small Monday night crowd as they send the elevator straight for the penthouse. When the doors slide open, Dan and Ella turn from where they wait at Lucifer's bar. Their mouths fall open in unison.

"Holy shit," Dan says.

"Whoa, Decker."

Lucifer snickers as Chloe leans against him and yanks off her boots, wincing when her ankle complains. "I know," she sighs, tossing the offending shoes to the side. "I look like a tomato." Lucifer helps her limp to a bar stool. "I'm fine, though. Just a little sunburn. And an ankle sprain."

"What the hell happened?" Dan asks. "We've been calling you all day."

"Our phones met a rather calamitous end," Lucifer says, handing Chloe a bottle of water and pouring three drinks.

"Things are crazy at work," Ella explains. "I just did a twelve-hour shift. Bodies are drop-ping. We've had five homicides in the last twenty-four hours. No connection between any of them yet."

"Is that quite a lot?" Lucifer asks.

"Uh, yeah," Dan says, looking at him oddly.
"There's usually less than one a day," Chloe says.

Dan glances at his phone. "I can't stay long, Chlo," he murmurs, apologetic. "I'm on the clock."

"What a pity," Lucifer says, sauntering toward his bedroom.

"Hey," Dan snaps, pivoting on his bar stool. If he intends to say something biting, he stops short. "What the— Is that blood?"

"Oh, this?" Lucifer laughs, twisting to look at the large, dried bloodstain on the back of his shirt and pants. "Yes, got shot again, didn't I?"

"Oh my God. Are you okay?" Ella asks.

"Right as rain, Miss Lopez." He glances at Chloe, his expression full of mischief. "Ask the detective all about it, if you like." Then he disappears behind the stained glass partition.

"He's okay, though—really?" Ella asks. Chloe raises an eyebrow. "Riiight. Of course he is." She nods, a little wide-eyed.

Dan looks between them curiously before shaking his head. "Just get us up to speed, Chloe."

She gives them an abbreviated and slightly altered version of events, sans flying, paralysis, and supernatural healing. When she's done, she slides the ziplock bag with the pen from the safe house toward Ella. "I know it's not great, but this is all I felt we could take. Hopefully there are fingerprints on it."

"I'll see what I can do," Ella says. "What's the cover story for your absence?"

"I was thinking we could say the Corvette broke down," Chloe says, shrugging. "It's not a great story, but it's simple." So long as they don't need Lucifer to lie directly at any point.

Dan frowns at the bar counter, one finger tapping against the glass. "What I don't get is, how did they know you were coming?" Dan asks.

"We don't know," Chloe answers.

He glances at the entryway to Lucifer's bedroom. "Are you sure you don't?"

Lucifer chooses that moment to reenter the room in nothing but a silk robe.

"Ah, put some clothes on, man," Dan groans, while Ella openly ogles his legs.

Lucifer pours himself another drink. "You're in my home, Daniel. You're lucky I'm dressed at all. Now, are you accusing me of being part of the Sinnerman's dodgy little network?"

"You did know Pierce was the Sinnerman before the rest of us."

"Dan—" Chloe starts.

"Fair enough, but then why would I invite snipers to shoot me, hmm?"

Unbidden, Chloe remembers a time when he did beg a sniper to shoot him.

"You wouldn't be standing here like nothing happened if you got shot in the back." Dan looks at Chloe. "You get that, right? He didn't get shot this time, just like he didn't get shot the last time you
thought he did."

Lucifer huffs and takes another swallow of his whisky. "You're veering toward douchedom again, Daniel. I had such high hopes for you this time."

"You're not helping," Chloe says, glaring at him. She isn't sure whether to stay quiet or to back Lucifer up, which will force her to further defend and explain the truth. In the end, Dan decides it for her.

He slams a hand on the bar and slides from his stool. "I can't do this." He turns to Chloe. "We'll find Otero. We'll find Barrow. We'll end all of this. And then I'm done." He takes long strides to the elevator. "You coming, Ella?"

"Dan, wait," Chloe sighs.

"Sorry, guys," Ella says, backing toward the elevator. "I, uh, hitched a ride with him." She waves the ziplock bag. "I'll do what I can with this." As the doors squeeze closed, she shouts, "I'm glad you're okay, Lucifer!"

"Thank you for caring, Miss Lopez! Unlike some people!"

When it's just the two of them again, Chloe frowns at Lucifer. "Why do you do that?"

"Do what?"

"Poke at him. He can't help that he doesn't know the truth. He's confused and hurt. You just made it worse. You get that we have to work with him, right? Dan is one of the few people we can trust at the precinct."

"All I did was tell him I got shot. Did you think I'd lie about it?"

"You also called him a douche."

"Not directly," Lucifer insists. "Besides, I deserve some perks in this long life of mine, and irritating your ex is one of my favorite pastimes. Do you know he's started hiding pudding in his desk drawer?" He laughs delightedly. "I'm letting him think I don't know for now."

"Yeah, well, can you please irritate him less? He's going through a lot."

"Aren't we all?" At her annoyed look, he relents with a sigh. "Fine. I'll play nice. For your sake, not his."

"Thank you."

"Right, now that that's all sorted..." He unties his robe and lets it drop to the floor. "Let's have a proper shower, shall we?"

For one who loves fashion as much as Lucifer does, clothing certainly is optional. Her gaze dips low before returning to his smirking face. "I'm pretty tired, Lucifer."

"So stay the night," he says, ambling closer. "I can do all the work."

"I don't know..." If she's honest with herself, she almost feels as self-conscious as she does exhausted. "I'm kind of a mess right now."

"What rubbish. You're a lovely shade of red." She groans, and Lucifer leans close, his mouth
nearly touching hers. "Stay."

And she thinks about sleeping against him, as she has for two nights now. The ease of it, the rightness. About his warmth and the way he curls against her like a parenthesis. About how, if this is what it means to get caught up in his storm, she's in the eye.

"Okay," Chloe whispers, and closes the distance with a gentle kiss. He deepens it until she flinches. He pulls back in concern. "Sunburn," she sighs.

"Right. Stay below the neck," he chuckles. "Not a problem."

She laughs as he lifts her from the bar stool, holding her flush against his bare skin. He carries her into his palatial bathroom, which rivals the size of his bedroom.

Lucifer does nothing by halves, and time is meaningless to him, so that all his boldness and innuendo turns soft and lazy when she least expects it. He removes her clothes slowly and draws her into a black marble shower made for multiples, where he seats her on a tile bench beneath the warm spray. He kneads her ankle and washes them clean.

In the six and a half years he's lived in L.A., how many others have been in this shower with him? Countless, and yet it's different with them, she knows. Different by how they connect, how, for once, he truly is naked.

Later, when he dries her off and hands her lotion to soothe her burned flesh, she knows he's thanking her. For who has ever cared if the Devil went to Hell? She wants to tell him there's nothing he has to thank her for, that of course she's got his six, just as he's got hers. But she knows he won't hear it.

She twists the top back onto the jar of moisturizer and looks at him in the mirror. He stands behind her, his hands resting low on her hips, confusion knitting his brow. "What?" she asks.

"You look good against me," his reflection says, though his tone is slightly distrustful. The unknown troubles him as much as it does her. She watches him stare into his own dark eyes and wonders what he sees, what haunts his long memory that stretches back to a time without stars.

Chloe pries one of his hands away from her hip and limps backward with a laugh toward his bedroom. "Come on."

Lucifer kisses her at the foot of the bed, then gently shoves her back with a mischievous grin. She falls, feeling light.

For a minute, he looks down at her, simply to look. Then he leans over, his palms flat beside her head, his knees between hers. And she almost gives in, almost begs him for more right then, but his mouth finds hers before the desire spills free.

He dips down her body, trailing fire on slopes and curves, on bruises and scars and lightning strikes of faint stretch marks. He shows her all the things he doesn't know how to say, and as her thighs tremble against his shoulders, she feels a little like a lock snicking free.

"You make great sounds," he later sighs, climbing up beside her, and he's hard against her thigh. He startles when he looks down at her. "Chloe?" He catches a tear on a fingertip. "You're a crier?"

"No," she whispers. "You're just good."

"Well," he breathes out on a laugh, "that's what I've been trying to tell you all this time."
She smiles. As is often the case, he misunderstands her.

Chapter End Notes

Huge thanks to ObliObla and TheYahwehDance for taking a scalpel to this one, and an honorary nod to puerile for having a life outside the fandom recently, unlike the rest of us.

Fic Recs • My Fics, Categorized • My Fanvids on YouTube • Tumblr
Cain snarls and throws a record into the stone wall. The vinyl snaps in two and crashes to the floor. He's torn through everything. There is nothing in this hidden room. Nothing. Only the inane pleasures of a narcissistic hedonist.

His hands pull at his hair as he stomps across the floor, screaming his rage. He can't be stuck in Hell. He can't be. Not because the Devil sparked a crumb of guilt. He pulled the trigger, and Charlotte Richards died—so what? He'd do it again. And this time he wouldn't miss Amenadiel. This time, he'd fire a second time, if necessary.

Fury vibrates down his limbs. He balls his fists and strikes out with clawed wings. His right wing blows through a wooden bookshelf, shattering oak into a million little chips and splinters. He grunts bullishly, his breaths loud in the room. Loud and...

Cain tilts his head and stares at the wreckage, sable eyes narrowing. He hears it more than sees it, how the acoustics of the room have changed. He claps his hands once, hard, and listens to the way the sound travels throughout the room—and beyond.

There's a secret room nested within the secret room. Cain laughs.

Flinging aside the remains of the bookshelf, he reveals a narrow, open doorway that leads into darkness. He claps again. The sound travels far and deep. Grabbing the torch from the wall sconce, he carries it to the threshold of the passageway. A seemingly endless hall awaits.

Cain enters, his wings folded close to his back, his booted feet lightly tapping across the polished hellstone. He's Jonah, traversing the intestines of a great, cold fish, except he intends to eat the fish from the inside out.

The hallway ends abruptly, opening into a tiny, claustrophobic room that isn't large enough to fit his wingspan. A black baby grand piano stands in the center of the room. It's nearly camouflaged against the black hellstone floor.

He secures the torch in the lone wall sconce and steps forward to circle the piano. Standing behind the bench, he lifts the fallboard and presses down on middle C. The note rings out, dull and flat after years of neglect.

The piano lid is down, and he raises it, fixing the the prop into place. He peers inside the instrument. More secrets lie within. He smiles, baring teeth.

Three items rest atop the baby grand's cast iron plate. A knurled lump of hellstone sits beside a curved, Hell-forged blade. Old, red blood cakes the knife's sharp edge. Finally, there is a wooden, rectangular box, no larger than his hand. On its top, a highly-detailed sheaf of wheat has been carved deep into the wood. The symbol is ancient and familiar. The harvest feast. Shavuot. Pentecost.

Cain thumbs open the box and sucks in a breath. He thought he knew all there was to know about the Devil's coin—that there was only one, that it was recently spent, the end. But here, here lie other Pentecostal coins, handmade, and in various stages of completion. Eight, to be exact. A bloody, maroon fingerprint stains the most rudimentary piece, which is more raw, lumpy hellstone
than smooth, engraved and embossed coin.

Tears crawl down Cain's cheeks as he lifts a coin to his face. He runs his thumb across the bumpy texture of the satirical goat's head, dark dreams of revenge filling his head. When he breaks free, he's going to destroy Lucifer Morningstar. His reputation, his beauty, his joy. Everything.

Cain's fist closes over the perpetually warm metal.

Hell's gates stand tall, black, and spiked between two fat-bodied volcanoes. Cain stares up at the doors and draws his wings into his scarred body. He carries with him nearly all his meager possessions: roughly-spun shirt and pants, uncomfortable boots, a Hell-forged knife, and three Pentecostal coins.

Paranoia drives him. He looks over his shoulder before pulling the first coin from the pocket he's stitched to the inside of his shirt. Trembling, he presses the coin to the seam where the two gates meet.

There is power in the Devil's blood. With an explosive roar, the doors blast open on their hinges, revealing a portal of pure, white light. The coin disintegrates, and a great force draws upon Cain, lifting his body and hauling him forward to extract him from the depths of Hell.

Behind him, the gates slam shut.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you to this lovely, hilarious trio: ObliObla, puerile, and TheYahwehDance.

Fic Recs • My Fics, Categorized • My Fanvids on YouTube • Tumblr
Lucifer stuffs his shirttail into his trousers, his eyes glued to Chloe's sheet-covered backside. She's taken to sleeping naked, just, he believes, to destroy him. A week has passed, and she still hasn't given in—and neither has he, but it's a near thing. Last night, she almost had him, and bloody hell, she knew it. Why they're continuing to play this game of cat and mouse, he's not sure, but he's never felt more intrigued, pent-up, or determined in his life.

If only he could tap into whatever that naughty little desire of hers is... No matter how much he assures her it won't shock him, she refuses to utter a word. It must be good to make her blush like it does. It wasn't feet. He learned that the hard way when she nearly kicked him in the face for tickling her. Ropes, maybe? Some kind of deliciously deviant roleplay? Nantaimori? He has no bloody idea, and it's driving him mad.

He glances at Chloe's alarm clock and clicks his tongue. Time to go. The prevailing rule is he must be dressed and out the door before the offspring is awake. Suits him fine, really, as it means there are no sticky hands to dodge before he's had a coffee. He buttons his shirt while dashing down Chloe's stairwell on light, silent feet.

"Lucifer!"

Not silent enough, apparently. He freezes at the foot of the stairwell. Slowly, he turns toward the kitchen, his fingers caught up in buttons and placket. "Hello, urchin. You're up suspiciously early."

"Hi," Trixie says, grinning and looking an awful lot like her mother does when she's caught a criminal in the act. "Did you sleep over?"

"Ask your mum." He frowns, noticing the lump of processed food resting on the plate before her. "What are you eating?"

"Sausage and biscuit."

"That is neither a sausage nor a scone, child." Shaking his head, he marches into the kitchen and yanks open the fridge door. "What is wrong with your mother?"

When Chloe enters the kitchen twenty minutes later, Lucifer has a small stack of pancakes growing beside the cast iron skillet he found buried deep in a cabinet. The woman hardly ever cooks.

"Lucifer," she sighs. "We agreed you—"

"Yes, I know, but don't start," he says, pointing the spatula at her. "Your progeny was starving." He grins a little. "You're welcome to thank me later, if you like."

Chloe rolls her eyes and runs a hand down her daughter's dark, wavy hair. "Trixie-babe, time to get dressed."

Lucifer flips a pancake. "Ooh, I believe I'm about to get quite the scolding, urchin."

"That sucks."
"Trixie..."

"Oh, I don't mind," Lucifer assures her.

Trixie looks between them, grinning. "Are you guys dating?"

"Go get dressed," Chloe says, "and come back and eat. Brittany will be here soon."

"But—"

"Go."

Trixie flings herself from the bar stool and stomps away. Honestly, how are there children in a time of birth control?

Lucifer pours more batter into the skillet before glancing at Chloe uncertainly. "What's this Brittany's last name?"

She snorts. "I'm sure she's never been to Lux, if that's what you're asking. Did you even know the Brittanys' last names?"

"Would you believe two are Smiths?" he says, and is pleased when it amuses her as much as it amuses him.

It's strange thinking of the Brittanys. How delightful they were, and no doubt still are, even the one with the overbite, and yet he couldn't be less interested in what they're offering now. Oh, he has eyes, and he'll always see how others look at him. He'll always flirt and play. Desire, after all, is his jam. But only one person has peeled back his onion layers and not run away weeping.

He flips another pancake and clears his throat. "Sorry. She was awake when I came downstairs."

Chloe steps close and touches his back. "It's okay."

Lucifer glances at her sidelong. "It is?"

"Yeah. I think so." She gives one of his belt loops a gentle, sideways tug that goes straight to his groin. "Especially if you're going to make breakfast like this." Her hand snakes out toward the towering pancakes, but before she can pick at one, he lightly slaps her knuckles with the spatula. "Ow!" she complains, glaring at him. "Fine, I won't have any yet."

He squints, watching her closely, before sighing and mentally scratching one more thing off the list of possible kinks. "Not until I've done the fruit compote," he says.

"We might get an earful from Dan about this, just so you know." She removes plates from a cabinet and laughs. "Don't look so excited about it."

When Trixie returns, dressed in an atrocious amalgamation of stripes, polka dots, and all colors of the rainbow, they sit at the breakfast table and eat. He watches, peripherally, as the Decker women dig in, and he feels... Well, he's not sure what, exactly, but it's lovely and hurts, all at once, and he desperately wishes to hoard it away somewhere dark and safe. Because surely none of it can last.

"We should get going," Chloe says, dragging the final bite of her pancakes through a pool of syrup. She claims not to have a sweet tooth. He's learning this is a lie she tells herself. "We've gotta close up the Hooper case today."

With the Rosales and Yates cases gone cold—officially, anyhow—Chloe was handed a new case
this week, one of the many homicides that's occurred during the long heatwave. It was an easy case to solve involving a horny housewife, a libidinous landscaper, and a passionate pool boy. The three conspired to kill the dullard of a husband and turned on each other in a matter of hours. All in all, a rather anticlimactic week after getting shot from the sky. The paperwork, however, persists like syphilis in an eighteenth century whorehouse.

"No can do, I'm afraid," he says, standing and taking their empty plates to the sink. "Big night at Lux."

"It's a Monday..."

"Ah, but the heatwave is supposed to break tomorrow, so we're throwing a bit of a farewell party in its honor."

"To the heatwave."

"Did I stutter? Yes, to the heatwave. Business has been booming. You humans can't get enough of my backup generators during the blackouts. You'd think you lot had had air conditioning for thousands of years with the way you carry on. But far be it from me to deprive you."

"For a price."

"Everything has a price, darling."

She blinks at him. "You realize a lot of people have"—she glances at Trixie, turns away, and covertly grabs her throat and rolls her eyes back in some comical approximation of death—"because of the blackouts, right?"

"Do you mean died, Mom?" Trixie asks, and Lucifer grins.

"Yes, honey," Chloe sighs. "A lot of people have died. It's sad."

Lucifer tsks. "If you sold the heatwave as a weight loss plan, L.A. would love it. Too hot? Visit Lux or go skinny dip in the bloody Pacific." She glares at him, but her glare burns with that playful ire that doesn't run deep. "Come out tonight," he purrs, leaning his hip against the counter. "The Devil will show you how fun a little heat can be."

And maybe, just maybe, if he winds her up just so, she'll break in the best way. Which is to say she'll break first, and he'll be able to tease her about it for the rest of her days.

"I can stay with Daddy!" Trixie volunteers, her shrill voice a bucket of ice water to his libido.

"See," Lucifer says, waving a hand toward Trixie, "even the child knows you're boring and need to get out. Come on, it's not as if Miss Lopez has even lifted any prints from that pen yet."

Chloe laughs. "I'll think about it, okay?"

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*Why a nightclub? It's a question Linda and Chloe have asked him more than once.*

Lucifer's go-to answer: *Why the hell not?*

Of course, there's more to it than that, but he's a poker player at heart. Best to hold your cards close, lest anyone discover you only have a pair of twos. Put on an expensive suit, a little makeup, and a charming smile, and the world assumes you've a royal flush in hand.
The truth is Lux is an expression of free will, his and others'. It's a place where people are free to make any choice—good or bad—in any moment, so long as it doesn't harm another. (You're welcome to harm yourself all you like.) And if you've regrets, relax. There's a loophole to be found in more alcohol or drugs or stomach pumping or antibiotics or Plan B. Most importantly, there's closing time, when all is forgiven and reset in preparation for a new day.

When he enters Lux now, it's to workers balanced atop ladders and otherwise rushing to and fro. With the nightclub now being part of a historic building, getting the city planner to allow him some...minor adjustments had been tricky, especially without the aid of sexual bartering, but it all worked out in the end. She got her trip to Bali, which itself was organized from a favor a travel agent owed him.

At his pre-dawn request made from Chloe's bed, temporary fans and a water misting system are being installed. Usually even a temporary setup like this takes a week to install, due to all the pesky electrical, fire safety, and water damage concerns, but the work team's leader, Nate Gardner, also owes the Devil a favor. It helps, too, that Nate would do just about anything to sleep with him again.

Lucifer watches from the bar as Nate directs a tradesman on hose placement—a process that is far less erotic than it should be, all things considered. The tragically dull task does nothing to diminish how Nate's hindquarters are a work of art in his faded jeans, however. He's got that wiry, sinewy body Lucifer prefers in men—fit as a whip. Not to mention he gives head like he's a hoover.

But then...none of that is enough anymore, is it? Nate, despite being quite nice, never was one to ask Lucifer how his day was or quietly bring him ranch puffs or tease him for liking B movies with awful catchphrases. He never picked Lucifer's feathers clean or kissed his burned mouth or ran into the wild, California desert to save him, the Devil, from Hell.

Nate is a lovely young man, a very good time in the sack, but as Lucifer looks at him, he hears the faint echo of his former lovers at the precinct, extolling his skills, naturally, but also suggesting he's only good for one thing. It reminds him of being in the Silver City, where he was only ever wanted for what he could do. And, when he wouldn't do, well, he was no longer wanted.

Lucifer looks away and pours more bourbon. Chloe's ruined him. He feels happy and terrified, all at once, not to mention horny out of his Dad-forsaken mind. Linda assures him it's all normal—healthy, even—but feeling this much is disturbing. He can't quite shake the belief that it makes him weak.

And, of course, that little notion might explain why he becomes a tad mortal in her presence, wouldn't it? He scoffs into his glass and shakes his head.

"Lucifer?"

"Hmm?" He turns on his bar stool and smiles. "Well, hello, Nathaniel."

"My guys should be done in a few hours," Nate says, his brown eyes raking downward. "I could stay back, though. If you need me."

"You always have been a bold and beautiful one, haven't you?" Lucifer downs the last of his bourbon. His glass clanks against the bar counter. "You know, I do loathe throwing a spanner into your desire, but I'm afraid I only require the tools you use for work."

Nate steps forward, pressing between his legs. "Are you sure?" he asks, his mouth close to Lucifer's neck.
"Quite." Lucifer places a hand on Nate's chest and pushes him back slightly. "There is such a thing as too bold, my dear."

"Sorry," Nate breathes, taking another step back. He glances over his shoulder, as if he didn't realize how openly forward he was being. "I didn't—"

"No need to be embarrassed." Lucifer flashes a grin. "I know I'm wickedly tempting." Reaching out, he grabs Nate's callused fingers and gives them a gentle squeeze. "We had fun, you and I, but I'm... Well, I'm spoken for now." Taking a deep breath, he lets go and proceeds to tug on his sleeves.

"Really?" Nate says, eyes wide.

"Believe me, no one's as surprised as the Devil."

"Well, that's nice." The sentiment rings genuine. "I-I hope you're happy."

"Disquietingly so," Lucifer admits.

Nate nods. "I get that. Oh, uh, by the way, thanks. You know, for paying off Christie's student loans."

"Christie can thank her brother. You're doing all this for free."

"This isn't a hundred grand's worth of work."

"Isn't it?" Who can keep up with the cost of things?

"Not even close."

Lucifer shrugs.

"Anyway," Nate says with a snicker, "I'll find a way to write it off."

"Good man."

"Your friend Mazikeen taught me," Nate laughs, and walks away.


Lucifer watches him return to his team. Nate will never know him, not really, but suddenly the reality of that doesn't sting quite so much. Doesn't leave him feeling hollow and alone. He had a good time with Nate...and that was enough for who he used to be.

Perhaps it's all right to want more than what the Nates and Brittanys of the world are willing to offer.

As he jogs up the stairs to the elevator, he texts Chloe: *Come have fun with me tonight.*

It's not quite as hot as Hell outside, but it's close, so it's no surprise when another blackout makes the City of Angels sweat. Even with it being a Monday night, the line to get inside Lux wraps around the block.

Everyone who's anyone wants to be here, and not just because of the backup generators. They're drawn in, as always, by promises of bacchanalian madness and rumors about the eccentric, piano-
playing club owner, who will either have mind-blowing sex with them or make sure someone else does. Twitter says the sex god's throwing a party? You'd be a fool not to go.

The aptly named Blackout Party hasn't even begun yet, but already Lux is raking in more cash than the Catholic Church during Lent. The IRS will never know it, of course, or, if they do, they'll never follow through on a tax audit.

Lucifer sits before his piano, his suit jacket tossed aside, so that he's down to a black vest and gray shirt that's rolled up at the sleeves. His fingers fly across the ivory and ebony from one song to the next. Below, red-soled shoes stretch toward the pedals as needed, flawlessly modulating sound as if the piano were an extension of his body. In a way, it is. Practice indeed makes perfect, and he's been playing since the instrument was invented in the sixteen hundreds.

He carries Lux's patrons through an eclectic musical tour of the twentieth century, from 1920s boogie-woogie, to 1930s swing, forties jazz, rock 'n roll from the fifties and sixties, seventies Motown, eighties glam rock, and even a few piano renditions of nineties pop and grunge. If anyone thinks the choices odd or out of place and time, they don't say so—can't quite get the words out—as the Devil's music drives them to the dance floor.

This is his wheelhouse, and he's a Pied Piper who knows what he's doing. Not to say he's in control of everything, not exactly. As he plays, he keeps one eye on the entryway in anticipation. He's confident she'll pass through that door. It's more a matter of when than if. A month ago, two, he never would have believed it. Wouldn't have dared expect so much unless a case required it or he did a lot of cajoling. The detective didn't allow herself to have fun, and when Cain entered the picture, she certainly didn't have fun with Lucifer then. She didn't even need him for work.

But things are different now. They're real, as partners, as lovers. And as much as she grounds him, he sees how he unwinds her, so that they're always dancing, pushing, and pulling. She'll be here, but he keeps an eye out.

Is dear old Dad behind the ease of it all? Will he take everything away in the blink of an eye? Lucifer doesn't know, but he's in too deep now. Couldn't go back if he wanted.

And then suddenly, Chloe's there, winding down the stairs. Her hair falls in golden waves, skimming the edge of a black, curve-hugging dress that leaves little to the imagination. Black straps encase her feet and wrap round her ankles and calves. And Lucifer knows she's playing their game, that she's set out to wreck him.

It may work, too. But then, the Devil is old and has tricks of his own.

He grins at her and shifts seamlessly into Carol King on the piano, because, really, doesn't the Earth tremble just a little when Chloe Decker comes onto a scene? Is that simply how he sees it, or is it something more, something written on the code of her blessed double helix?

Chloe slides onto the piano bench beside him and nudges his shoulder. As he closes out the song, she smiles and moves with the rhythm. When he's finished, he brings down the fallboard, which is the subtle cue for the DJ. Music blasts to life from speakers suspended in the corners of the club.

Turning to Chloe, he grins. "You're here."

"I'm here." She grins with him.

"And you look bloody amazing."

He pulls her close, his mouth descending to hers. As he deepens the kiss, her hands sneak along his
chest, up his neck, into his hair. He longs to tap into her desire, to ask her what she wants most in this broken world, even as it thrills a part of him that he can't, that he has to work for it. That she's always bloody making him work. What a taskmaster.

They part on a ragged breath, and he leads her to the bar. Staff rush out to the piano, throwing a cover over it and wheeling it away through the crowd. Chloe asks for whisky, neat. She used to ask for beer, like some commoner, but her eyes have seen the glory of the top shelf.

He admires her as she sips her drink, her smoky eyes scanning the crowd. There's no taking the detective out of her, which is precisely why she's so good at what she does.

"How many of these poor people know I'm the only one going upstairs with you tonight?" she finally asks, turning to him.

Lucifer laughs, enjoying her possessiveness. "Am I being gawked at?"

"Um, something like that."

He looks out at the crowd with her, and, oh, yes, there are eyes glued to him, but no more so than usual. Does she notice how many look at her, as well? They make a very nice couple, he thinks, and feels warmed by the thought.

"I suppose we'll just need to make it clear to them I'm going to be rather busy tonight," he says, enfolding her hand in his. "Come on." He uses his other hand to steal her glass and kick back the rest of the whisky before dragging her to the dance floor.

"Lucifer..." she protests, always shy about dancing.

"Chloe," he laughs in response, and yanks her close, enjoying the soft press of her breasts, the way the bullet slides along the chain at her neck. He moves her with him, feeling the rhythm of the crowd. "What did you think would happen at a nightclub?" he chuckles against her mouth.

Slowly, she gives in, letting the music take over with his help. The temperature rises in the room, fueled by movement and desire, and when it becomes almost unbearable, Lux's staff flip a few switches and Nate's brilliant work kicks in. People squeal in pleasure as mist trails down from the ceiling, cooling, though it barely touches.

Chloe's dancing slows. She glances up and frowns. "That can't be up to code, Lucifer."

"Bloody hell," he complains, "don't your wheels ever stop turning?"

Bending, he grabs her rear, pulling her even closer, so that the heat between her legs presses against his right thigh. She looks at him, startled, but far from protesting. He smirks briefly before she yanks his head down and slips her tongue into his mouth.

The night becomes an intoxicating blur of dancers pressed close, of bass reverberating up through the floor and Chloe grinding against him until he's forced to hide his erection between their bodies. The mist falls and settles, until dresses and shirts cling to skin. Alcohol flows, and Lucifer can tell when the Molly's come out from behind the bar when a woman in a cobalt blue dress can't seem to stop working her jaw around hard candy.

It's around this time that Chloe yells above the crowd, "Can we go upstairs?"

She doesn't wait for him to answer, but turns and pulls him by his hand. He follows without complaint, watching her calf muscles strain against the black leather cage of her sandals as she
walks. She really does have bloody fantastic legs.

In the elevator, she pushes him so suddenly that it catches him off guard, and he falls against the back wall. "Hello," he purrs before she's on him madly, fumbling with buttons. His belt buckle clinks as they rocket upward. "Are you giving in?" he gasps at her mouth. "Is this you begging?"

Chloe freezes, her hand halfway down his trousers. "Are you giving in?" she asks.

Lucifer stares at her as the elevator shudders to a stop. The doors slide open behind her, revealing the penthouse. Her skin is dewy with mist and sweat, hair curling at the ends, mouth red from rough kisses. She's beautiful, and so much more than that, too.

He holds her face and kisses her. "I might be," he admits, his voice hoarse.

"Me, too," she whispers. Her fingers grip around him, and he pushes his hips forward with a groan.

Grinning, he bends and hefts her up, squeezing her to him. She lets out a delighted squeal as her hand slips from his trousers. She grabs hold of his shoulders and wraps her legs around his waist as he walks them into the penthouse.

"You're about to have a very good night," he tells her as he settles her atop the bar counter. It's as far as he can get before he loses his mind.

She kisses him hard. "I've been having good nights."

"This one will be better." He stretches her knees apart, driving her short, fitted dress high up her hips. He groans when he sees blood red lace. "You look like sin, darling."

"That's what I was going for." Her chuckling dies in her throat as his finger slips past the edge of the lace. She's so worked up she trembles.

"You poor thing," he says. "What have I done to you?"

"Oh, God, you're such an ass," she laughs.

"Now, don't bring him into it."

"Sorry," she whispers.

He shrugs and drags the lace down her hips, past her knees and strapped sandals. He licks his lips and thumbs her clit, but he can't keep his mouth away for long.

There are few things Lucifer enjoys more than going down on a woman. There's just so much exquisite variety in appearance, taste, experience, and desirous need. All the wonderful challenges of finding the spots that make a woman sigh and moan and keen and quiver, of learning when to stop and when to keep going—all challenges that not nearly enough men are interested in meeting.

Don't they know there isn't much better than seeing a woman come undone?

Lucifer is an excellent multitasker when he wants to be, but most especially in the art of sex. He knows how to crook a finger, how to speak in tongues, and he never has a free hand. Much of his knowledge of human anatomy may come from dark places, but it serves him well in more pleasurable pursuits.

When Chloe comes, her back arching off the glass counter, he watches hungrily, greedily, from between her thighs, as if this might be another moment he could hoard. She tries so hard to bottle
up her sounds, but always fails, and making her fail is its own kind of high.

Her eyes find his several moments later. Sitting up, she pulls him to her and kisses him deeply, sucking on his lower lip. "My turn?" she breathes, quirking a brow as her hand brushes over the front of his trousers.

Lucifer thinks of her on her knees the night before, her blue eyes cutting up to his as her cheeks hollowed out. He's not sure he can survive that right now, but he finds himself asking what he so often does: "Is that what you desire?" A habit, the blueprint for so much of his behavior, especially in the bedroom, where desire reigns supreme.

Chloe's expression softens as she tilts her head and brushes her fingers through his hair. "What do you want? I want you to feel good."

"I do feel good."

She lets out a small, frustrated huff. "Okay, but tell me what you want."

"You," he answers easily.

"How?"

Any way you'll have me, he thinks.

But inside, he's spiraling. He's so used to being the inquisitor that her questions unnerve him, so that he has an almost overwhelming urge to go in circles with her. What do you want? No, what do you want? And so on, forever.

"Lucifer?"

He's stared off into the distance without realizing it—dissociation, Linda once called it, though he's skeptical of the whole concept—but his eyes return to Chloe's. She caresses his face and watches him like she sees him, whatever, whomever he is. Something eases in him, just a little, and he sighs.

"I'm usually the one asking these questions," he says.

"I know." For some reason, her eyes fill with tears, and he pulls her closer, worried he's upset her. "I want you to have me how you want me," she whispers.

It feels a little like a dream. "I don't—"

"I'll tell you what feels good. I'll tell you if I don't want something." She kisses his cheek sweetly. "I trust you." Then she smiles. "How bad can it be to let you take over? You're always saying you're the best."

He laughs, his forehead dropping to hers. "I'm not lying."

And yet he freezes again, like some inexperienced sod. Answering the question of what he desires is both easy and difficult. He desires Chloe, has since those days when he couldn't stop himself from barging onto her crime scenes and into her life. But how... Well, how doesn't he want her? Only in the ways she doesn't want to be wanted.

Chloe waits for him, her touch soft. She kisses the corner of his mouth. "Maybe it'd...it'd help if I told you my dreams."
He perks up at this. "Dreams, hmm? What do you dream about, Detective?" Tentatively, he slides the straps of her dress down her shoulders. She wears no bra underneath.

"Being with the Devil."

Lucifer pulls back sharply. Eyes narrowed, he hunts for deception or unkindness, but only finds the red on her cheeks, which runs down her throat. He's seen embarrassment in enough humans to know hers runs deep.

"I don't understand," he says. "But tell me." He wedges himself closer between her thighs. "No judgment."

She licks her lips and swallows. "I like what you are." Her hands skate up to his biceps. "That you're powerful."

He stops breathing, stops moving. Everything hangs on her words.

"Your burns make me sad," she says. "I'm sad you've been hurt. But everything else..." She laughs uncomfortably. "I think I'm into it."

"Into it," he repeats, disbelieving. "Into it?"

*This* is her desire? Truly? To have *him*?

She shrugs and looks to the side, her blush darker, deeper. "So, I guess when I say...you can have me as you want me, I really mean it. Just be yourself."

And who is the real Lucifer Morningstar? There are so many pieces of himself, scattered between the heavens, the stars, Hell, and Earth. Is he able to fit them all together, into one person she can know?

"You'll tell me if you're uncomfortable with anything," he says, drawing her chin forward, so she's forced to look him in the eye.

"Yes."

"Promise me."

"I promise," she says, her eyes boring into his. She looks...excited.

"You're a freak," he says, with great affection. "You realize that, don't you?"

"Maybe? But I think you like it."

"I most certainly do."

Running his thumb over her bottom lip, he sighs as a dam he didn't know he had built begins to crumble. He catches her lips with his, one hand in her hair, the other running along her side, gathering the fabric of her dress in his fist. Bitting her lower lip, he yanks, *hard*. The seams tear apart easily, as if he's torn tissue paper, and he pulls the dress free from her body. Chloe laughs loudly as she's left stark naked—except for her sandals—on his counter.

He might leave those.

She looks at him with hooded eyes.
"You are into this," he says, his fingers trailing her hip.

"You have too much on," she complains, leaning back on her hands and spreading her legs.

"Bloody hell."

The urge to tear off his own clothes is great, but he can't quite bring himself to ruin this particular bespoke ensemble, so he settles for making quick work of his vest and dress shirt before tugging his unbuckled belt free and letting it drop to the floor.

Never one to miss something, Chloe says, "Oh, of course you don't tear your clothes."

He snorts and kicks off shoes and socks, drops his trousers and boxers, and then stands before her, his arms spread, his erection comically obvious. "Well?"

"Very nice. Seen it already, though," she snickers.

"Seen it already! Like it's old hat!"

They're both laughing when he picks her up from the counter. She hooks her sandaled feet behind him, and he groans, feeling how wet she is against him, as he walks her into his bedroom and puts her on his bed.

Even with more than a week of play, of seeing her naked and writhing, he still can't quite believe what's happening. That, in a way, she's here because she's his, and of course he's bloody hers.

When he leans over her, he feels...unencumbered in a way he hasn't for a very, very long time. He kisses her and palms her breasts, his thumbs dragging over rose-colored peaks. He moans in pleasure when she tugs his hair, and her hips lift up from the bed.

Lucifer trails kisses down her throat, to the faint scar at her shoulder, to her breasts.

"You're sure you're clean?" she asks.

He snorts where his mouth hovers above a nipple. It's a completely reasonable question—one an astonishingly small number of his partners think to ask—but she's already asked several variations of it this past week because, in her words, he's "been a slut." Which he's rather proud to say is entirely true, but a little faith would be appreciated. It's not as if he's lying.

"I really can't get human diseases," he assures her. Again. "And you've really had a tubal ligation?"

He's teasing her, but, truly, having some Satanic offspring running about is far more terrifying than a case of the clap.

She nods.

"Lovely."

They stare at each other for a long moment before she reaches between them and touches herself. When she takes hold of his length, her fingers are wonderfully slick and he lets out a shuddering sigh.

"I'm ready if you want me this way," she whispers.

If he wants her this way. How absurd. He wants her every way.

"You're sure?" he asks, pressing his hips forward slightly. She wants him now, of course, but the
thought of her regretting it later... But she nods and kisses him, and he relaxes before he can worry himself too much.

In the end, this really is what he desires, the most boring of positions, all so he can look upon her face when he enters her for the first time. There will be time for other things, maybe even tonight.

He slides into her slowly, and though he's been here before, with countless women and men, it's different, so different it makes his chest hurt. He takes his time as he moves, savoring the sounds their bodies and throats make together.

With a hand wedged between them, his thumb never far from her clit, he carries her up and over the edge of her desire. Only then can he tolerate the thought of letting go. Release hits him hard, tearing through his entire body. And when he feels that familiar ache between his shoulders, he lets that go, too.

Chloe kisses him, her fingers buried in his feathers.

True to the weather forecasters' predictions, the next day proves to be much cooler, at least by summer-in-L.A. standards. But Lucifer hardly notices any of it as he waltzes naked through his penthouse. He feels like a new man, like he could throw open Heaven's gates with a whisper.

Chloe Decker wants him, all of him, and has him thoroughly ensnared in a most pleasurable way. His thoughts keep returning to the night before and to the early hours of dawn, when she woke and climbed atop him like a wet dream come to life. He grinned and lay back, arms behind his head, as he enjoyed the ride.

Despite his protests, she left for the precinct shortly thereafter, running about, dragging items out of her corner of his closet. Watching her go had been difficult. He almost went with her, but, well, he really does enjoy his morning routine.

He showers, cleans up his stubble, and moisturizes. For a while, he stares at himself in the mirror, trying to understand why he feels so different, but it's all too big for him, and he shelves it for his next session with Linda.

Wandering out to the bar, he reaches for his finest bottle of whisky when the elevator dings to the side. He smirks and pours his drink.

"Come for another hit, darling?" He drops his robe, his body already responding at the prospect. "Very well. I suppose I'll let you climb aboard."

He turns, grinning—and is immediately thrown into a cold shower. The glass cracks in his hand before he drops it to the floor, where it shatters.

"Hey, Lucifer."

"Mazikeen."

"Uh, yeah," Maze says, her eyes dropping low before returning to his face. "You should probably put your dick away. You know I don't care, but Decker gets weird about this stuff. I know you two are a...thing now. Or whatever."

Lucifer strides forward, anger building in his chest. "You've quite a bit of nerve, showing up here."

"We need to talk."
"What?" he scoffs. "So you can spin more lies? More like, I should cut your tongue out and feed it to you. How sad that will make all the boys and girls."

Maze raises her chin, but makes no move to defend herself as his hand closes around her throat. He lifts her off the ground and slams her into the nearest wall, sending fissures through the sandstone.

"The cost of your little games has grown too dear, Maizie."

"Cain—" She gasps in a breath. "Stole my blade."

"Ah, but why was he able to steal it in the first place?" He gives her a rough shake, like a cat with a rodent. "You forgot the first rule of scheming, Mazikeen: Never make a deal with a liar."

"I'm...sorry."

"I could end you, you know," he whispers, almost sweetly, and tilts his head. He feels Hellfire flare to life in his eyes.

"I'll fight...back," she hisses.

"Wouldn't be fun otherwise." His smile is sharp.

They stare at each other, eons of history between them—some good, some bad, most expedient. And for the first time in their very long relationship, Lucifer sees sorrow in Mazikeen, an emotion demons aren't meant to have. A fat tear rolls down her cheek and drops onto his forearm.

"Oh, well done," he says cruelly. "Been going to acting classes?"

She says nothing, simply lets him look at her pain, her breath uneven beneath his grasp.

Scoffing, he drops her, and she crumples to the floor. She doesn't get up, choosing instead to rest her arms on leather-clad knees while she gasps in air. She watches him warily from the corner of her eyes.

"Punishing you is no fun if you're going to be such a sad sack," he snaps. "Bloody hell, I at least expect you to kick me in my dangly bits."

"Look, things got out of hand, and I tried to make it right, but it was too late. I... I didn't come here to fight."

"Yes, well, forgive me if I can't take a thing you say seriously. Might have something to do with that little stunt you pulled with the angel wings."

What a week that was. He barely remembers it and thinks in passing that he really should rewatch Bones.

Rounding the bar, he picks up his robe from the floor and slips it over his shoulders. He ties the sash around his waist and returns to stand before his best torturer and erstwhile lover.

"Why did you do it?"

"I just wanted to go home, Lucifer."

"Hell was never home."

"Maybe not for you, but that's where I'm from."
"Well, I'm from the Silver City. Doesn't mean it's home." He shakes his head. "No one wants to live in Hell, Mazikeen, not even demons." Not really. It took an extraordinary amount of work to keep this mollified in Nox.

She looks away and shrugs a shoulder. "Maybe. Linda says I was"—she uses air quotes—"'running from my emotions.'"

"Yes, you're very lucky the doctor took you in."

"You knew, huh? You went looking for me?"

"Of course."

"To kill me?"

"I hadn't thought that far ahead yet."

Maze nods, accepting it. "Staying with Linda..." She rolls her eyes and blows air past her lips. "Let's just say she's been trying to help me become a 'well-adjusted individual.'" She spits the words like they're a curse. "Turns out that's not even a euphemism for getting laid."

"Is it working?" he asks wryly.

"Do I seem well-adjusted to you?" she bites out. "All this feeling crap." She sighs loudly. "But I guess not all of it's bad. Some of it's...nice. Sort of."

"Sometimes," he agrees.

"I'll make things up to you."

"I doubt it, but I agree you owe me."

She grimaces, but accepts this, too.

He turns away, back toward the bar. "Would you like a drink?"

Lucifer doesn't know why he asks. If anything, he wants her gone, far away from him and Chloe, but old habits die hard, and there are few habits as old as sharing a drink with Mazikeen.

"If you're gonna pour it," she says. He hears her scramble upright. "Actually, wait, I'll pour my own drink."

"Worried I might poison you?" he asks cheerfully, two glasses rattling between his fingers. "You know that's not my style."

He hands her an empty glass, and they take turns pouring expensive liquor. They stand on opposite sides of the bar, staring at each other.

"You're to stay away from Chloe and her offspring," he says, his glass held close to his enrobed chest.

"But—"

Before she can reply, they hear the loud flap of angel wings mere seconds before Amenadiel lands on Lucifer's balcony.
"Hello, brother."

Lucifer struggles to school his shock. "Bloody hell, fancy seeing you here," he complains, slamming his drink down. "Did I send out a bat signal, calling all immortals? I've places to be."

"Nice to see you, too," Amenadiel says.

Maze huffs a laugh and folds her arms over her chest. "You're wearing that dress again?"

"It does his legs no justice, does it?" Lucifer quips.

Amenadiel's scowl deepens. "Father's not seeing anyone, Luci."

Lucifer shares a look with Maze. "Right, and your point?" He finishes off the whisky in his glass before opting to hang on to the bottle. This morning is really putting a damper on his post-coital bliss. Well, all the more reason to get Chloe naked again.

"Gabriel won't let me into the Great Tower. I've been asking around... No one's seen Father in decades."

"Try millennia. You learn to live with the radio silence, I assure you." He heads toward the steps into his bedroom before stopping and turning back. "Wait," he says, waving his whisky bottle as he points an accusatory finger. "Does this mean Dad wasn't the one making you pop down and muck up my good times so I'd go back to Hell? Do you realize how many perfectly innocent men and women have left my company unsatisfied because of you?"

"Luci, I didn't even talk to Father when he sent me to bless Penelope Decker."

Maze lets out an excited, disbelieving laugh. "Oh, shit, I came at just the right time."

"And you never bloody well thought to mention that before?" Lucifer snaps.

"Blessing Penelope was just part of my daily missive. We've always taken them to be orders from Father."

"Daily missive."

"That was started long after you—"

"Dared to question the Almighty?"

"It was more than that, Luci."

"Was it?" Lucifer challenges.

"Anyway, Gabriel sends out daily tasks now. We don't speak to Father directly. I just... I didn't realize how long it had been since any of us had heard from him."

Maze rummages behind the bar until she locates a bag of mixed nuts. She tears it open, makes herself comfortable on a bar stool, and begins stuffing her face.

"Gabby—send out daily tasks?" Lucifer laughs. "Maybe Dad has a sense of humor, after all. So you're saying you got a letter that told you, 'Pop down to earth and wave hello to Penelope Decker's uterus,' and you didn't so much as stop to ask why?"

"It is not for God's servants to ask why."
"We're his bloody children, not his slaves!"

The room goes silent, save for Maze's enthusiastic crunching.

"Luci," Amenadiel sighs, "I know you and Father haven't gotten along for a long time, but—"

"He sent me to Hell," Lucifer interrupts. "Whatever nonsense you lot get up to in the Silver City is none of my concern. I couldn't care less if the old man is giving you the cold shoulder while he tinkers with some new toy. Now, if you're here to take me back—"

"I'm not."

"Good. Because, whether of your own accord or at the behest of Gabriel or Dad himself, I won't go, and you can't make me. So, if you'll excuse me, Chloe is expecting me at the precinct."

A pause. "Chloe, huh?" Amenadiel tilts his head and grins.

"Oh, yeah," Maze laughs.

"Yes, Chloe," Lucifer says, a little too defensively. "Detective Decker. My partner."

"Uh-huh," Amenadiel says. "A lot's happened since I left, hasn't it?"

"Yes, well, it may come as a shock, but the world doesn't stop turning simply because you flew the coop."

"Chloe knows," Maze says through a full mouth. "And they're totally boning." She looks around the penthouse and nods. "Recently, too, huh?"

Demons.

"Chloe knows?" Amenadiel says.

Lucifer feels himself smile. "Yes, and she still quite likes me." Likes him, in fact, partly because of what he is. "Also, Cain's dead." On that note, he jogs up the steps to his bedroom.

"Wait, what?" he hears Amenadiel ask. "Who killed him?"

Maze chuckles. "Who do you think, dum-dum?"

Amenadiel crosses into Lucifer's room and stops at the edge of his closet, where Lucifer is busy yanking on black trousers.

"Tell me you didn't."

"Oh, but I did."

How he'd loved it, too, watching smug Cain succumb to his own weapon.

"There will be consequences, brother."

"Will there?" Lucifer scoffs, sliding a belt through his belt loops. "Dad's MIA according to you, and I thought we decided we have the reality we think we deserve. Well, I think I deserve an eternity free from Cain." He spreads his arms wide, his unbuttoned shirt flapping at his sides. "Oh, look, I've got it. End of discussion."
"What about Chloe?" Amenadiel challenges. "What if the consequences of your sin befall her?"

"They won't," Lucifer insists, his heart drumming in his chest. He would never allow that to happen. He watches Amenadiel's face as he buttons his dress shirt and shrugs on his suit jacket. "Why did you come here, really? Why apprise me of Silver City drama?"

Amenadiel's face softens. "Perhaps I missed you, brother. Heaven looks...different, after my time here."

Lucifer looks away, busying himself with the drawer where he keeps his pocket squares. Once, very long ago, he enjoyed being around his big brother, but letting his guard slip now, with all their history, is a dangerous, foolish thing. Their camaraderie is only ever temporary.

"Well, you certainly didn't lead with that, did you? No one's stopping you from staying a while, you know," he says. "Your apartment's still empty." He stuffs his square into his breast pocket.

"I... That's very thoughtful."

"Just honoring our deal," Lucifer says gruffly. "You watched over Chloe while I was in Vegas. The apartment's yours, so long as you need it."

"I'll think about it," Amenadiel says. "For now... I suppose I'll return to the Silver City. Someone must make sure Father's all right. I just thought you should know."

Lucifer turns and nods. "Yes, well, good luck with whatever bollocks Dad is up to. A bit of advice? Don't involve me much, lest you want to incur his wrath."

Amenadiel leaves. A half-eaten bag of mixed nuts is the only sign Maze ever visited. Lucifer sighs, fills his flask, and enters the elevator. He almost forgot how much the metaphysical still dictates his life.

At the precinct, Lucifer rounds the corner to Chloe's desk and stops in his tracks. A young man bends over the desk, his shaggy, honey-colored curls falling forward as he pulls case files from her sorting shelf.

"Whatever do you think you're doing?" Lucifer snaps.

The man looks up, startled. "Uh, hi. Just grabbing my cases."

"I beg your pardon? Those are the Detective's cases."

"Oh, there's probably just some confusion," the man says, smiling broadly and revealing slightly crooked teeth. "I'm the newbie detective—Detective Webb. He holds out a hand. "Wow, nice suit... Are you my partner? The lieutenant said he was assigning someone to me so I can learn the ropes."

"I would sooner gnaw my own fingers off," Lucifer says, staring at the proffered hand. "Not a detective, the Detective. Chloe Decker. I'm her partner, not yours." He looks around the room, hoping to spot her.

Detective Webb's face lights with understanding. "Oooh, uh, yeah, Decker. I think she's in with Garcia now."

"Right," Lucifer says, immediately turning to leave. He pauses and looks back over his shoulder.
"By the by," he says, pointing at Chloe's mess of papers, "if you value your limbs, I suggest you not touch anything else on this desk."

An uncertain laugh bubbles out of Detective Webb. "Is this some kind of 'haze the new guy' thing?"

"No, that was a threat," Lucifer says, adjusting a cufflink.

At that, he strides toward the lieutenant's office, fully intending to barge inside. The door swings open as he reaches for the handle, and there she is: Chloe Jane Decker, looking like she's ready to lay waste to humanity.

"You look positively terrifying right now," he says, delighted.

"I've been demoted," she growls.

"Demoted? Whatever for?"

She drags him into an empty interrogation room, where she hands him her phone. On the screen is TFF!, the skeevy paparazzi website they encountered when their partnership was just beginning.

"Oh, Dung Beetle," Lucifer murmurs. "I thought he gave this up."

"He sold the company, but it's still thriving without him," she gripes in disgust.

Lucifer frowns at the homepage. "I get that Kim's bum implants are a slowly-deteriorating travesty, but I've no idea what they have to do with your demotion."

"Oh," she says, peeking over his hands. "No, go to the second picture in the slideshow."

He taps the right arrow, stares, and grins widely. It's them, making out on the dance floor.

"Look how filthy hot we are," he cheers, and gently bumps into her. "Oh, but what a dreadful headline."

Back Again?! Chloe Decker Stars in New, HOT Role with Lux Nightclub's Lucifer Morningstar

Utter trash. He immediately clicks on it, scanning the several shots. They really should film themselves. The entry ends on a screen capture from Hot Tub High School. He snorts at the small black bars hiding Chloe's nipples. Humans get hung up on the strangest things.

"Yeah, well, Chief Mitchell doesn't think we're hot. Not to mention every time I show up on these websites, undercover work gets that much harder."

"Not the only thing that gets harder, I'm sure."

"Gross."

Lucifer looks up from the phone. "Wait. Don't tell me this is why you've been reprimanded. What, for a snog at a party? I didn't even have your knickers off yet."

Chloe closes her eyes and lets out a breath. "Can you take this seriously?"

"I assure you I take your knickers very seriously—and your career, of course."

She glares at him. "Apparently the Los Angeles Telegraph is running another story on the Pierce case," she tells him quietly. "Someone told them I used to be married to Dan and that I was
engaged to Pierce."

"Daniel aside, that temporary engagement insanity only lasted two days," Lucifer says, perturbed.

"And now there's this, making it clear I'm with you, an LAPD consultant."

"Came to your senses." He grins. "But, yes, I see the angle they're going for: Detective Chloe Decker, office slag. What bollocks. If only that were true, we'd have been shagging ages ago."

"Can you keep your voice down?" she whispers harshly, and looks around, even though they're alone in the interrogation room.

"What? Don't want people knowing you had the best night of your life?"

"I never said that."

"A picture's worth a thousand words, isn't it?" He zooms in on her face in one of the pap shots and turns the phone toward her. Gosh, she looks incredibly turned on there, and why wouldn't she? She was with the Devil, after all. He invented several techniques for the bedroom. "Since TFF!'s already blown the gaff, can I post one of these beauties to my Insta?"

She snatches the phone from him. "What do you think my answer to that will be?"

"Yes?" he quests. "Hashtag relationshipgoals? Don't use the Gingham filter?"

"The answer's no. Not just a little no, but a hell no."

"Right," he says. "Of course, Jane. Wouldn't want the world to know you had fun."

Letting out a frustrated sigh, Chloe heads for the door. He grabs hold of her wrist, stopping her.

"We shouldn't even be in here together," she says. "Everyone's going to think—"

"Darling, people will think what they want, pictures or no." He draws her hands to his chest, where he covers them with his. "Were you planning to keep me hidden? I'm rather noticeable." He grins.

"No," she sighs, a finger fidgeting with one of his shirt buttons.

"Then, do you want me to take care of this?"

"What, with some deal?" He arches a brow, and Chloe frowns. "Your whole favor system doesn't always work the way you'd like it to..."

"It has a very high success rate, I assure you."

She considers it, for a long time, but finally she shakes her head. "I'll earn my spot back. It'll make the Yates and Rosales cases harder, but...we'll figure it out."

Sighing, Lucifer leans forward and presses a kiss to her forehead. "I know you never weary in doing good, Detective, but surely you're aware you don't always reap what you sow."

Chapter End Notes
Seriously, **ObliObla**, **puerile**, and **TheYahwehDance** are the best.
With a gasp, Cain grabs his chest, feeling a distant echo of sharp pain, of a blade sinking deep. There's no blood, no wound, but his fingers dip into a depression beneath his shirt, into that gaping hole where his heart once beat. It eases him, this crater in his body, for he knows his survival depends on the darkness it represents.

Get up, he tells himself, but he stays where he is, feeling tired and overwhelmed. The room he's in is hot and bright. He blinks up at the familiar mezzanine and vaulted ceiling, recognition slowly dawning. He's returned to the loft where he died as a man.

He rises to his feet as a creature of darkness and takes in the damaged surroundings. Signs of the fight with Lucifer and Chloe remain: chips in columns from gunfire; a large tarp where once there stood floor-to-ceiling glass; the jagged and broken, egg-shaped finials on both sides of the stairwell.

Unease coils, serpentine, round his spine as he's thrown back into his final human moments on Earth. He sees the Devil circling him, toying with him—and smiling, always smiling. As if to taunt, I've seen your kind before, many times, and I'm still standing.

All those months of playing lieutenant, of watching Lucifer squirm and panic over his identity... Cain had begun to believe him foolish, a bogeyman who had more lucked into his position of power than earned it. But Cain can see now that he was the only fool, that Lucifer held an impossible throne for an impossible amount of time, and that his human flesh never stood a chance against the Devil. He was an ant crushed beneath a fine leather shoe.

This time will be different, Cain thinks.

When he turns to leave the marred room, something catches the corner of his eye. He changes course, walking toward a marble pedestal. A small, downy feather, no larger than his thumb, is wedged in the sculpted lines of a clay bust. The feather delicately reflects the light, drawing attention to itself. Ella Lopez must have been interrupted from scouring this scene, he thinks, or it never would have been left behind.

Cain pulls the feather free from the bust's grooves and stares at it. Half of the down is stained pink with old blood that brings a faint smile to his face. He grinds the tiny quill beneath his fingers, feeling the fragility of the soft barbs, before slipping it into his hidden coin pocket.

Yes, this time will be different.

He exits through a stairwell, into a narrow back alley. At the doorway, he cowers from the bright, golden-white daylight that blasts into his obsidian eyes. There is so...much to Earth that he has forgotten. A mere fraction of it hits him in one great sensory overload, but it's nearly enough to shatter him. How different from Hell, how beautiful, how alive Earth is.

It is a world of dualities, of light and shadow, loud and quiet, hard and soft. A world of reds and greens and blues. Of rumbling cars and singing birds and laughing children and tender silence. Wind whispers, cooling him beneath the warm blanket of the sun. And there is no ash, no rotting egg suffocating him, no doors rattling on their hinges. The creatures here—human, as he once was...
—rush about, with no thought of what they have, of what might be taken away, the moment they pass their expiration.

Lucifer took everything from him.

Cain leans against a graffitied wall and allows himself a small moment of weakness, to feel the full weight of this world, and of how much he has lost by being a part of it and apart from it. To feel, for a moment, the painful ache of his yearning. What might he have been, if his father had loved him more, enough? If his mother had held him, embraced him a little longer? If he hadn't suffered thousands of empty lives? If Chloe had loved him more than the Devil?

She should have. She will one day, when it's all over.

The thought of her jolts him. There's work to be done, and these thoughts won't help him. He sucks in a breath, locking away old, useless feelings. After all, God's creations, beautiful and terrifying alike, obey but one law: kill or be killed. Should Lucifer find him here, earthside, before he is prepared, Cain knows he will die, even in this stronger body, and that the Devil will destroy all means of his ever escaping Hell again. No, Cain will have to play this cleverly, quietly, which means returning to more human tactics. He'll strike when the time is right.

Straightening, he steps from the alleyway, onto the nearest sidewalk. A man in a suit passes by, his eyes darting toward Cain, then away, in that universal human way that screams, I want no trouble.

Cain can only imagine how horrifying he must look. Despite living in the windowless shelter of the Black Tower, his body and clothing are covered in ash and dirt, and he knows his eyes look anything but human. But he does what he knows from experience works, even in the greatest depths of despair, fear, and loneliness: he acts normal, as if, of course he's meant to be here, looking just as he does. It's not an easy sell in a business district, but this is Los Angeles. Costumes appear, from time to time.

Know your mark. That's the first rule of all cons. Pick someone by his gender, her height, their clothes, walk, and talk. Lean into some things, and pick at others. Know that while some want to be flattered or fucked, others want to fall in love, and some want to be rich and famous. And know that fear is the easiest lever of all to pull: fear of getting hurt, fear of being found out, fear of being misunderstood, fear of the law, fear of missing out.

But at the end of the day, the Devil's right. Deep down, it's desire which governs everything.

Cain chooses a woman—a tourist, by the looks of it—who's only just stepped into young adulthood. She has the nervous canter of one affecting self-assurance, rather than embodying it. He picks her, too, because she looks a little soft, a little sheltered, like she might have been brought up in loving arms that caught her when she fell.

"Excuse me?" he calls.

The young woman turns and gasps, stumbling away while clutching her large, red purse. "I'm not interested," she says hastily.

Cain dresses his face in his best smile, pushing past the grime. "Gosh, I'm sorry," he says, laying on a thick, old American accent. "I know I must look awful." She continues to back away, and he slowly follows, one hand raised in a calming gesture. "I hate to bother you, but I'm an extra on this new show"—he indicates his black eyes and bedraggled clothes—"and my jackass friend thought it'd be hilarious to drop me off here after lunch. All my stuff is back at the studio. Can I borrow
your phone and call my friend to pick me up? I'll give it right back."

She hesitates, and he relaxes his posture and bends his knees to make himself shorter, friendlier. He rubs the back of his head, as though, golly, he's the nervous one. And that's when he has her. Her shoulders slump beneath the soft cascade of her straight, brown hair. A smile brightens her face. Her teeth are perfect and white.

"That costume's crazy. And your friend's a total jerk," she chuckles, digging into her purse for her phone.

"Don't I know it?" She unlocks the device and pulls up the dialer. "Thanks for your help," Cain says, working hard to maintain his smile. He couldn't care less about her if he tried.

As he dials, he notices in his periphery how the young woman admires him. Amazing. Even smelling of brimstone and looking as he does, she's reevaluating him beneath it all. After all, it's just Hollywood magic. If anything, maybe this "get-up" suggests he has aspirations. She reminds him of all the fools stuck in their Hell loops.

Otero answers on the third ring. "Yeah?"

"Hey, man, I need a ride."

There's a pause at the other end. "Who gave you this number? Who is this?"

A stranger come to town, from a very, very far-off place.

"Peter Avery." Just one of many aliases.

"Jesus Christ. Holy. Shit."

"Can you come get me?" Cain asks. "I'm outside FIDM, on the corner of Ninth and Grand."

"On my way," Otero says. He doesn't bother with goodbyes.

"Thanks, man," Cain says to the dead silence, then makes a show of ending the call. He hands the phone back to the young woman. "Thanks again."

"No problem. So, what show are you gonna be in?" she asks with that sweet, too-white smile.

Instead of responding, Cain turns away and never looks back. He goes to stand on the corner, near a yellow fire hydrant. Although he wonders how long it will take for cops to escort him away, no one pays him much attention, or, if they do, they're quick to move along.

Otero pulls up to the curb some time later in a black SUV. He honks three times in quick succession. Cain jerks the car door open and drops into the passenger's seat. The entire vehicle smells of cigarette smoke.

"Take me to a safe house," Cain commands.

"Which one, boss?" Otero asks, white-knuckling the steering wheel.

"Do I look like I fucking care?"

"Got it." Otero is a squat man with the thick, corded muscle of a wrestler. Beneath his fitted, black t-shirt, his muscles are tense, as though a well-timed Boo might spook the man enough to launch himself out of the moving vehicle.
"What's the date?" Cain asks. He forgot to look on the woman's phone.

Otero tells him.

"That can't be right," Cain snaps.

"Uh..." Otero weaves around a vehicle trying to parallel park. "I'm pretty sure it is." He stuffs a hand into his back pocket and pulls out his phone. "Here," he says, handing it over.

Cain swiftly checks the date. "I've only been dead for three days?"

How? How? He's been gone for years—maybe a decade or longer. For a moment, he thinks he's going to faint as the entire meaning of time itself warps and wobbles inside his brain.

"We, uh, didn't expect you to come back this time," Otero says. "We had guys waiting outside the coroner's until yesterday. When you didn't come out, we thought..."

"I didn't come from the morgue."

Otero's quiet for a moment, save for his loud, uneven breathing. "Yeah."

Cain wonders about his old body. Does it still exist here—can it? Does his soul truly reside in a wholly different version of himself? He may not have come from the morgue, but he decides he'll go there later.

"I need money," Cain says, ignoring the other man's discomfort. "And everything we've got for Peter Avery's identity."

"You staying in L.A.?"

"For now. I also need to know what's going on at the police department. Contact Barrow, and he'll get in touch with Morrison."

"Barrow's in custody."

"Fuck," Cain breathes. "See if you can't bail him out. Chances are they won't be able to hold him for long. What about Chloe?"

"Suspended. Ten days, we heard."

"And Lucifer?" Cain can't quite smooth the anger from his voice.

"No sight of him, but we suspect he's at his penthouse. He's shut down the nightclub." Interesting. "Have they been seen together at all?"

"Not in the last few days."

Something's going on there. Most of his time in L.A. was spent prying them apart. "What about Espinoza and Lopez?"

"They're suspended, too. Ten days."

As Otero drives, Cain mulls over his options, what few there are. Although he'd heard rumors of a hellish time zone, they had always been just that, rumors—little whispers from half-reliable sources. He never could have imagined how extreme the time difference was.
Three days out from his earthly death means investigations are just getting started. Everything’s too hot. Best to lie low and regroup, even if his wings pinch beneath his skin, longing for action. With a few calls and a few favors, he can start making inconvenient things go away. Revenge will have to come later.

Otero drives him to a nondescript, single-family dwelling buried in a Brentwood subdivision of other, similar little boxes. He parks at the edge of the driveway, his eyes glued to the curving cul-de-sac ahead.

"Anything else, boss?"

Cain stares at him. "Look at me," he says.

Slowly, Otero turns his head. He maintains his vise-grip on the steering wheel, and Cain gets the distinct impression that he's staring at his forehead, rather than into his eyes.

"Do I scare you?" Cain asks.

For a moment, Otero is silent. "I don't scare easy," he says finally. A non-answer.

"Yeah, but I am different now, I know," Cain says, his lips lifting in a small, vicious smile. "Nothing's changed for you, though. You still work for me. You still owe me."

"I know."

"Good. I'm glad you understand."

Cain stands alone in the morgue, the refrigerant of the open cold chamber chilling the area around him. To look upon his former self is to look upon a clone he never expected to have. In the right light and circumstance, the average person might not be able to tell them apart, but he sees and feels the differences.

Some are obvious—the wings hidden beneath his flesh, the black eyes, the hole in his breast, the carved remnants of SINNER, which never completely healed. Other changes are less obvious. He's stronger now, as evidenced by the way his muscles run down his arms and legs. And his face is harder, narrower, his eyes a little more sunken, as if food can't quite satiate his hunger.

Hunger... The sensation hit him hard shortly after he showered at the safe house. For the first time in a very long time, he could fill his gut with something other than sour air. What little food had existed in Hell, existed only in Nox, and tasted unsurprisingly of ash. Now, though, having eaten, his stomach bloats painfully, and he wonders at the wisdom of feeding this changed body of his. There is no guidebook for what he has become.

_No matter what you tell yourself, you can't outrun what you've done. What you truly are._

Cain brushes his fingers across lifeless skin and wonders who and what he is now. If it's enough to survive.

The door to the morgue opens, and Cain shoves the cold chamber closed on his old body and old life. It's late. The medical examiner's office closed many hours ago, but the Sinnerman's network has always operated at odd hours and in dark shadows.

Narcotics Detective Matthew Morrison swagger inside and freezes. _"Pierce?"_
"Morrison." Cain stares at the man, noting, as always, his soft, round middle, which speaks of a comfortable life free from hardship.

"I..." Morrison flinches beneath Cain's black gaze. "Everyone's being told you're dead."

"Yet here I am."

Morrison looks around the room, as if only now considering the odd choice in meeting place. "I brought the feathers," he says, lifting a large, navy shopping bag at his side.

"And I brought cash," Cain says, offering a thin smile. He pulls a wad of bills from his back pocket and waves them at Morrison, who hesitantly plucks them from his fingers. Morrison hands over the shopping bag.

Inside are three large evidence ziplocks, all nearly bursting with bloodstained angel feathers. There must be hundreds.

"We good?" Morrison asks, folding his arms across his chest. He's eager to leave.

"One other thing," Cain says. "Watch out for Decker. Lopez, too. They're good, and they're going to be on high alert."

"What about that idiot Decker works with? What's his name—Morningstar?"

Cain sneers. "Leave Lucifer to me."

Chapter End Notes

Huge thanks to ObliObla, puerile, and TheYahwehDance.

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Lieutenant Garcia stacks more papers onto Chloe's file sorter as he passes her desk. Lucifer's hand darts out, narrowly preventing the towering pile from sliding sideways to the floor.

"Bloody hell," he murmurs. "This is quite the punishment."

"Yeah," Chloe sighs, not bothering to look up from the report she's working on.

She's only five hours into an unknown number of days or weeks or months of her demotion, but it already feels like much more time has passed. How did Dan survive this for months? How did she, when she was pregnant?

Another half-hour crawls forward to the tune of the bullpen's noise and Lucifer's ceaseless fidgeting. He tears into two bags of chips from the vending machine, plays a game on his phone (volume on, until she insists he mute it), screws and unscrews the cap on his flask at least five times, and keeps touching everything. Finally, Chloe drops her pen and stares at him, exasperated.

"What?" he asks, one seasoning-covered finger hovering near his lips.

It's frustrating how distracting that finger is, now that she knows a little of what it can do. Now that she's eager to learn more.

"You're being a lot right now."

"When am I not?" he snickers, before sucking his finger into his mouth suggestively. As if they're not in the middle of the precinct.

"Are you bored?" she asks dryly.

He pops his finger out of his mouth. "Of course I'm bloody bored," he retorts. "This is boring. We should be out catching deplorables. Instead, they've turned you into a glorified paper-pusher."

"No one's making you stay."

"Well, what am I supposed to do if I'm not here with you?"

"I don't know. How have you spent the last several years without me?"

He arches a brow.

"Okay, maybe I don't want you to do...that."

"Except with you." He smirks.

She pretends not to have heard him. "Can't you do whatever you usually do when you leave in the middle of one of our cases?"

He couldn't have always been sleeping around and doing drugs. Could he?

"I'll have you know I've only ever left when there's been Devil business to attend to."
Chloe rests her chin in her hand. "Isn't any business you have Devil business?"

"Touché, Detective."

"So, do you have any Devil business to attend to now?"

"Not particularly." He brushes at the knee of his pristine, charcoal-colored suit.

She softens a little as she realizes he doesn't want to be sent away. "Look, there's just not a lot you can help me with right now, okay?" She reaches toward the hand on his knee, only to back away as her desire for professionalism overrides all else. "It's going to be like this for a while," she continues gently. "I don't know how long. At best, another detective will make me log evidence at a crime scene or question witnesses. Not exactly exciting stuff. There really isn't a good reason for you to stick around, not unless you want to partner up with another detective."

"Don't be absurd."

"It was just a suggestion." But inside, she's pleased he's hers.

"It's not right what they're doing to you." He frowns.

"It's not entirely wrong, either, though," she argues, shrugging. "I've made some unprofessional decisions that could reflect poorly on the department."

Lucifer looks like he's about to comment on that when Dan appears around the corner. "Hey, Chlo, can we take a rain check on Taco Tuesday?"

"I was going to suggest the same thing," she says, nodding toward the mountain of paperwork. "I've...been demoted."

"Yeah," he says, glancing between her and Lucifer. "I...heard."

Saw, too, judging by the uncomfortable expression on his face. Her cheeks heat. They both know she never looked with him like she did in those pap shots. Theirs had been a steady, comfortable sex life. O-face-on-the-dance-floor wasn't exactly their style. Turns out it might be hers.

She clears her throat. "How about pizza on Friday?"

"Works for me," Dan says, tapping a folder against her desk.

"Ooh, shall I bring my pizza stones?" Lucifer asks. Chloe knows by the look on his face that he's reveling in the awkward tension between her and her ex-husband.

Dan crosses his arms over his chest. "Taco Tuesday is family night."

"Ah, but this is Pizza Friday," Lucifer quips.

"You can't just go around—"

"Ella!" Chloe pipes up as the other woman comes to stand next to Dan. "You free on Friday? Pizza at my place." She looks at Dan and Lucifer pointedly. "Trixie would love to see you all."

Lucifer smirks at Dan.

"Oh, man," Ella groans, "I'd love to, but me and a few friends just started a new D&D campaign." She curtsies in her skinny jeans and vintage Back to the Future t-shirt, and says dramatically, "I'm
Qixina, elven warrior princess from Arrentgar. I narrowly survived the coup my cousin Beihorn orchestrated with the help of the greedy merchant class."

"Elves?" Lucifer scoffs. "As if the fae would tolerate such competition."

Chloe boggles at him a beat too long before nodding at Ella. Confused as she is, she tries to be supportive. "Wow. That... You'll have fun with that."

"Yeah, totally," Ella agrees, grinning. Then she seems to realize what Lucifer's said, as well. "Wait. Hold on. Dude, faeries are real?"

"Unfortunately," Lucifer answers. "If you ever cross paths with one, back away slowly and don't look it in the eye."

Dan grumbles about "crazy bullshit" and turns away. Ella grabs his elbow before he can leave. "Hold up, I was coming to get you guys. Everybody have a minute?" She nods, none too subtly, toward her lab.

"We should be careful meeting like this," Dan says, once they've all filtered into the lab. "The suits are watching Chloe more closely than ever now." He glances at Lucifer, an accusation in his eyes. Lucifer smiles placidly.

"Did you get a fingerprint from the pen?" Chloe asks, all business when she's unable to deal with the men in her life.

"I finally got the time to work on it," Ella confirms. "I could only isolate half a print, but it was enough to find it matched one of the fingerprints that was all over Imler's house. It's not Eddie's, either."

"The unknown female," Chloe says.

"The one and only."

So, not Otero. Shay, maybe—assuming Shay, whoever she is—is actually connected to any of this.

Chloe sighs. "So none of this really helps us, and we can't tell Webb about it because the pen wasn't acquired legally."

"Oh, yeah," Ella says, "I forgot they took you off those cases today, what with your"—she raises her arms and gyrates her hips—"muy caliente" pictures."

Lucifer eyes her hips appreciatively. "Salsa, Miss Lopez?"

"How'd you guess?" she asks, her body stilling as her face lights up with a grin. "My aunt was a teacher!"

"Is there anything else?" Chloe bites out, her face burning hot. She very intentionally avoids Dan's gaze.

"Uh, yeah, actually," Ella says, grabbing her work tablet from a desk. "Firefly heroin was found on the scene at two of last week's homicides."

"How's that bloody possible?" Lucifer gripes. "I've been trying to buy it for weeks. No one has any."

Chloe and Dan glare at him.
"It's for research," Lucifer defends, holding his hands up. "As if I'd use tainted heroin."

"Not helping," Chloe tells him.

"Where's Narcotics on all of this?" Dan asks.

Ella shrugs. "They say they're working on it."

"I'll believe it when I see it," Chloe huffs.

As they exit Ella's lab, Lucifer touches Chloe's back and bends to her ear. "Shall we see what our good friend Detective Morrison is up to, after hours?" he asks.

"It's tempting..."

"Well, you know I love a good temptation."

She flashes him a smile before sobering. "Lucifer, if I get caught following around another corrupt cop, I'm done. There are people here who still don't like me after Palmetto, and certainly not after Pierce—and now I've been demoted. I have even less of a right to go around investigating things."

"I can go alone."

"It's too dangerous."

He snorts. "Immortal, remember? At least when you're not around."

"I forget that." Chloe touches his waist. "I guess it's hard to wrap my head around. Even after what happened in Colinda."

Because what does immortality mean? Forever? Really? And a more painful thought always follows: They have so little time. She'll be ashes in a blink of his eye.

"I'm in far more danger with you by my side than I am on my own," he says. "But even then, well, I can always come back." He points his thumbs back toward his shoulders.

Like Hell is nothing to him. Like it isn't an exposed nerve that represents all the pain his family has caused him.

"I-I still don't want you to go without me," she says. "Stupid as that is. We're a team."

Lucifer's expression turns tender as he tucks hair behind her ear. "Okay."

Sighing, Chloe takes a step back, putting distance between them. Lucifer chuckles. "Afraid we might turn on your coworkers, darling?"

"Let's just...keep the PDA to a minimum," she says, as much to herself as to him. She frowns. "Actually, you need to go home. Really."

"But—"

"No, you're bored, and you're driving me crazy because of it. Go. Home."

"Very well." Leaning toward her ear once more, he says in a low, dulcet tone, "See me later if you want to unwind."
She watches him leave, her heart rattling against her rib cage. It's hard not to follow.

After her demotion, Chloe lives on tenterhooks. Every morning, she wakes early and, doing her best not to disturb the furnace of a man pressed against her, rises from bed. Retreating to the bathroom, she browses *The Telegraph* on her phone. Although she dreads the day they publish their article on the LAPD, its content can't be any worse than what she's imagined it might contain.

Maybe she really *does* deserve what's happened. She has been unprofessional while on duty, and that really could have repercussions for the LAPD. Lines have been crossed, time and again, with Dan, then Marcus. They're being crossed no less now. Just because your partner is a civilian consultant definitely doesn't mean you're allowed to sleep with him. Not that she has any intention of stopping.

So many questionable decisions, so much self-sabotage. And yet she's also worked hard to be taken seriously, to be seen as more than "barely legal" breasts. It took even more effort to escape her father's shadow and become her own detective. She's not sure what she'll do if a sensationalized—or, maybe worse, an *accurate*—recount of her love life destroys her career. To think what Linda's ex-husband, Reese Getty, might have done with all the salacious info.

And of course *that* line of thinking makes her realize Reese figured out the truth.

What else might clever *Telegraph* reporters figure out?

Then it happens. Three days after TFF! published the paparazzi shots, *The Telegraph* runs its article on the LAPD. Sitting on her bath mat, Chloe takes a deep breath as she selects the suspiciously benign headline.

*LAPD's former lieutenant had history of cutting corners*

The article is surprisingly short, but even so, she skim reads. When she doesn't see her name, she frowns, returns to the top, and reads more closely. There's nothing. Although the broader Sinnerman network is barely discussed, Marcus Pierce is dragged through the mud for his questionable work at the LAPD and in Chicago. Meanwhile, there's no mention of her or Dan, no mention of Lucifer or TFF!.

Confused, but also giddy with relief, she types in the address for TFF!'s website next. For some reason, looking at the paparazzi shots of them together has become part of her morning routine, even though, by now, she knows the pictures by heart. (As does her mother, disturbingly, if all the emoji exclamation points in her text messages have been anything to go by.)

In one photo, Lucifer's dark eyes are on her mouth, while his hands bunch fabric at her hips. In another, his fingers are buried in her hair, tilting her head back so he can kiss her throat. Her hands are no less busy in the photos, caught beneath the open collar of his shirt, resting low on a hip bone, or carding through his hair. In all of the photos, they're pressed so close that there's no space for light to escape between them. Their want is palpable.

And then there's her face, which tells a story of its own. To anyone else, she probably looks like just another woman caught under the Devil's spell. But there's something strong and wild about her, too, that she's not seen in herself in years, and maybe never to this degree. Visual evidence that she knows *exactly* what she's getting into with Lucifer Morningstar—and likes it. A sort of "take the Devil by his proverbial horns" look.

But this time when she visits the TFF! website, she discovers it no longer exists. A simple landing
page has replaced the pink, flashy, celebrity-filled design. An old promotional image from the show *Bones* fills the page as a background. Dr. Temperance "Bones" Brennan and Special Agent Seeley Booth are pressed back-to-back as they dance with skeletons. Layered atop the image is a quote, presumably from the show:

"Every society has its bottom-dwellers, and every society fears its bottom-dwellers, because they are a symbol of what happens in that society if you fail."

There's only one person who would be so dramatic and corny.

Chloe scrambles to her feet and yanks open the bathroom door. Lucifer looks up, from where he stands next to the bed, getting dressed in one of the suits he's shoved into her overstuffed closet. She launches herself at him, throwing her arms around his middle. He embraces her with ease, no longer hesitant to return touch.

"You're in a cracking good mood," he laughs, his hands warm through her shirt.

"The Telegraph published their article today."

"Ah. Did they now?"

"I'm not in it."

"Lovely."

"You're not in it, either. Or Dan."

"Hmm."

She leans back enough to look up at him. He's not quite smiling, but his eyes have crinkled at their corners in pleasure. "And TFF! doesn't seem to be in business anymore."

"Someone was bound to buy them eventually. They owned prime real estate on the Strip."

"The new owner seems to really like *Bones*."

He grins. "It's a bloody good show."

"Thank you," she says.

"Ah, well, your desire was obvious." He shrugs a shoulder. "I would have been remiss not to fulfill it. Besides..." He looks away, avoiding her gaze. "I couldn't have you regret being with me."

"Hey," she admonishes gently, turning his face toward hers. "I haven't. I wouldn't."

They stare at each other for a long moment before Lucifer turns his head and presses a kiss to her palm. His expression is haunted, as if he can't quite accept what she's said. Chloe knows there's no arguing with that feeling. She'll just have to prove it to him over time—that she's not his parents or siblings, that she won't turn against him. Unfortunately, time is the one thing she doesn't have a lot of, at least compared to someone who will live forever.

"You used favors?" she asks.

"Of course." He arches a brow, challenging her to argue with his methods.

She nods. What's done is done, and she's grateful for his unorthodox meddling this time. But there's
just one thing...
"Did you, um..."
He tilts his head in interest. "Did I, um, what, darling?"

"Did you save a copy of the pictures?" She asks so quickly that the words come out bunched together.

Lucifer's head falls back as he laughs. "Who do you take me for? Of course I bloody well have copies. The RAW files were part of the real estate deal." His eyes narrow playfully. "So, you want copies, as well, do you?"

"I... Yeah."

"And, pray tell, why do you want them?" he asks. His voice slips into that richness that she has an almost Pavlovian response to now.

"I like seeing us together," she admits on a whisper.

"Good. I do, too." His thumb sweeps across her lower lip. "Dearie me, you're quite red. Why are you so embarrassed?"

"I don't know." Which is true, mostly. She's no blushing virgin, not by a long shot, and it's easy to be physical with Lucifer, but speaking openly about her desires to one who's seen and done it all is sometimes intimidating. How boring and vanilla she must seem, getting off to fully-clothed pictures of them together.

But then, as if he senses this, Lucifer leans forward, dropping his forehead to hers, and says, "Don't you know your desires are mine, too?"

It's the truth. He doesn't lie.

Chloe knows she's hit rock bottom when she hides in the bathroom. Sitting atop a closed toilet lid, she blows out a shaky breath. This morning, she felt so hopeful after what Lucifer had done. The Telegraph article laid no blame on her. TFF! was gone, even if pictures on the internet never really disappear. She'd hoped—stupidly, maybe, but hoped, just the same—that it would be enough for Chief Mitchell and Lieutenant Garcia to reconsider her demotion.

But promotions don't work that way, and with the addition of Zack Webb, the department has no need for more homicide detectives right now. She's stuck doing grunt work. Stuck listening to Webb, who sits two desks away, ask all the wrong people, all the wrong questions—often over the phone, no less—as he flounders through his new job. He seems well-intentioned, just...very green. His partner, Detective Hopper, is retiring in six months and doesn't care about any of it.

There's a good chance the soonest she'll be back to work is when Hopper retires.

What happens to her cases? How is she supposed to do anything now?

You could do things Lucifer's way, she thinks, and immediately shies away from the notion. That way lies a slippery slope. They already cut corners together. What happens if they cut even more? At what point does a good cop become a bad one?

Unrolling several fistfuls of single-ply toilet paper, she dabs at her wet face before choking out
another tired sob. A second later, the bathroom door creaks open, and footsteps slap across the tile. Chloe stiffens.

"Hey, Chloe? You in here?"

She relaxes marginally. "Hey, Ella."

"You okay? You sound...not so good?"

Chloe palms her forehead and breathes a half-hearted laugh. "I don't know. Just not sure how long I can do this." She looks down at the black sneakers that have replaced her black boots ever since she sprained her ankle in the desert. "It's only day three, and I just feel so...useless."

And she misses Lucifer, which is foolish and clingy enough to make her cringe. She has him at night. It should be more than enough. In fact, they should want space. But, really, if she's honest with herself, she misses working beside him almost as much as she misses working cases altogether.

"The suits'll come 'round," Ella says. "They have to, right? You're the best detective we've got."

"What if they don't?" Chloe asks, voicing a fear that's been brewing over the last three days. "If someone's replaced Pierce, and they still have people here, demoting me, which gets rid of Lucifer, too, is a smart move. I mean, I know the pictures were bad—"

"Also hot."

"—but, I don't know, why didn't they just suspend me? I mean, the crime scene with Pierce was way worse." Or is she too biased to see the truth about her own behavior? "Why'd they demote me and immediately hire Webb?"

"You think he's in on it?"

"No, but he'd be a really useful idiot." She winces, feeling mean. "I shouldn't say that. I don't know him."

Ella's phone chirrups with a message. "Oh, yeah," she says a moment later. "I was just coming to get you. Apparently you're not replying to Lucifer's messages?"

"So he's complaining to you?" she laughs. "Do you know how many messages he sends me now? I wouldn't get any work done if I replied to them all."

"Yeeaah, I can imagine. He won't stop sending me gifs. But...he's kinda here? Waiting for you."

"What? Since when?"

"Since, like, a half-hour ago? He said he was picking you up for pizza night?"

That wasn't the plan, and whenever Lucifer goes off script... Chloe jumps up from the toilet and unlocks the stall.

"Dude," Ella says, eyes wide when she takes in Chloe's appearance. "I had no idea you were this upset! You totally need a hug, don't you?" She throws her arms around Chloe tightly.

Over Ella's shoulder, Chloe sees herself in one of the mirrors above the sinks. She's definitely looked better. Once Ella lets go, she scrubs at her skin, drying the remnants of her tears.
When she reaches for the bathroom's door handle, Ella stops her with a hand on her shoulder.

"Is he still the same old Lucifer?" Ella asks. "He's good to you?"

"He's good," Chloe says, meaning it in more ways than one.

Ella's face lights up with a smile. "Good. Great. I thought so. I just...had to check, y'know? After Pierce and all."

Chloe nods. "Thanks."

"No problem. Hey, you think he'd ever show me his wings?"

"Ask him to fly you somewhere sometime," Chloe snickers and exits the bathroom.

To her great surprise, Lucifer has actually behaved himself. She expected to find him intimidating Detective Webb or causing some other trouble, but he waits for her in the parking lot instead, leaning against the Corvette, tapping away on his phone. When she nears, he looks up.

"Detective Decker," he says, emphasizing her title with a smile, "you're late."

"Am I?" she laughs. A soothing warmth seeps into her bones as she takes in the sight of his black-clad form.

"Oh, yes." His smile broadens. "It's"—he glances at a nonexistent wristwatch—"five o'clock somewhere. Quitting time, laborers call it."

"It's a quarter past four."

"I said somewhere, didn't I?"

"I really should keep working..." Especially after all the time she wasted in the bathroom.

Stepping one leg forward, he leans and grabs her hand, drawing her to him. She looks around uncertainly, torn between wanting to be close and fearing being seen.

"Let me tell you a story about thankless tasks and ungrateful taskmasters," Lucifer says. "So long as you're obedient, more tasks will magically appear. And they'll get worse."

"That's not true. Dan was reinstated."

"But you're not Daniel, are you?"

"No," she agrees. She's not part of the brotherhood. Can't be, due to a quirk of birth. "I just don't want to lose my job. If I just knuckle down and get through this demotion, they'll—"

"They'll still have no idea what they've got in you," he interrupts. "Trying to top from the bottom won't work here, darling. You've no means with which to control this situation, except through a little good old fashioned disobedience." He smiles slightly. "So, let's skive off, shall we?"

Two hours and three glasses of wine later, Chloe is glad she skived off. She stands in her kitchen, making pizzas with her daughter and the Devil, and it's good, even if it's far from simple.

Beside her, Lucifer shudders in disgust while watching Trixie. "Must you touch your face every thirty seconds?"
Trixie giggles and rubs her cheek flagrantly.

"What is wrong with her?" Lucifer complains. "Cheeky mite."

Chloe glances at him while grating cheese. "I guess you'd know a rebellious kid when you saw one, huh? You realize her cooties are basically my cooties, right?"

"Half of them are Daniel's. I did not sign up for those."

"Be nice," she sing-songs, and then laughs at the incongruity of saying that to a retired torturer. She may be a little tipsy.

"You're no bloody help at all, are you?" Lucifer lets the bell pepper slices he was holding drop to the cutting board.

Chloe yelps when he jams a damp hand into her right, back jean pocket. "What are you—"

"Trust you to carry gloves when those fools aren't even sending you anywhere," he says, triumphantly lifting nitrile, which he foists upon Trixie. "If you're going to be foul, put these on before you handle the food."

Trixie grins and drags the gloves on. "They're too big," she says, waving floppy, blue fingers. "They'll do. Don't even bother asking your mother to carry a size that will fit you."

Chloe rolls her eyes as a knock sounds at the front door.

"Daddy!" Trixie makes a run for it, droopy gloves swallowing her wrists. A moment later, she squeals, "Aunt Izzy!"

A cherry tomato rolls out of Chloe's hand and falls to the floor, where it bounces before settling. "Oh, shit."

"My delicate ears," Lucifer laments. "Where's your little swear jar run off to?"

Ignoring him, Chloe rushes around the kitchen counter, to her front door. Trixie's wrapped around her aunt, who wears her trademark flowing black lace. Dan walks into the apartment behind his sister, a silent apology written on his face.

"Ooh, I didn't realize you had a sister, Daniel," Lucifer says at Chloe's back.

"Well, I do," Dan says. To Chloe, he says, "Ozzy thought she'd come for a visit. Unannounced."

"Showing up on your doorstep is the only way I ever get to see you," Izzy laughs and reaches over to poke his side. "If I tell you I'm coming, you find a way to leave town."

"Maybe take that as a hint?" Dan says.

"Izzy? Ozzy?" Lucifer says, looking confused. "Surely you've a real name."

Izzy smiles, her dark eyes roaming over him in a way that sets Chloe's teeth on edge. A few years older than Dan, age has done little to diminish the beauty of her heart-shaped face. Dark, brown-black hair falls in thick waves to the middle of her waist, framing her lace-covered curves. She really does look like the beguiling witch she claims to be.

"Isabel Espinoza," Izzy says, stepping forward and extending a hand. "Most people call me Izzy."
"Except Danny, who's embarrassed by his roots, and so feels the need to call me names."

"I'm not embarrassed," Dan grunts.

"Isabel is a perfectly good name," Lucifer says, shaking her hand. "I'm—"


Lucifer's mouth stretches into a delighted grin. "My reputation precedes me, I see."

"Danny may have mentioned you once or twice." Her eyes sparkle with mischief. "The cards have mentioned you more times than that."

"Cards?"

"Izzy," Chloe sighs. This is precisely why she rushed in.

"Can you not?" Dan says. "Just this once?"

Izzy smiles at them sweetly. "After dinner, then."

"Wait, are you referring to tarot?" Lucifer barks a laugh, his gaze becoming sharp and shark-like.

"Aunt Izzy's psychic!" Trixie says.

"Not bloody likely. Cold or hot reader, more like," Lucifer says darkly, and Chloe watches as he takes Trixie by the shoulders and pulls her toward him. Trixie tilts her head back and grins at him. "Also known as a charlatan who's not to be trusted, child."

"Says the dude who calls himself the Devil," Dan says.

"He is the Devil," Trixie insists, and Chloe frowns.

"See?" Lucifer says, smirking. "Out of the mouths of babes."

"We'll see if you still think I'm a charlatan after I've laid your future bare," Izzy says, and Lucifer's smirk falters.

"Okay," Chloe interrupts, clapping her hands. "Let's finish putting the toppings on the pizzas and get them in the oven."

Dinner is less awkward than Chloe imagined it would be with Izzy present, but a far cry from the relaxing evening she was hoping for. Dan, who really is the most normal of the Espinoza clan, handles his sister expertly, steering her away from potentially unsafe topics, like the summer solstice. Lucifer glares across the table at Izzy and broods over his pizza, both of which strike Chloe as preferable to the Devil opening his big, fat mouth. Trixie, too excited by her aunt's visit, for once fails to notice the tension in the room, and instead chatters on about the day she and Brittany had at Super Silly Fun Land.

When Dan slides the last piece of pizza off Lucifer's pizza stone, Chloe stands up. The room gives a pleasant tilt, and she realizes Lucifer may have refilled her wine glass a few times too many.

"Time for bed, monkey."

"But—" Trixie's protest is cut off by a yawn.
"Right," Dan laughs, ruffling the hair on her head as he pulls her into a hug. "Past your bedtime, kid."

"But I wanna stay up with Aunt Izzy."

Izzy smiles. "Tell you what? Why don't I come and stay with you tomorrow?" To Chloe and Dan she says, "No need to have a sitter when you have a sister in town."

Just how long is she planning on staying?

Dan narrows his eyes. "Not happening, Ozzy."

Chloe says more diplomatically, "We'll see." She gives Trixie a firm look. "Bedtime."

When she returns from tucking her daughter in, she finds Lucifer scrubbing at the kitchen countertop with barely-contained violence. Dan and Izzy's voices carry softly from where they sit round the table on the terrace.

Chloe touches Lucifer's wrist, stilling his hand. "You're going to wear a hole in my kitchen." He drops the rag. "What's wrong?" she asks in a whisper.

"I'm very close to doing something bad, and you're not going to like it. I should probably leave."

Her eyebrows raise high on her forehead. "What are you wanting to do?"

"I want to show her my face."

"Oh. Yeah. Maybe don't? Izzy's harmless."

"I hate liars, Chloe."

"I lie sometimes. You don't hate me."

"That's different," he huffs. "You lie for selfless reasons."

She rolls her eyes. She's his blindspot, which is as frustrating as it is flattering. "Would it help to know Izzy's not lying?"

Lucifer looks at her sharply. "She's conned you, as well?"

"No," Chloe soothes. "No, she hasn't 'conned' me. I just mean, Dan's family... They're into witchcraft, I guess? I don't know. He stays away from his family, mostly. But Izzy believes what she does is real, so, in a way, it is real. To her, at least."

That gives him pause. "Manifests her own reality, does she?" he scoffs. "There may be some truth to that, I suppose."

She knew that'd hit home.

"And some of her readings turn out to be pretty uncanny, anyway," Chloe says. Before accepting the truth about Lucifer and all he represents, the general cogency of Izzy's readings was one of the few things Chloe could never explain. She typically filed them under coincidences and self-fulfilling prophecies, but now she's left to wonder...

"Hmm." Prickly and unconvinced, Lucifer fiddles with his cufflinks. "Let's see how well she can read the Devil, shall we?"
Oh, no.

Lucifer strides out the door to the terrace and drops into one of the wooden outdoor chairs across from Dan and Izzy. "Let's make a little wager, shall we?" he says to Izzy, interrupting whatever Dan was in the middle of saying. "If you can tell me what I'm going to do in the next five minutes, I'll...buy you Aleister Crowley's house."

"A house," Dan echoes.

"Yes. Here"—Lucifer's face is set aglow as he taps his finger across the surface of his phone —"I've written what I'm going to do. Best of luck."

"Lucifer..." Chloe warns, standing behind his chair. She grips his shoulder, feeling how the muscle beneath her fingers is bunched tight.

"No, no, it's okay." Izzy raises a hand. "He's right to be skeptical." To Lucifer, she explains, "But it doesn't work that way."

"Then what good is your craft?"

Dan tilts his beer bottle in Lucifer's direction. "That's my question. If you can't tell me the winning lotto numbers..."

"I just read the patterns the universe gives me," Izzy says, unperturbed.

"What bollocks. I assure you that's not your function," Lucifer says, his voice hard. "The universe isn't talking to you. It's a load of hydrogen and helium, and I should bloody well know. I was part of the planning committee."

Dan stares at him. "Welp. I'm gonna need another beer," he announces, rising from his seat and wandering back inside.

Chloe sits in the chair beside Lucifer's. "Maybe we could talk about something else?" She nods hopefully at Izzy. "Like politics?" A safer subject.

But if Izzy hears her, she doesn't respond. Dragging a finger along the thick wrap of lace at her waistline, she pulls out a worn deck of tarot cards. She looks Lucifer in the eye as she begins to shuffle them. "I've been led here for a reason."

"Bloody hell," Lucifer murmurs, drawing his flask from his jacket pocket, "now you sound like my brother. Am I some sort of test for you, too?"

Chloe touches his knee. "Do you need to go?" she asks softly.

He turns his head toward her, his eyes dark with mischief or something much, much worse. "I believe I'll be staying, darling."

She's aware he didn't answer her question.

Dan returns and sets the rest of the six pack between his chair and Chloe's. He settles in, popping the cap off a new bottle of beer. From where Lucifer sits across the table, watching Dan, he jams a finger in his mouth, leans over, and pokes it into Dan's ear.

"Oh, what the fuck?" Dan cries, leaning sideways.

"Too straight to enjoy a wet willy?" Lucifer jests.
Chloe snorts loudly before descending into laughter.

Dan glares at her treachery. "Keep your hands to yourself, man."

"Blame your witchy sister for not warning you. I planned this minutes ago." He flashes his phone's screen as proof.

Izzy shakes her head. "Focus, Lucifer."

"On what, your poppycock?"

"On whatever is plaguing your heart, whatever question you want answered."

Before he can spout off another catty remark, Izzy draws a card and slaps it down in the middle of the table. It's *The Star*. On the card, a larger-than-life, naked woman kneels, one foot in a body of water, one on land. She pours water from two clay jugs, one into the ocean and one onto the earth, to form rivers. High above, in the sky, seven white stars surround a larger, golden star.

"This is who you are," Izzy announces.

"Alas, I've no breasts."

"You delude yourself into thinking you are something else, but time and again, you will return to this, your true form."

Lightbringer, Chloe marvels, and scoots to the edge of her chair. She props her elbows on the table and leans forward.

Izzy draws a second card and places it to the right of the first, a half-card's height above it. The card's illustration has landed upside-down, so that it faces Izzy instead of Lucifer. Chloe knows from past readings with Izzy that this means the card is "reversed" and that it should be interpreted differently than if the illustration were upright.

On the *Knight of Wands*, a knight, bedecked in military accoutrements and a golden surcoat patterned with salamanders, rides on his warhorse into an unseen battle. His garment's fabric flies behind him in rippled flames. Beyond, desert sands and three pyramids lie in the distance.

"Your recklessness has held you back—and may continue to do so. Any cruelty you have visited upon others may be visited upon you."

When Lucifer doesn't reply, Chloe looks at him. He scowls at the card, as if a hard enough glare might destroy it.

Could he have destroyed matter, once, long ago? Can he now?

"Karma's a bitch?" Dan offers.

"Something like that," Izzy says.

She draws another card and places it a small space below the second. It's another Wands card, the *Ten of Wands*. A peasant bends beneath the heavy weight of a thick bundle of ten wooden poles.

Izzy taps the card. "This is a force outside of your control. It may be a burden of your own making, but it has taken on a life of its own. Whether you can survive it will depend on the rest of your growth—or regression."

When her hand returns to the deck, Lucifer finally pipes up, "How many bloody cards are you going to draw, witch?"

"Oh, we're doing a pentagram spread," Izzy replies with a hard smile. "Didn't you figure that out yet?"

Chloe laughs again, and this time Lucifer glares at her. "What? It's funny."

"I'll deal with you later."

She grins and his lips twitch.

Izzy places a fourth card on the table, on the lower left side of the central card. The Seven of Cups is packed with meaning that Chloe knows is lost on her. A silhouetted man gazes upon seven gold chalices resting on gray clouds. A symbol floats above each chalice: a human head, a shrouded body, a snake, a tower, a mountain of jewels, a laurel wreath, a dragon.

"The universe offers you many options, some light and some dark, but you can't choose to have them all. You can't be them all."

Lucifer gives a rude, slow clap. "Delightfully vague. You've missed your calling writing rubbish horoscopes for the chronicle."

Choosing to ignore him, Izzy lays down the fifth card above the fourth. Lucifer smirks at the nude Adam and Eve of The Lovers card. The couple stands in the Garden of Eden, beneath a blazing sun and a giant, red-winged, white-robed angel whose arms are spread wide. Behind Eve, a serpent wraps around the trunk of the fruit-laden Tree of Knowledge. On the right of the card, Adam stands in front of a tree whose leaves are flames.

"You're supposed to be the snake, right?" Dan asks, his words slightly slurred. Chloe is shocked by the growing collection of empty beer bottles beside her ex-husband. Izzy will have to drive him home tonight.

"No, I'm not supposed to be the bloody snake, Daniel. That's simply more propaganda my siblings started to turn mankind against me." Looking back at Izzy, he says, "Go on, then. Tell me about my sex life." Eyes widening, Chloe stills at his side awkwardly as he leans back in his chair and crosses his long legs. "Spoiler alert: It's quite brilliant, really. Highly flexible."

Izzy laughs, the sound smoky in her throat. "The card's not called The Sexcapades. It's called The Lovers."

"Your point?"

"This is the way forward. The storm ahead that you must survive, the needs you want met—all of these things are possible through partnership. It's about more than sex, and you know it."

The hairs on Chloe's arms prickle and raise as the wet beating of her heart rushes in her ears. She doesn't look at Lucifer, and she's aware, from the corner of her eye, how he doesn't look at her, either.

Because so what if she's some kind of miracle or the cards are screaming their names or they're good together? The elephant in the room is that there is no happy ending for them. She grows old and dies and goes where he cannot follow.

"And the final card?" Lucifer asks, withdrawn, as if he's spent all his humor.
"It better not be The Devil," Dan says.

It isn't. Izzy lays down The World at the top and center, completing the pentagram. A large, green wreath surrounds a naked woman who holds two short staffs. A purple scarf wraps loosely about her shoulders, winding down to her hips, and behind her legs. At each corner of the card, there's a figure's head—a man's, an eagle's, an ox's, and a lion's—settled, bodiless, against white clouds.

"This is the culmination of your journey, Lucifer—what all the other cards are leading to. Embrace your true self, shun the old habits that harm you and others, and find the strength necessary to fight the demons of your past by giving in to your desires fearlessly. This is the only path that leads to the wholeness you seek. Perverting it leads to destruction."

"Well," Lucifer says, his jaw tight, "this is quite the show you've put on."

"It's just for fun," Chloe says, trying to convince herself as much as she's trying to convince him.

Suddenly, Lucifer stands, plants his palms on the table, and leans over Izzy, snagging her with his gaze. "Why are you here, Isabel? What is it you desire?"

"I—" Izzy's eyes shift uneasily, trying to break free.

"Hey, man," Dan slurs, "don't pull that weird crap on my sister."

But Lucifer doesn't listen as he bears down harder. "Why are you Espinozas so bloody hard to tap into?" He snaps his fingers at Izzy. "Listen to me. What. Is. It. You. Bloody. Want?"

Chloe gasps when Izzy goes slack in her chair, her eyes glued on Lucifer. "I want to help heal what is broken. The cards sent me."

"Let her go," Dan barks, and shoves at Lucifer's shoulder, breaking the hold he has on Izzy.

Lucifer falls back into his chair as Izzy sits up slowly and shakes off his spell.

"You truly believe in all this," Lucifer says.

"I wouldn't be here if I didn't." With trembling hands, Izzy drags the cards from the pentagram spread back into her deck and reshuffles. "What about you, Chloe?" she asks.

Chloe startles and looks between Izzy and Lucifer, uncertain how she should interpret his outburst or ensuing listlessness. "Maybe we should call it a night."

"He'll be fine." Izzy shoots Lucifer a wry look. "Once the shock wears off."

Chloe's eyes drift to the cards in Izzy's hands. Once, this was a fun, if occasionally mystifying, way to pass the evenings when her sister-in-law barged into their lives. Now, she's not so sure...

"What is it you want in life right now?" Izzy asks.

Answering that is easy. "I want my job back."

Lucifer stirs to life beside her. "I've told you, darling, you need only say the words, and I'll see to it."

Dan squints at Lucifer suspiciously as Chloe sighs in frustration. "We've talked about this, Lucifer. As much as I know your way works—"
"I'm glad you admit that. Finally."

"—I can survive this demotion. Even if it lasts...a while. No cutting corners." Chloe nods her head firmly, trying to forget how she hid in the precinct bathroom only hours earlier. "I do this the right way, the official way, or I just, well, I just shouldn't even be a cop if I can't do that, you know?" She shrugs, frazzled.

Izzy hums thoughtfully. "Okay. So, it's not stability you're after. You want to make sure you don't cross the wrong line, that you're able to seek the truth in your work with a clear conscience. It's justice you desire, for yourself and others."

"Don't presume to know her desires," Lucifer gripes, and Chloe glances at him sidelong.

"Why?" Izzy challenges with a smirk. "Do you know them?"

"How dare you?"

"Let's have a look at your past, present, and future," Izzy says. Turning to face Chloe, she taps the edge of the deck on the table.

On the left, she places The Tower in the Past position. On it, lightning strikes a sky-high, gray citadel, setting its lone spire ablaze. Two panicked royals, having jumped from the burning tower, face certain death by gravity.

"Boring," Lucifer comments. He looks Chloe up and down. "I can draw far more interesting things out of you, you know."

Dan makes a sound of disgust.

"Shut up," Chloe says.

The second card Izzy draws is reversed. She sets the upside-down Devil, with its illustration of a bat-winged, Sabbatic goat, in the Present position. From Chloe's perspective, it looks as though the devil hangs by his feet from an altar, while two naked, horned, and chained captives, one female and one male, stand on the ceiling. Each captive has a tail: the female, a tail made from a grape bunch; the male, a tail made of pure, red flames.

"Hah!" Lucifer barks. "But why must they insist on depicting me as some rank goat? If I ever find the slanderous gobshite who started that rumor, I'll merge him with livestock."

Finally, Izzy places the last card in the Future position. It's the bizarrely-illustrated Sun. A bright yellow sun stares, aloof, above a nude, blond-haired infant, who rides atop a white horse. The child wears a crown of flowers, plumed by a tall red feather, and bares a flowing banner of the same red. In the background, sunflowers tower above a fence.

Izzy stills, falling silent. Chloe looks up at her uncertainly, only to find the other woman has paled. "What is it?" Chloe asks, glancing back and forth between the cards and Izzy. "What's wrong?"

"These are all Major Arcana cards," Izzy breathes.

"And that means what, exactly?" Lucifer leans forward in concern.

Dan sits up as well, his eyebrows raised. "Huh, never seen that happen, have you, Ozzy?"

"No."
"What?" Chloe snaps.

"The odds of drawing all Major Arcana cards are very slim," Izzy says.

"How many cards?" Lucifer asks, abrupt. "How many Major Arcana?"

"Seventy-eight cards," Izzy answers. "Twenty-two Major."

"Two percent chance," Lucifer says, nodding toward the cards.

"Since when are you so good at math?" Dan says, leaning his face against his beer bottle.

Lucifer rolls his eyes. "It's a universal language, Daniel."

Izzy stares at the cards. "You've experienced great turmoil," she explains, one finger hovering above The Tower. "Your entire world was destroyed by change. I feel..." She looks up. "I feel a part of you died here, Chloe."

"Don't be preposterous," Lucifer snarls. "As you can see, she has a pulse."

"But you aren't the same, are you?" Izzy asks, her brown eyes boring into Chloe.

The question crawls down her spine. On her right, Dan frowns.

Sensing Chloe won't answer, Izzy moves to the Present. "This is where you are now. A time of freedom," she explains, tapping on the inverted Devil. "You're finding control here, as well. Learning how to live in your changed world and mindset."

"Why, Isabel, I think I'm beginning to like this tarot nonsense." Folding his hands over his crossed knees, Lucifer gives Chloe a rakish grin. "You can find your control with me all you want."

Chloe shakes her head. "What's The Sun mean?" she asks.

"It represents freedom, as well, but more in a sense of...wholeness. Happiness. Contentment. You will find your purpose by embracing your present. Stay true to what you are becoming, and all will be well."

But what am I becoming? Chloe wonders, searching within herself.

Lucifer tips back his flask. "Well, now that you've—"

A blood-curdling scream cuts through the night.

Trixie.

Chapter End Notes

If you'd like to see a visual for the tarot spreads, you can do so here.

This one took a village. Huge thanks to ObliObla for staying up until the wee hours of the morning with me to read the Devil's future, and to Arlome and Maimat for checkin’ out my spreads (hey, ladies). Thanks, as well, to puerile for answering all my absurd forensics/police questions, and to Miah_Arthur’s son for doing probability math
so I didn't have to. The Devil may speak the universal language of math, but I basically only know how to word good.

TheYahwehDance is attending to "real life." Leave her a review on The Trouble with Brittanies. You'll love it. It's hilarious.

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After meeting with Morrison at the medical examiner's office, Cain returns to the safe house in Brentwood. Having found more ash beneath his nails and a lingering scent of sulphur on his skin, he showers a second time since returning to Earth, scrubbing until his flesh is raw. He turns off the water and dries with a towel, taking care to rub inside the uneven bend of the hole in his chest. He still doesn't understand how only three days have passed since his death. It will take longer than that to get the stench of Hell out.

Once dry, he sits in a t-shirt and boxers on the sofa, punching the channel button on the TV remote. Tap, tap, tap, tap. He stares at the screen, unseeing, his mind caught up in past lives, in Hell, in scheming.

A new mask is settling over him. He's Peter Avery. Born and raised in Minneapolis, Minnesota, to much older parents, both long dead. Forty-one. Single. Outdoorsy. College graduate. An accountant. His hair and eyebrows, now dyed black, contrast against his pale flesh. With a pair of custom contact lenses, he will almost pass for human again. He could maybe even disappear and start yet another new life on Earth. But it's not to be. Inside, his wings itch. There's a score to settle, a girl to get.

The feather-stuffed evidence bags taunt him where he set them on the coffee table. He hasn't decided what to do with them yet, but he is well aware of their value, unlike Morrison, who only demanded a thousand dollars for the theft. The man had no idea he was in possession of divinity worth more than platinum and gold. But that has always been the benefit to Morrison: he never asks questions. He's only there for the cash.

Meanwhile, there's no shortage of people who will give all their life's savings for one angel feather. All told, it's not a bad deal. Unlike the usual snake oil, feathers live up to their reputation. The sick are healed. The lame walk. The blind see.

A thought crosses Cain's mind. What might a feather do to him?

Curious, he rises from the sofa and wanders to the fire safe tucked inside his bedroom closet. He's stored one of the Pentecostal coins there, alongside the Hell-forged demon blade. He unlocks the safe and bends to retrieve the knife. Once he's resituated himself on the sofa, he takes a breath, counts to three, and stabs his thigh.

The blade, preternaturally sharp, sinks deep, like a diver sliding into the smooth expanse of an Olympic-sized pool. Pain flares instantly, but he breathes through it. What's one knife wound compared to thousands of horrific deaths and the tortures of Hell? This will heal.

He yanks the knife out of his leg. With no heart pumping inside his chest, no blood geysers from the wound. He sets aside the blade and presses his thumbs to either side of the laceration. With a hiss, he stretches it wide. The fluid inside is thick, black, and still. For the briefest moment, he is repulsed by his own body, but in the next he files the feeling away.

Leaning forward, he digs into one of the evidence bags and withdraws a small feather that is sure to be less valuable, one so coated in dried blood that it crunches between his fingers. With another deep breath, he shoves it into the gaping stab wound.
Bright, golden light blasts outward from the feather, blinding him and burning a fire into his blood and bone. He struggles to hold back a scream as agony consumes him. He claws the remnants of the feather away before his body can fully absorb it.

The feather doesn't heal, but injures, leaving behind black, necrotic tissue. Huffing and nodding to himself, he probes the tender flesh tentatively. There was a chance his body would react this way. After all, the Devil, as much as he denies it, is still an angelic child of God, built to oppose and control the very chaos which forged Cain's new body into existence.

Thick, scleral contact lenses cling to Cain's eyeballs like glutinous shells. His thigh burns as he depresses the gas pedal in his SUV. He drives, one hand on the steering wheel, trailing Chloe's gray Charger. Even with two cars wedged between them, and surrounding lanes busy with morning traffic, following her is a risk he shouldn't take. If anyone checks behind herself, it's Decker. But Cain can't stop himself. There's something about her he can't resist—something as alluring as it is infuriating.

For a short time, he believed she could purify him, burn away his sins and wash his hands clean until he stood before her, a new man. She had these soft moments, as soft as her skin, that she blessed him with. A kind, caring heart, a clever sense of humor. But whenever her lips found his in the dark, they were firm with hungry displeasure, firm with a point to prove—to him, to herself, he didn't know. He fucked her, but she never quite fucked him. When she looked at him, he knew she tried to mold his face into someone else's. That's how it's always been for Cain: People look at him, hoping to see another.

It was easy for her to pull the trigger in the loft. He knows that. In a way, he respects her for it. Wants her even more, because of it.

Chloe's turn signal flashes, and she edges into the drop-off lane outside Trixie's school. He slips into the adjacent lane, avoiding the line of cars, and hangs a right at the next corner to make the block. When he comes around, he catches the tail end of Trixie making a show of dragging herself up the stairs to the main doors.

He won't miss dealing with the kid when this is all over. Half the time, all she did was talk about Lucifer—what he said, what he did, why he wasn't coming around as much, and Mom, why can't we invite Lucifer? Marcus is going.

No, he won't miss her at all.

Yanking his baseball cap lower over his forehead, Cain falls back into the line of cars behind Chloe's Dodge. It doesn't take him long to realize where she's headed. The precinct is farther east, her apartment southwest. She turns north. While there are any number of places she might go in that direction, he knows she's going to Lux.

When she pulls into the underground garage twenty minutes later, he turns left, into the parking lot of the old chophouse across the road from Lucifer's building. Killing the engine, he shuffles lower in his seat and waits.

Neither Chloe's Dodge nor Lucifer's Corvette leaves the garage any time soon. She stays for hours, long enough that his casual stalking turns into a full-blown stakeout. By hour six, he can only imagine one thing they could be doing, and he idly wonders if she was cheating on him with Lucifer the whole time. But she couldn't have been, not least of all because infidelity wasn't her style. Lucifer was turned every which way by their relationship. Nearly gone mad between it and Maze's machinations.
A new development, then, he decides, seething. Didn't take her long to get over his death.

At two-thirty, the Dodge rolls out of the garage. Cain hastily cranks the engine to life and resumes his surveillance, following Chloe as she picks Trixie up from school and drops her off at Espinoza's apartment in Ocean Park. She runs errands afterward, going to the nearest pharmacy, where she spends a half-hour, only to exit with at least ten full shopping bags. Cain frowns, suspicious.

He expects her to go home, then, but she surprises him, instead driving back to Sunset Boulevard and Lux. She returns to the garage, and he returns to the chophouse parking lot. Hours pass again. Ludicrously, he imagines her shopping bags filled with condoms. Imagines Lucifer buck naked—a sight he's all too familiar with after their stint as a "couple" in the suburbs—plowing into Chloe. With a snarl, he slams his hand on the dash, denting leather and plastic.

The desire to confront them in this body is almost unbearable, his wings on the verge of exploding to life. But Cain breathes deep and beats his emotions into submission. You don't live thousands of years without learning how to be patient.

It's half-past ten when Chloe resurfaces.

Traffic is light, making it both easier and more challenging to trail her car, but he doesn't think he has to worry about Chloe seeing him right now. Something has happened. She drives erratically, sometimes speeding, sometimes dropping far below the limit. She forgets basic road rules, like signaling, and sits so long at a green light that the person in the car behind her is forced to honk.

When it becomes obvious she's headed home, Cain turns into a dark alleyway a few miles from her apartment complex and parks Peter Avery's navy SUV. Stepping out of the vehicle, he looks both directions down the alley. Spotting no one, he flexes his shoulders and lets his wings unfold onto reality. He shudders in pleasure. Holding them within is difficult, the near-constant tingling beneath his skin almost impossible to ignore.

Ensuring he's alone one last time, he stretches his wings wide and high. He bends his knees and leaps, driving his wings downward to catch currents of air that will lift him high. He climbs the sky to soar above the city, where he glides only briefly before diving down into Chloe's quiet subdivision.

Drawing his wings close to his back and then drawing them within, out of sight, he blends into the shadows between two trees that grow across the road from Chloe's complex. He waits for her in the darkness, his breathing so faint that he might be mistaken for a statue, were anyone to notice him at all.

A few minutes later, Chloe arrives. She parks poorly, the Dodge's front right tire wedged against the curb, the back left of the car swung too far out into the road. If she notices, she doesn't care. Cain watches as she stumbles from her vehicle, as if drunk. His eyesight is unnaturally good in the dark, and he sees how her hand trembles against the door handle, sees the dark discoloration on her jeans—red, like blood. He squints, curious.

She stays rooted in place beside her car and looks longingly at the street light down the road, her chest heaving. Briefly, she turns and looks right at him. He stares back, his lips twisting in a smile, but then she turns away, her eyes too weak to see him.

The light on her smartphone flares to life. He hears her take a deep breath, and then she's running—running from the shadows, to the light.
Even two hours later, the television and lights remain on in Chloe's apartment, but there's a stillness, too, that suggests she's fallen asleep. No matter if she hasn't—what is she going to do if she catches him? Shoot him? It's good to be powerful again.

Cain picks the lock to the apartment and slips inside. It's just as he remembered it. Warm and lived-in, bursting with little shots of color. For a moment, he stands at the doorway, struck by how close he was to having it all. To having her and a normal, human life, free from running and turmoil and violence.

But Lucifer was always in the way.

He walks on silent feet and finds her asleep on the couch. She rests on her side, curled in the fetal position around a silver pillow. Her face is pinched, and her eyes swing right and left behind her closed eyelids, playing out dreams. Cain watches her for several long minutes, his eyes hungrily roving the curves of her body, before he turns away.

In the upstairs bathroom, Chloe's day clothes are knotted in a pile on the tiled floor. They smell strongly of sweat and the rusty earthiness of dried and drying blood. He frowns at the massive bloodstain on the jeans. It's honestly past the point of being a bloodstain; it's more like a dye job.

He rearranges the clothes as he found them. Returning to the living room, he looks Chloe over as closely as he can without touching her. She doesn't look to be injured. Though circles darken the underside of her eyes, even in sleep, her flesh is healthy, not so pale as to suggest she's lost blood, much less a lot of blood.

So, whose blood is it?

It can only be Lucifer's. Cain smiles and slinks from the apartment.

Adrenaline, or whatever the equivalent is in this body, floods Cain's nervous system as he stands at the foot of the Devil's bed. Lucifer sleeps deeply; his wings, limp and battered and stained, droop on either side of the mattress. The room reeks of putrid infection, but Cain knows better than to let his guard down. Celestials heal quickly. The Devil will rise.

In Cain's palm, the hilt of the Hell-forged blade is warm to the touch. He glances at the ceiling, as if he might look into the eyes of God. Like Lucifer, like Amenadiel, like every human who's honest about his place in the universe, Cain's never been able to understand God's plans—if he has any. But he wonders what El Shaddai would think if his brightest son was snuffed out, once and for all. Would he know? Would he care, if he did?

A glass bowl full of spent bullets rests on the nightstand by Lucifer's head, confirming how Chloe spent her day. Confirming, also, that she finally knows the truth. About Lucifer, perhaps even about Cain himself.

Why would she come to the Devil's aid?

But it's obvious why, isn't it?

She chose him. She fixes him. And Cain is rejected once more.

He remembers his Hell loop, how Chloe stood naked before him and pressed the diamond engagement ring into his palm. The star-shaped wound carved above her heart glowed, aflame, branding her in a way no ring ever could.
Shaking his head, Cain returns to the present. None of those simulations were real, and yet it's as though he can feel the grit of ash between his teeth. As though he knows this is worse because it is real. Chloe may not be branded so literally, but her allegiances were clear, even before she shot him. His lip curls. She chose the creature who sent him to Hell.

Cain folds the blade closed and returns it to his pocket. He breathes through his teeth, struggling to contain his anger. Even if the only law in the universe is to kill or be killed, it's isn't enough to kill the Devil.

Only Lucifer's suffering, only his torment, will be enough.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to ObliObla and TheYahwehDance for their eyes.

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Trixie's cry is a call to arms. Lucifer's chair rakes against the terrace concrete as he rises beside Chloe, Dan, and Izzy. A sharp spasm ripples between his shoulder blades. Before he's able to rein in the familiar urge, his wings unfurl in one powerful crack, upending a chair in the process.

Chloe is oblivious to the feathered mayhem as she rushes inside the apartment.

"Whoa!" Dan yells, stumbling back into the table. "You're-you're—"

"The Devil, Daniel," Lucifer finishes, "as I've explained many times before." He narrowly avoids smacking the man with a wing as he folds his limbs against his back and follows Chloe.

At the doorway to the apartment, Lucifer sees Izzy catch Dan around the middle as he swoons drunkenly. Dan's stupor is brief, though, before he shakes himself and scrambles to catch up.

"Trixie—"

Inside, Chloe strides through the kitchen, to the living area and sliding door that opens into Trixie's bedroom. She shoves it aside, revealing the small, colorful room, lit by soft lamplight. Trixie sits up with her knees tucked to her chest, her brown, wavy hair hiding her face as she weeps into the cuddly toy she calls Miss Alien.

"Oh, monkey," Chloe whispers brokenly, going to her daughter at once and enfolding her in a tight embrace. Trixie latches onto her mother, wailing.

Lucifer eyes the closed window and the shadows of the room. His shoulders relax when there's no sign of an intruder, but his wings remain at his back and his heart continues to thunder.

An uncomfortable pressure squeezes at his lungs as he looks at Trixie and considers her paltry weight. She's much bigger than when he met Chloe, but the world—Earth, Heaven, Hell, all of it—is much bigger still. The thought of any harm coming to Chloe's daughter... Well, he would put the fear of the Devil in anyone who dared try.

Swallowing back a much darker side of himself, Lucifer says, "You were louder than Gabriel's horn, urchin." Trixie doesn't look up as she continues to sob uncontrollably.

Behind him, Dan shoves at a wing. "Outta the way, man. You're blocking the damn door with those-those things."

"Apologies," Lucifer murmurs. He supposes the child shouldn't see the blasted wings, either, come to think of it. Stepping back, he watches Dan go to Trixie. Like Chloe, he huddles close, and still Trixie is inconsolable. If Dan gives any more thoughts to the celestial evidence he's faced tonight, he doesn't share them aloud. "Are you quite all right, Daniel? Not feeling a touch woozy or anything?"

Dan glances at him briefly, blinking hard before shaking his head. "Look, man, my daughter needs me, okay? That's-that's all that's on my mind." It is most certainly not all that's on his mind, but with a shuddering sigh, he returns to rocking Trixie.

On Trixie's other side, Chloe offers soothing words. "It was just a bad dream, baby. A night terror.
You remember when you used to get those? You're safe. It's okay."

With no burglars or demons to war with, Lucifer is out of his depth. He backs away from the familial scene, disquieted by a longing he doesn't wish to examine. Drawing his wings even closer to his back, he unravels them into nildimensional space.

He turns toward the kitchen, his mind on the cabinet he's annexed for hard liquor, and comes face to face with Izzy. She leans against the counter, watching him with pensive, brown eyes.

"Nice wings," she says.

Lucifer huffs. "Yes, you don't seem the least bit surprised by them, do you?" A note of suspicion colors his words.

"Well, I am a witch."

"Perhaps," he allows.

"No perhaps about it," she says, as he drags a bottle of scotch from the cabinet. "And, no, nothing I've seen has surprised me."

He pours amber liquid into a glass, not bothering to offer her one. "Shouldn't you be in there?" he asks, nodding toward Trixie's room. "Seems a very human affair."

"I'm not leaving any time soon. I'll start helping her tomorrow."

"Seems she could use help now."

"She's coming into her second sight. Nightmares are par for the course. She needs guidance, but right now she needs her mom and dad."

Lucifer's brow furrows as he looks down at his glass. That the child might be special comes as no surprise to him. Chloe is a miracle, after all. How might that be passed on? And Daniel apparently comes from more colorful stock than he ever imagined.

When he turns away from the counter to face Izzy once again, he wears a coolly neutral expression. "And what second sight might that be?"

"Danny will never admit it," Izzy replies with a small smile, "but Trixie's just like our abuela. Always has been. She could see people's true natures. How much light and dark they carry within."

"Auras, you mean?"

"Something like that." Izzy shrugs. "Not my gift, but you're so bright, even I can see it."

Lucifer's mouth thins into a hard line as he swirls the scotch in his glass. "The child may have said something similar recently."

"Makes sense. You're The Star, remember?"

Oh, but that's not all he is, is it? "Your cards lie," he says.

"No, they don't."

He sniffs, downs the last of his drink in two swallows, and lets the glass drop to the counter with a hard clunk. Stepping close to Izzy, he says, mere inches from her face, "You don't know me,
witch.”

Izzy holds his gaze. "I know you're tearing yourself in two. You must decide who you're going to be."

Lucifer stands back with a disbelieving huff. Shaking his head, he rounds the counter, snatches his suit jacket from the back of Chloe's couch, and walks out the door.

In the penthouse, Lucifer tries not to think about the cards. Tries to sleep, and when that fails, tries to distract himself with television, with video games, with an A-bomb that his metabolism burns through in annoyingly short order.

Chloe texts him at two in the morning: *Are you okay? Why'd you leave?*

He's not sure how to answer either question, and so he evades, lest he lie in the process of trying. He texts: *Is Daniel all right?*

**Chloe: He'll be okay. We talked a lot.**

**Lucifer: And the child?**

**Chloe: I don't know. Tell you about it tomorrow?**

Lucifer sends a thumbs-up emoji, and they say nothing more. A part of him aches to be with her. He's grown so used to being with her at night—his place, her place, it doesn't bloody matter—that he's keenly aware of her absence. In bed, he lies on the side that's become hers, smelling her in the sheets. Why doesn't he go to her? She would open her arms. But something holds him back.

At dawn, after a long, sleepless night, he retreats to his bathroom for a scalding hot shower. The room is thick with steam when he steps out nearly an hour later. He dries off and wipes the mirror with a hand towel. Lingering condensation warps the shape of his face in the glass.

*Embrace your true self... This is the only path that leads to the wholeness you seek. Perverting it leads to destruction.*

The damned witch got to the heart of it, didn't she? As well as if she had drawn out his desires.

He *does* want to be whole. Yearns for it, more than anything. It's not as if he doesn't pay Linda a boatload of money for a reason. There are pieces of him that don't fit with the rest. The trouble is knowing which pieces to keep and which to discard.

Sometimes, now, when he's with Chloe, he feels he *is* whole, or something very near to it, but only because he forgets who his father wanted him to be, *forced* him to be. It's often in those moments when he can pretend he is only a man, his own man, enjoying the company of a woman who's too good for him, but somehow hasn't figured that out yet.

With Chloe demoted at the precinct, the fantasy quavers while he stays behind. When they're apart, Lucifer remembers the truth: that he's an angel, yes, but that he's the Devil, too. The position may have been forced upon him, but he earned the title. Reconciling that with the person, even the celestial, he wishes to be in Chloe's life is difficult, if not impossible.

Who is he *truly*? Who does he *desire* to be?

The simplest truth is he loves a mortal detective, and has for a long time. But whenever he reaches
for the word, to give life to the truth, it turns to ash on his tongue. Surely love isn't a word a punisher from Hell is allowed to keep in his vocabulary. Not when he remembers peeling off fingernails, pouring literal salt into literal wounds, and pulling out teeth. Not when he remembers laughing and taking pleasure in screams. Remembers he's a murderer—of Uriel, of Cain.

Sometimes, when he runs his hands across miracle flesh, he worries he defiles with his touch. Chloe accepts him, believes him to be good and worthy—he knows that now—but should she?

He reaches inside himself and calls forth his devilish eyes with ease. Staring into the hellfire, he feels nothing of the terror it inspires in others. Hellfire doesn't frighten one who's come to embody it. Still, he knows what others see, the torment that awaits them, and it's a horrible thing, knowing torture is built into every fiber of his being—that, on some level, he wills it to be.

Lucifer searches for his full, monstrous visage next. It's harder to find recently, but it hasn't disappeared this time. It's there, in a dark corner of his heart. He drags it forward and stares at the grotesque, scarred flesh in the mirror. The face remains because he believes he deserves it. And why shouldn't he? Murderers, torturers, they deserve punishment—he should know. Why should he be any different? And what a punishment it is, to be reminded of how he looked, those first days he plummeted into Hell.

Finally, he looses his wings. They stretch out in the bathroom, the left wingtip spilling past the open doorway.

*Time and again, you will return to this, your true form.*

The wings came first—a "gift" from Mummy and Daddy dearest—but does that mean they're his true form? He's unsure, but he no longer desires to cleave off the feathered extremities. They're too bloody useful, for one.

He grips the counter with char-black nails. The incongruity of his devil form set against his bright, angelic wings nauseates him. The pieces don't fit. He'll never understand how Chloe looked upon him like this without running away. How she came back and tended his wounds.

*The universe offers you many options, some light and some dark, but you can't choose to have them all. You can't be them all.*

But isn't it dishonest, to choose the light, to pretend there's no darkness inside him?

Linda regards him with a slight tilt of her head. "This tarot reading upset you a lot, didn't it?"

"They're just bloody cards," Lucifer grumbles, as if he hasn't barged into her office, unannounced, because of them.

She looks at him doubtfully, and he holds her gaze with great difficulty. "I have a friend who dragged me to a tarot reading once," Linda says. "It's pretty subjective stuff, Lucifer."

"Yes, but Isabel is an actual witch."

Her professionalism slips. "What, like a real one?" She holds up a hand and chuckles tiredly. "What am I saying? Never mind. Leave it to the Devil to find a real witch."

Lucifer shrugs a shoulder as he pours himself another glass of water. He would prefer whisky, but Linda keeps a dry office. "The most shocking thing of all is she's Daniel's sister."
"Really?" She blinks. "Dan Espinoza's sister?"

"Mm." He leans back into the couch and nurses his water. "As much as I hate to admit it, she's right, too. Or at least one of the cards was. I-I do wish to be...whole, Doctor."


"But that's the thing. I don't know if I can be." He swallows back the rest of his water and shoves the glass onto the coffee table between them. "I mean, how do I reconcile all this?" he asks, waving his hands at his body.

"Is this about your wings?"

"And my devil face."

"I thought you wanted to have that back."

"Well, yes, but I regained it in a most egregious way," he snaps. "So, what might that say about my devil face, hmm?" He says. "That it only appears when monstrous deeds are done."

Linda nods. "Is there anything that says the Devil has to be?"

He looks at her incredulously. "Everyone says the Devil is monstrous, Doctor."

"Sure. Most people do. But you don't agree with them. Or that's what you've always claimed."

"No, you're right. I don't. I'm not evil. But the job is to punish, and the desire to punish never leaves me. That's dirty work. It has consequences."

"But that's not what this is really about, is it?" Linda argues. "You didn't have your devil face for months—and let me remind you, that upset you, too—but I don't think you stopped being a punisher during that time." She narrows her eyes. "Something changed recently to bring your face back. You've said that you and Amenadiel have learned angels manifest what they believe they deserve: So, why do you think you deserve your wings, your devil face? Is this about Cain?"

Lucifer crosses his legs and looks away. "It's foolish."

"I won't judge you." He glances at her, and she amends, "Okay, I'll try not to judge you by human standards."

"The wings, I...can't explain. But when I killed Cain," he says with some reluctance, "I didn't just kill him."

"What do you mean?"

"I ensured he went to Hell."

"Ah."

"He wasn't going to, you see. He felt no remorse for his actions, none of the crimes or murders he had committed for thousands of years. He didn't feel guilty for betraying Chloe. None of it."

"And you feel guilty about sending him to Hell?" Linda asks, unable to mask her disbelief.

"No," he scoffs with a sinister smile. "At least, not quite. But Hell isn't an earthly prison sentence, Doctor. It's eternal. No end to the torment."
"That didn't bother you in the past."

"It didn't for those who deserve punishment," he agrees. "I mean, really, what else are we to do with Pol Pot?"


"But endless punishment never fixes anything. It doesn't reform perpetrators or help victims, many of whom end up in Hell themselves." He barks a laugh. "Who alive cares that Genghis Khan is stuck in a Hell loop? So, what's the bloody point of it then?"

"And what does this have to do with your devil face?"

"I don't think it was evil to punish Cain," he says. "But Hell itself is evil. Using it to punish may be evil." He sighs, his fingers tapping on his kneecaps. "Cain didn't deserve Heaven, but I'm not sure he deserved Hell, either, at least not as it exists. And I... Well, I suppose I regret using it against him, and that my devil face may actually be more of a punishment than I previously realized. It's all bloody awful design."

"But that's not your doing. You've said your father created Hell."

"But I perfected it, Doctor," he insists, repeating words he said to Chloe weeks before. "Horribly. And only a monster would do that. Only a monster would wield Hell."

*Any cruelty you have visited upon others may be visited upon you.*

"You can't change what you've done," Linda tells him, her voice gentle. "You can only move forward. What do you want to be?"

Lucifer swallows as he thinks for a moment. "I want to be good."

Cain was right all along.

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A twenty-first birthday party runs well into the night at Lux. Lucifer mingles for a while, charming the young men and women who've reserved several booths. A friendly wager is made on who can drink the most, the fastest: Lucifer or Terry, the birthday boy. For his amusement, Lucifer plays along. He wins neatly and contributes his winnings, plus a little extra, toward the growing bar tab.

When he slips into Chloe's apartment, it's late. Everything is dark and quiet as he prowls up the stairwell, shucking off his suit jacket as he goes. When he reaches Chloe's bedroom door, he knocks lightly, twice, before slipping inside. The sheets rustle as he toes off his Oxfords.

"Are you decent, darling?"

"In pajamas," Chloe mumbles into her pillow.

"A tragedy I'm sure I can work with, if need be," he says, peeling down to his boxer briefs.

He climbs into bed, and she kisses him before turning to make him the big spoon. The blocky digits of the bedside clock cast a soft, red glow across her cheek. With his nose buried in her tresses, he slides a hand over her hip and slips beneath the cotton of her top. Touching her, even chastely, is heaven, more than Heaven ever was.

"I missed you last night," she says, sleep fading from her voice.
He kisses her shoulder. "Your offspring needed you."

"Mm, that's not why you left, though."

"No," he admits, his thumb brushing across the dip of her belly button. "Would you believe the Devil had a bit of an identity crisis?"

She laces her fingers with his. "Do you want to talk about it?"

"Nothing much to say, really. I've had an epiphany of sorts."

"Yeah?"

"I've realized I want nothing to do with Hell."

"That's why you retired, right?" She yawns again.

What kind of human nears dozing over talks about literal Hell?

"It's more than that," he says. "I don't feel I should use it anymore—the fear of Hell, that is. If I've truly retired, I should let that part of myself go, shouldn't I?"

This declaration seems to wake her fully. Chloe wriggles, turning beneath his arm to face him. Her hair is a messy, golden halo about her head. "You mean your devil face?" she asks, and touches fingertips to his chin.

"Yes." He smirks bitterly. "I'm sure you'll be sad never to see that monstrosity again. Assuming I can...keep it under wraps."

She shakes her head. "You know I'm not afraid of you."

"No, you aren't, are you?" he says in wonder. "But I'm not sure it's really me anymore."

"Okay," she whispers, and something restless stills in him to know it's the same reply she'd give, regardless of his decision.

"Last night, when your offspring cried out, it wasn't my devil face I reached for first."

"You were ready to go to battle for her, weren't you?" Chloe edges closer. His scruff scrapes across her palm as she runs her fingers into his hair. Her expression is soft enough to rest in. "You're never going to convince Dan you're the Devil after that, you know. As far as he's concerned, you're only a guardian angel. Ella, too."

"Only an angel," Lucifer snorts. "How quickly divinity has become prosaic to you."

"Probably what happens when you sleep with the Devil," she says with a grin.

"Probably," he agrees, and she laughs when he tweaks her nipple playfully. He smooths his fingers over her breast, soothing. "To be honest, I'm not quite sure what I am anymore."

"You're Lucifer Morningstar," she says, her voice firm. "You get to decide."

"More literally than I'd sometimes like," he says.

They stare at each other, and he's struck by the eons he's needed to live to enjoy this moment. To be in a time and place where there are people who care for him, people he cares for. She leans
forward and presses a kiss to his mouth before sighing and tucking herself beneath his chin.

"What is it?" he asks, sensing a shift in her mood.

"Just worried about Trixie," she breathes against his collarbone. "I don't want her involved in all this."

"Metaphysical bollocks?"

"Pretty much."

"We'll keep her safe."

"How?" She leans back and looks him in the eye. "I thought the biggest stuff I'd have to worry about with Trixie was bad grades, her first period, driving, crushes. Now she's...seeing things. Things I can't even see."

"Mm, that will make her an excellent detective one day."

"Be serious."

"I am. If you don't think she's going to follow in your and your father's footsteps, you're sorely mistaken."

"You mean she won't be the first president of Mars?" Chloe smiles. Groaning suddenly, she flops onto her back. "You're not making me feel any better."

He sits up in bed and looks down at her. "Actually, I have something to show you that may help." Grabbing her hand, he draws her upright.

As she scoots out from the sheets, she flicks a lamp on. When she sits cross-legged before him, Lucifer feels almost lightheaded—from excitement and fear, from an all-consuming desire.

He wants to be good. This is good, isn't it? It could be. He could be good. For her. For himself.

"Lucifer?" She touches his knee.

"If I'm putting my devilish ways behind me," he says, his words coming out fast, "I suppose I should go all in, don't you?"

"What do you—"

"I want to teach you how to pray."

He's taken aback when she snorts. "Oh," she says, a beat later. "You really mean it."

"Of course I bloody mean it."

"I just didn't think...prayer was real?" She pales and lightly covers her mouth. "I've maybe said some really awful stuff to your Dad. To God."

Lucifer grins widely. "Have you now?" He waves a hand. "Relax, darling. You've not been doing it properly, I assure you. There's a format."

"A format," she echoes.
"Yes, yes, put your hands up like this," he instructs, pressing his palms together.

" Seriously?" she laughs. "Actual prayer hands?"

His hands droop with his annoyance. "What did you expect? Peace signs toward the heavens?"

"I don't know. Something...more original?"

"We are the origin, darling."

"Sure. Okay."

"Now, if you please—" He raises his hands together once more and waits for her to do the same. "Good. Now, bow your head and close your eyes." He rolls his eyes at her giggling, but his throat goes tight when he's left to stare at the blond-haired crown of her head. Suddenly, the moment is vital to him. How and why he's waited so long to teach her this, he doesn't know. "In your mind," he says, his voice soft, "speak my name directly, and any thoughts you share thereafter, I shall hear them."

Chloe glances up, a mischievous glint in her eye. "Any thoughts?"

His lips twitch. "I like your thinking, and I can't believe I'm saying this, but save it for later." Reaching out, he presses her head into a bow once more. "Go on. Give it a go."

"Do you hear me?" she asks a moment later.

Lucifer frowns. "I don't." Then he scoffs. "Of course. Try my other bloody name," he sighs. "Samael." The name's as bitter on his tongue as ever.

Chloe's inner voice pops into his head a second later. It's sweeter and warmer than he expected, less worn by years of earthly pains and disappointments.

Samael, she thinks. Then, Lucifer.

And he feels how much she wants him to have the name he desires. As though her whole being wraps around it.

"I hear you," he whispers, his eyes stinging.

She looks up at him and lets her hands drop back into her lap. A light blush colors her cheeks.

"If you ever need me, pray to me, and I'll come," he says. "Wherever you are. Whatever has happened. You've my word." He takes her hands in his own. "Beatrice shall have my protection, as well, if you desire it. You need only teach her what I've taught you."

"Thank you."

Lucifer clears his throat. "It's no trouble. Just, should you show your offspring, impress upon her that this is for emergencies only. The last thing I need is the inner dialogue of a ten-year-old babbling on in my brain."

Chloe frowns. "It must get pretty loud, all the prayers."

"Gosh, no. I have to be open to receiving them. I could choose to open the floodgates, if you will, hear any random nonsense the pillocks of the world are requesting from Satan himself, but I'm not so inclined, and neither are my siblings. Most prayers go unheard, and thus certainly unanswered."
"Wow."

"Yes, you're all truly on your own, aren't you?" he laughs.

"Is this your idea of comforting?"

"Trust me, it's best not to be noticed by the rest of my family, if you can help it." Giving her thigh a pat, he falls back onto the bed and opens an arm for her to cuddle against him. She turns off the lamp and lies down, pressing into his side. "Now," he says, his grin wide in the dark, "about all those dirty prayers..."

If the Devil doesn't have to be monstrous, surely an angel doesn't have to be a boring wanker.

The horsehair brush scratches softly, sush, sush, sush, across the leather shoe. Lucifer lifts the Oxford, tilting it left and right, to inspect its shine beneath the bright Los Angeles sun. A breeze weaves around the penthouse balcony, whisking away shoe polish fumes and the earthy musk of the smoking joint wedged between his lips.

Satisfied with his polish job, Lucifer sets the shoe aside, joining it to a long line of nearly identical Italian leather. He sighs, equal parts content and wistful. Sometimes he misses the pompadour heels of the eighteenth century. How fetching his calves are in a good pair of tights.

His cell rings, and he sets aside his polishing cloth. Chloe's face fills the screen.

"Hello, darling," he answers, kicking back in the chaise lounge.

"Hey," she answers shortly. "I need you—"

"Eager, are we? Name the time and place."

"Lucifer."

"Hmm?" He struggles to contain his laughter as he puffs smoke. It's so easy to push her buttons.

"I need you to come consult."

"So that's a no to a bit of fun on the job?"

"There are twelve dead people around me right now."

"Ah, that rather does kill the mood, doesn't it?" He leans over and begins gathering shoes. "Does this mean they've promoted you back to your rightful position?"

"No. I'm logging evidence for Webb, and... Well, it'd be good if you, um, consulted for him."

"That so?" Lucifer tucks his final pair of shoes safely indoors and snubs out his joint in the nearest ashtray. "And by 'for him,' do you really mean for you?" He shrugs into his suit jacket.

A pause. "Maybe. I'll text you the address."

"Right, then. Be there in a jiffy, Detective."

Chapter End Notes
Thanks to ObliObla and TheYahwehDance for discussing absurd *Lucifer* things with me and being lovely betas.

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Fic Recs • My Fics, Categorized • My Fanvids on YouTube • Tumblr
Amenadiel exits his apartment building. He breathes in the scent of the orange blossoms flowering outside the complex’s walls and turns the nearest corner, heading for a particular park bench where lately he has done all of his thinking.

In the week since he visited Lucifer, he moved to a new building in the Silver City, one that hugs the line between the angelic domain and the human district. No other angel lives there. He's surrounded by humans, most of whom have no idea he is an angel. Sometimes, he can almost believe he's back on Earth, but there's no crime here, no seediness. And the few humans who recognize his divinity are overly polite and keep their distance.

Nothing is right. Nowhere is right.

He's given up on asking his brothers and sisters about their recent interactions—or lack thereof—with Father. None of them find it strange that they haven't spoken to him in decades. After all, what are decades to angels who have lived thousands, millions, billions of years? They trust in Gabriel, who has always been steadfast, and even more so in God. They all say the same thing.

"Father will talk to me"—to you, to us—"when he needs to."

Their blind faith shocks and shames him. Is that how he used to feel? Is that how he should feel?

He settles on his favorite bench, beneath the shade of a fertile fig tree. Fields stretch in all directions before him, an endless blanket of tender green. But looks can be deceiving, and Amenadiel knows well that this grass has not always been green, that more than once it's drowned in the blood of angels and suffocated beneath their feathers. They never speak of the civil wars, and why should they? They're in the past.

Angels, like all immortal creatures, have minds that favor living in the present. Amenadiel's is no different, but as he stares out over the never-ending fields, he longs for Heaven's halcyon days. Before the Silver City was a city, before Father breathed life into Earth's waters and sent Amenadiel to whisper into a primate's ear, even before Lucifer—Samael—painted the Milky Way and Andromeda and all those other galaxies. In those days when Father gazed upon them with something akin to affection, and Mother's light warmed their flesh.

How many billions of years have passed? Impossible to know. Time means less in Heaven than in the human universe and Hell. But for a moment, Amenadiel feels eternity's crushing grip, the misunderstandings and miseries accumulating across ages.

Memories pull at him, and he sees Michael throw Samael at Father's bare feet. How Samael's ankles, wrists, and luminous wings are bound in heavy chains forged specially for him. Blood streams down his light skin as he struggles to stand. He sways before righting himself and jerking his chin in defiance. Michael sneers at him and flies to join the rest of the heavenly host who surround the raised dais where God sits upon his throne.

It has come to this: Samael fleeing his divine responsibilities. For it was ordained that the heavens' Light Bringer should also assess the brightness of the light. "Are my creations good?" God wishes to know. What better way to find out, than to send one who can draw out desires and tempt
creations toward darkness, who can then destroy what is extraneous and filled with shadow? But Samael dares to ask, "Is this not evil?"

Angels have never asked such questions. When Samael does, a wildfire roars to life. Other angels whisper questions Amenadiel tries not to hear. Why, why, why?

"Samael," Father chuckles. "Son. You know better than to hide from me."

Samael remains silent, only stares, only trembles. Whether from rage or fear, Amenadiel doesn't know.

"You cannot escape your purpose, Samael," Father says. His voice is not unkind as he looks at his favorite son. "How am I to judge the value of a Creation without testing its integrity? This is part of the process."

"You're asking me to feed them lies, Father. Poison." His wings flutter in irritation, rattling their chains and catching the light of Mother's vaguely-formed brightness, from where she flits, silently, next to Father.

"No, I'm asking you to test sentient creations. It's the only way I can evaluate quality, and the only way they'll come to know me."

"Why must they know you at all?" Samael asks, and there's that word again. Why. "You can't force them to love you, Father."

But he is God, Amenadiel thinks, and God can do anything. And anything God does is good.

Father rises from his gleaming, white throne. Stepping forward, he places heavy hands on Samael's shoulders. Amenadiel, who has never felt their father's touch, believes this is a gift, but his brother's spine goes rigid.

"You must do this, son."

"Do not ask it of me," Samael pleads. "If you want me to punish those who oppose Creation, I will, but I won't test those who've done no wrong. I will not lie to them for you to see how easily they believe the lie. I-I reject this, Father."

Azrael gasps where she hovers beside Amenadiel. They share a glance as uncertain murmurs snake through the host. Rejection is a new word in primitive Heaven, but a word they immediately understand. It is far, far worse than why.

Father withdraws his hands from Samael's shoulders. "To reject your purpose is to reject me."

Samael hesitates, and it's as though Creation holds a collective breath. Finally, he says, "So be it."

Father's face hardens, his light brown skin drawing tight over cheekbones. "Then I know you not."

"What does it matter?" Samael laughs. "You only emerge to command us, for reasons we will never understand. To send us to this planet or that."

"I know best, son. I have more eyes to see, more ears to hear."

"Do you?" Samael growls. "I was under the impression that your many eyes and ears were our eyes and ears."

Father tilts his head, and his glory shines, haloing black curls. "But they belong to me. You belong
"Son, ask for forgiveness," Mother says, her voice lush and lilting.

"Forgiveness?" Samael scoffs, staring into her light. "For not wanting to set those who don't deserve it on a path toward destruction?" He huffs and shakes his head. "Do you even know what this is all for, Father? Why you do any of it, why Creation matters—what, because you say it does?"

"Enough!" God yells, and Heaven quakes. A convocation of cherubim fly close to the throne, anticipating orders.

But Samael runs hot and knows not when to turn away. "You think you own me," he hisses, "but it's only because I allow you to own me."

Shouts of protest rise up from Amenadiel and his siblings. Who does he think he is?

Father's voice carves through the commotion. "You. Will. Be. Silent."

The host quiets at once, and not even Samael is foolish enough to keep talking. Amenadiel assumes the sedition is over, that punishment will now be swift and just and fair, as Father's punishments always are. But in the perfect silence there's a hacking cough seconds before Samael rears back and spits blood at God's feet. The spittle smacks wetly as it collides with marble.

A new and worse restlessness vibrates through the host, but shock keeps them quiet. This is a direct insult, a rejection of all that is holy. It's never been done because even considering doing it is unthinkable.

Michael is the first to respond. He kites forward on carmine feathers, sword drawn. Landing behind Samael, he slaps the back of their brother's knees with the flat of the blade, forcing Samael to kneel.

Samael laughs as he falls and continues to laugh on his knees. From his view of their profiles, Amenadiel watches as tears create pink runnels through the dried blood on his brother's face.

God bends and grasps Samael's throat, silencing his madness. "Only traitors speak as you have." He squeezes and squeezes, his teeth bared, until Samael writhes.

"Husband!" Mother cries, and wraps around Father, obscuring him in thick ropes of light as she speaks to him alone.

Several long moments pass before God's fingers release Samael's throat. Samael sits back on his heels and gasps for air.

"You are no longer welcome here," Father declares, straightening to his full, imposing height. "I have prepared a place for you—a house with many rooms."

Did Father know Samael would rebel?

Father turns to Michael. "Unchain him."

Michael moves, swift and obedient. He remains close when Samael is free, lest their wayward brother turn on Father. But Samael continues to kneel, his freed wings drooping. The wind has gone out of him, leaving only tired acceptance. There is no fighting God or the host, even for one as powerful as the Light Bringer.
Father steps around him and takes hold of his wings—deep, where humerus meets scapula. Something dark, like smoke, wisps from God's fingers, seeping into plumage. Samael cries out and tries to wrench himself free, but Father's grip is unbreakable. "I forbid you from entering the heavens. I curse you to be bound to the underworld and to Earth."

New murmurs stir to life among the host: horror, confusion, anger. Not all of it is directed toward Samael. Another word is formed—exile—and they all know what it means.

Father rounds Samael and takes hold of his throat once more. "For your rejection of the gift, the purpose I gave you, I disown you. I never knew you. Depart from me."

He shoves into Samael's neck, as if to slam his body into the ground. Samael wails openly, his arms lifting toward Father, toward Mother, but his head never touches marble. His body disappears, mid-fall. It was many ages before Amenadiel realized that was only the beginning of his brother's fall.

Not for the first time, he wonders if Lucifer knows what happened in the years that followed his banishment. How his rebellion echoed, how sibling turned against sibling turned against God, how many were unmade on these very fields.

When it was all over, Father instated Gabriel as his regular mouthpiece, not merely a preferred messenger, and only agreed to see his children at certain hours, for limited time. He was too busy planning angelic movements to guide development in Earth's fledgling Homo erectus. Mother mostly hid in the Great Tower, as she would until the day Gabriel announced she had to be sent to Hell. And life went on in the Silver City, as it always does.

The past looks different to Amenadiel now, as does the present. He looks over his shoulder, toward the towering, white spire rising out of the Central District. He needs answers.

"Go fish," Amenadiel says.

Charlotte drags a card from the deck before sighing. "I'm bored," she announces, dropping the cards she's holding onto the table.

Amenadiel nods, letting his own cards fall. "Me, too. What about gin rummy?" She shakes her head. "Crazy Eights?"

"No more cards," she says. "In fact, I may be ready to burn the deck." She reaches for the nearly-empty wine bottle they shoved to the other side of the table and upends it over her waiting glass. "I need a job."

"The cherubim do all the work in Heaven."

"I've noticed. And all the food grows perfectly, and there's never any bad weather or traffic accidents or any of that. I know." She rolls her eyes and drinks.

"It is quite different from Earth, isn't it?"

"There has to be something exciting to do here."

"Have you been to the Hall of Records yet?"

"Is that supposed to be exciting?" Charlotte grimaces. "I went. Turns out my Aunt Beverly lives three buildings down. Can't believe she got in. I'm doing everything I can to avoid her." She turns
thoughtful. "Maybe I'll move. That's something."

"Better here than the alternative, though, right?" Amenadiel quips with a sad smile. He gathers the cards from the table back into a deck.

"Definitely," she says, tipping her glass toward him in agreement. "But I don't know how to be so...sedentary. I liked my job on Earth."

"We have no need for lawyers here."

"Good thing, too, because I've noticed there aren't many in Heaven," she says dryly. Her mouth lifts in a smile. "Even I needed a little help getting in."

"If you'd had more time, you wouldn't have had any trouble," he assures her.

"Maybe that's true for a lot of humans."

"Maybe," he says, and he wonders if this is how Lucifer and all their siblings who perished in the wars felt when they began to ask questions.

Charlotte sips her wine, her expression calculating. "You've been speaking to the other angels, haven't you? About God?"

"I have."

"And?"

"Are you sure you want to know?" Only a few weeks ago, she could hardly listen to him speak about Gabriel's strange behavior.

"I'll let you know if I can't handle it."

Amenadiel sighs in relief. "Great, because I really need someone to talk to."

When he's finished telling her about his siblings' indifference, she leans back in her chair and draws a svelte leg to her chest. "Are you going to break into the tower and see God?"

"What?" Amenadiel asks, shocked by the idea.

"What else is there to do?" She waves a hand. "We're talking about literal eternity here. Do you really want to wait to find out what's going on? That could take a really long time."

"That's true, but—"

"So, how are we gonna give Gabriel the slip?"

His eyes bug out. "We?"

"Oh, come on. It's not like we haven't done this kind of thing before. We make a great team."

"Charlotte," Amenadiel starts with a shake of his head, "that was before. This is... You've found it difficult to settle in here. I don't want to drag you into this mess. There could be consequences."

She raises a thoughtful finger. "But I wouldn't be sent to Hell, right? That has to do with my own guilt."
"For directly barging in on—" He stops himself from saying more. "You might."

"I won't barge in. I'll just help you barge in."

"I don't know..."

"Look, on this, my soul's fine. I won't ever feel guilty about helping a friend," she says, smiling. "So, there's no chance of that causing me problems. Anyway, I did say I was bored, didn't I? And what if God really needs you? Please let me help."

Amenadiel stares into her puppy dog eyes for a long moment. "Okay," he relents.

The plan they come up with has a high risk of failure, but that's never stopped them before.

The next morning, Amenadiel waits outside Building 591. He vibrates with nerves, but then Charlotte exits and lifts her hand in greeting, and he feels himself relax and grin. This is Charlotte Richards, confident soul, curve-hugging dress, high heels, and all.

"My brother's not going to know what hit him."

"I hope not. This wasn't easy to throw together, even in Heaven. Those cherubs act like no one's ever asked for stilettos."

"They look uncomfortable," Amenadiel says, glancing doubtfully at the improbable height of the heels. "Maybe no one wants them. Heaven's all about comfort for humans."


"Riiight, about that... I'm gonna need to fly you."

Charlotte stops and turns. "You what?"

"If my siblings see us walking together to the Great Tower, it's going to cause a scene and make it impossible for me to sneak past Gabriel." He shrugs a shoulder. "So, we'll fly. It'll only take a second, and probably no one will see you before we're safely inside the waiting room." He steps forward, arms outstretched.

She backs up, both hands raised. "I didn't agree to flying."

Amenadiel laughs. "How do you think you got here? I promise I won't drop you."

"But what if you, you know, do?"

"You won't die again, if that's your concern. You'll heal and wake up."

"Heal. So, I'll feel pain?"

"Charlotte, I'm not going to drop you."

Scowling, Charlotte puts a hand on her hip. She looks him up and down skeptically, as if trying to judge his airworthiness.

"It's flying or boredom," Amenadiel says, playing dirty.
Her hand slides from her hip. "I kind of hate you right now."

He grins and holds out his arms again. She sighs and goes to him, looping her arms around his neck. Scooping her up, he unfurls his wings and takes to the air before she can second guess her decision. In mere seconds, they arrive at the foot of the Great Tower, where he sets her in front of the massive blue door that leads into the waiting room.

"See?" he says. "Not bad at all, right?"

Charlotte looks at him greenly, while smoothing lines from the front of her white dress. "Can we...not go as fast on the way back?" She sticks a pinky finger into her ear and winces.

Amenadiel laughs and holds the door open for her. They step inside and let it close behind them. The round waiting room is empty, as it has been every time he's attempted to see his father.

"That's where you need to go?" Charlotte asks, pointing to the plain, mahogany door on the other side of the room.

"And where Gabriel will come from."

She looks around. "Do you guys have something against interior design?"

Amenadiel looks at the room with new eyes and supposes it is strangely utilitarian to a human, lacking in all "creature comforts," such as wall art. Or chairs. Or an actual reception process.

He shrugs. "It's enough for us to know we're going to see Father."

"Well, it may not be enough for us to keep Gabriel from seeing you. How are you supposed to sneak past in an empty room?"

"We'll do the best we can."

They stand and wait—or Amenadiel waits. Charlotte circles the room restlessly. An hour passes, then more.

"Is your brother, um, nice? I didn't think to ask."

"Much nicer than Michael," he assures, knowing that's her real question. "Also, a little...intoxicated? On divinity."

The mahogany door opens as Charlotte asks, "As in, high?"

"Greetings, human," Gabriel responds without thinking as he all but floats into the room. He stops abruptly and stares. "Are you lost?"

"Charlotte wanted to meet you, Gabe."

"Me?" Gabriel's glazed eyes swivel toward him. "Oh. Amenadiel, Firstborn of Our—"

"Yep, it's me, brother. Again."

"Father doesn't want to see you," Gabriel says, matter-of-fact, as he ignores the human in the room. Said human doesn't like to be ignored. "Wouldn't you say Amenadiel has a right to see God?" Charlotte argues.
Gabriel turns to her, swaying languidly. "No. Why should he?"

"Not even if he has legitimate concerns about the health and safety of all Creation?"

Amenadiel's eyes widen. That's a stretch. Glancing at him, she shrugs a shoulder, unapologetic about her methods.

Her words seem to interest Gabriel, who totters over to face her, baby blue feathers twitching. "If something were truly wrong with Creation, Father would know about it." He closes his eyes and sways while humming.

Charlotte stares at him. "Wow."

Behind Gabriel's back, Amenadiel waves his hands: Keep distracting him.

"Um," Charlotte starts, "Amenadiel tells me there's a daily newsletter."

"Hmm?" Gabriel says, returning from whatever trip he's been on. "Oh, yes."

"Why don't humans get it?"

"Why should humans get it?"

"Why shouldn't we?"

"It's for angels," Gabriel says, clearly confused.

"That seems discriminatory. Are you saying we don't deserve to know what's going on? We have family down there."

"Wha— What was your name again?"

"Charlotte Richards."

Amenadiel tiptoes to the mahogany door, the grin on his face so wide his cheeks hurt. He slips inside the heart of the Great Tower, his pulse thrumming as Charlotte's voice fades with distance. It's been so long since anyone other than Gabriel has entered the tower that he feels like he's trespassing.

In a way, he is, he supposes—Father wants no visitors—but the thought bothers him, and he hears Lucifer shouting, We're his bloody children, not his slaves! But it's more complicated than that, isn't it? They're servants, too.

Aren't they?

Torches, alight with a heavenly fire that never dies, cast a warm, ethereal glow on the smooth, polished marble and spotless glass, giving the tower an almost dreamlike quality. Minimally decorated, God's home is built with deference to the varying needs of Heaven's most common body types. Staircases wrap around the circular interior, ascending one bookshelf-covered floor to the next, while directly opposite of the door leading into the waiting room, there is an elevator. Centrally, the tower is hollow, an accommodation for angels and cherubim not bound by gravity.

Amenadiel flaps his wings, arrowing upward, where his father's suite and private workshop are said to exist. He knows this only by way of rumor, having never been invited to the top floors himself, even in the days when the tower was filled with celestials. He hopes the rumor is true. Charlotte won't be able to distract Gabriel forever.
The uppermost floor is as still and quiet as all the rest. Amenadiel lands on a short platform made for angels that juts beyond the guard railing. Tucking his wings into the ether, he hops over the rail and looks both directions down the circular floor, half-expecting guardians of one sort or another to attack him. But there are no celestials here. Only God, behind one of several doors in sight, and Gabriel, down below. It strikes him as lonely—sick, even.

He feels drawn to a door on his right and walks to it directly. When his hand touches the platinum door handle, he hesitates. What will Father say to him, if he's in this room? Will he be glad to see Amenadiel—indifferent, angry? Will he touch his shoulders, as he once touched Lucifer's? Amenadiel isn't sure whether he'd weep or if his spine would go rigid.

Sucking in a nervous breath, he turns the door handle and steps forward.

God's workshop sprawls before Amenadiel, the glory of it taking his breath away. In the middle of the room, an immense round table with a convex center and a holographic display of the human universe stands, resplendent. It's a larger, more stupefying version of what can be found in the Hall of Being, which these days functions as a fast travel mechanism for angels. He knows every galaxy is available at a touch here, but the view is zoomed in on the Milky Way, on the human solar system, on Earth.

This is where God shapes the Word, which is of him, but not him. All the Words that are given to Gabriel, that are given to other angels, that are given to Earth or elsewhere. They're indecipherable to all except God, but they lie at the heart of all Creation. The last Word given to Amenadiel was the one he spoke to Penelope Decker. He remembers how it felt on his tongue, like something sweet and made of light. How hard it was to contain it, this precious Word that desired to be set free.

Amenadiel shakes himself. "Father?" he calls quietly. "It's me. Amenadiel."

He winces. As if God doesn't know.

No one responds. He steps deeper into the workshop, walking close to the display. Earth looks very ordinary and fragile from this perspective, just another pale blue dot revolving around a gaseous orb. It's anything but, of course. God loves humanity most because they are closest to being in his image. They have free will and are welcome to drive themselves into extinction if they want, but more than a few asteroids have been set off course for them to be where they are today.

The stillness of the room bothers Amenadiel. It's as though no work has been done here for ages.

Perhaps Father is elsewhere.

He wanders the circumference of the table, but stops abruptly halfway into his circuit. A simple cot is wedged into the corner, and there lies God, asleep, his long, black curls half-hiding his face. There's something about him... He doesn't look like he's taking a nap, but rather that he's been sleeping for many hours or days or years.

Amenadiel goes to him at once, falling to his knees beside the cot. He dares to touch his father's shoulder. "Father."

God comes awake at once, his builder's hand latching around Amenadiel's wrist like a vise. Brown eyes bore into Amenadiel, as God growls, "What the fuck are you doing here?"
Many thanks to ObliObla, puerile, and TheYahwehDance. Satan's whisky-fueled blessings on you all.

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The small town of Cielito lies east of the Santa Ana Mountains and is a place no one visits. Commuters coast up and down the I-15, never taking a detour through the rural community wedged deep in the Temescal Valley. Not that there aren't benefits to living in Nowheresville, America. Cielito hasn't seen a homicide in years. The downside is when a murder does land on the town's doorstep, the local police are ill-equipped to respond and more than a little prone to self-sabotage.

This time, Cielito is saved from its own ignorance when a small, firefly-imprinted bag of heroin is found at the crime scene. The baggy matches a BOLO alert issued by the Los Angeles police, drawing the LAPD from its typical jurisdiction. Chloe jumps at the opportunity to join Detective Webb when he asks for her assistance.

Now, having reached Cielito, they keep going until they find themselves in the rural end of the rural town. Out here, enormous spaces separate one property from another, so that lumbering cows—far outnumbering people in the area—can graze in expansive pastures, and leafy, round-bodied cabbages can grow in neat rows for what feels like miles. Finally, they crest a hill, and a sea of golden sunflowers bursts into their line of sight.

"Creepy place to die," Webb comments.

Chloe has to agree. "There's the turn-off," she says, pointing, and Webb hangs a left onto a long gravel driveway.

The private road, which is lined by a fence of sunflowers, stretches on until it spits them out on the adequately-mowed lawn near a whitewashed, two-story farmhouse. A classic red barn and two cylindrical drying silos stand in the distance. An assemblage of cop cars and one of the LAPD's forensics vans are parked out front.

Webb eases the squad car beside a large, wooden plaque. Carved into the plaque's face is a cartoonish sunflower that smiles down at them.

WILSON SUNFLOWERS
"YOU ARE MY SUNSHINE!"
ISAIAH 40:8

"You religious?" Webb asks, shrugging as he looks at the sign.

"No, but I know the Devil," Chloe laughs, and for once there's no hysterical edge to her amusement. It's just a fact.

He looks at her oddly before chuckling. "Oh, yeah, your old partner, the consultant... No offense, but is he...okay? He seems to have a few screws loose."

"Fewer than you might think," she mutters. On her phone, she brings up the Bible verse and reads, "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever."

Webb nods. "Yep, still creepy."
Creepier still, Chloe thinks, to know for certain that God is real.

Past the sign, twelve victims—two boys, eight adult females, and two adult males—lie sprawled like forgotten toys in the dry grass. Eager flies zip around the stiff bodies, and the pungent, rotten scent of rapidly-decaying flesh hits Chloe hard, forcing her to breathe through her mouth. Webb pales beside her.

Mass murder is macabre in any context, but this scene knells with an eerie discordance as bees buzz through the farm's one and only crop that's in full summer bloom. Towering, golden flowers hug the gravel driveway and three sides of the farm's perimeter. They sway in the breeze, oblivious to the carnage in their midst. The bodies are scattered, face down, to the right of the farmhouse, as if the victims were trying to escape into the fields.

Ella looks up from the corpse of a young woman and lets her camera hang by its lanyard. "Estimated time of death is 02:00," she announces. "Ballistics will need to confirm it, but pretty sure they got mowed down by an automatic rifle." She points a gloved finger to the numerous bullet holes puncturing the woman's back. Dried bloodstains bloom across her white nightgown. Actually, they're all wearing white nightgowns or sleepshirts. "They didn't stand a chance," Ella says, shaking her head.

Though she doesn't want to, Chloe looks to Webb. "What do you need me to do?"

Even for a seasoned detective, the scope of the scene is daunting, so it's no surprise when Webb begins to sweat under the pressure. He stumbles through assigning tasks to the techs, forgets protocol more than once, and nearly disturbs evidence that hadn't been photographed yet. Chloe feels sorry for him, even as she struggles to tamp down feelings of frustration and envy. She's happy to break free from the precinct's concrete walls—happy that Webb asked to bring her along—but it's difficult to be subordinate to someone who's still learning the ropes.

Webb senses the tension, too. "Really wish Hopper had been able to come today," he sighs at one point. "He had to leave this morning. Said he was feeling sick."

Chloe doesn't have the heart to tell him Hopper always finds a way out of big cases that require extra travel. "It's a difficult crime scene. We need all the help we can get," she says, aiming to be diplomatic. "You know," she adds, "I could call Lucifer."

"I don't think he likes me much."

Not for the first time Chloe notices Webb is a very young twenty-eight, the lines of his face still soft and round.

"I'll keep Lucifer in line," she promises, and is thankful the man in question isn't around to comment on her choice of words.

"Okay," Webb relents, and she makes the call.

In the heat, it's paramount they clear the bodies as soon as possible. They work efficiently beneath tents that shade the evidence, taking thousands of pictures before sealing the victims into body bags and sending them to the medical examiner's office. Now, tape cordons off where the victims had lain, and unis dance around bright yellow evidence markers that match the sunflowers surrounding the property. There are markers for tire prints and footprints, for pools of blood and blood spatter, for the hundreds of spent shell casings littering the ground.

A good working theory develops. The victims and the murderer—possibly Bruce Wilson, the as-
yet-missing owner of the farm—were inside the farmhouse when something went awry. The victims ran from the house. The killer pursued them to the front porch and opened fire using a high-powered rifle, possibly an AR-15. They're still trying to ID several of the victims, and the motive remains unclear. If Bruce Wilson is the killer, no assault rifles are registered to his name, as required by state law.

Considering firefly heroin was found in a desk drawer, the murders could be drug-related. Morrison's goons from Narcotics seem to hope so as they roam the property with drug-sniffing dogs. Chloe tries to keep her distance from them, but doesn't miss how Morrison's eyes follow her.

The drugs and slaughter aren't the only clues available. While the outside of the farmhouse could be described as quaint and welcoming, something rotten infects its heart. There are no pictures of people inside the house, only crosses, plaques with Bible verses, and artistic depictions of Christ. Bibles, apologetics, and treatises on sunflower farming weigh down bookshelves. It's beyond pious. It's obsessive to the point of oppressiveness.

"Are we thinking they all lived here?" Chloe asks Dan, while rifling through a pile of papers they moved to the long, oak kitchen table. It's been hard to find recent addresses for several of the victims. "There are sixteen chairs here."

"There are thirteen toothbrushes between the three bathrooms," he answers.

Chloe nods. "So, our twelve vics and——"

"Bruce Wilson," Dan finishes from where he sits beside her with his laptop, keeping in touch with techs back at the precinct.

"Yeah."

"Are you guys getting crazy cult vibes like I'm getting crazy cult vibes?" Ella asks. She dusts at the refrigerator door handle for prints.

"Like Heaven's Gate?" Webb sounds a little too excited by the prospect.

"That was mass suicide," Chloe says, irritation coloring her tone. "This is murder."

A familiar British accent filters in from the front porch. Dan curses under his breath and accidentally knocks over a plastic cup filled with sunflowers. Water pools in the middle of the table as he barely moves his laptop in time to save it.

Webb reaches over and rights the cup before grabbing paper towels from beside the sink. "You okay, Espinoza?"

"He's okay," Chloe assures Webb, and rests a gloved hand on Dan's forearm. She leans toward his ear and whispers, "He's the same man you've always known. I promise."

"He's not a man, Chlo." And he looks at her as if he no longer knows her, not quite. Because, even if he's not seen scarlet skin, who in her right mind would knowingly sleep with the Devil? Not his ex-wife, surely. Not the mother of his child.

He has no idea who he's slept with, and Chloe's not sure he should ever find out. Hopefully he'll never think to ask just how Charlotte Richards was Lucifer's "stepmom."

But he probably will eventually, when the shock wears off. He is a detective.
"Just remember he was coming to Trixie's aid, too." She pats his arm, resisting the urge to roll her eyes. It isn't like he saw *hellfire.* She almost laughs at herself. How has all of this become so normal, so quickly?

Chloe catches Ella looking between them before the smaller woman lets out a squeal.

"Wait, oh my gosh! You *know,* don't you!"

"What's going on?" Webb asks, alarmed by Ella's outburst.

Chloe shrugs and shakes her head. Best to play dumb. Although, if there's one thing she's learned from being with Lucifer, it's that hiding the truth isn't necessary. Few, if any, people believe it. She didn't, and that was with seeing countless unexplainable things. Still, she's not interested in undergoing a psych eval for suddenly embracing the supernatural.

"Daaan!" Ella smacks Dan's arm. "Why didn't you *tell* me?" She bends over his chair and throws her arms around his neck. "Welcome to the club!"

"What?" Dan pushes her arms away and stumbles to his feet. "*You* know?" Ella nods, grinning. Chloe pretends not to see how he glares at her. "What am I, the last person to find out?"

"Having trouble adjusting to reality, Daniel?" Lucifer asks, sauntering into the kitchen, bedecked in midnight green. "World as you know it all *up in the air?*

Chloe sighs.

"I, uh... I'm gonna work on the bedrooms," he announces, slamming his laptop shut and avoiding Lucifer's gaze.

"It's only natural that fight or *flight* might kick in, Daniel," Lucifer quips.

Dan marches past him, giving Lucifer so much leeway that he rams his shoulder into the doorframe. Webb's bushy brows draw together as he watches Dan go.

"Are you sure he's okay, Decker?"

"He's okay," she says in a rush. "Totally okay."

"If you can ignore how he sulks more than a nun at a hen's night." Lucifer runs a hand over his head. Wind has blown the product from his hair, leaving unkempt waves behind.

Chloe glances at the time on the microwave clock. She only called him forty minutes ago. It should have taken him a *lot* longer to get to Cielito.

"You got here fast," she says dryly. "How was traffic?"

"Do you know, it wasn't a problem at all." His eyes all but sparkle with mischief.

"I bet," she says, and imagines him using road shoulders to pass other cars. The Devil loves to speed and "massage the rules," and he always will. She just better never have to get his ass out of trouble for bribing a cop.

Because he totally does that, and she knows it, too.

Webb clears his throat. "Good to see you again, Mr. Morningstar." He holds out a hand, then thinks better of it and lets it drop back to his side. "Decker felt you might be helpful on this case."
"Yes, I am rather good at finding the right people to punish." Lucifer smiles a thin predator's smile. "Tell me, though, who will get the credit for my and Detective Decker's work when we solve these murders?"

Webb chuckles uncomfortably. "It's my case, so—"

"Assuming we solve this," Chloe interrupts, "the department will receive recognition." She grabs hold of Lucifer's elbow and says to Webb, "If it's okay, I'm just gonna catch him up on everything."

"Oh. Yeah." Webb's nod is a little frantic and sets his light brown curls bobbing. "Yeah, sure. That's a good idea."

She pulls Lucifer out of the kitchen, into the backyard, where few evidence markers obstruct movement. When they're a safe distance from the farmhouse, barn, and other unis, she drops his elbow and snaps, "I called you here to help with the case. I don't need you fighting my battles."

"Of course you don't," he says. "But, darling, as much as they may not be wasting your talents today, they're certainly using you. Why do you let them? That wanker shouldn't get credit for your work."

"This isn't about who gets credit, Lucifer. This is about finding justice for the people who need it." She glances at the farmhouse. "People like those who lost their lives here."

She thought he understood this.

"Yes, yes, I know, and what better way for them to have justice than to let L.A.'s best do her job? Which is to say, have others work for her, not the other way around."

"I'm supposed to be used," she argues, wanting desperately to make herself believe it.

Lucifer scoffs and steps closer until they're nearly touching. He searches her face with that lofty, inhuman gaze that makes her pulse rush with desire. "And what of me? Am I not to be used? Admit it, you're thankful they let you out to play, but I could free you from that dreadful office chair they've shackled you to, once and for all."

"I don't want you to help," she growls. "I didn't want you to last week. I didn't want you to yesterday. I don't want you to today."

He leans back and shoves his hands in his pockets. "Or you do want me to, and that's what terrifies you. You're afraid you might like my world." He grins. "Afraid you might already be in it. Don't you remember Isabel's cards?"

"I thought you didn't believe in Izzy's tarot."

But he knows she does. A little. Especially with what Trixie's going through, especially since Izzy has taken up residence in the room Maze left behind.

"Who am I to argue with a witch?" Lucifer quips. "And as I recall, you're supposed to embrace your present, darling, which happens to be yours truly."

She squints her eyes at him and circles her index finger in front of his face. "Yeah, I'm starting to see the resemblance to Baphomet."

His grimaces so deeply that she struggles not to laugh. "Now that's bloody uncalled for."
"Look," she sighs, "are you gonna help me solve this case or not? Because Webb is nice, but he's in over his head, and I have to make sure he doesn't do something stupid along the way."

"Very well, Detective."

With the heated topic temporarily shelved, they wander the scene together, sinking into lockstep. She carries him through what the police have discovered, taking time to show him pictures of the victims on Ella's camera.

Lucifer clicks his tongue at the plain, drab nightgowns and pajamas. "What was this, Little House on the Prairie? Not much fashion sense among these poor souls, was there? But then cults always require dreadfully boring conformity," he sighs. "Bloody lot'd fit right in, in the Silver City. Not that they ended up there, of course. Except the boys, perhaps. Only truly rotten little bastards who know they should get coal from Father Christmas end up in Hell."

She stares at him, trying to unpack all he's said. He always makes Heaven sound so boring, and Hell sound so awful. Dying is gonna suck.

"What makes you think they didn't go to Heaven?" she asks.

Shrugging a shoulder, he sets the camera aside on a foldout table the techs set up. "Only desperate people join cults, and most desperate people feel guilty about something." He draws his flask from his jacket pocket and takes a sip. "If they don't start out that way, you can be sure Dear Leader will make them feel guilty later. Guilt's a very effective tool for keeping people in place. It's worked for millennia in Hell."

There are the eggs. Chloe looks over the crime scene with new eyes. What did these people feel guilty about?

They work into the evening, ID'ing victims and questioning who they can from neighboring farms. The more they learn, the darker the portrait of Bruce Wilson becomes. A former marine, Bruce returned home to Missouri in 2013 after four grueling tours of duty in Afghanistan. Friends and family, some of whom have spoken to the police, were shocked when he purchased a sunflower farm in California with the help of a VA loan. Upon moving to The Golden State, he cut all ties with his past and lived the life of a hermit—or so it seemed.

But his digital footprint tells on him. Virtually, he's led a very social life, hanging out in disturbed and chaotic corners of the web, where conspiracies range from the mundane to the extraordinary; where tap water, airport scanners, the shape of the planet, and equality are suspect. In 2015, he found religion—the fire and brimstone kind, judging by videos he shares on Wobble.

"Bloody hell," Lucifer gripes as they scroll through Bruce's profile. "This chap actually believes he found the meaning of life on YouTube. Has he read the comments?"

Chloe snickers. They're seated, shoulder to shoulder, on an old, country plaid couch in the farmhouse living room. There's no TV in the room, only a large, framed print of Jesus nailed to the cross where one might expect a TV to be.

They've lingered at the scene, simply because, Chloe thinks, they enjoy picking each other's brains. Narcotics left hours ago, finding no other drugs or paraphernalia, and Dan and Ella departed soon after. Webb is outside, finalizing paperwork with an officer from the Cielito police force.

"He didn't think it was the truth, though," she says. "Dan found a notebook of Bruce's thoughts on the Bible. Seems he put his own spin on Christianity and started drawing in followers." Not too
many that he'd garner unwanted attention from the police, but enough to have a live-in congregation. Carefully chosen, too. Lonely widowers, single mothers, those isolated and afraid and, yes, likely burdened by some guilt.

"Yes, well, revitalizing Christianity is one of humanity's favorite pastimes," Lucifer remarks with a wry smile.

She sets aside her laptop as a strange thought occurs to her. "Did you visit Earth during the Crusades?"

"Gosh, no, Hell was too busy because of them."

Laughter bubbles out of her, and he grins. "Does that mean—" she starts, and stops just as quickly. She frowns as she looks past Lucifer and spots Webb through the front window, talking to a young woman inside of the crime scene tape. She rises to her feet. "What the hell...?"

"Hmm?" He follows her gaze. "Well. Didn't think he had it in him. She's far out of his league."

"That's a reporter," she snarls, noting the way the woman holds her cell phone between herself and Webb, as if she's recording every dumb thing he's saying. Chloe marches out of the house and down the porch steps, her black sneakers pounding the earth. "Hey!" she shouts. "This is an active crime scene! You are not allowed behind the line!"

Webb startles, and the young woman—beautiful, brown-skinned, and busty—turns clever eyes on Chloe. "Detective Webb said it was okay."

"Well, it's really not," Chloe snaps before Webb can attempt to defend himself. She reaches over and lifts the crime scene tape. "Out."

The other woman shrugs and ducks under the tape. "What about you?" she asks. "Got any comments on the murders?"

"Who do you work for?" Chloe glares at her and holds out a hand. "Let me see your press card."

"I'm freelance," the woman explains, lifting her hands with a shrug and a laugh as she walks backwards to her vehicle. "You can get my deets from Zachary."

"What the hell were you thinking?" Chloe snaps, rounding on Webb. "No. Talking. To. The. Press. Hot freelancers included! Not until there's an official statement from the police chief. This is basic stuff."

Chloe watches, fascinated, as the reporter turns from getting in her car and immediately falls into Lucifer's seductive trap. She doesn't stand a chance. Thank goodness.

"What the hell were you thinking?" Chloe snaps, rounding on Webb. "No. Talking. To. The. Press. Hot freelancers included! Not until there's an official statement from the police chief. This is basic stuff."

Webb shakes his head. "I didn't tell her much, I swear."

"What did you tell her?" she hisses. "And you better not say you mentioned Bruce Wilson."
The way he pales is answer enough. "Shit, I'm so sorry, Decker. I just..." He laughs and sounds as exhausted as she feels. "I just got caught up on working on a big case. I've never done anything like it. I'm... I'm not cut out for this job. My uncle helped me get it. Look, I'll be the first to admit, I have no idea what I'm—"

"Promotions don't work that way," she interrupts.

"They're not supposed to," Webb admits with a guilty wince.

A high-pitched buzzing noise whirs in Chloe's ears. "Who's your uncle, Zack?"

"He works in Narcotics."

Of course he does.

"Let me guess," she seethes, "Matthew Morrison?"

"You know him?"

Chloe lets out a disbelieving laugh. "Yeah. I know his kind, all right." She shakes her head. "Shut things down, Webb, and go home. We're done for the night. In fact, maybe we're just done with this case altogether. If Lucifer can't cover our asses from your girlfriend over there, and she airs what you told her or blogs about it or does whatever the hell with it, our one and only suspect will know we're onto him. So, great job."

She'd report him to Garcia and Internal Affairs, but what's the point? Garcia and IA are more likely to find some way to come down on her.

By the time she retrieves her laptop from the farmhouse, the reporter's car is gone and Lucifer wears a smug expression. It falters when he looks at her.

"Everything all right, darling?"

"Turns out Webb is Morrison's nephew."

"Ah."

"Yeah."

"On the bright side, I've got Miss Ana Jackson's cell phone." He waves the device with cheer. It may be enough. It may not be. She just nods, at a loss for words.

"Right. Time to go, then, Detective?"

With one last glance at Webb, who sits with his head in his hands on the porch steps, she walks toward the Corvette, anger burning a hole in her gut.

The drive back is silent as she stews. When they enter the penthouse, Chloe yanks off her sneakers and socks and begins to pace across the cool black marble floors, fists on her hips. "You can say 'I told you so,'" she grouses.

Lucifer glances at her sidelong. "I would never be so foolish. You have a gun." He tosses his suit jacket on the back of the sofa and goes to the bar, where he pours scotch in two tumblers. He holds one glass out to her.
Chloe takes it without hesitation and tips it back, gulping smooth liquor and luxuriating in fire. She leans against the bar, mirroring Lucifer's stance. "I'm just so pissed," she admits, and her hands shake with it. "I've worked really hard, Lucifer."

"I know."

And what's she managed to accomplish? Half-assing motherhood for the sake of desk duty and babysitting newbies?

"They're never going to promote me again, are they?" Not on her own merits. Not without the Devil's help.

Lucifer offers her a sad smile. "I don't imagine so, no. You're a threat to their seedy operations. If not to what remains of the Sinnger's network, then to their latest enterprise. Darling, you know the LAPD is notoriously corrupt. Even Daniel—"

"I know," she interrupts. "Fuck."

He arches a brow, amused, and swirls brown liquor in crystal that catches light. "I can make Morrison go away." He looks at her, unblinking. "You know that, right?"

Something dark thrills in her, but logic pulls her back. "I thought you were done using Hell."

"Who said anything about Hell?" He smiles faintly as they stare at one another. "I own men like Morrison. They're tools—easily bought, used, and discarded."

She swallow as she sees his face, really sees it—the one he wears all the time, the one that gets the job done when she's not looking. It's an outcast angel's face, made for light and desire, and further empowered by a wallet full of cash and enough connections to make the purported Illuminati tremble. She's tried hard not to see it.

"You're a criminal," she says. A fact. Incompatible with everything she thought she believed in, everything her father taught her. And she's always known, hasn't she? Just like she always knew he was the Devil, knew he was an angel, knew her life would never be the same when he snaked his way under her skin.

And never cared. Never looked back. Not really. Because she doesn't turn her back on adventure. Who embodies adventure more than the Devil himself?

"What if I am a criminal?" he challenges, echoing old words. He leans forward, his mouth near hers. "You going to arrest me, Detective?"

"No," she says, pushing him back gently. "What good would it do, anyway?"

"None at all," he says with glee.

"I don't know that it's right," she whispers, "what you do."

The Old Lucifer would have fired off some snide comeback, but this Lucifer, a calmer, more grounded Devil, pauses to think.

"Human laws are fickle," he says a moment later. "When they aren't appallingly wrong, they lack nuance or don't apply to everyone equally, as you well know. Illegal things I do today weren't illegal yesterday. And things that are legal today will be illegal tomorrow. Crimes that kill one man are heinous. Crimes that kill thousands are good business"—he scoffs—"or carried out in dear old
"Dad's name. Following human law isn't what makes you good, darling." He bares his teeth with a grin. "And breaking those same laws on occasion doesn't make me evil."

"We have to ground ourselves some kind of way. Don't you believe that?"

"Why do you assume the Devil's way of doing things is wrong?" he asks. "I have my rules for myself. I don't lie. I keep my word. I only give people what they desire. And I don't involve myself in ventures that subvert free will.

"You didn't complain when I had the urchin's bully shipped off to Chicago, now, did you? There was nothing illegal about that, at least not according to your little rules, but I think we both know it wasn't exactly aboveboard, either, wouldn't you say?"

"That was different," she says, but they both know it wasn't, and that she doesn't believe a word out of her own mouth.

"When I say I can make Morrison go away, I'm not saying he'll show up in a ditch somewhere, even if that's what that cretinous cop deserves. He desires cash. That's it. Give him a way to acquire coin more easily, or write him a check, and he'll go his merry way. Easy—no different from my slipping that reporter several hundies."

"But is it right to make Morrison go away?" Chloe challenges.

"Well, the LAPD would be down one corrupt bobby, but that aside... Would you feel guilty doing it?" Lucifer asks.

The question stops her short. "No, probably not."

"There's your answer, then," he says, spreading his hands. "Dad built a barometer in you. It's crass—awful design, really. People feel guilty about things they shouldn't, and others don't feel guilty about the things they should." He shrugs. "But it's a start, and the only method that survives time and place, outside of making your own rules."

Chloe opens her mouth to reply but is interrupted by her cell phone ringing. She drags the device from her back pocket and answers on the third ring. "Hey, Ella, what's up?"

"Turn on the news," Ella all but shouts on the other end.

"Oh no. Chloe's stomach sinks.

"Which channel?"

"Any channel! It's bad, Chloe. Real bad."

Scrambling to the coffee table, Chloe grabs the TV remote. Thankfully the television is still upstairs from their binging of The Great British Baking Show. After having countless televisions destroyed by wild parties and "bloody celestials," Lucifer had generally taken to storing his on another floor when it wasn't in use.

She turns on the TV. Lucifer hovers by her side as she switches channels until she finds one airing the ten o'clock news.

They enter the second-half of a news segment, but there's little need to be caught up. A photograph of the sunflower farm's welcome plaque fills the screen, while a news presenter describes the murders in a voiceover.
"That poisonous knave," Lucifer scoffs, and not without some respect.

At the bottom of the screen, a chyron contains an ominous tagline.

**MASS MURDER SUSPECT, CULT LEADER ON THE RUN**

"Did they already name Wilson?" Chloe asks Ella.

"At the start."

"Great," she huffs, and turns off the TV. She's seen enough to know it's all gone south.

"Who leaked info?" Ella asks.

With a sigh, Chloe brings Ella into the fold. She pulls the phone away from her ear as the other woman yells Spanish profanities.

Chloe turns to Lucifer after ending the call. "Looks like Ana sent her files out before she handed over her phone."

"You bloody well think?" he gripes. "That conniving wretch desired a new phone—you'd think that'd be an easy enough deal! I gave her three grand, didn't I? How much do phones cost, even, fifty dollars?" Returning to the bar, Lucifer pours more liquor and continues to complain about the woeful state of mankind and its never-ending greed.

At some point, Chloe stops listening as she stands near the sofa, looking out at the night. The day has been long, and her head feels like it's stuffed full of cotton, that there's no room left for anything else. She put a little boy in a body bag today, a boy Trixie's age. He had a bleak future, growing up in a religious cult, but he was alive.

Bruce Wilson can't get away. Chloe is fairly certain he's the killer, but even if he isn't, he'll know something that will lead them to the one who is. Nothing happened on that farm without Wilson's knowledge.

She looks at Lucifer, who's settled at his piano to cool off. He tinkers with the keys aimlessly, stringing together natural melodies. He is this person, but she's been pretending he's only this person. He's flown her into the sky, too.

"Lucifer?"

He glances over his shoulder. "Hmm?"

"I want to find Wilson."

Lucifer's fingers slide from the keys as he half-turns his body on the bench to face her. "What, now?"

She nods, and a grin lights his face as he stands.

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Chloe's not especially afraid of doing something rash without backup, not with the Devil by her side, but the memory of sniper bullets smashing into the safe house door in Colinda hasn't faded yet, nor has the memory of tumbling from the sky. Before they return to the sunflower farm, she calls Izzy to check on her daughter. She wants nothing more than to hear Trixie's voice, but waking her to tell her she loves her would only cause alarm. She knows well the difficulty her father faced,
how you never know if you're saying goodbye.

She doesn't want to die, but she also doesn't want her daughter to live in a world where killers run free. Catching them is a job someone has to do—why not her?

The farm is even creepier in the dark, but it's the only starting point they have. With no solid clues as to Wilson's whereabouts—the man hasn't been spotted yet and doesn't believe in credit cards—they're forced to hunt for them now. There must be something they've missed.

It's easier, just the two of them, despite working by flashlight as a precaution. No distractions from Webb or Morrison, and, Chloe admits to herself, they can bend the rules, and Lucifer can be, well, *Lucifer*, if necessary. This is an extraordinary circumstance that may require it.

All because Morrison is a corrupt asshole, and his nephew is an idiot.

They start in the barn, clearing it easily enough. There's only fertilizer, pesticide, and factory equipment inside. The farmhouse is more promising, even if the LAPD has picked it over. They double back, re-checking the books and notebooks, drawers and cabinets, that they had previously determined unworthy of further investigation.

"The man is paranoid," Lucifer remarks. "He'll have a place to store secrets."

Chloe nods. "Maybe there's a safe somewhere?"

But if there is, it's not in any of the closets, nor is it behind any of the pictures on the walls, as in Lucifer's penthouse.

"I don't get what we're missing," Chloe complains over a yawn she tries and fails to stifle. They stand in one of the tiny first-floor bedrooms, and as eerie as the bed with its old floral quilt is, it's enticing after being awake for eighteen hours. "The guy's a creep. He clearly controlled those people. But where's all the—"

"Trappings of a cult?" Lucifer suggests. "All the dossiers on members for the purposes of blackmail?"

"Exactly." Sighing, Chloe makes to exit the bedroom, the diffused circle of white light from her phone guiding her steps. As she nears the doorway, Lucifer grabs hold of her shoulder suddenly, startling her. "What is it?" she asks, noting his furrowed brows.

Wordlessly, Lucifer stamps his heel on the rug where she previously stood. The floor creaks, and the overall sound is swallowed, not by the wool, but by something else—distance, maybe. Chloe looks up at him inalarm.

"It's your Palmetto Street all over again," he says.

Chloe huffs. "At least Wilson isn't a cop."

They squat and roll back the rug, revealing a trapdoor. Lying flush with the hardwood, it's crafted with extreme precision, so that it blends in with the wood grain.

Lucifer's chuckle is low and dark. "Only a very paranoid chap keeps a trapdoor like this in his home."

"Gimme your keys," Chloe says, seeing there's no handle with which to open the door. Wilson must have used a knife or similar tool to pry it open.
Wedging the key to the Corvette into the narrow groove surrounding the door, she works it back and forth until Lucifer is able to slide his fingers beneath the lip of the door.

Chloe's heart hammers against her rib cage as they open the trapdoor wide, exposing a pitch-black void. She's almost afraid to shine her light inside, for fear something horrible will burst out like a real-life jack-in-the-box.

"Are you frightened?" Lucifer asks softly, his fingers finding her wrist.

"No," she says. Then, after a pause, "A little."

Before he can offer to be a hero, she takes a deep breath and swings her flashlight toward the black hole. A dingy, wooden ladder shows in sharp planes of light and shadow.

"Right," Lucifer says, "that's starting to look like a sex dungeon, and not the fun kind. I'm going in first."

"I have a gun."

"And I can come back from the dead, darling. I've got you beat." He raises a finger. "No arguing." With that, he swings one long leg over, nearly kicking her in the process, and steps onto the ladder.

Chloe sighs, exasperated and enamored, all at once. "Look for a light," she tells him. Might as well see any possible enemies.

"I've hit solid ground," Lucifer says, his voice not far. "No light switch here at the entrance."

Well, that'd be too easy, wouldn't it? Chloe takes to the ladder, struggling to find her footing. Halfway down, hands take hold of her waist.

"I've got you," Lucifer promises, and lifts her with ease. He sets her safely on the ground—or as safe as anything can be in a potential serial killer's maybe-sex-dungeon. He gives her rear a small squeeze before removing his hands altogether.

"Really?" she gripes in a whisper. "Now is not the time for you to get handsy."

"I beg to differ. If we're about to die, this is how I want to remember you."

"What, annoyed?"

"No, as a splendid handful, of course."

"Shut. Up."

They stand, pressed close, in a narrow, dirt-walled passageway of what either is an unfinished basement or a tunnel. Chloe waves her flashlight along the walls, hunting for some other source of light.

"There!" she whisper-shouts, her phone light catching on a dangling pull chain attached to a light on the ceiling a few feet ahead.

Lucifer reaches out and tugs on the cord. Several lights flicker to life, flooding the underground passageway and blinding them. Chloe blinks back tears and turns off her flashlight to conserve phone battery. They look ahead, to where the tunnel opens into a larger room. There's no sound from within, but that could be deceiving.
Chloe draws her gun and steps forward. Adrenaline steadies her hands and strengthens her eyes.

The passageway spits them out into a room of plain, oak-paneled walls and shelves laden with home-canned goods. Colorful, handwoven and diamond-shaped art pieces hang from the ceiling, making it impossible to walk without ducking or dodging.

"Ojo de Dios," Lucifer says behind her, his tongue wrapping around the Spanish.

"Eyes of God? God's eyes?"

"Mm, votives."

"There's another door," Chloe says, pointing ahead. The door is painted a bright, cobalt blue. "Something's carved on it." She steps closer and reads the sloppy, white-painted engraving, "But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. Matthew 6:6."

Lucifer lets out an exasperated sigh. "I suppose this is the rotten little confessional, then."

Chloe yanks open the door. "Oh my God."

"And here's the blackmail. Served up with a heaping side of rubbish."

The room is little bigger than a narrow and compact walk-in closet. A gray, metal foldout chair stands at the back of the room, facing a camera on a tripod. Behind the camera, another foldout chair stands. And on every inch of the space, on the floor, on the ceiling, on the three walls, Bible verses are carved into the wood. Chloe holsters her Glock with a shudder.

"Any verses in here about me?" Lucifer asks, craning his neck around the doorway.

"Yeah, look," Chloe says, pointing, "there's one that says Satan needs to focus."

Bending, she removes the camera from the tripod. She flicks it on, noting the memory card is nearly full. Jackpot. It takes her several minutes to find volume controls in menu settings for the on-board speakers, but once she finds them and the volume is turned up, she begins to play the videos stored within.

The victims are brought back to life as they confess their sins.

"I wish I hadn't cheated on him..."

"When she died, I felt relieved. I hated being a mother. Now all I want is to hold her again."

"I know I shouldn't have stolen the money, but I just...couldn't stop myself."

Chloe pauses the video. "These people go to Hell?" she asks in a whisper.

"All the time," Lucifer says.

"Your dad..."

"I'm aware."

She presses play on the video again, and a second, deep voice speaks from behind the camera: "That's why we're doing what we're doing, Sarah. We must exorcise our demons to be closer to God."
Lucifer scoffs. "As if Dad cares what these sad sacks got up to."

Chloe shushes him as the next video starts. "That's Bruce Wilson," she breathes.

Gray hair is cropped close to his head, crowning the hard face of a troubled soldier. He looks slightly different from his license photo, a few years older, a few pounds heavier, whether from fat or muscle, but it's him all right.

"I don't know why the Firefly isn't working," Bruce says, his speech fast and frantic.

"At least we have confirmation that it's a firefly logo," Chloe murmurs.

"They promised me it had healing properties," Bruce continues after a pause. "It worked for the others—Katie's arthritis is healed. But I'm still having nightmares." Chloe notices how bloodshot his eyes are, as if in testament to his sleeplessness.

Lucifer snorts. "This knobhead thinks a bit of China White cures arthritis?"

Bruce looks up at the ceiling in the video. "How can I serve you like this?" His eyes shift back to the camera. "Our supply's running low. I guess that's fine. I can't have addicts on my hands. Tonight's the last time I'll try it. At least it...makes me feel closer to you in the moment."

"Bloody hell."

Something crashes in the farmhouse above them, giving Chloe such a fright that she nearly drops the camera. "Someone's here," she murmurs, digging into the camera for the memory card. She stores the small card in a spare nitrile glove and stuffs it into her back pocket before returning the camera to the tripod and drawing her firearm.

They retrace their steps as quickly and quietly as possible, batting away votives. In the passageway, Chloe debates on the best course of action, but finally decides to re-holster her gun and yank on the pull chain, throwing them back into darkness. Standing at the base of the ladder, they wait, listening.

After several long moments, Chloe nods to herself. "Okay, let's try to make it back."

Lucifer takes to the ladder before she can stop him. His steps are silent as he slips back onto the ground floor. Chloe climbs up behind him. Just enough moonlight has filtered into the room now that she can see him standing guard beside the bedroom door. She sets to work on closing the trapdoor and repositioning the rug before joining him on the opposite side of the doorframe.

Another crash, in the living room by the sounds of it, followed by a loud cry. She looks at Lucifer. Bruce?

"Amen, amen, amen!"

That's definitely Bruce's voice.

Again, Chloe yanks her pistol free. She marches forward into the hallway, turning to press her back against the wall. She peeks around the corner, into the living room. And there's Bruce Wilson, bent over a desk. He's dressed similarly to his followers: white pajama pants, white short-sleeved shirt. But what she notices most are his dirty, bare feet.

Where has he been for the past twenty-four hours?
"Bruce Wilson, hands up! LAPD!"

Bruce turns slowly.

"Hands where I can see them!" Chloe shouts.

Adrenaline burns through her once more, so that it seems as though she sees and hears and feels everything in the room. Lucifer stands just out of sight in the hallway. He vibrates with an eagerness that she knows and understands. There are few highs as delicious as catching a killer.

"Do you see him?" Bruce asks.

Gooseflesh crawls across Chloe's arms. "Bruce, I need you to put your hands up." She steps into the living room.

"He sees me," Bruce continues. "And he sees you, too. He sees we're all dirty, dirty sinners." He lets out a deranged laugh. "All I want is for the nightmares to stop! I need more Firefly. She told me it would help. I thought I left it here..."

"Okay, Bruce," Chloe says, raising her free hand in an effort to soothe him. She takes another step toward him, and then another. "We'll find something to help with your nightmares. But we need you to come with us and answer a few questions first."

"No!" Bruce yells.

He leans forward suddenly, his hand darting out and closing around the barrel of her gun. He yanks it to the side before she has time to pull the trigger. Stupid, stupid mistake, to stand so close with her gun drawn.

"Lucifer!" Chloe cries. He's at her side the moment Bruce wrangles the Glock from her hand.

Instead of aiming the weapon at them, as Chloe expects him to, Bruce turns it toward his own temple.

"Bruce, don't!"

"God sees all!" the cult leader screams, and pulls the trigger.

The shot cracks like thunder in the room, sending bits of flesh and blood, bone and brain flying. Chloe feels it splatter across her face the second before Bruce Wilson drops to the floor. His body collapses into a wall, tilting a picture of Jesus and putting Bruce in an awkward slouching position. Her Glock tumbles from his hand to the hardwood with a metallic clunk. Blood leaks from his head to the floor.

For a moment, she and Lucifer stand still, staring. All violence happens fast, but especially unexpected violence, as in the incident in Colinda and the showdown with Cain before it. Chloe can barely hear her own ragged breathing over the ringing in her ears.

"Do you suppose there's enough evidence on that memory card to prove he's the killer?" Lucifer asks. "Because Brucie here seems to be at a loss for words now."

She looks at Lucifer, her limbs trembling as adrenaline wears off. He's as covered in organic matter as she is, though he doesn't seem to notice or care.

"Lucifer," she breathes, her eyes wide, "he shot himself with my gun."
He frowns. "It wasn't your fault," he says.

Shivering, Chloe wipes blood and brain from her face. Nausea tickles at the back of her throat. "I have to call this in."

"But—"

"I have to, Lucifer. They'll find out one way or another."

Even before she makes the call, Chloe knows her career is over.
Cain blends in with the crowd, following Chloe and Lucifer as they wander Santa Monica, burgers in hand. There's an easy familiarity between them that Cain's never experienced with another person, but recognizes well enough to envy. Chloe never laughed like that with him, never walked quite so close. It's hard not to despise her for it, even as he wants her more now than ever.

Why does she—how can she—accept the Devil, mere days after learning the truth? But then there's always been something different about Chloe Decker. Not merely that she makes the Devil bleed or that she removed Cain's own eons-old curse. No, she behaves as though she's always had one foot in the supernatural. It makes him wonder if he could have told her the truth, if she might have accepted him, too. Might still.

They stop to watch a street performer. Cain leans against the prickly trunk of a palm tree, the gears of his mind turning as he fingers the precious Pentecostal coin buried deep in his pocket.

Before, he thought destroying Lucifer's life would be enough to tear them apart. He sees he'll have to destroy them both to get what he wants now.

Invisible webs blanket the earth, connecting organisms through blood and affection, money and debt. Everyone is caught in the web, and everyone spins silk. The key is to spin more silk than sticks to your legs. Only the Devil has spun more webs than Adam's first son. Until recent years, he was also the most slippery son of a bitch.

The webs are so thick in southern California that they're more like booby-trapped Gordian knots. Cain treads carefully along his strands of silk, lest he alert Lucifer to his presence. There are few connections he trusts not to turn on him for the right price, a fact that puts him in a weak position for cashing in old favors and negotiating new deals. Which means his lot in L.A. hasn't changed much since before he went to Hell. There's truly only one connection powerful and trustworthy enough for him to call upon in the region. It will have to do.

Some hours after trailing Chloe and Lucifer, Cain waits in Otero's SUV, parked two blocks from the L.A. County Jail. The dark-tinted glass hides his inhuman eyes from the humans traversing the nearby sidewalk. A half-hour passes before Otero returns with John Barrow by his side. Otero climbs into the driver's seat, directing Barrow to the back.

Cain leans over the center console and peers at the other man. "How's it feel to be a free man again, Barrow?"

"That I was dead?"

"Tha-that was the rumor, boss."

Like Otero, Barrow can't quite look him in the eye. Cain could wear contacts, but there are benefits to flaunting the power he's earned, even with his most devoted men.

Settling back into his seat as Otero merges into traffic, Cain commands Barrow, "Contact your
John Barrow is an easy man to control, and therefore an easy man to rely upon. Even at fifty-two, he desires nothing so much as his father's approval. That his father assigned him to work for Cain as part of a decade-old deal always meant there was little doubt Barrow would be loyal. Now, though, after being held hostage at Lucifer's penthouse and questioned for hours by the police, he's been tried and tested. He's the kind of man Cain can trust to ask "how high?" when instructed to jump.

Of course, Hector de la Cruz will never recognize his bastard son, but Barrow can't see that. Instead, he is all too eager to facilitate a meeting where his father might see him and show a sudden change of heart—or any heart at all.

Cain adjusts the strap of his leather satchel from where he sits beside Barrow on the cool concrete floor of an abandoned warehouse. Night has fallen, and no lights brighten the warehouse, but still they wear blindfolds. It's the only way one meets De la Cruz, who knows he has many enemies and does what he can to keep visitors from learning license plate numbers and the addresses of his homes. Not even Barrow knows where his father lives. Cain isn't one of De la Cruz's enemies, but the drug kingpin is clever enough to know he shouldn't trust anyone immune to death.

Exhaust fumes sour the air as a vehicle pulls into the warehouse. Van doors slide open, and people walk toward them, boots crunching on grime and broken concrete.

"Put them in the back," a woman barks, and large hands encircle Cain's elbows, lifting him to his feet and pushing him forward.

He's never needed to fear this part of the journey, but now he takes particular pleasure in knowing he could unleash his wings and kill everyone near him in mere seconds. If he wanted.

They're shoved into the van, the doors slide shut once more, and the blindfolds are yanked from their eyes. Dim LED strips light the back of the van with a blue-white glow. It's the only light available to the back, which sports no windows and is divided from the front seats by a thick plate of black steel. Two brawny men and a sepia-skinned woman clad in black biker gear sit on the bench across from Cain and Barrow.

"Hey, sis," Barrow says with a smirk.

Shayna de la Cruz returns the smirk, which is far more menacing on her crimson lips. Even in this short exchange, there's no mistaking who's the bastard, confident only in his skills, and who's the heir, confident in both her skills and bloodline.

When the van brakes some time later and the engine shuts off, Shayna reties their blindfolds. They're guided out of the van, into what must be an underground garage by the way the sound of their footsteps bounces back upon them. There's an elevator ride, a walk across polished tile, a knock, the sound of a door opening and shutting.

By the time their blindfolds are removed, they are safely ensconced in a masculine room filled with wood and leather, where time and place is meaningless and all windows are curtained by heavy, vermilion drapes. Armed guards blend into the shadows of the room's strategically under-lit corners, lending to the claustrophobic ambience. It's not Balor's cave in Hell, but a human could be trapped here, tortured, and never seen or heard from again.

A long table stands at the center of the room. Hector de la Cruz sits in the highest-backed chair, a
wine glass in hand. He's an imposing man, long-bodied, hawk-eyed, and sharply-dressed. At seventy-nine, he could pass for Barrow's younger brother, if not for the salt-and-pepper hair crowning his head—then again, Barrow has no hair at all. Amazing what wealth and a penchant for divinity can do.

Though Cain has never seen any of the rooms beyond De la Cruz's meeting places, which all look very similar to this one, he knows the man uses divine objects almost as frequently as he collects or sells them. Rumor has it a few have cured him of illnesses and restored elements of his youth. Having known De la Cruz for nearly forty years, Cain can only assume the rumor is true. The man is never sick, and he ages far more slowly than any other human Cain has met.

Shayna saunters to her father's side. She bends, black, wavy hair falling forward, and kisses his cheek before settling into the chair beside him. She smiles at Cain like a hungry dog. Cain stares back, briefly, before ignoring her completely.

De la Cruz holds out a hand to the chairs across from him. "Have a seat," he invites. "Would you like a glass of wine?"

"No wine," Cain says, sitting before the man. At his right, Barrow looks at his father with a sickening, barely-contained hope.

"I have to say, I was surprised to hear you wanted to meet...Avery, now, is it?" Cain nods his chin. "Barrow informed us you were no longer so indestructible." De la Cruz cuts his eyes over to his bastard son for the first time, his disappointment palpable. "I suppose he was mistaken. There were even whispers that you were dead."

"At any rate, you're clearly alive and have something for me, yes?" De la Cruz continues, unfazed by Cain's steeliness. "And want something in return, of course."

Without bothering to reply, Cain lifts his soft leather satchel from his shoulder and drops it onto the table. The bag's contents are so light that it barely makes a sound as it lands. "These are genuine," he explains.

Glancing at him, De la Cruz drags the bag closer and throws back the satchel's flap. He peeks inside, the disinterested expression on his face never wavering. "Angel feathers?" He pushes the bag to the side, as though he's offended. "They're a fucking mess."

"Not just any angel feathers. The Devil's feathers."

"Since when does the Devil have feathers?"

"Since angels do," Cain answers.

"And do El Diablo's feathers always look so bloody?" De la Cruz follows.

Cain refrains from revealing all his knowledge about Lucifer's weaknesses. "Do you want them or not, Hector? We both know you're just going to grind them up."

The old man's smile is thin. "Depends on your price," he says, and pours himself more wine.
"No price. Just a mutually-beneficial partnership. I have a score to settle."

"That is a price, Avery. And how will my doing what I do best with these feathers help you settle your score?"

How to explain the power of turning a narcissist's body against him?

"That doesn't matter." Cain nods to the satchel of feathers. "You powder those and put them on the market, and I'll worry with the rest."

"And what do I get out of it?"

"Other than a fuckton of money?" Cain chuckles. "Let's just say I'll help you get more where this came from." He smiles darkly. "You've never had a steady supply of divinity, have you?"

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to Obli and Yah for beta-reading the slimeball that is Cain.

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Flaxen sunshine peeks through the window blinds, burning past Chloe's eyelids. She kicks off bed covers, seeking a reprieve from the heat, and rolls over with a grunt.

The spot beside her is empty, save for a folded note left on the pillow. Chloe flicks the paper open, draws it close to her face, and squints, bleary-eyed, at Lucifer's sweeping, flamboyant script. It's as though a Founding Father got hold of Trixie's purple gel pen and wide-ruled notebook paper.

*Busy day at Lux. Will make it up to you later.*

Followed by a poorly drawn heart and smiley with horns.

Chloe huffs a small laugh before sobering and letting the note drop to the bed. He's been busy lately—going off during the day to do his own thing. Probably just as well they're going to spend another day apart. She feels a little too much like setting fire to something. Maybe life itself.

But things have to stay normal for Trixie, so she drags herself out of bed and stumbles to her bathroom. Standing in front of the mirror, she forces a smile to her face before letting her mouth fall back into a scowl.

When she shuffles downstairs after her shower, she sees a tornado has blown through her kitchen, leaving behind cracked egg shells, avocado skins, bits of cilantro, and a mountain of dishes. Izzy stands in the middle of the chaos, her black, wavy hair pulled back into a thick braid.

"Wow," Chloe says, "you've made breakfast."

"I have!" Izzy smiles as she spoons fresh salsa onto three plates laden with colorful food. "Huevos rancheros. Fresh-squeezed orange juice. Coffee."

"Thank you. This is...nice." Suspiciously so. Chloe ambles over to where Trixie bounces in her chair at the kitchen table. Wrapping her arms around her daughter, she smatters Trixie's cheek with kisses until she giggles and pulls away. "Morning, monkey."

"Are you staying home again today?" Trixie asks, hopeful.

"I am," Chloe says, swallowing back the lump that rises in her throat. She settles into the seat next to her daughter's. "I was thinking we could go to the beach today. Does that sound fun?"

"Can I bring my frisbee?"

"Sure, if you want." She watches as Izzy balances three plates to the table. After setting them down, she sits across from Chloe and smiles again. Chloe rolls her eyes. "Spill it," she says. "You're trying to get in my good graces."

"I need to put up a sign outside," Izzy confesses.

"A sign."

"For my readings."
"No way."

"You want me to pay my share of the rent, right? This is how I make money."

"I thought you were going to rent a business space."

"I am, but I either make this month's rent or I rent a space. I'm coming from Arizona, Chloe. I can't rent two places in California right now and..." She looks pointedly at Trixie, who's too busy digging into fried eggs to notice. And babysit, she means. For free.

Not that Chloe's needed a babysitter much these last few days.

"No, I get it," Chloe sighs. "I'm pretty sure you'll need a license to operate out of the apartment, though. It's probably against the lease." Which reminds her she hasn't even notified the landlord that Maze has moved out or that Izzy has moved in.

"Just get your boyfriend to talk them into it." Izzy smirks before sipping her coffee.

Chloe narrows her eyes. "I'm not doing that."

"You have the Devil at your disposal. Why wouldn't you use that to your advantage?"

"I'm not going to take advantage of him."

"He wouldn't see it that way, and you two need to work together, remember?"

"Well, that ship's sailed, hasn't it?" Chloe says bitterly. Glancing at her perceptive daughter with some concern, she adds, "What with my, um, demotion."

"Has it?" Izzy asks, arching a brow. She reaches for the tarot cards she keeps tucked within the lace sash around her waist.

"It's too early for that," Chloe says, holding up a hand. "And can you maybe not be so, I don't know, frank about all of Lucifer's...stuff?" Chloe nods her head toward Trixie.

"Oh, Trixie knows Lucifer's the Devil," Izzy chuckles. "Don't you, Trix?"

Trixie shrugs and stuffs a hunk of avocado in her mouth. "Sure, he doesn't look like anybody else." She looks at Chloe—or, more disturbingly, at the space around her. "Except kinda like you, Mom."

Chloe stares at her daughter, discomfited by this brave new world they're all living in, where she dates the literal Devil and her own flesh and blood, the child that took twenty-six hours and a C-section to enter the world, sees things. Real things. Not hallucinations, even if they make no sense to her. She's not sure which would be better.

"What do you think all that means, baby?"

Trixie shrugs again. "Lucifer's good."

It's the same conclusion Chloe's come to, over and over again, despite occasional evidence to the contrary and Lucifer's complicated relationship with the law.

"I'll think about it," Chloe says to Izzy.

"Great! I've already put out a sign for today."
After breakfast, Chloe slathers sunscreen on herself and Trixie. They don swimsuits and shorts and make the twenty-minute walk, hand in hand, to the beach, the sun bearing down on their floppy hats. There are people at the beach—when aren’t there?—but it isn’t crowded. Because it’s daytime. On a weekday.

Chloe drops her beach bag, lays out their towels, and wedges water bottles into the sand before settling down, her legs crossed before her. She's not ready for this conversation, but it's been a week, and it's better if Trixie finds out the truth from her than some other source. Sometimes Chloe thinks her mom had it easy, raising a kid in a time before the internet.

"Aren't we gonna throw the frisbee?" Trixie whines from where she still stands, bare feet toeing the sand, lips turned down in that preemptive pout she's learned from Lucifer. It never garners them the results they're hoping for, not with Chloe, but they keep trying valiantly.

"We'll throw the frisbee soon, I promise." Chloe pats the Mars rover beach towel beside her. "Have a seat, baby."

Trixie flops down on the towel. "Am I in trouble?"

"No," Chloe assures her with a laugh. She bumps her arm against her daughter's shoulder. "Should you be?"

"Uh-uh."

Not suspicious at all, Chloe thinks, and wonders with some amusement what she'll eventually find out her clever little girl's gotten into now.

Sighing, she looks out over the beach. The sparkling, blue Pacific kisses the sand with sea foam, and gulls circle above, crying raucously. Chloe rarely swims in the ocean, preferring instead the sun and sand, but the heat feels so oppressive today that it's as if the water calls to her.

"Are you okay?" Trixie grabs her hand, drawing Chloe back into herself. It's such an adult gesture from a ten-year-old that she nearly cries.

"I’m okay, monkey." Here goes... "I just want you to know that... Well, I'm not gonna be a detective anymore," she says, and is pleased when her voice doesn't break. She studies her daughter and struggles to read her frown.

"But you love being a cop."

"I did," Chloe agrees, feeling the sharp pang of sadness that accompanies all of life's remarkable endings. "But I made a very bad mistake, and my bosses thought I should do something else."

"You got fired?" Trixie gasps. It's hard to tell if she's shocked or impressed.

Chloe nods, her face hot with embarrassment. Surely this is what it feels like to fail her daughter, not to mention herself.

The LAPD fired her with little fanfare. Words like "out of line," "misconduct," and "PR nightmare"
were thrown around, and what hurt most was knowing how appropriate they all were. They took
her guns. They took her badge. They grilled her for hours, and though the investigation is still
considered "ongoing" for now, she knows that, in so many ways, it's all over. Bruce Wilson was a
disturbed, drug-addled man who did kill his followers, and then he killed himself. Case closed, and
Chloe's career with it.

Morrison had waited for her outside the lieutenant's office, a nasty smile curling under his beard.

"See ya round, Decker."

She'd wanted to punch his corrupt face, wanted to tell him she could bring the Devil to his doorstep
if she so desired, but she only scowled, said her goodbyes (extracted herself from Ella's hug),
gathered her things, and left. Because she agreed with the suits' decision. Whether she'd been
tried unfairly for the paparazzi shots or not, and regardless of what they did to Webb for his
ineptitude, a suspect was dead because of her. She'd been too tired to go in half-cocked, to draw her
weapon. But she'd done it anyway.

"What are you gonna do now?" Trixie asks.

The million-dollar question that needs to be answered sooner than later.

"You know, I'm not sure yet." Chloe wraps an arm around Trixie's shoulders. "But don't worry
about that, monkey. I just wanted to tell you that some things will be changing soon, and that's
okay."

It really isn't, though. But then that's the thing parenting books never tell you: how much you'll lie
to your kids to keep them safe and happy, even as the earth crumbles beneath your feet.

They throw the frisbee and chase each other in sea foam, and for a time Chloe forgets she's
misplaced a vital part of herself. Forgets, even, that the world is scarier and more complicated than
she ever could have guessed. There is no Heaven, no Hell, only herself, her daughter, and the sea
she's always known.

Just when Chloe thinks Trixie has grown tired of the beach, a boy her age runs to them, his skinny
arms wrapped around a beach ball. Chloe exchanges pleasantries with the boy's elderly grandfather
before settling back on her beach towel.

As she watches Trixie and the boy toss the beach ball to each other, a dull ache begins to throb
behind her eyes. Even with her hat and sunglasses, the bright sunlight has only become more
punishing. She sips water and grimaces when it slides, cold and slimy, down her gut. It's been
years since she had a migraine, but the sensation is familiar enough that she knows not to ignore it.

She struggles to her feet, while pulling up a rideshare app on her phone. "Trixie-babe!" she calls,
pushing past a sweeping wave of nausea. "Time to go!"

The colorful beach ball bounces across the sand. "But, Mooommm!" Trixie whines.

"No buts," Chloe hears herself say, too softly to be heard across the short distance.

She takes a step forward, and her vision whites out. She collapses in the sand.

***
"Lucifer, I can walk."

"I'm sure you believe that, but we're nearly to the car."

"It was just heat exhaustion," Chloe sighs as the wheelchair bumps along the hospital parking lot's asphalt. "I feel fine now." And more than a little humiliated.

"But you fainted," Trixie argues. She walks next to the wheelchair, one hand tightly gripping Chloe's fingers.

"She makes an excellent point," Lucifer says.

Chloe gives her daughter's hand a squeeze. "I know, baby, and that's super scary, but I really am okay now. You heard the doctor, didn't you? I'm in great shape. Just got a little too hot."

"I guess," Trixie grumbles.

No doubt spending four hours in a hospital has dredged up bad memories. Such a stupid mistake, Chloe berates herself. She's certain she wouldn't have fainted if she had only been drinking more water. No telling what ice packs and electrolytes from a hospital will cost.

"Ah, here we are!" Lucifer announces, and Chloe hears the familiar double-chirp of her car unlocking.

She frowns. "You got my car?"

"Well, what other car would you have preferred? The Corvette's a two-seater, and I know how you feel about popping the child in the boot."

"Okay, but you still have a key to my car? Pretty sure I told you to get rid of that." Not that she really cares anymore. It's just the principle of the matter.

"You did," Lucifer admits, "but I never promised to be obedient." He opens the back door of the car. "Hop in, urchin. It's hot as blazes, and your mother's clearly still suffering from a touch of the vapors."

Rolling her eyes, Chloe uses the momentary distraction to push to her feet. Lucifer and Trixie let out yelps of protest, which she ignores while yanking open the passenger side door. She drops to the seat and buckles up.

"Can you stop by a grocery store on the way back?" Chloe asks once Lucifer's gotten behind the wheel.

"Did you fall on your head?" he gripes, while cranking up the air conditioning and directing vents her way. "You should be home resting."

"I'm fine. And it's Taco Tuesday, and we need ingredients."

"Taco Tuesday can bloody well wait." Lucifer scowls at her before pulling up beside the ticket machine and shoving a credit card into the designated slot. As he weasels his way into traffic, he fishes his cell phone out of his breast pocket and tosses it onto her lap. "Text Emilio Torres your address and the time he should be there."

She stares at his phone. "What?"

"Emilio owns a food truck. Splendid street tacos."
"We get a taco truck?" Trixie gasps from the backseat.

"Yes," Lucifer says.

"No, monkey," Chloe says firmly. She glares at Lucifer as her daughter lets out an annoying whine. "There's no reason someone with a food truck would make a trip to our street."

"He bloody well will if the Devil tells him to," Lucifer says. "Message him."

Chloe picks up the phone and types in his absurd password. His contacts list is astonishingly long, and she finds herself scrolling through it, wondering how many of the people he's slept with, how many owe him. So many favors. Favors upon favors upon favors. Is it any wonder Lucifer thought he could save her job, the moment she was demoted?

"You know you want to," he says.

A shiver runs through her that has nothing to do with the cold air blasting across her skin. She hates that he's right. She does want to.

Tapping on Emilio Torres' name, she sees other times Lucifer has directed the man—to street corners near Lux and the precinct, to Santa Monica, to Redondo Beach. There's no banter here, no conversation. Just directions from Lucifer and thumbs up emojis from Emilio. Quickly, before she can change her mind, Chloe swipes "7pm" and her address and hits send. Emilio responds within the minute with a thumbs up emoji.

"So, we do get a taco truck?" Trixie asks hopefully. Only then does Chloe realize her daughter has leaned forward and wedged her face between the two front seats.

"Looks like," Chloe says, her brow furrowed as she passes the phone back to Lucifer. His grin is sly as he pockets it.

At the apartment, Izzy apologizes profusely when she learns that most of Chloe and Trixie's day has been spent in a hospital.

"I'm so sorry, Chlo. I had clients and had my phone on silent."

"Ah, what, your little cards didn't tell you she was eating sand?" Lucifer bites out.

"You know it doesn't work that way," Izzy says, a hand on her hip. "I should cancel my date for tonight..."

Chloe waves her off and encourages her to do as she pleases. Already, she's had to soothe Dan over the phone. The truth is she feels fine, and there's no reason why Lucifer shouldn't have been the one to drive her home, anyway. He's been busy this week, sure, but work is optional for those who have more money than they know what to do with. Not to mention she knew she'd never have heard the end of it if she hadn't called him.

The afternoon crawls as Lucifer, Trixie, and Izzy relegate her to the couch. They keep the temperature in the apartment cool and foist cold drinks upon her until her bladder can't take it anymore. By seven o'clock, Izzy's out the door and Chloe's had enough of all the well-meaning care. She pushes to her feet.

"No, no," Lucifer insists, gently shoving her back. "I'll bring you whatever you like."

"I'm getting up, Lucifer."
"But—"

"No," she says, standing again. She pats his chest gently. "I'm okay, and there's nothing you could have done if you'd been there." More quietly, she says, "Your dad's not behind this." At least, she doesn't think he is.

"You can never know with that bastard."

Great.

As he stares at her, she feels the ghost of another conversation she doesn't want to have, haunting them. That specter of truth, of how she will grow old and die, and he will not; a discordant note in what has become their melody. Something for another time. She leans up on tiptoe and kisses his cheek.

At exactly 7:00 p.m., Emilio Torres illegally parks his pink food truck against the curb outside Chloe's complex. At first, she intends to tell the man to move his vehicle, but she stops herself. She's not a cop anymore, for one, and even she has to admit a little illegal parking is just practical in L.A.

She stands beside the truck, her arms crossed. "Buzo de Tacos." She cuts her eyes over at Lucifer. "Really?"

"What?" Lucifer asks cheerily. "Doesn't everyone enjoy a good taco dive? You know I do."

"What's a taco diver?" Trixie asks.

Chloe closes her eyes as Lucifer answers, "A cunning linguist."

Before Trixie can become any more worldly, the roll-up door on the side of the truck grinds open, revealing a baby-faced Latino man. "Lucifer!" Emilio exclaims, his smile bright. "Good to see you!"

Though maybe it shouldn't, the delectation surprises Chloe. It's Will at Poke'n Around all over again, and she's struck once more by how popular Lucifer is. How, really, most of the favors she knows about have neither been good nor bad, but simply cut out middlemen. And people love him for it.

Of course, there was that kid who ran deliveries for the mob... Her brain immediately counters: And he chose that, didn't he? And the mob wouldn't go away, regardless.

"What would you like, Detective?" Emilio asks, pulling her from the depths of her moral crisis.

"Oh," Chloe breathes, her heart clenching at the title and the warm reminder that Lucifer brags about her to everyone. "Not a detective anymore." She shakes her head. "Um, I'll have the number three."

Dan jogs up to them several minutes later, apologizing for his lateness and complaining about parking. He looks between the truck, Chloe, and the small crowd of neighbors that has gathered to stuff their faces on the curbside. Chloe can see him struggle to decide which thing to tackle first.

Finally, he looks at her. "You're doing okay?"

"All good," she assures.
He nods several times—too many times to be considered natural or relaxed. Reluctantly, he looks at Lucifer. "You're behind the taco truck?"

"Well, I'd say Emilio is," Lucifer jokes around a mouthful of food, "but in a roundabout way, yes."

"Dan?" Emilio cranes his neck over the edge of the truck's counter. "I thought I heard you!"

"Ooh, you two know each other!" Lucifer laughs.

"Hey, man." Dan rubs the back of his neck and shrugs sheepishly at Lucifer and Chloe. "What can I say? I love Buzo de Tacos."

A giant grin breaks out on Lucifer's face.

"Don't even start," Chloe warns him.

Apparently tacos are what was needed for Dan to change his tune about Lucifer. They eat outside and take second helpings indoors after thanking Emilio. Lucifer and Dan fall into an easy conversation about *Destruction at Dawn*, an upcoming action movie Chloe couldn't possibly care less about. It all feels so normal, given the strange start to the day.

Chloe helps Trixie pack her backpack after they've finished eating. Family dinner nights have turned into Trixie trade-off nights. She always wonders if this arrangement is right, if her daughter isn't slowly breaking inside as she moves between apartments.

Trixie bends a Barbie's legs at a forty-five degree angle and stuffs the doll into her backpack. "Are you sure you'll be okay?" she asks.

This is one of the upsides to being fired, Chloe knows. Her daughter's fears are far less likely to be realized now. She pulls Trixie to her, hugging her tightly. "I'm fine, and I'm going to be fine, monkey." She runs a hand over the little girl's hair. "You've got Aunt Izzy's number if you have a nightmare?"

"Uh-huh."

Before Dan and Trixie leave, Dan pulls Chloe aside. "You all right for rent?" he asks quietly.

Chloe nods. "For now. I've got some savings."

"Good. Just...if you need help before you find a new job, don't make any deals with him, okay?" He glances to where Lucifer is busy navigating Trixie's steady babble about *My Little Pony*. Chloe can tell by the expression on her ex-husband's face that he still isn't sure how to reconcile Lucifer's many contradictions.

She almost laughs, but she remembers all too well the fear of the unknown that plagued her those first few weeks. Only perpetually-optimistic Ella could have Heaven and Hell's existence confirmed—not to mention the Devil's—and not experience an existential crisis.

"No loans from the Devil," she promises, and means it.

The door shuts several minutes later, leaving her alone with Lucifer. She turns to him and slides her hands up to his unbuttoned collar. "I'm not tired," she says.

Smiling slightly, he enfolds her hands in his, pausing her movements. "You're not?"

She shakes her head and presses closer. "And we're alone."
"Raincheck?" he asks softly.

Chloe frowns, but eases away. "Is something wrong? If this is about me fainting earlier—"

"It's not," he assures. "But, if you're not tired, well, I'd like to show you something."

"Show me something?"

"Mm." He grins, and a nervous excitement ripples through him. "What I've been working on these last few days."

"Okay," she agrees, perplexed.

"Lovely. It's at Lux."

***

In the elevator in Lucifer's building, Chloe watches as Lucifer punches in a different PIN and selects the sixth floor. Her breath quickens. She tried to visit the other floors in his building once before, but quickly learned they weren't accessible to the public. More than once, she's asked him what or who else occupies the other floors, but he's deflected. There are apartments, she knows. Maze lived here once, Amenadiel, too. But she's always known there was more. More secrets.

Will she ever know him?

"What's on the sixth floor, huh?" she asks, poking at his ribs.

"Patience, Detective."

She frowns slightly as the elevator jerks upward. "You need to stop calling me that. I'm not a detective anymore, Lucifer."

"Hmm." Lucifer looks down at her. "I must no longer be the Devil, then."

Before she can reply that that's entirely different, the elevator car halts, and the doors slide open. Lucifer steps forward and flicks a switch. Several floor lamps burst to life, spilling soft, yellow-white light across the room.

The massive and very empty room. No furniture other than the lamps and a black office chair warms the bare concrete floors. The sharp scents of plaster and fresh paint tell her construction has occurred here recently. The walls have been painted a warm, but neutral green-gray.

A weak smile lifts Lucifer's mouth. "Come see," he says, holding out a hand. She rests her fingers in his, and he draws her forward. Their footsteps echo in the concrete expanse.

"What is this, Lucifer?"

"You might call it a new business venture," he answers. "Of a sort."

She drifts over to one of the floor-to-ceiling glass windows. The view from the sixth floor isn't nearly as spectacular as it is from the penthouse, but the winking city lights still make her smile.

"Something for Lux?" she asks.
"Something for you," he says.

Chloe turns back, confused. "For me?"

He holds up his hands. "Hear me out, Detective. I know I've not always been the best at giving you gifts, but I promise you my intentions are good. Or, at least, I hope they are." He huffs, his hands dropping back to his sides. "Not to say good intentions wouldn't still land me in Hell."

"Lucifer, it's okay. I'm not upset or questioning your intentions. But I..." She looks around. "Help me understand? I don't know what this is, exactly."

"Right," he chuckles. "Of course. Perhaps it's best if I show you." Digging into his breast pocket, he resurfaces with a business card and holds it out to her.

Frowning, Chloe takes it. Her name immediately catches her eye, followed by the sleek monochromatic design. On the right half of the card, her name, printed in black, hovers above a gray job title: Consulting Detective. On the left half of the card, in white text on a black background, her cell phone number and the address of the building beneath her feet. A cheeky asterisk informs the person with the card that Yes, we're above a nightclub.

"Look here," Lucifer says, pointing to one corner of the card. "It even has a watermark."

"Lucifer, what is this?" she asks again.

"This is what I can do for you," he says, a manic edge to his voice. "You gave me back my purpose, even my home, once upon a time, so it's far past time I return the favor."

She feels a little dizzy again—not from heat exhaustion, but the overwhelming urge to accept his gift without further question, and the fear of what it could mean if she did so.

"But I'm not a private investigator."

"Ah!" He digs into his pocket again, bringing out a single, folded sheet of paper. "Your license."

Chloe snatches the paper from him. It's an official license from California's Bureau of Security & Investigative Services. There's a registration number and everything.

"Your ID card should be in the mail any day now."

"I...haven't taken the exam to earn this." Having been fired from the police department, she's not even sure she'd qualify.

Lucifer waves a hand, confident. "You'd pass."

Horribly illegal. Okay. Sure. Because he's a criminal. Chloe nods, half-dazed. She looks away from the license. "And where do you come into all this?"

His grin shines like a knife in the lamplit room. "Turn over the business card."

Chloe flips the card. A crisp, white serif rests in the center of a glossy pool of black. The Devil's in the Details.

"We can change the name, if you like," Lucifer says, "but I'm rather fond of it."

She looks up at him, her throat dry. She could swear her heart is trying to claw its way out of her chest. "You want us to go freelance."
"Think about it, darling. My connections, your know-how."

Favors upon favors upon favors.

"I don't want to be a vigilante, Lucifer."

"So don't be a vigilante, then." Gently, he takes the business card and license from her, returning them to his breast pocket. "But let's not pretend you aren't just as much of a rebel as I am."

Chloe scowls at him.

"See," he laughs, "that's the look you give me when you know I'm right." He steps closer, crossing into her space. Bending, he kisses her once, briefly, and speaks across her mouth, "Why not embrace it a little? Untether me to do your bidding."

"I haven't tethered you," she argues.

"Haven't you?" He leans back, amused. "You may not think it, but I've been a very good boy for you, Detective. Minded more P's and Q's than ever before. But there's truth in the shadows. You think we botched the Wilson investigation, but the killer was found, and now he won't trouble another soul—all because we bent the rules, found out the truth, and weren't going to let him slip away. You want to find Yates' killer, Rosales' killer. You want to wipe out what's left of the Sinnerman's network. We could." He grins slightly. "And without a mile of paperwork."

His words are distressing, if for no other reason than they poke at her own thoughts and desires. She's struggled to feel guilty about Wilson's death, or rather, suicide. If they hadn't gone back to the farm that night, who's to say he ever would have been apprehended? Who's to say the police ever would have found his secret room and the video evidence needed to confirm he was the killer? Time and again, they break the rules, and what that's led to, more than anything, is a very high solve rate.

Chloe swallows. "This is... It's really thoughtful, but it's a lot, Lucifer. I need to think about it."

"Of course. Take your time." He moves to her side and throws an arm around her shoulders. If he's disappointed, he hides it well. "Care to head upstairs?" he says, arching a suggestive brow.

***

"Join me in the shower?" Lucifer grins from where he stands naked at the foot of the bed.

Chloe eyes him appreciatively, but shakes her head. "I'm starving. Think I'll grab a bite to eat before I shower."

"You can look at me like that, and then turn me down cold? You wound me," he teases.

"You'll get over it," she says with a smirk. Crawling across the bed, she sits up on her knees and kisses him. "Or I can make it up to you later."

His laughter is low and wicked. "Oh, I do like the sound of that."

As the shower starts up, Chloe descends the stairs out of Lucifer's bedroom, pulling on his black dress shirt from the night before as she goes. She squints uncomfortably at the bright morning light pouring into the living area and grabs her phone from the bar. The summer art camp she signed
Trixie up for left a voicemail message an hour earlier. She opens the message up to listen.

"Hi, Ms. Decker!" a too-chipper, male camp coordinator exclaims. "Just wanted to let you know we've changed our payment system. The new website you need to visit to make your payment is—"

Chloe huffs as the man rattles off an absurdly long address. Why didn't they just email it? Rolling her eyes, she pauses the message and goes in search of a pen and paper. For some things, it's still easier to do it old school.

Two drawers, one shallow and one deep, run along the right side of the writing desk in Lucifer's library. She yanks open the top drawer, revealing a rectangular, black box the size of a child's lunchbox. Setting aside her phone, her eyes flick up to the bedroom's entrance. Reassured that she's still alone, she lifts the container out of the drawer. Is this...wrong, what she's doing? Is it any worse to open a box than it is to open a drawer?

After another moment's hesitation, she opens the box. Ooh. It's where he keeps his drug paraphernalia. Some weed, some cocaine, a glass pipe. Of course. Why did she think Lucifer's writing desk would contain pens and paper?

He's a criminal and a drug user. She knows it; he's never hidden the fact. And now he wants to run an investigative consultancy firm with her. Sure, why not? Shaking her head, she closes the box and returns it to the drawer.

The bottom drawer is stiff, and wood pieces scrape against each other as she tugs. When the drawer slides open suddenly, she stumbles back. Righting herself against the arm of the desk chair at her side, she looks into the drawer, at the dated spines of leather-bound journals. Her gut immediately knows what they are.

I've been giving favors for thousands of years. Would you like a peek at my ledger?

She'd said no at the time, not least of all because she thought he was delusional or a conman, or both. Now, though... Now, she knows the truth, but she still doesn't have all the details—and, well, that's where the Devil is, isn't it? There's a fancy business card to prove it and everything. She grabs the journal for the current year, sets it on the desk, and opens to a random page.

There are names, many names—some crossed out, most not—and beside each one, the service rendered. Some favors are mundane or strange or funny, and others are clear proof of Lucifer's power and wealth.

Akua Okafor — $5m for Ghana Space Centre

Mark Seabrook — Mistrial

Hillary Antonini — Construction of HEMNES dresser

Andrew Byrne — Lyrics to "Nobody"

Kristina Albert — A husband

Robert Trent — Pool of ranch dressing

Chloe grimaces and makes a small sound of disgust. Why ranch?

"What are we looking for, Detective?"
Chloe shrieks as she leaps back from the desk, and Lucifer howls with laughter. She looks at him, wide-eyed and slack-jawed. A black towel hangs low on his hips, and dark, damp hair curls at the edge of his forehead. His grin is wide and all teeth.

"I'm sorry," Chloe says. "I just— I was looking for a pen and paper, and—"

"And you thought you'd do a bit of snooping while you were at it." He nods, his eyes dropping down to her bare feet, only to crawl upward.

She swallows, flustered and uncertain. "You... You did say I could look."

"Oh, remember that, do you? Well. When I made that offer, I did rather think I'd be in the same room, Detective." His smirks. "No matter, though. I'm here now."

Lucifer rounds the desk, pulls back the leather desk chair, and takes a seat. Chloe stares at the back of his head, at the strong lines of his body. He does this sometimes, sits in chairs like he's a king. A king from the worst place imaginable, but a king nonetheless.

"Come here, Detective."

Her stomach gives a small flip as she moves to stand beside him. He looks up at her beneath dark lashes, and though she still wears his shirt, she's stripped naked by his gaze.

"Sit," he says, nodding to his bare thighs.

"You want me to sit?" She tucks a strand of hair behind her ear.

He tilts his head. "I want you to sit."

Chloe isn't sure why she obeys, but she does. Clearing her throat, she shuffles between his legs and the desk, and sits carefully at the edge of his knees. She's suddenly very aware that she's wearing nothing but his shirt.

Lucifer chuckles and grabs her hips, dragging her back on his thighs, so that only the tips of her toes touch the floor. Hooking his feet along the inside of her ankles, he gently kicks her legs and knees apart. "There," he says, "that's much better, wouldn't you agree?"

She doesn't trust herself to smart off like she normally would. Whatever's happening between them is crackling like fire in her blood. Still, she shivers, but then Lucifer's hand is there, pressing between her shoulder blades and running down her spine, warm and soothing.

Reaching forward, he takes hold of the ledger and draws it to the edge of the desk. "Far be it from me to interrupt your reading, Detective. Keep going. Aloud."

Her brow furrows. "You want me to read?"

"I do. It's lovely to be reminded of my good works. Oh, but one thing before you start." He runs a hand up the side of her arm, over her shoulder, to her collarbone, and up the length of her throat. Gently grasping her chin, he taps a finger against her lips. Taking the hint, she opens her mouth and wraps her tongue around his finger. She sighs when he pulls away. "Go on, then," he says, and she's pleased when she hears he's a little breathless, too.

Chloe bows her head and, though she feels silly, begins to read, "Hege Hansen." Lucifer's hands curve around her hips and dip between her thighs. "Restitution."
"Mohammed Ah—ah," she gasps as his wet finger explores between her legs. A moment later, he slides it inside of her and hooks it back toward his palm, finding her G-spot with ease.

"Why'd you stop reading?" Lucifer teases at her shoulder as fingers from his other hand find her clit.

"I'm not sure I can," she breathes out on a laugh.

"You can," he says. "Or I can stop. Your choice."

Any other time in her life, she would have been embarrassed by the plaintive whine that slips from her mouth. "Mohammed Ahmed," she says, voice shaking. "Two million for cocaine business." Holy shit. "Wait, how much cocaine?" Lucifer doesn't answer as he huffs and begins pumping his fingers. She groans, and her hips move of their own accord, driven toward his hands, driven toward the hard, heavy length pressing between their bodies.

"Nina Rey," she pants, afraid he'll stop. "Access to JPL."

"Oh, that was a tricky one," Lucifer comments.

She continues to read, her tongue tripping over syllables. Names, so many names. So much scheming and playing. But then, the longer they're like this, the less she cares, the less she can read or even think. Finally, her head falls back against his shoulder, and his mouth presses against the sensitive spot beneath her ear.

"I need you," she moans, unbuttoning and discarding his shirt. "Please."

"There it is," Lucifer sighs. "That's desire." He drags the towel away from his erection, lifts her by her hips, and lines them up together. She takes over, sinking onto him feverishly, and they groan together. "You're glorious like this," he compliments, as she braces against the desk for leverage. "The way you look..."

Chloe moves on him, chasing pleasure, and he grabs her waist to help drive her. She claws at his right hand, drawing it toward her chest. The bullet sways, forward and back, brushing their fingers with every lift and dive. The calescent ache between her thighs crescendos and erupts when she least expects it, tearing air from her lungs. Strong arms and white wings engulf her as Lucifer surrenders to his own want and moans against her neck. He twitches inside her, over and over.

She melts back against his chest, listening to their ragged breathing and feeling the mess of their sex, damp on her thighs. His wings tremble and flag, relaxing beside them. Turning her head, she kisses him lazily. "Did I just experience one of Lucifer Morningstar's infamous improvisations?" she asks, smiling against his mouth.

He huffs. "Yes, and?"

Laughter bubbles out of her. "I should go snooping more."

"I would expect nothing less, Detective." His fingers caress her skin, bringing them down from their high. "Not that it's exactly snooping. Anything that's mine is yours, you know." He says this like it's a given.

It's so intimate, so pure, that it overwhelms her a little, and something warm stirs deep in her breast. She loves him, doesn't she? Whether it can work or not. Whether it makes sense or not. Whether it's dangerous or crazy—or maybe because it is dangerous and crazy. She loves him.
"What are your thoughts on favors now, hmm?" he asks, and she's drawn out of her head, but the warm glow of her affection lingers.

"They're growing on me," she says quietly, too relaxed to be critical at the moment. And three words are right there in her mouth, burning at the door of her lips. She opens her mouth to give them life, but he speaks before she does.

"What if I show you how it's all done?"

***

It starts with a call to one of Lux's bartenders, who operates as a sort of town crier: Come one, come all. Lucifer Morningstar is giving out favors.

"So, what," Chloe says around a mouthful of honeydew melon, "they schedule an appointment?"

"Schedule an appointment!" Lucifer laughs heartily. "It's first come, first serve, through the door. I let it be known I'm feeling generous. Give it a half-hour or so, and then I can pop downstairs and begin considering their requests."

She stares at him. "People come that fast?"

"With me? Of course they do."

Chloe laughs, "You know what I mean."

"And my answer's the same."

"But why?" She shakes her head. "They don't know who you are."

"Well, I do tell most of them," he says.

"I've noticed, but none of them believe it."

"A few do, perhaps, but, no, most don't." He shrugs a shoulder and pops another grape in his mouth. "Most think I'm in the mob." He stands from the sofa suddenly. "Ah, that reminds me..." Jogging into the bedroom, he returns a minute later with a simple, but elegant black dress thrown over his forearm and a pair of black heels. "Wear these today, would you?"

She takes the clothing from him. The heels look far from comfortable, but the dress is soft to the touch, the texture of the threadwork nearly impossible to detect. "The boss needs me to look good?" she teases.

"Something like that."

Nervous jitters tingle through her when they take the elevator down forty-five minutes later. She has to admit, they look striking. Her midnight dress and heels match the black of his suit, which contrasts against his white shirt and vibrant pocket square, which itself complements the red of her lips.

The elevator doors open, and Lucifer tucks her hand in the crook of his arm. "Shall we?" he asks, and she nods.
A long line of people stretches down the curved staircase into Lux. There are men and women, young and old, dark- and light-skinned and everything in between, from every walk of life. As they pass the crowd, Chloe rubbernecks in astonishment, while Lucifer, who's been doing this for thousands of years, never bothers to turn his head.

He draws her to one of the nightclub's crescent booths and holds her hand as she takes a seat. When he settles beside her, a server rushes forward with a tray laden by two tumblers filled with brown liquor. Lucifer takes them both, hands one to Chloe, and leans back comfortably, a lord surveying his subjects. His free arm runs along the back of the booth, making it obvious she's here with him. She sits up a little straighter.

Lucifer looks to the burly, flannel-wearing lumberjack of a man seated on the stool across from them. "Hello," he purrs, "care to tell me what you desire?"

The desires and stories aren't what Chloe expects, and many favors turn into deals on the fly, all sealed with vows or handshakes. Businesses are funded, real estate is bought and sold, contacts are exchanged, and legal problems disappear with phone calls. Millions of dollars are moved, and careers are made.

But not all desires are fed.

"I want my ex-husband dead," one woman snarls, and Chloe barely contains her shiver.

"Do you now?" Lucifer says, his smile vicious. "Fraid you'll have to do the dirty work yourself. I'll warn you, though: Nasty bit of business, murder. Might land you in a place you'd rather not be." He holds up a finger. "Actually, I know just the therapist for you."

"Therapist?" the woman echoes dully.

"Well, yes," Lucifer says. "You're in L.A. You're supposed to have a therapist."

An hour into the madness, an attractive Asian woman comes forward. Her fitted turquoise dress rides up, hugging and displaying the round curve of her rear. Chloe bristles as the woman openly leers at Lucifer, who licks his bottom lip at the sight of her.

"And what is it you'd like?" Lucifer asks.

But it's plenty obvious, and before the woman can answer, Chloe grips Lucifer's wrist, drawing his attention. "No," she says.

"No?" he asks, and actually seems shocked.

"No," Chloe says.

Lucifer looks at the woman apologetically. "Maybe some other time, dear," he soothes.

And, oh, it is the wrong thing for him to say. Chloe glares at him as the other woman pouts and climbs down from the stool. Her narrow hips sway as she walks away.

"What the hell?" Chloe snaps as quietly as she can.

Lucifer sighs, "You just ruined a perfectly good threesome, darling." He flicks his fingers. "Next!"

"I'm not interested in a threesome, Lucifer."

He huffs. "Aren't you?"
"And I'm not bi," she adds.

A young man in a cheap suit sits on the stool across from them. Chloe almost feels sorry for him. As if Lucifer will ever be able to overlook that suit.

Lucifer eyes her skeptically. "Not even the least bit heteroflexible?"

"No," she hisses, embarrassed.

"Hmm." Lucifer turns to the young man and grabs hold of him with his gaze. "Go on, tell me what you want."

"I want my big break," the young man responds. "I'm a singer." The spell melts off him. "And it's so hard to—"

"Yes, yes, the industry is a cruel and fickle beast," Lucifer says, waving a hand. "Here's your chance, then. Give us a song, bard."

The young man swallows hard and nods. Sucking in a deep breath, he launches into his own, terrible rendition of Phil Collins' 'In the Air Tonight.'

Chloe nudges Lucifer. "Are you saying it's a problem that I'm not bi?"

"What? Of course not. I'm into your desires, after all. But it's okay to be curious, you know, especially with me."

"Well. I'm not curious."

"My mistake." Chloe, her heart pounding, thinks the conversation is over until he adds, "I suppose I misunderstood what I saw in your browser history."

"Okay, that's snooping," she says, her face growing hot.

He winces as a sustained note falls especially flat. "Well, it's not my fault you forgot to use incognito on your mobile. There I was, simply trying to search Google... But I wouldn't be me if I didn't notice porn in an address bar. I'm a consummate researcher, of course. I approve of your taste, by the way. Literally and figuratively."

"Uch," she murmurs, wanting to crawl out of her body. "Let's not talk about this right now."

"No need to be embarrassed. Have you ever acted on it?"

"No."

"So there is something to act on!" he all but shouts in triumph, his body turning toward her in his excitement. The singer falters. "I bloody well knew it. But how haven't you? We're in Los Angeles, and you've bared your lovely—"

"Okay, fine. I may sometimes...notice other women. So what? I don't need a label. And it's just not happened, okay?"

"Uh-huh," he says, and she can tell he's holding back laughter. "Would you like for it to?"

"I—"

"Because she would be very amenable," he says, nodding to a curvaceous brunette standing in the
favor line. The woman notices them looking at her, and her pink mouth tilts with her smile. Chloe feels herself smiling back before she realizes it and turns away. She purses her lips.

"You can't know that."

Lucifer grins. "Fancy a wager, dear heart?"

"No."

"So?"

"So, what?"

"So, do you want to play?" he asks, bumping against her shoulder. He cranes his neck and whispers close to her ear. "Do I get to watch?"

For the briefest moment, her body, sore as it is from earlier, is set aflame by the thought. It could be fun, she thinks. But then in the next moment, fear and jealousy grab hold of her as she imagines another woman's hands on the man beside her. "Are you that bored with me already?" she lashes out, old insecurities rising up.

"I beg your pardon?" Lucifer leans away to see her fully. He searches her face and frowns. "You can't possibly think that... But you do, don't you?" To the singer, he snaps, "All right, that's quite enough, thank you."

"So, what do you think? Will you help me?"

"Hah, that's a no," Lucifer says without preamble, and the young man's face falls. "Consider taking up a trade, perhaps."

"I think I should go," Chloe says, and moves to stand.

"What?" Lucifer grabs hold of her hand. "No, stay." He turns to the crowded line suddenly. "That's all for today!" he shouts. Grumbles and groans ripple through the line, and he yells, "Out, or someone will help you leave!"

They scurry away from the man they wrongly believe is a mob boss.

When it's just the two of them, Chloe glances at Lucifer, feeling small, confused, and exposed.

"I don't understand," Lucifer admits. "You desired those women. They desired us."

"Desire isn't all there is," Chloe says, staring at a spot on the floor.

Lucifer leans forward, trying to catch her line of sight. "Yes, it is. So, what is it you're desiring? You have to tell me, Chloe. You know I can't read you."

Tears sting her eyes. "What I want is you," she admits. Because she loves him and is sick with it.

"And you have me," Lucifer insists, his fingers wrapping around her wrist.

"You have a weird way of showing it. We've been together for a month, and you already want to sleep with other women." She shakes her head.

"You think someone could steal me away from you? That's utterly preposterous."
"I don't care that you're...you. I just wanted you to want me."

"To choose you?" he asks softly.

Chloe huffs, tired beyond understanding. "Yeah."

"Of course I bloody choose you. You're in a whole other league, darling."

Yes, she thinks, but what league? She sometimes feels so plain next to him, a borderline teetotaler, a single mom, and now jobless.

"You've interviewed my lovers," Lucifer says. "You know it's not the same." He rests a hand on her back, between her shoulder blades, but it isn't as soothing as it was earlier. "Darling, I've one kink, and one kink alone. I get off to people doing exactly as they please and including me in the fun along the way. Missionary, hanging from the rafters, strap-ons, it matters not."

"And before you think that makes me some selfless lover, I assure you it does not. I'm very greedy, especially when it comes to you. So, if you want to play with girls or boys, we'll play, and if you don't want to, we won't. And if you say yes, but then change your mind, it doesn't matter what we're doing, it will stop. It starts and ends with you and me. It's that simple."

Chloe rests her head in her hands. "It's just a lot, Lucifer. The PI business, the favors, and now...this."

"Yes," he sighs, "I suppose I could have timed things better, but, well, I get so excited, sharing these things with you. I've never had anyone to share them with, wanted to share them with. Except Maze, and that's not the same at all." He takes hold of one of her arms, pulling her upright to look at him. "But I forget how frightened you are of your own desires." He smiles at her sadly. "But you don't have to be. You're free with me. I'll never bind or chain you—well, unless you want me to. I'll only ever open doors, if I can help it."

A tear slips past her hold and burns its way down the side of her face. "Maybe some doors aren't meant to be opened, Lucifer. Maybe some desires shouldn't be explored." Gently, she extracts herself from his hold and stands. He watches, forlorn, as she scrubs at her eyes and heaves a deep breath. "I need some time...to figure things out. Okay?"

"I've ruined things, haven't I?" he says, and throws back his drink.

Chloe touches his cheek. "No," she whispers, and those three words fill her mouth again, but the timing is all wrong. Instead, she smiles faintly. "So, there's no need to go off the deep end and be dramatic."

He snorts and kisses her fingers. "Very well. I'll try to contain myself."

***

Nightmares disturb Chloe's sleep, wriggling like maggots through her subconscious. She sees the faces of the dead, frozen in agony, bloated beyond recognition, and chewed to the bone. All the shootings, the stabings, the strangulations. Her father's face, lifeless and powdered white. Bruce Wilson's head, tilted, blood waterfalling from his skull.

Dreams shift like puzzle pieces hunting for a neighbor, and she stands in the loft, staring down the barrel of Cain's gun.
"I don't want to die," she breathes. "And I can't... Not without stopping you." She scrambles for her firearm, but it's as though she's wading through sludge. The wasted time costs her everything.

Cain squeezes the trigger, and his aim is true. Lucifer cries out as the bullet strikes between her eyes, puncturing flesh and driving through bone, to gray matter meat. The loft disappears in a brilliant, white light that explodes like a thunderclap in her head.

Chloe gasps awake, her body covered in sweat, pulse slamming against the surface of her skin. She breathes in small, quick puffs of air and squints at the bright sunshine coming through her bedroom blinds. That strange ripple of weakness she felt at the beach washes over her once again. Her stomach roils as she blinks up at the faint, pastel rainbow coloring her ceiling.

She turns her head, searching for what could be scattering the light. Years ago, she had a small, crystal teddy bear the size of a tennis ball, a gift from her grandmother, which acted as a prism, tossing bands of color, beneath the light of the sun. But Trixie knocked the keepsake over, shattering it, when she was a toddler...

Too tired and ill to explore it further, Chloe turns, reaching for Lucifer's pillow—and flinches when the colors follow her movement, shifting against the walls. She sits up, ignoring how the room spins, and looks around the bed in confusion. But there's nothing—no glass, and even her phone is set aside on the nightstand, face down.

Chloe blinks and focuses, finally, on herself, finding her white skin too pale, and the morning light against it almost blinding. She slides to the left, where the room is blissfully shaded.

The prismatic colors disappear from the wall.

Frowning, she lifts her hands and stares at them, wondering if she's finally lost her mind after all that's happened. Slowly, she snakes her fingers across the bed cover, toward the light. The moment her fingertips meet the sun, she sees and feels how the light enters her skin and spreads outward. Opalescent colors burst across the ceiling and walls.

She snatches her hand back, as if burned.

Then does it all again.

"No, no, no," she mutters on the ninth try. "Nope, not happening. I am not seeing this."

But it is happening, and she is seeing it.

Chloe launches herself from her bed in a panic and forces herself to stand in the sun. Though she knows the room is cool, the heat hits her hard, as if she's stepped into a brick oven. She sways in place, stumbling back against the windowsill. Narrowing her eyes against the discomfort, she searches her body frantically, but finds only her hands disperse the light.

Lucifer. She needs to call Lucifer.

Is this prayer material? No. No, not immediate danger.

Just freaking the hell out.

She retreats to the shade and grabs her cell phone, her thumb hovering above his cheeky grin, but she stops herself from dialing. The only person who would freak out more about this than her might be Lucifer. It was bad enough when she was poisoned, but that had a human, earthly explanation. This... She looks at the plain flesh of her hand, which is behaving normally in the
shadows. This doesn't feel like it has a human or earthly explanation.

But I'm human, she thinks. John Decker was human. Penelope Decker is human.

"Amenadiel blessed your mother."

Dread surges within her, but she shoves it back. Think, she tells herself, forcing herself to be calm and methodical, even as she wants to claw off her skin. Who else could help her?

Linda, she realizes a moment later. Linda is in the know, and has been the longest. Linda will know what's happening. Maybe.

Taking a deep breath, she calls the therapist, hoping against hope that she's not in session with a client.

Linda answers on the fourth ring. "Chloe! What's up?"

Chloe steps toward the light and holds up her hand. Color spills wherever she angles her fingers. "Linda, I think...something's wrong with me."

Chapter End Notes

1) In case you missed it, I wrote a canon-divergence one-shot, *Baptized by Desire*, that takes place during "God Johnson." *So did several others!* Check the collection out—we all had quite different takes on the same prompt.

2) Did you spot the two Easter eggs in this chapter? ☺️ Let me know if you did.

3) Huge thanks to Obli and Yah, even if I didn't go with "unbaked pumpkin pie filling" or a "sausage of confusion." You two are amazing brainstorming partners.
Most drug empires specialize in one or two drugs, but Hector de la Cruz is a firm believer in diversification. His empire produces its share of blow and smack, but it also caters to obscure tastes, to those searching for answers to life's biggest questions down their gut, up their nose, and in their veins. His empire peddles the mind-altering spiritual experiences one can achieve under the likes of acid, DMT, shrooms, and ecstasy. He even owns Ayahuasca retreats in Peru.

What the De la Cruz empire is best known for is its peculiar ingredients that often come with the not-quite-promises of improved health, reduced wrinkles, and aphrodisiacal side effects. Why snort a line of boring old coke, when you might try it laced with saint's blood? Enjoy your rave on Molly and mermaid scales. Or, hell, try Viagra crossed with white buffalo horn. There's no guarantee you'll live longer, look better, have an out-of-body experience, or see the face of God, but there's always the chance you might.

The chemists at the disposal of the De la Cruz empire have the processing of such numinous ingredients down to a literal, if simple, science: grind them up to the finest powder, or water them down to near-homeopathic levels. Spray a very light mist of the diluted ingredient across a row of blotter papers, add a speck of dust to heroin, and so on, and voilà, an artisanal experience awaits. For a price.

There are branches of the empire for everything: logistics, design and marketing, distribution, and accounting. Most operations start in Mexico and slither their way up into California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas, but occasionally the snake slithers in the opposite direction. It all depends on the ingredients and whether Hector de la Cruz is hobnobbing with the elite in the U.S. or Mexico.

Shayna de la Cruz doesn't pretend to understand the specific demands Peter Avery has set for the alleged devil feathers—or why her father is so willing to cooperate. Hector may be grooming her to take over the family business, but he intends to live another several decades and so is hardly an open book. But, for whatever reason, he believes in the quality of the ingredient and bends to Avery's wishes. Los Angeles distribution only, and there's a list of dealers they aren't meant to sell to.

It seems like a lot of trouble for a celestial ingredient. Ninety-eight percent of the time, they turn out to be duds (someone did the math), but that pesky fact doesn't slow business for the De la Cruzes anymore than it's stopped the pseudoscientific ventures of Hollywood celebrities. Of course, the other two percent of the time... That's made even Shayna a believer. Her father, a lifelong cocaine user, wouldn't look as he does without a little supernatural help.

Her own faith is strengthened when she tries the first batch of Firefly. There can't be any more than a grain of sand's worth of those feathers in the concoction, but Shayna sees things that make her weep. All the colors of the universe, the blinding white light and heat of stars born and dying in the heavens. Above all else, is a sense of boundless peace. The feeling that nothing is wrong, has ever been wrong, will ever be wrong; that everything is connected and has meaning. At the tail end of the high, she thinks she hears the universe sing.

Later that night, when she stands beneath the hot spray of her shower, she realizes every scar on her body has healed. All from a crumb of divinity.
For all important, delicate, and brutal tasks, Hector sends his daughter. At thirty-four, she's already earned several nicknames: The Henchman, The Nail, La Bruja. Among the less eloquent, she's often just called a bitch. She's smart, mean, and efficient, and doesn't mind getting her hands dirty—likes it, even.

Her sleek, black motorcycle roars beneath her as she speeds along the 110. She takes the exit to Carson and navigates to one of their suburban drop-off sites for a vehicle change. The neighborhood is filled with single-story, middle class family homes, and the neighbors here have no clue what's in their midst. She pulls into the driveway of a plain, stucco house, casually waves to a neighbor as she goes, and tucks her motorcycle away in the garage. With the door closed, she changes the car tags on the old, white Honda sedan back to what they're supposed to be. In less than five minutes, she's on her way to Palos Verdes Estates, to the nouveau-riche house purchased under Victoria Imler's name.

She parks in the driveway and enters through the front door, a small box wedged beneath one arm. As she enters, a black poodle comes bounding up to her, yapping excitedly. Behind the dog, a man rises from the couch. He's dressed plainly—white t-shirt, snug jeans, but it suits him, and Shayna's gaze lingers on his muscles and tattoos. She could do without the ones on his face, but they're artful enough, and he's still a handsome man.

Eddie Rosales is a little fish, and only ever will be due to an overdeveloped conscience and an underdeveloped sense of ambition. But Shayna likes him a little more than the average person, and he's a surprisingly attentive lover.

"Shay, baby!" Eddie exclaims, his arms spread wide. "Long time no see."

"Hey, Eddie."

Shayna ignores his obvious invitation for a hug as she walks past him. She throws the box onto the kitchen counter and scowls when she notices the poodle has followed her, stubby tail wagging. The dog sniffs at her motorcycle boots. "I told you to stop bringing your fucking dog here."

"I know, but nobody could take Lola for me today. And you know she's my baby."

Flipping open her pocket knife, she slices the taped box. She peels back the box flaps and reveals a pile of heroin baggies.

"Cool stamp," Eddie says, coming to stand beside her. He flicks a bag with his index finger.

"It's a firefly," she explains, sliding her hands around his arm at the open box of heroin. "You need to sell it that way. It's not just heroin.
It's *firefly* heroin.

"Okay, but where's the rest?"

"This is all you're getting." She doesn't mention this is the case because he isn't good or well-connected enough to handle anything larger.

"What?" Eddie wheezes a laugh. "You know this won't take any time to move."

"It'll take longer than usual. It's got a special ingredient. Costs a bit extra."

He lifts one of the bags and peers at it, as if doing so might help him understand it on a chemical level. "How special?"

"Special enough that you don't get a taste," she says, snatching the baggy from his fingers.

Eddie shakes his head. "You know I don't touch H."

She does. Until recently, he only sold weed, but legalization has killed the black market even more than medical did.

"Your friend uses," she says.

"I have lots of friends," Eddie hedges.

Arching a brow, Shayna moves away from him and drops the bag back into the box. She takes his right hand in both of hers and says sweetly, "Eddie, don't ever think because you're a good lay I don't keep tabs on you. I help my father run an empire, not a corner store. That little troll you give discounts to at your abuela's? Don't take this stuff near him. He'll steal it, and then you'll be on the hook for it."

"Okay, okay." Eddie holds up his hands in defeat. "Just, you know, David's an addict, but he's a decent guy."

"Sure," she chuckles. "Just keep in mind Good Guy David doesn't have the money for Firefly, and you're not gonna want to give him a discount."

Eddie looks back at the heroin. "That pure, huh? High-end clients only?"

"Start the price at a thousand a bag. There are five hundred bags here."

"Wait." Eddie's face screws up in confusion. "You mean for a bundle, right?" He shakes his head. "Even then, nobody's gonna pay that..."

"No, per bag. I told you. It has a special ingredient."

"What's the ingredient?"

"Angel feathers."

"Aww, Shay," Eddie groans, "you know I don't wanna sell shit that's been laced with stuff that could hurt people. Especially some snake oil. Not even to the rich assholes around here."

"Eddie. You push heroin."

"Yeah, but still. People should know what they're getting into."
Jesus Christ, a drug dealer with a heart of gold. She's seen it all.

"Look, some of the stuff my father sources and has put into drugs, I'll be the first to admit it's worthless. We all know it. This stuff, though..." She looks at the heroin bags and breathes out a small laugh. "It's real. Some people have been healed using it."

Eddie's brows furrow. "What do you mean healed?"

"I mean, healed—scars gone, wrinkles smoothed, tumors shrunk."

"So, I should target the sick."

Shayna shrugs. "Target whoever. Just get the cash, same as always." She pats the side of the box. "With any luck, there'll be more where this came from." Turning, she leans her back against the counter and starts to unbutton her kevlar jeans. "Now, how about you talk a little less?"

When she's finally done making her rounds and deliveries to dealers around the city, it's three in the morning. She stops at a twenty-four-hour diner for coffee and to eat something she'll no doubt regret in a few hours. Plunking her motorcycle helmet down onto a kitschy, laminated table, she takes a seat and kicks up her boots on the booth facing her. While she's holding up the menu, browsing it, she feels the cushion sink down near her heels.

Shayna lowers the menu slowly, only to look into the face of Peter Avery, née Marcus Pierce. "Can I help you?" she asks.

If this big man thinks he's going to startle a poor, defenseless woman, he's got another thing coming. The black contact lenses are a nice touch, but don't work on her, either.

"Just thought I'd see how your day went."

"Aww, that's sweet, honey, but we're not married, and I'm not interested in dinner or pillow talk." She tears open a packet of sugar and tips it into her coffee. "You're the guy in the black SUV who's been following me all day, right? You're lucky I knew it was you and that my father has a standing deal with you."

Avery seethes. "All I want to know is that everything went smoothly."

"It did. My father sent me." She sips her coffee and grimaces at the lackluster flavor. "Why do you care so much about the timing and logistics, anyway?" Money is money, but more money is even better. The fact that the whole of West Hollywood and Beverly Hills is one of his no-go zones is driving her crazy with questions.

Shayna can tell he considers not replying, but after a moment he says, "Have you ever hated anyone, De la Cruz?"

"Oh, yeah. Your 'score to settle.'" Tilting her head, she smiles. "Me? I hate everybody equally." Knowing people are dirt bags, deep down, is what makes her such a good soldier.

"No," he growls, leaning forward. "I mean really hated someone."

"Maybe," she says.
"Then you know it's not enough to destroy them cleanly. Even if that's the smart thing to do."

Shayna stares and says nothing. For the first time, Avery's presence bothers her, and gelid fear snakes around her spine. Even she has to admit he's one scary motherfucker. Something about him just isn't right. But her father's been doing business with him for decades, and that's the way of it. Not to mention his celestial ingredient is the real deal, whether the feathers are from the literal Devil or not. She, for one, isn't even sure the Devil's real.

"So," she says, sniffing, "we've done our part. When do we get access to your supply?"

Avery shakes his head and leans back. "Not until I'm sure you've done a good job." He shuffles out of the booth and looks down at her with his black eyes. "I'll be in touch soon."

Usually, that's her line.

After she's finished her coffee and country fried steak, she remounts her motorcycle, her helmet tucked under her arm. Looking around to ensure she's alone, she digs into the right pocket of her leather jacket and pulls out the lone bag of Firefly. She aches to hear the universe sing.

Chapter End Notes

Thank-yous and weird gifs to Obli and Yah.
Chloe pulls on the one pair of winter gloves she owns, unlocks the front door in preparation for Linda, and drags from her kitchen cabinet the most expensive liquor Lucifer has stocked in her home. She retreats to the bathmat of the upstairs bathroom, where she hides all her grownup meltdowns from Trixie.

The whisky burns, but she powers through. Drinking may not be the best decision right now, but not drinking is out of the question. She feels an extreme kinship with Lucifer as she looks up at the ceiling, that old Albert Einstein quote about God not playing dice with the universe playing on repeat in her head.

And just what is God up to?

She hears the front door open. "Chloe?" Linda calls.

"Up here!" she answers.

Linda's high heels strike the wood flooring of the stairwell in quick succession. A moment later, she peeks around the bathroom door. "Hey," she says, her smile cautious, "I left as soon as we got off the phone."

"I'm sorry I've screwed up your day."

"Don't worry about it." Linda drops her purse to the bathroom counter, kicks off her stilettos, and sinks to the bathmat beside Chloe. "I see we're drinking. At ten in the morning."

"Yep."

Linda nods, and the tiny part of Chloe that isn't screaming inside appreciates the acceptance. Straightening out the lines of her purple dress, Linda asks, "So. What did he do?"

"Huh?"

"This is about Lucifer, right?"

"Oh." Chloe laughs tiredly. "More about his dad, I guess." Not to say there isn't plenty to bring up about Lucifer. Apparently one therapy session with Linda might not be enough when you're dating a son of God. Or literally exist only because of angelic interference.

"Existential crisis. Gotcha. Do you want to talk about it? You sounded really upset on the phone."

A pause. "Why are you wearing ski gloves?"

"Oh, yeah, like my new style?" Chloe laughs and extends her black-gloved hands out from her body. They're quite the fashion statement alongside the white-and-green-striped t-shirt and shorts she slept in. She draws the liquor bottle close and swigs more whisky.

"Is there a...reason you're wearing ski gloves?"

She sets the bottle aside. "I think I have to show you. And, just so you know," she warns, "you're going to freak out, because I'm going to freak out."
"I promise to do my best not to freak out," Linda says, resting a hand on her arm. "I survived Lucifer's devil face."

Chloe nods. In that context, a little light-throwing really doesn't seem like a big deal. Until she remembers it's happening to her own body. Taking a deep breath, she pulls off her right glove, baring a normal-looking hand. She turns toward the frosted, round window of the bathroom. Soft light pours through it onto the floor. Chloe leans sideways and stretches toward the golden pool of light.

Although she hopes she'll feel foolish, that nothing at all will happen, it's just like before. The light's heat wraps around her fingertips like a second skin, bleeding into her body until her white flesh seems almost to glow with it. Iridescent dots of color project onto the nearest wall.

"Oh my Lord."

Frightened by her own body, Chloe looks back at Linda as if she's a life raft in a wide, open sea. But Linda's troubled expression isn't reassuring. She stares at Chloe's hand, her mouth agape as she clutches at her middle.

"You said you wouldn't freak out!"

"No, I said I'd try not to freak out! Biiig difference."

Wincing, Chloe withdraws herself from the light. Linda gasps at the sudden movement and spider-walks backward on her hands and heels. Chloe freezes. "Linda, I would never hurt you."

A terrible thought hits her. Can she hurt people now, just by existing? What about Trixie? She worries she might throw up as she drags the ski glove back on.

Linda looks frantically around the bathroom. "The gloves cover...that?"

That. Her. Her body. Chloe nods. "Even disposable gloves seem to work, but...I didn't want to take chances."

"Okay, let's just stay calm," Linda says, though Chloe isn't sure which of them she's saying it to. "We don't know what's going on yet, so let's try not to apply judgment."

"You just crawled away from me."

"Yeah, but there's some history there you may not know about. Nearly died 'cause Lucifer's mother tried to fry me with her light."

Chloe's eyes widen.

"Right. Didn't think he'd have gotten around to telling you that. Long story." Linda stands, dusts off the back of her dress, and pulls her cell phone from her purse. "I'm calling Lucifer."

"No!" Chloe clamors, scrambling to stop her from dialing. Linda flinches away, and Chloe subsides, sitting back on her heels. "Sorry. Just...please don't call him."

"Chloe, I know I've somehow become therapist to the freaking celestials, but the whole supernatural thing isn't exactly my expertise."

"I don't want him to know yet. Not until I'm sure I'm okay. If this has anything to do with the whole...miracle thing, he's going to lose it." She feels like an ass whenever she thinks of herself as a
miracle, but there it is.

"Okay, I hear your concerns and think they're valid," Linda says, "but Lucifer isn't going to take being kept in the dark any better."

Chloe grimaces, knowing she's right. "I just can't deal with his panic and my own right now." Even if he didn't panic, she's not sure she could stomach well-intentioned hovering any better.

Linda nods hesitantly. "Then we need to call Maze."

"Maze?" Chloe echoes in disbelief. "She almost got Lucifer and me killed."

"Yep. Yep, that was bad."

"Do you even know where she is?"

"Um, she's been staying with me." She holds up a hand. "I know. You don't have to say it. But she feels really bad about the things she did to you and Lucifer—well, as bad as a demon can feel about betrayal and torture." She nods, looking a little shell-shocked. "We're working on that. Slowly."

Chloe holds the liquor bottle to her chest. "Okay, call her. Just don't call Lucifer."

Maze arrives twenty minutes later. She tromps into the bathroom, takes one look at Chloe, and says, "You look like shit."

"Maze," Linda admonishes.

"That's what you have to say to me?" Chloe snaps. "After you pushed me toward a psychopath?"

Maze rolls her eyes. "Hey, I'll be the first to admit I could have handled that better, but I was going through a lot."

"Oh. Oh, I see. You were going through a lot," Chloe says, leaning over her bent knees as she glares up at her former roommate. The whisky bottle tilts precariously as she vents.

"If you're that pissed, why am I even here?" Maze asks.

"I'm gonna show her," Chloe says, and Linda backs away.

"Show me what?"

Again, she goes through the process of pulling off her glove and stretching toward the light. As soon as the prismatic colors dance across the wall, Maze laughs so hard she snorts like a pig.

"Thanks," Chloe gripes, stuffing her hand back into the glove. "Really helping, Maze."

"Oh, come on. It's funny." The massive grin doesn't slip from Maze's face as she leans against the vanity. "How was I supposed to know you were gonna light up like an ornament?"

"The main thing, Maze," Linda says, "is we need to know that she's okay."

"How the hell should I know?"

"Because you're a demon?"

"So? Light has Lucifer's dad written all over it." She looks between Chloe and Linda. "Why haven't
you called Lucifer?"

Chloe sinks her forehead onto her knees and groans.

The front door opens again. "Hey, Chlo!"

"Izzy!" Chloe shouts. The room tilts pleasantly, and she realizes the alcohol is finally doing its job. "We're up here!"

"Ooh, is this Isabel?" Linda says excitedly. "Oh, I can't wait to meet her."

"Who?" Maze asks.

"My roommate," Chloe answers. "Dan's sister."

"She's a witch," Linda says conspiratorially.

Maze arches a skeptical brow. "Bitch-witch or witch-witch?"

"Witch-witch," Izzy answers as she appears in the bathroom doorway.

Chloe experiences a brief reprieve from her anxiety as Maze does a double-take. She looks the other woman up and down with obvious, hedonistic interest. "You're Dan's sister?" Maze asks.

"I am." Izzy smiles. Her mascara is a little smudged, and she's dressed in the black top and black, ripped jeans she wore on her date the night before, but she's no less striking for any of it. "Maze and Linda, right?"

The two women look at her blankly.

"Danny and Trixie talk." Izzy glances around the room. "Why are we congregating in the bathroom?"

"It is almost like a Tribe Night," Linda comments, and reaches for the whisky bottle she's begun to share with Chloe. "Maybe we should call Ella."

"Decker's all aglow," Maze explains, throwing a hand toward Chloe. "Show her."

If Izzy's surprised when Chloe spills fragmented colors, she doesn't quite show it. "Well," she says, plopping down beneath the towel rack, "looks like the cards were right, Chlo."

"I don't want this," Chloe says, and Izzy shrugs, as if such feelings don't factor into the universe's equation. And maybe they don't.

They spend the next half-hour crammed inside the bathroom, brainstorming and sinking deeper into the bottle—well, bottles, plural. They've got nothing for it: no idea what's happening or how it works. Finally, they Facetime Ella during her lunch break.

"Wow!" Ella shouts. "Just wow."

Chloe turns the phone back to her face and glares into it. Her head is so fuzzy she almost doesn't care what's happening to her anymore, but she has enough of her faculties to know she should be annoyed. "Can't say I feel as excited as you do."

"Don't you get it? This is, like, your superhero origin story. God's plan for you."
"God's plans have a pretty bad track record," Maze says.

"We don't know that," Ella argues. "We're looking at it from our teeny-tiny perspectives. I'm sure the Big Guy can see the whole picture."

Chloe sighs. "Reflecting the sun is not...cool, Ella."

"Oh, you're not reflecting it," Ella says. "You're refracting it. So, really, even cooler."

Linda squints, thinking. "I think I remember learning about that in high school. Reflections are light bouncing off something. Refraction is..." She drops off, uncertain.

"Light waves change direction when they're refracted," Ella explains. "Usually because they're passing through something else—in this case, I guess, it's you, Chloe. That's gotta be why you're seeing colors on the wall. White light is being split into its individual colors."

The way Ella takes all of this in stride blows Chloe's mind, and frankly, makes her wonder about her friend.

"You'll be a big hit at Pride parades," Maze jokes.

"Great," Chloe says, her tone thick with sarcasm, "but how do I make it stop?"

"Beats me," Ella says. "Have you talked to Lucifer?"

"Is there a chance she's causing this to happen to herself?" Linda asks Maze after they end the videocall with Ella, who had to return to work. "Like with Lucifer's and Amenadiel's wings?"

The demon shrugs. "Maybe, but she's not an angel, so who knows? Humans aren't supposed to have stuff like this happen to them. But I don't know how many humans are miracles."

From where she sits beneath the towel rack, Izzy shuffles her tarot deck reflexively. Chloe, tanked to the point of somnolence, listens to the satisfying prrrbt of the cards as they slap against each other.

"Lucifer told me the LAPD let you go from your job," Linda says, and Chloe stares at her dully. "That's a lot to handle. Has anything else been going on that might affect you emotionally?"

Chloe snorts, then laughs, and then can't stop laughing.

"Good job, Linda, you broke her," Maze says.

"Has anything been going on?" Chloe wheezes through her laughter. "Let's see." She holds up a gloved finger. "The guy I almost married was the world's first murderer." A second finger. "My boyfriend, who's actually Satan, killed him." A third finger. "My ten-year-old sees auras." A fourth finger and a swallowed hiccup. "And, yeah, I lost my job because I stupidly killed a suspect and"—she holds up both hands, fingers splayed out—"because there are mean, old, corrupt assholes on the force. And Lucifer wants to open a private investigation firm with me. Oh, and apparently I'm not straight." She throws her hands up in the air.

Linda nods, wide-eyed.

"Wait, you really didn't know you liked girls?" Maze laughs, and Izzy looks no less amused. "I knew."

"Maze," Linda reprimands. She pats Chloe's knee. "You are going through a lot. If what's
happening to you works anything like how it does for Lucifer and Amenadiel, it would maybe make sense that it would occur now, wouldn't it?"

Chloe doesn't know. She's not sure she knows anything anymore. The world stopped making sense the moment she saw the Devil. But then, she thinks, staring at the liquor in her glass, that's not really true, is it? That's a lie she's telling herself. In fact, more things make sense now than in the past. They just aren't easy truths.

Maze's phone rings, interrupting Chloe. She draws it from her back pocket. "It's Lucifer," she announces, and the room stills.

"Don't tell him," Chloe pleads.

"Sure. Whatever." She answers the call. "Hey. Uh-huh. No. Okay. So you want me to watch over Chloe?" She looks at Chloe and rolls her eyes. "Does this mean you're over the whole Cain thing? Okay. Fine."

The call ends like every other call Chloe has ever overheard between the two: abruptly.

"Is this...something he does?" Chloe asks, bleary eyes narrowed. "Sets you to watch over me?"

"Sometimes," Maze answers, shrugging. "What? He's the Lord of Hell. He's going to be paranoid, Chloe. Look, you should probably tell him what's going on, but if you don't want to, I know where we can lay low for a few days while you figure things out."

"You do?"

Maze jumps up, unaffected by the alcohol she's drunk. "Yep. Pack a bag, Decker."

With Izzy and Linda's help, Chloe stumbles to her feet.

***

Two hours in a Miata with a demon...what could go wrong? An hour in, Chloe groans and rests her head into the crook of her arm. Even with sunglasses, the ache behind her eyes has worsened as the alcohol has begun to wear off. The Viking metal playing on low-volume isn't helping any, either. At least the convertible top is up.

"I'm taking a finger if you throw up in my car."

"Yeah, well, you can have this one," Chloe says, the polyester of her ski glove swishing as she lifts a middle finger.

Maze cackles. "Having your life go to hell suits you, Decker."

"Where are we going again?" she asks. She's certain she asked when she was packing, but the details are fuzzy now that she's sobered up.

"Near Ojai. Lucifer has a place there."

Chloe looks up, incredulous. "You left out that it was his place, I think. I'm trying not to alert him, Maze."

"Do you know how much property Lucifer owns?" Maze laughs, and Chloe recalls the expensive
home where Cain killed his protégé. "Besides, it's private," Maze continues, "and he'd never think to look there if he were to go looking for you. I don't think he's even visited it before."

"Lucifer owns a place he's never been to?" And then, she thinks, of course he does.

"He's the Devil," Maze says, as if this explains everything, and maybe it does. "He's more into rubbing elbows and making deals than he is accumulating wealth. It's just the one leads to the other. Trust me, he has no idea what he owns."

"Why, though?" She thinks of his ledger. "Why all the deals and favors?" she asks, and then promptly grabs hold of the door handle as Maze jerks the wheel to the left and guns it, passing another driver on a double-yellow line.

"You want the truth, or are you still in denial about who he is?"

"I want the truth."

"Okay, so, think of it this way: what's the cruelest punishment?"

"Uh, torture?" Chloe guesses, struggling to follow the intention behind the unexpected question.

"Yep, but not just physical torture." She shakes her head and sighs. "Sadly, it's emotional anguish that breaks most souls, living or dead. The best way to punish someone? Figure out what they want most and take it from them."

"But that's not what Lucifer does," Chloe protests.

"Not usually, no. But it's what God wanted him to do—to test humans, to lead you astray if he could, to punish you when you failed. So, yeah, Lucifer does the exact opposite of what Daddy wanted. But toying with desire? That's just who God made him as the Light Bringer." She spits the moniker like a curse. "He mostly doesn't mind if it's on his own terms."

A quiet rebellion, Chloe thinks, and suddenly Lucifer's desire-fueled hedonism seems even more tragic than it did before she knew the truth. But there's also something wonderful about him finding a way to make his gifts his own.

When it becomes apparent Chloe has nothing else to say, Maze turns the volume up on her music. A husky-voiced woman screams in a Scandinavian language. Chloe stares at her ski gloves and wonders if she'll need to have a quiet rebellion of her own.

Lucifer's ranch is buried deep in the hills and enveloped by trees. As they wind along the property's private road, Chloe looks out the passenger window, her jaw slack and her headache momentarily forgotten. A vineyard as big as, if not bigger than, Wilson's sunflower farm stretches out on either side of the road.

After a while, the paved road curves sharply, and a sprawling, ranch-style house comes into view. The older architectural style has been updated with large windows, concrete and steel accents, and a light gray, metal roof. Monkey grass lines a stone pathway up to a small patio and an oaken door.

"It's beautiful," Chloe murmurs.
Maze parks her car. "It's all right. I like the city. Out here, it's too"—she turns up her nose in disgust—"clean."

"You know," Chloe says, staring at her, "I have no idea how I ever thought you weren't a demon."

"Me neither," Maze says, climbing out of the driver's seat. "Come on, shiny."

*There's* a nickname Chloe can do without.

If the outside of the house is charming, the inside is stunning. Polished hardwood gleams alongside plush rugs, and the open plan means one end of the home can very nearly be seen from the other. The interior design is simple and clean, favoring beiges, greens, and blues. Ironically, it's the kind of place she can imagine Lucifer liking, if he ever bothers to visit.

Chloe sets her backpack down on a beige sofa and dares to take off her sunglasses and gloves. It's a relief to be in the shaded interior of the house. Even the Miata's over-tinted windows hadn't blocked out all of the sun. Without that source of discomfort, Chloe's headache eases, and her stomach calms.

Slamming the front door shut behind her, Maze drops a bag of her own onto the floor. It clanks suspiciously—or maybe not so suspiciously at all, given it belongs to Maze. "All right, Chloe, here's the deal."

That doesn't sound good. Chloe turns to her.

Maze stalks close, her leather pants and black crop top hugging her toned muscles. "I've been with Lucifer for thousands of years. He can be a real dumbass, so I get needing space from him when you've got your own shit to deal with. But he's only just stopped hating me today, so we'll lay low for a few days and try to figure out what's up with you, but after that? You're calling him and telling him what's going on. Or I am." She shrugs a shoulder. "I'm tired of being on the Devil's shit list. It's not a great place to be."

"Okay," Chloe agrees with a sigh.

"And don't try anything stupid. You can't run away from me in a few days, just to keep avoiding him."

"I wouldn't try to—"

"You're freaking out. You don't know what you'll do. But running would be pointless." Maze grins and licks her teeth. "Then again, catching you might be fun, especially now that you're out of the closet."

Chloe glares at her.

"All I'm saying is I'm right down the hall, Decker."

They order pizza for dinner and watch trash TV, and it almost feels like nothing has come between them. Like Chloe never saw Maze's blade stabbed, hilt-deep, in her ex-fiancé's chest.

Tossing a gnawed-on crust into the empty pizza box, Maze leans back into the sofa and belches. "Let's go see if you light up under the moon." She turns off the television.

Chloe tenses in her recliner. "I-I don't know that I'm ready." It's been nice, pretending she's normal.
"Look," Maze says, sitting forward with her elbows on her knees, "God's fucking with you. You're not the first. You won't be the last. Deal with it. Get over it. Move on. You don't wanna be like Lucifer."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Chloe snaps, bristling.

"It means, don't waste your life trying to figure God out. There's nothing to figure out. Lucifer's dad 'works in mysterious ways,' remember? It just is. So it's pointless trying to make sense of it. Lucifer's never heard from his dad since he fell. And Amenadiel?" she says. "He's telling us no one in the Silver City has even spoken to God in decades."

"Amenadiel's back?"

"No. He just flew in to drop that on Lucifer's lap, as if Lucifer can do anything about any of it." She rolls her eyes. "Here's the thing, Chloe, Amenadiel didn't even get a direct commandment from God to bless your mom—Heaven's running on autopilot, just like Hell. So, whatever's happening to you, only God knows, and he's not talking. Doesn't change that it's happening. The sooner you accept that, the better."

Chloe looks down at her hands. "But I'm human... Aren't I?"

"Hell if I know, but here's to hoping you're not. Being human sucks."

Reluctantly, Chloe follows her onto the back patio. Solar-powered fairy lights and a luminous waning moon paint the wicker outdoor furniture with an inviting glow.

"Anything?" Maze asks, wiggling her fingers like a demented conjurer.

Chloe holds up a hand in the night. It's only her hand, no fancy light show, but she feels a sensation similar to the one she's felt in the sun all day, how the light caresses her skin and worms its way into her blood, warming it. She looks up at the moon, the investigative wheels of her mind turning.

"It's weaker at night," she says. "I guess I feel the sun...reflecting off the moon?"

It's a solid observation, but her world pitches a little at it because this isn't how the sun should feel, day or night. Like it's a bottomless drink, and she's a straw.

Maze reaches out suddenly and takes her hands.

"I could hurt you," Chloe gasps, trying to pull away, but Maze holds on.

"I'm tough, Chloe. Besides, you don't want to hurt me, so you won't."

Chloe trembles as tears well in her eyes. Maybe a tiny part of her believed no one would ever want to hold her hand again. "I don't know what's happening to me, Maze."

"Take a deep breath."

"Is this demon-guided meditation?"

"Just do it."

She draws in a breath, then another, and then another. "I still feel it," she says, panic-stricken.

"That's what you get to live with then," Maze says, gripping Chloe's fingers tightly. Not to comfort, but to drive home the point. "That feeling under your skin. That's a part of you that you can hide or
use. Every human's got a secret like it, Chloe. We just have it a little more literally."

We. Because Maze isn't sure Chloe's human. And Chloe isn't sure either.

"What's your secret?" Chloe asks.

She expects words, but it's Maze, so of course she doesn't get them. Instead, Maze transforms beneath the moonlight. Her face is cleaved in half by the change, the left side corrupted by a web of ashen, decayed flesh. She stares at Chloe with one dark eye and a ghastly, gold-tinged cataract. The left corner of her mouth pulls back in a rictus smile that bares worn teeth.

Chloe presses her heels into the ground, willing herself not to bolt. She's seen the Devil. She can face his favorite demon, too. And so she holds onto Maze's hands as hard as she wants to shove them away, in a death grip that would hurt a human.

"H-how do you do that?"

"It's like a muscle," Maze answers, and Chloe isn't sure whether it's more or less terrifying to see and hear Maze's voice come out of her demonic form. "Find the muscle, and you can flex it or you can relax it. Kinda like kegels."

Laughter breaks through Chloe's fear, and Maze chuckles with her. Although Maze doesn't immediately return to her human mask, Chloe can only see the face of an old friend.

***

Chloe approaches her body's betrayal as methodically as any investigation into a homicide. If there's a way to control what's happening to her, she'll find it, and she knows the most likely place the answer is hidden is deep within herself. And so she forces herself to sit in the sun, her eyes screwed shut, pain hammering at her temples, while she hunts for the truth. Daylight is a heavy, onerous blanket that sinks into her bones. Only the earth beneath her, where she sits amid the grass, is cool and comforting.

She tries to follow the heat of the sun from her fingertips, down into her skin and muscle, blood and bone, but she loses track of the sensation somewhere, if she ever has hold of it at all. Over and over again, she senses she almost has it, only to have it slip away and blend in seamlessly with the mysteries of her internal organs.

"Dammit," she growls, opening her eyes and slapping a palm to the ground.

"You need to relax," Maze instructs, from where she reclines in a nearby lounge chair. "I don't know, sext Lucifer or something. Maybe he'd stop whining at me then."

"I can't do anything like this," Chloe complains, grimacing when the hues of light dance across the grass as she gesticulates.

Maze snorts. "It's just a little light, Decker. It's not like you're a monster."

She scowls at the demon over her shoulder. "That's not what humans will think." She hates how, the more she dwells on it, the more she feels she's in separate category—something other. Whether she's still technically human, like Cain was, or not, this is not human. Not normal. Even wearing gloves all the time to hide it wouldn't be normal. "I mean, the Salem witch trials were a thing, Maze."
"Oh, yeah, we tortured some of the guys behind those. Nothing I love more than flaying a misogynist," Maze sighs dreamily, while picking at a nail with one of her knives. "Where do you think the term chauvinist pig comes from? Men like that are weak, Chloe. They squeal lots."

"There's Trixie to think about," she says, refocusing the conversation. "I can't look like this and be a good mom."

That, at least, Maze seems to take seriously. She looks down at her leather boots. "With Trixie and all...you think I could maybe see her sometime?"

"You owe her an apology. You really hurt her."

"I know I do. I'll find a way to make it up to her."

Chloe nods. "Okay."

The demon's head pops up. "Really?"

"Yeah, maybe with me there?"

"Sure, okay. We can have a girls' night."

The thought makes Chloe smile, but just as quickly her expression turns serious. "Just don't ever put her in danger," she says.

"Chloe, I'd die for Trixie." The words aren't said lightly. They're an oath.

They stare at each other for a long moment before Chloe nods and returns to her inner struggle. Nothing she tries works, and after a while, the heat becomes unbearable, forcing her to retreat to the house to avoid another fainting spell. She goes to her room, tugs the blinds and curtains closed, and sleeps for fourteen hours straight.

The next day is no less frustrating. She stays in the same spot outdoors for hours, long after her rear end and legs go numb. She tries bizarre breathing techniques, flexes different muscle groups, and searches her soul for levers. Eventually, her mind tires of focusing and begins to wander, sifting through past events.

The trip down memory lane starts where it so often does: at her father's funeral, to breaking her knuckles open on an intrepid paparazzo's camera lens. To the police academy and all the casual boob jokes made at her expense.

To Dan Espinoza's smile, which was easy and genuine, instead of manipulative and lascivious. To dates and sex, to I love you over ice cream, to moving in together, to an ill-fitted engagement ring and courthouse wedding that, at the time, felt like more than enough.

To the colors of Mexico City and a positive pregnancy test, to fear and anxiety, to a little girl at her breast. To missing first words and first steps and hoping motherhood wasn't a big mistake. To learning, much later, it definitely wasn't.

To her marriage disintegrating because of duty and dullness and deception. To a corrupt cop shot and a precinct full of adversaries. To a pop singer's bullet-ridden body and the frustratingly-cocky nightclub owner who simply wouldn't go away, who she now can't imagine letting go of.

"Lucifer...Morningstar. Is that, uh, a stage name or something?"
"God-given, I'm afraid."

The memory of his infuriating smirk is rose-tinted by affection. Deep and warm in the center of her chest, where she stores Trixie's pealing laughter and the Devil's secrets. His darkness and his light.

Light.

Suddenly, she feels it, as if it's always been right there, wedged close to her beating heart, incandescent and ready to be manipulated. Chloe clutches at it mentally, and it's as though a valve twists in her mind's eye, releasing steam with its sudden appearance. Her migraine and nausea subside.

A twist to the right, and the light is contained. A twist to the left, and— Her eyes snap open as more light sweeps through her like an electrical current tearing through a filament. Vivid prismatic colors paint the grass, and she's astounded, knowing it comes from her body. In the absence of pain and discomfort, she's taken, finally, by awe, wonderful and terrible, as when she first dared to stand before a winged devil.

Now that she knows where the light passes through her body, it's impossible not to feel it; not to feel how the sun enters her skin and arcs throughout her body, angling and angling until it pours from her chest, down into her arms, and resurfaces in her fingertips. And still she feels she could open herself up more—more and more, until, maybe, Chloe Jane Decker would cease to exist. Until there would only be light piercing a vacuum, straight and true.

It's a little addictive, this feeling, and she wrenches at the internal spigot in a panic to regain control. It's not...easy, but it is natural, akin to bending her arm at an awkward angle to scratch a hard-to-reach itch. She watches the colors fade and then disappear altogether.

"Maze!" she cries, ecstatic. "I made it go away!"

She turns and sees the demon is already watching her with narrowed eyes. Maze rises and saunters forward. Squatting in the grass, she reaches for Chloe's face.

"What are you doing?" Chloe complains, batting her hand away.

"Just hold still." She grabs Chloe's chin in one hand and drags a finger along her upper lip with the other. The finger comes away wet with dark blood.

Chloe stares at it. For the first time in days, a chill ripples through her. "I didn't realize..." She rubs at her nose, wiping away more blood. The blood she clears away is sticky and half-dried, suggesting the bleeding stopped recently. She sniffs experimentally.

"You need to be careful," Maze says, sitting back on her heels like a feline. She wipes off her finger on the side of her pants. "Lucifer will be pissed if you up and die from an aneurysm."

"It's fine, Maze." It's not. "Whatever this is, I'm not gonna use it."

"Uh-huh."

"Really." She puts a hand to her chest, over the spot where she now feels a pool of light, resting, waiting, as if held in a reservoir. "Whatever Lucifer's dad is up to...I want no part in it."

Maze exhales sharply through her nose. "Where have I heard that one before?" Smirking, she says, "I'm a demon. Never met God. Never will. But I've been around a long time, Chloe, and I can tell you this. No one who has power doesn't use it, especially if that power comes from God."
"Well, there's a first time for everything."

"Hey, you have free will. You can use whatever gift you have in a way God wants—or any way you want." She leans forward, her nose mere inches apart from Chloe's. "But you will use it." She tilts her head. "Why do you think Lucifer cut off his wings? It wasn't about aesthetics. He didn't want to be tempted to use what Daddy gave him."

"I won't be tempted," Chloe says, determined.

Maze leans away again. "You're looking at this all wrong, Decker. I mean, you just got way more interesting. Finally."

"I don't want to be more interesting. I just want to be me."

"What?" Maze barks a laugh. "A cop, a mommy, a girlfriend? If that was all you wanted, you wouldn't be running with the Devil."

"Okay," Chloe says, shoving to her feet. She sways slightly before stabilizing. "We're done here." Maze follows close behind as she marches toward the house and throws open the sliding door that leads into the kitchen.

"Chloe, hold up."

She stops and turns. "What?"

"You can't just pretend your power's not there. You need to learn what it does, how to use it."

"I don't want it!" Chloe yells. "What part of that don't you get?"

Maze scoffs. "It's not so bad, not being boring and average, you know. Maybe you'll finally be able to protect Trixie the way you've always wanted." She eyes her up and down and comes away with a scowl that suggests Chloe fails to meet basic standards. "You could be Lucifer's equal for once."

Her words are a punch to the gut. Chloe doesn't know if it's just Maze or something intrinsic to demonhood, but her former roommate is disturbingly talented at detecting weak spots. And Chloe has no weaker spots than her fears for Trixie's safety and her own insecurities.

When she speaks again, her voice is quiet and tired. "I want to go home, Maze."

She looks down at her hands, which now appear to be perfectly normal, even as she stands in sunlight near the kitchen sink. She wants to forget she was made for some divine purpose she'll probably never understand, but deep down she knows there's no going back.

***

The Saturday night crowd at Lux bounces with energy. Chloe stands at the top of the staircase, leaning over the curving, wrought iron railing as she searches for a telltale undulation in the crowd. A hard, vibrating bass beat pulses up through the floor and into her body, where it rattles uncomfortably at the reservoir in her chest. She glances at her hands in concern, but sees only familiar, white flesh.

"Hey, Detective!" a bartender shouts, passing on her right. "Boss is upstairs!"

"Thanks," she murmurs, her voice swallowed by music as she turns toward the elevator.
When the doors to the penthouse slide open, her eyes find Lucifer at his piano. He's dressed down, for him, no suit jacket or vest, just dark green trousers and a crisp, white shirt. Upon seeing her, a pleased grin pulls at his mouth. He shifts to a familiar melody on the piano as she steps into the room. It takes her a moment to recognize it, but when she does, she rolls her eyes and laughs.

"Is that Backstreet Boys?"

"It might be."

She slips out of her shoes and goes to him, sliding onto the piano bench, where she breathes in the warm, woody scent of his cologne. "You know, for someone who makes fun of nineties music so much, you sure do know a lot of the songs by heart."

He glances at her sidelong. "Would you believe they're a common torture device in Hell?"

"If you want me to," she teases.

Lucifer grins. "Lovely," he says, and lets the melody drop off. Shutting the fallboard, he turns to her. "You're back."

"I am."

"Does this mean you've figured things out, then?" he asks softly.

No, she wants to say, but doesn't. Instead, she says, "I hope so."

Tell him, she thinks, but her mouth stays shut.

"I feel I should apologize," Lucifer says. "I realize I may have... well, I may have pushed you too hard."

"It's okay," she whispers. Honestly, the favors and the forced revelations about her sexuality feel like they happened a lifetime ago.

"No," he says. "No, it's not." Taking her hands, he dips his head to better look her in the eye. "I'm not trying to change you. I like you as you are. Very much."

Tears well in her eyes. "And what if I am changing, Lucifer?"

"Bugger. Don't cry. I didn't mean to suggest you couldn't change." He sighs. "Bloody hell, I don't know how I'm stuffing this up so badly."

"You're really not, I promise." She sniffs and sits up straighter. "Just a lot's been going on, I think. It's taken a toll. But I can handle it."

"Can I do anything to help?" he asks. "A massage, perhaps, some makeup sex?"

She breathes out a weak laugh, and he smiles. "You know what I think would really help me?" She runs her thumb across the ring on his finger.

"Name it, and it's yours."

"I want to get back to work." Throwing herself into work has always helped in the past. "I know it'll be different, being a PI, but I need something."

"You want to go into business with the Devil?" he asks, his eyes crinkling at their corners.
"Yeah," she whispers, nodding. "And I like the name, by the way."

"Well, then!" Lucifer shoves at her hip, nearly pushing her off the bench. "Scoot, scoot, scoot. This is cause for celebration, Detective."

Chloe watches in confusion as he rushes into the bedroom and throws the bed's soft, black comforter over his shoulder. Then, at the bar, he lifts several bottles until he finds one to his liking. She expects him to pour the bourbon into two glasses, but he holds the bottle aloft, shrugs his shoulder to reposition the comforter, and grabs her hand. He pulls her toward the elevator.

"Lucifer," she laughs, "what are we doing?"

"Why, we're going to christen our new office, of course." He waggles his eyebrows.

Loving him is warm and increasingly familiar, a soothing balm to her soul. After, they lie, pressed skin to skin, Lucifer sprawled on the comforter. Chloe draped across him, listening to the steady thump of his ancient heart. His hands roam her back, trailing heat wherever they land.

Without curtains or blinds to cover the floor-to-ceiling windows, Chloe refused to undress with the lights on. Now, the office space remains dark, the only light in the room coming from nearby buildings and street lights, and the mottled purple haze of the city's night sky. But even without the moon shining bright, the light beyond the sixth floor isn't the only light Chloe senses.

There are many things about Lucifer Morningstar that are decidedly hominine, but there's no ignoring what she now feels burning beneath her cheek: starfire, as if pure light is intrinsic to his seraphic DNA. And maybe it is. How she missed it before, she'll never know.

Sated and sleepy, she strokes his chest, caressing toward the light with her fingertips.

Lucifer suddenly lifts his head, looking up toward the ceiling. "I'm regretting that cocaine I snorted earlier." He falls back with a grunt. "There are bloody lights on the ceiling."

Chloe jerks awake and follows his upward gaze. Her heart skips a beat as she takes in the polychromatic splendor above. Clutching her hands into fists, she scrambles internally to rebuild her levee. The light spilling from her fingertips retreats and disappears, but one glance at Lucifer tells her the damage is done.

"Are you quite all right?" he asks, uncurling her fist where it's wedged by his rib cage.

"Fine! I'm fine," she laughs nervously, and proceeds to press a desperate kiss to his mouth. His lips tilt downward beneath hers. Cupping the side of her face, he pushes her away.

"Best not to lie, darling."

She sighs shakily. "I don't want you to worry, okay?"

He squeezes her closer. "I've been around longer than your planet. Very little surprises me."

"Yeah, well, I think this might surprise you." Sliding off his body, she sits up beside him.

Lucifer turns on his side and props his head up on a fist, the very picture of relaxed. "Out with it," he says, giving her knee an affectionate shake.

She opens her hand and directs it toward the space between them. Drawing in a deep breath, she taps into the lambent cistern hiding deep in her chest. Shimmering, colorful flecks pop into
existence, dancing across the luxuriously soft, black comforter.

Lucifer tenses. "What is that?" he asks, his voice tight. He looks, unblinking, between her face and hands, and once, briefly, to the ceiling above.

"I don't entirely know," Chloe answers. "It started happening a couple of days ago. I think it's why I fainted."

He sits up, facing her. Like Maze, he reaches forward and grasps one of her hands, only to turn it, palm up. Worried—maybe foolishly—about what the light could do to his eyesight, Chloe walls herself off in record time.

"You're able to control it," he observes.

"Maze helped."

"Did she now?" He glances at her before returning his focus to her hand, which he explores like a palm reader, one finger tracing the lines of her flesh. "And why didn't you come to me?"

"I didn't want you to be afraid."

"The Devil doesn't scare easy, darling."

Chloe rests her free hand on his arm. "He does when he thinks my safety is on the line."

He doesn't deny it. "Does it hurt?" he asks, his tone gentle.

"No." Her fingers tighten their hold on his arm. "And it doesn't have to mean anything, okay? I'm not going to use it."

"Of course it means something," he scoffs. "You're a bloody miracle, after all. You're here for a reason—part of dear old Dad's bollocks plan."

He lets go of her hand and reaches for the half-empty bottle of liquor. After raising it in sarcastic cheers, he draws it toward his mouth and tilts his head back. When he's finished drinking, he pushes the bottle toward her.

Chloe takes it and sets it aside once more. "Well, your dad's going to be disappointed since I'm not going to cooperate."

Lucifer chuckles, and Chloe hears eons of bitterness behind the sound. "Take it from a lifelong rebel, darling. There's no returning gifts from my father."

She holds back a shudder. "Let's just focus on work," she suggests, looking around the empty office space. "There's plenty to do." Plenty to distract.

"Very well," he says. "On one condition."

"What's that?"

"You come to me next time," he answers. "Not Mazikeen. I'm your bloody partner."

"Okay," she agrees on a whisper.

Lucifer grabs one of her hands and squeezes. "I'd storm the gates of Heaven before I allowed him to hurt you. You must know that."
She does, and it's just one of several reasons why she didn't want to tell him. But the chivalrous sentiment charms her nonetheless, and she goes to him, straddling his lap and holding him close. They may have light within them, but Chloe can't help but think they are two pawns in the dark.

Chapter End Notes

1) Lucifer was totally playing a piano cover of "I Want It That Way".

2) Apologies in advance, but there may or may not be an update next Monday. I'll have family in town.

3) Huge thanks to Obli and Yah for helping me, especially with the ending (and title!).
David tugs on his shirt sleeves, trying to hide fresh track marks. Eddie understands it's been a bad year, and an even worse couple of months—there's no need to hide a relapse from him—but Maria Rosales doesn't like to be reminded that her grandson is a part-time drug dealer who befriends addicts living in her apartment complex. Anyway, a little modesty is a small price to pay for free, home-cooked meals. They're good enough that, for a very short while, David can forget about the other hunger chewing at his insides.

He trudges down the three flights of narrow, concrete stairs that separate his apartment from Maria's. He has to knock twice before Eddie opens the door. David expects to see the tribal tattoo on his friend's face lift with his smile, but Eddie's typically jovial expression has been replaced by a tight scowl.

"I brought pie," David says, raising a questionable, mixed-berry concoction he got from the dollar store. The first ingredient is high fructose corn syrup, and the last is a word he can't pronounce.

"That's great, man," Eddie says, taking the plastic shell container. "Why don't you have a seat?" He nods toward the old, yellow couch. "Abuela's just finishing up. I'll let you know when dinner's ready."

David frowns, knowing when he's not wanted, and shuffles to the loveseat. Usually he joins them in the kitchen. Watching Maria cook is a ritual he's come to enjoy, even if the old woman never talks to him. It reminds him of those rare occasions growing up, when his mother stood before the stovetop, not to whip up culinary delights, but to struggle her way through the instructions on a box of Kraft mac and cheese. She was a shit mother, but everyone has their moments.

The cadent, scripted Spanish flowing at low volume from Maria's ancient television clashes with the rapid-fire Spanish spoken in the kitchen. David's Spanish is little more than a patchwork mess of basic vocabulary, curse words, slang, and menu items, but the potential juiciness of a family argument has him straining his ears and mind more than usual.

"I want it out of my house."

"You're so fucking stubborn! It could heal you."

"God is the only one who can heal me, Eduardo."

"What if this is how God wants to heal you?"

"Heroin is not a cure for anything."

Heroin. China white. Smack. The mere thought of the drug picks at David's pleasure receptors like he picks at the scabs of his skin. Memories of heavy, spaced-out bliss override the rich scent of tamales and beans. God, he has to find his fix for tomorrow. Or tonight, if the cravings become too unbearable. He's trying to control his addiction, but it's getting harder every day.

In a more rational corner of his brain, he wonders why Eddie would want to force heroin on his own grandmother. He must have bought into some crazy story to believe it could be the answer to any of her problems. She's already wheelchair-bound. Even if she's in pain, the last thing she needs
is an opioid addiction.

The argument dies down and Eddie calls David into the kitchen. It always takes him a moment to adjust to seeing his own compact kitchen's layout constructed lower to the ground for wheelchair accessibility. Maria cuts her eyes up at him from where she spoons refried beans from a cast iron pot onto a plate. It's a look that feels like a cat hiss sounds.

He wants to tell her, *Lady, I didn't make your boy sell drugs*, but he keeps his mouth shut. Tugging at his sleeves once more, he sits at the rickety breakfast table. Eddie claps his shoulder in apology and puts a plate full of food before him.

"How's the job search going?" Eddie asks, sitting across from him.

"It's going," David says.

Maria snorts as she wheels over to her place at the table. She knows he's a liar. All addicts are, eventually. And the reality of this—the reality of his lassitude—reminds him of how close he is to homelessness. A month and a half, if he can keep the landlord off his ass. Two or three weeks, more likely.

She smacks the back of Eddie's head before he can shovel food into his mouth. "Say grace."

***

After dinner, Eddie and David leave Maria to her telenovelas and retreat to David's apartment to watch the Angels play the Twins. David holds a plate of leftovers in one hand while unlocking his door. Shoving inside his apartment, he swallows back shame at the sight of the empty living area. It's not really a home anymore. The beat up, plaid recliner sticks out like a sore thumb, as does the growing mountain of Maria's dinner plates. He really should return those.

"Shit, man, where's your couch?"

It only takes Eddie a minute to realize the answer is obvious. The monkey on David's back stole and sold the couch to feed itself, just like it sold the bed frame and floor lamps, the signed Chris Cornell poster, the iPad. The monkey has stolen everything—David's love life, his job, his possessions, his youth. These days, the monkey is nearly all he has left. It's both his best friend and worst enemy. Eddie gets it—he feeds it, too, so long as David has money.

"You can have the chair," David says, wandering into the kitchen. He tosses the plate of leftovers into the fridge and pulls out a six pack of beer.

"The floor's fine," Eddie assures him, dropping down onto the stained carpet and crossing his legs. He grabs a bottle from the six pack as David passes.

David twists the cap off a beer bottle, turns on the TV, and flips over to the game. "You selling?" he asks, casual as he can, his eyes glued to the screen, as if he's not a junkie at all. From the corner of his eye, he sees Eddie stiffen and glance his way.

"Nah, man. Sorry."

"I'm good for it. I got cash." Not much, but enough for a few bundles, depending on the price.

Eddie shrugs. "Not selling right now."
Bullshit. He's always selling H, and he's got to have something on him after how he was talking to Maria. David glowers at the game and picks at a scab on his arm. Part of him wants to lash out in anger, but he's not so far gone that he'd ruin a relationship with a dealer like Eddie. Someone who doesn't sell him weak product or cheat him. Not until tonight, anyway.

The game isn't much of a distraction from David's growing unease. The Angels can't play for shit, and the Twins are only marginally better, despite their clear lead by the seventh-inning stretch.

Eddie pushes to his feet during the intermission, stretching his arms high over head. "I gotta drop a deuce," he announces, and leaves the room.

While leaning over to grab another beer, David notices something lying beside the empty bottles where Eddie was seated. Two small, rectangular bags—clear, save for a red logo and the fine white dust coating their insides—call to him like a siren. His mouth goes dry as he slinks from his recliner to the floor and snatches them from the carpet. He's never stolen from anybody before, but he feels only the briefest pang of guilt as he pockets the heroin with a sweaty palm. He needs four bags to survive most days, but Eddie's smack is purer than most. It'll be enough to get him through tomorrow. If he can wait that long.

He knows he can't.

When Eddie returns from the bathroom, he's none the wiser of his missing cargo.

***

Before David sold drugs, he was studying to become an accountant. He was going places. And before he used heroin, he was a handsome stoic. He didn't cry at movies or funerals. He didn't laugh too loudly, but neither was he quick to anger. He was even-keeled, steady, and a brown-eyed girl loved him for it. Now, storms roll within him, and the only way to calm them is to use the very thing that engenders the tempest.

The tourniquet lassos tightly round his arm, and the needle goes in on the third try. He tests the vein, depresses the plunger, and pulls the needle free with ease. Once, long ago, he was squeamish about the process, but he's not that man anymore. Stripped down to his underwear, the rubber tourniquet and plastic syringe tumble down onto his bare thighs.

Seconds pass. The drug arrows through his veins and pierces his heart, sending his soul afloat down an enchanted river. A current throws him to the shore of a twisted paradise, where vines gently pull him into a soft jungle filled with flowers. He's cradled by loving boa constrictors that whisper sweet nothings in his ears: All is well. You are loved. There is always tomorrow, and tomorrow is full of promise. His eyes roll back, and he breathes in sweet air.

He rests in a bed of moss, gazing up at the star-dappled heavens. He belongs to every speck, and every speck belongs to him. No beginning or end, forever and ever. But the earth beneath him rotates ever faster, a spinning top spiraling out of control until stars are lines drawn across a midnight sky. Faster and faster, brighter and brighter, closer and closer. Suns weaving a noose around the planet he calls home.

The air sours, turning rancid, and David's cradle transforms into shackles that trap him in place. Light bursts across his vision—a blaze of white fire that destroys and creates.

When the light withdraws, it leaves behind a boiling, tiger-orange gulf embedded in a desolate gray
landscape that knows no sun. He gasps as the molten lava bubbles, blasting scorching heat that
singes the hairs of his body. From within the lake of fire, a blighted man emerges, naked and red
and wailing, clawing at his face with sable nails. The burning man heaves bile, and the giant, bare
bones that rise out of his back—skeletal, featherless wings—beat erratically with his pain.

David's mouth yawns open in a noiseless scream. He cannot move, cannot breathe. The monster
looks up and meets his gaze, his lips wet. Glowing, red eyes pierce into David's soul, and he sees
himself, his soul, as if in a mirror. He sees his failures, his excuses, his losses, his unfulfilled
desires. All the things he could have been, but never was. All the things he wanted, but was too
weak to strive for. He sees himself and knows he is a detestable creature who deserves torture and
death.

He is trapped in the burning man's gaze for what feels like an eternity, but is only an hour, maybe
two. Slowly, the broken, shadowed world fades. But even after his apartment rematerializes, he is
plagued by the afterimage from that perverse, red-eyed mirror. The broken junkie without hope. He
has to get it out of himself, this poison, even as he hates himself all the more for stumbling to his
bathroom and pulling a blade free from his razor.

David opens his body with a dozen little cuts, and a dozen more, and watches the poisoned blood
drip sin down his flesh. It's only what he deserves, believing he could find paradise, believing he
might be worthy of it.

But the will to survive persists, even if only faintly. Hours later, his fingers slip, wet with blood,
across the face of his phone as he desperately calls Eddie.

***

Shayna dismounts from her motorcycle two blocks away from Cedarwood Heights. Leaving on her
fitted, leather gloves, she marches south, toward the apartment complex. It's a boiling hot Monday
afternoon, neither the ideal climate for full motorcycle gear nor the ideal hour to take care of
problems in the drug business. But when her father orders her to clean up a mess, she cleans up the
mess, especially if that mess traces back to her, and this one does.

Fuck Eddie Rosales. A mere forty-eight hours have passed since she handed off the Firefly, and
now she's here, fixing his shit, in broad fucking daylight. At least he had the sense to call her via an
encrypted connection.

"What the fuck's in that stuff!" he'd yelled.

"I told you. Angel feathers." And she'd laughed, thinking he'd finally tested the product himself. It
wasn't good if he had, he'd owe them money, but it wasn't the end of the world, either.

She wasn't prepared for the truth. Wasn't prepared to face just how much of a tool her lover was.

"What do you mean David's freaking out?" she'd snapped. "David, who I told you not to take
Firefly to?"

Yes, that David.

"A bad reaction," Eddie had called it. "It's not wearing off," he'd said. "I'm afraid to go over there. I
think he's dying. Nobody can see me with him. I need your help, Shay."

No shit. He doesn't have the cojones to do what might need to be done.
She blows air past her lips, letting her anger go with it. Anger is useful, but only if it doesn't control the host.

A quick but careful tour of the apartment complex's perimeter reveals three security cameras "guard" the area, but the complex is sprawling and comprised of many units. There are dead spots everywhere. She ascends one of the outdoor staircases without concern and stops only when she stands before David Yates' apartment door.

It's quiet—most people are still at work—but she stays aware of her surroundings, every sound, every shift in the light. She draws a lockpick set from a jacket pocket, pulls out the tension wrench and rake pick, and gets to work. Five minutes later, the doorknob twists beneath her hand, and she enters the apartment.

Shayna's eyes land on David's nearly-nude form as she shuts and locks the door behind her. Focused as he is on his hands, he doesn't look up when she enters. Flashing hues from a muted television light up the dark room and draw her attention toward his bloodied, round belly.

Self-mutilation. Never a good sign, but an especially bad one in the De la Cruz drug business.

She glances around, her nose scrunched. Drug dens aren't sparsely furnished, they're formerly furnished, and here is no different. She can still make out the faint outline where a couch once stood.

"How're you feeling, David?" she asks, conversational.

David startles, looking up. He holds a razor blade in his right hand. The sharp edge presses against his thigh. "Whooo...are...you?"

The words come out thick and slow, and his gaze is not quite there. Eddie was right to call her—at least he didn't screw that up. The Firefly hasn't worn off like it should have. Even when injected, the purest heroin shouldn't leave an addict high for more than a few hours. As it is, five hours passed simply while Shayna made her way back to L.A. from Vegas.

"Used to be a friend of Eddie's," she answers, walking closer until she comes to stand before him, her knees a short distance from his. He reeks of sweat and urine, and the shallow cuts which litter his body well and weep with blood. Looking down her nose at him, she says, "You took something that wasn't yours."

David's head falls back and he lets out a tired wail.

"When did you shoot up?" she asks.

"Holy, holy, holy," he babbles, and laughs. "Lord," he says, tears springing to his eyes, "why have you forsaken me?"

Jesus.

Reaching out, she grabs his chin and draws his head forward. "When. Did you. Shoot up?" she enunciates.

His glassy eyes hold hers. "Middle of night."

She lets him go with a small shove. His head falls back again, as though he's a doll thrown into a corner.
"Do...you...see him?" David asks, the razor blade in his hand nicking against his flesh.

Shayna rolls her eyes. "No one's seeing what you're seeing."

"The burning man," David whispers. "He showed me...what I am."

"And what's that?" she asks, curious, though she shouldn't be.

"Unworthy." He digs the razor in, then, and blood curtains down his inner thigh. When he moans, it's impossible to tell whether it's from pain or pleasure, or from pure coincidence.

For a long moment, she stares. This isn't a heroin overdose. This is someone driven mad by divinity. They haven't seen it happen in decades, not since they decreased the content of divine artifacts in their drug formulas. (Most of the time, none of it matters since the vast majority of ingredients turn out not to be divine, anyway.) She, herself, has never seen it happen. But it can happen. They even have a humorous code name for it: holy roller.

Firefly could have done this to her. Twice.

Instead she heard the hymns of Creation. The mere thought of that music makes her eyes sting.

She leaves David in his chair and goes into his kitchen, which is filled with drab, olive green counters. She opens stiff drawers, searching for a knife. Any will do, so long as it's sharp and big enough, and belongs to David. Because she has a flair for the dramatic, she chooses a butcher's knife.

Although she's never dealt with a holy roller, she knows the protocol. There's no curing this kind of madness. No hospital visit, no stomach pumping, can solve it. His brain is officially, royally fucked, which means he has the potential to be a blubbering idiot one minute and a singing canary in the next. There's really only one thing to do, accordingly: contain the mess to protect the De la Cruz empire.

You could argue it's humane, what she's about to do. Not that Shayna concerns herself with such debates.

She returns to the living room, the butcher's knife held down by her side. David's head tilts her way, his dull gaze dipping to the knife.

"You...gon' kill me...now?"

Shayna looks down at him, the leather of her glove creaking as she squeezes the knife handle.

"Yes," she says, and drives the blade home.

Kitchen knives are notoriously dull, but the gut is spongy, especially in one as relaxed as David. She aims below his rib cage and slightly to the right, shoving the point of the knife into his left kidney with practiced ease. A stomach wound might not kill, or, if it does, it's a slow, painful death. But renal damage does the trick in under an hour. She's not a monster.

David surprises her when he drops his razor blade and covers her hand with both of his. The combined weight of their hands jars the knife in his belly, widening the wound. Blood spurts and falls, discoloring his underwear.

"Thank you," he breathes. "Thank you."
Shayna yanks her hand away and steps back, leaving the knife embedded in his abdomen. It's one thing to hear stories about how far gone a holy roller becomes, how pain is nonexistent in the face of their existential dread. It's another to witness it.

Taking a deep breath, she gathers the two empty bags of Firefly and David's paraphernalia from on and around his chair. She finds his cell phone on the floor, next to a tall stack of plates, and pockets it, as well. When she's certain the scene is clear enough, she turns away. There's nothing to be done about the body that will be left behind, but it's no matter. What drug testing can account for angel feathers? And how hard will the LAPD hunt for a drug addict's killer?

At the doorway, she looks back one last time. As David Yates bleeds out, he mumbles about a burned man. She'll never use Firefly again.

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It would have been nice, ending her evening there, but Hector de la Cruz did not only order his daughter to kill David Yates. He ordered the death of Eddie Rosales, too.

Shayna knows her father is punishing her. For not listening to all his lectures warning her not to grow close to small-time dealers. For entrusting one of those dealers with the most important drug they've created in years. For nearly destroying a deal with Peter Avery, a man she can't begin to understand.

Her bastard brother, John Barrow, may be beholden to Avery and may think he wants the De la Cruz name and all that comes with it, but the price Shayna pays to keep the name of her birth is steep. There is nothing Hector won't ask his daughter to do in the name of his empire, and there is no end to his creativity when he punishes her for failing him.

They meet at the Imler house at dark. He brings his stupid dog. She doesn't tell him David is dead, only that he's getting the help he needs. He apologizes profusely, begs her forgiveness.

"Did you bring the supply?" she asks.

"Yeah, it's in the Lambo."

"You're not selling anymore."

"I know I fucked up," he says, and holds her in the bland master bedroom of the house. He's still shaken by David's phone call. "Shay, baby, I'll make it up to you, I promise."

"It's okay," she whispers, lies.

And she kisses him.

And she cuts his throat.

Eddie collapses to the carpet, gushing blood with every beat of his heart. The dog he loves dances around his head, yapping in concern as he drowns in himself.

His warm, brown eyes shift wildly, left, then right, but they return to Shayna over and over again, full of questions and fear and accusations. He dies, staring at her, into her. She lets him.

Shayna de la Cruz is her father's daughter, a knife, a nail, a witch. She never loved the dead fool at
her feet, but she liked him a little more than the average person. Even now, even after his
carelessness cost him his life.

Fuck Eddie Rosales.

She shakes her head, hardens her heart, and sets her mind on the task at hand. There's nothing left
to do with the body. As a general rule, the De la Cruz empire doesn't dispose of its organic waste.
The harder you try to, the more points of failure you create, the more likely you leave evidence
behind. Anyway, in the right circles, you can build a reputation on a mountain of corpses.

The Imler house is littered with her fingerprints, but she's not in the system yet. Otherwise, there's
not much of a better place to leave a dead man—and his dog. She eyes the poodle with disdain.

Digging in Eddie's pocket, she pulls out his cell phone and unlocks it. All dealers for the De la
Cruz empire carry one phone and one phone alone. It's locked, no contacts are saved to it, and no
questionable websites are browsed on it. All business-related communication is handled through an
encrypted messaging app set to delete message and call history every five minutes.

Sometimes Eddie sent her nice messages. No one sends her nice messages.

Shayna leaves his phone on the nightstand. Despite his faults, Eddie used the phone as intended,
making it a potentially useful red herring for the LAPD, whenever they happen to come across this
crime scene. At the same time, competing empires will recognize the clean, if brutal, De la Cruz
M.O.

She steps over Eddie's body as she leaves the room. The dog curls close to his side and whines.

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She fucking hates the Colinda safe house. There's nothing to do there. And her father is well aware
of that, so of course he's sending her there, so she can think about what she's done. You want to rule
this empire one day? he asks through his punishment. Then you won't let feelings get in the way of
good business.

Shayna makes it half-way to Colinda before she can't take it anymore. Exiting the 5, she finds
herself in a sleepy town that isn't much better than where she's headed, but even sleepy towns have
bars, thank God.

When she enters the dingy dive bar, drunk, middle-aged men look up at her and squint, as if they
can't decide whether she's an oasis or a desert mirage. She stares back, her lip curled. She's in no
mood to deal with horn dogs, and she'd really rather not maim or kill anyone else tonight.

Her motorcycle boots stick to the grimy floor as she wanders over to the counter and orders shots
of tequila. As she slams down an empty shot glass and grabs the next, the door to the bar swings
open.

"Rough day?" the newcomer asks, settling on the stool beside her.

She turns slowly. It takes everything in her not to recoil at the sight of Peter Avery. In the dark bar,
his face glows red beneath a neon beer sign.

"Are you following me?" she snaps.
She's not sure how he could be. No one as high up in a drug business as she is doesn't know to watch for trailing cars, and she knows his black SUV. And yet here he is, the fucking creep.

"Your father told me what you did this evening," he says, ignoring her question.

"Great. So you can understand why I don't want your company." She downs another shot and bites into a lime.

Avery chuckles and waves off the bartender who nears them. The busty, curly-haired white woman, who looks to be in her sixties and as if she's seen some shit, takes one look at Avery's eyes and shuffles away.

"Goddammit," Shayna seethes. "Now I'm gonna have a hell of a time getting a drink." She throws her hands up. "All right. I get it. You're here. I'm here. What do you want?"

"Just wanted to tell you good job. I like people who do what it takes. I'm like that, too."

"Bully for you."

Avery takes one of her tequila shots and downs it. She scowls when the glass hits the counter.

"Otero's waiting for you at the safe house. In a few days, you'll have your chance to capture the Devil."

Capture the Devil. She huffs at the absurdity of it. But it's not funny. She's heard the universe sing and seen a man fall mad to divinity. What's the rate of madness? Is it higher than the number of people who die, OD'ing on heroin?

"I take orders from my father," Shayna says, "not you."

"Sure," Avery agrees, "but I thought you deserved a heads up. I mean, you do the dirty work."

Shayna remains silent, hating how his words burrow deep. She spins an empty shot glass beneath one hand and stares into his black eyes. While Eddie looked at her in confusion, Avery looks at her as if he sees through to her soul.

Chapter End Notes

Mushy words of thanks to Obli and Yah for checking this story behind me and making me laugh on the regular.
Fatigue weighs on Chloe's bones, but she leaves Lucifer late in the night for her apartment. There are chores to catch up on, clothes to wash, bills to pay with dwindling savings, things Lucifer doesn't think about and would distract her from if he were present. It's strange now, taking care of life's myriad mundanities, trying to compartmentalize and pretend the world is as it's always been, that she hasn't changed. Just long enough to do the things humans who don't quite believe in eternity have deemed important.

Trixie is still with Dan, and Izzy is out again, leaving the apartment quiet. While Chloe waits for a load of laundry to finish, she sits out on the terrace with a glass of wine and the gentle presence of the moon. Light thrums in her chest, lapping gently like water against reeds on a muddy lakeshore. The desire to drag her fingers through it is nearly unbearable.

She argues with herself for a while. What she told Maze and Lucifer is true. She doesn't want what's inside of her. It must come with strings attached. She's not going to use it. She isn't.

But curiosity has always gotten the better of Chloe. She was the little girl who peeked in the closet and under the bed, searching for scary monsters. The girl who threw punches at bullies twice her size. The preteen who hiked her leg up and held a mirror between her legs, marveling at hair the adults in her life forgot to prepare her for. The woman who's asked questions others wouldn't, who's gone into places where others would have waited for backup—for better or worse.

Sometimes she's held back her curiosity out of fear—it's not as if it hasn't gotten her into trouble more than once—but it's a hard desire to ignore. Embracing it led her to the Devil, who maybe she still should fear, if not directly, then existentially, but who instead only exhilarates her. Who she loves.

So maybe it's no surprise when she extends a hand and plays with the very light that terrifies her. After all, there's no returning to the person she used to be.

The less light she releases from herself, the fainter the colors, and the more light she pours forth, the narrower the prism, the whiter and brighter the band of light. She draws in moonlight and resurfaces it on the ground and then daringly on her own leg, which feels a little like standing between two mirrors, staring into an infinite recursion of her own reflection. Finally, she directs light toward her wine glass, where it refracts again in the dark, burgundy liquid. She pushes herself, letting more light in, letting it pass through her and focus.

Steam suddenly rises from the wine, and Chloe jerks back in surprise. Withdrawing her light at once, she drags her fingers under her nose, checking for blood. There is some, but not as much as earlier in the day.

"What am I doing?" she hisses, putting a hand to her forehead. As if any amount of blood is acceptable.

She told herself she wouldn't play with this—told Maze, told Lucifer, mere hours ago. If you got hurt, she thinks, what would happen to Trixie? But just as easily she wonders if Maze is right, if finally she can protect the people she loves.
As she touches the outside of the wine glass, a small, shaky breath passes her lips. The glass is hot beneath her fingertips. Any hotter, and it might have shattered.

_I did that, _she thinks._

Wrapping her arms around herself, she leans back in her chair and gazes at Lucifer's stars.

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Chloe takes the elevator from the parking garage to the sixth floor of Lucifer's building—or, rather, to The Devil's in the Details. It'll be a while before she can think of anything that close to Lux or the penthouse as being work-related. None of it feels real yet, jumping into business with a man who's been almost as flaky as he has been dependable. It's probably a horrible idea that will crash and burn, but that doesn't seem to quell her excitement.

To her surprise, Lucifer is already in the office, although she supposes he can't beat the new commute. He sits behind an ebony executive desk, looking perfectly put-together in charcoal and white, his red-soled shoes kicked up. Why did she have to fall for someone so obnoxious?

He smiles, all teeth and boyish delight, and she remembers. "Good morning, Detective."

"You got us desks," she says, returning his smile.

More like _desk_—two corner desks, banked against each other to form a _U_, and turned to face any who might enter. Just what he's always wanted, and what she should likely fear.

"Indeed, I did. And laptops"—he nods to the device resting precariously on his angled thighs—"and name plaques."

He reaches toward the other desk and lifts a silver placard that reads _Detective Chloe Decker_. It's much shinier than the one that was on her desk at the precinct, enough so that she has a sneaking suspicion it's made, not from plastic or even stainless steel, but from _actual_ silver.

Chloe opens her mouth to comment on his priorities, but gives up before she starts. The desks are fine—no amount of _feng shui_ will stop him from trying to distract her—the laptops will be useful and are no doubt top-of-the-line, and the plaques are... Well, he wouldn't be Lucifer if he wasn't extravagant. Pick your battles, Decker.

"This is great," she says, sincerely—because it _is_ thoughtful—and he preens beneath the praise.

She wanders toward one of the windows, her footsteps loud in the largely unfurnished space. The summer sun bakes the sprawling city, casting a hazy glow over its streets and buildings. The sunlight presses upon her, too, and she closes her eyes and follows its warm path past her skin, through her veins, and into that waiting basin within her chest. That _feeling she gets to live with_, as Maze called it, is easier, and less frightening, to trace each time she tries.

"Do you like anal?" Lucifer asks, his voice echoing and shattering her spiritual journey.

Her mouth hangs open as she turns. It's barely nine in the morning. She hasn't even sat down yet.

"Uh," she starts, and he looks up from his laptop. It takes everything she has to maintain eye contact. "That area's more, you know, exit-only for me. Historically."
In the history of her ass with other men. She holds back a laugh.

"Hmm." He refocuses on his laptop and clicks on something. "Is that a hard limit?"

Due to more uncomfortable experiences than good ones, she nearly says yes, but then hesitates. If anyone can make anal sex pleasurable, it's the man in front of her. "Not...necessarily," she answers, and immediately hates the smirk that appears on his face. "And, I mean, I know you're into it. Probably."

"Oh, yes, my prostate works just fine."

She stares. She meant giving, not receiving, but of course in his long sexual history he's been the bottom before and enjoyed it... She shakes herself. "We're at work now. This is unprofessional."

"Is it?" he asks, a little too innocently.

Chloe gives him a firm, knowing glare that makes him grin.

"Very well," he sighs dramatically. "No butt stuff. On the sixth floor, anyway."

"Thank you."

Taking a deep, fortifying breath, she walks to her new desk and settles into the waiting office chair. She's a little taken aback by how comfortable it is. She begged the precinct for a new office chair all last year, to no avail.

Lucifer sets aside his laptop and swivels around to face her in a move she knows she'll see many times in the future. "Any trouble?" he asks, nodding toward her hands. His tone is casual, curious, but his concerned expression gives him away.

She grimaces. Part of diving headfirst into their new business was trying not to think about the rest of her life. "I may have tested myself some more," she admits, wincing as she pushes herself to be honest with him. "Turns out I can boil liquid."

His brows lift high on his forehead. "What, like a kettle?"

Chloe snorts so hard her nose hurts. Saying it aloud does sound insane. On par with a man in a suit roaming around L.A., claiming to be the Devil. "I guess?" she says.

"Darling, we've no idea what Dad is up to," he says, worried. "I thought you were going to leave it be."

"I know. I was," she whispers, turning serious. She flips her hands over on her lap and stares at her palms. She can still feel the light from outside and, more subtly, the light in the man sitting next to her. "I just can't figure out if it's better to pretend it's not happening, or to do everything I can to learn how to control it."

"For the first time in my life, I vote repression."

"Like with your wings?" she prods gently.

"That's different," he scoffs, but she can tell he doesn't believe that. "Just..." Covering her hands with his, he sighs, "Just be careful. Please? Or test yourself around me or Maze, since somehow that treacherous demon has weaseled her way back into our graces. Someone who's at least familiar with our world, in other words. You're human. You're in over your head."
As if he isn't, too.

"And what if I'm not human?"

"Don't be preposterous." But his head tilts, and his brow furrows. "Perhaps you are a Jedi."

Her mouth twitches. "Jedis are human. Also fictional."

Lucifer waves a hand, as if that hardly matters. "I've tried calling Amenadiel to see if he could tell us anything, but it seems he's back to not taking my calls." He offers Chloe a faint, apologetic smile. "I'm afraid you're with the black sheep of the family."

"I don't mind," she says softly.

Maybe she should, considering his family, but she doesn't. With the exception of Amenadiel, none of them seem real, as it is. God himself is just a distant concept, even now, though one she isn't fond of, if she thinks about it too closely. What she does know about his family... She's not sure she could stand being in the same room with them.

Squeezing his hands once, she turns and scoots closer to the desk. She eyes the cavernous office space and says, "There's a lot we need to do here." She isn't even sure where to begin. "We'll need to hire... Well, some people who know what they're doing?"

She's a former cop and has no idea how to run a business. Something tells her the man beside her doesn't have a clue, either, even if he does own a very successful nightclub.

"Ah, that reminds me." Lucifer yanks open a drawer, revealing familiar, dated journals that make her blush, though thankfully he doesn't notice. "Ten years of ledgers in here, darling. I stayed up after you left, adding in details. They've got phone numbers, last known location, and professional information now." He adjusts his cufflinks, clearly proud of his work. "If you ever need to cash in a favor quickly, do be aware some of these chaps hop the twig before I ever get to them." He barks a laugh. "Lucky sods, getting a freebie from the Devil."

"You'd let me cash in your favors?"

"They're there to be used."

"Okay. And...'hop the twig,' I'm guessing, is dead?"

"Yes, some of them shuffle off their mortal coil before the Devil gets to them. You know, kick the bucket, buy a farm, pop their clogs."

"Right." She nods, wide-eyed. "Wait. You stayed up all night doing this? Aren't you tired?"

He pulls open another drawer. "Coke's in the other drawer."

Groaning, she palms her face. "I think we need some ground rules for work. Well, you do."

"Oh, dear, found myself in the naughty corner again, haven't I?" he sighs and removes his flask from his suit jacket. "Go on then. Make your little rules, and I'll tell you whether I'll follow them."

"You probably won't," she sighs.

"Now, now, you know my word is my bond, Detective. If I say I'll be a good boy, I will be."

"You'll find loopholes."
Lucifer smirks. "I'll always be the Devil, darling." He nudges her leg with his when she sighs again. "You don't complain about that when you're riding me six ways to Sunday."

She stares at him and tries very hard not to laugh, lest she encourage him.

The rules are simple and obvious, but they're best spelled out for Lucifer. No sex (no, not of any kind) on the sixth floor, no watching porn or buying sex toys on company devices, no drugs on the sixth floor (yes, marijuana counts; no, he doesn't have glaucoma), no drinking on the sixth floor (fine, just not in front of clients). And while he tends not to smoke around her and never smokes around Trixie, Chloe doesn't put it past him under stressful situations, and so bans that, too.

"Right. Nothing fun on the sixth floor. How much vacation time are we giving ourselves? Civilized countries favor four to five weeks. What about a daily siesta?"

"You were the one who wanted to do this," she reminds him. "If you want out, better to say so now than later. I can find something else to do."

"Oh, I'm all in, Detective. I'm merely best in the field, wouldn't you say? And there's nothing wrong with a little R&R, now, is there?"

"The field is going to be entirely different now," she cautions, jabbing a finger against the top of her desk. "We've agreed to focus on cold cases and corruption, and those can get dangerous. We don't have the full weight of the LAPD behind us anymore. If something goes wrong, it's on us. If we get into trouble, we don't have backup."

Lucifer leans back in his office chair, his eyes roaming over her. "You suspect the Yates and Rosales cases will turn dangerous, don't you?" He grins sharply. It's not a very human grin, and she's not sure how she ever thought it was.

"Try to look a little less excited about us putting our lives on the line."

"But don't you see?" he says, a mischievous glint in his eye. "Things will be entirely different now. No hiding, no struggling to make sense of my behavior in your paperwork. We can use my connections, my strength. You'll see, darling. Doing things my way can be quite fun."

"Fun." Right.

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They mount a long whiteboard to the wall closest to their desks. As Chloe stares at the blank surface, she's struck by how crippled they are without access to state and federal databases. Normally, any investigation board worth its salt is filled with DMV photos, mugshots, and other official pictures, licenses, and certificates. Now, she's down to writing names on a whiteboard. They'll need to look into purchasing access to other databases eventually, but, for now, it's dry erase markers and memory.

They start where they left off, before Lucifer's notoriety, Chloe's B movie fame, and the now-defunct TFF! derailed them.

"Okay," Chloe says, "we know David Yates was friends with Eddie Rosales." She writes and circles both men's names, crosses them out to indicate they're deceased, and draws a red line to connect the two. "Eddie had firefly heroin in his possession, and David had it in his system." To be thorough, she adds Eddie's grandmother, Maria, to the board, as well as the Daltons, who employed
Eddie at their hardware store.

"Matty at the LAPD has been very interested in all of this, of course," Lucifer says around a mouthful of food. He lounges in his office chair again, feet kicked up, chopsticks heaped with noodles and hovering over a takeout box. His second takeout box.

Chloe crunches on a spring roll as she adds Detective Morrison off to the side on the whiteboard. He's likely at least one of the people who got rid of evidence from the loft. Lucifer is right about him, though. Anything he does is about money, and nothing more. Now that she's no longer part of the police force, following that money could be a good start to understanding whether he had a relationship with Eddie Rosales or not. She draws dollar signs and question marks beneath Morrison's name.

"Don't forget that pillock of a nephew, Zachary."

"Your personal feelings about Webb don't make him a suspect," she says, even as she writes his name in an effort to appease Lucifer. "He wasn't even in L.A. when David and Eddie died."

"Not suspect," Lucifer crows. "He couldn't stop thinking with his knob long enough to solve a case."

Chloe cuts her eyes over at him. "You're right. Who would dare let their libido interfere with a homicide investigation?"

"Exactly," Lucifer says, without a hint of irony. "This is important work we're doing."

She opens her mouth to respond, then shakes her head.

"Yes, it is. So. Webb brings us to Bruce Wilson," she says, and shudders slightly as she remembers the night they spent, deep in the cult leader's secret basement. The marker squeaks as she scribbles and crosses out his name. "I don't know if he's connected or not, but he did have firefly heroin. Someone sold it to him."

"Miss Lopez mentioned two other homicide cases where the drug was found."

"Good thinking. We'll call her later and see if she'll give us the victims' and suspects' names."

With this summer's heatwave and subsequent uptick in murders, it's been harder than ever to keep track of the cases handled by other homicide detectives in the precinct.

Finally, Chloe adds John Barrow, Juan Otero, and the mysterious "Shay" to the board. Barrow, they know, was Cain's man, and Otero bailed out Barrow, which automatically makes him suspect. Not to mention both men have disappeared. Shay is nothing more than a name, but she has connections to Eddie, and possibly Otero. They were never able to confirm that the matching fingerprints from the Palos Verdes mansion and the Colinda safe house belonged to anyone by that name; they simply weren't in the system.

Chloe caps the dry erase marker and stands back to look at the board. She chews on another spring roll, one hand banked on her hip. "I think that's everyone," she says, frowning.

"There's one other name we could include," Lucifer says, tossing the now empty takeout box to his desk, where it joins the first.

"Whose?"

"Cain's," he says wryly. "The world's first murderer may be ash in a cardboard box by now, but his
operation is alive and well."

Her heart beats faster as she remembers the horrors of the loft. She's not sure that day will ever disappear from her nightmares. With some effort, she shakes the memories off. "Are you sure?" she asks quietly.

"No, but I have my suspicions," Lucifer says, straightening his vest and jacket as he rises and comes to stand beside her. He throws an arm around her shoulders, and she leans into his side. "The men I hired to be my ears have heard rumors in the last week about another Sinnerman. It could be a copycat, but—" He shakes his head, his brow furrowed.

"What is it?"

"Only that it's strange I haven't been able to buy firefly heroin. I know dealers all across this city. Lux is one of their best customers." At Chloe's disgruntled huff, he shrugs, unapologetic. "I'm not going to lie to you. I should have access."

"But you don't."

"I don't," he confirms. "None of my dealers do. Which suggests—"

"Someone, knows who you are and is preventing you from accessing it. It'd have to be someone who was close to Cain before. Maybe this new Sinnerman."

"Precisely."

"But why?"

"That is the question, isn't it?" Lucifer frowns. "There's something really very odd about that heroin, Detective."

Chloe holds back a sigh. They've explored this already. Firefly heroin is simply very pure heroin—around ninety-five percent pure, which is virtually unheard of, and otherwise it's cut with a little sugar. Whatever else is in it likely came from the manufacturing process and accounts for such a minuscule amount of the product that machines struggle to detect it at all. Even the CDC came to the same conclusion: extremely minor contamination from manufacturing. Nothing that could affect a drug user, not like the heroin itself.

"The mystery's never been the heroin," she says. "It's who's making and selling it. I know you thought there was something weird about it, but there just isn't."

"Right. You think I'm paranoid," he accuses.

Maze does, she thinks. After all his time of being the Lord of Hell, of being a torturer. Even now that some time has passed, that she's seen him for who and what he is, it's hard to think of him that way, the way she must.

"Maybe a little," she says, as gently as possible.

He snorts. "You've believed me to be paranoid on quite a few occasions, darling, when I very much wasn't. You'd do well to be a little more paranoid yourself," he says. "Who knows what Dad has in store for me—for you, for that matter? Anything that tyrannical bastard wants, one of his children will carry out the task. If he truly desires it, he can hear all, see all. He—" His annoyance vanishes at once and is replaced by concerned curiosity.
"Lucifer?"

His arm slides away from her back. "Detective..." He steps closer to the whiteboard, one finger lifted and wagging. "Never mind the reprobates. We've two fanatics on this board."

Chloe pulls her focus away from him to look at her primitive diagram. "Wilson, sure... But who else? Maria?" She shakes her head. "A few votives hardly make her a fanatic, Lucifer."

He turns and looks at her. "God sees all, Detective."

The words feel powerful in the quiet, empty room, maybe because they're said by the Devil himself. They're also familiar, now that he's drawn her attention to them. They're what Bruce Wilson yelled into his dark living room before pulling the trigger, and what Maria shouted at them weeks ago, even before they knew Eddie was dead.

"It could just be a coincidence," Chloe says, cautious. "It's not exactly a lot to go on."

Lucifer is adamant. "There aren't many true believers in L.A., but they both had fervor."

"So, what? Now you think your dad is involved in all this?" He shrugs a shoulder, and she taps her foot, thinking, doubting. "Maria didn't know much. We can't go talk to her if we don't have any questions." Besides, they won't be her favorite people; the last time they spoke to her, it was to inform her that her grandson was dead.

"Are we partners?" Lucifer asks, dark eyes studying her.

"Of course," Chloe says with ease.

"Then humor me, and let's pay Maria a visit. There are fewer coincidences in this world than you believe, Detective."

And there are probably more than he believes. Hopefully, Chloe thinks, their stubbornness balances each other's out.

"Okay," she relents. Smiling a little, she raises a hand toward the elevator and affects a botched British accent. "Lead the way, Mr. Morningstar."

"What, I still don't get a title?" he whines, looking over his shoulder.

"Absolutely not."

***

The steady hum of window air conditioners hard at work sweeps across the parking lot like a swarm of insects. Nervousness pricks at Chloe's skin as they near Maria Rosales' first-floor apartment at Cedarwood Heights. It feels wrong, coming here as a private investigator. She has no badge, and while she still has a license to carry a weapon, for now, she has no gun, either. Just the Devil—and maybe that light she's constantly confirming is staying inside.

On the fourth knock to Maria's apartment, the door swings open, and they're faced with the old woman's surly mien. The difference between now and the two other times they visited is that this time they don't have to look down. Maria isn't in her wheelchair. She stands on her own two feet. Grouchiness aside, she looks far healthier than she did a month ago.
"Well, would you look at that, Detective!" A Cheshire grin bares Lucifer's teeth. "She walks! What miracle cure would you like to claim, Maria? Holy water? A visit from my half-brother on Shabbat?"

"Qué chingados," Maria breathes.

Chloe is so horrified that, for a moment, she can't speak. "Lucifer," she gasps a beat later, "people in wheelchairs don't necessarily need them all the time." To Maria, she says, "Please excuse my idiot of a partner. We're just performing a follow-up into your grandson's case."

She isn't an officer anymore, and by not declaring that upfront, she's impersonating one. She knows it. Knows how illegal it is. And yet... What if Lucifer's hunch is right, as it so often is? As horrified as Chloe is by his impropriety, even she didn't expect to see Maria Rosales out of her wheelchair. The fact that the old woman's able to walk at all is a twist and immediately makes her a suspect in the Yates case.

Maria looks between them. "You have news about Eduardo?"

"We have questions," Lucifer corrects. He studies her from head to toe in amusement.

"No questions," Maria says, and begins to shut her door.

"Oh, no, you don't." Lucifer slaps his palm against the door and easily holds it open, even as Maria shoves against it with all her might. "I'm afraid there's no avoiding us this time, Maria."

"Leave!"

"You know more than you've let on," Lucifer accuses, shoving the door open another inch. "You've lied, haven't you?"

Chloe stands, stock-still, struggling to make sense of right and wrong. For so long, she's depended on protocol to keep her behavior in check. Now, they answer to no one, need no warrant, and the man, the Devil, beside her can make nearly any illegal act they commit go away with money or favors. How is that any better than the police union protecting Dan's crimes or the suits sweeping Pierce's death under the rug for convenience?

Lucifer said God gave her a barometer, a conscience, and hers tells her what they're doing now is wrong, but might be salvaged. She rests a hand on his forearm.

"Not like this," she says. Not simply because they're stronger or think they're right. They look at each other for a long moment before she refocuses on Maria. "We want to find your grandson's killer. If you weren't completely honest with us before, being honest with us now could change everything in his case."

When Lucifer lets his hand drop from the door, Maria doesn't slam it shut on their faces. She hesitates, looking down at her blue, fuzzy slippers. Gray hair slips from her long braid.

"You're afraid to talk to us, aren't you?" Lucifer says, and the old woman's head jerks up. "If you need protection, you'll have it," he assures her, his voice soothing, "but you must tell us what you know. Deal?"

Slowly, Maria nods and opens her door wider. In her overheated apartment, she sits in a recliner, and Lucifer and Chloe return to the lumpy, canary yellow loveseat that dips at its center.

"I don't know where to begin," Maria admits.
Chloe nods. "Let's start from the top. How did you know David Yates?"

"What I said was true. He was Eduardo's friend. But I..." She clasps her hands together tightly. "I knew him more than I let on. He would come for dinner every Sunday."

"Did you kill him then?" Lucifer asks bluntly.

"No," Maria spits. "I hated that pendejo—he was a deadbeat—but I didn't kill him."

"Do you know who did?" Chloe asks. "You can trust us, Ms. Rosales. We won't let anything happen to you."

"The week David died, Eduardo brought me—" Her breath hitches and she struggles to speak. "He brought me heroin."

Lucifer glances at Chloe. "Like to chase the dragon, do you?" he says to Maria.

"No!" she insists.

"Did the heroin Eduardo bring you come in a bag that had an insect logo?" Chloe asks. "A red firefly, to be exact."

"That's the one," Maria answers. "Eduardo told me it was special, that it could...that it could heal me."

"Heal you?" Lucifer's laugh is loud in the small room.

Maria shrugs. "It's what he told me. It made no sense. I didn't want it. I told him, but he wouldn't listen. He left it here for me."

"Do you still have it?" Chloe asks, hopeful.

Maria shakes her head. "I smoked it, like he told me. Carefully. Little by little. I started using it the night he gave it to me—you have to understand, I've been hurting for so long."

"Oh, bloody hell." Lucifer rolls his eyes in exasperation.

"It's not what you think," Maria says. "The day after he gave it to me, he called me and told me to flush it—that it was no good, after all. But I didn't. It had already made me feel better, just the little I'd used. And then I was so sad when you told me he died... I raised him, you know?"

"So, you took the edge off," Lucifer scoffs. "Of course you did."

"Why do you think I can walk!"

They stare at her. Chloe isn't sure what ailed the woman before, but she had assumed it was diabetes. But even if some other chronic pain had kept her wheelchair-bound, heroin wouldn't help for long, not unless she kept up her use.

"Are you..." Chloe tilts her head. "Are you suggesting heroin cured your illness?"

"That's ridiculous, by the by," Lucifer says.

"It had a special ingredient," Maria explains. "Some kind of feather."

The word sucks the air out of the room and echoes through Lucifer's body as he straightens. Chloe
clamps a hand around his wrist, uncertain of what he's about to do, but knowing he isn't fully in control.

When he speaks, his voice is little more than a growl. "Who gave your grandson that drug?"

Maria clutches her saint medal and leans back in her chair, as if to escape him. "I'm not sure."

"But you have a guess, do you not?" Lucifer snaps, leaning forward.

The woman nods shakily. "His girlfriend."

"Shay?" Chloe asks, heart thudding in her chest. They're close. So close. She can feel it.

"I never met her." At Lucifer's incredulous glance, she insists, "I didn't! But I know she's a daughter in a big drug family. I overheard Eduardo and David talking about it once. I got a call the night before you came that must have been from someone she knew..." A very distressing call, judging by her expression. "They told me they'd kill me if I said anything to the police about the heroin. A tear rolls down her cheek, dipping into wrinkles. "I didn't know Eduardo was dead already."

Learning that he was would have made their threat all the more frightening, Chloe thinks. "Do you know who called you?" she asks.

Maria frowns. "No. They used something to change their voice."

"Do you know if it was a man or woman?" Not to say modulators can't significantly alter the voice to make it impossible to tell.

"A man, I think," Maria answers. "That's all I know. Really. This is everything."

"Okay," Chloe says, nodding. "Get all your important documents and pack a bag. We've got to get you out of here."

Witness Protection is out of the question. If a new Sinnerman is using Marcus' old connections, there's a good chance he's embedded himself—or herself, Chloe mentally amends—in the law enforcement and legal system. Witness Protection may be anything but, in that case. Luckily, Lucifer owns property all around California, and no doubt he has people he can put on security detail.

As Maria pushes to her feet, Lucifer asks, "What did it do to you, the heroin? What kind of high was it?"

Maria rests a hand on the back of her recliner. Chloe watches as the lines of her face smooth beneath the powerful memory. She looks younger—and wistful. "It made me hallucinate. I saw the stars," she sighs, "and a gleaming city."

Lucifer huffs a breath. "Tall spire in the center, by any chance? Polished white-and-gray marble?"

"How did you know?"

"Get your things," he says, leaving her question unanswered.

"You think she saw Heaven," Chloe whispers when Maria has left the room. His tales of the Silver City are few and far between, but he's told her some stories.

"Quite likely. My bloody wings are the only heavenly thing left on me."
Chloe turns, sinking deeper into the loveseat's worn cushions. "Are you okay?" she asks. It's a stupid, inadequate question.

When he looks at her, it's with haunted eyes filled with ages of pain and anger she can't begin to imagine, much less understand. "Just dandy," he jokes, while drawing his flask from his suit jacket.

"Do you need to see Linda?" she asks, scrambling to contain the darkness she feels brewing inside him. "If you tell me where I can take Maria, I'll see to it that she's safe."

"No, it's better if I help." He swallows liquor and twists his onyx ring with his thumb. "We have to find this Shay, Detective. We have to get that drug off the streets."

"We will. I promise. Lucifer, I-I'm so sorry I downplayed your concerns about the firefly heroin." But she never could have imagined feathers stolen from evidence could be used this way.

He shrugs. "Why should you have believed me?" he asks, staring down a wooden crucifix hanging on Maria's wall.

"I should have listened better, at least. I should've—"

Maria reenters the room, a small overnight bag stuffed to bursting at her side. Lucifer rises at once and heads for the door. Behind him, Chloe hears his cigarette case open and his lighter flick to life.

***

It's dark by the time they settle Maria in a house—a mansion—that must seem like a vacation dream home coming from Cedarwood Heights, but a cold comfort after the death of her grandson and weeks of silent fear. After the security detail shows, Chloe drives herself and Lucifer back to Sunset Boulevard, her stomach in knots over the mounting silence. The Devil is a storm cloud at her side, lightning arcing at his edges.

They take the elevator straight to the penthouse, and he goes straight to the bar, shedding his jacket to the floor. Chloe picks up the expensive fabric and drapes it gently over the back of the sofa. Lucifer grabs the first bottle he touches at the bar and doesn't bother with a glass. She stares as he drinks and drinks.

"Lucifer..."

He lets the bottle drop to the bar counter and turns toward her. In two long strides, he's in her space, framing her cheeks with his hands. "Don't make me talk," he says, and his mouth falls to hers.

"Okay," she whispers. "Okay."

So they don't speak. There is only touch and taste, the delicious sting and scrape of nails, the pleasurable draw of hair caressed and pulled. His hands clasp in hunger and desperation, and he's rough as he loves her, like Hell's at his heels and Heaven won't stop taunting him. Chloe meets him in the middle, giving herself freely, taking what he has, sensing the flare of light within him.

When they're spent, he turns on his side and lights a joint he digs out of a nightstand drawer. He sighs, blowing smoke away from her, toward the open glass doorway to the balcony. She clings to his back, one arm wrapped around him, a hand resting above his thunderous heart. She falls asleep with her nose pressed against his neck, breathing in vanilla-tinged weed.
Hours later, her arms are empty. She turns and reaches for him, only to realize she lies alone. Sitting up in the darkness of his bedroom, soft, golden sheets low at her waist, she hears the steady spray of his shower. Shoving out of bed, she walks toward the bathroom. The door is wide open, but she knocks on the edge of the door frame.

"Lucifer?"

"Here," he says, and even this one word seems to cost him.

Chloe steps into the bathroom and turns toward the black marble shower, her naked reflection walking beside her in the enormous vanity mirror. Her breath catches at the sight of Lucifer, sitting on the floor of the shower, his body almost entirely hidden by vast, white wings. Three bottles of scotch sit with him in the shower, two of them empty.

"I'm coming in," she tells him.

With gentle hands, she lifts primary feathers out of the way and moves to stand before him. The water is scalding hot, and she reaches over to adjust it to something she can tolerate. Chuckling, Lucifer grabs her by her hips and pulls her to him. She stumbles forward, palms slamming into glass, toes caught in feathers. He presses his mouth to her sex, his tongue dragging flat and hard.

"Shit," Chloe murmurs, and pulls him back by his hair. "Stop."

With a dark laugh, he looks up at her drunkenly, his eyeliner smudged. "Don't you want to see how fast I can make you come?" he asks, arching a brow. "I'm very good at this."

His capacity to self-destruct has always blown her away.

"Enough putting this off. Talk to me," Chloe says, keeping a firm hold on his hair.

"Talk, talk, talk," he slurs. "Maybe I just want to feel, darling."

"This is the opposite of feeling," she says, and he scoffs.

All the times she watched from a distance as he sank into the bottle, into the arms of lovers who only wanted a good lay, a scandalous story to tell... She's thankful those walls between them have crumbled.

"Be good," she commands and squats down to straddle his thighs. She keeps her distance on his legs, sitting back near his knees. But it's telling, she thinks, that when she glances downward he has no erection. "Now, talk."

Lucifer's top lip curls, and he lets forth a literal growl that rattles her bones. His eyes snap to hellfire red.

She stares into the flames and lifts a hand, palm upright, and gently loosens her hold on her light. Colors spring to life on the black marble ceiling.

"You're not so scary," she tells him, looking up.

"Don't, Chloe," Lucifer begs, clapping his hand around hers.

She draws her power back with a shiver, and the red glow of his eyes melts into brown.

"It's not your fault your feathers were stolen," she whispers, touching the hard line of his jaw. "It's not our fault we didn't realize what they were being used for. We'll find Shay."
Lucifer lets his head fall back to the glass with a thud. "But how many have gone mad?"

Her brow furrows. "Gone mad?"

"Did you miss that?" he chuckles. "Maria may have been healed, but what of Yates, who cut himself to shreds? What of Wilson, who gunned down children your offspring's age?"

"That— None of that is your fault. You didn't ask for any of this."

"No, but Amenadiel was right; humanity and divinity don't mix."

"Maybe not like this," Chloe says, "but you've lived here a long time now without issue."

"Have I?" he breathes out. "Look at the horrors I've brought to this city's doorstep, to your doorstep. My brothers, Cain." He fumbles for his scotch, throws back a long swallow, and holds the bottle close, covering the mouth to keep water from getting inside and ruining the liquor.

"You're not responsible for other people's actions, Lucifer."

"Perhaps," he says, holding her gaze. "But where am I to go?"

Chloe touches his chest gently. "What do you mean?"

"I don't belong anywhere," he laments, his voice catching. "Kicked out of Heaven, couldn't stand Hell, but I'm poisonous for Earth. Can't fucking fly anywhere else." He heaves a broken laugh.

She takes the scotch bottle from him and sets it aside with the empty bottles. One twitch of his left wing, and they'll all tumble and shatter on the hard tile. Holding on to his hands, she says firmly, "You belong with me."

They're words she's spoken to Trixie after nightmares, back when she still feared Malcolm could steal her away. Words she means, deep in her heart, even as she knows they can't possibly provide the same comfort to an immortal.

Lucifer looks down at their joined hands. "Did you miss the part about horrors at your doorstep, darling?"

"No, but I accept the risk." Driven mad by divinity or not, Yates and Wilson are far from the only mutilated victims or monsters she's seen—that they've seen. Monsters have existed longer than Lucifer has been in her life. A monster killed her father. The only difference here is Lucifer is a victim, too. "Lucifer, I've made my choice."

Scooting closer on his legs, she draws him to her, cradling his head to her neck. His wings wrap around her, enveloping them beneath the warm water.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks go to my betas, the Memelord Obli and the Chaotic Good Yah.
When De la Cruz's men arrive at the warehouse, Lucifer isn't with them. Cain can tell, simply by how they park the pickup truck, but hesitate to exit the vehicle. Marching forward, he rounds the truck in disbelief, peering over the side panel into the truck bed. Rifle cases are there, alongside the chains and tranquilizers they were meant to use on Lucifer when he was weak.

The truck doors open, and the gunmen drop to the ground. The driver, a bald and thick-necked ex-marine, looks at Cain blandly.

"He got away," he says, in that terse, matter-of-fact way military personnel develop.

"And how did that happen?" Cain snaps. At his back, his wings ache to unfurl.

He was close, so close, to making Lucifer suffer. He'd orchestrated everything—getting Chloe and Lucifer away from L.A., leading them to Colinda's secluded, rural wasteland. It was perfect. He was going to have everything he wanted. He hears himself breathing loudly, seething, and forces his anger into submission.

"He grabbed the woman you told us to look for and flew up," the marine explains. "We shot 'em down."

"That should've done it. He's vulnerable in her proximity." As an afterthought, he asks, "Did the woman survive the fall?"

"She did," the man says, "and she ran."

Cain squints. "What do you mean she ran?"

"I mean, she ran. Seems you aren't the only one who knows that angel's secret. He was gonna heal and be indestructible, so I got my boys out."

"He doesn't heal immediately." Fucking jarheads. "You blew it."

The man says nothing, but Cain can read his lack of remorse. When De la Cruz picked this crew for the job, Cain looked into the men's backgrounds, particularly this leader of the pack. They're good, but no group survives multiple tours and years as guns for hire by throwing caution to the wind.

Cain has always preferred working with desperate men for this reason. They don't turn away from anything. The impoverished are ruthless and willing to play fast and loose with their lives and morals for the sake of a dime they couldn't otherwise hope to acquire. They make for excellent tools, while also being expendable. An investigation into a poor man's death is never thorough.

These men De la Cruz picked are paid well enough on the regular to walk away when they feel like it. They saw an angel of God and chickened out.

"Where's Shayna?" Cain demands.

As if Hector's darling daughter heard him, the growl of a motorcycle engine emerges in the
distance. A few moments later, a familiar, sleek motorbike curves around the corner of the warehouse's open service door. Shayna kills the engine and drops the kickstand before yanking off her helmet, letting loose black waves. She dismounts and turns, popping open her top case. Digging inside, she resurfaces with a drink cup and grease-stained paper bag. She took a detour on her way to the warehouse.

Cain knows mind games and affectations like no other. She pretends as if seeing Lucifer, wings unfurled and set to flight, hasn't shattered her human understanding of the world, but he sees how her hands shake.

"You bailed," Cain says, wandering away from the snipers. They talk quietly amongst themselves now, waiting to be released.

"Win some, lose some, Avery." Shayna arches a brow and sucks on her straw, hollowing out her cheeks to draw up the milkshake. Her lips leave red lipstick behind on the plastic. "There's no line in our nonexistent contract that says I have to die for this."

"No," he says, lowering his voice, "but these men do now."

She glances at the snipers. "They won't say anything about what they saw."

"I'm not worried about what they saw," Cain says. "No one would believe them, anyway. But I can't release hired guns into the world who know the Devil's weakness. That's valuable information I'm not willing to let spread."

"They're not your men to kill. Or mine. You'll have to talk to my father about it."

Cain smiles thinly. "Your father doesn't even let you make decisions on the ground, does he?"

The small pause before she replies lets him know his words have sunk home. He doesn't know if he'll ever need to turn Hector's daughter against him, but there's value in controlling all the pieces on the board.

***

Time spent in one of Hector de la Cruz's meeting rooms is like time spent in a casino. It could be day or night outside the dark walls and thick, crimson curtains. There's no way to tell without a trustworthy clock.

Cain sits across from the kingpin at the long, mahogany table, his fingers caressing the fragile neck of a wine glass he was given but has no intention of drinking from. For the first time since he met De la Cruz all those years ago, it's just the two of them—no armed guards in the room corners, no Shayna, no Barrow. De la Cruz calls it a "show of good faith," but Cain knows it means the man thinks he's weak.

Is he? It's hard, even in this strong body, to forget the bite of Balor's chains, the way Lucifer twisted his fist, shattering bone, to drive a Hell-forged knife deep into his chest. He's been weak before—and foolish enough to believe he was strong.

De la Cruz sips his wine. "I had my men record the shooting," he says, a beat later.

"Why?" Cain asks.
What, you didn't expect me to find out what creature I was up against?" De la Cruz chuckles and licks his lips. "You showed me pictures of a man, Avery, not an angel—certainly not El Diablo, by any popular understanding of him. I don't make it a habit to play with things I don't understand." He shakes his head. "Have to say I'm impressed, though. Quite the wingspan on that cabron."

"So you see how profitable owning him would be."

"Mm. Firefly is making me a lot of money. I'll give you that. But why do you think I purchase ingredients, instead of living things? I'll tell you: I'm more risk averse than some of the men in my industry." He holds out a hand, indicating the dark, secretive room around them. "The potential benefits of our partnership are high, but there's a lot of overhead, a lot of risk. Perhaps too much. I can't blame my men for packing up and leaving. It made good sense."

"We have an agreement. I can't have your men blabbing or using their knowledge in their spare time."

"You needn't concern yourself with my men. They'll be taken care of. And you and I did have an agreement," De la Cruz says, "but the costs are too high for me to continue moving forward with it. This is money I can do without."

Cain barely resists the urge to unleash his wings in a show of power. He might be able to scare this old fool straight into the grave. But revealing the full extent of his inhumanness wouldn't be wise in a compound where the supernatural is ground up for money. He doubts they could kill him, but they might be able to capture him as he'd hoped they'd capture Lucifer.

"Why pull out now?" he growls.

"My daughter, for one," De la Cruz answers. "I may send her to do dangerous things, but bringing down the Devil is something else entirely. It seems bullets might not be enough to subdue and capture him, and I'm unsure how you plan for me to hold him after we've got him. I'm not interested in having my entire business destroyed by a celestial entity, and I won't kidnap an LAPD officer to help contain him. If you want to continue our partnership, the least you can do is capture the freak yourself."

Cain leans back in his chair. De la Cruz has him by the balls, and they both know it. The drug lord is the best way to ruin Lucifer, and even if he wasn't, he knows too much now. Worse, he's probably right. Even with Chloe, Lucifer is a force to be reckoned with. Cain already died once making assumptions about the Devil's strength.

He fingers the Pentecostal coin buried deep in his pocket. How much does he want revenge?

Bile tickles the back of his throat as he says, "I know what we can use to catch him. Something better than bullets."

"And what might that be?" De la Cruz asks, only mildly interested.

"Hell-forged steel."

***

Cain sits alone in a wide, curved, black leather booth situated in a shadowy back corner of Koreatown's best steakhouse. The table is meant to seat five or six people, but Cain requested it to hold the full extent of his order, which includes everything from bacon-wrapped scallops, to half a
chicken, a New York strip steak grilled rare, lobster, garlic bread, and mashed potatoes. The heavy
scents of meat, butter, and herbs travel on curling steam beneath the muted, yellow light of the
restaurant.

If he's going back to Hell, he's going to gorge himself on a damn good last meal.

While he wolfs down the food, he argues with himself, as he has every day since escaping the
underworld. He could let this vendetta against Lucifer go. He could walk away, but Lucifer's
triumphant grin won't leave him. And the more he thinks about it, the more he can't wait to wipe it
off his face.

The more he can't wait to take Chloe from him. If she can accept the Devil, surely she can accept
what Cain has become. Surely, with Lucifer out of the picture, she will see what great lengths he's
gone to, to be with her, to make her life ready for him. He imagines her on her knees, thanking him,
pretty blue eyes staring up at his face. He palms his erection beneath the white tablecloth and eats
his potatoes.

After dinner, he goes home—insofar as the Brentwood safe house can ever be a home. With each
passing moment, he feels less like Peter Avery, less like Marcus Pierce, or even Cain, the world's
first and greatest murderer. He is, instead, the Prince of Darkness, the ruler of Nox. His human
mask itches.

In the living room, he sits on the sofa, the Hell-forged blade tucked against his side, one
Pentecostal coin sewn into a hidden pocket. The other coin he pinches between thumb and
forefinger.

Drawing in a deep breath, he sets his wings free. The leathery membrane of the right appendage
knocks against a table lamp, sending it crashing to the floor. The bulb shatters, dying on impact,
and the room falls into a darkness he can still see in without difficulty.

Tucking his wings around himself, he opens up to that which he has worked so hard to ignore on
Earth. Hell is always with him, a small, but insistent tug on his bloodless veins. Whispers tickle at
his ears, telling him the way back, promising him strength.

Thisss way, they hiss.

Drink the Devil's blood, and don't stop drinking.

On instinct, Cain shoves the Pentecostal coin into his mouth, gagging on the taste of spoiled egg,
soot, and ore. Relaxing his throat, he swallows the hot metal. It gets stuck and drags downward
 sluggishly. He struggles to breathe.

Yes, the voices whisper. Yes. Come back.

Hell yanks him from Earth. The black, spiked gates yawn wide for him, like open arms welcoming
him home.

Chapter End Notes

Praise be to Yah and Obli.
Apologies in advance to the people of Georgia (the country, not the state). I did my best to research phrases from your language and transliterate them, but I may have screwed up. Same goes to the lovely folks of El Salvador. If I made any terrible language mistakes, I'd love to know in the comments or via email.

To everyone else, this is a day late because it required a lot of research. I wrote five versions of it. Send booze.

The smack to Chloe's rear end is hard enough that she moans a muffled "Ow" into her pillow. She whines as covers are pulled away from her naked body. At least Lucifer keeps it warm in the penthouse.

"Rise and shine, darling!"

"What time is it?" she mumbles.

"Oh, it's a bloody ungodly hour."

Chloe snorts into her pillow. "Let me sleep."

"'Fraid I can't, my dear. It's going to be a long day, so we need to start early. First stop is a meeting with Blackjack Haley."

That makes her sit up on her elbows and look at him over her shoulder. He's dressed in a black three-piece suit already, no hair out of place, no sign that he spent hours, drunk and depressed, in the shower, and only escaped with her help.

"Blackjack Haley...the head of the Iron Ghosts Motorcycle Club?"

"The one and only."

"You know him? Lucifer, the LAPD's been trying to catch him for years."

"Well, he lives in Santa Monica and drives a Bentley when he's not on his motorcycle, so they must not be trying too hard. But, no, I don't personally know Haley," he says, his voice carrying as he wanders into the closet. "Shouldn't be a problem, though." As if it's a minor detail. He returns and throws black jeans and a white shirt at her.

The clothes slide off her body as she turns onto her back. She throws an arm over her eyes to hide from the rising sun. "Can't we just stay in bed another hour?"

She lifts her arm a little, peeking at him, and is amused to find his attention isn't at all directed on her face. Dragging her knees up, she spreads her legs wide and enjoys how his eyes dart from one leg to the other before settling between them. He doesn't lie. He really is a leg man.
"Lucifer, come back to bed."

He stares for a long moment, the smirk on his face deepening. "Oh, what the hell?" he says, throwing off his jacket.

Chloe smiles in victory.

Lucifer works through buttons and hooks with practiced ease until he's left standing in all his naked glory. Sunlight tinges through Chloe's skin and casts enticing reliefs across his body. Her heart rate spikes as he crawls up the bed like a big, prowling cat. Suddenly, she's not tired at all.

He leans over her, his erection pressing hard against her thigh, and kisses the corner of her mouth. He drags lips and teeth and tongue down her jawline, the slope of her neck, and the wings of her collarbone. Resting on his elbows, he holds a breast in each hand and circles his thumbs around her nipples. Chloe arches into him when his fingers change course and drag roughly over the sensitive skin.

"Quite the seductress, aren't you?" he chuckles, his warm breath leaving gooseflesh in its wake. "Tempting the Devil."

She melts beneath him as he dips his head and draws a pink bud into his mouth. The thing about foreplay and sex with Lucifer is there's no part of him that's ever idle. His hands are no less busy because his mouth is at work. He heeds every moan and sigh, and reads flesh and bone like a blind person reads Braille.

"Such a siren," he says, dragging long fingers down her ribs. He grips the curve of her waist tightly and kisses his way downward. His tongue follows the crescent arches of her hipbones, and finally—he's between her thighs, where she wants him, and she's already moaning his name.

He presses a hot, wet kiss directly over her clit, and she jolts a little at the contact. Backing away suddenly, he gently slaps her inner thighs. "Right, up you get, Jezebel. We've places to go, people to see." He scrambles up before she can reach for him and looks down at her in lustful amusement.

Chloe sits up at once, her mouth hanging open. "What? No!" As he slides his arms back into his dress shirt, she throws a hand out, indicating his arousal. "You obviously don't want to stop!"

"Nothing wrong with a bit of delayed gratification. Besides, darling, you've trained me too well. I've suffered with blue balls next to you for years."

"But you don't have to anymore!"

"I'll get the shower started for you, shall I?" he says, waltzing from the room. He peeks around the corner of the hallway that leads into his closet and bathroom. "Water a bit cooler than usual, yes?"

She groans, and his laughter is loud and full.

Chloe rushes through her shower, feeling like a wire pulled taut. She'd get herself off, but Lucifer seems to know that and keeps passing through the bathroom. When she steps out of the water, he hands her a bath sheet and a cup of coffee with a smirk.

"I know we need to find Shay," she says, holding the hot mug close, "but why are we starting so early? It's five-thirty in the morning."

He shrugs a shoulder. "Early bird catches the feather-thieving degenerate?"
Setting aside her coffee, she flips her hair and towels it dry. "And why do you think the leader of the Iron Ghosts will know who or where Shay is?"

"Crime syndicates keep tabs on each other, just like the LAPD keeps tabs on them. Any crime ring that sells drugs is notoriously tetchy about new drugs entering the market. They like to get their hands on them—I should know, because I like to get my hands on them, too. And yet my contacts have curiously had no firefly heroin to sell me, nor have they been able to tell me where to acquire it. So. Time to speak to management myself, as it were. If Haley doesn't know Shay or where to source the drug, we've seven other kingpins we can see."

She turns her head slowly to look at him. "You know seven drug lords."

"Mm. Well, in L.A., at least, and not directly, but soon I suppose we both will."

Chloe stands straight, towel clutched to her breasts. "And we're just going to go...talk to them."

His mouth twitches. "They're people just like you and me."

"Very dangerous people."

"And I'm a dangerous devil," he says, his sharp grin coming out in full force. Digging into his trouser pocket, he emerges with a pair of her underwear, which he presses into her hands. "Chop-chop, darling. If you don't hurry it along, I'll have to speed more, and we both know how much you hate that."

Chloe holds her underwear limply and stares at his black-suited back as he strolls out of the bathroom.

What the hell has she gotten herself into?

***

Lucifer drives them deep into Glendale, while Chloe squints behind her sunglasses and nurses a second cup of coffee. It's barely ten in the morning, but she's already come face to face with men from the Iron Ghosts and the Yakuza. Neither group knew anything about Shay, even though both had heard of Firefly in passing. That's the important takeaway, but all Chloe can really focus on is how nice everyone has been. Because everyone likes Lucifer.

"I can't believe they gave us snacks," she says, staring at the small box of Japanese treats on her lap. It contains everything from mochi to matcha chocolate and wasabi peas.

"Yes, I really thought the Yakuza and I had parted on bad terms last time," Lucifer says, taking one hand off the wheel to dig into the box for chocolate, "but perhaps I misread things."

Last time. Because her partner, the Devil, her boyfriend, occasionally meets with the Yakuza. And she, a woman who doesn't even know if she's quite human anymore herself, goes with him.

What the fuck.

She grounds herself by focusing on the streets as they pass them. Like most neighborhoods in Los Angeles, Glendale is a sprawling mishmash of businesses, nouveau-riche wealth, and urban poverty. As always, gentrification is making for strange bedfellows, placing houses flipped by hipsters one street over from dilapidated bungalows, and trendy juice bars next to pawn shops.
They pull into a tiny parking lot beside a trio of businesses, one of them Niko's, a dive bar with a traditional, red-brick face awkwardly forced onto the concrete body of its mini-mall container. They've come to meet Terenti Abashidze, the head of the Georgian Mafia, another man the LAPD would like to have a word with, but can never seem to track down.

Lucifer parks the Corvette—poorly, as usual—and pulls the keys from the ignition. The engine ticks as it cools.

"So, are the Georgians going to give us treats to go?" Chloe asks, trying to make light of the bizarre morning she's had. She's not sure what the hell else to do with it.

"No, but they might shake figs at us." Lucifer fails to notice how her brow furrows with confusion. "The Georgians are a deeply religious and superstitious bunch. The only reason they tolerate me and my name is because money often has more pull than dear old Dad." Tilting the Corvette's rear-view mirror toward himself, he smooths his hair. "As such," he says, glancing at her sidelong, "might I suggest you take a step back, Detective? I do love to see you at work, but I fear you might get us shot dead, is all."

Chloe stares at him, lips parted. She's never been one to shy away from danger—far from it—but she's used to being in control and having the police force at her back. Mostly, anyway. If she's honest with herself, Lucifer's been the one at her back, usually.

"What are we walking into here?" she asks, concerned.

He pats her thigh. "It'll be fine, I'm sure. At any rate, you'll find a gun and ammo in the glove box for you."

"What?" Chloe yanks open the glove compartment and gawps at the Ruger pistol. "Lucifer, is that even registered?"

"Not likely. I bought it from a chap at three in the morning."

"I'm not touching that."

He shrugs a shoulder. "Suit yourself. Probably won't need it."

"Probably," she mutters. She stops him before he can climb out of the Corvette. "Wait, wait, wait." She smacks his arm. "Put the top up! We can't just leave a—she mouths the word gun—"out in the open." She's horrified to realize they did exactly that during their last two stops.

"Ah, right you are," Lucifer agrees, while Chloe does her best to hold it together.

At the front of Niko's, a yellowed Closed sign hangs in the slender, diamond-shaped window of the venue's vaguely Eastern European-styled door. Chloe frowns at it. "Do you know someone who will let us—"

The lock snaps free beneath Lucifer's touch. "Why, yes, darling, I do know someone who will let us in," he says, pushing the door open. He walks into the dark bar, munching on the last of the Yakuza's chocolate.

"All's quiet on the Caucasian front," he declares.

Chloe follows him inside, yanking her sunglasses off and blinking against the sudden change in light. For a moment, she feels off-kilter, as she often does now when going between the intense power of natural light and the relative tranquility of shadowed or artificially-lit interiors. The
swoop in her gut and the sharp pang in her skull are reminders that what's happening to her physically hasn't gone away, simply because the rest of her life is relentlessly busy and complicated.

She closes the door behind them. Without the sounds of growling car engines from the street outside, she can just make out the soft, fluctuating noise of muffled human speech. "Where's that coming from?" she asks.

Lucifer flicks a finger toward a door behind the empty bar counter. A white-and-red sign declares in both English and squiggly Georgian script that the space is for employees only. "That leads to the illegal gambling hall set up in the basement." He fingers his cufflinks and grins. "Shall we?"

He strides forward before she can answer, pausing only briefly to peek behind the bar and turn his nose up at the selection. Tugging open the *Employees Only* door, he reveals a tiny threshold that leads into a narrow, dimly lit stairwell.

A thickly-bearded man looks up from his cell phone in surprise from where he perches atop a wooden stool far too small for his giant form. He stands, shoving his phone into a pocket, and booms, "How did you get in?" He points a finger behind them. "We are closed." Slapping the flat of his palm against the door he guards, he adds, "Staff only. You don't read?"

"Been around since cuneiform, actually, so, yes, I do happen to be literate, thank you." Lucifer slams a hand to the door before the goon can close it. This time, Chloe doesn't object to his aggressive methodology. "We're here to see Terenti Abashidze."

The bruiser's bushy brows arch like black umbrellas above his eyes. A gold tooth flashes beneath the overhead light as his head falls back with his laughter. "And who are you?" he asks, once his amusement has died down.

"Lucifer Morningstar. You may have heard of me."

The barrel-chested man's eyes widen as he clutches at the buttons of his shirt. "You go."

"Bloody hell, you must be new." Lucifer rolls his eyes and waves a hand. "Yes, yes, my name strikes terror, but be a dear and pop downstairs to announce my arrival, would you? Someone will know of me. I've played here before."

Shaking his head, the bruiser moves to close the door and frowns when his shove doesn't make it budge an inch. Lucifer glances at Chloe in amusement as the man continues to push with increasing agitation, going so far as to peer at the bottom edge of the wood, convinced something—certainly not Lucifer—must be blocking the door's movement. Chloe looks away, face scrunching as she struggles to contain inappropriate laughter. Nothing could have prepared her for this morning.

"Batono\[L\] Lucifer?" a heavily-accented voice calls from the base of the stairwell.

This is followed by a steady flow of Georgian. Chloe doesn't understand any of it, but it must be in their favor because Lucifer grins smugly at the bouncer.

Scowling, the large man steps aside, opening the door wider before stopping them again with a raised hand. "Who is this?" he asks, looking down at Chloe, as if noticing her for the first time.

"Ah," Lucifer says, dragging her in front of him by her shoulders, "this would be my associate, *Jane*. She's not a cop."
Chloe nearly chokes. If they survive this basement full of mobsters, she might kill him.

Despite Georgian ownership, the basement is modeled after vintage American gambling halls. Waitresses dressed in tiny black skirts weave around classic, green-felted gaming tables, holding aloft serving trays laden with glasses. Pale yellow liquor glows beneath golden-domed lanterns hanging from the ceiling.

At the base of the stairwell, the swift, clipped syllables of the Georgian language wash over Chloe, leaving her feeling foreign and disoriented. She tries to convince herself this is just another undercover job, with the only (big) difference being that she's not the one in control of it. It'll be okay, she thinks. Lucifer knows what he's doing...right?

She yanks her hand away from her face when she realizes she's chewing on the edge of her thumb. She can't bring herself to say it to him after the long night he had, but the visits to see the Iron Ghosts, the Yakuza, and now here, to talk to a Georgian mob boss, feel like wild goose chases. What are the odds Abashidze will lead them any closer to Shay?

"Turns out the Devil does go down to Georgia," Lucifer jokes, observing the smoke-filled room with fondness. He looks toward the back, right corner of the hall, where a waitress is bent toward a middle-aged man. "Ah, there's Terenti now."

Lucifer leads them to the oval-shaped poker table. Players at other tables look up and watch them pass, giving Chloe the distinct impression that the Devil has a reputation here. Whether it's good or bad, or simply notorious, she can't be sure, and not knowing puts her on edge.

Five men are gathered round Terenti Abashidze's table, some slender, some hulking and bearded like the bouncer. Shot glasses litter the spaces between them, and cigarette and cigar ash gathers in ashtrays. One man reaches for his poker chips, revealing knuckles scabbed over from what Chloe can only assume was an act of mob justice.

Of the small group, Terenti is the only attractive man. Dressed in a black button-down, he is lean and dark, like Lucifer, but with ice blue eyes that lock onto them with shark-like intensity. While the men around him seem savvy in the way all hardened criminals do, Terenti is the only one who doesn't look like he earns his living by throwing punches. As the boss, he earns it by being clever. The nervous pit in Chloe's gut twists, making her regret her second cup of coffee.

"Dila mshvidobisad[2]!" Lucifer cheers, standing at the head of the table. Chloe blinks at the reminder that he's fluent in literally every language, ever.

"Gvinakulef[3]," Terenti murmurs, blowing smoke from his cigarette. "St'umari ghvitasad[4]."

Lucifer scoffs and makes what is clearly a sarcastic reply. The dealer slings cards toward the players at the table.

Terenti shrugs a shoulder in response. A moment later, his eyes cut up to Chloe, and he smiles around his cigarette. It's a cruel smile she refuses to be intimidated by. She's seen it on others, many times before, and it pisses her off more than it scares her. Terenti asks Lucifer a question.

"Es is Jane," Lucifer says, glancing at her.
The mob boss chuckles and peeks at the cards he's been dealt before returning his attention to Chloe. Winking, he holds his hands in front of his chest and shakes them up and down.

"Genatsvale jigrebshi[5]!" he laughs.

Other men at the table, and even some at the tables nearby, suddenly ohhh and ahhhh and roar with laugh. She doesn't need to be fluent in Georgian to know they've recognized her from *Hot Tub High School*, the movie that won't die. In this particular case, she supposes she should be grateful they know her from that, and not for her work as a detective.

Lucifer speaks through a cutting smirk, the language rolling off his tongue. Their corner of the room falls quiet at once, save for the soft clicking of caressed poker chip stacks. The men at Terenti's table look up with narrowed eyes.

Chloe rests a hand on Lucifer's elbow. "Lucifer, it's fine. I'm sure I've heard it before." She resists the urge to point out his chivalry is hypocritical, given his own crass, if glowing, reviews of her erstwhile acting career.

A match of wits starts up between the two men. Chloe stands to the side, her eyes shifting back and forth, as she tries and fails to understand where the conversation has drifted. Are they still talking about her breasts? Who knows.

But then she hears "Shay" and realizes Lucifer has managed to stay focused.

Terenti, having won a round of poker, rakes chips toward himself. He leans back in his chair and locks his fingers behind his head. He looks up at Lucifer, as though he is a king staring down his nose at a lowly subject. Lucifer's expression borders on dangerous.

Don't, Chloe wills Terenti. Don't be stupid. Not today. Not over this.

But when Terenti speaks again, it's through a dismissive sneer.

Lucifer's teeth show in a barely-contained snarl. Chloe calls to him softly, one hand lifted between them, but she's seen him this way, shoving men out windows, sitting unrepentantly by criminals he's rendered insane. He's too far gone, and something crackles through her in response, a sharp reminder.

*Not human.*

Time seems to slow around Chloe. She steps back instinctively, bumping into a waitress, who curses as glasses tumble and shatter. But all Chloe can see is the moment Lucifer springs like a cobra, grasping the end of the gaming table and flinging it sideways. The table crashes into the wall, plasterboard exploding. Poker chips and cards fly through the air.

Terenti's men yell and scramble up as one, but they're too slow. Lucifer rages forward, lifting Terenti by his throat and slamming him into the wall. The mob boss babbles and gasps, his blue eyes wide as he grasps at Lucifer's forearms in shock. Lucifer growls a question while Terenti's men surge forward.

The gambling hall erupts around Chloe.

"Lucifer!" she cries. And it's Colinda all over again. It's freefalling from the sky, feathers engulfing her and snapping in the wind.

The crowd swarms around him, separating them. Struggling to keep a hold on her light, she shoves back at a man twice her size who tries to move her out of the way.
Chloe's eyes dart around the room, hunting for other exits to the surface and finding none. They have to get out of here. For their safety. For everyone's safety.

One of Terenti's men shouts something in Georgian and raises a pistol, firing it at the ceiling. The blast is deafening in the basement. Chloe's ears ring as plaster and wood rain down. Behind the crowd of mobsters, she makes out Lucifer's slow, agitated turn. Newly free, Terenti scrambles away.

A scream gets stuck in Chloe's throat. She presses forward in a panic as the gunman trains his pistol on Lucifer.

But Lucifer's hand flashes out, snatching the weapon with ease. The barrel bends alarmingly beneath his fingers, and he hurls the gun sideways—right into the face of the shooter. The man drops like a rock.

"Iqos mase!" Terenti's shout is all but a scream. "Iqos mase!"

The room goes still. Chloe sucks in a breath as Lucifer turns toward her with crimson eyes that send the Georgians scurrying, muttering litanies to God. Many hands have grasped at him, leaving him disheveled. He steps before her and stops, the red of his irises slipping back to warm, familiar dark brown. He stares, as if she might have answers to questions he hasn't voiced.

She grabs his hand. "Let's get out of here."

They leave the basement without being further accosted, their shoes crunching on glass. The bouncer at the top of the stairwell gives them a wide berth as he holds open the door to the bar, which is still closed for the morning. The staff door slams shut behind them.

"Chloe—"

"Not until we get to the car," she says, dragging him with her to Niko's entrance.

She pulls the door open and steps outside, only to wince as bright sunlight bears down upon her. Pulling her sunglasses from her back pocket, she shove them onto her face and marches to the Corvette, trusting Lucifer is behind her.

The inside of the Corvette feels more like an oven than a car. Lucifer cranks the engine and turns up the air conditioning.

"What the hell?" Chloe finally says.

Lucifer glances at her, fingers tapping a jittery rhythm on the steering wheel. "Go on, then," he huffs. "Tell me off."

"You know what? I will. You could have gotten us killed in there! And I had no idea what was going on! I can't understand Georgian—I can barely handle Spanish!"

"The Los Angeles public school system really does leave much to be desired, doesn't it?"

Chloe's eyes narrow.

"Fine. I could have prepared you better. But I had it under control," he argues, shoving a loose curl back from his forehead. "Things simply went a bit south because Terenti's a knobhead who wouldn't make a deal with me that didn't involve you."
She'll have to unpack *that* later.

Lucifer continues, "But nothing would have happened to you or to me. I assure you of that."

"That man had a gun!"

"And you could have one, too," he sing-songs, nodding his chin toward the glove compartment.

She closes her eyes. "Oh my God."

"Yes, it wouldn't surprise me if Dad were behind the reprobates who absconded with my feathers."

"*Look* at yourself," she seethes, jabbing a finger toward his half-tucked shirt and drywall-dusted suit jacket. Scoffing, he lifts his hips and re-tucks his shirttail. "*That*," she says, directing her finger toward the building, "was not control."

"What would you know about my control?" he gripes. "Anyway, you're bloody with the Devil, aren't you? Devil is as Devil does. Best get used to it now."

The trouble with moments like this one is sometimes she wants to kiss the attitude right out of him. Today, she wants much more, but she squashes those feelings down with brutal efficiency.

"You just— You just—" She lets out a small squeal of frustration and blows air past her lips. "We're done for the day. We're not going to go on anymore wild goose chases because"—she slips into her fake British accent—"I'm the Devil, Chloe. This is Devil business. This is what I do. *No.*" She quiets, searching for patience. "I get that you want to find Shay—I do, too—but we have to remain calm. We have to do this *logically*."

"Calm," he chuckles. "Detective. *Darling.* Someone stole my body parts to sell to the highest bidder again, and *said body parts are now killing humans.* I. Am. As. Calm. As. I. Can. Be." Pulling his flask from his breast pocket, he unscrews the cap and drinks deeply.

"Okay," Chloe says gently, touching his arm. "You're right. I'm sorry. I just... We need to be careful, you know? *You* need to be careful."

His gaze softens. "No need to worry about me. I'd make my way back if anything happened. Eventually." He adds in a somber voice, "I'm not the fragile one in this partnership."

But she does worry. He lives like he's immortal around her, but he's not—not quite. And the thought of him descending to Hell—*again*—because of her... They can't be sure what would happen if he truly died in her presence. He's convinced he'd be able to come back, but it's not as if the theory has been tested.

Lucifer makes a small sound of protest when she yanks the flask out of his hand and drinks from it. "Let's just go back to the office, okay? I'll make some more calls, see if I can't find us a lead. There has to be something I haven't thought of yet."

She feels she's exhausted *everything*, but some stone must remain unturned.

"No need for further inquiries, Detective," he says, taking the flask back and screwing on the top. "Terenti squealed on a Salvadoran by the name of Fernando Portillo. He's rumored to be *dealing* firefly heroin. Lucky for us, Mondays apparently happen to be Bad Guy Meetup Day at Portillo's house."

For a moment, words fail her, then she bursts out, "Why didn't you *lead* with that?"
"Well, someone was bloody well reaming me, wasn't she?" he says, delighted.

"You are such a dick," she complains, ripping into overheated wasabi peas for something to do with her hands that won't involve throttling Satan.

Lucifer barks a laugh, sounding as crazed as he looks. He shifts the gear into reverse. "This is the part where you tell me to lead the way, Detective."

"Just drive, Lucifer."

***

They head south to Pico Union, one of several Salvadoran enclaves in Los Angeles. While Lucifer drives, Chloe calls Ella and Dan to get as much information on Fernando Portillo as possible. There isn't a lot. Aged thirty-five, Portillo is a second-generation immigrant, born and raised in L.A. His record is spotless. After a little digging, Ella discovers his most revealing behavior online is that he owns a pest control business.

"Excellent cover for making special deliveries," Lucifer comments. "Kill a roach, sell a roach." He looks at Chloe, expecting a laugh. "You know, because roach is a euphemism for joint."

"I got it," Chloe says.

"Wow, Fernando's got five stars on Yelp," Ella says. "Think he knows of a humane way to get rid of ants? I've been trying to live with them ever since my ant farm fell off the table and broke, but it's getting pretty hard. They're all like, 'We didn't ask you to put us in a prison made of glass, Ella.' And I'm all like, 'Yeah, I know, but you're kinda getting in my peanut butter.' I eat a lot of peanut butter, you guys."

Chloe blinks. "Um, we'll...ask him, if we get the chance, I guess." She shakes her head.

Dan is nearly as upset as Lucifer about the news that angel feathers are in firefly heroin, and he still hasn't warmed to the idea of Chloe slipping into the role of private investigator, though he knows better than to voice that opinion outright. Taco night might have smoothed over the worst of the tension between her ex and the Devil, but he's far from accepted the supernatural at large. Sometimes Chloe wonders why she finds it so easy to accept, especially with her own body doing things she can't explain. But, as always, there's little time to process her feelings in the work they do. There's only going forwards.

"Lemme send a few guys, Chlo. Unmarked cars."

She considers it, but she doesn't trust anyone at the precinct right now, not even the guys Dan is close to.

"Cops will only complicate matters, Daniel," Lucifer replies, speaking loftily from the driver's seat. "The scent of cop is just now fading from the Detective. Don't want to ruin that, now, do we?"

"We'll be fine," she assures her ex-husband, her voice pitched high as she thinks of the disaster they just narrowly escaped. Clearing her throat, she changes the subject to something safer. "Did you send off the payment for Trixie's art camp?"

Traffic crawls like sludge down a drainpipe as they make their way to Portillo's neighborhood. There's little street parking close to his house, leaving Lucifer to wedge the Corvette into a spot too
small for the car's long, steel body. He "solves" the problem by parking the front of the Corvette over the curb, on the dry grass of someone's front lawn.

"Ready?" he asks, cutting the engine. He ditches his suit jacket and dusts plaster from his vest and out of his unkempt hair.

Chloe holds up a finger. "On one condition."

"Oh, and what might that be, Detective?" Lucifer grins. "That I make for up this morning?" He glances at a nonexistent watch. "I suppose we have time now if we're quick." He tilts sideways, looking past her. "Can have a roll in those bushes over there."

"What? No," she says firmly, and his eyes glitter with amusement. "Just let me take the lead on this one, okay? You're too close to this case"—she is, too—"and I want us to make it out of here alive. One near-death experience is enough for a day."

"Very well," he sighs. Pushing open the driver's door, he turns back and asks, "Sure you don't want to arm yourself, then?"

"No, I'm good," she says, still reluctant to leave the Ruger unattended. She climbs out of the Corvette and pulls down her fitted shirt, smoothing wrinkles. "Think I'm too afraid I might use it on you," she jokes.

"Angling for those earrings, after all?"

Chloe laughs, and Lucifer falls into lockstep beside her. From the corner of her eye, she watches his thumb worry his ring.

Portillo's eggshell-colored dwelling is lined by bars, from a white-painted iron-bar fence, to white window guards and a white security door. It's also well-kept, unlike some of the other homes on the street. Potted herbs line a compact patio, and the grass is neatly trimmed, and greener than most. It's a good cover for a drug dealer.

They push past the waist-high gate and make their way to the front door, where Lucifer rolls his eyes at the large wooden crucifix hanging at eye level. Chloe jabs her finger into the doorbell.

A moment later a young Latina woman dressed in a yellow sundress opens the door, her curly-haired head turned as she continues to speak, laughingly, in Spanish to someone inside the house. When she faces forward, she stares blankly at the gringos on her doorstep.

"Can I help you?" she asks, her eyes sweeping over Lucifer.

"We're here to see Fernando Portillo," Chloe answers, and her hand ghosts toward her waist, where her badge used to rest.

Lucifer sighs. "Really, darling, we must work on your social skills." He holds out a hand. "Lucifer Morningstar," he says, introducing himself. "And this is Jane. I apologize. She has no manners."

Chloe rolls her eyes.

"Rosa," the woman says absently, shaking his hand. "Are you...cops?"

"How dare you? What cop dresses in bespoke wool?"

"No," Chloe responds, struggling to hold back a laugh, "we're not cops." The truth of her answer
settles on her all over again. "Lucky for you, since we heard Fernando sells drugs."

"Uh, Nando's in pest control."

"Sure, but this guy," Chloe says, chucking a thumb at Lucifer, "has got more money than he knows what to do with, and he loves drugs." Too much.

Lucifer grins widely. "It's true. And I'd particularly like to get my hands on a drug Nando is said to be selling right now."

Rosa shakes her head, confused by the blunt honesty. "Uh, well, he's out back." She shrugs a shoulder. "Guess you can eat while you're here."


In lieu of responding, Rosa leans out of sight, grabbing something with a grunt. "You got any guns or knives?" she asks. "Abuelita has a zero tolerance policy on violence."

Chloe looks around the patio with sudden understanding. The house might belong to Fernando, but the home must be kept by his grandmother. When her focus returns to Rosa, Chloe's mouth drops open. The young woman holds aloft a basket filled to the brim with pistols and knives. No doubt all the guns are loaded.

"Ooh, do we get to pick one?" Lucifer asks.

Rosa looks at him strangely. "No... Put your weapons in here."

"W-we're unarmed," Chloe stammers.

Rosa leads them past a cramped living room and a pale blue kitchen that's less kitchen than kitchenette, but is nonetheless filled with three young women—possibly Rosa's younger sisters—who are busy cooking. They look up briefly, brows raising at the sight of white people, but quickly turn back to work. Considering their tepid reaction, it seems they're quite used to seeing visitors.

Latin pop flows from a stereo as they step into the backyard, which is shockingly green for southern California and larger than the front yard and house, combined. A small vegetable garden rests near the back edge of the fence. Bright red tomatoes hang on the vine.

A man standing at a charcoal grill looks up at them, curious, tongs and meat thermometer in hand. Beyond him, five other men lounge in lawn chairs, paper plates stacked high with beans and various meats, beers in hand. The men stop speaking and stare. They all slightly resemble each other—cousins, Chloe thinks, maybe a brother or two.

"Nando, you got visitors," Rosa announces unnecessarily. A bald-headed man wearing a red jersey sets his beer on the ground. "This is Jane and...Lucifer." She shakes her head at the name. Introductions made, she turns on her heel and returns inside.

Nando rises and walks closer, all loose-limbed, a slight smile on his round face. Though she's never worked in Narcotics, Chloe knows men like Nando from her days as a patrol officer. The problem with small-time dealers is you never know who's a poser making a buck, versus who's looking to prove themselves to someone bigger and badder. One's harmless if you overlook the drugs, while the other might kill you to climb the ladder. At least Abuelita makes them leave their guns at the door, though there was no pat-down to prove they were unarmed. Chloe eyes Nando and his men with suspicion.
"Lucifer, huh?" Nando says, chuckling. "El Diablo."

"That would be me, yes," Lucifer replies.

Nando hesitate a beat before asking, "What can I get you?"

Chloe steps in. "We heard you have something that"—she lowers her voice in a whisper—"heals people."

Nando snorts. "Nah, sorry. Sold out of Firefly a week ago."

"Sold out?" Lucifer repeats, a tinge of panic in his tone.

"Yeah, that shit sold fast, even with the high price tag." The dealer rolls his eyes. "I got other stuff, though. You look more like a coke guy, anyway," he says, eyes on Lucifer. He glances at Chloe, but seems to decide she's too straitlaced for any of it.

Chloe puts a soothing hand on Lucifer's waist. "You don't seem to believe Firefly works."

Nando sighs, "I go to Mass on Easter and Christmas. I light a few candles." He nods his head toward the house. "Makes my abuelita happy. Look, I don't know if you heard, but the whole thing about Firefly was it supposedly had [angel feathers] in it, and that's just..."

"Bayunco," one of Nando's men supplies.

"You wouldn't even be able to look upon angel wings without turning into a babbling prat," Lucifer scoffs at the man.

"Oh, we got a believer," another man crows.

"Don't mind them," Nando says to Lucifer. "Come on, let's see what I can get you."

Before Chloe can stop it, Lucifer's hand flashes out and grasps Nando's arm. "What you can get me, is the name of your supplier because we both know you're not at the top of the bloody pyramid."

Nando's men rise to their feet. The man barbecuing ribs drops the top of the grill closed and comes to join the others.

"Dammit. They just went through this.

"Lucifer, let him go." Chloe looks at their potential assailants in concern, hands lifted in an effort to soothe.

"It was Shay, wasn't it?" Lucifer grinds out, his jaw tight. "Who is she?"

Trying to salvage the situation, Chloe rushes to add, "Is that who you got it from, Nando? We won't tell her you told us. But we need to find her."

"Didn't ask for a review," Lucifer says, leaning forward and giving Nando a rough shake. "Who is
she, and where can I find her? I know you know."

"Hands off," one of Nando's friends finally warns. "The feathers aren't even real, you idiot," he says, clapping a hand onto Lucifer's shoulder to push him away.

It's the wrong move.

Lucifer's left fist rises and punches straight into the man's nose, which crunches loudly. It's such a hard punch that the man goes down and stays down.

Violence erupts for the second time in as many hours.

"Everybody stop!" Chloe shouts. But she's not an officer, she has no badge or gun, and her words fall on deaf ears.

At her left, Lucifer faces off against five men, laughing and taunting them in Spanish because of course he's been raring for another fight. The girls from the kitchen yell at the doorway to the backyard, Auto-Tuned melodies from the Latin Top 40 drowning out half of their words.

A man wearing a blue baseball cap reaches for Chloe. Without thinking, she rears back and meets him with the right hook her father taught her so long ago. She could have easily slipped away, but, boy, did it feel good to land that hit. She laughs slightly, so pumped up on adrenaline that her bruised knuckles don't spark with pain.

The man stumbles back. For a moment, they stare at each other in shock. Chloe breathes heavily, feeling the light in her body, crackling like a raging fire. She could reach for it, she thinks, and raises her hand.

She could—

A meat thermometer flies through the air, spinning end over end like a pint-sized cheerleader's baton. The metal probe lands with a horrifying squelch in the man's left eye. Chloe's mouth drops open as he crumples to the ground, screaming in shock.

"He's well done, Detective!" Lucifer quips over the moans and screams.

She turns, her attention landing on her partner, who's in the process of rolling up his shirt sleeves. He's grinning and wild, shirt untucked, hair a mess, and so alive that it takes her breath away. Three men lie flat on the ground, knocked out cold near his feet. He sidesteps the bodies and sways backward, dodging the grasping hands of Nando and his two remaining men. Swiping a lawn chair from the grass, Lucifer hoists it and uses it like a discus against one of them. The man is struck in the stomach and goes flying backwards.

Whatever is playing on the stereo, whatever the girls are yelling at her back, whatever the man injured by the meat thermometer is groaning, all of it falls away as Chloe watches the Devil dance. Her understanding of the past changes with each second. Finally she sees why Lucifer walked into Jimmy Barnes' gunfire, why he was so surprised by his own blood when she shot him, why and how the Korean Power caved. She sees, too, how easily Cain was dispensed of. In her nightmares, the fight has always been close—a true struggle between the Devil and the world's first murderer. But that isn't what happened, is it? She sees that now.

Chloe is shaken from her thoughts when a short, stocky elderly woman dressed in a pink nightgown bursts from the house, cursing in Spanish. The woman stomps toward the mayhem, a leather sandal lifted high in the air.
"Ma'am!" Chloe calls, following close behind. Everything's already a mess. The last thing they need is an old woman getting hurt.

But said old woman is already in motion. The sole of her shoe makes first contact with the back of Lucifer's neck. He turns around, confused, just in time for her to hit him again, this time on the side of his head. Tired and bloody, Nando and his flunky take a step back, breathing heavily, as Abuelita's sandal strikes the Devil again and again.

"Basta, basta, basta![4]!" Lucifer whines, wincing with each thwack.

Chloe can't help it. A giggle slips through, and soon enough she can't stop laughing. On the other side of Lucifer, Nando huffs and then follows suit. At the threshold to the house, the teen girls join in.

When Abuelita's righteous anger has spent itself, she directs her grandson and the other man left standing to clean up—wake their friends, put the chairs back in place, clear the strewn beer bottles. The men who were knocked out slowly come to and wander indoors, groaning.

Abuelita points at Lucifer. "You pay hospital bills," she demands, looking at Chloe's half-blind assailant, who Rosa is going to take to the ER.

"Sí, Abuelita," Lucifer agrees, sounding almost contrite.

"She got you good," Chloe says, stepping up beside him a moment later and slipping her hand in his.

"Well, women are bloody terrifying," he replies, squeezing her fingers. "Especially abuelitas."

True, she thinks, but she also knows now that the fight stopped only because the Devil was ready for it to. She supposes he needed to let off some steam. He does seem more relaxed now, the lines of his face smoothed.

Abuelita plunks three lawn chairs down into a circle. "Sit," she commands the men. "Talk."

To Chloe's surprise, the men obey.

Nando is the first to speak. "You fight like hell," he says to Lucifer.

"You have no idea," Lucifer says.

Abuelita adds a fourth chair to the circle and looks at Chloe. "Don't let them be stupid," she warns, and pats her shoulder. "I bring food."

Beers and tequila, and new plates of beans and carnitas, are brought out. The truth surfaces slowly. Nando is only in the drug business to keep his younger sisters in private schools.

"If I snitch on a supplier, we're dead," Nando says of himself and the man they've since learned is his cousin Oscar. "And then what happens to them?"

Lucifer leans forward, sensing an angle. "I can cover their tuition. You could get out of this whole nasty business. All I ask for in return is that you tell us what you know about the person who supplied you with Firefly."

Nando and Oscar share a look, and Chloe jumps in, "We'll make sure you're safe."
"What?" Oscar laughs, speaking up for the first time. "By having the police patrol the area? Quickest way to die."

"We're not with the police," Chloe says.

"If you need security, you will have the best money can buy," Lucifer adds. "Surely Abuelita's virulent shoe will suffice for the rest."

Nando is quiet for a moment before he nods. "I want it in writing. That you'll pay their tuition. Whether I'm alive or not."

Lucifer settles back into his chair and crosses his legs. "My word is my bond, but if you insist upon a devilish contract, fetch me parchment, and it will be done."

Chloe watches, rapt, as the contract is drawn. It's simple and straightforward, no legalese. And she faces, again, the uncomfortable expediency of the Devil's favors and deals. How many times in her own life has she wanted to bypass all the red tape and get down to the point? Even her apartment lease is ninety pages long.

The longer she is with him and sees him for who he truly is, the more skeptical she becomes, not only of God, but of her own world, with all its strange and inconsistent rules, its extraordinary unfairness. Lucifer is a criminal, but he speaks the truth, and he's fair to a fault, so long as his emotions don't cloud his judgment.

"Now," Lucifer says after scribbling his sweeping signature, "your end of the deal." He opens a hand in invitation.

"De la Cruz," Nando whispers, as if mere utterance of the name might kill him. "That's the supplier."

"Of the cross?" Lucifer scoffs and glances toward the sky. "What irony."

Nando frowns at his strangeness. "Shayna is who approached me."

"Shayna?" Chloe confirms. "Not Shay?"

"I knew her as Shayna." Nando takes a long draw from his beer bottle. "They're weird. Very cagey. The product changes. The pickup and dropoff point change. Everything's careful, calculated. I was already selling—have been since I was sixteen. I got approached by Shayna because my cover's good. They don't use full-timers. Everybody who deals for them has to have a job outside of dealing. They don't like anyone getting suspicious." He shudders and adds, "And if you slip up, your ass is dead."

"What do you mean 'the product changes'?" Chloe asks.

"Their whole thing is"—he uses air quotes—"celestial ingredients. It's just dumb shit rich white people buy." He looks at Lucifer, wide-eyed. "No offense."

Chloe waves him off. She may be white herself, but as a child of L.A., she knows well there's a lot of "dumb shit" rich white people buy, especially if they've made it to the big screen or landed a solid gig on television. And there's no denying there's a lot of dumb shit Lucifer Morningstar does with his money.

"The latest ingredient was angel feathers," Nando says with a shrug. He notes Lucifer's responding silence. "Hey, man, if you were hoping to find a cure for something... If you're sick or somebody
"You know is... Sorry."

"I'm not sick," Lucifer says, his tone menacing. "I'm bloody furious."

"Do you know where we might find Shayna?" Chloe asks over the subsequent awkward silence.

Nando shakes his head. "I only met her the one time. But—" He breathes quickly, like he's panicking. "But I can tell you where and when the next pickup was set for."

They leave Fernando Portillo's house with leftovers and a lead.

Chapter End Notes

1. Batono = Mister (return)

2. Dila mshvidobisa = Good morning (return)

3. Gvinakhulet = "Come see us," a greeting used when the guest was not expected (return)

4. St'umari ghvtisaa = "The guest is from God" (return)

5. Genatsvale jigrebshi = "I love your tits" (return)

6. Iqos mase= "Let him go" (return)

7. Bayunco = silly, stupid (return)

8. Basta = enough, stop (return)

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Big thanks to Obli and Yah on this one, for picking through languages and locales with me. You guys are lovely to nerd out with.
Cain falls on his hands and knees, disturbing a thin layer of ash. Something hard and rough claws at the back of his throat, obstructing his breathing. He wheezes and retches, his black wings thrashing as his lungs cry out for Hell's hot, stale air. With a final, heaving cough, a black stone flies past his lips, and he gasps in deep breaths, only to choke on sweet, rotten decay. It is the putrid scent of corpses bloating beneath a blazing sun, of spoiled eggs and sweating meats, and moldering infection.

Panting, he picks the stone up and dries it on his shirt for closer inspection. The Pentecostal coin now resembles nothing so much as one of the many lumpy, black pebbles that litter Hell's ashen grounds. With a faint huff, Cain pockets the rock.

He expected the material to disintegrate, as it did when he escaped Hell, but perhaps the underworld is eager to reclaim what belongs to itself. The thought gives him pause as he wonders if he might be included in that category. He glances back at the closed gates, which tower like black, brutalist skyscrapers wedged between bulbous, gurgling volcanoes.

None of it is as frightening, this time around.

***

There is a place in Hell where souls are not bound by loops, but are put to work as slaves in mines and forges. For thousands upon thousands of years, handpicked rapists have toiled in the heat and ash, weeping through the thick layer of soot that coats their cheeks. They break Hell's black mountains with ancient fire-setting and dull, rudimentary hand tools. It's work that would kill them, if they had earthly bodies that could die. Sometimes they do collapse, but Hell always brings them back.

As they labor, their Hell loops whisper and drag at them, but they are chained to the mountainside, and to each other, at the pleasure of a former king. The demons who never tire of torturing them occasionally permit them to rest, but only because this is the most torturous time of all, as they turn predatory eyes on one another and feel compelled to sin again and again and again.

Even when he was maneuvering for the black throne, Cain never sought to make alliances. He worked around existing coalitions, usually by driving wedges between their members. But he befriended those demons who oversaw the mines and forges, insofar as Cain befriends anyone. It was the only way to flood Nox with Hell-forged metal that would encourage infighting.

But Hell-forged metal is just that: metal, forged in Hell. Similar to iron, it's nothing special. It cuts and wounds, but Hell heals those who are wounded from it and those who "die" from it. No, the stronger material is an alloy that incorporates malam, a precious silver-colored metal found deep within a scant few of Hell's mountains.

Maze's karambits were forged from this alloy. Demon blades, Hell's citizens call them, not because they belong to demons, but because they're the only Hell-forged blade that can permanently maim or snuff out the life of the soulless creatures who exist here. On Earth, they can kill celestials,
sending them to Heaven or, in Lucifer's case, to Hell. Lucifer banned them from Nox long ago. Only Mazikeen, the trusty dog at his heels, had access—legally, anyhow.

As Cain approaches the heaving, sweating souls and their demonic overseers, his hand drifts briefly to his chest. Beneath his ash-covered shirt, he feels the puckered ridges of the old scar left by the archdemon Balor, proof that demon blades have sometimes found their way to black markets. (And even more Cain himself has put there.) *SINNER*, his scar yet reads, and is punctuated by the hollow hole where his heart beat for thousands of Earth years. The scar is another score to settle, one day, even if the name holds true.

He calls on the demons to put the souls to forging cuffs and chains, blades, and needles, all using the alloy. They don't ask questions, lest they suffer the wrath of a winged creature who's sat upon the black throne. They merely obey, as any wise friend of Cain's would.

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Cain soars above the gray desolation of Hell. The demand for infernal real estate is so great that even from this height, there is no end to the plane in sight. In the visible distance, an enormous volcano belches ash into the muted sky, its thick smoke sparking white with lightning. Lakes of fire bubble up from the dead, ash-thick ground, providing bright, persimmon contrast to the underworld's near-monochrome palette. At the foot of overcrowded and craggy hills and mountains, doors to Hell loops rattle on illusory chains.

It's a hot, festering place, and yet it feels good to tear the human façade from his creature skin and fly. On Earth, he was powerful, but trapped by convention. Here, he is king, even if the kingdom is a dung heap.

At Hell's center, the Black Tower gleams tall and dark and proud, but the surrounding city—vibrant as any place in Hell could ever be—has quieted. Creatures no longer press, shoulder to shoulder, at the market kiosks. The charred remains of gambling halls stand like black, boxy skeletons, and those still operating are filled with fewer revelers.

Fighting must have broken out again, in his absence. Not that Cain cares.

He enters the Black Tower, expecting it to be filled with demons torturing and pleasuring souls and each other, as it was the first time he stepped foot in the dark palace. But it's silent and barren, a spire turned to tomb.

Lucifer's old throne is part of the tower itself. There is no end to the hellstone floor, no beginning to the dais or throne. They meet and merge seamlessly, having all been whittled out from the chunk of mountain that was toed here for the king.

The throne stands black and high-backed, imposing. Cain steps up to the dais, ascending the three short steps, and settles into the seat. He looks down at his booted feet, as he did the first time he sat here. There's a slight dip worn into the hellstone where his shoes rest, evidence of the passage of time. It used to bother him, seeing such things; seeing a stranger's face, only to be reminded of a person he'd known thousands of years prior. It used to bother him, knowing time would pass and he wouldn't pass with it. That he'd live forever.

No longer bothered, he crosses his legs and leans back in the throne. Imagines himself settling disputes between demons, handing them demon blades and watching them fight to the death. He imagines their fear and obedience at the sight of his wings. The quaking of the changelings. The
respect of the old hag.

And he dreams of a second throne, carved for a blue-eyed queen.

***

When Cain next stands before Hell's spiked gates, it feels like a month has passed, but he knows now little time will have transpired on the earthly plane.

He carries with him heavy, silver-black chains, and his pockets bulge with a Hell-forged knife, bundled needles, and three more Pentecostal coins. Draping the chains across his broad shoulders, he glances backward to ensure he's alone before drawing a coin into his hand. Tightening his grip on the chains, he presses the coin to the seam where the gates meet.

Hell obeys the Devil's blood. The gates burst wide open, and Cain squints against burning white light. The coin decays in midair, the primitive In God We're Damned atomizing before his eyes as the portal draws him forward like a marionette pulled onto a stage.

***

Cain wakes in the loft, where the sun blinds him, and the air is clean and sweet. Everything, even this broken room, is beautiful and full of color.

Hell-forged chains clank against the marble floor as he turns on his side and retches. The bile that spills from him is black, the spittle thin and discolored like dirty water. Still, he tastes rot.

He claws the chains away from his shoulders and dusts frantically at his clothes, ash flying up and away and catching the light. He struggles to reconcile the shattered pieces of himself. A son, a first son; an unwanted and cursed son. A man, an immortal. The dead, the risen. Criminal and king. He belongs in Hell, where he longs for Earth's beauty. He rises to Earth, where he longs for Hell, the one place he is free to be himself.

"Boss?"

Cain's head snaps to the right, his face slipping into a practiced, neutral expression. Barrow stands near the entrance to the loft, pale and clothed in drab brown, sunlight reflecting off his bald head. Fear ripples through the wiry man in waves.

"How much time passed?" Cain asks, his voice rough.

Barrow glances at his watch. "Half an hour."

Hiding a shudder, Cain stands and hefts the chains once more. Hell whispers softly in his ear.

***

A sliver of light from Chloe's bathroom paints her bare heels yellow. She sits up on her knees, naked curves hugged by shadows, golden hair shifting with the movement of her head. Her fingers trace thighs and clutch narrow hips, so different from Cain's own. Lucifer bites his lip, holding back moans, his eyes fixed on the woman before him, as if she is all that has ever existed. He never
thinks to look up or out her window.

He trembles some time later, his hand touching her face. "Chloe—"

But she doesn't move away, like she did with Cain. She presses closer and lets out a muffled moan that makes Cain instantly hard.

"Oh," Lucifer breathes. "Oh, bloody hell."

When she releases the Devil with a wet pop and a laugh, Lucifer grins through his panting. Dragging herself to her feet, she stands on tiptoe and pulls him down for a kiss.

And Cain stares, burning with jealousy, plagued by confusion. This isn't how it was supposed to be.

***

Cain thumbs the horned goat on the Pentecostal coin and glares at the TFF! website. That son of a bitch bought the entire company—and promptly posted a picture and a quote from *Bones* on the website. This, on top of the failed *Telegraph* article has put Cain in a foul mood. He called in quite the favor for that article, but the Devil cut him off, likely with a favor of his own.

Not that Cain's machinations have gone according to plan lately. As much as the pictures had the desired effect on Chloe's career, her reaction wasn't what he expected. He thought she would distance herself from Lucifer, perhaps even call their relationship off, when she was demoted. The quickest way to vex Chloe has always been to call her ability to work into question. But it's different this time. He's seen the pictures, the way she looks at him.

If he doesn't separate them before capturing Lucifer, the odds of Chloe's affections shifting back to him are reduced to nil. And Cain wants that sweet victory, the look on Lucifer's face when she chooses him, once and for all.

*Come back,* Hell whispers, and Cain squeezes his eyes shut against the sound. *Bring us a queen.*

Los Angeles is suffocating. All the sun, all the people. All the connections he dare not reach out to unless he's prepared to meet the Devil himself.

He's taken to letting his wings out in the safe house, and they twitch now, eager for a fight, terrified of one. The Hell-forged chains lie on the floor of his living room, taunting him nearly as much as the whispers. All that effort, and for what?

He has to get out of here. Regroup. Cut his losses. The thought leaves him bitter, so bitter that he turns and punches a hole in his bedroom wall, his fist burrowing through Sheetrock and wood.

In the middle of the night, Cain flies to the public storage building where Barrow placed his belongings from his time in Los Angeles as Marcus Pierce. At the back of the building, he draws his wings into his body, chafing at the offensive repression. Inside, he stomps up the stairs to the third floor and the three-hundredth unit, where he unlocks and throws open a blue roll-up door.

To anyone else, this would be the most worthless storage unit imaginable. Mostly, it's filled with shelves that are filled with rocks. There are a few fossils and some gemstones—garnets, lapis lazuli, lots of quartz—but most of the rocks are simple and gray, with no special shape or quality to make them stand out from the others.
Cain knows the exact location he pocketed each rock. He knows that fourteen represent women he loved, three of whom died by his own hand. If he looks closely, he can still make out where their blood stains the stones.

Seventy-eight of the rocks represent children he fathered. Some grew, had children of their own, and died of old age, but most died before the age of five, of some disease or other that is now preventable. Smallpox, measles, scurvy. He knows of only one living descendant, a young man in Novosibirsk, Russia.

He removes the hellstone pebble from his pocket and places it on a shelf.

*You belong with us*, Hell coaxes in reply.

Does he? He could go anywhere, start anew. Again. But every place is tainted by memories, good or bad. He's seen everything, done everything.

He hums a sad, off-key tune and thinks of Chloe as he lifts a small, striped rock he picked up in Chang'an during the early days of the Silk Road. Running a finger over the rough surface, he realizes he wants nothing so much as to return it to its original home. To see if there's anything left for him, anywhere, on this plane.

And what's stopping him? So he retraces his steps. He pockets rocks and takes to the sky and stands in places he has already stood. In Germany and Chile, Iceland and Uzbekistan and Sudan. On dead and flattened cities, on grassed-over graves, on tourist-filled beaches and in tourist-filled alleyways.

There are so many people since industrialization. Too many. Crawling all over Creation.

They'd look better dead, their souls tucked away, in rooms made just for them.

With each place, his sanity slips a little further from his grasp.

***

In Jakarta, Cain lies on a hotel bed too firm for his liking, listening to Hell speak. The voices are interrupted when Shayna de la Cruz calls for the fifteenth time in two days.

Grunting, he swipes to answer the call. *"What?"*

"Nice to hear your voice, too," When he doesn't reply, she adds, "We're out of Firefly."

"Not my problem."

"What about your score to settle?" she asks.

The reasons why he still desires revenge grow more and more nebulous, but no less acute. He hates Lucifer how he hated Abel—blindly, for existing. For coming along and getting in the way of something good. For being chosen.

"Hector ended our partnership."

"Only because of Colinda. And you told him you'd find another way to capture Lucifer."

"Maybe there's no point."
"I didn't take you for a quitter." She pauses for him to respond, but he doesn't bother. Silence stretches on until she's forced to clear her throat and speak again. "Look, I don't care about your deal with my father. I want to make a deal with you."

"What makes you think I'd want to make a deal with you?"

"Isn't that what the Sinnerman does?" she baits. "Makes deals?"

Hearing the name, thinking of the persona he first created in the days of Moses, wakens something in him. Reminds him of who he is. He sits up and looks around his hotel room, at two rocks waiting beside a white teapot. 'This isn't him. He's always been a man of action, always looking for the next path forward—a new place to live, a new skill to develop, a new serial killer to obsess over. Even a new way he might die. He's been bored, but he's always been moving.

And whatever he's wanted, he's taken.

Yesss.

So the pawns have shifted. There are still moves he can make. There must be. Maybe this is one of them. He wouldn't be the Sinnerman if he didn't consider every possible angle.

"What do you want?" he asks.

"Let's do this in person," Shayna says. "Why don't you come over to my place? Got paper? I'll give you my address."

"I already know where you live, Shayna. I can be there in five hours."

She breathes a laugh, one killer acknowledging the skills of another. "I'll leave my door unlocked. See you soon, Avery."

***

It's nighttime in L.A., dry and cool and, this close to the water, tasting of salt. Cain arrives on Shayna's doorstep, windblown, Hell's caterwauling surprisingly absent as he hides his wings. For the first time in two weeks he feels focused on what could be ahead of him instead of all the failures that lie behind.

He opens the door to Shayna's nondescript townhouse. Her living room is as uninspiring as the outside of the home—softly lit by lamps, decorated in neutral beiges, a place people aren't meant to notice. Cain recognizes the effort because it's a cover he's mastered over the centuries. Raise no suspicions. Leave no trace.

Shayna steps into the room, barefoot, but otherwise dressed in her usual attire. She holds the slender neck of a beer bottle between two fingers, the glass resting against the outside of her black-jeaned thigh. "You look like shit," she says.

"What's the deal you're wanting to make?" Cain asks without preamble.

"The same one you had with my father, more or less," she answers, ducking back into the room she came from. There's the sound of a fridge door opening and a bottle cap snapping free. She returns a moment later, holding a beer out to him. "Stop being weird," she says. "Sit. Have a drink."
"Are you going rogue?" he asks, taking the bottle. They sit on a dark brown sofa, an empty seat cushion between them.

"No," she snorts, and sips her beer. "But I want more control than I've got. The only way I'm getting that is if I prove I'm more than the cleanup crew." She shrugs a shoulder. "So the deal's mostly the same, but it's with me. I get my ingredient, and you get your revenge. You can do whatever you want to Lucifer, so long as I get those feathers."

Cain's mouth goes dry at the thought of it. This isn't how he wanted it to go, but Chloe will come around. He'll make sure of it.

"I have chains that will hold him."

"And I have a warehouse waiting in Tijuana."

"Tijuana?"

"Yeah. Can we get him there? I want it to be a surprise for my dad when he heads home next month."

Cain drinks his beer to hide a laugh. What is it with children trying to please their parents? It never works. Especially for De la Cruz's children.

"We'll need heavy drugs. Barbiturates. I've got hypodermic needles for us to use."

She swallows loudly, and Cain knows she's remembering angel wings. She hasn't seen anything yet.

"I can get barbiturates," she says. "Thiopental oughta do the trick. They use that shit on elephants."

She straightens, sets her beer aside on the coffee table, and holds out a slender hand. "So, it's a deal?"

For a moment, Cain sees Balor's hand stretched toward him in that old loop. Kill him, kill him, kill him, Hell screams in his head. But the vision passes, and he clasps Shayna's fingers. "Deal."

"Great," Shayna says, holding onto his hand and sliding herself across the empty seat. She draws his beer from his hands and places it next to her own.

Cain looks at her, alarm and disgust surging through his body. And interest, too. Where Chloe is light, Shayna is dark. And like calls to like.

"Can you take out those dumb contacts?" she asks, throwing a leg over his hips. She grinds into him and slips out of her black t-shirt. Round breasts drop free in front of his face.

"Can you stop being a bitch?" he replies, reaching over to turn off the nearest lamp.

She laughs. "Guess that's a no." She rolls her hips again and again until he shoves her back from his knees. Taking the hint, she drags down jeans and black panties. From the discarded jeans, she pulls a condom out of a back pocket.

"Well?" she laughs, holding the square packet up. "You gonna get undressed?"

Grunting, Cain unzips his fly and shoves his jeans and boxers down to his thighs, where the puckered scar from the demon blade he stabbed into his leg remains.

Shayna stares at him. "Really?"
"The shirt stays on," he says, standing to kick off his shoes and shove the clothes the rest of the way down his legs. He kicks everything to the side, standing in nothing but a plain, blue shirt.

"You're weird as hell, Avery."

He grabs her, pulling her close. They collide into each other, mean and angry, and not pretending to be otherwise. She climbs his body and claws at his back, where his wings rage to break free. He shoves her into the sofa, driving into her body as if in doing so mistakes might be unmade. They grapple, and she ends up on top, her body writhing. And though Cain's body responds eagerly, he's bored within. He's had a lot of empty fucks like this one, but only one in recent memory that made him feel.

Shayna's hands land on his chest, searching for leverage. The heel of her right palm sinks into the hole of his chest, the fabric of his shirt dipping down. She sits back, unnerved, her hips stuttering to a halt.

The thing about humans, though, is they like to pretend everything is normal. Embracing denial is preferable to facing tragedy or terror, and so, it's easy to grab Shayna's hand and misdirect her.

In the dark, he pretends she's Chloe, choosing him.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to Obli, Yah, and TheWillowBends. The NSA is watching us, and they're highly entertained. It's fine.
"Bloody hell," Lucifer gripes, his knee hopping against the Corvette's steering wheel. Absolutely shocking Los Angeles traffic didn't feature in his Hell loop. Proof that Hell's gone to, well, Hell since he left. "I'd very much like to break the law right now," he announces, eyeing the grassy median.

"Why not?" Chloe exhales a tired laugh. "What's one more broken law for the day?"

He glances at her sidelong before turning a scowl on a soulless Tesla. "Yes, well, I've never claimed to be a saint, have I?"

"No," she agrees.

An apology isn't in him, and they fall silent as he returns them to Lux. He digs into the bag of leftovers Nando's abuelita gave them and looks across the sprawling city with growing agitation.

All across Los Angeles, and perhaps beyond, there are people using him. For a high, for a cure—and some will die because of it. As he drives, he dreams up punishments for Shayna de la Cruz. Angels aren't the only creature with body parts worth selling on black markets. Kidneys are in quite high demand.

Nearly an hour has passed by the time he pulls into Lux's private, underground garage. He parks the Corvette in his reserved spot and climbs out of the driver's side swiftly, fixated on the case.

Three long days until the drop-off and pick-up points open. Just enough time to learn more about Shayna de la Cruz's odious empire, and just long enough to lose what's left of his Dad-damned mind. With two locations in play, they'll need backup. He whips out his phone, knowing exactly who will be up for a little torture when the time comes.

Chloe climbs out of the passenger side, the Ruger pistol held away from her in a gloved hand. She removes the magazine and clears the chamber before slipping the weapon's body into the plastic bag that no longer contains leftovers.

Lucifer flashes her a smile, but his attention returns to his phone as he jots off a text to Maze—well, a string of emojis. Marvelous reinvention of pictography, those things. He looks over his message: the angel (he scoffs), the syringe, the face with dollar signs for eyes, a woman, a left-facing punch toward her, and a question mark. Seems clear enough, all in all, and he hits send before turning to head into the building.

A few feet away from the Corvette, Chloe grabs his elbow. "Lucifer? Wait."

He gives her a perplexed look. "Detective, surely you agree there's work to be done."

"I do." She releases him, nodding, and sets the bagged gun on the Corvette's boot. "I know. But can we talk a second?" She taps her fingers against the sides of her thighs. "I just don't think I'll say this if I don't do it now."

There's little that amuses him or gives him pause more than Chloe Decker, flustered. Stuffing his hands in his pockets, he shrugs. "Very well. What is it?"
"What you did at Portillo's..."

"Ah." He chuckles. "In trouble again, am I?"

"What? No! No, it's just... I, uh, see now what you've been doing, you know, behind the scenes." She shakes her head and rolls her eyes. "I get it, okay? Why my solve rate went through the roof when we became partners."

"Come, now, Detective, don't dismiss your talents," he says, grinning. "But you're welcome."

She huffs a laugh and lifts a hand between them. When it drops, her fingers land on his stomach, one nail catching over a shirt button. "I didn't know."

"Well, you weren't supposed to, were you?" Lucifer looks down at where her fingers rest, touching, but not quite caressing. "But there's no hiding between us anymore, is there?" He smiles a little. "I thought you'd be more upset about how everything went down."

He did let her take the lead, as was agreed upon, but, well, things got a little out of hand, didn't they? He's a big enough Devil to admit that. Not that an eye patch won't only improve that one chap's street cred.

"Oh, I'm upset," Chloe says, and he glances up in time to see her scowl. "But..."

"But...?" he prompts.

Chloe sucks in a deep breath before saying in a rush, "I want you like that."

Now she has his full attention, certainly. He tilts his head, ever eager to coax desires from the one person who doesn't succumb to his charms. "Like what, darling?" Shifting closer, he rests fingers on the side of her neck and marvels at her hummingbird pulse.

"I want—"

"Yes?"

And it almost feels like he's pulled her in, but her eyes aren't on his. They're on his Italian leather shoes, and slowly rake up to his face, sending a frisson of excitement through his middle.

"All of it," she says, and licks her lips. "I don't want you to hold back with me. And I know you do."

"I have to," he sighs, pained to deny her, his thumb running along the strong line of her jaw. "Dad made you lot terribly fragile."

He works very hard not to think about that every night she lies against him, every morning she stretches awake. How all of this is temporary. How she is temporary. It has to be enough, even though it will never be enough.

Disappointment flits across her face before she hides it. "Right."

"But I could hold back less," he rushes to add, "if that's what you desire."

"It is." Her fingers drop to his belt. "If you'd want that, too."

She has no idea.
Lucifer swallows deeply. Her desire coils around him, matching his own in exquisite and frightening ways. He wants—and wants and wants. And surely that way lies a special kind of pandemonium. Chloe steps closer, and he backs up, alarmed, as he sometimes is with her, by his own yearning.

"We should... We should research the De la Cruz family, Detective."

"It could wait a little while," Chloe says, a temptress looking up at him under long lashes. "We've got three days."

"Usually you're the one telling us to get back to work," he says dully. "And there really is an awful lot to—"

Lucifer falls silent, his brows hiking up in surprise as her hands move to unbutton and unzip her jeans. Shayna de la Cruz is the furthest thing from his mind as Chloe grabs his hand and draws his fingers down her jeans, past close-trimmed curls, to her wet sex.

He stares for a long moment, his mouth hanging open. Chloe, he has discovered to his utter delight, is not shy in the bedroom, though occasionally his experience makes her wary. But this isn't a bedroom. It's the bloody garage. And while similar, delicious things have occurred in the space, they've not occurred with her.

"I want you," she whispers.

Like throwing water on a grease fire, that. Denying her in the morning had been torture enough. Groaning, he bends and pushes his mouth to hers, sliding his tongue past her lips. There's no savoring as he pins her against the concrete wall and devours her pleased gasp, his fingers exploring within the tight confines of her skinny jeans.

A moment later, he draws his hand away from her, holding her in place with his hips as he licks wet, slick salt from his fingers. Bending, he grabs her by her thighs, lifting her and lining her up with the hard ache between his legs.

"I was very mean to you this morning, wasn't I?" he teases with a pout, pushing against the seam of her jeans.

Her eyes spark with lust and a look he finally knows is gifted to him alone. "You're going to make it up to me, right?"

"Oh, many times over," he promises. "Pity we don't have the whole day and night. You have no idea how many things I still want to do to you." He grinds into her. "Things no one's ever done to you."

She moans obscenely, her mantle of propriety slipping. She pulls her shirt off and lets it drop to the ground. He spots the necklace he gave her and skin flushed pink above white lace before she darts toward his mouth. She arches into him, only to hiss and clutch at his shoulders.

He pulls back at once, hips slowing. "Something the matter?"

Chloe shakes her head. "Concrete's cold."

"Right," he laughs. "Of course. Perhaps best if we don't shag in the garage." Perhaps. He eyes the Corvette thoughtfully before shaking his head. Another time.

"The pistol," she reminds him.
He grabs it and rushes them toward the elevator, not bothering to hide his speed for her sake, and she lets out a jubilant laugh that makes his head spin. After all the anxiety of the day, he's filled with a sort of unbridled joy, even knowing that trouble waits beyond.

In the lift, he shoves the unloaded weapon down the back waist of his trousers—something he's always wanted to do—and they return to each other, hungry and grasping. He tugs down the cups of her bra, his fingers finding nipples already firm with desire. When the elevator doors slide open a few moments later, they stumble forward. Lucifer stops abruptly, his mouth sliding away from Chloe's as he realizes he directed them to their office space.

"Bollocks. Wrong floor."

"Don't care," Chloe murmurs, her fingers worrying at the last few buttons of his shirt.

"But you said—"

"That was before this morning," she says, removing the Ruger from his waistband and setting it aside on the unfinished floor. She shoves his shirt away from his shoulders and goes for his belt. "And...everything else."

"Darling, I gave you my word."

"Yeah, well, we can break the rule, just this once."

"Ah. Just this once." Lucifer nods in mock seriousness. "I see my good influence has—"

But he doesn't get the words out as she pulls him in for a kiss infused with laughter. He kicks off his shoes, unclasps her bra, and pushes at the waist of her jeans. She backs away with a frustrated huff and shimmies out of the rest of her clothes, and he follows suit. For a moment, they stand, naked, looking at each other, breathing loudly. There's rarely hesitancy in their play now, but her request is new and intimate, revealing for them both. He gives her a small, lopsided smile.

Finally, they move as one, she walking to him, he walking her back toward the office desks which are suddenly much better investments than he could have ever imagined. She hops up on her desk, shoving her name plaque out of the way, and banks her heels on the edge of the ebony wood. In the afternoon light, she glistens between her legs, and he drops to his knees.

Chloe catches his descending cheek with a palm. "I want you to fuck me."

Lucifer nods, shakily. Usually he's one for more foreplay, but sometimes the main event demands to be enjoyed without delay. Unable to resist, he presses a kiss between her legs, as he did so many hours ago, before rising to his feet. She shudders, her breath leaving her in a ragged sigh.

"We need a safe word, darling," he says, fingers trailing soft thighs.

Eyes settled south flicker up to his face. "What, like, monkeybottoms?" she asks with a laugh.

"That'll do," Lucifer chuckles, gliding himself through her slick heat. He grins when her head falls back.

Grabbing her ankles, he settles her calves on his shoulders, then slides his fingers down to encircle her knees.

Chloe leans back on one elbow and reaches between them, taking him in hand, squeezing flesh, as she lines him up with her body. They groan when he pushes inside slowly, and he wonders, as
always, at the unexpected felicity found in their evolution as a couple.

When his hips fall flush with the undersides of her thighs, he smiles down at her. "Okay?"

She nods, and the anticipation in her gaze, in her rosy breasts, kindles the fire crackling within him.

Lucifer starts at an easy pace, but steadily increases the tempo, well familiar with desires for a bit—or more—of roughness. But this is different. Different because she knows the truth, which paints speed and strength in a wholly new and honest light.

When she moans for more, he gives it—until he feels the telltale flutter of her inner muscles. He stops abruptly and laughs at the horrified look on her face that quickly morphs into a squeal of pleasure when he leans forward and works her harder. Until the dam bursts and her eyes roll back and her muscles grip him in head-spinning spasms. He lifts her in the middle of her climax, when she's most disoriented. The soft flesh of her breasts falls, damp with sweat, to his chest. Her legs slide down limply to hook onto the crooks of his elbows.

Lucifer banks her against the nearest wall, as he did in the garage. She hisses, coming into contact with a cold surface once more, but this time the sound is made in pleasure, not discomfort.

"Still good?" he chuckles, a little breathless as he rolls his hips. Not from fatigue, but from the precipice he stands upon. Freeing himself with her, even if only a little, is like taking a bump of coke.

Her fingers grip into his hair. "Don't stop." She draws in a shuddering breath. "I can take more."

And so he kisses her and pushes into her harder and harder, his hands clasped at her hips. She watches them slide together, her lips parted with gasps and moans that he hears himself echo. And he falls further and further beneath her temptation until something snaps beneath their shared desire.

Tell me to stop, he begs her silently, his eyes watching her face.

But she doesn't. Instead, she cries, "Holy shit. Holy shit."

It makes him want to laugh, to tell a joke, but he lost both abilities several dozen thrusts ago. There is only her body and his. Harrowing, this trust. He says something, he's sure of it, but English has gone slippery, and a Sri Lankan creole, of all things, pops out. But it's fine, as she's lost language, too. She speaks only in sighs and cries.

Until two chilling words.

"Your eyes," Chloe gasps, and terror seizes him, for he's naked in a way he doesn't mean to be. He makes to look away, but she grabs hold of his face and stares into hellfire. "Lucifer," she moans, and comes with a sharp cry, her muscles clamping around him, her legs trembling against his arms. Her hands slip to his shoulders, and drops of color paint his skin, tingling like electricity. She smiles at him softly and arches her hips.

And Lucifer presses home, stretched up on the balls of his feet, and the pleasure that hits him is sharp and blinding and tastes of free will, his and hers. When the spasms ease and finally release him, he closes his eyes and rests his forehead against hers. "Chloe," he says softly, and he feels fire fade and disappear from his gaze. "Are you all right? I didn't—"

"Don't apologize," she says in a rush, fingers above his heart, her light contained. "That was the best sex I've ever had."
He pulls back a little, a small, uncertain smile tugging at his mouth. "Yeah?"

"Oh, yeah," she says, and kisses him. "But can you let me down so I can find out if I can still walk?"

"Right," he laughs.

They groan as he slides from her body, and laugh at the mess on their thighs. Chloe stretches and winces at a twinge in her back, but is otherwise hale. She shakes out his dress shirt and buttons it up over herself. "Mine's downstairs," she says sheepishly, color creeping into her cheeks.

"You look lovely," he tells her. And the warm familiarity between them is hard for him to look at straight on, and yet he can't imagine looking away. He wants to tell her—nay, needs to tell her how he feels. Even if she never feels the same.

He opens his mouth.

"I'm gonna get cleaned up," she says, gathering her discarded clothes. "Then we can start digging into the De la Cruzes."

Suddenly they're back to work, and isn't that where he wanted them?

"Of course," he says, burying awkward endearments, and feeling foolish for thinking now was the time or place for them. Instead, he falls back on what he knows best, dragging on his trousers and giving her a leer as she punches the elevator call button. "I'll join you."

"Great, but just for a shower," she laughs, and steps forward as the doors slide open.

"Why, what else would we do, darling?" he teases.

***

Later, Dan and Ella have very different reactions to Devil's in the Details.

The huge smile on Ella's face dimples her cheeks. "Wow, guys! This is going to be so cool. If you need someone for forensics when you've really got things kicking..."

"Oh, I assure you," Lucifer says with a grin, "we're not above pilfering the LAPD's finest."

"Look, we have business cards," Chloe says, grabbing one from her desk.

A little thrill runs through Lucifer at her excitement. The business was a good idea. Chloe has her heart's desire for justice, and he gets to continue to work by her side, helping her capture and contain evil. If tearing the limbs off a feather-thieving lowlife soon happens to become part of the job description, well, all the better.

"This is how you're spending your time, Chlo?" Dan looks around the empty office space skeptically. "Really?"

"Yeah, actually, it is."

Lucifer sighs. "One would think all that improv might improve your imagination, Daniel."

Dan shakes his head and spreads his hands in confusion. "No, look, we're all in the know here now,
right? So, I'm just gonna come out and say it. Why are you even on-Earth, man, playing detective? I thought for sure you'd give this up when Chloe got fired." He glances at her. "Sorry, Chlo."

Lucifer scoffs. "Oh, what, retirees can't have hobbies?"

"Dude," Ella interjects, "the Devil's all about helping people find things out."

"What?" Dan says at the same time Lucifer says, "I am?"

"Hello? Garden of Eden, Tree of Knowledge?" Ella looks up at Lucifer, troubled. "Wait, that story's true, right? Like, Eden was a thing, and you gave Eve an apple, and, like, humanity knew too much then and the jig was up or something?"

"Ah, that. Yes. In a fashion. Mouth off a bit over a fruit basket, and look what Dad does."

"Point is, this guy"—Ella smacks his arm playfully—"cares about the truth."

"Miss Lopez is right." Lucifer nods. "I don't lie, and I abhor those who do."

Which is precisely why he didn't like Daniel Espinoza when they first met. He reeked of deceit.

"Don't know what answer I thought I was going to get, but it wasn't that," Dan says. "Anyway, we're here. We've got to get that heroin off the streets. That's what matters."

"I agree," Lucifer says. "This is not the part of me L.A. is used to enjoying."

"Gross," Chloe mutters.

"Oh, pot, kettle, darling."

Ella looks between them, hands clasped under her chin. "You guys are so cute."

Laptops are booted up, and Dan and Ella settle in chairs brought up from Lux. Lucifer smirks at Chloe's wide-eyed expression as she rights her toppled name plaque. They may have cleaned the desk before the others arrived, but he knows exactly what she's thinking about. Choking off a laugh, he nudges her foot under the desk. She straightens guiltily and stamps on his toe.

"So what'd Fernando Portillo tell you?" Dan asks. "That is why you guys called us over, right?"

Composure restored, Chloe nods to the revised whiteboard, where Shay's name has been updated and circled several times. She explains the strange nature of the drug business behind De la Cruz and adds, "They're careful, apparently. They change where dealers drop off cash and pick up drugs every month. Portillo had the addresses for the next exchange, but the people who handle it won't be at either location for another three days. They're at both for the same twenty-four hours, so it's a tight window."

"Two locations?" Dan confirms with a frown.

"Yep," Chloe answers, spinning her laptop around to show them where she's pinned the two addresses on a map. "Opposite ends of the city—pick up is at an outdoor storage and RV place up in Santa Clarita; drop-off is at a strip club called The Tigress in Anaheim."

"Money laundering, almost certainly," Lucifer says. "As I once told Detective Morrison, that's how it's done. At least one way."
"We're going to need to split up between the two locations," Chloe continues, ignoring his criminal expertise. "The goal should be to gather information."

"And to capture the queenpin herself," Lucifer says.

"Maybe," Chloe replies. "If we can do that safely. But hopefully our research tonight will turn up someone important that we can get to more easily." She sighs and looks at Dan and Ella. "That's where you guys come in. We don't have much access to databases yet." She bites her lip before continuing, "We'll understand if you don't want to get involved."

"She will. I won't," Lucifer amends.

"Of course we'll help!" Ella insists. "Even if these weren't cold cases, what are friends for?"

Dan isn't nearly so certain. "Chloe, this is..." He puts a hand on his head and stares at the whiteboard. "It's not just outside our jurisdiction. This is bigger than the LAPD. DEA and SWAT stuff. Why don't we contact the FBI?"

Lucifer rolls his eyes. "Because, Daniel, we don't know what connections the Sinnerman has in the FBI, and it would be very foolish to alert him to our intentions."

Dan's open expression shuts. "Do we even know there's a new Sinnerman? All we know for certain is Marcus Pierce is rotting."

"And you're welcome." Lucifer enjoys the flicker of surprise on the other man's face. "He's a chestnut roasting over an open hellfire, yes, but someone does appear to have taken his place and may well be connected to De la Cruz. Cain was well-connected."

"Wait, all that Cain nonsense was true?" Dan yells.

"Well, of course it was," Lucifer says while toying with a cufflink. "Do keep up."

"Dude, you almost got hitched to Cain," Ella gasps to Chloe.

"Yeah, we've been over that," Chloe says, cutting her eyes at Lucifer.

"I mean, I know that was all about Lucifer," Ella continues, "but still."

Lucifer barks a laugh. "Oh, it was about me, was it?" he says, his face breaking into a grin as he turns to Chloe, who looks mortified.

"Thanks, Ella," Chloe sighs.

"So, Cain, from the Bible, killed Charlotte?" Dan asks.

Their attention shifts to him, and the room turns melancholy. So much has happened since her death. What time has Daniel had to grieve?

"He did," Lucifer answers, his tone gentle. "Cain was not the reformed man I believed him to be. I regret deeply that I misjudged that." Perhaps it's another thing he'll see in a Hell loop, should he die. "But you must know she's in the Silver City now. You'll see her again one day." He smiles wanly. "Provided you don't return to your old douchey ways."

Beneath the desk, Chloe rests a hand on his knee.

Dan blinks hard, tears barely shelved on his lower eyelids. "If Pierce's, Cain's—whatever's—
enterprise is connected to this, you're right. We have to go it alone. The way the suits wiped the investigation into his crimes under the rug—"

"Marvelous," Lucifer says. "We're all in agreement then."

Slowly, they build a profile on the De la Cruz family. Shayna is all but a ghost, absent from systems and social media alike, but the man they determine is her father—Hector de la Cruz—has quite the social presence if one digs a little. On the surface, Hector is a squeaky-clean businessman known for his perfectly legal pharmacy chain. He's also a beloved philanthropist, spotted at black tie events in Mexico and California. All red flags that point to evildoing.

Ella pulls up satellite images of the outdoor storage park next. She lets out a low whistle. "That's a lot of open space."

Lucifer shakes his head. "And that's a bad thing because...?"

"No good cover," Chloe answers. "Lots of potential for things to go wrong."

"Goody. You know, I could just go in and nab our miscreant," he says. He arches a brow. "You saw I'm perfectly capable of wiping out a small army of bad guys."

"We don't even know which location Shayna will show up at," Chloe reminds him.

"I can handle the club," Dan says.

"Actually, Daniel, strip clubs are for looking only," Lucifer quips. "Handling will get you thrown out."

"I'll go with you," Ella says to Dan.

"No way," Chloe intervenes. "You're not trained for a raid."

"But—"

"Chloe's right," Dan says.

"You do need backup, though," Chloe says with a frown.

Lucifer draws his phone out of his jacket pocket. "Well, I messaged Maze earlier about—"

The elevator doors slide open with a ding, and Maze strolls in, dressed in black.

"Speak of my demon," Lucifer laughs. "Mazikeen! Pull up a chair. Your Spidey sense must have been tingling. We're just plotting mayhem and destruction now."

"Or not," Ella chuckles uncertainly. "Mayhem and destruction sounds bad. You know, coming from the Devil."

Lucifer waves her off.

Maze folds her arms over her tight leather tank top. "I'm not your demon," she gripes.

"We could really use your help, Maze," Chloe says. "I don't know what Lucifer has told you, but —"

"Some bitch made an angel drug or something, right?"
"I..." Chloe tilts her head and sighs. "Sort of?"

"Whatever. But if you want me to help you get her, it's going to cost you."

"Yes, yes, we know," Lucifer says. "Standard fee, is it?"

"No," Maze says, dragging a chair over. She flips it around and sits on it backwards.

"No? Well, what then? Don't leave us hanging."

"I want in."

"To...?"

"This," she says, one finger wagging, indicating the office space.

"Oh, Maze," Chloe sighs, "we can't hire you. The business isn't even making money yet."

Lucifer shrugs. "Not a problem. I'll just pop her back onto Lux's payroll."

Chloe's eyes bug out. "Lucifer, you can't do that."

"Oh, no, it's no trouble at all, Detective. Worked just fine the other day."

"Wait. What?"

"When I put you on Lux's payroll."

"You what!" Chloe shouts. "Do you have any idea how illegal that is?"

"Is it?"

"I just took out a loan!"

"A loan?" Lucifer laughs. "Whatever for?"

"Oh, boy," Dan chuckles, snapping his laptop shut and standing. "That's our cue," he says to Ella.

She scrambles to join him. "Uh, definitely."

"Where do you two think you're going?" Lucifer demands.

"Down to your bar," Dan announces. "Where we're going to drink. For free. Because money means nothing to you. Probably because you're Satan."

He looks at Chloe. "Tell me what to do, where and when, and I'll do it." He eyes Maze, who snaps her teeth at him. "Give me a heads up if it's going to be with her?"

Chloe nods from behind the palm of her hand.

"You still good for having Trixie tomorrow?"

Chloe nods again, still silent.

"Great. Do you want to pick her up early or later?"

"I'll get her at eight."
Maze grins at Dan as he passes her chair. Ella waves from within the elevator car, and Lucifer lifts a hand in farewell.

When the doors close, Chloe drops her hand from her face and turns on them both. "You can't just move money around like that. And you"—she points at Lucifer—"can't just throw money at me."

"But, darling—"

"Don't darling me."

Maze snorts. "You two are idiots." She points at Chloe and says to Lucifer, "She's human. They're weird about this money shit. You've offended her pride, which is something you, of all people, should get." She points to Lucifer and says to Chloe, "He forgets he's not a king anymore. Money really doesn't mean anything to him. He's dumb when it comes to you and wants you to be happy. Get over it." Spreading her hands and grinning widely, she says to them both, "Make me a partner, and I'll manage the books and keep everything legal."

"Done," they say in unison.

***

Although he's exhausted, Lucifer sleeps little. He slides from under Chloe's arm in the middle of the night and spends two hours baking a chocolate cake. When that's done, he descends to Lux's straggling crowd. The bar is only open for another half-hour, meaning its remaining patrons are already well and truly sozzled—speaking too loudly, leering a little too obviously, and utterly unaware that most of their friends departed ages ago. The last people to leave a bar are even sadder than those who enter too soon.

Lucifer pays them no mind as he drops to his piano bench and flips the fallboard open with a snap. Patrick swings by, leaving scotch and an ashtray without a word. Nocturnes flow of their own accord beneath his fingers, and for a time he's not a bar owner or a consultant or even Chloe Decker's lover. He's flying in an endless, black expanse, invisible elements held in the palm of his hand, contained and manipulated by his will. And then there's the sweet release of all that pent-up energy—not quite orgasmic, but not quite not, either. For what is desire, realized, if not a blazing fire?

His father looks upon the stars and declares, "This is good, my son."

Pride whispers, I know, and Lucifer sees the stars as his works by his hands. Good luck creating anything substantial without a sun to revolve around, without desire to impel the spirit. He's still proud.

The stragglers stumble out of Lux. Patrick brings him a bottle and locks up. He continues to play, trying to banish fury from his bones, from feathers he always senses and only sometimes wants because they remind him of what he was, what he will never be again; of the glory and wonder of flight, coupled with the limitations imposed upon him.

Hours later, Chloe exits the elevator and descends the staircase. She's dressed plainly in a button-down and what might charitably be called "mom jeans," but he smiles no less because of it. His fingers slide away from piano keys to snuff out his cigarette and wave the smoke away as she slips onto the bench beside him.

"Hey," she whispers, nudging his shoulder.
"Good morning."

"Did you get any sleep?"

He shrugs. "Although I appreciate indolence, I don't need as much sleep as you do."

"You didn't answer my question."

Lucifer snorts. She's gotten too good at reading between his lines. "Not truly, no."

She touches his arm. "We're going to get them. I promise. I won't let them get away with this."

The strange thing is he believes her.

Chloe kisses his shoulder gently. "Spend the day with Trix and me? She heads to art camp tomorrow morning, and I promised her we'd spend the day at Universal Studios."

"All those children." He shudders.

"It's like Vegas," she argues. "With more rides."

"There's gambling in Vegas."

Candy, as well, though he prays she won't snag onto that.

"Have you ever even been to Universal Studios?"

Lucifer lets out a relieved breath at the averted crisis. "No."

"I think you'd have fun."

"I don't know, Chloe."

"Come on," she wheedles. "You can give Trixie that chocolate cake yourself before we go."

He stiffens. "Who says I made that for her?"

"Didn't you?" she asks knowingly. She laughs a little. "Your secret is safe with me, you know."

"And what secret is that, Detective?"

She whispers, "That the Devil's kinda a softie."

Lucifer splutters. "I assure you no one has ever accused the Devil of being soft."

Chloe smooths a hand between his shoulders, where his scars used to be. "Well, you're soft with me."

"I was not soft with you yesterday," he quips, and she rolls her eyes.

"Please join us?" She grins cheekily and goes in for the kill: "It's what I desire."

"Bloody hell."
The comparison to Vegas is apt, which means Lucifer enjoys himself, though he refuses to admit it. There's just something fascinating about humans creating twee versions of their imaginings and architectural marvels. They explore shops with "English" façades and castles made of concrete that are littered with plastic stones and sprayed-on faux-snow. At the "French street bistro" where they buy lunch, the pigtailed girl behind the counter has the nerve to use the word y'all.

"Vous vous foutez de ma gueule?" Lucifer mutters, glaring at a suspect, backlit menu.

"What's that mean?" Trixie asks, grinning up at him from where she's crouched, looking at desserts.

He looks down at her. "It means this is a travesty."

After lunch, Trixie coos over trained beasts at an animal show and begs for a puppy. (Chloe vetoes this.) Lucifer flirts with Marilyn Monroe—not for the first time—and dances with costumed men who are very easy on the eyes, but also easy to turn down. Tragically, no movie set they tour contains his favorite hot tub.

Some of it Lucifer could do without. He ushers them away from the row of red doors outside a Minions attraction. Of course those little bastards bring Hell to Earth. He nearly pops his wings on Revenge Of The Mummy—a true insult to ancient Egypt—and the child almost loses her croissant. Chloe wanders out from the attraction, eyes wet with tears of laughter.

"Your mother is cruel, child."

Trixie looks at him, green and sympathetic, her wavy hair a tangled mess on her head. Chloe wraps her arms around them and cossets them, half-teasing, half-affectionate. It's lovely and safe, and for a little while he forgets what's been done to him.

The day wans, but the heat persists until finally they decide to leave.

"My feet hurt," Trixie whines.

"I know, baby." Chloe rests her hand atop her child's head. "The heat's getting to me, too. We're almost out of the park, though."

Lucifer frowns down at them, noting Trixie's reluctant trudge and how Chloe's balled her hands into fists. "You're not going to faint again, are you?" he asks her, plagued whenever he's reminded Dad is doing something to her. "Have a burning urge to set anything on fire?" He nods toward a wandering Scooby-Doo. "Might I suggest a hot dog, if so?"

"I think I'm okay," she says, squinting up at him behind sunglasses. "It's just really bright and hot."

An unconvincing answer, if he's ever heard one. "There's a bench there," he says, pointing to one outside the Wizarding World of Harry Potter.

They settle onto the warm steel, three stair-stepped people. Trixie wedges into Chloe's side, and Chloe wedges into his, and a strange pain seizes his chest as he glances down at them before turning his attention to the unwashed masses. All the lovers. All the lovers with children. He supposes it's what others have seen when they've looked at him with Chloe, and even the child. Though he's much better dressed than all the other blokes here. And he'd never procreate.

Linda used a word in his last session that he does not dare say aloud. But somewhere, deep under his rib cage, it beats like a drum: family. He has a family, possibly, one he's made, or at least
happened upon. Sticky, manipulative urchin, included. And spinning out from the hub of this web are friends—real ones, not people looking for a favor or a good time or even to repay a debt.

He's never felt like he does now, strong, yet exposed. There is nothing he wouldn't do to protect his web. Well, except for the one thing he should do, which is walk away. Lucifer can't allow their world to become dangerous because of his divinity, and yet he's too weak—too soft—to leave. He looks up at the clear blue sky and wonders how long he has until Amenadiel returns to shove him back where he belongs. If not Amenadiel, then another sibling, then, no doubt heavenbent on carrying out Dad's unknown and unknowable Plan.

A kiss to his cheek stirs him from his thoughts. He looks down at Chloe and arches a brow at her mischievous grin.

"Let's go on one more ride," she says, seemingly recovered after a rest.

His eyes narrow. "What ride?"

"Jurassic Park."

Trixie whoops on Chloe's other side and springs to her feet, weariness forgotten.

"That's the water ride, isn't it?" Lucifer despairs.

"You usually don't mind getting wet," Chloe replies, a twinkle in her eye.

"Yes, and you'll notice I don't wear Armani during"—he glances at Trixie—"that activity, either."

Trixie comes around and grabs his hand before he can stop her. "Pleeease." She unleashes puppy dog eyes and the pout he taught her.

He stares at her and tries, half-heartedly, to shake off her hand, which she clutches all the more tightly. "Urchin, do you have any idea how many souls have pleaded with me over the eons?" He whines, "Please, my lord. Please, my king. Boo. Hoo."

Trixie giggles, while Chloe's face goes slack with her horror. A month ago, he would have worried such casual references to his former career would be the end of them. Now, he takes pleasure in rocking her world. In more ways than one. She said she wanted the Devil.

The ten-year-old turns pensive, her brows furrowing like her mother's. "What if we make a deal?"

"Well. Now you're talking my language, aren't you? One of them, anyhow." He smirks and crosses his legs. "How much is this Jurassic Park ride worth to the Decker women?"

***

In soaked clothes, they pick up burgers on the way back to Chloe's, where they dry off and pig out. Chocolate cake is doled out during Scattergories, a game Lucifer quickly comes to like as he handily wins every round. When the hour grows late, he haunts the door to Trixie's room and watches as Chloe helps her daughter pack for camp and braids freshly-showered hair and dims lights in a practiced routine. It's all very human, and he's very not, and very uncomfortable for it, and yet damned if it doesn't make him think of his mum and those charred cheesy noodles he forced down his throat. Good thing he worked out his gag reflex eons ago.
"What have you been reading with Dad lately?" Chloe asks when the child is tucked into bed.

"Holes!"

Lucifer looks up from his phone. "Gosh, I bet that's not as interesting as it sounds."

Chloe gives him a wry look.

"It's really good," Trixie gushes, oblivious to the innuendo, as she clutches a hardback. "It's about a boy who gets into trouble for something he didn't do. He gets sent to a really bad place with mean people."

"Oddly relatable."

"But it's not what you think," Trixie continues, so awed by the book that she sits up, casting aside blankets. "Everybody's mean because they're all hurt. They do bad things, but they're not bad people."

"Good people don't do bad things, child. Not truly."

Chloe tilts her head and narrows her eyes at him. "Maybe we should read a little together?"

"Yes!" Trixie hollers. "I get to read!"

"She's going to read?" Lucifer asks, horrified.

"Yep," Chloe says, patting his shoulder as she passes him. "She's started reading to us."

They move to the couch, where there's enough room for the three of them. Chloe draws a blue throw and a fleecy yellow blanket over them. Both smell clean, of laundry detergent and the Decker home. It's free from ash.

Trixie's squeaky child voice lays waste to the narrative, which already leaves much to be desired. Hard labor over stolen shoes? Not for the first time he wonders if writers are possessed.

"Don't you do any voices?" Lucifer complains, his stubble catching on the fleecy blanket.

"Lucifer, she's ten." Chloe's shoulders shake with her amusement as she touches her daughter's hair. "You're doing great, baby."

But he only survives a few more minutes.

"Hand it here, urchin. Won't be the first time I've brought labor camps to life."

They howl with laughter as he gives each character a different accent and when he pitches his voice high for the female Warden. He frowns as the book meanders through injustice, abuse, racism, and murder. Lucifer shakes his head. And Chloe worries about swearing.

"I can't believe I never saw this book in Hell," he comments, turning a page. He glances down and his breath catches at the sleeping woman on his right, and the sleeping girl on his left. "I'll be damned," he whispers, even as he feels quite the opposite.

The back door opens, and Isabel Espinoza sweeps inside, dark and bedecked in lace. Neither Trixie nor Chloe stirs. Izzy stands at the foot of the stairwell and smirks at him.

"What, witch?"
"Oh, nothing, Devil," she says, and wanders upstairs on silent feet.

As the Decker women sink further into sleep against Lucifer, he crosses his ankles and closes the book and his eyes. And he thinks, idly, that he could take a bullet and not lose a drop of blood.

Chapter End Notes

1. Vous vous foutez de ma gueule = "Are you fucking kidding me?" (return)

Thanks to Obli and Yah, as well as GlitchedMindy for the French lesson.
Lucifer leans his head against the passenger window and stares at the dry, rolling hills which surround Lockport Storage. A strong, chemical "new car smell" wafts up from the gray leather-and-plastic interior of the nondescript Toyota they rented for the stakeout. Like a torture straight from Hell, they've another three hours until Narco Nando's intel proves useful—or utterly worthless. Chloe wanted to scout the area and watch for signs of early activity, and so they've sat—and will sit—in this bloody cramped car that doesn't fit Lucifer's stature or mood.

"Nothing on their end yet," Chloe announces, setting her phone down.

Their end, being Dan and Maze's at The Tigress strip club. Well, Daniel's, anyway, poor sod. Maze refused to join him until closer to the time Nando said the exchange would open up. Clever demon.

"Of course there isn't anything happening on their end, Detective. Bad guys aren't going to flood a nudie bar with cash at this hour." He shakes his head at her naiveté. "We should have taken the club, though. At least that would have had interesting views. Not to mention stripper gossip is juicy."

Chloe rolls her eyes before twisting around and diving toward the backseat of the car. Lucifer glances at the duty belt at her waist, where a gun—a legal one—and Taser are holstered, before gazing appreciatively at her curves. When she reemerges and settles in her seat again, she holds aloft a granola bar and a bag of cool ranch puffs.

"You're getting cranky. Here." Her eyes twinkle as she holds out the granola bar.

"Not a chance," he snorts, and snags the bag of crisps from her other hand. Several moments later, he hums in satisfaction as the salt and seasoning hit his tongue, and the corn puff melts. He will never tire of Earth's mundane little pleasures.

From the corner of his eye, he catches Chloe watching him and turns. "What?"

"I just like working with you," she says, shrugging.

The crisp bag crinkles as he relaxes and rests his hand to his lap. "And I you, Detective."

Her mouth twitches, lifting in one of those soft smiles where he knows she's trying not to laugh at how absurd and improbable their partnership is. She turns her attention back to Lockport Storage, her angular profile as sharp as her focus.

***

Every hour crawls, each one more punishing than the last, making Lucifer regret the promise he made long ago not to play on his phone during stakeouts. What was he thinking?

The business is clearly a front, at least by his approximation. Nothing more than a yawning plot of lifeless land in a valley no one visits. From where they're stationed at a nearby, twenty-four-hour tow service's slightly elevated, and no less dead, lot, the RVs, mini trucks, and motorboats parked
haphazardly at Lockport Storage are a white-and-tan sea reflecting bright daylight. In the center of
the Lockport property stands a squat office building and several rows of green-doored self-storage
units. Nothing has stirred since they came here—no entering, no exiting, no movement.

Not exactly riveting entertainment.

"I have to stretch my legs," Lucifer gripes, one hand drifting to the door handle.

"It's"—Chloe glances at the dashboard clock—"only fifteen minutes until showtime."

"Exactly. I've been in this bloody car for six hours."

"I'd really rather you stay in the car. Shayna and her people could show and look our way."

"Yes, and while I appreciate the concern, Detective, I am not a sardine." He rolls his eyes. "Don't
worry. I'll be inconspicuous."

Chloe looks him up and down. "That is literally impossible in what you're wearing."

"Oh. Want me to wear less, do you?" He smirks, seeing a path to victory. "I'm not sure the seats go
back far enough, darling, but..."

"Just get out of the damn car."

Too easy.

Lucifer laughs and unfolds from the tight confines of the Toyota like a caterpillar stretching free
from his cocoon. Outside, he breathes in the hot, arid breeze and smells smoke from one of several
distant wildfires. It reminds him, eerily, of Hell.

True to his word, he wanders to the boot of the car, which faces away from Lockport Storage.
Leaning his back low against the vehicle, he draws out his cigarette case and lights up. The
nicotine does little for him, but the cigarette gives him something to do with his hands. Somewhere
to focus the nervous energy.

If they face Shayna de la Cruz today, he's uncertain of what he'll do. He doesn't want to wield Hell
—it doesn't quite mesh with how he sees himself now—but the cupidity for punishing evil still
burns within him.

He stamps out his cigarette and returns to the passenger seat.

"Good timing," Chloe says. "They should be here any minute now. Feel better?"

Instead of answering her question, he counters, "You don't happen to have a single malt in that little
box of goodies, do you? I could really—"

Something buzzes by his ear. Lucifer jerks back.

"Whoa," Chloe says, jerking back with him. "What's wrong?"

"I believe there's a bee, Detective."

Chloe snorts. "You believe there is?"

Lucifer stares at her, appalled. "Have you been drinking?"
She rolls her eyes. "Oh, I hear him. You must have let him in."

Another droning hum sounds next to his ear as the insect dives toward his head. "Bloody hell!" Lucifer curses, swatting the air.

Chloe lets out a giggle. "Maybe he likes your pomade."

"Yes, well, it has bloody good taste, but—" He yelps as the bee pings into his knuckles.

"Wait, are you—" Chloe snickers. "Are you afraid of bees?"

"Well, I don't like spending time with them, if that's what you're asking."

He reaches for the door handle again, but Chloe dives forward and grabs his hand. "Don't go running off! It's way too close to the pick-up opening. Just...calm down. We'll get the bee out."

"You don't understand, Detective. I've never been stung before—not like this!" He waves his hands frantically and gives her a panicked look. "What if I'm allergic with you around?"

"Can you bee allergic?" Chloe asks, emphasizing the word. She bites her lip to contain laughter.

"This isn't funny!"

"It kinda is...honey."

He gives her a poisonous look, right when the bee decides to land directly on his hair and walk through the strands. A shiver skitters down Lucifer's spine one microsecond before he launches into full-body flailing, wriggling in his seat while stuffing fingers into his hair and ruffling the locks.

"Lucifer!" Chloe gasps. "Don't swipe at him like that. You could hurt his wings!"

"That's the whole bloody point!" he cries, shaking his head as though he's a wet dog.

"He'll die if he can't fly," she argues, putting her hands on his upraised wrists.

"Oh, what rubbish," Lucifer says, though he stills under her touch. "Being wingless isn't so bad. It'll be a bit hobbled, but it'll get used to it."

The bee lands on Chloe's left forearm and walks through faint, golden hairs. "See?" Chloe whispers. "Just a honeybee. Relax. We need this guy."

"It'll sting you."

"He won't. Not unless I upset him."

Slowly, very slowly, Chloe turns her body, shifting her arm toward the driver's side door. She pushes the door open a few inches and snakes her arm outside. With a gentle shake to the limb, the bee goes flying into the great unknown. Chloe pulls the door closed as quietly as possible, her eyes fixed on Lockport Storage for any signs of trouble, of which there aren't any.

All fires duly put out, she turns to Lucifer. "Come here," she says with a soft snicker, her hands lifting to his hair. "Who knew the Devil would be so afraid of a little honeybee?"

Lucifer bends his head toward her. "I wasn't afraid, Detective. Just a bit worried."
"Uh-huh."

He sighs, his eyes closing as her fingers straighten his mussed hair.

"Lucifer?"

"Mm?"

"What was so bad about having wings before? Why'd you... Why'd you cut them off?"

He swallows hard as her hands drop and shifts in his seat, uncomfortable with the question, unsure of the answer. For a long time, he says nothing as he tries to make sense of the snarled knot that is his life's history.

Finally, he says, "You have to understand, Dad orchestrated your existence, and we—my siblings and I—aided your development. Most of my brothers and sisters..." He pauses, remembering the great hubbub in the Hall of Being, where the entire universe containing Earth could be fast-traveled to and tinkered with from a bird's eye view. "Mostly, they're in charge of right boring tasks. Vital things, but boring."

"Like what?"

"Bloody pollinating insect management, for one. Tectonic plate shifts. That sort of thing. Most of it is automated by nature of the planet's environment, but it's given a nudge from time to time, especially in the early days."

Chloe's eyes are wide. "Right."

"But I... Well, I was in charge of light and desire, and that eventually put me in direct contact with you lot. Even back before you had proper language. When it was just grunts and miming."

"Wait, do you, like, speak that?" He lets out a simple grunt in the affirmative, his lips jutting out like a gorilla's, and Chloe howls with laughter. "Oh my God."

"Oh, Dad never spoke that," he chuckles bitterly. "Too far beneath him."

"Why even create us then?" she asks, staring at the sea of RVs.

Lucifer scoffs. "Your guess is as good as mine, Detective." He sighs. "At any rate, things changed when he started making plans for me to test you later, to put the unworthy on a path toward Hell—a place none of us knew much about, mind you. All we knew was it was...well, let's say undesirable." He shrugs a shoulder. "When I refused, he put me with the misfits in Hell to think about what I'd done, I suppose.

"I tried to understand what he wanted from me—tried to become what he wanted, in the capacity I could. But...I don't actually know if I did. I don't know how any of it works, or why. All I knew when I left for good was that I didn't feel..."

"Didn't feel what?" Chloe prompts, when he's quiet for too long.

"I wasn't his anymore," Lucifer says, looking at her. "Or I didn't want to be, at least. I wasn't like my siblings. I was only the Devil I'd become. But I didn't want to be that, either. Not truly. So I became..."

"Lucifer Morningstar," she says, her voice soft.
"Yes. Not quite angelic, not quite devilish, not quite human. My own man. The wings didn't fit with that. The wings were his."

Lucifer scowls at the hills. Is he really his own man, if he only defines himself by what he's not? He wants to be good, but what does that entail when there are still evil people who deserve punishment, when corrupt human law fails, time and again?

Chloe's hand slips into his and squeezes his fingers. "I like who you are," she says. "You frustrate the"—she glances at him sheepishly—"hell out of me sometimes, but I wouldn't change you. I don't think about your dad when I look at you."

"I should hope not," he jokes, but the delivery is all wrong.

"I like your wings," she says, a slight blush rising to her cheeks.

"I've noticed."

"I like your devil face."

His jaw tightens. "No one likes that face."

"I could."

"No." He looks away, his throat tight. "You couldn't." He hasn't forgotten how she looked at him in that form. Shocked. Afraid. But most of all, as if he were alien. And he is, isn't he? That's what Hell made him.

But she kissed him in that form, too, in spite of it. He hasn't forgotten that, either.

"Maybe you should let me try." She squeezes his fingers again. "The point is, I know who I'm with, and I like you."

"I believe you," he says, and the truth of her affection unravels some old, unnamed hurt. Letting out an unsteady breath, he looks out over Lockport. "They're late. If that little imp gave us bad information..."

"Let's give it another hour."

***

The sun climbs higher in the sky, and no one visits Lockport Storage.

Chloe frowns at her phone. "Dan says two men are being taken to the back of The Tigress. Could be money hand-offs."

"I'm sure Maze will get them into the back," Lucifer replies with a slight grin.

"Probably. No sign yet of anyone who fits Portillo's description of Shayna."

"Well, then, fancy a visit to Nando's? Because our location has given up the ghost."

She shakes her head, fingers rapping against her thighs. "There could be something here that could give us a clue about what's up." She frowns. "There's got to be, or we're stuck again. We don't know where the next exchange will take place. I think we need to get into that office building."
"You wouldn't let me get out when a bloody bee was attacking my person, but now you want us to go down into the lion's den?"

"I thought they'd show," she says, shrugging a shoulder. "One of us should stay back while the other goes in. And by one of us staying back, I mean you."

"Don't be absurd," Lucifer barks. "You can't go in there alone. You need me to unlock doors."

Chloe's expression turns sheepish. "Actually, I don't."

"Since when?"

"Since always. Mom taught me how to pick most locks with a credit card after I kept locking myself out as a teenager and having to call a locksmith. I just...don't like doing it."

"Mischievous Mama Decker," Lucifer says with an appreciative grin.

Chloe looks back to Lockport Storage. "We need intel, and one of us has to keep an eye out for incoming traffic."

"Lovely. It should be you. From this distance, I'll be immortal if I encounter any degenerates."

"Lucifer," Chloe says, putting a hand on his forearm, "it has to be me. She gives him a gentle, fond smile. "You're not exactly used to being subtle. There are probably cameras to dodge, and you won't know what to look for."

"Tell me what to look for, and I'll look for it," he groused.

But she's already stuffing into her pocket those infuriating nitrile gloves from the box she put in the backseat. "I'll have my phone on silent," she says. "I'll check it every thirty seconds to a minute. I'll text you if I find something, and you text me if you see anything. No calls."

Don't go, he thinks. He says, "You're sure you'll be all right?"

"I'll be fine. I've done things like this on my own before." She grins. "Anyway, the Devil's got my back, right?"

"Always, Detective."

She leans over and gives him a quick peck on the lips. "Back in a bit."

Lucifer watches the road without blinking as Chloe scurries down the hill the tow lot is on and crosses to Lockport Storage. When she makes it to the garish, arched pinewood entrance, she slithers along one side of it, likely to avoid a camera's viewing angle. He grins despite his trepidation. Funny thing about detective work is it often looks quite a lot like someone up to no good.

When she passes into the storage lot and out of sight, Lucifer climbs out of the car once more. Damned if he's going to waste any time getting to her if she needs him.

He divides his attention equally between the road and his phone. Looking for cars, for people. Waiting for texts.

Several minutes pass, each one a greater agony than the hours wasted before.

Finally, his phone vibrates.
Chloe: Look what I found

Attached to the text is an image from a dark closet, where she was forced to use her camera's flash. Inside the closet are stacks of boxes, the topmost of which she's opened to show bundles of heroin, each one stamped with a blue frog. He texts back quickly.

Lucifer: No firefly logo

Chloe: Nope

She goes silent again, and this time he allows himself to relax a little. The detective knows what she's doing. She was doing this long before they met.

Have faith, he commands himself wryly.

But at some point, he realizes he's pacing and forces himself to stop. When he can't take it anymore, he messages her.

Lucifer: ok?

Thirty seconds pass. A minute. Two.

Lucifer: Chloe?

She's supposed to be checking her phone.

Chloe: Don't panic

Lucifer: ??

Chloe: Someone's here, but I'm safe. Hidden. I don't need you to come down

"Shit," he mutters, glaring at the quiet lot.

Lucifer: who's there?

Chloe: De la Cruz people

His wings unfurl with a hard snap and settle close to his back. Feathers ruffle with his concern.

Chloe: They knew we were coming

Lucifer's mind races with the beat of his heart. There were a dozen people at Fernando Portillo's house; one of them must have squealed. And they'll squeal again when he sees them next. He'll make sure of it.

Lucifer: I'm getting you out

Chloe: Not yet

Grunting in frustration, Lucifer slams his cell phone to the bonnet of the Toyota. Bowing his head, he closes his eyes and prays, Amenadiel. Brother. Could use a favor right about now. Will make it worth your while.

How, he doesn't know. What does one get for the angel who has everything? But he'll think of
something.

He cracks open an eye, hoping to see Amenadiel's ugly dress and holier-than-thou glower. But his brother doesn't appear or bother to reply.

You're on your own, he thinks. Bloody typical.

But also not quite true. He has a demon and humans—not as useful as even a mildly sympathetic celestial in times of trouble, but admittedly far less annoying. Snagging his phone once more, he checks for more messages from Chloe before sending texts to Maze, Dan, and Ella. His phone vibrates with several replies at once.

Before he has time to open the first message, a gunshot rings out, echoing across the valley and in his skull.

There's no conscious thought to his flight, no hesitation at all. One second, he stands in a tow lot. In the next, he lands behind Lockport's white-paneled office building, dust kicking up around his black leather shoes.

People turn toward him, guns raised. He sees Chloe first, weaponless and stood rigidly ten meters to his right, with a pistol pressed to her temple. She looks at him, her eyes filled with fear and remorse. Lucifer follows the barrel of the gun to the hand that holds it, to the wrist, the arm, all the way up to John Barrow's long, familiar face.

"Step away, and you might survive this encounter," Lucifer says, his gaze sharp as his fingers brush at his cufflinks.

"You don't have bargaining chips here," a sultry, female voice replies with a chuckle.

Lucifer finally takes in the scene around them. They're surrounded by men with guns, at least a dozen, none of whom seem shocked to see angel wings, though a few faces are slackened by something akin to wonder. It's the woman he homes in on. Her arms are locked straight. Her hands steady a pistol aimed directly at him.

"Ah. You must be Shayna de la Cruz," Lucifer says, each word clipped with anger. "Part-time murderer for Daddy dearest, full-time thorn in my side."

The leather-clad woman's bright red lips curve upwards. "Move a muscle, and I shoot you." Her eyes flick to Chloe. "Then I kill Detective Decker and drop her body, oh, about fifty meters away, and you heal miraculously. That's how this works, right?"

Yes, but how does she know that?

"Surely killing us isn't what you really want," he says, his words dripping with honey. "But there must be something you desire. What might that be?"

Shayna averts her gaze in the last moment, tearing herself free from his power's grip. A sickening chill sweeps through Lucifer, leaving him exposed as other. For a split second, he's elsewhere, caged in an abandoned warehouse freezer, speaking to a disturbed killer who knows all his tricks.

"What I want is more of those pretty feathers," Shayna answers. "But something tells me you're not going to just give them to me."

"What if we make a deal?" Chloe asks, her voice quavering. "No one has to know about today. We're not with the police."
"Yes," Lucifer agrees, "and angel feathers aren't the only supernatural ingredient you might use in your little concoctions. I have many such ingredients in my possession. Real things with real power. Let us leave here, and they're yours."

"Sorry," Shayna chuckles, "I'm not dumb enough to make a deal with someone who might actually be the Devil."

Lucifer's muscles twitch beneath his three-piece suit. For a moment, he considers stripping away his face and showing her *exactly* who he is, but how many fingers would tug on triggers? Would Barrow fire his gun?

"No *might* be about it," Lucifer snarls. "I *am* the Devil, so perhaps you should tread carefully. After all, you don't actually think you're going to Heaven, now, do you? Not with all that *guilt* on your conscience. Whatever happens here, we'll meet again, you and I."

The barrel of Shayna's gun shifts to and fro as she trembles. "God decides my fate."

Lucifer wheezes a laugh, bitter mirth rising like poison to his tongue. "You believe that? Oh, no, no, no, my dear. Dad wouldn't dare concern himself with one little soul—not when there are billions of you. All that nasty, cruel business he leaves to his children. Of course, you'd know all about that, wouldn't you?

"That's the best part, Shayna. *You* decide your fate. And, oh, the wages of your sin are written all over you. How many is it? How many have you made suffer for dear old Dad?"

"Stop talking."

"Make a deal with me, and your hands will be a little less bloody. You want freedom? I'll bankroll it. A new name, a new life? I can give that to you if you let us go."

"I told you to stop talking!" she yells.

"Shayna," he purrs. "Look at me."

She squeezes her eyes shut. "No!"

Shayna de la Cruz pulls the trigger. The round explodes, darting through the air. There's no time for prayers to Amenadiel. Lucifer's muscles bunch beneath the soft fabric of his fine clothes, awaiting impact.

But the bullet never lands.

Something pulls at his gut, a sharp tug on the very threads of his being that leaves him gasping in pain. A beam of light streams from the right. Somewhere, a man screams as it cuts through the space like the flaming sword tore through the world. The light consumes the bullet in midair, melting it. Metallic liquid spills to the dry, thirsty earth and disappears.

Lucifer looks at Chloe in shock. She stares back with glazed eyes, one hand lifted slightly. A thin rope of light, as unbearably white as a noonday sun, tethers them to one another. Spectral colors spill from her hands, painting kaleidoscopic patterns on the yellow grass. At her side, Barrow still holds her hostage, but is so unnerved that his pistol has drifted down to her neck.

The past rewrites itself on Lucifer's heart. He really *is* here for Chloe Jane Decker. He must be. But Lucifer loses his train of thought when he sees bright, red blood snaking from her nose.
"Chloe, let go."

His words wake the humans from their awed stupor.

Before Lucifer can stop it, Shayna fires again—but not at him.

The bullet drills into Chloe's forehead. Barrow drops her and scurries away, cursing at Shayna for shooting so close to his head. The light connecting Chloe to Lucifer snaps back into his body like a rubber band as her legs crumple beneath her.

She never touches the earth as Lucifer sweeps in, heedless of all else. He draws her to him and takes to the air. Bullets hit him as he soars, stinging, but never sinking into his flesh.

He's immortal.

He refuses to speculate why.

Blood streams down the hills and valleys of Chloe's face. Where he clutches her head to his shoulder, it slicks his fingers, his hand, his wrist, staining cotton and wool. He lands, stumbling, on a small hill, and rests her on the hot earth. Her bright blue eyes stare and stare and stare. Why did he let her rush in? They don't do that. But she did it for him, didn't she? And that's worse, so much worse.

"Chloe," he begs, and yanks a feather from a wing.

He presses the feather to the weeping wound in her forehead and watches the fine, soft barbules sink into the blood. His heart hammers, willing resurrection. Let there be light. Let there be light. Let there be light. But it's only a useless, white feather, painted crimson. Lucifer plucks a second feather, a third, a fourth.

She doesn't wake.

"Chloe," he whispers. "You can't go yet."

She's silent. The dead always are.

Weeping, he draws her limp body to his chest, his legs and wings encircling them, as if they might fall together into some other space and time. Pulling her hand to his lips, he kisses her fingers over and over, in grief and gratitude. "I should have told you," he whispers. "Why didn't I tell you?"

He looks up at the sky through tears, his face burned red by her blood. Above, the sky dares to be blue and cushioned by cumulus, as if the world hasn't just cracked open beneath his feet.

"Dad," Lucifer cries. "Please." Please give her back. Please take him up. Please something. Because not having her soul next to his simply doesn't make sense.

But the heavens are silent. If God hears Lucifer's prayers, he does not speak. Lucifer should be used to the silence by now, but it scalds his flesh every time. Now, he's not even sure he has any flesh left.

He rocks back and forth, wailing into golden tresses, mumbling in dead tongues that taste like ash.

His gasps draw up short as cold chains wrap around his throat like fingers made of ice. A needle presses into his arm, and more ice spreads through his veins, turning him blissfully numb. As he falls, he sees Chloe, her lovely face bathed in blood and feathers.
Welcome to the worst cliffhanger ever. I'm going to be in Australia for two weeks, starting tomorrow, but rest assured I'll try to keep to the usual posting schedule.

Thanks to Obli and Yah for beta'ing, brainstorming, and memes.
So, uh, hey. My trip was a little busier than I anticipated, but I'm back now! Enjoy the new chapter!

Amenadiel stares, wide-eyed, into the face of God. "Forgive me, Father. I thought—"

"Stop." God tosses Amenadiel's wrist aside with a grunt. Sitting up, he swings his long legs over the side of the cot, looking old and harried. Glory doesn't roll off of him like it once did. "Is it finished?" he asks.

"Is what finished?" Amenadiel replies dully.

"That's the only reason I was to be woken," God snaps. His dark eyes sweep over the ethereally-lit workshop before returning to his firstborn. "If Gabriel or Uriel didn't send you, you have no purpose here."

Uriel. Alarm bells ring in Amenadiel's skull. He never considered his father might not know. For perhaps the first time in his very long life, he is struck with true fear for his outcast little brother.

"I-I've been worried about you, Father."

And confused. Questions boil within him.

"Worried about me," God echoes.

"No one's spoken to you, heard from you, seen you..."

God stares at him, and Amenadiel stares back, covert feathers trembling at his back. To look into the eyes of God is to see eternity itself, to know how very small even angels are in the grand scheme of Creation. Amenadiel wants to look away, but can't, and instead feels as though his skin is being peeled back, his bones picked clean, until all his secrets, all his many sins, are laid bare. But then his father blinks, and the sensation passes, and eternity narrows into the present. Amenadiel draws air into his lungs.

"Did it not occur to you that I didn't want to be spoken to, or heard from, or seen?" God says, and Amenadiel bows his head. "Well, I'm awake now," his father continues with a huff. "You might as well bring Gabriel and Uriel to me. At least I can get an update before I go back to sleep."

"I can get Gabriel. He's downstairs," Amenadiel hedges, scratching behind an ear.

"And where's Uriel?"

"He isn't... He's not here, Father."

He's not anywhere.
"Well, find him. Bring him to me."

"I...can't."

"What do you mean you can't?" says God. "Oh, for my sake. Bring me Michael, then. He'll find your brother." He waves a hand, dismissing him. "On your way out, tell Gabriel to come see me."

"Father..." Even now, after many months have passed, the truth has a way of getting stuck in his throat. "Uri... He's dead." Lest his father wrongly believe Uriel is simply resting in some heavenly apartment, he clarifies, "His soul was destroyed."

God stills, his gaze turning into a thousand-yard stare, the sharp angles of his lightly wrinkled face slackened by shock. Then, suddenly, he releases a hard, bitter laugh. "Hah. I suppose not even Uriel could escape Murphy's law." He looks over his workshop again. "Well, that's it, then."

"Father?" Amenadiel asks, uncertain.

Ignoring him, God lifts a hand and snaps his fingers. The door to the workshop swings open at once, and cherubim fly into the room, their saucer eyes filled with excitement in their round faces. To be summoned by God himself is a great honor—and a very rare one, recently.

"Wine," God demands, and the cherubim bow in midair and flutter from the room. "And bring the bottle!" he shouts at their stubby, retreating wings.

"Father—"

"Not until my wine's here."

Amenadiel didn't even know his father drank, but he subsides with a nod.

God rises, long purple and white robes swishing as he wanders, barefoot, to his worktable. Scowling at Earth, he reaches into the holographic display and pulls at the planet's edges, zooming in on the emerald and azure—and then some more, until city skyscrapers become visible on one side of the planet, while city lights sparkle on the other. Bizarrely, Amenadiel is reminded of Google Maps and is impressed again by how much humans have accomplished, gentle nudges from Heaven notwithstanding.

"At least they haven't destroyed everything," God mutters to himself. "Yet."

Amenadiel stands beside the cot, uncomfortable and uncertain if he's still dismissed.

The cherubim return, wobbling with their burdens. One holds a wine glass filigreed with gold, the other an uncorked bottle of red. They present both to their lord, who pays them no mind. With another, deeper bow, they rush from the room. Cherubim are simple creatures who know only how to serve, and the best servants are seen only when needed.

Setting aside the glass, God drinks straight from the bottle. "So," he says after a long pull, "Uriel's dead." He holds out a hand. "Explain."

What would Lucifer do? After a pause, Amenadiel says, "Uri stole Azrael's blade."

"So your sister killed him," God concludes with a nod. "Your brother should have seen that one coming."

The urge to lie is there, no matter how foolish. And the reality of that feeling chills Amenadiel, for
what can it mean other than he has chosen a side, the wrong one, the one they have always assumed was evil? He knows all too well what happens when sides are chosen in Heaven. Remembers fields coated with blood and feathers, the joy and pain of surviving a civil war—surviving, only, because no one truly wins a civil war.

"Azrael... didn't kill him," he finally says. He's not even certain his sister knows her infamous blade was taken from her collection.

"So he was killed," God says. "Who did it, then, and why?"

There's that word again. Why?

Amenadiel looks away. In his mind's eye, all he can see is Lucifer's stiff back as he tells Amenadiel his old apartment is waiting for him, should he desire it. Part of a deal, and the Devil doesn't break those. But Amenadiel now knows kindness when he sees it. Wishes he had accepted it, wishes he had never returned to the Silver City at all.

God rests his wine bottle on the worktable, his fingers tight around the skinny neck. He leans forward and fixes Amenadiel with a raptor's stare. "Amenadiel. Who killed him?"

For a moment, they are still, the projected lights of God's human experiment casting colors across their faces and the workshop.

"When you sent Uriel to collect Mom, I don't—"

"What does your mother have to do with this?" God interrupts, taking a step closer to his firstborn, his gaze narrowing.

"The deal you made," Amenadiel rushes to say. "With Lucifer."

His father reels back, surprised, and barks a laugh. "What convoluted story has Samael come up with to shirk his duties?"

"It's not like that, Father."

"Think, son. Why would I make a deal with your brother? And over your mother?" He scoffs.

"But..." Amenadiel glances at the cot his father has been resting on. "You saved Chloe on the condition that Lucifer would return Mom to Hell... Didn't you?"

"Your mother's escaped Hell?" God glances at Earth, concerned. "Oh, that's not good. Has she started another plague?"

"No. It's-it's okay," Amenadiel says. "Lucifer used the flaming sword to give Mom her own universe."

The raptor's stare returns, swiveling back onto Amenadiel. "Samael can't have that sword."

"He destroyed it."

"Well. And Uriel, it would seem."

Amenadiel swallows, realizing he's said as much without meaning to. "Lucifer didn't know what else to do, Father. I believe he is truly remorseful. But he doesn't think clearly when it comes to Chloe. Uriel tried to make him choose between Mom's life and Chloe's, and... he couldn't."
Turning away, God grabs a stool from a corner. He drags it to his workbench, the wooden legs scraping loudly. Plopping down on the wooden seat, he holds his wine bottle between his knees. "Who is this Chloe?" he asks wearily.

This time, Amenadiel is the one to reel back, not simply from the sudden change in topic, but from the question itself. "The daughter of the woman Gabriel instructed me to bless—Penelope Decker. I spoke the Word over her. You did want that, didn't you?"

"Ah. Yes, yes. I gave Gabriel the Word to give to you. Went to sleep around that time, though." God nods and swigs his wine. "And how has this child turned out?"

"She's good, Father. You'd like her. She's a police detective."

A grimace twists at his father's mouth. "Nothing more than that yet?"

"Uh, she's a mom?" Amenadiel guesses with a bewildered shake of his head.

"I see. And what's your wayward brother got to do with her?" God frowns. "It's your job to keep him in Hell, you know. Someone's got to make sure none of the creatures escape."

"Wait. You—" Amenadiel blinks, confused. "You didn't make Chloe for Lucifer?"

God coughs and spits wine back into his bottle. "What, as a wife?"

"I...don't think it's that serious yet."

The laughter that pours from God is so hearty and deep that the walls of the Great Tower seem to tremble beneath his amusement. "You think I made a girlfriend for Samael?" He laughs more and wipes tears from his eyes.

"I don't understand," Amenadiel complains, and begins to pace the long length of the worktable.

"Well," God chuckles, "there's no sense in fretting. With Uriel dead, there's no point anymore. It's all a mess. No fixing any of it. He was the linchpin." He huffs a breath through his nose. "Of course Samael would get in the way of things." He shakes his head and rolls his eyes. "Always his mother's son."

Amenadiel halts and turns on his father. Suddenly, he can't take it anymore, and questions burst from him. "What do you mean by that? What do you mean by any of this?" he shouts, and his wings stretch with his frustration. "Why have you been sleeping?" he dares to ask, using that ancient, forbidden word. "Father, the humans have needed you."

I've needed you, he thinks.

"I doubt that," God sighs, seemingly unbothered by his son's impertinence. "And even if they did, who's to say my meddling would do any good?"

"But you're God."

"Pah. I'm a washed-up artist is what I am."

"But—"

"Long story. One I'm not interested in telling."

"Please, Father," Amenadiel begs. "I want to understand."
His father's face softens, and for a moment he isn't this haggard, embittered soul, nursing a near-empty bottle of wine. He's gentle, as in the early days of Creation. "Haven't you heard ignorance is bliss, my son?"

Amenadiel straightens and lifts his chin. "As your firstborn and favorite son, I believe I have a right to know. How else am I to serve you?"

"Favorite son?" God tilts his head, and light catches on a streak of gray amid his black curls. "Who told you that?"

"I read it," Amenadiel says, his shoulders already beginning to sag. "In a Sumerian text. The one that told us how to construct the flaming sword." He touches the metal rod at his chest. For so many days and nights, it was his only comfort when he was powerless. "This is the only remaining piece."

"Ah, I see. A human text told you that." A thin, unkind smile turns God's mouth. It's the cruel smile Lucifer inherited, a knife that gleams before its finishing cut. "How many times have I told you, son? You mustn't believe everything the humans write."

Amenadiel's wings tuck close to his back as pain and anger bloom within him. "I have been your loyal soldier from the very beginning," he says, his voice quavering. "Does that count for nothing?"

All the things he's done, all the detestable things, to obey what he believed must be right and good, no matter how he felt about his actions.

God lifts his wine bottle, only to scowl and shrug when he notices he's drained it. "You were made to be used."

"And you think you can use us, however you want," Amenadiel accuses, knowing his words are true and blasphemous, an echo of Lucifer's eons-old rebellion.

"I can," God says. "For I am the Lord."

"But you gave us free will," Amenadiel argues. "I know that now."

"I never said otherwise. Free will was never what separated you and your siblings from my other creations. It was always your purpose that separated you." He glances at the holographic display beside them. "They have to make their own. Far as I can tell, most of them are still too primitive to figure that out, and end up miserable because of it, so consider yourself lucky to be blessed out of the gate."

"But why give us freedom of choice if you won't tolerate our choices? Why give us the ability to-to change ourselves?" he says, patting his chest with open palms as he remembers the agony and shame of losing his feathers.

"You needed a good, built-in punishment and reward system. Nothing more or less. And I do tolerate your choices, son—all the time. I give very few orders."

"You don't tolerate disobedience, Father."

Reaching for Earth, God zooms out from the planet and sets the display to spin gently. "Honor thy father," he says wryly.

"Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath," Amenadiel quotes, and though his little brother is
living and loving in a distant universe, Amenadiel feels the Devil at his back. He steps closer to God, fists at his sides. "Was Samael lucky when you sent him to Hell for rejecting his purpose?"

God's face hardens, and silence screams in the workshop. It's broken when his father's hand sweeps to the side, raking the wine bottle from the edge of the worktable. The bottle flies across the room and crashes against a wall of scroll-laden shelves. Shards of glass rain down in a fine dust.

"You're a fool who speaks of things you cannot possibly understand," God says, pressing that final inch into his son's space.

They're of a similar height, and Amenadiel smells the alcohol on his father's breath. "Then teach me," he demands, staring into an eternal gaze.

"Fool," God says again, and his hands dart forward to grab Amenadiel's smooth head. Fingers dig into flesh, as if intending to crush bone. The pressure stops on the edge of pain.

Wind swirls around them, a twister tugging at their robes. Scrolls fly from shelves. And Amenadiel's wings spread wide when he senses the floor disappear from beneath his feet. Like a drowning man, he scrambles for purchase to stay afloat and clutches at forearms corded with muscle.

"Truly, you are a son of God," his father laughs, his dark eyes burning with knowledge.

He breathes a Word across his stubborn son's brow, and Amenadiel slips out of time and space.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to mah crew, Obli and Yah.
Consciousness surfaces like static across Lucifer's vision. Grainy, plastic grooves dig into his temple as his head rolls and bounces. He listens to the sounds of a growling car engine and the hum of paved road passing beneath tires. Slowly, his eyes regain focus and settle on what appears to be the black interior of a windowless panel van. He has no memory of how he arrived here, only shifting, fragmented thoughts he shies away from, but can't quite expel.

He loved her, and he was too cowardly to tell her so.

The van drives over a craggy pothole, and his stomach dips; nausea is a disgusting sensation he's suffered, at most, three times in his long life. He draws in a shallow, shaky breath, and dust fills his airways, smelling of dry earth and dead grass.

Stripped down to his boxer-briefs, he's chilled beneath warm metal that rubs at his flesh. Hogtied into a ball, his arms have been crossed tightly over his knees, which in turn press into his chest, constricting his already labored breathing. Chains bind his wrists to his ankles, left to right, right to left; other links thread between his limbs, round his waist, and up to his neck, where a thick collar pushes against his Adam's apple every time he swallows past his thick tongue and parched throat.

Out of habit, he sleepily quirks fingers, caressing metal, questing for freedom. But when he forces his will onto the locks, they hold. He huffs, stirring dust. No earthly chains can bind him, which can only mean these are celestial or infernal.

Thinking about it is too hard, Lucifer decides, and closes his eyes. None of it bloody matters, anyway.

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Every time the van hits a bump in the road, Lucifer stirs, swallows back nausea, and rolls his shoulder, trying to relieve a strange, stinging pain in the crook of his arm. Distantly, he's aware of some thin bit of plastic sliding back and forth across his bicep.

The tenth time this happens, he groans, jerks his shoulder, and the plastic slips away. Something wet trickles over his skin as the source of his pain trails down his back and drops onto the floor of the van, where it proceeds to thump across the flooring grooves whenever the driver makes a turn. There's a rhythmic quality to the sound that soothes him into twilit slumber.

He'd gotten used to her quiet snoring.

***

The next time Lucifer wakes, it's to the loud, vibrating thrrrup of a van door sliding open behind him. Yellow, artificial light shines into the vehicle, and he's catapulted back into Hell, his eyes wide, his heart racing. His back, his back, he must never leave his back unguarded.
"Maze," he whispers.

He waits for boots to strike the van roof, for a wail, for the thunk of a thrown blade, embedding itself in someone or something. When none of these things happen, self-preservation kicks in and adrenaline spikes. He snarls, flexing at chains, rocking and squirming in a blind panic.

"Mierda!" a young man yelps. "His IV's out! I told you we should have stopped earlier!"

"So fuckin' jab him again," a second man says with the clipped accent of a Boston transplant.

"No way, man. I ain't touchin' an angel of God," the first says, and Lucifer is cognizant enough to vow he'll feed the man his own digits, simply for the slur. "I signed up for transport only."

"You believe all that horseshit? Angel. Yeah, right. Where's his fuckin' wings, then, ya moron?"

"I don't know, but they were there earlier!"

"If you say so."

"I ain't lying. He flew."

"Whatever. Atta the way. I'll do it."

The van dips as the New Englander climbs inside. Lucifer continues to wriggle and writhe, his body inching ineffectually. The locks hold.

"A deal," he breathes, his voice hoarse. "Anything you desire."

"Yeah, don't think ya got anything I want, but nice try, pal."

Lucifer sucks in a breath when something small and sharp sinks into the skin above the metal collar at his throat. Cool fluid rushes through his veins. Whoever heard of a needle that could thread the Devil? Well, if they think a little downer will do him in, they've another thing coming. Still, he strains that much harder against his infuriatingly durable shackles. If he could just find some bloody leverage...

"You knooow," he slurs, "usually ah love a good prick, bu—"

"Shut up," the man says, and yanks the collar back, cutting off his air.

It won't kill him. The detective— Well. She's not near, is she? She's very far away. But it isn't comfortable, nor does it feel good when the man pierces him again and again and again in a tender spot that had forgotten pain.

After the third shot, Lucifer slumps against the van's ridged floor, every muscle in his body turning heavy. Oh, he thinks, his thoughts soft and fuzzed, these are choice drugs, indeed. Almost enough to make him forget that—

The last thing he feels is a pinch in his arm as a new IV is inserted.

***

He arrows through clouds that bathe his skin with mist. Far below, Father's latest creations are small, scaly, presently nonverbal, and don't interest Samael in the least. All he cares about are his
stars and the pleasure he takes from flying through cold atmospheres beneath warm sunlight. This particular system's star is one of his best—only those stars and planets placed just so support life—but he knows he could do better, will do better.

The Silver City is abuzz. Father is drafting his grandest work yet, creations that will one day form in his image. Every angel will be required for the task, but all of it begins with starlight. So, although his siblings will never admit to looking on, Samael is well aware that all eyes are on him, and he shines nearly as bright as his stars beneath the attention. His eldest brother, Amenadiel, cautions him against such pridefulness, but then Amenadiel can only slow time—quite a useful trick when Father or another sibling needs to fix something that's gone awry, but not much in the way of skill, at least in Samael's opinion.

Pulling air deep into his chest, he soars higher on feathers he keeps fastidiously clean. Higher and higher, he goes, and— He stills in midair, wings locked in place as he floats upright at a ninety-degree angle. Gravity should take him, but it doesn't.

"Here, wrap the chain around him like this."

The words are spoken a million miles away.

Lucifer groans as warm metal bites into his ribs and abdomen. Rough hands then manipulate his limbs into various positions, weaving chains between and around arms spread wide and legs forced together. He fades in and out of consciousness during the process, disjointed questions beleaguering him from one moment to the next. He's not sure where he is—a play party? He would mutter his safe word if he could only remember how to speak. Who desired stringing him up like this, anyway? How is he this inebriated?

His chin rolls against his collarbone, and small, puffed breaths pass over his lips. His head is too heavy to lift; so, too, are his eyelids. Is the detective nearby?

There comes a vicious tug to the bindings running around and along his arms. His body is hoisted high from the ground until his bare feet no longer touch the floor. His elbows and legs press against what feels like steel bars. The discomfort pierces through the fog of his mind until he's able to blink his eyes open a sliver. The room around him is bright and white...and seems to be spinning.

"Let's get out of here," a man says from somewhere near Lucifer's waist. "He's waking already."

"What? I just lowered the dose." There's some fumbling. "Did I lower it too much?"

"I don't know, but he blinked. I'm not sticking around."

"Shit, yeah, let's go. We did our part."

Work boots and sneakers tap and squeak across tile as the two men depart. A door opens and closes shortly after, and Lucifer feels himself break through the fog once more.

Chloe. She's in danger. He has to get her out.

But then he takes a breath and blinks again, and cruel memory batters into him. He forces his eyes open, wide, and is blinded by unforgiving fluorescent lighting in a giant and windowless, sterile room. He has no idea where he is or what's happening to him, but all of it pales beneath his grief. The agonized keen that tears through him starts quiet, but builds, leaving him gasping for air.

A door somewhere behind him clicks open some time later, and he draws in a shuddering,
uncertain breath, feeling exposed. With great difficulty, he lifts his head, rolling it toward the sound of light footsteps. It's then that he sees an IV is attached to his wrist, the plastic tubing hanging down from somewhere above.

Something cold and hard pokes at the middle of his back—a pipe, if he were to hazard a guess.

"That tickles," he quips, his tongue thick in his mouth. The joke is a reflex without humor, but a good shield, nonetheless.

The pipe continues to prod at him, and the sensation makes him realize that, although his arms and legs are bound to steel beams that rise out of the floor, as if he has been nailed to a misshapen cross, his back isn't pressed against anything. All his weight hangs from his shoulders and arms and is stabilized by the way his legs are tightly bound to another beam.

"Where are your wings, angel?"

Shayna de la Cruz. Her voice is a shot of adrenaline to the heart. Lucifer snarls and yanks at his bindings, but his movements are slow and weak and sluggish. But he'll find a way, eventually. He'll kill her, and, oh, he will show no mercy. He'll hold her for years, licking her blood from his fingertips, until she prays for death. And he will gladly answer her prayers—when he feels like it—and then he'll return to Hell and continue his work there.

"Don't wear yourself out," she advises with a laugh, still standing at his exposed back. "How are you feeling—a little sleepy?" She sounds the opposite of sympathetic. "I've only lowered your dose enough for you to talk. Anyway, you're not breaking free from these chains."

He hates that she's right. Having now seen the metal, he knows they're not celestial. Only Hell produces a metal that looks like this. Dull silver veins run through the black, strengthening the chains enough to hold the Devil himself.

The question is how Shayna de la Cruz came to possess such restraints. Either a very clever and very foolhardy soul has escaped Hell or one of his siblings is up to their mind games. He wouldn't put it past them to devise another elaborate ploy to get him to return to Hell. What better way to start, than by taking Chloe from him? Nausea sweeps through his gut at the thought, and he swallows back foul saliva.

"Who are you working for?" he demands, disliking the weak and uneven rasp of his voice.

"Myself," Shayna answers. "Now, where are your wings?"

He glances left and right over the room, which is so giant that it must have once been part of a hangar or tremendous warehouse. Now, it's clearly some place for processing—recently cleaned, too, judging by the harsh bite of bleach that fills the air. Lab desks line the walls, and hundreds of translucent, plastic containers stand empty atop them. Slowly, understanding dawns, and he lets out a disbelieving laugh.

"You think you're going to harvest me, is that it?"

"No think about it." She prods his back with the pipe once more, bumping the cold metal up the ridges of his spine. She taps it between his shoulder blades. "Trust me when I say you don't want me to make you bring them out."

Lucifer chuckles darkly. "What more could you possibly take from me?"

"Believe it or not, angel, I'm not your enemy," she says, and pushes the pipe against him harder
before pulling it away. "That detective you were with, whatever she was, was just collateral damage. Nothing personal."

Hissing, he rattles at his chains.

"But you do have an enemy," Shayna continues, unbothered by his feeble outburst. "Cooperate with me now, and I'll do what I can to decrease your suffering later."

"Yes, well, you'll forgive me for not making a deal with someone I can't see," Lucifer bites out. "Someone who's cocooned me in chains—quite an impressive hold, by the by. Where'd you get them?"

"Show your wings."

"Get fucked," he scoffs.

"You will cooperate," she says.

The room is cold, and Lucifer feels the heat of Shayna's body as she comes close. She seems to take a step up onto a footstool or ladder to reach him.

"What are you doing?" he asks, and wishes his voice didn't betray fear. He tries to crane his neck, but the collar obstructs movement. A moment later, he understands when something cool glides into his arm. "Dammit," he breathes, fighting tiredly.

His eyes flutter closed.

Chapter End Notes

to Obli and Yah.
In the beginning, God opened his eyes and saw the light of distant stars.

"Beautiful," he breathed.

It was the first word spoken in his universe, uttered in an innately celestial tongue, and it will echo into the gleaming beyond, forever and ever and ever.

"Hello," a second voice called, because everything in a universe interacts, be it to attract or repel, to merge or explode apart.

God turned toward the sound and gazed upon the most beautiful star in all the heavens. In the privacy of their fledgling universe, he called the goddess Ishtar.

And Amenadiel watches down the barrel of the past, in a fragmented body he no longer senses.

***

For a time, either seconds or billions of years, God and Goddess drifted and spun together, immortal flesh clutching a hand made of burning light. And it was good.

"Look at all these pieces," God said, his eyes sighting chemical elements that his cleverest creations would one day name: hydrogen and helium, neon and carbon, and so on. "We could make something."

They started small, pulling particles into atoms and atoms into matter; instilling life with light. And at some point, as happens with all creative pursuits, the matter took on significance. They created a paradise not unlike the small paradises they had stumbled upon, on planets in their corner of the universe. But theirs was an ever-expanding plane that wasn't subject to the forces of typical nature; a home where wills and wishes could shape reality.

For a time, they were blissfully happy, roaming groves of fruit trees and bathing in clean rivers. But God had a habit of watching the stars they had yet to visit, of wondering what they were and how they came to be. And he saw how, with each passing year, they drifted a little farther away.

"I want to visit them," he said.

Ishtar stretched beneath the comfort of a shade tree, her body shadow-dappled and vaguely-formed to match the shape of his own. "You want to leave all this?" she asked, incredulous.

"I have to know if we're alone," he said.

She sat up and pressed warm light to his cheek. "You're not alone."

But God turned his head, and her light slipped away from his face as he looked toward the heavens.
Ishtar found God on his favorite mountaintop. It was where he always went to do his thinking. She formed herself into a sitting position beside him on the ground and coiled light around his waist in the fashion of an arm or a rope.

"I've been thinking," she said.

"Oh?" he responded, fondness coloring his tone. "What about, my love?"

"How we might make more like us."

God turned to her, his dark brows furrowed.

"You're lonely," she whispered, and it was a new word, but they both understood it. "You need more."

"Where would we find the energy?" he asked. "Creating all this”—he looked upon the lush valley below—"is nothing compared to what it would take to make something as complex as we are."

"We could try." Her light wrapped around him more tightly, warming his flesh and bones and making him shudder with pleasure. "I think it could work if we gave pieces of ourselves to them. Gave them purpose."

His gaze turned sharp. "That could be dangerous."

"Creation is," she said, and enveloped him in the white-gold of herself.

They had many children, gifting to each a portion of themselves, but some got bigger portions than others, and left bigger craters in their wake. Like all sentient parents who would come after them, God and Goddess were surprised by their children. No angel was ever quite what they expected him or her to be. For instance, the wings came as a surprise, but were useful, and so were allowed to stay.

God's desire to build and delight in Creation was in all of his children, and Ishtar lit the wicks of their souls. But only one child was to touch and manipulate the sparkling lights of the heavens. The Goddess never gave, and never would give again, as much of herself to another. When God pulled away from her embrace, he saw she was dimmer for their new creation, that she had given some vital portion of herself away.

"Ishtar," he breathed, "what have you done?"

She cradled his face. "I'm giving you stars, husband."

But, really, she gave the stars to her favorite son.

God sent his firstborn to explore distant galaxies in search of other life. As one who could slow
time, Amenadiel was the only angel who could keep up with the rapid expansion of the universe. Still, he was gone for a very long time.

When he returned from his journey, Heaven had grown exponentially. He sought out his father, who was overseeing the construction of yet another building in a corner of paradise that some now called the Silver City for its gleaming, gray-white marble and sparkling fountains.

Upon sighting Amenadiel, God eagerly handed off his task to Samael, who had his father's eye for beauty.

"My son," God said, love and pride pressed onto the title, "what have you found?"

Amenadiel told his father about all he had seen—about gas giants and rings of ice, about desert planets and the terrifying maw of black holes he dare not enter. There were only some planets that might hold life, he had discovered. And hold life, some did. But it was a murky, scurrying life, frequently aquatic or insectival, and always primitive. God and his children could whisper secrets to the universe, but the universe would not respond.

"There's truly no one else?" God asked, leaning against the rough bark of a tree.

"We're one of a kind," Amenadiel confirmed with a smile.

"One of a kind," God said. But was that good?

God glanced upward nervously. The biggest question of all remained unanswered. Where had he come from?

***

They called forth cherubim into being, who further built the Silver City, by day and night. And when the building was to God's satisfaction, he had a tower constructed in its center for Ishtar and himself.

"What do you think, son?"

Samael stared at the growing spire. "It's a little tall, Father."

"It is," God laughed. "That way, you will all know where to find me."

At the time, God never could have imagined how the tower would turn him into a king and his children into loyal subjects.

***

Rest eluded God, and no comfort in the Great Tower could soothe his growing fear. Something or someone had put him here, he was sure of it, and that raised questions. Questions such as, could that something remove him, remove them, whenever the whim struck? Might they expect something in return for all this beautiful complexity, all this power? To whom much was given, surely much would be required.

Now it came to be that God spoke to the faceless ones who he believed had created him. After all, if his children could speak to him and to each other in this fashion, who was to say another,
elsewhere, couldn't hear his prayers?

At his work desk, he bowed his head. *What do you ask of me? I wish to know you.*

"Come to bed," Ishtar whispered in his ear.

God opened his eyes and pulled away from her touch, agitated. "I'm busy."

"Are you?" Her soft laughter sounded like rain.

"Yes," he snapped. "Don't you *ever* wonder what made us?" His tone was accusatory, though he was never quite sure what he was accusing her of.

"No, I don't." She had no face that could be read, but her light gave away her exhaustion over the topic. "Who says we had to be made, husband?" An old, tired counterpoint—almost as old and tired as the conversation itself. "There doesn't *need* to be anything before us, does there?"

"What other explanation is there?" God sighed, rubbing his forehead. "We weren't, and then we were. We didn't come from *nothing*."

"Maybe we did." Ishtar's light winked with her shrug. "Does it matter? We're here now. We have everything we could want with each other and the children. With our Creation."

But God was not satisfied because God feared losing everything.

***

*What was expected of him?* The question ate at him until he became convinced he was being tested.

He looked at his children and considered their gifts and the quiet dreams he and Ishtar had for them. No two were alike, though they shared many traits. They stood on two legs, flew with two wings, but their bodies differed in size and shape and color. They had personalities influenced by his own and Ishtar's, and personalities uniquely theirs, too. He didn't quite know how. Creation was forever one part love, two parts mystery.

But God *wanted* to understand, and surely the only way to do so was to create grander things. To prove to those who had created him that he was worthy of all he had been given. Perhaps, then, they would finally respond.

And so it came to be that God turned his gaze toward the skies and carved off a piece of himself to create the Word. It was a Making language and an Unmaking language, too. As in Ishtar's creation of Samael, God gave away something vital to create the Word, so that forever a part of him limped on the inside, even as his creations flourished externally.

He gave Words to his children, who had gifts and a drive to create and please, and sent them to one of the planets in a nearby galaxy, one Amenadiel and Samael had determined would support advanced life. There, they whispered over small, skittish creatures.

***

God sat on his throne in the Great Tower and tried not to laugh.
Amenadiel stood before his father, back rigid, sunburned face full of righteous anger. His charcoal wings were folded high at his back. Beside him, Samael couldn't have looked anymore different if he'd tried. There was a boneless quality to the Silver City's light-filled son, a swagger which could, in turns, delight and infuriate. God knew he should feel angry, but in fact struggled to hide his amusement.

"My sons," God said, "start from the top."

"Samael told me to go look at the sun," Amenadiel began. "I thought something was wrong with it."

"Is this true?" God asked Samael.

"It is. It happens to be a very lovely sun, Father."

"Go on," God said to Amenadiel, who was scowling.

"I went up, as requested, and then he hit me with a solar flare! Right to the face!" He waved a hand in front of his rubicund, peeling flesh. A giant water blister sat on his forehead, giving him the appearance of having a misshapen third eye.

Samael's mouth twitched. "I don't see what the big deal is, brother," he said. "You'll heal."

"That's not the point!" Amenadiel shouted.

"Samael," God said, forcing firmness into his voice, "apologize to your brother."

His overly-confident child turned a slow, sly smirk onto Amenadiel, and it was as though God saw Ishtar's light made flesh. "I'm sorry you flew too close to the sun, Meni."

For a moment, there was silence, and then Amenadiel let out a roar, spread his wings wide, and launched himself straight into Samael's middle. The two angels crashed into the wall, chipping marble and sending decorations tumbling to the cool, hard floor. Above Amenadiel's growling indignation and punches, Samael gasped through laughter.

"Take it outside!" God shouted, and the boys obediently pummeled each other to the nearest exit.

In another time, one far into the future, the memory makes Amenadiel's soul smile.

***

"What do you mean they're planning an uprising?" God said.

"Pfft," Samael scoffed, "as if those swamp dwellers will ever make it to our door sill."

"And if they do?" Michael challenged, his red feathers ruffling as he turned toward his indolent brother. "What then?"

"Father obliterates them, obviously." Samael had absolute faith in his father's power.

Michael shook his head in disgust. "Let me take a team of angels for a culling, Father."

"It must be done, husband." Ishtar rested light against God's arm. "You gave those creatures too many Words to risk this."
God was well aware of her feelings on the matter. It had been the source of many arguments between them. She couldn't understand why lowly creatures might deserve such power when their own children, not even Samael, were not gifted any kind of fluency. But God had hoped that by giving his creations such power, he might see them create other good works, too; that they might know him as their creator, and that others might know them as their creators. Instead, the primitives were hoping to use their power to overthrow him. It would take some time, certainly. They hadn't even made it off their home planet yet.

"Leave me," he said, and Ishtar and the children obeyed. All except for one.

Uriel stepped forward. He was a strange son, smaller and disliked by many of the others, and given to bouts of prolonged silence and staring. More than any other of God's children, Uriel's gift was a mystery. Seeing into the future wasn't something either God or the Goddess could do, or had planned to instill in a child, and yet Uriel had eyes to see how subtle changes were like threads which might be spun into knowable patterns. In truth, God did not know this son very well, partly because he didn't want to—Uriel's gift unnerved him.

"Yes?" God said.

Uriel bowed his head low. "Father, I see you plan to make another realm."

God struggled to hide his disquiet. "The disobedient must go somewhere."

Obliterating them, as Samael would have him do, left God feeling cold. Because what, then, might happen to him, to Ishtar, if those who had created them decided they were disobedient? Would they be wiped off the face of the universe, too? Execution was not an option.

"Mother will not help you with this," Uriel said.

God frowned. "Won't she?"

Uriel shook his head. "If you make this place, it will be your creation alone, and it will know no light."

***

Creations came and went, some more successful than others. God continued to pray, and, still, his gods were silent. The longer the silence prevailed, the more nervous, the angrier, he became. The more he created to placate unseen lords, the more he sacrificed pieces of himself to the cause.

He took to sequestering himself in a room in the Great Tower. It became a workshop of sorts, filled with scrolls and displays. There, he began planning something new, something magnificent.

"Husband, the children are asking after you."

"Tell them I'm busy."

"At least take a break to—"

"No," God yelled, and a quake rippled through the Silver City.

That night, Ishtar gathered her possessions and moved into another wing of the Great Tower. It was a long time before God noticed.
God came to love his children the way an artist loves a paintbrush, never conflating the art with the tool. They were there, he had decided, to be used by him, and he would need them all to realize his grand plan. Certainly, Ishtar had pulled away from such projects.

He summoned Samael, who came at once, a gleam in his eye to be called alone, above all the rest.

"Son, I need your gift."

Samael grinned, his wings twitching with excitement. "As you desire, Father."

God led Samael to the edge of Heaven, where a waterfall cascaded into the empty expanse. Water droplets spun in strange directions in the mercurial gravity. "Don't let me fall," God commanded, and Samael clutched his father's shoulder.

"I won't," Samael said, not knowing what lay ahead, but being stubborn and brave.

And God stretched a hand toward the dark skies beyond and tore himself apart to Make a new universe. His face paled and sweat dripped from his forehead as the Words poured from his lips like milk and honey. The lines of his face deepened, and a black curl on his head shot through with white. And all the while, Samael held fast and wept beneath his father's shining glory, for he was the son most moved by Creation, though pride made him hide this from his siblings.

When a portal opened onto an empty, black space, God swayed on his feet, but smiled in pleasure. He turned to Samael and grasped his son's face with damp palms.

"Let there be light," he said, and roughly, joyfully kissed Samael's brow.

With a jubilant shout, his son flew into the new universe and painted its black canvas with stars.

Amenadiel feels a tug on his psyche, a wheedling call from some distant place, but it's drowned out as his father draws him toward another memory.

Chapter End Notes

Love to Arlome, Obli, and Yah.

UPDATE (Sept. 26, 2019): The fabulous Zee Arts drew the final scene between Samael and God in this chapter. (If you want to be tainted forever, this is the reference pic for God that I gave her.) Have a gander at this astonishingly beautiful artwork...
UPDATE (Nov. 24, 2019): There is an outtake for this chapter now, called *Morningstar's Splendor*. 
Banked against Federal Highway 2 in a lightly-populated area southeast of Tijuana, Mexico, Shayna de la Cruz's warehouse is a fortified compound, complete with towering concrete walls, twisting coils of barbed wire, and threatening floodlights that turn on automatically at dusk. Craggy mountains guard the facility's back, and roller doors pepper its side, marking it for more than simple storage. This is a processing plant and distribution center combined.

Hell rises and whispers excitedly in Cain's ear when the guard manning the boom barrier waves his SUV through. Once parked and inside the sprawling building, he's stopped at two more checkpoints, where he has to show ID in order to pass. It's an impressive, well-secured venture, and Cain wonders how he might further pit John Barrow against his half-sister to get the most out of both of them. Hector's children have proved far more useful than Hector himself.

Unlike a standard warehouse, which might have a tall, open center filled with towering, stacked shelves, De la Cruz's building contains a central spine, a hallway which opens onto laboratory and maintenance rooms on its right, and distribution rooms on its left. It reminds him of a hospital—brightly lit, painted in sterile grays and whites. He continues down the corridor until he reaches a door labeled **Security**.

When he enters, Shayna de la Cruz looks up from where she sits at a computer desk before a trio of screens. On one of the monitors, Cain sees Lucifer's long body, stripped down and tied to three steel beams by his arms and legs. For a moment, he is enthralled by the image and all it represents. Revenge, yes, but freedom, too—freedom to do as he wants, without the Devil at his heels.

"Well, Avery, we did it," Shayna says, drawing Cain out of his reverie as she rises from the desk and hooks her thumbs into her jean pockets. The last week has aged her by a year. Dark circles have blossomed around tired eyes, and her black hair lies flat and dull against her scalp, having lost its midnight sheen. Her brash confidence endures, however, and she flashes a red-lipped smile. "The angel's trussed up like a bird."

"Gotten a batch of feathers off him yet?"

"No," she snorts. "He isn't cooperating."

"He's hiding his wings?"

"They're not out, that's for sure, and talking him into showing them isn't exactly easy since we have to keep him drugged. By the way, he's costing me a fucking fortune in thiopental." She shakes her head. "I wanted to have a shipment of Firefly out by the time Dad came down."

"Threaten Decker," Cain says, shrugging. "Lucifer will get in line then. If he doesn't, I'll take a crack at him." He's wanted the timing to be right, though.

"Decker. Yeah..." Shayna grimaced. "Listen, Avery... I know you had a thing with that detective for a while, but she... She got in the way, okay?"

For a moment, the words simply don't register. Then a poisonous twinge of guilt-ridden grief twists inside Cain as he lunges forward and grabs Shayna by her leather jacket. "Are you telling me she's dead?" he spits in her face. His breaths come out in giant, bullish puffs.
Shayna's thumbs slip from her pockets. Her hands ball into fists at her sides, but she doesn't fight him. Not yet. "I'm saying she got in the way."

"You weren't supposed to kill her."

"I panicked, all right?" Shayna admits. "She-she did this thing with her hand that melted a bullet in midair. I mean, what the fuck, Avery? Real angels are crazy enough. You didn't prepare me for her."

His eyes narrow. "What do you mean she melted a bullet?"

"Just what I said. She turned a bullet into goo with some weird light she got from the angel—nearly blinded us. She was divine, too, right?"

No... Was she? Cain pushes Shayna away as the wheels in his mind spin. He began keeping tabs on Chloe Decker the moment she entered the Devil's life. She was special, of that he had always been sure. No one else made the Devil bleed, and no one before her had rid Cain of his millennia-old curse.

But she was human, mortal.

Wasn't she?

He draws his cellphone from his pocket and swipes through contacts. "You better hope she's alive," he says, selecting Otero from the list.

"She's...not," Shayna insists with some trepidation. "There's no way. I shot her point-blank in the head." She pokes a finger between her eyebrows to illustrate. "The angel flew her up a hill. When we got to him, trust me, she was dead. Even if she wasn't, she'd be a goddamned vegetable."

Probably, Cain thinks, in which case he'll kill Shayna in retaliation, but it never hurts to be thorough.

Otero picks up on the third ring.

"Avery here," Cain says. "De la Cruz shot Decker in the head."

"You need me to dispose of De la Cruz's body?" Otero surmises without a hitch.

"Not yet," he answers with an amused huff, eyes fixed on the woman in question. She glares back at him. "Get in touch with Morrison. Find out if the LAPD even knows about the crime scene or what happened to Decker's body. If she's alive, find out what hospital she's in."

He ends the call abruptly and stuffs his phone back into his pocket. Lifting a hand, he brushes limp hair behind Shayna's ear. "Feeling lucky, honey?"

Sneering, she shoves his hand away.

***

A voice whispers in Chloe's ear, rich and exigent. It speaks a single, polysyllabic word in an unfamiliar tongue, stirring something deep within her.

She wakes to a fathomless, black void that is as claustrophobic as it is immense. In the cavernous
space, the steady thudding of her heart is so loud that it's almost as if she has returned to her mother's womb.

"Hello?" she calls. She wants to step forward, but is terrified to move in the black.

"Detective?"

Chloe turns, hope rushing through her. "Lucifer?"

But if he's near, she can't see him or sense his brilliant, burning light. She lifts a hand to her face—and can't see it at all. Breathing shakily, she reaches for the pool of light in her chest that has grown familiar, if not quite comfortable. But there's nothing left in that hidden place; her stores are spent.

"This way, darling."

"Where are you?" She spins in blind, distressed circles, looking up and down and into the face of unrelenting darkness. "Lucifer—"

A pickaxe-sharp clang reverberates through her head, and she cries out in surprise. The pain drives deeper and deeper between her eyes until she's left gasping. Slamming her hands against her forehead, she screams until her vocal chords ache, the sound of her heart pounding in double time filling in the space of her gasps for breath.

The black swallows her whole.

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Cain slips into the hospital room and slides the glass door shut behind him. Stopping at the foot of the mechanical bed, he stares at a diminished and sunken Chloe Decker. She lies beneath a tangled nest of black and blue wires, connected to monitors big and small. White bandages wrap tightly around her greasy-haired head, while purple bruises mottle her swollen brow and puffy eyelids. Tubes snake to and from her body, sustaining her with liquid nutrients and withdrawing waste to bags which tower on technicolor display. He focuses for a time on the drainage tube curling out from the dressing on her head, how the pink fluid trickles toward its waste bag.

She's alive when Shayna de la Cruz is sure she can't be. If anyone else had thought Chloe dead, Cain would have doubted them, but Shayna is no fool. Having sent men to their graves, she knows death when she sees it.

But Chloe Decker is not dead.

So what is she? Not infernal, Cain knows that. Not celestial, judging by Lucifer's and Amenadiel's reactions. But apparently powerful in a way he never knew... Does she know her own power? Did she keep secrets, a mark of her own? He thinks back on her naked skin, but recalls only the faded battle scars of duty. Then again, God can do as he pleases. Cain doubts inconvenient scarification is necessary.

Rounding the side of the bed, his fingers following a trail of wires, he leans in close to Chloe's face. He studies the faint lines of aging at her mouth and eyes, the bruising and swelling distorting her waxy skin, the sharp scents of medicine and plastic and fetid, barely-contained infection.

"I've been where you are," he whispers near her cheek. "Confused. Hurt." How many times did he wake, pain gnawing at his bones as his body stitched itself back together? And he's never forgotten
his first time, how terrifying it was, how long it took. How utterly alone he was. "But you'll heal and move on," he says.

Being this close to her makes him ache with what could have been, and he sees her in his Hell loop, sees his own hand holding the gun, and her breast alight with the pentagram he scorns. He knows she never loved him, not like he wanted, not like he loved her. Knows, too, that she doesn't love easy. They're alike in that way. They don't bend or let people in. But things could be different. They just didn't have enough time without Lucifer's interference. Soon, he hopes, that will change.

"Good health," he says, brushing his thumb across her bottom lip.

Chloe's pulse jumps beneath his touch, turning the steady beeping of her heart monitor into a clarion call. Cain smiles at the response and slinks from the room. In the sterile, gray-and-white hallway, nurses rush around a corner on their way to Chloe's room.

One of them, a young Latino woman wearing dinosaur scrubs, stops and frowns. "Visiting hours are over, sir."

Cain's lip curls as he leans forward and unleashes a small, inhuman snarl. The woman pales and gasps, stumbling back against the wall. He laughs and turns away.

When he exits St. Claire's and takes to the midnight sky on his leathern wings, he thinks about how much he and Chloe have been through. How much is yet to come.

***

In the black, soft music drowns out the sound of Chloe's heartbeat. She looks up sightlessly and listens.

Penelope Decker more breathes than sings, "Lovers forever, face to face... My city, your mountains; stay with me, stay..." Chloe senses when blankets draped across her ribs shift and tuck in closer to her still body. "I need you to love me. I need you today," her mother whispers. "Give to me your leather; take from me my lace..."

Chloe sways in the dark, smiling. For as long as she can remember, her parents have loved this song. Her father knows exactly how long to fast forward Side 2 of the cassette tape to reach the track. Though she's not sure why in the moment, a sharp pain grips her lungs at the memory of his face, the crinkle of his police jacket, the scent of the greasy paper holding Petey's Hawaiian bread.

Penelope's singing fades, and for a time Chloe drifts in nothingness and nowhereness. But then her mother speaks, drawing her back from the black. "You know I prayed for you?" she says, rubbing Chloe's arm. "You're not going anywhere, pumpkin. You're here for a reason."

Somewhere, Chloe hears Lucifer scoff.

***

Every beat of her heart throbs in her head like a taiko drum. Pain comes in earth-shattering waves, supplying an accompanying death metal scream to the percussion. Sometimes, though, Chloe lingers, floating, neither pained nor at peace, and it's in these moments that she senses the world outside her body.
"Mr. Espinoza? Hi, I'm Dr. Chen, one of Chloe's doctors. Just here to check on her charts. You're her husband, right?"


"Her vital signs are stable and improving. She's off life support. Those are good things."

"Yeah, but she's been off life support for, what, three days?"

A pause. "We can't know what to expect from her recovery until we run more tests, but...you shouldn't expect this to be fast or easy."

"Yeah. Yeah, I know. Just...she looks better, doesn't she? I think she does. She's always healed really fast." The doctor is quiet as Dan lets out a tired sigh. "Okay, what happens when she wakes up?"

"If she wakes up, it will be a long journey."

"She'll get back on track, though, right?"

"You should expect her to have limitations."

Dan doesn't ask any more questions.

Chloe knows this should frighten her, but her ability to connect emotionally to the things she hears comes and goes like the inexplicable pain; washing over her, only to be forgotten.

The doctor makes small talk—he has a daughter Trixie's age—and hovers over Chloe's face. A moment later, he leaves with a soft promise to return in the morning. As Chloe drifts away once more, her head is filled with Dan's choked sobbing.

It must be bad, she thinks, falling back into oblivion. Dan only cries when someone's dead or dying.

***

"Hey, I see Trix sent you Miss Alien. Kid's got grit, Decker. She's pissed they're not letting her see you yet—took a plastic knife to an orderly yesterday." Maze barks a fond laugh that sends a twinge of pain through Chloe's head. "Relax, okay? I corrected her form and taught her how plastic can actually be a great weapon."

A chair creaks as the demon possesses the room. There's the sound of food packaging being torn open, followed by open-mouthed chewing.

"So." Smack, smack. "Linda says I need to keep shit upbeat for you, just in case you can hear me, but... You gotta hurry it up with the healing, okay? I need info. So, you know, wake up soon?"

But Chloe doesn't. She can't.

"Hope this doesn't ruin your face," Maze says around a mouthful of food. She gulps loudly. "Not that I wouldn't still let you go down on me."

***
Gentle, repetitive scuffling and snapping pulls Chloe forward, the sounds intriguing her nearly as much as they irritate.

"Hey, Chlo." She can hear Izzy's charming smile in the greeting. "Would you believe I've been drawing Major Arcana cards for you?" She breathes a laugh. "Let's see what we get now, before Danny comes to rain on our parade."

The cards click in her hands and *shush* as she spreads them wide.

"The Magician. Upright position. Again." She pauses thoughtfully. "This is a very good sign. You have everything in you that you need to survive. Doesn't mean it's going to be easy. Hold on to the future we saw for you. The Sun will rise."

But in Chloe's world, there is no light to guide her way.

***

Chloe finds Lucifer in the black, not by sight, but by the scent of tender forests and the smooth whisper of bespoke cashmere. His kiss is a conversation with her hidden desires and tastes of whisky and something free. And for a little while she rests in pleasure.

But agony returns as a thief in the night, spiking like a nail through her skull. She grips Lucifer's arms blindly, and he falls with her to her knees in the nothingness.

"I don't want to die," she weeps.

"I won't let you," he promises. "Your father will just have to wait for you."

They've been here before.

Though she cannot see him, she feels his hands cradle her face. They're hot and rough, corded with scar tissue earned in Hell. But feathers graze her shoulders as he shelters her from the storm.

***

"Oh... I didn't know she'd be so... *Michelin Man.*"

"Yeah, well, gunshot to the head and a boatload of steroids will do that." Outside of her office, Linda rarely pulls punches.

Chairs scrape the floor as Linda and Ella settle in for their vigil.

"I-I just don't get why God keeps letting these things happen," Ella whispers after some time has passed. "I thought, when I learned the truth about Lucifer, I thought—I don't know—that I *got* it. Got *something*. Like, knowing the Devil, knowing it's all real? Pierce and Charlotte and all of those things *had* to be part of the Big Guy's plan, right? Now..."

"Now you're wondering if we're cosmically screwed," Linda says.

"I don't wanna believe that."
"Me neither."

"Think she can hear us?" Ella asks. "I think she can hear us. There's a ton of stuff we don't know about the brain, right?"

Linda hums in agreement, and Chloe senses as each woman takes hold of one of her hands.

"Maybe there's a lot we don't know about her brain, especially," Linda says.

Lucifer snorts, and Chloe feels his arm hang over her shoulders. "See?" he teases. "Even Linda knows you're a freak."

***

"It's okay, Trix," Dan says softly. "You can go in, if you want, or you can go back with Linda and Maze. I know it's scary."

After a pause, Trixie's voice stirs Chloe further to awareness. "I'm not afraid," her daughter insists. And her brave little monkey's sneakers stomp across the floor as she marches forward.

"Not too close," Dan warns.

"Okay," Trixie sighs a few feet away, and Chloe yearns to wrap her arms around her. "She looks different."

"Uh... Oh. You mean her...light?" The subject makes Dan deeply uncomfortable.

"Yeah, it's almost gone."

"Well... She's gonna pull through," Dan says in that tone he gets when he doesn't believe what he's saying, but wishes he did.

"Yeah, Lucifer will fix it."

"Lucifer will—" Dan starts with a growl. "You know what? I hope he does. I really hope he does."

"He will," Trixie replies confidently. "Can I read to Mommy?"

"Sure, monkey. She'd like that."

"I have a new book. It's the second in the series. Is that okay?"

"She won't mind. Hey, wait...where'd you get this?"

"Aunt Izzy gave it to me. Have you read it?"

"Yeah," Dan sighs, wistful. "Yeah, I know The Dark Is Rising. This used to be mine, kiddo—one of my favorites. I didn't know Ozzy had it."

"Oh, cool. It's a really good book."

There's the sound of shuffling, a soft kiss, and Trixie clearing her throat as if she's about to give a lecture. Chloe struggles to follow along, but forces herself to stay as present as possible. Eventually, she understands it's a classic story, one about a gifted boy filled with power who finds
himself caught in a war of Good versus Evil, Light versus Dark.

"It is a burden," Merriman said. "Make no mistake about that. Any great gift or power or talent is a burden, and this more than any, and you will often long to be free of it. But there is nothing to be done. If you were born with the gift, then you must serve it, and nothing in this world or out of it may stand in the way of that service, because that is why you were born and that is the Law..."

Later, Trixie's voice broadens as she chants, "There must be fire on the mountain, fire under the stone, fire over the sea. Fire to burn away the Dark, for the Dark, the Dark is rising!" Sighing suddenly, she breaks away from the story and announces gravely, "I'm hungry."

"Yeah?" Dan speaks as if he's coming out of a fog. "You wanna go get something?"

"Can I have more of those cream-filled cupcakes from the vending machine?"

"I... You know what? Sure, but no more after that." Dan rises to his feet. "You wanna come with me or stay with Mom?"

"I'll stay here."

Dan's shoes squeak on the linoleum as he exits the room. A moment later, Chloe feels the bed dip on her right.

"It's okay, Mommy, I know what to do," Trixie whispers conspiratorially, and small fingers caress Chloe's neck.

There's a pause, some wriggling, a deep breath, and then Trixie begins to pray with the earnest faith of a true believer.

"Dear Samael," she starts, "where are you? I hope you're okay. I know you told me to use this only for really special emergencies, and this definitely counts. Mommy's hurt, and we need you to come fix it. If I need to make a deal, I give you cart bla-block—I'll let you have what you want. Okay, bye, I love you. Oh, yeah, this is Trixie. Bye! Amen."

***

In Shayna de la Cruz's warehouse, Lucifer twitches beneath his chains. The child is talking—she's always bloody talking—something about her mother, a deal? Impossible to follow, but then he tends to struggle when it comes to the pint-sized human and her motor-mouthing. Or when she's texting him. Snapchattting him. At least she's no longer learning the recorder. He didn't listen to his voicemails for a month.

Hearing her stirs something in him, and he finds himself sitting in Linda's office with no memory of how he got there. Or perhaps this is a memory. As if in response to this thought, he sees a face, covered in blood, and flinches away from the image, seeking comfort.

"Doctor!"

"How are you?"

Confused, truth be told. He's been dreaming lately about things he's never dared dream about before, things he didn't even know he desired to dream. A home shared with another—room, even,
for her mendicant child and the colorful depictions of himself on a fridge. Board games and movie nights and Chloe in a pile of his favorite women after a particularly successful night of drinking. Clothing optional, of course, although his mind has been rather PG-rated of late, much to his concern.

"It's disgusting, really," he complains to Linda, his hands animating his speech. "I mean, at least give me a sex dungeon or a room bursting at the seams with an orgy."

Linda fixes him with that look that eats past his makeup, designer labels, and devilish charm. "Is that something you want?"

"Oh, you know I love a good orgy, Doctor, or have you forgotten when we went to—"

"Lucifer."

His brows raise. "Mm?"

"You've been monogamous with Chloe for a couple of months now. Are you missing things from your old life?"

He looks away, the pad of his index finger circling the rim of his water glass.

"It's okay if you are," Linda assures him. "You've enjoyed yourself"—she chuckles—"and lots of others for a long time."

"That's just it," he finally says, his voice filled with wonder, "I don't miss any of it. Shouldn't I by now?"

"No. It's just as okay not to miss it," Linda says, even as he feels he's made a horribly shameful confession. "It's normal to want stability and a home with people you care about. That's what family is, Lucifer."

"Family," he scoffs, twisting his ring with his thumb. "I'm the Devil, Doctor, not Martha bloody Stewart."

No matter how often he plans to bake that peculator's chocolate cake.

Linda laughs, and he feels a little better, a little lighter.

"Give yourself time to adjust to these feelings," Linda advises. "You've never had anything like this. But, Lucifer, it's okay to want it. It's okay for this to be part of your identity—or for your identity to change again in the future. A healthy understanding of yourself, with Chloe? That's always going to be a conversation. The goal is to be open, to check in and work things out when needed." She smiles at him and spreads her arms wide. "You contain multitudes."

"Well, yes," he says, grinning with her, "I have been known to do that."

He hisses suddenly as a sharp pain stings at the inside of his wrist. When he looks, blood trickles down his skin, staining his white dress shirt. "Bollocks," he murmurs. "Is the Detective—is Chloe—near? I appear to be exsanguinating again."

"No, that's the IV," Linda answers.

"The IV?"

"How are the drugs, by the way?"
Oh, yes, that's this feeling. Floating and dreaming and wanting to retch all over his dress shoes. Good and bad, all wrapped into one, but the good outweighs the bad by a mile.

"I bloody love them," he says.

"Why do you think you love them, Lucifer?"

He scoffs and turns toward the arm of the sofa, his bleeding wrist pressed close to his chest. "Why does anyone love drugs, Doctor? They're fun."

"Maybe, but I think you're enjoying them because they help you avoid what you know is true."

Anger flares beneath his skin as he rises to his feet and sways in place. "I believe our time is up, Doctor."

"Running away, hiding, won't change the truth."

"And what truth is that?" he snaps, unable to stop himself. Because, really, he desires to be called out and punished.

Linda leans forward in her chair, her movements as smooth and calculated as a demon's. Her warm, brown eyes lighten and redden. "You failed her," Linda says. "She's dead because of who you are."

"Forgive me," he breathes, stumbling backward.

Something hard pokes against his shoulder blade, and he blinks awake into a cold, sterile room that spins and spins and spins. His face is unnervingly wet with tears he hopes no one has seen, and saliva dribbles from a corner of his mouth and down his chin.

"Time's running out, angel. Show your wings."

"I'd much rather show you my face," he says. Or wishes to say. Instead, it all comes out as thick-tongued, meaningless syllables.

"What was that?" Shayna laughs.

He quiets and closes his eyes against the Tilt-A-Whirl in his head. He's so bloody tired.

Wings contained, he suffers. Wings unfurled, the world suffers. Flying to Hell, even if he had the energy for it, is out of the question—these chains would go with him. He hasn't forgotten what it was like to be in chains there.

So he remains, just as he is, unable to imagine how things could get any worse. When Shayna gives up and increases the dose of whatever drug she's pumping him full of, he's grateful.

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Cain haunts the warehouse with Shayna. With Chloe alive, their uneasy alliance continues. Most of their time is spent in the Security room, staring silently at Lucifer's screen. It's a dull, borderline pointless, job that is below their pay grades, but it's hard to look away from a dream come true. There's no sound with the footage, but he relishes every visible cry and groan, every muscle twitch and small indignity. Shayna watches the same scenes with interest, but she does so with the narrow mind of someone seeking parental approval by way of profit. All she cares about are the wings.
One day, she turns away from Lucifer's screen. "It's been two weeks, Avery."

"And?"

She arches a perfectly-shaped brow. "And this is your idea of revenge?"

"Time means nothing to Lucifer." Or to him, he refrains from adding. "I could keep him like this for years before I did anything else at all."

It would be effective, too. Lucifer suffers most beneath the agony of his misplaced grief.

"Funny," Shayna says, "I thought I was the one keeping him here, in my warehouse."

"You couldn't hold him without the chains."

"And you couldn't hold him without a steady supply of sedatives that not just anybody has access to."

Cain nearly laughs in her face. The Nail is a force to be reckoned with—clever and lethal and unafraid. But she's in over her head and knows it, or she would find more creative ways to work the situation. Keeping drug dealers in line is one thing—dangerous, but doable. Bringing the Devil to heel is another. Cain could break her easily if he wanted. One unfurling of his wings would do it.

"What I'm wanting to know is," she continues, "does the Sinnerman keep his word or not?"

He looks at her with black, alien eyes. "The Sinnerman keeps his word," he confirms. Though perhaps not as seriously as the Devil does. Nor does he mention how, if a deal becomes too inconvenient, he's not above snuffing out the person whose hand he shook.

"Your deal with me was I'd let you do whatever you wanted, so long as I got feathers." She shrugs. "I'm not getting feathers. He's costing me more than he's worth right now. I won't do it forever, Avery. And guess where I'll direct him when I let him go?"

"Are you threatening me, little girl?"

A spark seems to ignite within her. "You know what I discovered when I looked into Lucifer Morningstar? His whole shtick—which maybe wasn't a shtick at all—was making deals and giving out favors. Apparently pretty good about keeping his word. Sound familiar?"

Leaning forward, Cain reaches out and grabs her by the jaw. She stares at him obstinately, a wild smirk pulling at her mouth, only because she doesn't know he could shatter her bones. His wings twitch beneath his skin, begging for release.

"He's not the only one you need to fear," he snarls. "You have no idea who you're dealing with. You're only alive now because Decker survived."

"You're not unique, Avery," she laughs. "You're just another jealous man possessed. At least make me some money off your angst. Like you said you would."

He lets go of her so roughly her office chair rolls back. She rides the ride and cackles as he leaves the room angrily.

She wants feathers? He'll get her fucking feathers. And then all bets are off.

Cain stumbles through the brightly-lit hall until he finds one of Shayna's men, a short, scrawny
white man with a rapidly-receding hairline.

"Wake him up," he demands, grabbing him by the shirt collar.

The man swallows, looking up at him. "De la Cruz requested that?"

"Just fucking do it."

The man scrambles away to Lucifer's unmarked holding room. Cain stands at the edge of the doorway and for a moment he sees Hell's towering, black gates. And it feels as if the floor is swallowing him whole, as if a portal to the underworld and the loop he clawed his way out of has opened. A small, quiet part of his being, whatever being he has become, still cries for him to turn back and flee. But in the next moment he sees Chloe—a future beyond running and destruction. A future without the Devil.

Shayna's flunkey power-walks out of the room several moments later, his face pale and distressed. "He's already waking," he explains while rushing past to put distance between himself and the room. Unlike Lot's wife, he doesn't pause to look back.

Cain stares at the doorway, uncertain, but then he has always had a strange calling, a sickness in his soul that drives him forward with rock and sword and axe and gun. He hates the Light Bringer even more than he hates how Shayna de la Cruz has seen right through him.

Letting his face fall into a disinterested expression, he squares his shoulders and crosses the threshold. As he strides into the vast, aseptic room, his boot heels stamp and echo.

He stops in front of the three steel beams that tower up from the floor. Lucifer hangs, suspended by his chains, an unnailed and unholy Christ. Oh, how the mighty have fallen. Adorned in chains, a tube snaking down from an IV bag to his wrist, he doesn't look anything like the suited Devil who danced around Cain in a broken loft. Whatever strength was left in him beyond all the drugs has been sapped by grief that has hollowed out his face.

With a groan, Lucifer's eyes blink open and rove sightlessly until they land on Cain. His brow twitches and lips part on a confused breath.

Cain smiles up at the Devil. "Hello, Lucifer."

Chapter End Notes

Huge thanks to TheYahwehDance and ObliObla for helping me nail down the scene order in this chapter, and to TheWillowBends for all her medical info.
Lucifer stares at Cain, utterly bewildered. His head pounds as the fog clears enough for Earth's first murderer to come into crisp focus. But that can't be. Cain is reliving his guilt in a Hell loop. Lucifer made sure of that. In which case...it becomes obvious there's only one possible explanation for what's happening.

"Tho Ah'm—" Lucifer huffs in frustration at his thick tongue and dry mouth. Licking his lips several times, he tries again. "So I'm dead," he says, carefully enunciating each word.

Hell's really outdone itself putting this bastard in his loop—and the chains and drugs! A very nice touch, indeed. Mazikeen would love this. Although... He searches himself and can't imagine what guilt could have put Cain in his loop. It's not as if he regrets pulling a Weaponizer on the man.

"No," Cain says, "you're alive."

Lucifer tilts his head, which nudges the thick collar surrounding his neck. This is the sort of thing he'd expect a Hell loop to tell him. He studies Cain and realizes the black eyes he thought were a trick of the fluorescents or the effects of drugs are actually quite real—or as real as any of the rest of this. Hell is very good at cooking up monsters and making bogeymen of past acquaintances.

But the longer Lucifer stares at Cain's cruel smirk, the more the last two months begin to make sense, even to his sluggish mind. Why the investigation into Pierce's crimes went away, how corrupt Matty Morrison might have had a bigger role in it than Lucifer suspected, why and how John Barrow disappeared, how the De la Cruz family came to use the Devil's own feathers in their drugs. How he got Devilnapped and suspended like a sub with a medical fetish.

"Well," Lucifer breathes in disbelief. An uncomfortable mirth tickles his throat, and suddenly he begins to laugh. Then he can't stop, and the laughter turns to wheezing, until he's left sucking in great, tired gasps of air as his eyes weep. The more annoyed Cain becomes from his reaction, the more absurd and hilarious the situation seems.

"It's too bad about Chloe," Cain says, cutting through the laughter. "She was a good woman, too good for you and me."

Lucifer sobers immediately. "You don't get to talk about her," he snaps, and pulls hard on his chains. Steel creaks and bends before he wilts, sapped of energy.

"Don't wear yourself out. I'm not here to talk about Chloe. I'm here to talk about your wings."

"Fantastic," Lucifer bites out. "Short conversation, then: the answer's no."

"I made a deal. I'm keeping my end of it."

"Is that what this is, a deal with the Sinnerman? Second-rate devilry never did suit you, but it's like I've always said, imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. The answer's still no."

Cain snorts, his black eyes drifting up and down Lucifer's body. "Look at yourself."

"You're doing enough of that for the both of us. By the way, seems you've got something in your
"I have you strung up in chains I brought from Hell, and you still think I can't make you comply?"

"Yes, how did you make it out of Hell, Cain?" Lucifer can't quite hide his grimace as Amenadiel comes to mind. Perhaps there's a reason his big brother hasn't been taking celestial calls.

"Let's just say you have powerful enemies and aren't as clever as you think. Face it, Lucifer, you haven't ruled anything but a nightclub for a long time. You threw away your power in Hell, and now you're powerless here."

"Oh? And how do you reckon that?" Lucifer chuckles. "Because I'm in chains? This is temporary."

"You're exactly the angel you were designed you to be," Cain answers, amused, and Lucifer scoffs. "You love humans. I bet you wouldn't even let me kill a stranger if you thought you could stop it."

"That a wager?"

"Oh, no, I won't bother with strangers."

Cain pulls his mobile phone from his pocket. After a few cursory swipes, he lifts it high for Lucifer to see. The detective fills the screen, and his heart squeezes painfully. Smiling, she leans over, her arms draped around her offspring's small, wiry body. He knows on sight that this picture is a few months old—the child's face has changed—that it was taken in those painful, disjointed days when Maze turned against him and the detective was actually going to marry this Cro-Magnon man.

"I'll take Trixie if you don't spread your wings," Cain says, withdrawing his phone and the Decker women with it. "I could do with another star pupil, don't you think? I hated having to put down the last one because of you."

Lucifer schools his face and breathes very carefully. "What makes you think I care about a filthy human child?"

"Huh. Maybe you don't." Cain shrugs, taps his screen, and lifts his phone to his ear. The threat is clear.

It's a blatant, clumsy manipulation, but gone are the days when Lucifer might dare to underestimate this wretched malefactor.

A man's voice comes through the receiver moments later. "Yeah, boss?"

Lucifer's voice rings out, "Don't."

"Never mind," Cain says, and ends the call. He smiles at Lucifer. "See? Powerless."

"And what will you do when my demon finds you?"

"Who's to say she's not working for me?"

"You're lying," Lucifer says, his eyes narrowed.

Cain ignores him. "Come on, let's see them."

Lucifer hesitates beneath the old, burdensome weight of choice. His feathers will heal or destroy lives in untold numbers. He should contain divinity. And yet, the child... Beatrice, who looks up at him and sees light; who liked him, the moment she met him and grinned a gap-toothed grin when
he made a mean girl tremble. A mischief-maker after his own heart. She is—was—the detective's, and so, in a way, she is his (her occasionally-douchey father, notwithstanding). There are some limbs Lucifer simply won't sever.

And so, staring down Cain, he rolls his shoulders and unfurls his wings, pushing past a hazy, drug-induced lethargy to stretch them to their full, intimidating span.

Cain smiles tightly, bright white wings mirrored in his black eyes. "Glad you're willing to cooperate."

"Just remember no chains have held me forever. I will come for you, and when I do, you'll wish you never left Hell."

"Maybe, but I'm not the same man you sent there."

"Yes, your flesh doesn't sit quite right anymore, does it?" Lucifer says with a feral grin, his wings flagging, then folding to rest at his back. "All the better. Dad won't mind when I kill you a second time, then. Not sure he cared the first time, as it was."

"Good luck with that."

Lucifer's head whips to the side as Cain reaches for the roller clamp on the IV hooked to his wrist.

"Sweet dreams," Cain says, adjusting the dose of drugs.

***

Chloe senses someone leaning close to her face. Fingers snap beside her right ear three times before the person sighs loudly.

"Okay, Decker, here's the thing," Maze says, plopping down into a nearby chair. "I know you're in there. There's no way God made you, just so you could go get shot up in Santa Clarita. Like, at least you'd get shot up somewhere more interesting." Fingers clasp around Chloe's and squeeze, painfully hard. "So, you gotta get up. I—" Maze breathes unevenly. "I need your help, okay? I've never lost Lucifer before. Not for this long. Those assholes have connections everywhere. He's just...gone."

And in the black, Chloe feels Lucifer disappear.

Was he ever there at all?

The darkness is much bigger and colder without him.

"Linda's wrong about all this touchy-feely shit," Maze gripes. "I hate that I have to sit here and miss you, too."

***

For a long time, Chloe lives alone in the black, her only company her pain, but then something begins to change, as if some essential switch has been flipped. Migraines continue to crash into her, warping all sense of time and space, but as the days pass they torment her less and less. Then comes a prickling sensation, like pins and needles, that skitters down her limbs, into her fingers
and toes, and the world outside her body becomes a little more vibrant and real, like a place she might exist in and interact with, not merely sense.

One day, her fingers twitch.

"Whoa," Dan breathes. "Holy shit. I'm here, Chlo." His large hands grab hers, and still her fingers shift, as if to say, I'm here, too. "Should I get a doctor? Shit, what am I saying? Of course I should get a doctor! Wait right here." He groans as he scrambles to his feet. "You know what I mean!" he shouts, rushing out of the room.

It's only in this moment that Chloe finally understands she's injured and in a hospital. She has no memory of what landed her here, and details of her time in the black swiftly fade from cognizance.

They move her out of the ICU. Confused excitement permeates as she's poked and prodded and carefully maneuvered for a new battery of tests. It's good news, doctors assure the people in her life. Very good news. So good, in fact, that for a while several doctors are convinced the CT scanner must be broken. Surely her brain hasn't mended that much after three weeks.

And then Chloe tries to speak. "Uungh."

At her bedside, Linda gives a surprised shout. "You're talking! Oh, you're talking!"

There's always need for hope in hospitals, and news of Chloe's strange, swift recovery spreads on whispers in the hallways. Whispers about miracles, about God's boundless love. The skeptics roll their eyes, sure that any rapid recovery is merely another case of manmade medicine triumphing over death, no gods or saints necessary, thank you very much. Agnostics shrug, content to enjoy the unknown and unknowable. And Maze, for her part, says it's about time Chloe got her shit together.

But none of it feels miraculous or impressive to Chloe, who drools and mutters in garbled and embarrassing, nonsensical grunts. Her world remains dark, her body a prison through which she can only wiggle a few fingers. Words spoken to and over her have a tendency to filter in without sticking. If this is miraculous, she can't imagine what being "normal" is like anymore.

Where's Lucifer? she wants to ask, time and again. Why isn't there a pompous "British man" demanding she be given luxury accommodations? A clever Devil willing and able to learn her new, broken language and interpret for her?

A small, insecure voice tells her that the grossness of her humanity got to be too much, that he's left her again for something or someone better and easier. A natural blond with bigger boobs and no kids. A Candy.

But a bigger part of her knows that's a lie.

"Nana, Mommy's crying," Trixie says, and there's a small wobble to her voice that suggests she might start to cry, too.

"Oh, pumpkin," Penelope whispers, and gently dabs a tissue beneath Chloe's swollen-closed eyes. "Things'll get better soon. You're doing so well."

"Where's Lucifer?" Chloe asks, but it doesn't come out right, doesn't come out as anything remotely understandable. Penelope pats her hand in response. It's loving and patronizing at the same time.

Chloe pushes herself. The migraines come, and she forces herself to stay present through the pain.
People speak, and she hangs on to every word, every syllable, willing herself to relearn the mouthfeel of language and to record new events to memory.

Every day, she gets a little better, a little stronger, until her doctors begin discussing rehabilitative options.

"Where's Lucifer?" she continues to ask, but no one understands.

***

Lucifer drifts, his memories and dreams slipping and sliding until an imagined present patchworks with the place of his birth. He dreams of Chloe in the Silver City, rushing into the open arms of a long-dead detective whose face lights with joy. Lucifer watches from outside the heavenly gates and doesn't have it in him to feel happy about their reunion.

"You always were selfish," God sighs from where he suddenly stands by Lucifer's side.

"Bloody hell." He glances at his father, his face scrunching in a deep moue. "One undesirable reunion is quite enough, thank you."

"I work in mysterious ways," God quips.

His voice is all wrong and sounds eerily like Lucifer's own. Really, it's bad enough he's always looked like his father

"But why did you take her from me, Dad?" He wants to hurl the question like a demon blade, but instead the words come out weak and tired and hurt.

"What?" God scoffs. "Did you think you would have her forever?"

"I thought I'd have more bloody time than I did! But, no, our whole relationship was just another one of your manipulations, another punishment." He exhales a bitter laugh. "Wasn't it enough that you saw to it the whole bloody world would hate the Devil?"

"You shouldn't give me so much credit, son."

A sharp pain rips Lucifer from the dream. Nerves in his right wing catch fire, sending flames licking across muscle and bone. His eyes open wide onto a room of blurry, fluorescent white as shocked, shallow breaths puff past his lips.

"Fuck, they're really in there, aren't they?" a man says at Lucifer's back. "Look at the size of this quill... Beautiful, too, though, ain't it?"

Something patters unevenly to the floor, like droplets of rain slipping off a gutter's edge long after a storm has passed. At first Lucifer thinks he smells earthy petrichor, but on the next breath he knows it's iron—blood. His blood.

"They are pretty, but ugh, they're so slippery now," a woman complains. "We should have worked from bottom to top."

"Next time."

"If there is a next time," she says doubtfully. "This would kill a bird."
The man snorts. "Does he look like a bird to you?"

Lucifer's stomach churns when gloved fingers wrap around another feather; the follicle aches, as if this feather has already been pulled on several times. The duo's crude manipulations are nothing like how the Detective touched this part of him—with care and acceptance, like his wings and feathers were another part of him to be treasured and protected. He longs to have Amenadiel's and Michael's sharp primaries, for the harvesters to slice their fingers open and bleed as they've made him bleed. But he was made with light and desire in mind, and there's a soft edge to the texture of his feathers, despite their undeniable strength.

The man and woman at his back pull at the feather again—*hard*—and Lucifer cries out.

"Oh, shit!" the man yells.

They release the feather, and Lucifer breathes a small sigh of relief, even as the pain echoes through the quill and deep into the muscles of his wing.

"He needs a new IV bag," the woman says.

"Go get Ricky—and hurry. We don't want him to break free."

Freedom. Now *there's* a thought. And Lucifer knows exactly who he'll find and send screaming back to Hell the moment he breaks free. He focuses on his pain in an attempt to sober up. If he could just push past this bloody fog...

But they're too fast. A third person rushes into the room and makes quick work of changing out the IV bag.

"Up his dose," the woman says. "We're gonna be here a while."

---

Chloe moves to a rehabilitation center. She has her own room again and tries not to think about how much that will cost along with everything else. After losing her job at the precinct, she switched over to basic coverage—after all, she reasoned at the time, she never got sick.

Therapists fill her days, testing her physical responsiveness, sounding out words she already knows but can no longer say. Sudden bouts of frustration and anger turn small challenges into insurmountable mountains. She learns that little is worse than *wanting* to throw a tantrum and not being able to.

One day, she opens her eyes; she swears she can hear as the eyelids peel apart. Her mouth twitches when the room doesn't come into view. Slowly, she closes her eyes again and opens them as wide as she can.

There is only darkness.

Panic seizes her, and she moans in her distress. She can't be blind. She doesn't know how to live without sight—can't imagine never seeing the faces she loves.

Someone enters the room. "Oh, hello, blue eyes!" a nurse says with pleasure. He fluffs up her pillow and chatters about the weather.
All Chloe can think is what if she never *sees* the color blue again?

Lucifer groans as his celestial metabolism eats through the drugs in his system, slowly pulling the veil off his misery. For a few perplexing moments he loses track of time and believes he's returned to Hell, in those earliest of days, when his wings and body were burned up from entering the infernal atmosphere. What else could light up his body with such pain?

The laboratory comes into focus on a wave of vertigo and nausea. Cain sits on a stool before him, black eyes watchful. Lucifer stares back, trying to imbue his expression with as much hatred as he feels.

"Why aren't you growing more feathers?" Cain asks.

The question doesn't make any sense—at first. Then Lucifer's vision clears even more, and he sees his captors have been busy. Great steel tubs of water sit atop the lab desks that are banked against the room's walls. The water within them comes in varying shades of red and pink, and he realizes they're a makeshift washing station for bloodied feathers. At the end of the procession of tubs, a dozen plastic containers are filled with clean feathers that, even behind the translucent haze of the plastic, catch and reflect the light with a warm glow.

"That—" Lucifer clears his throat with some annoyance. "That's all of them, then?"

He supposes that explains the deep and unfamiliar nakedness at his back. It's a strange feeling, nothing like having his full, feathered wingspan or even no wings at all.

"They didn't miss any," Cain confirms. He crosses meaty arms over his barrel chest. "So, why aren't you growing more? It's been three days."

"Oh, I don't know, could have to do with the accommodations, don't you think? I'm not exactly feeling pampered."

His throat is dry and his stomach aches with hunger beneath all the other pain. Though he's a glutton at heart, he doesn't *need* much sustenance on the earthly plane—and he's certain he'd never die from starvation or dehydration—but, even if he's not been awake for most of what's happened, he has exhausted everything in himself. He can tell Cain has lowered the dosing on his sedatives considerably this time, and yet he's no threat, no matter how much he wishes otherwise. His pain is too substantial.

Cain scowls. "What do you need?"

For the detective to be alive. For her to cradle him to her breast. For him to whisper across her heart all the foolish ways he's fallen for a mortal.

"Don't suppose you'd unchain me, let me go for a bit of a stroll?" Cain doesn't dignify that with a response. "I suppose some food and something to wet my whistle wouldn't go amiss."

"Does that mean we need to hook you up to a catheter and clean your shit?" Cain's brows arch high. "I don't know the rules."

"If you're asking whether I'd let you wipe my arse, the answer's yes."
Cain launches himself forward and marches around the steel beams that hold Lucifer aloft.

"Hit a nerve, did I?" Lucifer chuckles, but inside he's riddled with fear and regrets speaking out of turn.

Behind him, Cain stumps up onto a stepladder. And then violent hands grab hold of raw, plucked wing skin. Lucifer screams hoarsely at the fire blazing through his nerves. Every irritated pore stings to life, as if needles are being shoved inside the damaged follicles.

Cain yanks at the forearms of Lucifer's wings, pulling them back at an odd angle. He laughs when Lucifer cries out. "You listen to me," he says, his face so close that his breath warms Lucifer's left ear. "You're only alive because I want you to be. Become too much of a pain, and I'll cut off your wings, kill you, and take Decker's kid."

Lucifer hisses, and hellfire fills his eyes.

"That's what I thought. But who knows? Maybe you'd like it now. Decker might be in your Hell loop." He gives Lucifer's exposed wings another rough shake and waits for the groaning to subside before saying almost cheerfully, "One meal coming right up."

He picks up the stool he was sitting on before and moves it off to the side before turning and grinning. "I'll make sure it's fit for a king such as yourself."

***

The morning Chloe opens her eyes and light filters through her pupils, she weeps. Shapes are, at best, amorphous blobs of shadow, but that she can see anything at all brings her joy and hope that her life can go back to normal—as normal as it has been since falling in love with the Devil.

Where's Lucifer?

She turns slightly in bed toward the lone window in her room; such movements are clumsy, newly relearned skills that exhaust her, but are often worth the effort. Golden light pours through the window's glass, and she reaches for it until her fingertips are within its range. She sighs as the heat caresses her skin. Lucifer's star... She wants to thank him for it. Wants to lie with him in some remote spot and listen to stories about the universe. She's a miracle who's cheated death and doesn't have it in her to be overwhelmed by his long, strange life. She just wants to know him.

Closing her eyes, she still sees how the light brightens the room outside her lids. She soaks up the rays like a lizard basking on a hot stone. And inside herself, she follows the light as it weaves through and round her veins and settles in that small reserve buried in her chest. Finally, finally, the cold, lonely dark retreats and she is warm.

***

Can he die here? Does he want to die here? Lucifer doesn't know the answer to either question anymore. The detective made him vulnerable, but Cain, dastardly reincarnated Sinnerman that he is, has found a loophole. Hell-forged chains and needles, coupled with a truly endless supply of drugs? Uncharted territory, even for the Devil.

They wake him periodically to eat bland porridge and drink milk or juice. It's only ever the cheap
stuff—high fructose cardboard and watered down flavors on his tongue. Just enough to kick his body into gear to produce more feathers. After a while he stops making inane jokes about it, and a while after that, he stops complaining altogether. Complaining puts the child's life at risk. Anyway, silence is easier.

Every day, they pluck him and wake him and feed him and put him under and pluck him and wake him and feed him and put him under, and round and round they go, and where they'll stop, nobody knows.

Hell loops, his own and others', are all he dreams of now.

"The piece is here," Uriel taunts.

"No, it's in the Silver City with Amenadiel," Lucifer says as he runs his brother through with Azrael's blade. He lets out a tired wail. "Please stop this, brother. I never wanted—"

"The piece is here."

"Would you stop bloody saying that?" Lucifer cries, and the blade sinks deep. "There's no piece or peace to be found, brother."

***

Maze, Ella, and Dan sit at Chloe's bedside. Although her eyesight is still poor five weeks into healing, the two women and her ex-husband look and dress so differently that it's impossible for her not to be able to tell them apart, even before they speak.

Ella starts. "So, uh, we were thinking that, since you're getting better and better every day, and, you know, they won't keep you for long if you continue to heal at the rate—"

"We need to talk about what happened," Maze interrupts.

Chloe remains quiet. Communication is a work in progress, and she's unwilling to stumble over words more than necessary, but she tries to appear attentive.

"Let's start easy," Dan suggests, hesitant. "Do you remember Lockport?"

She thinks on it. Lockport... Lockport... The memory surfaces slowly. Hazy, a little broken, but it's there. An RV lot? Terenti—no, Fernando Portillo gave them the address. She and Lucifer were on stakeout. She gives a stiff thumbs up.

"That's great, Chlo."

"Yeah, so great," Maze echoes, dripping sarcasm. "That tells us nothing."

They ask her more questions about the day of her injury, until finally Ella bumbles through the biggest question of all: "Uh...do you remember who, um, pulled the trigger?"

For a long time, Chloe is silent as she tries to piece together her memories. She knows she left Lucifer behind and went into an office of some kind, that it was a trap and she was caught by two men. One of her last memories is of taking a picture of a closet filled with boxes of heroin, a picture the others already found on her phone, which was left on her body. The heroin, too, had been left on site. Judging by how little the cops have been involved with the crime since she woke, she
knows the three people next her have done a lot to keep the police out of it.

Memories of how or why she got shot, or what happened to Lucifer are simply...not there. Chloe shakes her head against her elevated pillow. She grimaces when the movement makes her feel like she's going to lose her bland dinner.

"It was probably that De la Cruz bitch," Maze says. "Her daddy doesn't like to get his hands dirty."

"We don't have enough evidence to say that with certainty," Dan argues.

"Well, she sure as shit didn't show at the Tigress. It was her or one of her thugs."

"But why shoot Chloe?" Ella asks, and none of them have a good answer for that.

Shooting Chloe Decker, a PI, a former cop, the ex-wife of an LAPD detective, the girlfriend of a well-known nightclub owner is far messier and more provocative than the other murders connected to the drug family.

Feeling a little as if they've forgotten she's there, Chloe opens her hand at the edge of the bed. Ella's narrow, soft fingers grab hold. With jerky movements, Chloe draws an "L" and a question mark on her friend's palm.

"Lucifer?" Ella asks for confirmation, and Chloe nods carefully. "She's asking about Lucifer... Should we...?"

Chloe draws the question mark again, pressing as hard as she can on Ella's skin.

"He's gone," Maze says bluntly, and the words trigger some faint memory in Chloe, almost as if she's heard Maze say them once before.

She draws the question mark again and again. Gone? The word is loaded. At least with Lucifer, she can be nearly sure it doesn't mean dead. Alive doesn't mean safe and well, though. She remembers the day he blew into the precinct, complaining of wings and Devilnapping. She still hates how she ignored him, but then, hindsight has made her regret a lot of things.

"He was gone by the time we found you," Dan says.

Maze insists De la Cruz took him, and Chloe is silently inclined to agree.

"Or he ran," Dan says. After a pause, he says defensively, "Oh, come on, don't give me that look. It wouldn't be the first time, would it?"

"It's different now," Maze says.

Knots twist in Chloe's stomach. With De la Cruz after Lucifer's feathers, it's easy to imagine he might be in an awful situation. But...what can possibly hold Lucifer without her around to render him vulnerable?

"We're trying to find him," Ella rushes to add, sensing Chloe's rising panic. "We're also keeping an eye out for more firefly heroin on the streets."

"He's a needle in a haystack," Maze complains. "De la Cruz owns places all over the southwest, not to mention Central and South America."

"So far, it's all on the up and up, too," Dan says.
Maze snorts. "Which means he's hiding just as much that isn't. I've got people on it, but so far...there's no trace of him."

Scowling in the direction of the demon's shape, Chloe stutters, "W-why n-not...you...go?" Even through the mess of her speech, her agitation is clear.

"Because he'd kick my ass if I left you right now, Decker."

Chloe breathes out a small, surprised huff, perhaps her first since waking. She knows Maze is right, and knowing as much makes her heart ache.

Dan pats her leg gruffly. "Don't worry, Chlo, we'll find him."

"We'll all look for him when you're outta here," Ella says.

Later, at lights out, Chloe shuts her eyes and slowly draws her hands up to her chest, where she presses them together in an ancient symbol of sincere communication.

_Samael_, she prays. _Lucifer. Whatever's happening, don't give up. We'll find you._ She hesitates, breaking her hands apart before pushing them together once more. _Samael_, she prays, her heart pounding. _I love you._

---

Cain spoons porridge into Lucifer's mouth, a cruel smirk canting his lips. The world's first murderer delights in degrading his captive. His feeding technique has more in common with shoveling than anything else, really, leaving Lucifer little time to chew or swallow. Not that Lucifer cares. Life in the De la Cruz lab has begun to blur together. But the child is safe. That's all that matters.

_Samael. Lucifer._

Lucifer chokes, spitting porridge.

Cain grunts in disgust and flicks mush from his flannel shirt. "What's wrong with you?"

"Chloe," Lucifer croaks, his drug-addled gaze sweeping the large, brightly-lit room.

"She's dead," Cain says, shoving another spoonful toward Lucifer's mouth.

Lucifer turns his head, listening to the voice within himself. The spoon rams into his cheek, and porridge runs down the side of his face, dribbling uncomfortably beneath the metal collar around his throat.

The voice sounds just like hers—the her beneath the cool, tough cop exterior. The Chloe that thaws against him in the darkness and tells him secrets.

_I love you._

For a moment, he doesn't breathe. Tears burn his eyes as Cain grabs him by the chin and forces him to turn forward.

"What did I say about not eating?"
Lucifer remains quiet and is glad when he hears the spoon scrape the bottom of the bowl. He tries to push through the haze, to discern reality from fantasy.

By the last spoonful, his eyes are dry. The detective is dead. He felt the stillness of her pulse. He's simply hallucinating, hearing things he wishes to hear. It wouldn't be the first time.

***

Chloe pushes herself out of bed and grabs her cane. Six weeks have passed since she was shot, and she walks like a newborn fawn, with wobbling ankles and weak knees, but what she lacks in coordinated mobility she makes up for with sheer, stubborn determination. In an hour, she's checking out of Greenwood Rehabilitation, and she's not looking back. She's going to go home, kiss her little girl, pack a bag, and go searching for the Devil.

In the bathroom, she stumbles through what's become her simplified morning routine, her eyes resolutely glued to the cream-colored sink basin. Although she knows she should be—and is—grateful for her life and unexpected recovery, that doesn't make it any easier to look in the mirror now that her eyesight has mostly returned. She doesn't like seeing how one eye droops, how there's still a little swelling and a deep, bruised indentation between her eyes.

At this point, she suspects it will all eventually heal, but in the meantime, she's learned she's more vain than she thought, that she's absurdly thankful she probably won't have to go around looking like this forever. And that brings certain interesting questions to the surface, such as if she's cheated death and long-term disability once, can she cheat it again? Is this what being a miracle is?

Is it immortality? If so, what does that really mean? Does she want it? Does she get a say in it? She glances at the mirror reluctantly, at the three gray hairs that run from the top of her head and down behind her right ear. They're suddenly as perplexing as they are familiar.

Dan arrives, helps her sign out, and drives her home. The thick traffic gives him enough time to catch her up on LAPD politics and carefully segue into the fact that he's hired an in-home nurse for her.

"She'll arrive this afternoon," he says.

Chloe scowls out the window. "No nurse," she says.

"I know you think everything's fine because you've healed fast and gotten out of rehab, but—"

"No," she says.

Anger and sadness flare easily right now—part of suffering a traumatic brain injury—and she's taken now by the infuriating reality that her well-meaning ex-husband is the one beside her, not the man she wants. She respects Dan and will always care for him as the father of her child. But he's also a man who doesn't completely mind when life takes her down a peg.

"I mean, I know Ozzy's there, but really I think you should—"

"Not...an invalid."

Besides, she doesn't plan to stay home for long. She can only imagine how much drama that's going to cause. She also can't find it in herself to care.
But then Trixie hugs her delicately when she enters her apartment, and her resolve to leave so soon wavers. Lucifer isn't the only one who needs her. If she thought shoulder wounds and kidnappings and poisonings were hard for her daughter to weather, she can only imagine what's been going through Trixie's mind for the past six weeks. At least she talks to Linda sometimes now; it's not ideal, but it's the best they can do.

Trixie tilts her head back, looking up into her mother's face, and Chloe smiles down at her, even as she feels almost uncomfortably seen by her own child. These days, she's so tall her chin sits between Chloe's breasts.

"Your light's back," Trixie says, and Dan's posture changes beside them.

"Yeah?" Chloe choke's out, and her mind screams that they've never been normal. That was only a lie she told herself for many, many years.

"Yeah," Trixie says, grinning, before pulling away and returning to the couch and unpausing her episode of *SpongeBob*. Chloe frowns, recognizing avoidance when she sees it.

Dan looks between his daughter and ex-wife, clearly uncomfortable. "I should...head back to work." He glances over Chloe's shoulder. "Ozzy can—"

"We've got it, Danny," Izzy says firmly, and all but shuts the door on her brother's face.

The witch wraps a laced arm around Chloe's shoulders. "Welcome home," she greets. "And yet," she says, her voice dropping to a whisper, "I don't see you staying. I see you going on a journey."

Chloe looks at her sidelong, ignoring the slight twinge the eye movement causes in her head.

"I hope you know I'm going with you," Izzy says.

It's weird living with a tarot reader. But then Chloe almost laughs. Her whole fucking life is like this, and has been for years. Cheating death, looking into the eyes of her gifted child, loving the Devil, and trusting in cards, those things are normal in her life.

"Don't know...I should," Chloe says, staring at the back of Trixie's head above the couch.

"But you already know you will."

Chloe spends the day beside Trixie on the couch, dozing between movies and TV shows until Dan returns in the evening with Italian food and Penelope. And Chloe feels a divide yawn between herself and her mother and her ex-husband. A divide she doesn't like, but knows must exist. Whether she's human or not, she knows she's not like them, and neither is Trixie or Izzy.

After dinner, on the walkway leading up to the apartment Lucifer talked her into renting, she plants her cane in a groove between two concrete tiles and regards her mother and Dan.

"Mom," she says, "can you"—she struggles with the phrase—"give a minute?"

"Of course, pumpkin." She leans over and gives Chloe a kiss on the cheek. "I'm praying for that handsome devil of yours, you know."

"Thanks."

Who knows? Maybe her mom's got a direct line to God, all things considered. Not that Chloe trusts Lucifer's dad to care.
"What is it, Chlo?"

"I have to...leave. Soon... Take Trixie?"

Dan's face twists in anguish. "You can't. You're not even fully healed."

But they both suspect she will be in no time at all.

"Have to find him."

"Why? He's-he's not like us. I mean, he's an angel—that's gotta count for something, right? He can get himself out of this mess. Chloe, we can let this rest. Stop chasing Sinnermen and crazy drugs and just-just be."

"No."

"Why not?"

Because it's not her life, and she's never wanted picket fences. Chloe shrugs a little and goes with the easiest answer. "I...love him."

"I know, but..." He looks at her softly. "It can't last. You know that, right? Maybe he hasn't run off this time, but what about next time? What about when we get old?"

Finally, she voices her growing suspicion. "Don't know...I will."

Dan stills, and something breaks between them, some final thread of their marriage that maybe neither of them knew was there after "Pierce" and Charlotte and Lucifer. And it hurts, but it's also right.

"What about Trixie?" Dan asks, and his voice reveals how tired he is. "You don't know what she's been going through."

It's true. Chloe has no idea and never will. Trixie clams up about horrible events almost as much as Lucifer does. But, then, maybe she does know, at least a little. It's her dad's voice that surfaces from the distant past, from a time when Chloe was around Trixie's age herself.

"Daddy, why do you have to go?"

The docu-reality show Cops had been airing weird, comical, violent, and unhinged incidents for a few years by then, and with the brutal beating of Rodney King, even the LAPD was suspect. Suddenly her father's job was a lot more dangerous and complicated and real.

Her father hugged her tightly. "I have to go because somebody has to be around to help people, monkey."

"But does that have to be you?"

"No," John Decker admitted, kissing her hair, "but then I wouldn't be your dad if I didn't go."

More than twenty-five years later, Chloe finally understands and knows Trixie will one day, too.

***
Lucifer smacks his lips as the room swims and swirls into view. His stomach heaves unexpectedly, leaving him to swallow and cough past the discomfort.

When clarity returns, he gazes upon three familiar faces, although one he has seen only in pictures: Hector de la Cruz. The stately man is taller in person, dwarfing his daughter on his right and nearly reaching Cain's height on his left. And Lucifer can tell, simply by looking at him, that he is an evil man who's done evil things. He will deserve every bit of punishment that awaits him on the other side.

"This isn't a good idea, Papa," Shayna says, her eyes downcast, toward the floor.

Hector waves her off. "I want to talk to him."

Lucifer's bleary focus swivels toward the dark-headed woman. Something cool sweeps through his veins, then burns up, hot and explosive, like a struck match tossed into a barrel of petrol. He hates her, possibly even more than he hates Cain. For she pulled the trigger that killed— Well. She's a murderer, unfit for Creation's pleasures.

"Tell me what else your feathers can do, El Diablo," Hector says.

"You humans," Lucifer chuckles dryly, "careless in your greed, aren't you?"

"Papa," Shayna says, touching her father's fine, Italian wool. "Let me put him back under." She's afraid of facing Lucifer, terrified of looking at him, as well she should be.

"Shh," Hector hushes. To Lucifer, he says, "Avery has explained what will happen if you fail to cooperate, has he not?"

"Avery, is it?" Lucifer laughs, glancing at Cain, who stares back, but makes no move to slow the scene unfolding before him. "I'm afraid you're a pawn in a very big and old game, De la Cruz. Both of you."

"And yet you are the one in chains," Hector says.

Lucifer bares his teeth. "Pray they hold me." Either way, he'll see them in Hell.

And in thinking of Hell, he becomes it. He calls upon that part of himself that was forged in fire so long ago, drawing forth every scar, every blackened nail and gnarled knot of skin.

Hector de la Cruz gasps and yells and scrambles away, leaving his daughter to suffer the Devil's judgment. Cain stands by her side, watching with a smirk as she trembles, her gaze stuck on Lucifer's feet. But there's something about seeing a tail peeking out from under a bed, about a closet door cracked: some people have to look, to be sure the monster isn't real. Every now and again, though, it is.

Shayna de la Cruz's eyes drift upward slowly and fall into the depths of the Devil's Hell, into the wages of her hedonism and destruction, into the torment that awaits. She collapses to the ground, wailing and gnashing her teeth.

Chapter End Notes

Praise be to ObliObla and TheYahwehDance for the usual hand-holding. Also to
TheWillowBends for yet more medical info.
Morning sunshine spills into Chloe's bedroom, waking her gently. Trixie is beside her, clinging with arms and legs like a barnacle on a boatside. Chloe presses her nose into her daughter's hair and breathes. Every time she thinks she's no longer in awe of being alive, something hits her—a touch, a sound, a flavor, the way light plays in her body and through her hands. On the heel of such sensations comes the excitement and fear for the future, of what it might mean to be who and what she is.

"Are you going away?" Trixie whispers.

Chloe startles a little, unaware her daughter was awake. "If need to... You okay...with Dad?"

Trixie asks, "Are you gonna find Lucifer?"

Observant monkey. "Gonna try."

"I think something bad's happened to him."

I do, too, Chloe thinks, and is struck again by all the awful and creative things her mind conjures for Lucifer. Gurneys and straps, scalpels and saws, painkillers and no painkillers at all. The many, many horrible things she's seen as a detective. But just as easily, she tucks those fears away; she can't help him any better by torturing herself with what-ifs and worst case scenarios.

To Trixie, she replies, "What makes...you say?"

"He didn't come when I prayed to him."

"You prayed?" Chloe asks, tears nettling her vision. "For me?"

Trixie wriggles beneath the sheets to look up at her mother and roll her eyes. "Duh."

Breathing out a laugh, Chloe kisses her daughter's forehead. They cuddle in bed a while longer, until it becomes impossible to ignore the conversations and clattering plates filtering up from the first floor. The scent of bacon is the last straw.

Together, they hobble down to the living room. Chloe dislikes how much Trixie has to support her faltering, healing body, even though she needs the help. But then, her ten-year-old started growing up too fast the moment Malcolm kidnapped her.

Downstairs, the apartment is filled with women—and Dan. Maze, Linda, and Ella sit at the breakfast table, chatting, while Dan and Izzy argue in Spanish in the kitchen. It's not often Dan speaks Spanish—he's always been a little cagey about his Latin heritage, probably because of his weird relationship with his family—but he'll spit his mother tongue for the sake of arguing with Izzy, who enjoys pushing his buttons in either language.

Everyone looks up when Chloe enters the room, cane thumping the floor.

"Morning, Chlo!" Ella greets, waving a hand.

"What... Why..." Chloe grimaces, hating her broken speech. "Why here?"
Linda smiles at her gently. "Maze, Ella, and Izzy are going to help you find Lucifer. I'm here to wish you luck and because I was told there'd be breakfast tacos."

"Working on it!" Izzy says, and Linda lifts what looks suspiciously like a margarita at eight in the morning.

Chloe stares at them, her eyes burning with tears. She's never had many friends, not the kind Lucifer claimed you could call any time for drinks. But here they are, and it's good and overwhelming.

"Not this again," Maze complains, noticing when a tear rolls down Chloe's cheek.

"Maze," Linda reprimands.

"What?"

"Aww, Chloe," Ella cries and jumps up from the breakfast table. "You look like you need a hug!" She rushes forward and throws her arms around Chloe's middle.

Honestly, it's exactly what she needed. "How did you get..."

"How did I get time off?" Ella guesses, pulling away with a smile.

Chloe nods, both thankful and frustrated to have her thoughts completed for her.

"I got food poisoning," Ella says, curling her fingers in air quotes. "Worse comes to worst, I'll use leave."

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In the garage beneath Lucifer's building, Chloe is surprised to see several familiar cars parked in their reserved spots. Foolishly, she'd assumed Lux would be closed while Lucifer was gone. Though he hasn't entertained the crowds as often, or in exactly the same way, since they began dating, it's hard to think of the club as just another business that can keep running in its owner's absence. Lux is Lucifer.

But maybe she's biased.

"It's...open?" Chloe asks, taking Izzy's hand as she climbs out of the back of the Dodge.

"I'm keeping his disappearance on the DL," Maze replies. "Last thing we need is a bunch of vultures swooping in to do a story."

"Or the LAPD to find out he's missing," Ella says, grimacing. As they wait for the elevator, she sighs. "You know what really blows? If I'd wanted to be involved with a bunch of criminals, I'd have just kept stealing cars." The elevator arrives and they step inside. "Do you know how many people get kidnapped or killed because of car theft? Zip. Zero. None. Naadaaaa. Do you know what you get to do instead when you steal cars? Drive them like you stole them."

In Devil's in the Details, Chloe's eyes seek out Lucifer's desk. For some reason, she expected him to be there, shoes kicked up, innuendo at the ready.

"Quit pining, Decker." Maze grabs her by the elbow and draws her over to the whiteboard. "Here. Look. Some of us were busy while you were lying around."
Chloe gives her a wry look before turning her attention to the board. Matthew Morrison's name is now under a big red X, and a new name, Alberto Bellani, has been added with a circle around it. He was one of Portillo's cousins. She points to both, an obvious question in her eyes.

"Fernando thinks Alberto's the one who squealed to Shayna. He's been missing since the night before you got shot. Likely got some cushy position with the De la Cruz bastards for his valuable info. No drug family likes snitches, but better to keep an eye on them, anyway. And Morrison..." Her face scrunches up in disgust. "Something's wrong with him, right?"

Chloe shrugs. Other than being a Grade-A, sexist asshole, she can't think of anything. "No?"

"Well, I shook him up a bit— Oh, get over it. I had to exhaust all avenues. He thinks Marcus Pierce is back from the dead and that he handed Lucifer's feathers over to him."

Izzy looks at Maze sharply. "Is that possible?"

"Yeah..." Ella pales. "What if he's, you know, a ghost?"

Maze snorts. "Ghosts aren't real."

"Really?" Chloe asks at the same time Ella says, "Are you sure?"

"Ghosts are some shit you humans made up," Maze explains, and rolls her eyes at their worried expressions. "Cain can't escape Hell. Even if he got out of his loop—and no one ever has—he'd have no body to return to."

So, Chloe thinks, final confirmation of Morrison's involvement, but he's got screws loose. Great. Still... "This is...good, Maze."

"I know, right? And Fernando was pretty great in bed."

Chloe sighs. One day Maze will understand boundaries. Maybe. "Let's...work."

"What can I do?" Izzy asks, resting a hand on her shoulder.

They gather round the two office desks. Chloe thought a lot the night before about how to find Lucifer with their lackluster setup and without the police getting involved. She doesn't like what she knows she's going to do, but desperate times... Sitting in Lucifer's chair, she opens one of his desk's drawers and pulls out three ledgers.

"Hey," Maze barks sharply, "what are you doing with those?" There's a reptilian quality to her gaze that, even after all this time, raises the hairs on Chloe's arms.

"I think," Chloe starts, "some favors...could help."

"They're not yours to cash in."

Chloe's brows knit together. "He...said I could."

Maze's mouth drops open. "What? Really?" Chloe rolls her eyes and winces slightly at the movement. She's uninterested in speaking more about it, or anything else, than she must. Maze reaches out and touches the spine of one of the leather-bound journals. "You don't get it," she says, softening as she sometimes does. "Nobody but the Devil cashes in the Devil's favors. I'm allowed to know what's in these, but not even I get to cash one in unless he says I can. Most people don't even know about these books."
"Aww," Ella coos, "you get to cash in his favors, Chloe? That's so sweet." Her face takes on a troubled expression. "Wait, what's a deal with the Devil like?"

"Not that bad, usually," Maze answers, shrugging a shoulder as she regards Chloe with a curious expression. "Depends on the person and the favor."

Chloe stares at the ledgers with a new understanding that makes her blush at its implications of intimacy. She barely knew Lucifer before he was offering to let her see these books. Clearing her throat, she passes them to Izzy. "Note anything that...could help."

"You got it," Izzy says, opening the first ledger. Her eyes bug out. "Dios mío, how much money does he have?"

***

They spend hours poring over files and emailing or calling potentially useful contacts gleaned from Lucifer's ledgers and his cell phone, which Ella found discarded near Chloe's body in Santa Clarita. They add pins to a map of De la Cruz properties and go over (again) what little Chloe remembers from the day she was shot and Lucifer disappeared. It's all tedious, and more than once Maze walks out in frustration.

It's not much better for Chloe. Work has always grounded her in difficult times, but that was before a brain injury and people she cares about looked to her to make sense of everything they'd been stuck on for the past month and a half. She's uncertain of what she should tell them. The De la Cruz family, particularly Shayna, has been slippery from the moment she walked into David Yates' dim and depressing apartment at Cedarwood Heights.

Dark truths picks at her: Not all cases are easily solved. Some aren't solved at all. And the first forty-eight to seventy-two hours are vital in missing persons cases.

Chloe massages her temples. The sun set a while ago, and her vision has taken on a haze to join the migraine chiseling away at the edge of her brow. The room smells of the pizza they ordered, that she couldn't bring herself to eat and that now makes her stomach turn every time she glances at the greasy box. Honestly, what she wouldn't give for a cup of coffee... But doctors recommended she lay off caffeine for now—not that they or anyone else has any idea what to make of her rapidly-improving condition.

Izzy is the first to notice she's flagging. "You should rest, Chloe."

"I know, but—"

"Dude," Ella says, looking up from her laptop. "You look half-dead."

"Wow. Thanks."

Maze snorts as Chloe glares at them. "Face it, Decker. We're not finding him today." Her tone is bitter.

Nodding reluctantly, Chloe uses the desk and her cane to push to her feet. She stares, waiting for them to rise. "Are we...going?"

"There's a bed upstairs," Maze says, not bothering to look up.
She's not wrong, of course, but... Chloe hesitates a moment longer before deciding she's being silly. "Good night," she says firmly.

"Night, Chloe!" Ella says cheerily. "Don't worry—tomorrow's a new day!"

Sometimes Chloe wishes she had half as much hope as Ella Lopez has in her pinky finger. She rests her head against the elevator wall as the car jerks upward. When the doors open onto the penthouse a moment later, she remains rooted in place, staring at the dark, open room. Maybe she should call an Uber...

Don't be stupid, she chastises herself.

A haunting stillness blankets the penthouse whenever Lucifer is absent, and as Chloe wanders inside, she feels like one of those nonexistent ghosts come to life, as if she belongs, but is also, somehow, trespassing.

Everything is in its place. Cleaners have passed through, but not recently, she thinks, judging by how the immaculate room smells both fresh and gloomily untouched. Disquieted, she glides her fingers across things as she passes them—the bar, the piano, the sofa. After sliding open the glass doors to the balcony, she sets the fireplaces roaring, not to chase away any cold, but to chase away the darkness that lingers in the corners of the apartment. Lucifer never leaves any room completely dark, even when they sleep.

She pads up the steps into the bedroom, and into the closet that is bigger than her bathroom at home. There, she stares at the strange painting of the clown-faced mermaid and her bug-eyed seahorse. She can never decide if it makes her want to laugh or crawl right out of her skin, or maybe both. Lucifer has a strange relationship with this...art. When she asked about it, he insisted it was a good investment and that it had to be hung somewhere. Its current home in the closet was the compromise they came to after she said she was finding it hard to sleep with it gazing down at them. He seemed almost as relieved as she was to get it out of the bedroom.

Turning away from the bizarre deep sea creature, she rests her cane against a shelf and strips out of her clothes, leaving her jeans on the dressing table, next to the headless, winged bull sculpture she's sure should be in a museum. Shrugging into one of Lucifer's dress shirts, she buttons mother of pearl and rolls up crisp long sleeves. Everything smells faintly of the blocks of cedar and pouches of lavender he keeps tucked away on shelves and buried in drawers. Pleasant, clean, all the things he says Hell is not.

Her head pulsates with her migraine, but being here, in Lucifer's space, is the closest she's been to him since waking, and soon she finds herself drifting, opening drawers and doors, looking behind things she's not looked behind before. It's snooping, but she can't seem to stop herself, and well... A soft blush rises to her cheeks as she remembers Lucifer's delight when he caught her with his ledgers. If he came back right this moment, Chloe wouldn't mind repercussions like those again. Come back, she wills him, caressing finely-woven wool, soft cottons and silks, and polished leather.

In the back corner of a shelf where he keeps his many shoes, she spots a black ceramic bowl, hand-painted with white jasmine flowers. She hasn't noticed it before and, upon drawing it out, finds it's filled with gold coins. The thin, misshapen rounds are embossed with faces and symbols from times and places she does not know. She lifts one, running her thumb across the crowned head of a long-dead king, before letting it drop back into the pile with a metallic clink.

She finds other strange things, now that she's hunting for them. Faded deed papers, a box of old black-and-white pornographic photographs that are too comical to arouse, a Chinese dragon carved
from real ivory. Precious gems and old pocketwatches.

Biting her lip, she opens the tall cabinet that she's christened in her head The Sex Arsenal, where all manner of toys and lubricants are neatly organized on shelves. Hanging on the inside of the cabinet door are ropes and bars, cuffs and gags, and sundry whips and crops. The utterly cliched feather duster.

The first night he opened the cabinet, it was with a twinkle in his eye. He stood beside her, one arm around her waist. "Go on," he said. "What calls to you?"

Chloe forced her mouth closed. There was a lot here she'd never done. It wasn't as if she didn't own vibrators or hadn't been married for years, but there were some things she just didn't talk about or do. And then there were some things she didn't talk about or do that she'd really like to talk about and try.

Sensing her hesitation, Lucifer tilted his head into her line of vision. "None of this," he said, nodding to the cabinet's contents, "could change what I think about you. This is just for fun." He grinned. "And we both know Jane is in desperate need of that."

The memory makes her chuckle, but also feel lonely because only she stands before the open cabinet. She shuts it gently and leans her forehead against the mahogany.

Where is he? Think, Decker, think.

But she's barely able to see past her clouded vision, and knows it's time to admit defeat and rest. Leaving her cane behind, she stumbles to the enormous bed and collapses onto soft, golden sheets. They don't feel the same without Lucifer's weight and heat pressing down upon them, but they're nicer than anything she owns.

Lying on her side, she closes her eyes and folds her hands beneath her chin to pray. As she falls asleep in the pose, she tells Lucifer about the first time she fell for him. It was after she had shot him, and his blood was still caked into the creases of her palms. She'd been so certain that her career was over, but he'd given her that sly look, the one that said, "You and me? We have a secret," as he didn't-quite-lie to save her ass. Her heart was in trouble as they stood close and she watched the police cars' lights color his face.

***

Four more days pass. Chloe's speech clears, except for the occasional missing word or phrase, and she leaves the cane in the penthouse, but tiredness and headaches still hit when she least expects. The unnatural indentation remains between her brows, but is swiftly fading.

As her health continues to improve, the search for Lucifer stagnates. They've exhausted their contacts, reinterviewed Portillo and Rosales, carefully scoped out L.A. properties belonging to De la Cruz. She's even added Amenadiel to her nightly prayers, to no avail. Whether that's because Amenadiel isn't open to hearing her or he doesn't care to reply, she can't be sure.

Lucifer is his brother. How could he not care?

"Is it... Is it possible he's gone back to Hell?" Chloe asks one evening, while rubbing a bloodshot eye. Sleep has gotten more and more elusive.

"He wouldn't leave without me," Maze answers, but there's a doubtful wobble to her voice. More
confidently, she says, "He wouldn't leave you shot in the head on some hill."

They look up when the elevator into Devil's in the Details dings seconds before Ella spills into the room, hands raised and waving. "You guys, you guys, you guuuys!"

"Whoa, everything okay?" Izzy asks, putting aside a ledger.

"Totally! Well, I mean, in terms of I've got a lead, but maybe not in terms of what it means for humanity? Like—"

"Just spit it out, Ellen," Maze gripes.

"It's Ella," she pouts. "And you know that."

"Ella," Chloe says. "Lead."

"Right," Ella says, saluting. "A San Diego friend of mine found someone selling Firefly."

Chloe sits up eagerly. For the first time in days, she allows herself to feel hopeful. "Have we got a name?"

"Uh...yeah, actually. Get this. Elvis Priestly."

The room goes quiet for a moment before they dissolve into laughter.

"Wait," Chloe says between chuckles, "that's really his name? Not an alias?" Oh, Lucifer would love this.

"No evidence of a name change, and there's an Elvis Priestly in San Diego, born and raised."

"Is he eighty?" Izzy laughs.

"Try twenty-eight," Ella says, "and he's got priors. Petty theft and, oh, yeah, he got caught dealing heroin in the past. Out on parole, actually." She draws her phone out of her pocket and turns it toward them, one finger pointed to a marker on her maps app. "He lives in Golden Hills. Pretty middle class neighborhood."

"That's our cue," Maze says, fists parked on her hips. "Grab your bags." She turns to Chloe, a vicious gleam in her eye. "You ready, Decker?"

Forcing herself to ignore her tiredness, Chloe stands and lifts the backpack she's kept beside her desk since she was able to join the search efforts. Unzipping it, she gathers Lucifer's strewn ledgers and stuffs them inside with her clothes. "Let's go," she says.

***

The main artery from L.A. to San Diego is clogged by evening commuters that Maze does her best to get around with ample cursing and traffic violations. Chloe couldn't care less about the lawbreaking this time. All she cares about is the next clue. Every moment in the car is another moment something might go wrong—Priestly could pack up and leave or the De la Cruz family could get to him. Or, hell, an earthquake could hit.

She's begun to understand Lucifer's paranoia. Is this all part of God's plan?
"Do we have a plan?" Izzy pipes up from the back seat, as if her mind is in the same place. "Not that I'm against going in guns blazing."

Chloe blinks at the red brake lights of the cars ahead of them. She thought she knew Izzy Espinoza before she moved in, but her ex sister-in-law surprises her constantly. She's grateful for her presence now.

"Not much planning you can do for some of this stuff," Ella says. "Just gotta roll with what happens. Kinda like when you come across a monkey in Southeast Asia. They're cute and sweet until suddenly they're not, and you have to look 'em in the eye and puff yourself up and tell 'em who's boss."

"What?" Izzy asks after a pause.

Maze cuts in front of a driver and barks a laugh when the woman blasts her horn. "The plan is we find Elvis and beat the shit out of him until information falls out."

"Guns blazing," Izzy says, her cards snapping as she shuffles them in her lap. "Got it."

"You're taking this way better than Dan would," Maze says, her gaze seeking out the other woman in the rearview mirror.

"I go where the cards tell me to go, Mazie."

Chloe looks between them curiously. Are they flirting?

"Hey, are there any snacks in your bag?" Ella asks Maze, and Chloe hears a zipper peel open. "Whoa, that's a lot of cash."

"You brought a bag of cash?" Chloe asks, even as she thinks it might have its uses.

Maze shrugs a shoulder. "Money talks."

The sun has fully set by the time they turn onto Priestly's street in Golden Hills. A front porch light highlights his white stucco home, with its blue-accented windows, blue door, and short, white picket fence. Maze parks in the driveway and removes the key from the ignition.

"You two are staying here," she says, reaching into the back and dragging the bag of money toward herself. "Call us if you see anything suspicious." Before they can argue, she looks at Chloe. "Come on, Decker."

As they climb out of the Dodge and walk up to the front door, Chloe's heart thunders against her rib cage and in her head. Either they're about to have a big break in Lucifer's case, or it's going to be a huge disappointment, with no in-between. She tugs on her shirt and checks for the Taser at her waist. She didn't feel confident enough to carry a more lethal weapon. In fact, she might be afraid of guns now, but she tries hard to pretend otherwise. There's no time for fear.

Maze pounds a fist on the bright blue door. "If he doesn't open up," she says, "you know we're breaking in, right?"

It doesn't come to that. A lock snaps free a few seconds later, and the door swings open wide, revealing a short, wiry white man in baggy jeans and a black t-shirt that's two sizes too big. His brown hair juts out at odd angles from his head, as if he recently woke up from a nap.

"Yeah?" he says dully.
"Elvis, uh, Priestly?" Chloe asks, and despite the seriousness of the situation, she struggles to keep a straight face.

Priestly grimaces. "I go by my middle name, Keaton."

"Keaton," Chloe amends with relief. "We'd like to ask you a few questions."

Beside her, Maze cuts her a disapproving look. "You really have to work on a new introduction."

Keaton looks between them, confused. "Are you...cops?"

"Do cops dress like this?" Maze quips, and all three of them look at her bared midriff.

"Uh, if you're not cops, I don't think there's anything for us to talk about," Keaton says and starts to close the door.

Chloe's hand slams against the door's face a second before Maze reels back and kicks it open.

"Dude!" Keaton shouts, stumbling away, his arms pinwheeling to keep him upright.

Ella's head pops out from the back of the Dodge. "Everything okay?" she shouts.

"Uh," Chloe starts, wide-eyed. "Maybe!"

She rushes inside the house to join Maze, entering a dark living room lit only by a paused video game on an enormous television. The cute house is wasted on this man, and the space has been decorated with console gaming in mind instead of coziness. Empty chip bags, diet soda cans, and two controllers litter a coffee table parked in front of a faux leather couch that a cat has laid waste to with its claws.

Maze slams the door shut behind Chloe, and the lock snaps into place.

"Who the fuck do you two think you are?" Keaton asks, backing away. Shoving a hand into his pocket, he lifts a cell phone. "I'll call the cops."

"You do that," Maze laughs, ever eager to add numbers to a potential brawl. Dropping the money bag at Chloe's feet, she announces she's going to clear the house and marches past Keaton into what appears to be a kitchen and hallway leading to bedrooms.

As subtly as she can, Chloe leans against the nearest wall. "We know you're selling Firefly, Keaton." Her blood boils as she speaks the words. What gives anyone the right to use Lucifer's feathers? "Last I checked, selling drugs is a parole violation."

The hand holding his phone drops back to his side as he hesitates, breathing heavily. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"We're not with the De la Cruzes," Chloe adds. "If that's what you're worried about."

"The who?"

"Don't play dumb," she snaps, her patience already worn thin.

Maze returns, shoving past Keaton. "We're with much worse than De la Cruz," the demon says with a savage grin. "Literal Hell on Earth. And here you are, all by yourself. So start talking."

Keaton swallows hard. "Okay, fine. Yeah, I have a little Firefly, not much. It's—"
"Who's your supplier?" Chloe's feet carry her forward without her realizing it. She stands before the man, mere inches from his face, where she can see a smattering of freckles and smell the candied scent of an energy drink.

Despite his obvious fear, his face suddenly closes off. "I don't snitch." His hazel eyes dart back and forth between their faces. "Look, I'll sell you what I've got, but it's expensive. Ten grand."

"We're good for it." Maze squats down and unzips the bag she brought, flashing crisp, bundled hundreds. "Go get the Firefly. All of it. And don't even think about slipping out a back door."

Nodding shakily, Keaton rushes from the room. Chloe turns to Maze in frustration. "We need a name."

"Relax. We'll get it, Decker. First thing's first. Gotta get rid of his supply."

"Yeah, you're right. Okay." Chloe nods and curls her fingers into her palms as they wait. Calm, she tells herself, keep calm, but it's hard to with sharp pain pinching behind her forehead. With the knowledge of what Firefly represents.

Keaton returns a few minutes later, a small box in his arms. He shoves aside one of the top flaps, revealing its illicit contents. Familiar red firefly stickers contrast against white heroin contained in small ziplocks. Chloe grabs the end of the box and pulls it closer to herself.

"Was this box full?" she demands.

"Yeah..." Keaton answers reluctantly. "This is all I got left."

"We need to know who your supplier is," Chloe says firmly.

"I told you," Keaton says, taking a step back. "I'm no snitch."

"Well, we're not leaving here without a name," Chloe says, nails digging into her palms. She's torn by the need to find Lucifer and the means of doing so without the power of a badge. If Lucifer were here, Keaton would be charmed putty in his hands, but Maze isn't Lucifer, and neither is Chloe. She isn't even operating at her best.

Keaton licks his thin lips as he regards them uncertainly, as if he's weighing up his odds of taking them in a fight. He lifts the box toward Maze in invitation. "Just take it and go, okay?"

"You're giving it to us," Maze scoffs doubtfully.

"Yeah, just go."

Chloe frowns as her mind hunts for a motive. She looks over Keaton's nervous face before glancing back at the coffee table with its two controllers. "You have a partner," she says, and Keaton's white skin pales even more. She steps closer. "Is that who gave you the Firefly to sell? Are you protecting them?"

"I—"

"Because that's what I'm trying to do," Chloe says, her voice trembling. "Protect my partner. I get it. And we don't want to hurt your partner—"

"Speak for yourself," Maze says.

"—but we need to know how you got this drug. Where it came from."
"I'm not telling you anything. You-you can't make me!" Dropping the box of heroin to the floor, he spins on his heel and runs into the connecting kitchen, his bare feet smacking across linoleum.

They follow after him as he retrieves a baseball bat from beside a door to the backyard. Chloe stares at the panicked dealer, feeling sorry for him, but only for a minute. She holds up a calming hand, and it takes nearly all her concentration to keep her light from spilling out.

"Keaton."

"Get out!" he screams.

"We just want to talk."

"You can't make me talk," he says again, bat quivering in the air.

Chloe huffs tiredly and drops her hand. Whether from the brain injury or the stress of Lucifer's disappearance, she can't find it in herself to play the good, understanding cop. "Maybe I can't make you talk," she says, her eyes gliding over to Maze, "but she can."

A cruel grin lights Maze's face as she unbuckles her belt and slides it free from her belt loops. "I bet this one's a squealer." She licks her teeth and looks at Chloe. "Do I get to make him bleed?" she asks before her eyes swivel back to Keaton, who has the shivers and the wild, angry eyes of a trapped animal.

Turning away, Chloe steps back into the living room and picks up the heavy money bag and the box of heroin from the floor. "We need a name," she says simply.

Maze chuckles in the kitchen. "If I were you, Elvis, I'd sing sooner than later, but for my sake, I hope you take some convincing."

Chloe walks out the front door and closes it behind her. She leans against it, letting the bag and box drop to the ground, and for a moment, she's at a house party, closing another door to another room where Lucifer lies in wait for a vile and unsuspecting man. As Keaton squeals in horror, she consults her conscience, that old barometer God put in all humans.

As she glances up at the star-filled sky, she feels no guilt at all.

Chapter End Notes

Great betas and friends: ObliObla and TheYahwehDance.
Ishtar would not look at her husband, and God knew this was proof that his makers were displeased. His chances were running out. If he failed this test, he failed them all and would incur their wrath. And so his grand Plan was embarked upon with great precision. With God's guidance, peculiar Uriel and dapper Phanuel drew the blueprint for Creation, and the rest of the host were accorded jobs befitting of their gifts.

For a time, either seconds or billions of years, Heaven toiled on behalf of this singular solar system in its universe Made by God. Samael perfected the size and shape of its central sun, which in turn adjusted gravitational pulls and drew a stabilizing force, a moon, toward the third planet, where one day this universe's sole creations would struggle and thrive through seasons. Amenadiel flew next to Samael, slowing time to allow for accuracy, for timing mattered a great deal beyond the boundaries of the Heavenly plane.

Now this callow planet was a boiling greenhouse with no life worth mentioning, and so the angel Zimchiel was sent to stimulate the growth of single-celled organisms. Her sister cooled the roiling planet, which turned water vapor into small oceans, and cooled it more still, to encourage solid land to form. And Raphael exhaled an abundance of oxygen onto the atmosphere and oceans, which collided with methane to make carbon dioxide, and for a very, very long time the planet was no longer hot, but cold.

The ozone layer strengthened, shielding the land and waters from the cruel tongues of Samael's radiant star, and life erupted across the planet. The waters teemed with tiny, wriggling creatures, and the angel Atzmotael was sent to put backbone into a select few. Spines lengthened and expanded and became ever more complex until some enterprising fishes drew themselves from the water, gasping and trembling, to crawl and then walk the land.

Under the guiding hands of angels, plants flourished, insects swarmed, and cold-blooded reptiles surfaced from the depths of the waters and the darkness of caves. Feathered behemoths roamed the colossal landmass, some scampering between bushes, others using their immense weight to shove aside giant evergreens, while others still took to the skies like the children of God who had nurtured their existence.

And then there came a time when God summoned his shining son to his workshop once more.

"Samael," he said, "take one of your wandering stars and strike the third planet."

The Lightbringer, so frequently given to smirks and grins, had grown somber in recent years. He stared at Heaven's king, his mouth drawn into a dire, straight line. "That will destroy everything we've made, Father."

"Nearly so, yes."

As never before, death was intrinsic to a Creation's survival. There could be no life without it.

"I—" Samael shook his wings out, as if to dislodge some sticky substance from his feathers. "I don't want to do this."

God's dark eyes narrowed. "You will not ruin my Plan."
A pause, a grimace, a curt nod. "Very well," Samael said, his jaw clenched tight. He made a low, sweeping bow, but his gaze never drifted from his father's.

There's the sound of something crashing to a floor, and Amenadiel twitches in the liminal space.

"Father!" Gabriel cries, and it's as though his voice comes from somewhere deep underwater.

"Wait, that's God?" Charlotte Richards' crisp American accent is unmistakable. "What's wrong with them? Why aren't they moving?" Amenadiel feels something shake his arm. "Amenadiel?"

"You should leave, human."

"My name's Charlotte, and like hell I'm leaving."

"This isn't Hell."

"Who knows what it is! God's out cold on the floor!" she snaps. "Can't you do something? Wake them up?"

"Why would you think I could wake them up?"

"I don't know! Because you're an angel. What good are angels if you can't even wake God up?"

"Amenadiel, my son," God says, drawing his attention away from a distant and but infinitely more tangible space. "You wanted to understand."

Amenadiel's soul turns toward his father's. "Yes."

"This way," God says, and pulls him under once more.

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Uriel's projections proved true: It was the small, furry creatures that survived Samael's wandering star. With the giant, reptilian beasts all but gone for good, the smaller mammals thrived and grew and changed. And God sent angels to protect the tree-dwellers, who swung from branches by fingers and toes, and later hobbled on two legs in tall grasses.

And here, some angels in Heaven began to whisper to one another, about their father's obsession with this planet and its smelly critters. About his prolonged absences. About their mother's dimmed light. About all the work they were made to do for this one potential creature, the creature.

It was Amenadiel who reassured the host of the goodness of Father's Plan, but Samael's troubled expression did not go unnoticed as he spent his time in the Hall of Being, scowling as Creation unfolded. He had taken to chewing sweet, pungent khat ever since he found the leafy trees tucked away in a rocky outcrop of Heaven. Enjoyed in large enough quantities, the stimulant kept his pupils dilated and his perpetually agitated gaze fierce. Some of his brothers and sisters whispered about this, too.

God knew unrest was brewing but could not bring himself to care. All of his attention was on the ape men, with their squished faces and long, hairy arms. Death was built into their system, but it came almost too easily. Infections wiped out entire populations; starvation and natural disasters claimed others. Miscarriages took the unborn, and painful childbirth took too many of the women. It was a delicate balance—opening the door for these creatures to know him, while also figuring
out how to let them grow on their own, as he understood he himself had been allowed to learn and
grow by his creators.

As the creatures advanced, God began to wonder which of them were worthy of a place in eternal
paradise. They were too primitive for such things yet, but he could foresee a time when they would
be wise and had begun to prepare a place for them in Heaven—and a place, too, in Hell.
Automation was the finest feature of this Creation—proof, he hoped, that he was worthy.

He summoned Samael to use his gifts for language and temptation.

"I won't do it," his son hissed, inches from his father's face.

God put a restraining hand on his headstrong son's throat. "Careful, now."

"Or what?" he spat.

He blinked at his son, feeling off-kilter. Sometimes the king's mantle rested uneasily upon God's
shoulders. He missed being a father. When was the last time he had thought of his children as
anything other than tools? The last time Ishtar had curled against him? And, yet, did he not do all
of this for them, to protect them from the wrath of those unseen?

"I wasn't created for this," Samael said, and there was a plaintive, pleading undertone to his words
that annoyed God.

Annoyed him, because Samael had the luxury of knowing his creator, while God did not.

"Weren't you?" God said, arching a brow. "You are light and desire made flesh. You are my son,
and therefore you serve Creation. All of this is your purpose."

Samael held his father's gaze with eyes that glowed white. He breathed heavily, his tongue scented
by khat. "I see how it is," Samael said, and he turned suddenly, and leapt skyward, darting away
from the Heavenly plane.

But there was nowhere Samael could go that his brother Michael would not find him.

God heard the whispers that followed his stubborn son and knew they would become a problem.
He had come so far with this good work. He couldn't allow Samael to ruin it.

***

An age passed after God crippled his son and forced him to rule over Hell, and in that time the
clumsy bipeds lost most of their hair and God selected two to live in a small paradise tucked inside
a fertile crescent of the earth. One day, God sent an echo of himself to walk verdant Eden. It was
early there, and Samael's sun did not yet sit high in the clouds. God looked for his human children,
but could not find them.

"Adam," he called, "where are you?"

Eventually, leaves rustled nearby, and Adam shoved past a knotted mass of vines. "I heard you,"
Adam admitted, eyes downcast. "But I was afraid... I—" He looked down at the rough loincloth he
had fashioned from leaves. "I'm naked and needed to hide myself."

"Who told you that?" God asked, his voice sharp enough that Adam winced.
"Lucifer showed us," Adam said, and his light brown face reddened. "He said it was good, but I'm not sure anymore..."

The name was new, but God had no doubt of whom Adam spoke. His disowned son had been nosing around Creation ever since they'd developed a more complex sense of humor. Time and again, Amenadiel pushed his brother back through the gates of Hell, but it was obvious this would be an ongoing battle.

"Where is Eve?" God asked.

Adam's face reddened even more as he glanced backward. "With him, Lord. Still."

God waved a hand at the vines, which wilted and died before him. He stepped past them, into a vale gently colored by morning light and sparkling dew. Eve was there, and his wayward son, too.

She sat, impaled on his lap, her hips undulating. Beside them, a handwoven basket had toppled, leaving pink pomegranates on the ground. God looked on in disgust as Samael turned his head and let out a sharp laugh.

"You've outdone yourself, Father. Humans are wonderful creatures, especially this one," he said, and gave Eve's waist a squeeze. Light caught on the ring he'd had cherubim fashion for him in the Silver City.

Eve's head snapped in God's direction, her long black curls flying over her shoulder. Yelping in surprise, she scrambled away from Hell's keeper, her hands drifting to her chest and the hair between her thighs. "He-he tricked me!"

"Oh, I did no such thing," Samael said, sitting up on one hand. "I asked you what you desired, and you simply couldn't resist knowing all this, and who could blame you?"

Wordlessly, Adam shuffled over to Eve, muttering with leaves in hand. "Do I have to?" she whined, even as he plastered one to an exposed nipple.

God scowled down at Samael, who'd done nothing to cover himself or his unflagging interest in Eve, as though he were as primitive as these creatures who were only now smart enough to know their creator and enter Heaven when they died.

"You debase yourself, Samael."

"Is that what it's called?" his son asked, and his grin was sharper, more lethal than it used to be. "I learned it in Hell with Lilith's brood. Not a bad way to pass time, if you ask me. Also, it's Lucifer now." And the word had immediate meaning. "You did make me the Lightbringer, after all."

God bent at alarming speed and grabbed Samael by his throat. As a mere echo of himself, he was not at full strength here, but what he lacked in strength, he made up for with frustration. "You are a cursed child," he spat, "a serpent striking my heel."

Samael wheezed a laugh beneath his father's fingers, and it was as though God were laughing at himself in a mirror. Bitter and broken and fearful. He let go and stepped away, feeling, as he had more than once now, that his own hand had betrayed him against his children.

"I am what my father made me."

God smoothed his robes. "And I could end you," he said, not with intention, but simply as fact and to regain the upper hand.
"Then who would contain those naughty castoffs of yours? Some of them still speak the Word, you know." Something pained and haunted crossed Samael's face, but it was gone in a flash, replaced by an air of mischief.

Although his son was disobedient, God could not bring himself to banish him from Earth, too.

Eve bore Adam two sons. The first was Cain, who grew to till the land; then came Abel, who grew to shepherd sheep. God walked among them as an unimposing echo of himself, and he spoke to the two young men and told them to bring to him the best of their harvest and flock.

Cain brought the fruits of his labor—barley and wheat—and Abel brought lambs, wobbling on knobby knees. God looked upon their works and saw how Abel had tended his flock with care, while Cain had neglected his crops.

God rested a hand on the woolen head of one of Abel's lambs. "You have done well, my child," he said. "I am pleased." To Cain, he said, "You can do better."

Cain's expression fell and darkened.

For a time, God returned to Heaven, where wars were being waged. He hid himself in his tower, in his workshop, and pretended not to see how his own crops were faltering, and he knew himself to be a coward.

Ishtar haunted his threshold. "You can't leave him down there forever, husband."

God turned to her, his face twisted with pain. "He has an army here, and we are fortunate he doesn't know it. They bleed for him even now. If I allow him to return, our children will try to kill me." And could very well succeed. Even now, he was fortunate they didn't question his position and think to turn their frustrations toward the city or the Great Tower.

Goddess said nothing, only turned and left, and God wondered if that was her hope—that Samael, that Lucifer, would return and destroy him. Perhaps he deserved it.

It felt as though there were nowhere to go. Everywhere he turned, he faced his mistakes. In the end, though, he was unable to stomach his children's bloodshed at the edge of the Silver City and left for Earth once more. He spoke to Adam and to Eve, and then went in search of Abel, whereupon he found Cain instead.

"Where is your brother?" he asked.

Cain's smirk was sly. "Am I his keeper, that I should know?"

A chill crawled up God's spine as he sensed the cunning wickedness in the human before him. "What have you done, Cain?"

And God knew this Creation was broken, too, and he sent forth his firstborn to curse the murderer with his greatest fear: to walk the Earth until he learned to be a better man. God did not send him to Hell, for he feared what that dark place might make of Adam's corrupt son.
The humans who had died guiltless and passed through the gates of Heaven pretended not to see the winged creatures who darted like comets above and looked down on them with eyes that only saw ants. They pretended not to hear the clash of metal against metal or the sounds those winged creatures made as they tumbled from the sky and made craters in fields of paradise.

For a time, Ishtar tried to stop the bloodshed, but her pleas, even her anger, went unheard. Heaven's civil wars were bigger than God or Goddess, Father or Mother. They were the growing pains of children imbued with power and purpose but bereft of identity. And so Ishtar hid in her wing in the Great Tower, where she watched from a window as her children fought, sometimes to the death, on pristine, rolling hills. Perhaps, with God's help, she could have put an end to the wars, but God and Goddess were rarely on speaking terms in these days.

As Ishtar hid in her rooms, God hid in his workshop, where he knelt on the cool, marble floor and prayed. For wisdom and guidance. To know how to live and to help his wife and children and Creation flourish. For forgiveness, because he knew all he did fell short.

His prayers were met with silence, and the deep, bitter resentment, which had long ago taken root within him, exploded to life.

"I know you can hear me!" he screamed at the ceiling, and a fissure in a nearby wall expanded. Deflating, he said more softly, "Don't you care at all? All the work I've done..."

No one answered, and in a fit of rage God shoved a bookcase, sending it toppling onto its side with a loud crash. Scrolls spun and unrolled and ripped in half, and jarred herbs shattered, releasing frankincense and myrrh into the air.

Alarmed cherubim rushed into the workshop, their small wings thrumming.

"Leave me!" God shouted, and they dipped in the air. When they hesitated, he reminded them of their place on the heavenly plane. "I am the Lord your God, and I said, 'Get. Out.'" The cherubim tittered and bowed and flitted away nervously.

With the door closed once more, God whirled toward the display of Creation, his anger swelling. Touching fingers to the third planet, he sent his spirit across the waters and over the lands in search of something that had not spoiled. And though he searched far and wide, he found among humanity few who might be called good, and only one who truly did no harm. One man who loved his wife and their three sons, and in this man God saw what he once had been and had and now longed for, but could not get back.

"Is this what you wanted—for me to fail?" he demanded of his gods, one hand stretched above a holographic Earth. "Well, I did. I failed your test. It's rotten, and I'm going to destroy it."

Stop me, he willed them, but he was alone in his actions.

"Noah," God called, speaking directly into the human's mind.

And soon God sent the angel Meiel down to Earth to raise the seas and set the skies to weeping. And the world trembled beneath the awesome power of its Creator and his children.

The flood spared few souls. Huts were swept away, and cities collapsed in on themselves. Dry plants gulped water until their thirst was sated, until they wilted and withered. And broken people choked and drowned, holding their broken children afloat until they could no longer bear it. Some were flung far in little boats that took on water or rafts that plunged beneath the currents. They cried to gods and to God, who heard them, but hardened his heart as his makers had hardened.
Cattle squealed and flailed, hooves kicking wildly. And insects beat their wings against the waves. And birds flew, in search of shelter—and flew and flew and flew. They fought until they tired and the oceans swallowed them whole or the high winds bore them up into funnel clouds.

And Cain drowned, many times over, but the curse God had placed upon him revived him again and again and again.

On the fortieth day of the storm, Gabriel knocked on the door to God's workshop.

"Father," he said, keeping his eyes downcast, "Samael is at the gates."

God looked up from the drowning Earth with a scowl. "Uriel knows to send him away."

"Yes, Father," Gabriel said, ducking his chin, "but Samael pinned him to the gate by his cloak..."

"Of course he did." Setting aside his wine with an exasperated sigh, God rose to his feet. "Fine." At the doorway to his workshop, he drew Gabriel near. "Take my cherubim and distract your mother. It's best if she doesn't know your brother is here."

Gabriel hesitated, but eventually nodded, for he adored being one of God's favored children.

Samael's return, no matter how cordoned off or brief, drew a crowd. A temporary truce was even agreed upon on the battlefields, and many of God's children now huddled and hovered near the gates, arguing and jeering. God stood at the back of the crowd, peeking around the ankles of a low-flying daughter.

Uriel's black cloak was tied around him and looped around the bars of the gates. And there Samael was, the son who looked like God, but shined like Ishtar. He kept one hand at his smaller brother's throat, while the other gripped another bar from the gate. His mouth opened wide as he screamed words God couldn't make out over the din, but his appearance spoke volumes. Soot-smudged wings rose up from black, torn robes, and a thick, full beard had grown from his chin. Dried blood stood out on his face and hands.

All those broken, drowning souls had to go somewhere. It was part of the design.

A small hush rippled through the crowd, and Samael's voice cried out, "What have you done?" His voice broke as he asked again, "What have you done?"

"Go back to Hell!" heckled an angel.

Samael bared his teeth. "Why don't you come with me?"

The crowd roared back to life, and God drew in a short, shaky breath. Reaching for the nearest of his children, he ordered, "Have Michael and Amenadiel return him to Hell."

"Y-yes, Father," the angel stuttered, shocked to see God outside of the Great Tower. Shocked more, still, to be touched by him.

God didn't linger. Turning his back on his shining son, he returned to his workshop to look upon his wicked deed. What had he done?

Full of regret, he sent the angel Meiel down to Earth once more, where she bridled the rains. The angel Raphael joined her, breathing winds across the endless ocean, so that the waters began to
evaporate. But even when the land resurfaced, the damage was done, and the survivors of the flood knew only how to fear God. They built altars in his name, where they made burnt offerings to the unseen. Little pleas for peace and forgiveness.

When a vibrant rainbow arced in the sky, the humans mistook it for a gentle promise. It was the only way to cope with the unimaginable loss, to go on living without a fear of water. And God looked upon his fragile children and vowed to keep the promise they believed he had made. And whenever a rainbow arced in the sky, he remembered his vow.

*Amenadiel*, a soft, familiar voice calls in prayer. *I'm not sure you can hear me...*

"Focus," God says, closing Amenadiel's ears to the words.

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Heaven's civil wars drew to a close beneath Michael's devoted sword and Amenadiel's counsel, and the human souls of Heaven finally knew peace after death.

In this time, God avoided visiting Earth in a tangible form, if he could help it, and rarely interfered. He avoided everything, if he could help it, choosing, instead, to let Gabriel mediate. But he was often bored in his tower workshop, and so continued to send his spirit out and watch the Earth unfold from the eyes of a clever man named Moses.

One day, Moses was leading his father-in-law's flock over craggy Mount Horeb. It was a long, dull journey, but Moses had a placid personality that made it relaxing. Drought had plagued the region for years, and although there had been rain recently, the mountain was covered in dry boulders, thirsty yellow grass, and small, wiry scrub bushes that held to life only by sheer stubbornness.

During the heat of the day, Moses brought his sheep to graze near an outcropping of boulders. Sitting back on his heels beneath the shade of a jutting rock, he pulled dried fruit and wine from his satchel and settled in for supper. As he chewed on a tough fig, he heard a crackle and snap from somewhere nearby. Ever cautious of predators that might harm his flock, he rose with his staff in hand and went in search of the source of the sound.

And it came to be that he happened upon a large bush squashed against a boulder that was alight in orange and yellow flames. He stared at it in surprise.

Then the bush began to speak. "Why even bother coming here?" it sighed. "Just so I can get dragged back *again*?"

Oh, no, God thought, far off in his workshop.

"Lord?" Moses asked in awe.

A pause was followed by a snort. "Oh, hello, didn't realize I had an audience. This should be fun. And what's your name?"

*Moses*, God summoned at the same time Moses told the burning bush his name.

"Are you the Lord my God?" Moses asked, voice quavering.

God's mouth dropped open. Did this man honestly believe a bush was talking to him?
Another sigh from the other side of the boulder, which, yes, Moses fully believed came from the bush. "I am what I am," Samael said. "Tell me, how are things, Mo?"

Moses was astonished by how the bush continued to burn, but was not consumed. In his eagerness to hear from God, he had forgotten that it had rained the night before. And that bushes couldn't talk.

"It, uh, could be better, Lord."

"Oh? And what is it you desire, Mo?"

Dammit, God thought, as Moses' focus homed in on Samael's hypnotic voice.

"I want..."

"Yes, yes, go on."

"...the Egyptians to let my people go."

"Ah, admirable desire," Samael said. "I heard about the slavery. Nice pyramids, nasty business. Well, for what it's worth, I take great delight in putting masters to work in the mines when they relocate to my pit. They have so much in common with the rapers."

"Lord?" Moses asked in confusion.

"Suppose that doesn't help you much in the here and now, though, does it?" A pause, the sound of breath being sucked in. "Have you tried talking to Pharaoh?" The breath went out. "He's a mite more reasonable than the last son of Ra, and Nefertari is as sweet as mead."

"Talk to Pharaoh?" Moses said in disbelief. "Who am I that I should go unto Pharaoh and free the children of Israel?"

"Well, my name ought to get you through the door and in for a meeting." Another puffed breath. "I certainly know Pharaoh, you understand."

Moses didn't.

"And what is the name I should give them?" Moses stared at the burning bush with wide eyes. "You are a flaming one, Lord."

"Oh," Samael chuckled, "what gave it away? That I am."

God felt Moses' confusion. What sort of name was I am?

"Do you know, I'm not doing anything. Perhaps I'll tag along. My brother—"

"You have a brother?" And Moses was astonished again.

God couldn't help it. He laughed so hard in his workshop that he almost lost his hold on Moses.

"Yes, runs on self-righteousness, that one. Anyway, he'll probably leave me be for another day or so. Don't see why I can't go with you to talk to Pharaoh. Maybe have a bit of fun while I'm there." Samael sniffed loudly—once, twice, and then a third time. "Is that smoke?" He laughed. "Not just what's in my hand, either."

Samael rounded the rock, finally revealing his tall, angelic form, and Moses scrambled back, one
"Sandal flying off his foot."

"Ben Bl'ial[1]!" Samael cried, a small, smoking bit of papyrus wagging from his lips. "Why the hell are you standing here when there's a fire?" Yanking his cloak off his shoulders, he whacked at the bushfire with wool. When the last of the fire's embers sputtered out several moments later, Samael stood back and looked at his discolored cloak in disgust. "Could've set fire to the whole valley, Mo."

Moses swallowed. "Forgive me, Lord."

"Call me Lucifer," Samael said. "Please."

"L-Lucifer?"

"Did I stutter?" Tossing the cloak aside, he went to Moses and threw an arm around the smaller man's shoulders. "Now," he started, pausing long enough to puff on his joint, the ashes of which had nearly spawned an inferno, "about this chat with Pharaoh..."

It was around this time when Ishtar finally learned of Samael's one and only visit to Heaven's gates nearly a thousand years prior, during the height of the torrential rains God had set upon Earth. And Ishtar ventured from her wing in the Great Tower, her light nearly blinding in her rage as she flashed toward the Hall of Being and stretched her hand over God's beloved project.

The Goddess had never been one for creative projects, not outside of her children, but she was not weak, nor did she lack creativity. Beneath her hand, the Nile ran red with blood and overflowed with frogs. Lice and locusts and flies preyed upon livestock and herder alike. Disease rippled through communities, growing boils on children's faces. Fire rained from the sky, and smoke obscured Samael's sun for three days over heavily-populated Egypt. The stories would one day tell of a people who were spared this wrath and were freed from their captivity because of it, but the stories are wrong. Goddess cared not for any human. She only cared for the pieces of herself that she had given away to her children.

"You must stop this," God hissed when he realized what she was doing.

"I will when you free my son," she snarled, and her light poured over the streets of the Silver City.

"Hell needs a ruler," God argued.

Samael's banishment had started as punishment. Now, it was a matter of practicality as demonic hordes purportedly grew and sinful souls descended.

Ishtar's light winked. "I won't stop until you free him. I will kill every last one of your precious little humans."

"Ishtar," God breathed, reaching toward her gleaming shape. "You know I can't let you do that."

She flitted away from his touch. "Do I?"

"Yes."

"I won't stop," she said again.

"Then you know what I must do."

"You wouldn't," she spat.
But he did. God called upon his most loyal son, his eyes brimming with unshed tears. "Take your mother to Hell," he commanded.

And Ishtar laughed bitterly as God bound her in a jar.

The memory makes Amenadiel's soul weep. He can still feel his mother's light baking the clay pot in his hands.

Chapter End Notes

1. Ben Bli'al = Son of a demon/bitch/useless person (return)

Thanks to the usual culprits, Obli and Yah, as well as to Arlome, for angelic naming and Hebrew cursing, and Zee, for another set of delightfully heathen eyes.
A fly buzzes, rapping against the window in a room with too many green accents. From where she lies beside Ella on a double bed, Chloe turns and watches the floundering insect. The window is actually open an inch, but the fly hasn't figured that out yet. She can't help but think of him as a kindred spirit.

The past twenty-four hours, the past week, the past several months, have been the longest of her life. Full of confusion and betrayal and terror, love and joy, pain and uncertainty. Despite the prevailing trend of extremes, she convinced herself everything was about to be put right. Elvis Keaton Priestly sang for Maze, giving them a name and location, and Lucifer seemed within reach. She should have known it couldn't be that easy.

Their lead is Raul Flores, Keaton's drug supplier and occasional friend with benefits. Aged thirty-five, born and raised and living in Tijuana, Mexico, he drives trucks for Soluciones Logísticas, a warehouse logistics company—the perfect gig for someone moving drugs across international and state lines. Notably, Tijuana is also where the De la Cruz pharmacy chain is headquartered.

Everything was lining up.

So they prepared and drove south, and this morning they burst into Soluciones Logísticas' reception like they owned the place—only to discover Flores is on the road following a shipment to Reno, Nevada, and won't be back for another twenty-four hours. And so their lead is away from the city where they suspect Lucifer is held captive.

The bad timing is almost comical. One more day shouldn't matter that much, but it's agony. None of them expected to be stuffed into a drab hotel room with their disappointment and unspent adrenaline.

Chloe looks back to the ledger in her hands. It's the oldest from Lucifer's set, and many of the favor debts within have been repaid. One that hasn't been stands out to her.

Selena Martinez — Blue agave crops in Jalisco — Owns the bar/restaurant Néctar Azul in Tijuana

She runs a finger over the flowing script, missing the writer behind the words, wishing he were here to tell her how he came to have tequila agave crops in the first place.

Ignoring the finer, newly-added print that reveals the woman's phone number, she pulls up Néctar Azul on her burner phone. To her surprise, the bar is located a mere ten-minute walk from where they're staying. Five-star reviews, of course. Only the best and brightest, or at least the most interesting, receive a favor from Lucifer Morningstar.

Chloe glances at her friends, at Ella's bored stare as she swipes at a colorful game on her phone, at Izzy's grimace as she watches Spanish talking heads on the hotel room's old television. Maze looks equally disgruntled from where she perches on the office desk, picking her nails with a very sharp knife.

For so long, Chloe has looked at pleasures big and small as a waste of time, even a weakness, but she knows better now, or at least accepts that it's more complicated than that. Pleasure is also a release, a small spark of light in the darkness. They need a break. She needs a break, even if she
feels guilty about it.

And what's one more debt repaid? The drive to Tijuana was paved with favors. For highly illegal, and very convincing, fake IDs. For the Subaru that couldn't be traced back to them. For the unregistered firearms and Kevlar in the trunk.

Throwing her legs over the side of the bed, Chloe sits up. "Anybody else up for a drink?"

"Now you're talkin'!" Ella exclaims, immediately closing out of her game. "Let's do it."

Lithe as a cat, Maze hops down from the desk, knife disappearing somewhere inside her cropped jacket. "Not like I wanted to sit here all day and night."

Izzy turns off the television. "Are you sure a drink's a good idea, Chlo?"

"No, but I'm having one." It's not as if it's going to kill her.

"Okay, well, there's this place near—"

"We're going to Néctar Azul," Chloe interrupts, patting the ledger she holds close to her chest. Her smile is tremulous. "The owner owes the Devil a favor."

A slow grin spreads across Maze's face. "Didn't know you had it in you, Decker."

They wander out of their hotel and walk downtown, along clean streets lined with palm trees. This close to the U.S. border, Tijuana smiles with a veneer of greenback wealth. There are no skyscrapers, only squat, colorful buildings—farmacias and dental clinics, bars and restaurants and shops catering to the city's northern visitors—all set against a distant backdrop of slums and beneath a miasma of sunbaked sewage.

As one of the trendier eateries on the small downtown strip, Néctar Azul is easy to spot. The front of its stucco face is painted a bright blue which complements the green and yellow umbrellas that shade its outdoor seating. Chill beats flow past the restaurant's open doorway onto the sidewalk.

"I...think I see Lucifer's influence," Ella says, brows raised at the bar's logo, which, along with the business name, features a shot glass and a fresh lime squirting juice in a way that doesn't inspire thoughts of citrus.

Maze snorts and walks inside.

At the doorway, Chloe hesitates as the others settle at the bar. Cashing in Lucifer's favors has been awkward enough in English. In Mexico, she's mostly a dumb gringo dependent on the English of strangers or Ella's and Izzy's interpretive skills. (Maze, she suspects, can speak Spanish, but enjoys making others work on her behalf.) Altogether, it makes Chloe realize she should stop ignoring the notifications from the language-learning app she installed on her phone ages ago, when she was halfway through a bottle of wine and pissed about a certain hot flight attendant.

"Chloe?" Ella calls.

Shaking herself, she lifts her chin and joins them at the bar. When the buff, square-headed bartender turns to them with a smile, she stumbles through asking for English, which he kindly obliges. She asks to speak with Selena Martinez.

The bartender scratches the back of his neck, his baby face screwed up in confusion. "Is something wrong? You haven't ordered yet..."
"What?" Chloe blanches. "Oh! No, no! It's not like that." She cringes. How does Lucifer do this without feeling like some asshole with an expired coupon?

Maze sighs loudly. "Tell your boss Lucifer Morningstar's skank has come to collect on a debt." Her smile is hard as she reaches over the counter and lifts a small dish of chili-dusted peanuts.

"Gee, thanks, Maze."

"No problem." Nodding, Maze throws a handful of peanuts into her mouth. "You know I got your back."

"Lucifer Morningstar..." the bartender breathes, crossing himself. "I-I've been told about Mr. Morningstar." He straightens, tugging on his black button-down. "Round of tequila shots?"

The afternoon slips through Chloe's fingers, bleeding into evening and then night. They're moved to a table, and the restaurant slowly fills as every plate and cocktail is brought to them for tasting. Ella gushes over the Star Trek tattoo that peeks out from a waiter's sleeve, and Izzy reads tarot for the bartender. And for a little while, Chloe is able to laugh and live in the moment. Then the lights dim, and a live band appears, and she lets herself be drawn to the dance floor, where she spins and spins, staring up at fairy lights strung between wooden ceiling beams. They shine like his stars.

When the band takes a break, Chloe turns to Ella, distraught. The room wobbles behind her friend like a decelerating spinning top. "What if we don't find him?" she says, and even in the loud bar, she thinks she may be yelling more than necessary. "What if I never see him again?" What if she's immortal and never sees him again?

"Aww, Chloe," Ella says, grabbing her hands, "we're getting close. We're just waiting on Flores."

Izzy and Maze appear—or were they always beside her? Izzy snakes an arm around Chloe's waist. "Let's get you back to the hotel," she says gently.

"You know what the last thing he said to me was?" Chloe asks, stumbling between Izzy and Maze. "He said he was getting me out from Lockport. He was going to save me. Again! Well, look at me now!" she slurs. "I'm here. Where's he?" She leans forward and groans. "Everything is spiinning."

"Don't barf, Decker," Maze grunts, jerking her along.

Chloe laughs, but makes no promises. "Trixie—"

"I called Danny," Izzy interrupts. "I told her goodnight for you."

The street is different at night—well-lit, but seedy, and filled with rambunctious college students who've drifted south for cheap booze and fun. Street vendors press against the curb, their spiced pork and chicken turning Chloe's stomach, while taxis weave through traffic behind the food carts. Latin pop, dance, and hip-hop blares from nightclubs, clashing between buildings until her head pounds in time with the syncopated rhythms. She really shouldn't have been drinking...

She loses track of the walk back and misses when they reach their orange-and-yellow hotel with its long outdoor corridors that seem to go on forever. And then suddenly she's in a bed that feels more like a ship rocking at sea. She watches with half-lidded eyes as Ella kneels beside the bed and whispers her nightly prayers.
The next morning, Chloe has regrets. Squinting behind dark sunglasses and holding a coffee cup close to her chest, she trudges behind Izzy and Ella into Soluciones Logísticas’ tiny reception office. The squat room is connected to a garage filled with big rigs in various stages of horribly loud repair.

While the two women launch into a conversation in Spanish with the unkempt man behind the front desk, Chloe forces herself to look at her surroundings more closely than she did yesterday, when they rushed in under the assumption that they were close to finding Flores. Between the pervasive scents of grease and dirt, the vase of half-dead carnations, and the row of empty, glass Mountain Dew bottles shoved against the wall, it’s obvious few visit the business in person. Likely everything is handled over the phone or via email.

Izzy turns to her with a frown. "Flores isn't back."

"He needs to get back," Maze snaps. "Or I'll find him myself."

"What happened?" Chloe asks, flinching when a metal tool clatters to the concrete in the mechanic's garage.

"Breakdown not far from L.A." The irony.

"So, what, we wait another day?"

"Bruno says Flores isn't answering his phone."

"This is taking too long," Chloe despairs. She chews on the edge of her thumb, thinking. "Maybe we don't need Flores," she says a moment later.

"How?" Izzy asks. "He's our only lead, isn't he?"

Chloe lowers her voice. "Yeah, but most people act alone or work in small groups. They're not part of a big conspiracy. For now, we don't have any reason to suspect this whole business." Not that she's ruled out the possibility of organized crime; a business like this would be useful to De la Cruz or any cartel. All the more reason to tread lightly. "Right now, we just need info on Flores or from him. Does this guy know him? If he doesn't, find out who does, and we'll go talk to them."

Sometimes detective work is as much about finding new and more practical leads as it is about following the best and most promising ones. She stands back as Ella and Izzy grill the man whose exasperated expression suggests he's already tired of seeing their faces.

"Do you, uh, understand what they're saying?" Chloe whispers to Maze.

Maze's head swivels toward her. She rolls her eyes. "Duh. Need Spanish to torture Inquisitors."

Chloe's brows pinch together. "Wait, like, nobody expects the Spanish Inquisition Inquisitors?" At Maze's shrug, she takes several long swallows of coffee, only to find she can't stop herself from asking for more information. "What was that like?"

"No time for stories, Decker," Maze says, grabbing her arm. "They got a location." She drags Chloe toward the door, Izzy and Ella on their heels.

"Where are we headed?" Chloe asks when they're all stuffed in the black Subaru that Lucifer's favor afforded them.

"Las Razas," Ella answers, holding onto the back of Chloe's seat as Maze peels out of Soluciones
Logísticas' parking lot. "Bar south of here. Bruno says Flores used to go there a lot after work."

Great. A bar. Just what her hangover ordered. "No other leads?"

"No," Ella says, "but, hey, we can always try the address connected to Flores' license if we're down for some B&E."

"Bar first. We're trying not to break any more laws than we have to," Chloe sighs. "Than we already have."

As Maze merges into traffic, Chloe applies pressure to the faint indentation between her brows, where a headache throbs persistently.

***

Sandwiched between a halal kabab cafe and a currency exchange business that has a giant yellow dollar sign on its front door, Las Razas is one of those bars that's doing more to obscure itself than advertise. It immediately reminds Chloe of Niko's, the Georgians' dive bar in Glendale. Blackened windows and a solid wooden door keep Las Razas' secrets hidden from the public eye.

Inside, Chloe's headache eases in the dim lighting; one of the brightest and only light sources in the bar is the big screen television that's currently airing a soccer game. Years of cigarette smoke cling to the walls, which are covered in faded pennants, a giant Mexican flag, and hundreds of photographs. Two sun-aged Mexican men with thick black mustaches—the bar's only patrons at eleven-thirty in the morning—look up briefly before returning to their beers and conversation.

Izzy scrunches her nose when her ballet flats stick to the floor. "So Flores has great taste."

"I think it's popular, actually," Chloe hums, scanning photographs as she passes. "Lots of people in these photos." And some are faded, suggesting the bar has been open a long time.

The bartender, a middle-aged woman with wavy black hair, watches them from behind the bar, her face painted in shadows. "Cómo puedo ayudarles?"

"Inglés?" Chloe asks hopefully as she stops at the bar's edge.

The woman gives a world-weary sigh and leans against the counter. "Yeah."

Ella swipes through pictures on her burner phone until she locates the photo of Flores from his American commercial driver's license. She turns the screen toward the bartender.

"Do you know this man?" Chloe asks.

The woman stares at the photo for a long moment before studying each of them. "Police?" she asks.

"No police," Ella assures her. It's mostly true. Tijuana is far outside the LAPD's jurisdiction, and she's only a forensic scientist—out on sick leave, officially.

"Sound like police."

Maze drags a stool away from the counter, indifferent to the grating sound it makes. She glares at Chloe as she sits. "No one thought I was a cop until I started hanging out with you." Nodding to the bartender, she demands curtly, "Tequila."
The bartender scowls as she reaches for a shot glass and a bottle, but in serving Maze, she also relaxes. "Raul worked here," she finally says.

"Worked here?" Izzy says.

"Sí." She slides Maze's tequila shot down the counter, where the demon deftly catches the glass before it can sail off the polished wood.

"But he works at—"

Chloe grabs hold of Izzy's lacy sleeve before she can give anything away. "What did Raul do here exactly?"

"He was a bartender."

"A bartender," Chloe echoes, even as she wonders how that works with the tight schedule of a truck driver. "What were his hours like?"

"He worked nights," the woman answers. "Drove deliveries around the city by day."

So a trip to Reno isn't typical, Chloe thinks. "Why did he quit?"

"I fired him," the woman spits, revealing herself to be the owner, or at least a manager, of the bar.

"Bad employee, huh?" Chloe asks, not missing a beat.

"Thief," she answers.

"What'd he steal?"

"You ask many questions." The woman grabs a dishcloth to dry freshly-washed glasses. "Like a police. I think you should go."

"You want my guess?" Leaning close, Chloe jabs her index finger down onto the counter. "I know a guy who runs a bar. And I know what his bartenders do—what they sell and what they could steal, if they were ever dumb enough to steal from him." Maze huffs in amusement. "Raul Flores stole drugs from Las Razas, didn't he?"

"I like you." Letting the dishcloth drop to the counter, the bartender smiles wryly. "You're good, blanca, but—"

"So he did steal from you."

"Why do you care?"

"Because we're looking for Flores, too. He has information we need." She hopes.

After a pause, the woman explains, "He stole from my supplier."

"Turtles all the way down," Ella murmurs.

"Qué?"

Chloe pulls the woman's attention back to her. "We need the name of your supplier."

She snorts. "Even if I knew his real name, blanca—and I don't—I wouldn't give it to you."
A loud clunk sounds in the small bar, and Chloe winces. Maze wiggles the tip of her Hell-forged blade in the counter's wood. It squeaks unpleasantly. "What about me? I'm fine with nicknames."

The woman stares at the knife, a visible shiver rippling through her body. "Rosco."

"Rosco the Drug Dealer," Chloe says dryly. There are no Roscos tied to De la Cruz that she knows of, but then there's a lot they don't know.

"It's what I know him by." She glances at Maze's knife again. "That's the truth. Raul stole from Rosco, and it came back on me. That's all I know. You turistas may breeze in here with your American dollars, but then you go home. Some of us live here. Best not to know too much."

"Who are you calling turista?" Izzy snaps, a hand going to her hip.

The bartender looks at her coolly and raises a brow.

"Okay, okay," Chloe sighs. "What can you tell us about Rosco?"

The woman is reluctant to part with information, but gives them a basic physical description and tells them he only delivers to Las Razas twice a month. "I don't have a number. He comes to me. If you find him, you can't tell him I told you anything."

"We won't," Chloe assures her.

They turn toward the door, their shoulders rolled forward with their disappointment. Just what they needed—another face to find in a city of millions. Rub elbows with drug dealers too much, and they'll attract the attention of the cartels. Chloe grimaces as she browses wall photos near the front door—all the men and women over the years celebrating one sports event or another. The cartels would be a dangerous distraction; De la Cruz operates entirely outside of them.

Chloe stops. A long face stares out from a picture faded by time. In it, two men in their thirties stand together, smiling, one short and Latino, the other tall and white, although... Chloe's brows knit together as recognition hits her. The taller, paler man's typically bearded face is clean-shaven, the bald head she knows covered in the black, combed hair of his youth. Light from outside washes over the photograph as Maze opens the door.

"You know someone here," Izzy says, looking between Chloe and the wall of photographs.

She does. How could she ever forget the man who spun tales of a sister and led them into Cain's trap? If not for this man, she may never have learned the truth about Lucifer. She would not be standing here, in this moment, as this person.

Ella gasps when she spots the photo. "Whoa. Now that's a clue. Big Guy really delivered this time."

If God has anything to do with this, Chloe thinks, he's sick. At the same time, she wonders what is and isn't coincidence.

Maze leans close to the photo in disbelief. "Is that—"

"Yeah." Chloe snatches the photo from the wall, tearing it away from its red pin, and returns to the bartender. "Who is this man to you?" she asks, holding the photo aloft.

The woman looks at her warily before squinting at the picture. "He was a bouncer here...fifteen years ago? Maybe twenty? When we first opened. Think his name was John...Barlow?"
"Barrow."

"Yeah, that's it."

A bitter, disbelieving laugh slips past Chloe's lips as she turns back to her friends. "We're done here."

In the Subaru, Chloe feels the others' eyes on her as she frantically digs her laptop out of her backpack and opens the files she has on John Barrow. She hears Izzy's nervous card shuffling.

Ella touches Chloe's shoulder. "What is it?"

"Look at him," Chloe insists, shaking the photo in one hand as she clicks through pictures with the other.

Maze snatches up the picture. "It's a crazy coincidence, but I don't get it."

Chloe shakes her head, unable to reply. As one of the few figures she knows had a connection to Pierce, Barrow always stood out as a lead suspect in her mind. But even with Juan Otero bailing him out, and Otero's connection to Shayna's safe house in Colinda, connecting Barrow himself to the De la Cruz empire has been tricky, if not impossible.

But intuition is a strange thing. Chloe has spent most of her time as a detective trying to ignore her gut. After all, that way lies assumptions and false positives, missed clues, and other rookie mistakes. Much like the scientific method helps keep scientists on track, following protocol is the gold standard of detective work for a reason. And yet, her "notable instincts" were the first thing Lucifer noticed and complimented her on, and there's no denying she could have saved herself a lot of heartache these last few years if only she'd followed them.

With this photo, she sees it clearly—why did she never see it before? John Barrow has Hector de la Cruz's nose and brow line. "There!" she yells, stopping on an older picture of Hector. He's dressed in a tux at some gala, a voluptuous young woman on his arm. Taking the old photograph of Barrow back from Maze, she holds it up beside her laptop's screen. "See?"

"Oh, shit," Izzy says, her cards falling silent.

"They're definitely related," Ella says. "Father and son, yeah?"

"Unrecognized, though," Maze points out.

Chloe exhales. "If he is Hector's son, but by another mother, that means he does have a sister—Shayna." Letting the photo drop to her knee, Chloe opens the map of De la Cruz properties on her laptop. "Ella, when we had John Barrow in custody, did we look into properties he owned?"

"Yeah, not much came up. One apartment and a rundown house in Inglewood, I think?"

"Did we look in Mexico?"

"N-no... I've been speaking with record keepers here about De la Cruz properties only." She digs into her pocket for her cell phone. "I'll make the calls."

Chloe snaps her laptop shut and smiles. "I think we're close.

***
John C. Barrow owns one property in Tijuana, Mexico. The warehouse, a 20,000-square-foot behemoth purchased a mere two and a half months ago, is a concrete fortress jammed against the mountainside. From where Maze has parked their vehicle at a tire shop across the highway, Chloe peers through a set of binoculars, watching a semi drive away from the building. The garage door swiftly rolls closed behind it.

"So when do we send me in?" Maze asks.

"Just because this place is in Barrow's name doesn't mean this is where Lucifer's being held." Chloe lowers the binoculars. "We need to make sure this is the right warehouse before we let you wreak havoc on just anybody." She smiles slightly.

Maze rolls her eyes. "Okay, so how do we figure out if this is the place?"

"We could follow one of those trucks," Ella suggests. "Find out what's inside."

"That could take too long," Chloe says, "and we only have one car."

"So, what, you want to just sit here and watch them?" Maze gripes.

"That's...kinda what a stakeout is." At Maze's glare, Ella holds up her hands. "Just sayin'."

"Uh, guys?" Izzy says, drawing their attention as she points. "There are people walking out of the building—heads toward the cars?"

Chloe fumbles with her binoculars, lifting them once more to focus on the small parking lot to the right of the warehouse. She jerks back in surprise as she sees none other than Hector de la Cruz himself. "Ella, take pictures!" she cries.

"On it!"

Photographs have not done justice to the tall, imposing CEO of one of Mexico's biggest pharmacy chains. The seventy-nine-year-old, dressed in a tailored suit, doesn't look a day over fifty and walks with no hitch in his step. He strides beside two men who guide a fourth person—a young woman with long, black, wavy hair. Hector casts exasperated glances toward the woman as he directs the others. Dressed in sweats and a baggy t-shirt, the young woman stumbles between her handlers toward a black BMW. The two helpers shove her into the back of the car before climbing in after her. Hector joins them, and a moment later the vehicle reverses from its parking spot.

"Get the license plate number!" Chloe demands.

"I aaam," Ella says, the shutter of her SLR snapping.

Chloe lowers her binoculars as the black car merges into traffic and drives away. The windows are so darkly tinted that she can't see inside, anyway. "I think that was Shayna de la Cruz," she says, astonished. "With Hector."

Ella thumbs through the image gallery on her camera before lifting it between the two front seats. They lean in, looking at the photo from different angles, at the woman's slackened expression and hunched shoulders.

"She sure looks like Hector and Barrow," Ella says.

"What's wrong with her?" Izzy asks. "I thought she was some badass gangster."
Maze sighs, sounding almost wistful. "I know that look."

"So do I," Chloe murmurs, glancing at the demon, memories of a haunted Jimmy Barnes flitting through her head.

Ella looks between them. "What am I missing?"

"She saw Lucifer," Chloe explains, using her thumb and forefinger to zoom in on Shayna's face. If she could zoom in any further, Chloe knows exactly what she'd see—pupils stretched wide and black with fear.

"Bitch had it coming," Maze says.

"Saw him?" Ella says.

"In his devil form," Izzy answers gently. Chloe glances at her, curious. Izzy's never seen Lucifer in that form, but her witchy ex-sister-in-law has a tendency to know things.

"He... He has a devil form?" Ella's voice is small. "I mean, of course he does, right?" She laughs, clearly disquieted as her imagination runs wild. "He's not just an angel."

"None of it changes who he is," Chloe says, her voice firm.

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The afternoon in their hotel room is stifling and filled with a nervous excitement. They force food into themselves at dinner, finalizing their plan of entry on a rough drawing of the warehouse and its perimeter. It would be better if they had blueprints of the interior, but none of them can shake the feeling that time in running out. How much Firefly has already entered the world?

"Izzy, you should stay behind," Chloe says, tapping the warehouse drawing with a hotel pen. "We'll get Lucifer out, and you can drive."

"I'm going with you," Izzy insists.

"No, you're not. You have no training or experience."

Izzy lifts her chin in a classic Espinoza way. "It's in my cards. I'm going. If I don't go, someone dies. I don't know why or how."

"Uh, do I get a say?" Ella says, raising a hand. "Cause I'd rather none of us died."

Chloe's heart skips a beat as she swallows. Finally, she nods. "Okay, but I want you and Ella to stay between Maze and me at all times."

"Leave in three hours?" Maze suggests, staring lovingly at the knives she's laid out on the office desk.

Plan as finalized as it can be, Chloe retreats outdoors, where the stars sparkle above the hot city. She wanders to a quiet corner outside the hotel and sits down on the pale pink bricks of the parking lot, which were likely orange in the past. Leaning against a yellow wall, she tries to ignore her nervous stomach as she takes out her cell phone and calls Trixie, who answers on the second ring.

"Hey, Trixie-Babe," she says, trying to infuse her greeting with all the love and none of the fear she
Trixie skips pleasantries. "Have you found Lucifer yet?"

"We're close," Chloe answers, then redirects her daughter's attention. "How was your day?"

"It was okay," Trixie sighs. "Will you be home before school starts? I start on Monday."

"I know you do." Chloe squeezes her eyes shut. "I'm gonna try to be back, baby."

Fifth grade. Where did the time go?

She ends the call several minutes later and stares at her reflection in the unlit screen. Sighing, she shoves her phone into her back pocket before bowing her head and folding her hands. Just as she's thinking of Lucifer, footsteps sound around the corner, and then Izzy is there, sliding her back along the yellow wall until she comes to sit beside Chloe. She rests a card between them on the pink bricks. *The Tower* stares up at them, with its castle spire set ablaze by lightning and its nobles tumbling through the air to their gruesome deaths.

"That seems bad," Chloe whispers.

"No card is all good or all bad."

"Yeah, well, last time you drew this, you said a part of me died."

"Chaos and destruction are coming," Izzy interprets with a shrug. "There's no getting around it. But that could mean lots of things, Chlo. If we're successful tonight, you'll be well on your way to destroying a drug lord and wiping out Cain's network."

Chloe studies the card, her blood uncomfortably cool in her veins. She can't shake the feeling that *The Tower* is far more ominous than that.

Chapter End Notes

Blessings upon Obli and Yah, and upon Hircine Taoist's pure eyes.
Kevlar and a loaded backpack weigh heavily on Chloe's shoulders as they crawl through the ditch that runs alongside Federal Highway 2. The occasional truck, beat-up sedan, or police car passes on the road above, white lights piercing the darkness, but it's mostly quiet at this hour, save for whistling wind and the steady, chirruping call of desert crickets.

They stop at the edge of the ditch, where the ground slopes around a drainage pipe running beneath the driveway into the Barrow / De la Cruz facility. Maze turns back, her dark hair and eyes lit by moonlight and the ghostly glow of the floodlights surrounding the warehouse. Chloe blinks, remembering the decayed, webbed flesh of her cheek. How often has Maze stormed places like this for or with Lucifer? Surely this is nothing compared to the things they saw in Hell. It's a small comfort.

"Stay here," Maze instructs, and Chloe finds she's content to let someone else play general. "I'll take care of the guard." She leaps up to the driveway, a black cat figure materializing beneath bright lights.

Chloe ducks low beside Izzy and Ella, but soon they peer over the driveway's edge as much as they dare, watching as Maze saunters forward. A man stands in the guard house as she nears, caught between alarm and the excitement of seeing a beautiful woman in the middle of the night, in the middle of nowhere. Maze stops in front of the small, narrow structure, and Chloe can just barely make out the sultry purr of Spanish over the wind. The man soon leans close, relaxing into the conversation.

Maze is so fast Chloe almost misses when her hand darts into the opened half of the guard house window and grabs the man by his shirt. Yanking his body toward her, she slams his head against the glass partition. The sound of the smack—meaty and wet—travels far in the night, followed by the soft thud of a body collapsing.

"Holy shit," Izzy whispers. "That was awesome."

Maze turns and waves them forward.

Climbing out of the ditch, Chloe ushers Ella and Izzy in front of her, her head whipping from side to side, looking for cameras. There are several, but it's hard to determine if they're in the line of their vision, or if anyone is watching the security footage with any dedication. They should assume guards will come for them soon.

They jog toward the side of the building, where the main entrance meets the parking lot, and stop in front of a door with a card reader.

"There's no way they haven't seen us," Izzy laments, keeping her face pointed away from the obvious, dome-shaped security camera mounted a few feet above the door.

"We'll just have to move fast," Maze says. Taking a step back, she lifts her leg in a roundhouse kick toward the door, but Ella grabs her at the last minute, pulling her back. "What the hell, Ellen?" she complains.

"You'll set off all the alarms!" Ella hisses.
"So? We gotta get in, and Izzy's right. We've probably already been seen."

"But we don't know that, so I can disable this alarm if you'll give me a minute." Ella drops her backpack to the ground and rummages through it, retrieving a screwdriver and cutting pliers. With skilled fingers, she pries off the face of the card reader, unscrews a protective plate, and pulls out a braided tangle of wires.

Maze smirks appreciatively. "Where'd you learn this?"

"Eh, all alarms are pretty much the same," Ella says, picking through the wires. "Mostly security theater. Good to know how to disable them when your life is basically Grand Theft Auto. That game's totes unrealistic, by the way. Great music, though."

Chloe holds her breath as Ella picks out a wire and slips it between the cutter's teeth. **Snip.** Only when the world doesn't end does she dare to breathe again.

They resume their formation, and Maze throws open the door, revealing a closed-off reception area that smells of recent construction. At a desk positioned to the right, a bald man rises in alarm, his hand going to the sidearm holstered at his hip. "Oye, quiénes son—"

Maze's knife flies through the air and sinks into the hollow of the man's throat. He looks at them, stunned, one hand touching the blade buried to the hilt between his collarbones. Blood runs down his chest, staining his white shirt, as he falls, face first, over his desk before sliding to the floor.

Ella stares. "Is he..."

"Dead?" Maze asks coolly. "Oh, yeah."

"That seems...bad. Like, real bad."

"So does one of us getting shot in the face."

A button on a panel near the dead man's computer opens the door, and they continue forward, passing through to another room with lockers and an unmanned card reader system, which Ella overrides. Maze rests her hand on the doorknob, hesitating.

"We should have seen someone by now," Chloe whispers.

"Means anyone who's here...they're all through that door," Izzy says. The pupils of her eyes are blown wide by adrenaline, and Chloe wonders if she's ever seen a man die before tonight.

"There probably aren't too many people here," Chloe says, trying to reassure them all. "I counted seven cars in the parking lot." None of them mention how carpooling could mean dozens are inside.

Maze looks between their faces, her nose turning up at the motley crew. "I'll clear things out."

Chloe protests, "I'll go with—"

"No. You keep the humans safe."

Without another word, Maze slips into the room beyond, slamming the door shut behind her. Chloe stares in shock at the closed door and its mangled card reader, torn between the desire to join her unhinged friend and the duty to protect civilians. Then come the sounds—men shouting in Spanish, fists meeting flesh, bones snapping like branches underfoot. She meets Ella and Izzy's fearful
stares over the screeching and yowling. *Maze is happening.*

Tense minutes pass as the room beyond becomes quieter and then quiets altogether. Chloe flinches, one hand going to her pistol, when Maze reappears a moment later, opening the door wide. She grins at them viciously, blood on her teeth and in her hair, shining slick and red. Chloe doubts any of it belongs to Maze herself.

She peeks around the doorframe, looking into a long, brightly lit corridor that is littered with bodies of grown men whose limbs sit at unnatural angles. Pools of blood collect around a few of the men, growing with each stuttering heartbeat. But it's the doors Chloe finds most alarming. Closed doors line both sides of the enormous hallway—all points of possible attack.

"We'll need to clear each room," she says to Maze.

"Not my first rodeo, Decker." Maze shoves damp hair away from her brow, smearing blood. "Grab the others. Let's go."

Chloe keeps Ella and Izzy between them as she guards their rear, heart racing, her fingertips warm with barely-contained light. But as they push through the hallway, opening doors to empty storage rooms and loading bays, a new sensation flows through her to swirl with adrenaline. Far from being afraid of the confrontation ahead, she knows she is bigger than their enemies, that bullets may stop her, but she rises again. That she consorts with the Devil and walks with demons and witches and gave birth to a miracle of her own.

For the first time in her life, Chloe knows faith.

"There," Ella says, pointing to a door. "Another card reader. That's gotta be where they're keeping Lucifer."

They step around bodies, clearing the rooms standing between them and the secured door ahead. Suddenly, a door beyond swings open, and a man appears. His mouth falls open as he frees a handgun from his side.

"Look out!" Izzy cries.

But the warning comes a second too late. The man raises his gun and fires two quick rounds. Maze's knife throw goes wide, the blade wedging into drywall as bullets sink into her middle.

"*Maze!*" Chloe screams, and lifts her pistol and fires. The bullet hurtles down the hallway, piercing the man near his heart. The three shots crack and echo painfully in the enclosed space, making her ears ring. Knees buckling, the man crumples to the concrete floor like a puppet whose strings have been cut.


Izzy and Ella rush to Maze moments before she falls to the floor. Crimson blood spurts past the demon's fingers, where it pools across her waistline and spills down to the floor, collecting in a puddle.

Breathing raggedly, Chloe looks around the hallway, anticipating more assailants. When none appear, she drops to her knees, sliding close to Maze. "You idiot," she mutters, tearing open her backpack. "I told you to wear a vest." She drags out a first aid kit and locates a sterile compress, which she pushes against the bullets' entry points. Maze groans in agony, and Chloe winces. "Sorry."
"It's okay, Decker," Maze chokes out between gritted teeth.

"It's not," Chloe says, trying to ignore how quickly the compress is dampening. They need to get Maze to a hospital, but there's no going back now, not when they're trespassing and among a sea of bodies. Not when Lucifer could be a few doors down.

"You're gonna be okay," Izzy says in a rush, digging through the first aid kit, hunting for anything else that might help. But a wound like this is more than a standard first aid kit can handle.

Maze barks a laugh. "I'm gonna die in a fucking warehouse." She grabs Chloe's hand, her fingers wet with blood. "Get him out."

Chloe despairs. "I'm not leaving you here to die."

"I'm a demon," Maze says, breathing in small, shocked gasps. "This is...not a bad death."

"None of you die if I'm here," Izzy snaps. "Let's get out of this hallway." Standing, she shoves open the door to the nearest room they already cleared. Like most of the rooms in this warehouse, it's filled with nothing but empty metal shelves. Turning, she crouches and grabs Maze under her armpits. "Get her feet," she tells the others. "Gently!"

Alongside Ella, Chloe grabs hold of Maze's legs. Moving the injured isn't a good idea, but staying in an open hallway seems even worse.

They shuffle into the room with Maze, who grunts in pain as she swings between them. After settling her into a corner, Chloe runs and shuts the door. Izzy sits beside Maze, brushing bloodied hair from her forehead. She uses the first aid kit's only other compress to try to further stanch the blood. For a moment, they're quiet as they get caught in their own thoughts.

"We're in a warehouse full of angel feathers," Izzy says. "Or should be, right? Don't they heal?"

"Lucifer's feather!" Ella shouts, startling them all. "I forgot!" Digging past the neckline of her Velocirapper shirt and her Kevlar vest, she drags out a chain that has a long, slender pouch made of black silk hanging from it. "He told me to keep the feather I found in the loft. 'Good for life-threatening wounds,'" she says, fumbling with the drawstring. Chloe's breath catches as Ella pulls out a long feather that shines even beneath the artificial lighting. "Oh, man, it feels good getting that out from my underwire."

"Save it, human," Maze groans. "Won't work on demons."

"What? Why?"

"No soul."

They pause, considering her words. "Nope, I don't buy it," Ella says. "Sounds like propaganda."

Maze huffs. "It's not."

"Use it," Izzy says to Ella.

"Don't I get a"—Maze gasps in pain—"say in this?"

"No," Chloe says with the authority ten years of motherhood has given her. She nods to Ella.

With only a second of hesitation, Ella drapes the feather across Maze's wounds. The vane swells with bright, golden light that spreads like a fire, consuming the feather. Light bursts forth from the
plume like a solar flare unfurling from the sun. Ella and Izzy yelp, covering their eyes, while Maze lets out a long, deep moan before her eyes roll back in her head and she sags down into unconsciousness.

Chloe presses fingers to her friend's neck, feeling the thready thump of her pulse. She stares into the burning light which washes over them and fills the room with warmth. A deep sense of peace sweeps through her, as if Creation itself has come to wrap its arms around her shoulders. A second later, the light collapses in on itself, as though the feather were nothing more than a tiny star born to die. The tranquility disappears with it.

"Talk about a light show," Ella says shakily, smiling and wiping a tear from her cheek. "Dude, look, the feather's gone!"

Izzy gently pulls Maze's shirt away from her gunshot wounds—except now there are no wounds at all. Smooth, light brown skin exists where only a few moments before bullet wounds bled profusely. "She's healed... I wonder if the bullets are still in there."

"It really worked," Chloe breathes.

"Thank God," Ella says.

"It wasn't God's feather," Chloe says, frustrated.

"Sorry."

Recalling something Lucifer once told her, Chloe grimaces. "I think she'll be out for a while." Shit, what are they going to do if they need to haul two incapacitated people out of here? She chews on the edge of her thumb until she realizes she tastes the iron of Maze's blood. She scrubs her fingers against her jeans.

"You and Ella go get Lucifer," Izzy says, touching her arm. "I'll stay with Maze."

"We can't leave you," Chloe protests.

"We'll be okay."

Chloe wants to argue, but what else is there to do? Nodding, she unholsters her Glock. She still has her smaller pocket pistol. "Have you ever used a handgun?"

"Not for a long time, but...yeah. Abuelo used to take Danny and me shooting. He had guns of all kinds." She shrugs and gives a small smile. "Texans."

"Good." Chloe sags with relief. She hands Izzy the weapon and quickly refreshes her on how to use it. "Ella and I will knock like this"—she raps her knuckles against the wall in a rhythm—"when we come back. If anyone opens the door without that knock, you shoot them. Aim for the center of the body, not the head."

Izzy stares, wide-eyed, at the gun in her hand. "Okay."

Clutching Izzy's shoulder, Chloe adds, "Don't be a hero. No matter what you hear happen outside this door, don't venture out. Wait for us to come get you or for Maze to wake up."

Izzy nods, speechless.

Chloe returns to the hallway with Ella by her side. The mass of bodies have only become more
horrifying, and the stench of excrement sours the enclosed space. It's a scent they're all too familiar with from crime scenes, but not one that's usually so concentrated.

"Should we clear the rooms ahead?" Ella asks, glancing at the ten or so doors beyond the one with the card reader.

"I don't know," Chloe admits, her gaze focused on a distant door labeled Security. She bites her lip, thinking. "$\text{There's only two of us... If we can get Lucifer out, he can help.}$" Her mouth twists. "$\text{Maybe.}$" The fact that she makes him vulnerable may put a wrench in that, depending on what's been done to him.

Ella makes quick work of the card reader panel, leaving the wired guts hanging. On the count of three, Chloe shoves open the door, and they rush inside, banking their backs against the wall, their firearms outstretched before them. The room is bright, like all the rest, and very still and quiet, tainted only by the scent of medical supplies and the tang of old blood. For a moment, Chloe is taken from the room, transported back into her paralyzed body and filled with fear.

"Oh, man," Ella says, breaking the spell.

Chloe blinks, returning to the present, only to gasp and stare at the middle of the room. Three steel beams rise up from the concrete floor. The middle beam stands, nearly as tall as she is, while the beams on either side of it reach much higher. Unlike the middle beam, the beams on the left and right have hook arms, like upside down L's.

Lucifer is the connecting piece. His body "floats," suspended by black chains wrapped around the beams, which are shaped to allow access to his exposed back. A tall metal rod with an IV bag the size of a toddler is placed high near his head. Plastic tubing runs down from the bag to his arm. Three step ladders are nearby, one facing his front and two facing his back.

Tears spring to Chloe's eyes as she takes in the vermilion skin of his naked form and the long, pale pink arms with their thin membranes of flesh protruding from his back. The massive joints wedged beneath and into his shoulder blades are relaxed, leaving his wing arms to wilt downward, the long digits at the tips nearly touching the floor. It's almost impossible to imagine these appendages are his magnificent wings, though logically she knows from extracting bullets from his flesh that this is what lies beneath the tightly-overlaid feathers.

Ella stares. "$\text{What have they done to him?}$"

"They've $\text{plucked}$ him," Chloe says bitterly, scrubbing at her wet cheeks. She makes to step forward, but Ella stops her with a hand on her wrist.

"He's... This is his devil form?"

"$\text{He's still Lucifer.}$"

Ella nods several times. "$\text{Yeah. Yeah. Sure. Still Lucifer.}$" She forces out a chuckle. "$\text{Still our wacky club-owning friend.}$"

"Look, you stay on this side of him, okay?" Chloe says, knowing from experience that his face can be quite a shock. "$\text{Focus on getting his chains off. I think I see a lock near his ankles.}$"

"O-okay."

But when Chloe walks forward, Ella doesn't follow. She turns back. "$\text{Ella, I really need your help.}$"
Ella shakes herself. "Yeah, okay. I'll just focus on the chains holding...el Diablo."

"Thank you," Chloe says, and rushes forward. She sloughs off her backpack and tosses it aside.

If she thought Lucifer's back was heartbreaking, nothing could have prepared her for his front. Passed out, his scarlet face is slack in a drug-induced sleep, but even in rest, even in this form, there is a tiredness pulling at the corners of his eyes and mouth that she's never seen. The unforgiving fluorescents highlight his bald head and the twists and pits of his flesh, which itself contrasts with the black chains binding his arms and legs. A large collar rests at his throat, further connecting and restricting his arms to his neck. Her eyes drift down his body. She wishes she had something to cover him with. He's never been shy about nudity, but she knows his chutzpah doesn't extend to this form.

Chloe shakes with anger as she goes to him. Reaching up, she grasps his black-nailed hand and studies the IV at his wrist. She's taken first aid courses, but those don't exactly cover IVs. All she knows is it has to come out. She can't imagine how dangerous it is for him to be on these drugs with her near. Whispering apologies, she peels away the dressing and carefully pulls the catheter free from his skin. Blood wells at the injection site, a darker crimson than his flesh. She lifts the catheter and studies it, curious. How the hell did they puncture his skin in the first place?

"These chains are really warm to the touch," Ella says as she wiggles a pick in a lock the size of her hand.

Turning her attention to the chains, Chloe reaches for one of the heavy links. It is warm, as if it's been baking beneath the sun. Frowning, she touches one of Lucifer's knobby knees. He's a furnace, as always, but it doesn't seem to be his body heating these shackles. Even the links that don't touch him directly are noticeably warm.

He groans, and she looks up, startled. "Lucifer?"

"Detective," he sighs.

"I'm here," she says, and scrambles up the nearest step ladder to be near his face. "I'm here," she says again, when she's level with him, and frames his jaw with her hands.

He flinches beneath her touch.

"Shh, it's okay," she whispers, a tear rolling down her cheek as she sweeps her thumbs across rough skin. "We're going to get you out of here." She glances at the braided chains and tries not to despair. Ella still hasn't gotten past the first lock.

Lucifer chuckles, fiery eyes opening briefly before rolling back in his head. "You're not here."

"I am," she insists, frowning, even as she chalks up his confusion to the drugs in his system. There might be hope for them if his supercharged metabolism kicks in fast enough. He's strong—strong enough to throw grown men through windows and fly her into the sky. He can unlock anything. Surely no chains can hold him. Which makes her wonder...

"Why haven't you tried to break free?" she asks softly, and he jerks again, but remains asleep. "Have they had you drugged this whole time?"

And how is that even possible? She studies the oversized IV bag again. Who can hold the Devil —De la Cruz? He may trade in alleged celestial artifacts, but something doesn't add up.

"Uh, Chloe?" Ella calls. "This lock is serious. The pins in it are breaking my picks." She nods to a
small, but growing, pile of broken lock picks on the concrete.

Hopping down from the step ladder, Chloe watches while Ella continues to work at the lock. Chloe hums in thought, tracing several chain links with a finger. "I could try breaking it," she says, and ignores the little rush she feels at the chance to use her very newfound skill.

Ella glances at her doubtfully, pick still digging. "Uh, no offense, Chloe—I know you can throw down with the best of them—but you're not exactly She-Hulk."

"No," Chloe agrees, "but I'm not the old me, either."

Gripping a chain link, she pulls the draped shackles as far away from Lucifer's legs as possible. Each link is heavy and the size of her palm. She struggles to hold the chain up with one hand, while directing her other hand toward the connection between two links. Pursing her lips in concentration, she taps into the pool of light settled deep in her chest. Warmth races down her arm, to her hand and through her fingertips, until finally prismatic colors manifest across the dark metal.

"Whoa," Ella says, backing away, a perfectly intact pick falling to the concrete with a tiny, metallic clatter. "You have way more control over that now."

Chloe focuses, loosening the hold she has on the energy. It's like opening a floodgate. The wide band of colorful lights narrows into one sharp, white ray. Sweat beads on her forehead as the black link she has targeted brightens to burgundy, then red, then orange and yellow. The metal expands slightly, then dips, softening. The light from her fingers falters, then sputters out, as she yanks at the chains. The link breaks easily, the hot metal tumbling to the floor, where it hisses and smokes against much cooler concrete.

"You did it!" Ella shouts, hopping on her toes. "That's so cool! We should totally do experiments when we get home."

"I did it," Chloe agrees, laughing tiredly. She sways slightly as a sharp ache tears through her head. Running a finger under her nose, she's amazed when it comes away free from blood. Still, no amount of pain or dizziness could diminish her elation as she watches Ella free Lucifer's legs. Her joy only falters when she hunts for her light, only to find nothing is left in her reserves.

"I don't think I can do that again," she announces, anguished. There are no windows in the room, no source of light other than Lucifer, whose light feels disturbingly dim.

Worry flickers across Ella's face before she masks it with her usual optimism. "Well, maybe Lucifer can help soon? You could try waking him again."

Chloe nods and carefully returns to the step ladder in front of Lucifer. "Hey, sleepyhead," she whispers, patting his cheeks, "I need you to wake up."

Lucifer blinks his eyes half open, and she looks into hellfire. She remembers when she was afraid of his devil face and inhuman gaze, but like a nightmare suffered in years past, she can't quite remember the details of her fear, only that, once, it was real and keenly felt. Glazed, red eyes shift over her face as she leans forward and presses her lips to his rough cheek.

"Feels so real..." he murmurs.

"I am real."

"I love you," he blurts out suddenly, his eyes opening wide with the force of his words.
"I know. I love you, too," she says, eyes burning. She can tell he doesn't believe her, doesn't quite know she's here at all.

Below, Ella lets out a small *aww* before the last of the chains around Lucifer's legs tumble to the floor with a loud clank. His body sags slightly, the collar around his neck angling higher, as the weight of his body shifts to his arms.

"Lucifer?" Chloe says, patting his face again. "I need you to listen. We've freed your legs, but we need help with your arms."

It takes several long moments for him to process what she's said, but finally he experiments, slowly stretching his feet and circling his ankles. He lets out a pleased moan at the freedom.

Though his eyes have fallen shut again, she smiles at him encouragingly. "Good. The sooner we get you out of here, the better. Others may be coming." She's shocked, in fact, that they've had this long to work, uninterrupted. She hopes Maze and Izzy are okay.

Lucifer's mouth works for a few moments before he breathes, "Can't leave."

"You can, and you will," Chloe says firmly.

"The child," he murmurs.

Fear sweeps through her. "Trixie?" she says sharply.

The door clicks open, and a burst of adrenaline sends her lunging off the step ladder. Dashing around the steel beams, she whips out her small Colt Mustang and aims it toward— Chloe reels back and freezes, breath rushing from her lungs.

"Chloe."


"You're dead," Ella says, backing up against an L-shaped beam. "We *saw* your body. Y-you were cremated."

Chloe's vision becomes a white tunnel, until only she and the ghost remain. Not the ghost of Marcus Pierce, but the ghost of Cain, the *first* murderer. Her stomach churns as she remembers his hands on her waist, in her hair, between her legs. The ring on her finger. The bullet wedged in her vest and Lucifer's ruined feathers.

She squeezes the trigger, letting loose an enraged howl that comes from deep inside her, from some dark well that also isn't afraid to murder. Marching forward, she fires again and again, until her magazine is empty and she's left squeezing the trigger with nothing in the chamber to fire. *Click, click, click.*

The bullets meet Cain's stomach and chest, blasting holes into a sky blue t-shirt before bouncing off his skin and plinking to the concrete. He flinches beneath every shot, but still he stands. He does not bleed.

"How?" she breathes over the ringing in her ears. At her back, she hears Lucifer groaning and mumbling questions.

"Detective?" Chains rattle.
"I deserved that," Cain says, raising his hands and taking another step forward.

Chloe stares, still holding her worthless pistol aloft. His face is sickeningly familiar. Of course it is. It's a face she kissed, a face she said yes to, a face she's seen in nightmares. But it's changed, too. It's thinner, more haunted, hungrier. And his eyes—his eyes. She falls into eyes the color of pitch, chills skittering across her flesh.

"I'm so glad you're here, Chloe." He steps closer. "When my men told me you were coming, I—"

"Hey! Stand back," Ella commands, voice shaking as she keeps her weapon raised.

"Or what?" Cain snaps, his attention sliding toward the forensic scientist. "You'll kill me? You can't stop me, Lopez. Not before and certainly not now."

Chloe throws her spent weapon to the floor and shuffles backward to be closer to Lucifer. "Why are you here, Cain?" she asks. The how doesn't matter.

"I came back for you," he says, and though his face softens with the sentiment, his eyes remain cold and vacant, a void to Lucifer's wild inferno.

"Dude, maybe she's just not that into you," Ella says, the barrel of her gun wobbling.

De-escalate the situation, Chloe thinks, falling back on old training. "I can't imagine what you've been through," she says, raising a placating hand. In her periphery, Lucifer's raw wing twitches. Without seeing his face, it's impossible to tell if he's awake and listening or if the drugs in his system are still pulling him under due to her proximity.

"I've been through Hell," Cain says, "but it was all worth it, Chloe. I've learned so much." He smiles, and she sees now what she was unable to see in the past: how it's a learned expression, rather than one felt deep within. "I understand now what you need from me," he says.

"What I need is for this to stop. I need you to let Lucifer go," she says.

All softness disappears from Cain's face. "I can't do that."

"Because of De la Cruz?"

"Because Lucifer's the reason everything fell apart. His family has stolen everything from me, from the very beginning, and he stole you."

"He didn't steal anything, Marc— Cain."

He walks closer, ignoring Ella's threatening posture. Stopping a few feet from Chloe, he looks at her longingly. "You don't see it now, but you will when you have time away from him. I've missed you. I want to make things right—whatever it takes. I can't let Lucifer go, but... Chloe, there's so much I can give you. So much we can have together. You'll see."

This close to him, a thousand bells peal in her mind and body. Lucifer has always been strange—in hindsight, never quite human—but Cain is different, darker by way of whatever vital element his soul lacks. And she feels this in her body, in the way a primitive part of her brain begs her to scurry away from a predator. Instead, Chloe curls her fingers into her palms and grinds her heels into the concrete to hide her trembling.

"Let us go," she pleads, breaking. "Please. We won't tell anyone what we've seen."
"No one would believe you, anyway," he huffs. "They might be interested to see how many bodies are in the hallway, though."

"I'll make sure Lucifer leaves you alone," Chloe continues, stumbling over her words. "You can live your life, just like you wanted."

"It's not enough," he says, and he finally closes the gap between them, a hand stretched toward hers in clear invitation. "You're the reason I want to keep living. Wherever that may be."

With a sudden yell, Ella rushes from the side, sneakers pounding, her pistol raised like a club. Cain's cold eyes never leave Chloe's as black, batlike wings explode from his back with a resounding snap. Chloe gasps and staggers back, her eyes tracing the horrific, webbed membranes and hooked claws. The skin seems to swallow the light of the room as he thrusts his right wing out, bashing Ella sideways.

"Ella!" Chloe cries.

Ella's pistol spins out of her hand, clattering to the floor, as she flies like a rag doll across the room, colliding with a metal lab table. A bone cracks loudly, and Ella falls to the floor, knocked out cold. Chloe makes to run in her direction, only to be grabbed by a strong, large hand.

She spins on Cain, venom on her tongue as she takes in his grotesque form. "I want nothing to do with you," she snarls, and with an outstretched hand she grabs tender angel flesh.

Lucifer's body spasms, his wing arms drawing close to his back, loosing from her grip. He wails long and hard, spilling agony that tears at her. But she needs him awake. She needs him to survive.

"Wake up!" she screams at his back.

"You shouldn't have done that," Cain growls, drawing his wings back into his body. His other hand darts forward to restrain her.

Chloe jerks, twisting her arms so the narrowest points of her wrists can slip free from his hold. Reeling back, she smashes her right fist into his face, the force of the punch ricocheting through her knuckles, up to her elbow and shoulder. Cain spits as she dances back until Lucifer's face comes into view.

"Now would be the time to break free, Lucifer!" She glances up at him.

The Devil is watching her, head tilted against his thick collar. "Detective?" he asks, his bare, red brow furrowing. Bright eyes latch onto Cain as he passes under Lucifer's suspended form.

Cain and Chloe circle each other, attacking and feinting and defending. But Chloe knows their fight isn't quite real, that she's being toyed with by a much bigger, stronger man. Lucifer watches them, his lips curled back in distaste.

Finally, Cain slips past Chloe's defenses, grabbing her by her shirt and yanking her close. Threads rip as she shoves at his throat to resist.

"You don't get to touch her," the Devil growls. Steel squeals in protest, warping and bending as he draws his arms toward himself.

"You're hallucinating," Cain gasps out with a laugh, looking up at Lucifer as he holds Chloe's back to his chest, his chin pressed against her temple. "Chloe's dead."
She wriggles against him, looking for leverage but finding none beneath his strong arms. "I'm here!" she cries to Lucifer, unsure why she even has to tell him, but knowing it must have to do with the day she was shot. "He's lying!"

"Just relax," Cain says against her hair.

"Fuck you." Stamping on his foot, she reaches for his face while stretching fingers toward Lucifer, questing for light.

"Your little light trick?" Cain chuckles. "I wouldn't do that. He's very weak."

Chloe falters, knowing it's true, and this is all Cain needs to wrestle her back into submission.

"I won't let you—"

Cain's hand clamps over her mouth. She shrugs her shoulders up, trying to break his hold, and hisses, fitting teeth to flesh. But in opening her mouth, warm metal jams past her lips, clicking painfully against her teeth. He shoves at the round metal piece, and suddenly death sweeps across her tongue, tasting of murder victims at crime scenes. Her eyes widen as she retches around stale blood and sweet putrefaction. Cain tilts her head back and holds her chin and nose, muffling her protests.

She squirms. Air, she needs air!

"Shh," Cain soothes, "I know it's frightening."

Between her panic and the angle of her head, a reflexive swallow draws the metal into her throat. Choking, Chloe watches with wild eyes as the Devil struggles against his chains. A loud buzzing sound fills her head, as if flies have hatched to life across her eardrums. Her vision fizzes, flickers, and dims. The last thing she sees is Lucifer falling to the concrete floor, bent and broken steel and concrete all around him. Black nails claw the floor.

The world slips into black, and the jaws of darkness devour her whole. She loses track of Cain's unwelcome form as she tumbles, falling away from something and toward something else. A great force draws on her like a twirling maelstrom in a turbulent sea.

Over the buzzing in her ears, metal grinds and creaks. Dim light flashes as two yawning gates swing open before her eyes, revealing a gray, mountainous world. Her mouth gapes open in a breathless scream as she flies, wingless, toward the passage. On the other side of the gates, gravity takes hold of her once more, and she crashes down to a soft, papery earth, where she heaves. Jamming two fingers down her throat in an attempt to grab the metal stuck there, she instead lurches forward on her hands and knees and vomits.

Bile sinks into the gray debris, leaving behind a black rock. It's only in expelling it that she's able to focus on her surroundings. She looks up, her mouth falling open as she comprehends the desolation, and the scent of sulphur fills her nostrils. Ash drifts down from the cloud-filled sky like misting rain, and distantly she thinks she can hear screaming, carried on a hot wind. Tears roll down her cheeks as bitterness takes root.

The gates slam shut with a gunfire crack, and she flinches.

"Chloe."

She spins on the ashy ground toward the voice, and there she finds Cain, staring with black eyes, standing with black wings unfurled. He extends a hand in her direction and has the gall to smile.
Thanks to Obli and Yah for being evil with me.
When Lucifer opens his eyes, the room spins. His prison has been turned on its side—or rather, he has been turned on his side. It's not his first time waking naked on concrete, but experience makes the sensation no less uncomfortable. His arms, drawn lower than they should be by a heavy weight, pull his shoulders downward at a nerve-pinching angle. At his back, his plucked wings thrum with a persistent, searing sting.

What now? he wonders with a ripple of unease. He feels more lucid than he has in weeks, or however bloody long he's been stuck here, in stasis. Not to say wakefulness has meant anything good recently. They wake him to feed him, for his blasted feathers to regrow because apparently, for some absurd reason, he still believes he deserves his wings, and so the feathers reappear, again and again. It's in these moments when Cain's ugly mug is often close to his, within tempting, head-butting distance—and yet there is nothing he can do about it.

He smacks around dreadful dry mouth, longing for a toothbrush and a drink. At this point, he'd settle for a cosmo or, the unthinkable, water. Lifting his head as much as his restrictive collar will allow, he looks himself over. Chains still keep his arms pinned and elbows locked to steel beams—the heavy force that's pulled his limbs at an angle—but the beams themselves have been rended from the floor like uprooted trees. He lifts an arm experimentally, cringing when metal screeches across the concrete. The chains clank, settling, as he rests once more.

In the silence that follows, someone groans, and he freezes. He's not alone. "Cooking up something new to torture me with, hey?" he bellows a moment later, full of a bravado he doesn't feel.

Mind games, he reckons, having played enough of them on souls in Hell to recognize their timbre. Torturing him may not benefit Hector de la Cruz, but Lucifer is under no illusion about who runs this show. The Sinnerman would love nothing more than to see him squirm.

When no one replies, he twists slightly and discovers his feet are free from their chains. Digging his toes against the floor, he uses his legs and the limited mobility of his arms to shift his body sideways. He performs what he assumes must be the loudest and most pathetic one-eighty the world has seen, hissing through the pain of lugging raw wings. The only thing worse than moving them would be trying to tuck them away.

Fully spun round, he gapes at what he sees, or rather, who he sees. It can't be... A human lies on the floor, angled toward him, feet first, but he'd know those chunky sneakers anywhere. As he stares at Ella Lopez, memories of a strange, harrowing dream resurface and turn his stomach. In the dream, he was being rescued by the detective and Miss Lopez. Until Cain came and— He shudders, unable to bear entertaining the nightmare. It wasn't real, of course. The detective is in Heaven, where she belongs, even if he'd much rather her alive and well and rolling her eyes at him.

But then...

Why is there so much evidence his dream wasn't a dream at all? His legs are free, the steel beams are broken, Ella Lopez lies no more than five meters away.
"Miss Lopez?" he calls, hoping she'll have answers.

She groans again, but doesn't wake. Is it bad for humans to be out cold like this? He can never remember what the rules are. Surely all the noise he made should have woken her.

"Miss! Lopez!" His voice booms and echoes.

Ella gives a great twitch, and finally she wakes. She remains still for a long moment before drawing in a deep, shaky breath. Tucking her chin, she looks straight at him. "Whoa," she breathes, and her eyes fill with tears.

"Oh, no," he says, "no time for that. You need to be up and on your way. It's not safe here."

She remains quiet, her eyes wide.

"What am I, speaking in tongues?"

Her face crumples then, and she gasps a soft laugh. "It really is you in there, huh?"

"Yes, it bloody well is. The question is what are you doing here?"

The dream wasn't real. It wasn't. How could it be?

"We're the rescue party," she says, drawing a hand up to the back of her head.

Lucifer swallows and demands, "What do you mean by we, Miss Lopez?"

Ella flinches and looks away. "Can you, uh, maybe not be so snappy right now? It's kinda intimidating—like, I'm-gonna-pee-my-pants intimidating."

"What?" But then, as if history is repeating, he registers the crimson of his left arm out of the corner of his eye. He'd taken pleasure from torturing De la Cruz and his stooges with this flesh and had chosen to wear it without further thought. Now, he sucks in a breath, turns his head, and hides his monstrous form. "You were never meant to see that," he says, face still averted. "Are you all right, Ella?" At least this time he isn't standing over a corpse with an echo of rage pulsing through his veins and out his skin.

She doesn't reply, and he wonders if, despite her ability to speak before, he's broken her mind. Eventually, though, she breaks the silence, "Not gonna lie, you're kinda terrifying. But! It's kinda intimidating—like, I'm-gonna-pee-my-pants intimidating."

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She shrugs. "I've been staring at your skin while I worked on your chains, just not your face."

"It's my face that has a tendency to render people into babbling idiots."

"Yeah, well, they're not your friends. We've all got parts of us that aren't...pretty, y'know?"

The sentiment pains his chest. Drawing in an uneven breath, he nods against his collar. "Miss Lopez," he starts, his heart beating hard as he asks again what he must, "what are you doing here? Who came here with you?"

As if finally remembering where she is and how much danger she could be in, Ella pushes herself up into a seated position. She whimper down at her right arm, which hangs loosely in her lap,
clearly dislocated or broken.

"Chloe should be here," she says, looking around, her brow stitched with concern.

"No, the detective is dead," Lucifer says, the words poisonous to him. "I watched her die."

"On the hill?" Ella asks softly.

"Yes," he chokes out, and he feels her blood on his body, hot on his dress shirt.

"Lucifer, she didn't die. Chloe healed! Like, miraculously. She's been looking for you. We all have. She's here." Ella's eyes sweep around the room. "Or...she was."

"You must be mistaken."

Ella shakes her head. "Chloe's alive."

Lucifer squeezes his eyes shut. His breaths release in loud, panicked gusts as his world remolds itself around this new knowledge. Chloe, alive... It should be cause for celebration. Instead, fear takes hold of his organs and twists.

"Cain was here?" he asks, opening his eyes to a reality he never could have imagined. To believe the nightmare is to believe in a fate far worse than Chloe walking the Silver City's gleaming streets.

"I think he took Chloe," Ella concludes. With her good hand, she drags her mobile phone from her jean pocket and checks the time. "I remember he...threw me. I couldn't have been out more than fifteen minutes. Twenty, tops." She touches the back of her head again and hisses before turning a thousand-yard stare toward an adjacent wall. "He wasn't... I guess he wasn't a man anymore," she says, her voice distant.

Two devils in the span of a half-hour is two too many, perhaps.

So that settles it. He took Chloe to Hell. Lucifer's stomach churns. It's his fault for making those damnable coins, for always hunting for loopholes. For leaving the coins unattended in his tower. But how did Cain get to them—

"He had wings," Ella murmurs, unintentionally answering his question. "Big bat wings... I've always liked bats. But his wings weren't normal, you know? Like, how could they be? They were...twisted." He senses her panic, rising up to meet his own.

"Now's not the time for a nervous breakdown," he says to himself as much as Ella. "You must release me from these chains immediately."

She blinks and looks back at him. "I don't know how."

"You freed my legs!" he argues.

"That was Chloe's light...thingy. Whatever your chains are made of, it breaks my lock picks." She glances at her phone again. "How long does it take for one of your feathers to work?"

He shakes his head, struggling to keep up. "To heal, you mean?"

"Yeah, we had to use the one you gave me on Maze. She's with Izzy in a room a few doors down."

"Maze is here?" he says, unable to keep the excitement out of his voice. Maze will surely be able to
free him from these infernal chains. But then his racing thoughts stagger to a halt. "You used a feather on Mazikeen—and it worked?"

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Nursing her broken arm, Ella stumbles out of the room to retrieve Maze and Izzy. Lucifer tries not to panic in her absence, but the nightmare, the reality, plays on repeat in his head, making him itch with anxiety and burn with rage. Chloe is in grave danger—quite literally.

His drug-addled memories return to him, broken into sharp, bright shards: Voices...Chloe's, Miss Lopez's. Chloe, held by a twisted soul who never should have escaped Hell. Chloe, choking for reasons Lucifer at first didn't understand, but knew to fear. The bite of infernal chains and steel as he struggled to break free from his restraints. Cain, looking him in the eye and opening his mouth wide above Chloe's struggling form as he placed a familiar coin on his tongue. Lucifer tumbling forward, his breath knocked from his lungs as his body met concrete. The disorienting whoosh and warp in space and time as Cain, with Chloe, disappeared from thin air, slipping onto another plane—the only plane a subway token for the damned can take its wayfarer into or out of.

He must get out of these bloody chains.

Time stretches on without Ella's return, and he renews his efforts to break free. Wriggling and writhing like a trapped animal, he contorts his body into futile, undignified knots. Even were he to break an arm, there'd be no slipping out of this hold, certainly not with his limbs further chained to the collar. With great effort, he might be able to stand and drag the damned beams with him, but then what?

Finally, the door to his overly bright prison cell swings open, drawing his attention. To his relief, it's Ella who enters once more, this time with Maze and the witch Isabel on her heels. Her arm no longer dangles, but she's two shades paler for the relocation process. Maze isn't exactly known for her bedside manner.

"Took you long enough," Lucifer gripes from the floor.

Maze snorts. "Yeah, sorry. I was a little busy trying not to die from saving your ass. Again."

From where she stands over him, a look passes between them, one that says they know they will need to discuss her bizarre celestial recovery—one day, but not now. Such is the way of their long relationship, to set aside complicated matters for the sake of moving forward, to the next guilty soul, the next fight, the next party. No rest for the wicked.

"I'm going to kill every De la Cruz within a hundred-mile radius," she swears.

"Save your ire for Cain," he says.

"So, Ella's not crazy?" Maze asks. "He's really escaped?" She glances at Ella, who's rested her back against a nearby wall and slid down to the floor beside Izzy. They look utterly spent, but Ella especially.

"Yes, leave it to Earth's most unkillable killer to become Hell's special snowflake."
"We'll find Chloe. He couldn't have gotten far. I was only out for an hour and a half." She touches a link of chain and hisses. "These are infernal. How the hell did he get infernal chains up to Earth?" Shaking her head, she whips out a demon blade and stabs the point into the lock holding his right arm in place. The sturdy pins click within.

"Mazikeen," he says, and she focuses on his face, "he didn't bloody take her to the airport. He had my Pentecostal coins."

She stares at him. "Fuck."

"Precisely, so chop-chop."

Maze is an exceptional picklock, but even beneath her skilled fingers, it takes several minutes to crack the lock holding Lucifer's right arm. Izzy pats Ella on the shoulder and comes to help untangle him from the beam while Maze works on the lock on his left.

"Surprised to see you here, witch."

"Don't be," she says, hefting chains. "Witches have a lot of sympathy for the Devil."

"Yes, enough sympathy to storm armed madmen, it appears."

"We all have our cards, Lightbringer."

He grimaces at the name, but chooses not to comment on it. "And your cards told you to come help save me?"

"No. My cards have always been to aid Chloe when the time came. To help look after the people in her life."

"Well, congratulations, witch, you aided her right into the hands of a murderous troglodyte."

"You know that wasn't my fault."

He looks away from her, at a crack in the concrete. In a softer tone, he asks, "Is Beatrice all right?"

"Trixie? She's okay. Worried, I think. Why?"

"Cain threatened to harm her," he says.

"That piece of shit," Maze huffs.

"Is that why you didn't try to break free?" Izzy asks.

"Clearly, I would have been able to," he says wryly, while eyeing her handiwork.

The chains on his right loosen enough for him to pull his arm away from the steel beam, just as the lock on his left snaps open. With a grunt, Lucifer pushes himself up into a fully seated position, blood rushing into his freed arm. Maze moves to the collar, kneeling on his right to avoid his tender wings.

"What time is it?" he asks, shoving at the chains on his left forearm.

"Three minutes since you last asked," Maze says, exasperated.

"Yes, well, three minutes here, perhaps," he snaps. "Just hurry it up."
"I got shot for you and have a blade at your neck. You really wanna be an ass right now?"

He scoffs, irritated. Then, all of a sudden, the chains on his left arm slacken, and the steel beam tumbles free with a loud crash. Ella gasps and jumps from where she sits against the wall.

"Apologies, Miss Lopez! I swear to you I'll tear off one of Cain's limbs in your honor."

With great pleasure.

"I better go see to her," Izzy says.

With his arms free, Lucifer immediately draws his hands together and bows his head in prayer. Amenadiel, brother. Whatever I've done, I need you to put aside our differences and come help me. A moment later, and with no sign of Amenadiel, he tries a different angle. Look, you were right. I was wrong. Souls popping up from the old fiery pit—quite the problem, it turns out. Could use some backup.

"He's not replying?" Maze guesses when he lets out a frustrated sigh.

"I'm sure he's just...busy."

"Right."

Brother, it's Chloe. She's in terrible danger. Please. Name your desire, any desire, and it's yours. His breathing quickens as he begins to panic. Don't you get it? This isn't about me!

The collar clicks open as he drops his hands to his lap, giving up. Maze removes the yoke and throws it aside with distaste. "You're free," she says. She looks at the others. "Time to move out."

Lucifer stumbles to his feet. "I—I have to get to Hell, Maze."

"We have to get to Hell. But right now you're naked, you don't have feathers to fly there in the first place, and—surprise—your brother's still a dick. All we can do right now is get out of here."

He scowls. "Very well."

"Besides, I don't want to be here if De la Cruz shows up." She flashes a grin. "I want to savor my time with Hector and his daughter."

Usually thinking about Maze doling out well-deserved torture lifts his spirits, but all he can do now is nod as they make their way to the door. Hoisting the infernal chains that held him hostage, he doesn't look back on his prison.

The central hallway of the warehouse is filled with dead men.

"Someone's been a busy little demon." He shoves the chains at Maze. "Hold these."

Bending, he begins rummaging through pockets, hunting for a lighter and cigarettes. These chaps certainly won't be in need of them any longer, not where they likely are. Enough smoke and ash in Hell to enjoy lung cancer ten times over.

"Dude, can you...take a jacket and cover up?" Ella says. "That's more of you than I ever wanted to see."

"Ah, my condolences," he says, straightening and holding his cheeks. "Bit of a jungle around the Devil's postern right now, what with the whole being 'held hostage and tortured' thing. Look, I'll
don a sarong if you'll be a dear and help me find some bloody cigarettes and a couple of lighters.”

Maze sighs while Ella sets to digging through pockets with the aplomb of one used to working with the dead. Izzy holds back with a grimace. No reading entrails for her.

"Why do you need two lighters?" Ella asks, half her forearm engulfed in the pocket of a man's trousers.

Lucifer shakes his head at her lack of imagination as he wraps a jacket around his waist with practiced ease, fashioning it into a loincloth. "One's for me," he says, his grin widening, "and the other's for a spot of arson."

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They leave behind an inferno in the night. Amazing what an improvised pipe bomb can do.

Seated on the floorboard of the Subaru to accommodate his wings, Lucifer watches land and squat buildings sweep past the tinted windows. Freedom usually tastes sweeter than this. And Tijuana this whole time? He's almost offended Cain and De la Cruz didn't take him farther.

A half-hour later, Maze pulls into the small parking lot of a hotel not far from downtown and the U.S. border. It's a tawdry orange with uninspired, white bubble letters that read, simply, HOTEL.

"This is where we're staying?"

"Yep."

Their room, which is tucked near the end of yet another long corridor filled with doors, proves no better on the inside.

"From one prison to another," Lucifer complains as he steps inside. It reminds him of the hotel rooms that often appear in Hell, usually alongside copious amounts of drug abuse, domestic violence, poverty, and prostitution. Low budget (if not paid for by the hour or the week, depending on the goals of the proprietor), poorly-appointed, styled with no decade or intent in mind. "Did one of you actually choose this place?"

"Chloe did," Maze answers, dropping infernal chains to the tile without consideration for who might be sleeping on the floor beneath them.

Lucifer sighs, half in exasperation, half in longing. "She would, wouldn't she?"

What is Cain doing to her in Hell? He glances at the large, red digits of a bedside clock. Two hours—months in Hell, depending on how the plane of the damned is churning.

Please, he thinks to no one in particular, let her be all right. Let his name still hold some power that she might use to her advantage.

Ella kicks off her sneakers and collapses onto the bed farthest from the window—on the bedspread, to be exact. Dad only knows when that was last washed. Izzy pulls closed the window's blackout shades, blocking pink dawn light, and joins Ella with a sigh.

"Can you put your wings away yet?" Maze asks, circling to inspect them.

The thought of trying to tuck them away makes his stomach pitch, as does her attention. He turns
with her, keeping her away from his back. Taking the hint, she holds up her hands in surrender and plops down to the foot of the unoccupied bed.

"Is there food? I should eat," Lucifer says. "Turns out nutrients are like Miracle Gro for feathers."

"Chloe has some granola bars in her suitcase," Ella murmurs against her pillow. "But, dude, you should rest."

"I'm fine," he protests, adjusting his too-short shorts and the overly large tourist t-shirt that says Greetings from Tijuana above a pink sombrero, which they cut to accommodate his wing bones. How humans believe nudity is a greater travesty than a get-up such as this, he'll never know. "It's not as if I haven't been sleeping for weeks, Miss Lopez."

"You're no good to Chloe if you aren't strong enough to survive Hell," Izzy points out.

"What would you know of Hell?" He glares at her, though she can't see him. Her eyes are covered by a black sleep mask embroidered in white with cat eyes. Two triangle ears are sewn near the top of the mask, partially obscuring her brows. Ridiculous.

She doesn't reply as he locates Chloe's suitcase and opens it gently.

Explaining to two humans that their friend was not merely kidnapped, but rather ferried to another dimension by way of a coin he fashioned together thirty-five hundred years prior in a fit of pique, had not been easy, and he suspects the only reason they're able to rest with the knowledge is due to severe exhaustion. Miss Lopez, in particular, was full of questions, many of which he could not answer. The only truth that matters is Chloe Jane Decker has no place in Hell.

Lucifer's heart thuds as he picks through her belongings. She didn't pack much, but that she packed at all is yet more proof of life. And he'd recognize those threadbare cotton pajamas anywhere.

Fishing around, his fingers finally close over a rectangular block held in a plastic wrapper.

He tears open the package and stuffs half the granola bar in his mouth. Better to get eating cardboard over and done with quickly.

"She's right, you know," Maze says, tearing off a tall leather boot. "We need to sleep."

The unspoken sentiment: Who knows what awaits them in Hell, seven Earth years after leaving? Well over a hundred million new souls will have found their way into unlocked cells. Certainly demons and other creatures will have fought for Nox's throne in his absence. Skirmishes, battles, all-out war...these are all possibilities.

But Lucifer suspects he already knows who has clawed his way to the top. Tossing the granola wrapper in the rubbish bin, he pauses and eyes the infernal chains where they rest beside the television stand. Chains are in high demand in Hell, one of those items fabricated in perpetuity by souls forced into hard labor. They are not, however, forged from the alloy used in demon blades. Malam is far too dear and dangerous a metal to use liberally. Which leaves only one explanation for the alloyed chains lying on the floor: They were forged with the Devil in mind, by a crafty human-turned-other. One with enough sway in Hell to command the demons who oversee the mines and smithies.

"I'll guard the door if you want to rest," Maze offers.

Stirring from his thoughts, he looks over his shoulder. Beneath the covers, with her back turned to him, Maze seems a far cry from Hell's notorious torturer. He supposes he doesn't exactly look like the Devil now, himself.
Words have always cost them, but recently he has learned there is a greater expense, still, in not speaking them at all.

"That won't be necessary," he says softly, "but thank you, Mazikeen."

He retreats to the hotel room's cramped bathroom, which is painted the same melon green as the bedroom. After turning on the shower, he slips out of the cut t-shirt and looks in the mirror over his shoulder at his pathetic angel wings. Prickly, itchy feather shafts have already begun to peek out from the raw skin, but it will be many hours, perhaps even a day or two, before there's enough growth for him to fly. Disgusted, he faces forward, turning away from the sight.

Months ago, he couldn't stand seeing his wings in all their—as he believed at the time—God-given glory. He'd taken great, if incredibly pained, satisfaction in dislocating his wing arms and carving them from his body. All that self-mutilation for nothing. Now, it looks wrong to see them plucked, and he can't imagine them altogether absent.

Make up your bloody mind, he thinks toward his reflection.

Steam fills the room as he lays a towel on the floor. It's far too small for his long form, but he prostrates himself atop it nonetheless and rests his forehead on his folded hands. It's humbling to settle into a position countless humans have been in before as they prayed—toward their holy lands, toward their gods or God, even toward the Devil in Hell, as their damned souls begged for clemency.

Most prayers go unheard, but as all those who've gone before him have hoped, he hopes to be heard now, if only just this once. He's willing to make a deal for his desire, to bargain all his possessions and all he is, if only he can return to Hell sooner.

Isn't that what they all want, anyway, for naughty Samael to be in Hell forever, where he deserves to be for daring to question his part in Father's grand Plan, for all the evil deeds humans have claimed he's committed? All the murders and rapes, all the destruction? It's not goats he has a problem with, exactly. It's scapegoats, being the biggest one of all time himself.

Swallow your pride, he thinks, squeezing his eyes shut.

He prays first to those siblings most likely to be sympathetic, starting again with Amenadiel and moving on to his cheeky brother, Zadkiel, and his little sister, Azrael, neither of whom he has seen since his dramatic Fall. He prays, then, to the siblings who had no strong opinion about him, one way or another, and finally, to the ones who hated him, including Heaven's biggest tosser next to Dad himself: Michael.

The success of his prayers depends on two things: a sibling sympathetic to the cause, if not to him specifically, and even more importantly, a sibling open to hearing from him at all. He fears few are.

Pleading done, he sits up and back against the hard plastic of the bathtub. Resting his elbows on his knees, he rolls his shoulders forward to shift his wings away from touching more than they must.

He waits and listens, picking at a loose thread on his cheap burgundy shorts.

He waits until the mist hitting the back of his neck from the shower turns cool.

Eventually, he lets out a small, tired laugh. He isn't surprised, really. Once a scapegoat, always one.
A knock on the bathroom door wrenches Lucifer from a trance. He's not sure how long he's sat in the shower, beneath cold water—hours, certainly. Hours of staring at a grainy, plastic wall, imagining all the horrible things that might be happening to Chloe in Hell.

"Hey, you okay in there?" Ella calls, knocking twice more.

The tap squeaks in protest as he shuts it off, and the flow of water dribbles to a stop. "I'm afraid there's no hot water," he replies, rising from the tub and awkwardly wrapping a towel beneath his wings and around his waist.

"Don't talk about water! My bladder is about to explode!"

Lucifer opens the door. Ella's eyes widen and sweep up slowly from his chest to his face. "I, uh..." She shakes her head and shoves past him, narrowly avoiding his wings. "Coming through!" She nearly clips his wings as she slams the door behind him.

Izzy looks up from the bed. "Cute wings."

"How dare you?" He flexes his left wing. Finding it only slightly stiff, he curls it around his side to inspect it. Thick down feathers have sprouted over the last several hours, leaving him looking like a puffed-up chick. No flight feathers have grown in yet. "Yes, well, this is what happens when you've been plucked within an inch of your life."

"How long will it be before you can go get her?"

As if popping into Hell to save Chloe from an unhinged immortal will be like a quick visit to the corner shop.

"Hours," he answers peevishly, and glances at the clock. Ten in the morning. He's taking too long to heal.

Well. No matter. He has a contingency plan now.

"I should eat again," he announces, hands on his hips. "And I need clothes—proper clothes. I refuse to return to Hell in board shorts. The Devil is not a frat boy returning from holiday."

Maze nods her chin toward the front of the room, eyes not leaving her phone. "Check the closet. Chloe brought you a suit."

His chest tightens with affection. "She's always thinking ahead."

"Yeah, she's kinda neurotic."

Inside the closet, he finds a black Armani waiting beside a white shirt and a white-and-charcoal-patterned pocket square. Polished Louis Vuittons rest on the floor, a pair of socks stuffed into the right. He touches the wool of the jacket, taking pleasure in the softness, and wonders if Chloe prefers him in black or if it's merely that she likes classic styles. Or perhaps he's overthinking it, and it was the first thing she grabbed. Though that pocket square wasn't exactly at the front of the drawer, come to think of it... He grins, imagining her snooping through his things. Just as quickly, his delight falters.

Who will she be after Hell? Will it break her, as it did Malcolm Graham?
Rolling his shoulders, he forces his wings to unravel into the ether. He winces as his secondary shoulder blades reposition and narrow. The bathroom door swings open just as he drops his towel and reaches for his shirt.

"Ah, Miss Lopez!"

She blinks up at him.

"Would you be a dear," he says, buttoning buttons, "and run along somewhere to get me tequila? Lots of it. I usually love a good whisky, but, you know, when in Tijuana."

"Uh, okay. Sure, no problem."

He peeks around the closet wall and looks at Izzy. "And would you get me some food? Fruit would be nice—ooh, and cheese. Cigarettes, too."

"Do we look like we run errands?" Maze barks.

"You look like three lovely women who will take pity on a man who's been held captive." He pokes out his lower lip. "Perhaps I've acquired agoraphobia and am not ready to face the world yet." Izzy laughs openly. "You don't know, witch!" he cries, yanking his pants up and stuffing his shirttails inside the waist. "Also, I have a phone call to make."

"So make it," Maze says, tone colored by suspicion. "Your phone's on the other side of the bed here. Charged and everything."

Lovely.

"Yes, well, it's a bit of a private matter, Maze, so if you could run along with Isabel or Miss Lopez, that would be much appreciated."

"Phone call to who?"

"To whom, and, as I said, private matter. So."

Maze narrows her eyes. They stare at one another for a long moment before she throws her legs over the side of the bed. "Whatever."

The three of them leave several minutes later. The door shuts, and Lucifer stares at it longer than necessary, half expecting one of them to return and see right through his intentions. When he's certain that won't happen, he turns toward the office desk, where Maze has left her leather knife roll bag.

Hell's best torturer brought four demon blades with her to the earthly plane—two to keep on her at all times, and two as backup. In fact, the second set actually belongs to him, though he long ago handed it to her, having grown disenchanted with trying to be the punisher he believed his father desired in Hell. If he knows Maze at all, she will have brought all four blades on a rescue mission such as this.

He unrolls the leather bag. Metal clunks along the desk surface as knives, hammers, pliers, and forceps are revealed. Some of the tools are very old, but all shine from meticulous care, to the point that it would be easy to assume they haven't seen much use. He supposes, on Earth, they haven't, really—not to say they haven't seen any use. Before he had an in with the LAPD, he'd had his own...method for dealing with those patrons of Lux who believed all the party was missing was a little Rohypnol.
In the upper left of the roll bag, held in place by leather ties, he finds the two backup demon blades.

"Hello, old friend," he murmurs, slipping a knife free. With a flick of his wrist, he twirls the blade round by its safety ring, muscle memory firing. Pressing the sharp tip to his opposite forefinger, he nicks his skin experimentally, before putting copper to his tongue.

If he had hellstone at his disposal, he could try making a new Pentecostal coin, though the old magic involved is finicky and requires more of a blood sacrifice than he likes. He huffs and sets the blade aside. As it is, he'll have to sacrifice more blood without a coin.

With the blade's presence confirmed, he pulls his phone free from its charger and calls his lawyer. He doesn't bother with the man's office reception, choosing instead, as always, to call him directly.

"Yello? Theo here," the man answers on the second ring, clearly too distracted to have noticed who was calling.

"Yes, hello, Theodore, this is Lucifer Morningstar."

Theo goes quiet for a long moment. "Mr. Morningstar. What can I do for you?"

"Remember that bit of paperwork I had you draw up last year in case I needed to go home?"

"Y-yes sir."

Lucifer walks into the bathroom. "Well, it appears the time has come for me to bid Los Angeles adieu."

Not to mention this blasted hotel in Tijuana.

"I see," Theo says, his relief palpable.

"Oh, don't sound so disappointed," Lucifer quips, turning on the tap and wetting his hand. He runs damp fingers through his hair, scowling at the mirror above the sink. "You got what you desired, didn't you?"

"I-I... Yessir. Thank you."

"And you always knew you were going to have to pay the piper. I haven't been that bad of a client in return."

A pause. "Mr. Morningstar, do you realize how many people have died in your club in the last few years?"

"What can I say? It's a busy place." He presses harder at stubborn curls. "Anyhow, if you don't hear from me within a week, you know what to do."

"Yessir. And is Chloe Decker still Beatrice's legal guardian?"

Lucifer's mouth purses. "You may want to add Daniel Espinoza, the child's father, to the papers." He turns away from the mirror in frustration. "But do make sure it all, except for Lux, goes to the girl. Especially the Corvette. She's quite good at driving it, despite her height."

"She's... I have down that she's ten, sir."

"And?"
"It's just— She can't legally— Never mind. I'll make sure the Corvette goes to her."

"Good. Don't let Daniel near it."

"Father a lowlife?" Theo guesses.

"Only mildly douchey, but I'm not above sticking it to him from Hell. I'll take my pleasure there where I can get it."

"I— Uh, okay."

Lucifer sniffs. "You can leave him one of the houses, however. Whichever he prefers."

"You...don't want him to have the car, but he can have property?"

"Is my reception bad?" Lucifer glances at his phone in confusion.

"Uh, no, sir. I got it."

"Lovely. Well, that's everything, I suppose. In case you never hear from me after this, have a nice life, Theodore. With any luck, you and I won't meet again."

He ends the call before the other man can say anything else. Sucking in a deep breath, he returns to Maze's roll bag and lifts the demon blade once more. Light from the window highlights the metal's silver veins.

Gripping the back of the rickety office chair with his free hand, he draws the blade up to his hammering jugular. His hold is unsteady, and the edge of the knife is sharp enough to make a superficial cut. Warm blood trickles down his neck, and he stills, his vision blurring. The decision to dive into Hell for Chloe is as easy as ever, and yet...

What if, this time, he can save her, but not himself? What if he really can't return to Earth after dying here, even with his wings? What if this dreadful, mismatched hotel room is it? What if smooth whisky and good Mexican food never cross his tongue again? If he never again sets the Corvette's engine to purring from ten meters away, simply because he can? Or never sees the stars he painted across the black expanse of space? Never hears another unbroken tune? Or learns from Linda's wisdom or Miss Lopez's friendship? Never feels small arms clinging round his waist?

"You bloody coward," he scoffs, and grinds his teeth.

This has been a longer vacation than he thought he'd ever have. More than he ever deserved, perhaps.

Every minute counts. Every minute is hours or days for Chloe.

Suddenly, the door to the hotel room opens with a bang. Lucifer barely has enough time to glance toward the front of the room before a blade zips through the air and sinks into the middle of his forearm, tearing past wool and cotton, to bury itself in muscle and nerves. "Bloody hell!" he cries, his fingers springing open of their own accord. He stumbles back, and the demon blade in his hand clatters to the tile.

Maze rushes forward, a black leather blur, and shoves him so hard he flies back onto the white-and-green-quilted bed, which crashes into the wall. Plaster rains down onto the pillows as his back seizes under the distant ache of his wings.
"Would you stop!" he complains, yanking her demon blade from his arm.

"You idiot!" she shouts, using one hand to tear the blade from him, and the other to punch him in the face.

His head snaps to the left. "Owww!"

"I knew you were acting strange. You're lucky I realized what you were planning."

"This is lucky?" Lucifer sits up, breathing raggedly. His arm vibrates with pain, and a small circle of his jacket is wet with blood, but already he can feel the muscle knitting together. "What other option do I have?" he despair. "My bloody wings are taking too long. My siblings want nothing to do with me, as usual. But I must get back to Hell."

"But not like this, not alone! You promised you wouldn't leave me behind," she says, pointing a finger in his face.

"Well, that was before Cain pulled a Dawn of the Dead on me, wasn't it?"

"I don't care," she snaps. "You made a promise, and you keep your word."

"Mazikeen—"

"No. I didn't almost die saving your ass to have you off yourself. Besides, you don't know what waits for you there. You need me at your back."

"Yes, but the time dilation," Lucifer sighs, tired beyond measure. "She must think I've abandoned her, Maze."

"She knows better than that." Maze crosses her arms over her chest. "And don't underestimate Chloe. She's tough."

"Oh, I'm well aware, but it's not Chloe I'm worried about underestimating."

"Look, let's make a deal."

Lucifer eyes her warily, but can't stop himself from finding out more. "Your terms?" he asks bluntly.

"You give yourself twelve hours. To rest, to eat. As soon as you think you can fly us to Hell, we go."

Twelve hours... Months and years in Hell.

"And if I can't in twelve hours?"

Maze grimaces. "Then I help you die."

"What makes you think you can?" he laughs. "You had trouble killing me last time."

"That was several arguments ago," she says with a hard grin. Her eyes shift away from his. "Anyway, Decker can't stay in Hell. Trixie needs her mom."

"Right." After a slight hesitation, Lucifer holds out his hand. "Deal."
Chapter End Notes

Cheers to ObliObla and TheYahwehDance, as well as to Maimat.
Beside the towering gates of Hell, Chloe scrambles in the ash, away from the tall, winged creature who once was a man and once was her lover.

"Stay back!" she yells, her voice hoarse from the metal that had been lodged in her throat.

The smile on Cain's face falters, as if he's surprised to find she's not amenable to the situation. His outstretched hand falls to his side. "I won't hurt you, Chloe."

Meek and cooperative, that's what you're supposed to be with kidnappers, but Chloe can't help it. She laughs at the absurdity of what he's said. "You've taken me to Hell," she bites out. "How is that not hurting me?"

He looks out over the barren plain, and though she hates to take her eyes off him, she looks, too. There's nothing, as far as the eye can see—just an expanse of gray death that is only given shape by darker, lifeless mountains, burbling volcanoes, and the thick clouds swirling above. No trees. No grass. No sun.

"It's not much," Cain says, the lines of his mouth deep with doubt. "I hated it at first. But," he continues, turning back to her, "we can make it ours. We can do anything we want with it."

"But I don't want to be here," she dares to say.

"You'll learn to appreciate it," he replies gruffly. "Our old home... We don't really belong there anymore."

Speak for yourself, she thinks, stomach turning beneath the penetrating stench.

"Come on," Cain says, stepping closer and holding out a hand once more. "Let me take you home."

He doesn't mean back to Earth. Chloe stares at his hand, her mind leaping from one fact to the next. She can't fight him here. She has no weapons, no sunlight, and an obvious physical disadvantage. She can't outrun him, either, not with those wings. Even if she could, where would she go? How would she survive this uncharitable landscape and the dark creatures Lucifer has told her creep in the shadows? And Lucifer... He was in no shape to come to her aid. She trusts he will come for her, but not right away.

Sometimes there is only one choice, and it isn't a good one.

She takes Cain's hand and allows him to draw her up. When she stands before him, his black eyes shine with an old, familiar sincerity that brings her no comfort.

"We have to fly there," he says, and his leather wings, with their curved claws, twitch in anticipation.

Chloe swallows back sweet saliva and nods once. "Okay."

She forgets how to move for a while, until finally Cain grows impatient, taking hold of her hands and planting them on his shoulders. Bending, he lifts her easily, settling one arm low on her back,
while the other hooks beneath her knees. She hates the warmth of his hand as it engulfs the edge of her waist.

Cain gives no warning before he jabs the tips of his wings against the ashen ground and springs into the air. Chloe gasps as they lift off and clings to his neck, despite her disgust. She pretends not to see the broad, toothy smile that rounds his cheeks.

Inside, she chants to herself, to stay calm and focused. To take in the world around her without judgment. To learn about her captor. Anything that might help her survive. But she knows she's running on adrenaline, that a crash is just around the bend.

It soon becomes apparent that Cain's flight is very different from Lucifer's. Whereas Lucifer darts and glides like a bird of prey, Cain undulates through the air like a bat, as if coasting and cresting along waves. It's a sickening sensation, not unlike being on a rickety carnival ride, and does nothing to soothe her stomach. But she also gets the impression that this style of flight is more flexible and potentially faster. Cain changes direction with a simple curl of a wing, while Lucifer must angle his flight in an inefficient arc. It scares her to think about the implications of that, and so, for now, she doesn't.

Ash pelts their faces, and Hell sweeps below them. From this angle, Chloe can see there is some color in this world, after all, but only in the form of orange, molten lakes and belching volcanoes. She tightens her hold on Cain's neck and dares to look straight down. If she squints, she can just barely make out rectangular panels buried in mountainsides.

Doors. Dozens, hundreds, thousands of them, many trembling on their hinges. And those are only the ones she can see.

And all those doors are unlocked, she remembers. All filled with torture. Forever.

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Cain flies long enough for Chloe to begin to wilt beneath the weight of her anxiety. It's only when a black, gleaming tower becomes visible in the distance that her breath catches and she drags herself from despair. Izzy's tarot card has come to life.

Reaching toward the melancholy sky, the sleek structure, with its central spire and smaller minarets, is beautiful in a hard, calculating way. It reminds her of the palaces that belong to villainous kings in fairy tales. Reminds her, too, of Lucifer, when they first met. When he stared a little too long and hard, and saw the bad in humanity too easily.

Surrounding mountainsides have been beaten back from the tower's edge to allow for the growth of a squat, sprawling city that looks to be about the size of San Diego, if San Diego had fewer and narrower roads. Like everything else she has seen in Hell, the city is devoid of color, or, if it isn't, a fine layer of ash has covered what's there. No building reaches higher than three or four stories. Only the tower stands tall and proud, an architectural wonder in a place where achieving anything clearly shouldn't be possible.

Lucifer never mentioned a city, and yet Chloe knows on sight that this place belonged to him and that he once lived and ruled in the tower, no different from how he now lives and rules in Lux. The sheer stubbornness of developing a capital in Hell has Lucifer Morningstar written all over it. Though it probably shouldn't, knowing he was here makes her feel a little less afraid.
"Where are we?" she asks, raising her voice over the wind beating against their faces.

"Nox," Cain answers. He provides no further detail.

Chloe's heart squeezes. Lux, she knows, means light. Nox must mean darkness.

As they near the tower, she notices the stillness of the city and the many burned-out hulls of buildings. In the streets, she can make out the lumbering gait of misshapen creatures and the human shape of those she assumes are demons like Maze, but too few navigate the numerous, meandering pathways. This is a place that must have once teemed with life, however grotesque and improbable, but something—war, maybe—has sent it spiraling into a ghost town.

Cain descends, diving so hard and fast that Chloe lets out an involuntary cry. He laughs at her surprise, twisting his body at the last second to land gently at the foot of the tower. She scrambles out of his arms, wrapping her own around her body, as if she might protect herself from this harsh environment that wishes to tear everything apart. He lets her go without argument. After all, where could she run? Still, the urge to run is there.

A single, giant door, engraved with an eight-pointed, star-like symbol, stands before them. As Cain pushes the door open, Chloe looks back on the sprawling city. Two people—demons, she corrects herself—watch them from a short distance, leaning against the side of a deformed stone building that sits beneath a sign written in a language Chloe can't read. It reminds her, vaguely, of Thai, if Thai were written with a very shaky hand. Looking more closely, she realizes one of the demons, male in appearance, has a skeletal leg, the other, exposed muscle and tendon around her eyes. Don't think about it, Chloe tells herself, shuddering and turning away.

Smiling, Cain draws her inside the tower. When he closes the door behind them, Chloe is struck by how claustrophobic the entrance of the palace is, despite its cavernous size. The ceilings are high, but the shadows are higher.

"Why are there no windows?" she asks, unable to mask her horror.

No sunlight is bad enough, but blocking out the strange ambient light from outside makes it a hundred times darker. Even with numerous torches burning bright, shadows swallow the edges of the room, giving her the distinct impression that something might jump out at her, at any moment.

"It's to keep the ash out," Cain says, freeing a torch from a wall sconce. Holding it aloft, he steps forward and waits for her to follow. "If you want, we can add windows. Maybe with shutters? Didn't you say you liked those?"

Her stomach flips. She had said that once, when they were cuddling on the couch in her apartment, talking about dream homes. She looks at his wings with distaste, her opinions on window trappings souring. Does he think they're going to play house?

"Do others live here?" she asks, struggling to stay calm enough to gather information.

"I don't know. Last time, I was the only one here."

He leads her into another room, this one even more cavernous than the first. Additional lighting, fire that must burn eternally, helps to counteract the enclosed space. Similarly, the black dome ceiling has been polished until it has become an inky mirror, so that fire from every ensconced torch and every fat fire pot is reflected, if only in a dull, scarlet hue.

The lights are placed in such a way that her eyes are drawn to the center of the room, where there
stands a high-backed throne. Its face is masked by shadow, while light from a giant fire pot fans out from behind it, casting a haunting gold and crimson halo. A royal silhouette.

Chloe stops and stares, and it's as though the ground spins out of control beneath her feet. Hell or not, this is a king's throne, and she's well aware of who sat in it. She's caught glimpses of this side of Lucifer, but this is hard proof in a way his casual arrogance and "holding court" in Lux are not. She can imagine him, long and regal and red-eyed, sitting cross-legged and passing edicts.

"Go ahead and try it," Cain says, nodding his chin toward the throne.

She forces herself to look away. "I'm good, thanks."

"One day you'll sit beside me," he says, full of longing. "I'll have a throne made just for you."

Chloe pretends not to have heard him. "Can you show me the rest of the...palace?" she asks.

He seems pleased by her request and leads without complaint.

The tower twists and turns with uneven stairs and narrow hallways. Many of the passageways are so dark that Chloe is forced to drag her hand along a wall to offset the sensation that a step forward is a step into nothingness.

There are many rooms, all hidden behind heavy metal doors, and Cain makes it clear none are off limits to her, though she can't imagine what she would want to do in rooms fitted for torture. Perhaps, somewhere, there is a weapon she can use... But then she glances at Cain's wings, at the way he must walk with them quirked at an angle to keep menacingly clawed tips from dragging the floor, and she becomes exhausted by the idea of fighting him before she has even begun.

A medieval brutality takes shape as they pass from room to room. She doesn't have names for all of the torture devices she sees, and Cain doesn't address them, but it isn't difficult to imagine how wooden pyramids or thrones spiked with nails or tables adorned with levers and cranks might be used to violent ends. It isn't hard to imagine why there are drains in the center of some rooms.

And then there are the rooms that straddle the line between pleasure and pain. Rooms with stocks and cages, whips and floggers, chains and gags and swings.

How many of these tools has Lucifer used to inflict pain or to please? It's one thing to know he was a torturer, to know his desires—or willingness to accommodate others' desires—has gone dark places. It's another to face evidence of it.

There's a pervasive heat to Hell—not uncomfortable, exactly, but reminiscent of a dry sauna. And in the sealed, fire-lit confines of the tower, it's much warmer still, so that Chloe sweats through her t-shirt from the heat and distress. They climb higher—she loses count of the floors—and she begins to wonder if he's trying to wear her down. And then he brings them to a stop before a small room with a bed and a dresser.

"I had this prepared for you."

She stares at the bed, her stomach in knots. "I won't have sex with you," she blurts out, her muscles bunched in preparation to fight or flee.

Cain looks down at her. In this low light, his eyes don't appear black, so much as wholly absent from his head. "Not until you want to."

So never then, she thinks, but is wise enough not to say it.
"I know I screwed up," Cain says. "Again. With all that happened in the loft." The lines of his face deepen as he scowls. "But I want to fix this. Fix us. Whatever it takes."

All that happened. As if he had nothing to do with it. As if he hasn't orchestrated death and destruction ever since.

She chooses her words carefully. "It will take time, Marcus." Her eyes widen at her mistake. "Cain. I'm sorry."

He shrugs. "I've had lots of names. You can call me Marcus, if you want. If that would make it easier."

How could it possibly make it easier? Who was Marcus Pierce, anyway? A lie within a lie within a lie. The opposite of Lucifer Morningstar, who is a truth within a truth.

"Do you like the name Cain?" she asks.

"It's the name of my birth."

"But do you like it?"

"It's mine. I...wish it meant nicer things."

Her ears prick up at the confession. "Maybe it still can," she says.

Cain isn't the only one who can lie.

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When he leaves her to rest, Chloe shuts the metal door to the bedroom and leans against it. There's no lock, but having a barrier between herself and her captor is a relief. Calm, she reminds herself, swallowing back a scream. *Stay calm.* But inside, she's slipping, tumbling down the wormhole of an incarnate nightmare. She eyes the shadowed walls of the room and hears things moving in the dark. Slithering snakes and crawling bugs, skeletons waiting to wrap cold, bony fingers around her ankles.

*No.* There's no evidence that's real.

But how can she know what's real in Hell? She once thought there was no evidence of the Devil—and she'd been working with him.

She yanks one of the three wall torches in the room away from its holder and marches forward, forcing light onto the shadows. There are no monsters lying in wait, slithering, crawling, or otherwise. There is only black, polished stone, only small clumps of ash wedged in each corner. Her lungs burn with it as she gasps for air.

Confident she is alone, her fear subsides slightly and she returns the torch to its sconce to study her surroundings. The bed is narrow and simple, and smells of disuse; the sheets rough, as if sewn from some coarse hair or fiber. In the chest of drawers, she finds similarly coarse tunics and pants made to different sizes. All are washed and neatly folded, though many are bloodstained. Whose blood? Why were they bleeding? Who or what made them bleed?

Does she want to know?
Beneath the bed, she finds a round, metal tub that, after some consideration, she realizes is a chamber pot. Disgusted, she shoves the tub away from herself, wincing at the loud clatter it makes as it wobbles before settling on the stone floor. This, for whatever reason, this lack of basic plumbing, is the last straw. She leans her face against the side of the musty bed and begins to cry, the scent of rotten eggs clogging her nose. She wants so many things in this moment: to be home, to be safe and clean, to be held and to hold.

She was so close... Now, she couldn't possibly be farther away from her desires.

You can't have those things right now, she tells herself brutally. Focus on breaking free.

Scrubbing tears from her dirty face, she stands and sets to work. Removing the drawers from the dresser, she shoves the piece of furniture in front of the door as quietly as possible. Cain is strong. It won't prevent him from entering. But it will give her time to react if he tries anything.

What else? Panting from exerting herself in the heat, she looks around, thinking. Time, she realizes. She needs to keep track of time. But how? No sun or stars; no water, as far as she's seen yet. Thirst hounds her at the thought, but she shoves it aside, refusing to call for Cain's aid just yet.

Tracking her sleep will have to do, though how reliable that will be in a place without sun, she isn't sure. People in solitary confinement lose track of time easily, and she never knew what time it was when she was blind after being shot.

Still, it's something. Biting her lip, she picks up the metal chamber pot once more. The bottom is roughly constructed and has a sharp edge. Kneeling beside the bed, she tilts the tub at an angle and uses its edge to scratch a rough line into the polished floor.

After thoroughly checking the sheets, she climbs into bed and says a prayer to Lucifer, even though she isn't sure it will get through. Something tells her prayers from Hell can't be heard.

One sleep, she thinks, staring up at the black ceiling, but for a long time, she can't close her eyes.

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Eight new scratch marks line the floor in Chloe's bedroom. She only remembers carving five. While it's possible Cain has been interfering with her makeshift log, she suspects it's just as likely she's confused. In the low light of the tower, she feels like a mole, bouncing from passageway to room, beholden to no schedule save the oddness of Cain's comings and goings.

He doesn't say why he leaves or what he does outside the tower. He doesn't speak to her much at all, which is both a relief and a point of confusion. Is he letting her get acclimated? Is he trying to unsettle her? There are too many possibilities.

They spend little time together and have no occasions, such as mealtimes, that would logically require it. Hunger gnaws at her stomach and thirst parches her throat, but they don't eat or drink. Her body protests the austerity, growing weaker, but not as it would have on Earth. There is persistent discomfort, but no signs she is truly shutting down. Just one of the many ways Hell is built to torture those unlucky enough to be here.

The one silver lining is she's only had to use the chamber pot once. She looked away in discomfort when Cain collected it without a word.

His bedroom is several doors down from her own. He's noisy, and her sleep becomes attuned to his
departures, which allow her to slip from her room to go exploring for anything she might use to escape. She needs a weapon, of that she's certain, and yet the tower's many rooms lack anything beyond the occasional whip or chain. It's during these search efforts that she begins to notice signs of looting—spaces where once there were weapons, or at least tools, like hammers, and now there are none.

But then after what may or may not be her fourteenth sleep, she finds a black bag wedged beneath a table. The bag, sewn from a rough, leather-like animal hide, is filled with rusted, bloodstained instruments. The scissors, pliers, and clamps are stiff and worthless, but there's a saw, as well, and more importantly, a knife. It's nothing special, but it's sharp, weighted well, and small enough, the dark blade no bigger than her hand. Easy to conceal if she fashions a simple sheath for it.

Chloe holds the knife out from her body before pulling her arm back and stabbing forward. Even she knows the motion is inelegant, and wishes in retrospect that she had taken up Maze's many offers to learn how to hold her own in a knife fight. But then she had believed she would always have her gun. She huffs, thinking that even Trixie knows more about knife fighting than she does. That bothered her before. Now... Now, she's grateful.

Later, Cain knocks on her bedroom door. Her stomach drops as she scrambles to answer it. How can he possibly have found out about the knife she's hidden beneath her mattress? Are there cameras in the tower? How do they work without electricity?

She yanks open the door, slowing her pull only at the last second in an attempt to act natural. Cool, obsidian eyes stare at her a beat too long, and it's all she can do not to spill confessions out of fear of punishment, but then he speaks.

"How are you settling in?"

It's not what Chloe expects, and she blinks and stumbles over her reply. "I— Well, okay? I guess."

How on earth—or in Hell—is she supposed to answer that question?

"Great. Do you want to spend some time with me?" He grins, and it's that broad boy scout grin she once told herself was enough. "I've got checkers."

"Checkers?" Here? In Hell? She almost laughs.

"Yeah, you always liked games. Come on, it'll be fun." The innocent grin isn't quite so convincing beneath his otherworldly eyes.

She hesitates. What does it mean that he wants them to spend time together? Can she refuse? Is it better not to? Leaning against the edge of the door, she says, "I don't know... I'm really tired." She forces a simpering smile to her face. "Guess it's the time difference."

Cain chuckles. "It takes some getting used to."

"Rain check?" she says.

"Sure." Another grin, this one more false than the last.

Before she registers what he's doing, he lifts a hand between them and rubs his thumb across her brow. It takes everything in her—every acting class, every experience from her time as an officer—not to recoil.

"Soot," he murmurs.
"Right." She starts to push the door closed. "Goodnight, Cain."

"Sleep well, Chloe."

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Chloe doesn't sleep, or if she does, it's with eyes wide open and staring. The only thing weirder and worse than seeing little of Cain is the thought of having to spend time with him. Playing checkers. Does he really think she doesn't know he's grooming her?

She sits with her back against the door, waiting. Time passes—how much, it's impossible to know—but then she hears it: the squeak and scrape of his door, the stomp of his boots. Never certain how long it takes him to descend to the first floor and leave the tower, she counts off several minutes in her head before daring to move.

When she's somewhat confident he must be gone, she launches herself up and darts from the room, shirt-wrapped knife tucked into the waist of her pants. The tower is somewhat familiar to her now, and she retraces her steps, slipping down one claustrophobic corridor to the next, down narrow stairwells and sloping hallways. At the edge of each passage, she calls for Cain and tries not to shudder when her own voice echoes in reply.

Passing the throne room, she enters the foyer, where, after a short, uneasy breath, she heaves open the massive tower door. Hot wind blows inside, setting ash to swirl around her legs. Pulling the door shut behind her, she tugs the neck of her shirt over her mouth and nose and steps into Hell's cruel landscape. With false purpose, she jogs down the tower's front steps, throwing herself into Nox's black, stuttering heart.

What is she doing? Where is she going?

Away is her only plan, adrenaline her only companion.

Outside the tightly enclosed tower, the scent of death and decay is overpowering. Her empty stomach lurches, and sickly sweat beads across her forehead. Ash hinders her every step, like fine sand, and makes it impossible to see more than a hundred feet ahead.

As she passes one of the many stone buildings, an abnormally long-limbed demon staggers past the threshold, nearly running into her. He grunts something in a guttural tongue, his breath foul with sour drink. Heart racing, she nods, as if understanding, before pressing onward. She's exceedingly aware of how out of place her sneakers are, but at least they're black.

Hell is relentlessly monochrome. The sky is gray. The streets are gray. The buildings are gray. Even the lone, active marketplace she crosses is gray, despite its tiny crowd of colorful patrons and merchants, like the woman with five bared breasts selling eyeballs strung on a wire. The ash and rot sink into everything until it all blurs together. Her only clue as to where she's headed is the black tower, which she keeps behind her at all times, if only to put distance between herself and Cain.

If she can get out of the city, she can then... What? Where will she go? How will she survive?

She keeps walking.

Someone shouts from above. Chloe looks up and isn't quite able to mask her cringe. A demon, who would be a strikingly handsome masculine figure if not for the absence of lips, leers down at her
from a stone balcony, speaking in the thick tongue his kind seem to prefer. She turns away from his giant teeth, picking up her pace as she scurries around a corner. The demon jumps to the ground behind her.

_Run!_ her body screams, and she leaps forward, driving her sneakers into the muck. Her shirt slips from her face, and she sucks in ash that makes her cough as she zigs around one corner and zags around the next. She fumbles for the knife tucked in her pants, discarding the makeshift sheath she made from two bloodstained tunics.

Behind her, the demon calls in a mocking tone. He jokes first in his language, and then in Chinese, before trying heavily-accented English. Something in her body language must tell him he's finally landed on the right words.

"Where are you running to, human?" His boots pound the ashen ground as he gives chase. "How did you get out of your loop?"

Somewhere, a female demon shouts: "We got a free one!"

Chloe doesn't look back, even as her lungs burn in agony and her muscles twitch in protest. Even as she knows she can't run forever. She skids through the ash, making another sharp turn, and—

A dead end. The gray stone wall stands tall.

She spins around, panting as three demons near, slowing and fanning out in the narrow street. Sweat-soaked hair sticks to her neck and face as she plants her feet shoulder-width apart and clutches the knife low by her side. She wonders, if death isn't possible for her on Earth, is it possible in Hell? And where will she go if she dies? Will she slip into one of the loops? Will she be pulled into Heaven, leaving Lucifer to wonder?

Her assailants are like Maze—all loose limbs, moldered flesh, and feral smiles—but they are also nothing like her. Their eyes are void of all emotion, as if they've never seen or felt a soft thing. Or, if they have, they suffocated it to death. Even in Maze's most inhuman moments, her eyes are never quite like this.

"Congratulations!" the lipless demon cheers as he draws closer. He smiles, baring even more of the roots of his teeth. "No one's ever gotten out of a loop before."

"Loop-de-loop!" a small, bug-eyed demon cackles behind him. "Humans aren't meant to fly the coop-de-coop!"

Chloe holds up her free hand. "I don't want any trouble. I'm just passing through."

Lipless turns to the small demon and the female, whose neck is corded with decayed, exposed muscle. "She's just passing through," he laughs. Turning back to Chloe, he says, "But we're not done punishing you yet."

The demon's hand shoots out, lightning-fast, and takes hold of the blade by its sharp edge. He rips it from her hand with no regard for the deep gash it opens across his palm. The blood-slicked blade flies into the building on her right, rattling against stone before falling to the ground, where ash dampens the sound of its landing.

Lipless reaches for her face with his bloody hand. Crying out, Chloe rams the heel of her right hand into his nose while stamping on his foot. He yelps, backing up, and she dances away—only to have nowhere to go.
"Feisty, I like it," Lipless says, snorting and rubbing his nose. "What should we do with you first, human?" He chuckles as he steps toward her again.

"You can't hurt me." She scrambles for something to add and says, "I'm under Lucifer's protection!"

A look of surprise crosses the demon's face before he barks a loud hyena laugh. "Lucifer's protection!" he crows, and the other demons laugh with him. "That angel doesn't live here anymore. We rules ourselves!"

"Do you?" a voice challenges from above, followed by the flap of wings.

Chloe startles and looks up, relief and fear flooding her veins as Cain's boots touch down on a nearby rooftop. His menacing, clawed wings spread wide behind him. Even more than the demons, Cain looks like he grew from Hell's hostile climate, as if ash collected into the form of a monstrous man.

Lipless' body language changes immediately; his shoulders roll forward submissively. "My lord," he says. "We didn't realize you were back."

But there is no we now. The other two demons have fled.

"Save it," Cain snaps. "This human is mine. Do you understand?"

Lipless bows, but there's resentment in the lines around his eyes. "Of course, my lord."

"I don't think you do." Cain hops down from the rooftop and advances on the demon. His wingspan eats up a significant portion of the narrow alleyway, blocking Chloe's view of Lipless until he drives his palm against the demon's chest, shoving him into the nearest stone wall. "This is my city."

"Nox is for demons, Sinner," Lipless chuckles, a wild gleam in his dead eyes. "The others may have left for now, but they'll be back."

It happens so fast Chloe barely sees it. Lipless twists and draws a dark blade from his hip, which he slashes across Cain's middle. Cain grunts, and flesh meets flesh as the two tussle briefly before Lipless' knife falls to the ash. Holding the demon in place, Cain kicks the weapon away as his right wing thrusts forward to further pin Lipless to the wall. The clawed thumb of Cain's wing digs into the hollow of the demon's throat. Lipless cries out from his skeletal mouth as blood wells and cascades, staining his dirty, roughspun shirt.

Chloe wedges herself in the corner of the alleyway, uncertain of who to root for or what to do. She eyes the two knives lying on the ground. She could take one and run, but how long would she have before more demons followed, before Cain found her?

Suddenly, Cain yanks his claw away. He looks at Chloe before shoving Lipless toward the end of the alley. "Go," he commands, and Lipless scrambles toward freedom, hands pressed to his bleeding throat as he hacks wetly.

Holding his stomach, Cain turns to Chloe and extends a hand. "Come on, Decker."

Before she places her hand in his, she glances at the knife at his feet.

The tower is worse the second time around, its shadowy darkness a bitter defeat. Cain closes the door, and Chloe hears Izzy speaking over her past. "I feel a part of you died here."
Because she saw Lucifer. Because her eyes were opened to the truth. Because everything changed.

She sees him now, too. Haunting this dark-hearted place, a specter in a throne. Maybe another part of her will die here.

"Why did you leave?" The way Cain says this makes it seem as though he can't understand her betrayal.

"Why would I want to stay?" she counters, anger overriding her fear.

"I know you think you know me, that you understand everything I've had to do." His black eyes shift over her face. "If you'd just give me time..."

As if she has any choice.

Fire from a torch sways, lighting his middle. A black, oily stain has darkened his ash-soiled shirt where Lipless cut him. In the torn line of fabric, she sees a puckered scar forming. She holds back her disgust when she realizes the oily stain must be his blood. What has he become?

Whatever he is, she knows to keep peace with him. "Thanks for saving me," she says. Unlike those early days, when Marcus Pierce had just joined the precinct, she knows better than to think he did it out of the goodness of his heart.

"Don't mention it," he replies, in his firm, walled-off way. "Just...don't run away like that anymore. Not until the horde recognizes your place here." He touches the stain on his shirt. "There are worse monsters out there than me, Chloe."

That, she doubts, and yet she still hopes that he is less of a monster than he seems. That there's someone here she can reason with.

"Please let me go," she whispers.

"I can't." Chloé presses her lips together. She feels very close to crying and hates herself for it. "Why not?"

"Why would I?" His smile twists into a grimace. "There's not been one thing in my life that I haven't had to take for myself. I want you. You're good, and you're good for me. I know you don't want me yet, but you will. Until then, I'm going to keep you."

Chapter End Notes

People I'm going to Hell with: Obli and Yah. We'll say hello to Chloe while we're down there.
Time means everything and nothing in Hell. Sometimes it seems to speed away, unraveling like a ball of yarn tumbling downhill. Other times, it crawls like the minute hand of a waiting room clock. Chloe stops trying to understand it when her period never comes, not even when a hundred marks decorate the black stone floor beside her bed. When she finally gives up, she laughs, supposing it could be worse. Hell could have tortured her with a never-ending period. Small mercies.

Untethered from timekeeping and other earthly cycles, she sleeps less but is vexed by fatigue, as she is vexed by hunger and thirst. When she's alone and tired in the dark tower, time spins out, dreamlike, sliding from one scene to the next, so that Chloe is sometimes left to wonder what is and isn't real. It reminds her of being stuck in her body. How she had no way to scream.

Where's Lucifer?

Though she knows she shouldn't, she begins to look forward to the moments Cain gives her. It's comforting to find another face in the shadows, even one as disquieting as his. Comforting to hear him speak, to remember she can speak. That she may be in Hell, but she is not snuffed out of existence. Not yet.

He brings her games. Checkers and chess and Go, backgammon and mancala, and others, too—games that are old and forgotten, that died with people and cultures along humanity's mad dash toward progress. Chloe enjoys learning them, even if she wishes her teacher were someone else.

The game pieces are always made of bone and stone, and appear hand-carved. Did Cain make them? Did Lucifer? Some hapless demon? Chloe never asks, lest she have to thank Cain for giving her this sliver of joy. By now, she's lost count of how many games they've played, sitting across from each other at a metal table, beside the hot glow of a fire pot.

Cain snatches her last bone with a triumphant grin.

"I'm no good at this one," Chloe laughs.

"Unfair advantage," he says, already returning pieces to the board. "Try playing for thousands of years and see what happens."

Chloe tucks a knee up to her chest and regards the top of his head, how the ash turns his light brown hair darker. Even with all she knows, he only ever seemed like Marcus Pierce, and now... Now, he is something wholly outside of time.

"I forget you've been around so long."

"The first son," he says wryly. "First one God counted, anyway."

"Why?"

"Why what?"

"Why did God start with you and...Adam? And Eve?"
"I don't know. Want to play again?"

"Sure," she says, but only because she thinks he may reveal more if his hands are busy. She slides a round of bone forward. "What was it like, back then?"

"You fishing for information, Decker?" He moves a rock piece.

"Maybe," she admits.

He's back to calling her Decker, ever since her failed escape attempt. The distance is a relief—and she fears that's by design. That every interaction is carefully manufactured.

They make several moves in silence before he speaks again.

"It was hard," he says. "Eden was where everything grew." He smirks. "We didn't live in Eden. Thanks to Lucifer."

Chloe is quiet as she struggles to remember the details of Genesis. "I didn't really understand why God kicked them out of the garden. So what if Eve—" she trails off, recognizing the uncertain territory she's stumbled into.

"So what if my mother fucked the Devil and knew too much?" Cain finishes.

"Sorry."

"I don't have the answer, other than God expected perfection. He chose the perfect humans for the perfect place and expected them to be perfect." He looks up from the game. "You know any perfect humans?"

"No."

"Neither."

He moves a piece. She moves a piece. He moves. She moves, a finger from her free hand tapping against the table.

"Out with it, Decker."

"I believe in right and wrong," she blurts out. "It's maybe not as...clear-cut as I thought it was, but I think we know when we've hurt people that didn't deserve it."

Cain leans back in his chair and folds his arms. "And you think I've hurt a lot of innocent people."

A litany of names comes to mind, and those are just the ones she knows about, just the ones in her lifetime. "You don't?"

"I did what I had to do."

"You can't really—"

"What do you know about bread, Decker?"

The question throws her, even as her stomach growls loudly. "Huh?" she says, face scrunching in confusion.

"Bread. You ate it on Earth, right?" he asks, knowing full well she did.
"I— Yeah?" Thoughts of Petey's Hawaiian bread make her mouth water.

"You ever worry you wouldn't have any?"

Chloe feels oddly chastised. "Not really, no."

"Abundance like that isn't normal," he says.

"I guess...it hasn't been, in the course of history."

"Still isn't, or did you miss all the commercials about starving kids?" He looks into the flames of the fire pot. "When I was a kid, we used to hear from neighboring tribes about a time when nobody was hungry, but those were probably fairy tales. Or there just weren't too many mouths to feed yet. Maybe the weather was better." Shaking himself, he turns his attention back to her. "Point is, the food you've eaten, you ripped out of someone else's hands." Before she can protest, he adds, "No shame in it. That's survival."

She realizes they've forgotten their game. "What are you getting at?"

"I'm just wondering if you think you should be punished for eating when others go hungry?" he asks. "What about when you throw away food?"

Chloe hugs her knees. Talking about punishment in Hell feels an awful lot like tempting fate. "I-I don't know." She frowns. "The system's broken."

"Yeah, but you still have to live in it, don't you?" Cain suddenly moves a piece on the board, proving he hasn't forgotten the game at all, and she realizes her mistake. She'll lose this round, too. "I had to live in the system I was born into, just like you. We needed bread, and I grew the grain."

"Your brother had sheep." And the Sinnerman killed him.

"Abel had the sheep," he confirms. "And everything else. He was the favorite. Whatever he wanted, my parents made sure he got it."

What was it with the parents of immortals playing favorites? "That doesn't sound very fair."

"It was also stupid. We were in the middle of a five-year drought. The crops and livestock needed more water than the creeks could supply, so we built a cistern, but guess who got the majority of that water."

"Abel?"

"Abel," he echoes with a sigh. "It takes more water and land to feed sheep, but the meat doesn't go as far, doesn't fill as many bellies. Grain, though? Feeds more, for less. You need both, but Abel didn't leave me enough water." He chuckles mirthlessly. "And then God came down."

Chloe moves a game piece for posterity's sake. "He wasn't impressed," she recalls.

"No. He wasn't. And I...was angry."

So, the first murder was a crime of passion. It bothers her how much sense it makes in context, how, all things considered, it's a far more explainable murder than many she's investigated. He's a serial murderer, she reminds herself. He killed Charlotte. He worked with the De la Cruzes to create firefly heroin and torture Lucifer.

But once he was a farmer in an unfair situation.
She frowns, confused and agitated, as always, by God's behavior. How hot and cold his participation is in all their lives. It's hard not to let Lucifer's, and now Cain's, loathing and paranoia rub off on her. Not to mention her own feelings about a higher power.

"What happened after you killed your brother, after the curse?"

Cain exhales loudly through his nose. "Half the tribe died of starvation," he says, sliding a game piece. "There wasn't enough bread."

***

Chloe tries not to let Cain's story change how she sees him, tries not to let it rewrite history, and for a while this works. But then more time passes. Months, definitely. A year or two, maybe. More games are played by the fire.

She expects him to be cruel, and so every time he isn't, he cuts at her armor. She tells herself this is all part of a long con, that he's evil, that he's hurt people she loves. But it becomes harder to believe, the farther away those people appear in her rearview mirror.

Over their games, he tells her stories about the places he's been, the people he's met. Some of them are nice. Others aren't because he's lived in the shadows. But in the telling she also rediscovers how funny he can be. She doesn't think most people knew that about Marcus Pierce, much less about Cain. He has a sly sense of humor, one that cuts its eyes sideways to bring you in on the joke. It's more subtle than—

Where's Lucifer?

She recites the truth to herself in a mantra: I am Chloe Decker, daughter of John and Penelope Decker. I am thirty-eight years old. I have a sweet, too-smart-for-her-own-good daughter named Trixie. She is ten years old. I am a private detective. I work with Lucifer Morningstar, who is exactly who he says he is because he does not lie. Cain lies. Cain cannot be trusted.

Chloe believes all those things. She does. They are written on her soul. But it's Cain's face she sees in the dark, his voice she hears. So when he finally touches three rough fingertips to her knuckles as she reaches for a game piece, she doesn't flinch. She only looks into his black eyes.

"I'm going to take you somewhere," he announces.

The thought of going anywhere very nearly doesn't compute. The tower is all there is. "Where?"

"It's a surprise."

The ambient light outside the tower is blinding, the stench and ash a brushfire in her lungs, but the modicum of freedom is exhilarating. Cain flies her high into the sky, so high that they nearly touch the thick cloud cover as they jounce along invisible air currents. After a while, he turns suddenly and then dives, and she holds her breath, this time anticipating the plunge. If she closes her eyes, she can imagine white wings, gentler hands. She can hear another's laughter.

Cain lands in the middle of a dark, mountainous corridor, where the jagged sierras run as far as Chloe can see. Pressed into these black cliff faces are the doors. This close, the sound of their rattling upon their hinges is maddening, as is their discordant appearance. They come in all manner of styles and materials: wood and steel and aluminum, even glass, which, try as she might, she cannot see through. Some doors are plain, and some are painted and even ornate; all are pregnant
with horror. Her fingers drift to her hip, searching for her firearm.

"Decker."

Blinking, Chloe turns away from a blue, metal door. Several feet away, Cain stands next to a gate made of rough, unfinished driftwood, his hand outstretched—sideways, not quite an invitation to take it. She goes to him, deteriorating sneakers sifting through the thin layer of ash at their feet. As she nears, Cain tugs on a wooden handle and throws open the door.

Chloe gasps in surprise as soft moonlight spills beyond the threshold and kisses her skin. Closing her eyes in pleasure, she inhales as salted wind whispers, cloaking the rotten abyss at her back.

Cain touches her shoulder. "Come on," he invites, nodding toward the open doorway.

Like Alice gamboling down the rabbit hole, she goes willingly, stepping into glowing sand. An ocean crashes ahead, its dark waves lapping at the shore and sparkling beneath a fat, full moon that seems close enough to touch. Stars light up the sky around it.

Cain shuts the door behind them, but Chloe hardly notices as she busies herself, tearing off sneakers and socks. Burying her toes into the soft, granular sand, she sighs and draws in a breath of clean air. Her whole body thrums with joy: home, home, home.

"Real beauty, isn't it?" Cain watches her with a smile.

She feels herself returning the expression before she glances back to the sea. "Can I...?"

"That's why we're here, Decker."

Chloe doesn't need to be told twice. Heedless of how she looks, she runs with madcap abandon toward the open water, kicking up sand, eyes stinging with unshed tears. When she hits the water, she shrieks before laughing happily. It's freezing, but she doesn't care as she jumps toward the embrace of the next powerful swell. When the water laps at her breasts, tossing her roughspun clothes about her limbs, she lifts her hands high, hoping to steal light from the Man in the Moon. Oh, how she's missed the sun, the moon, the stars—all the warmth that doesn't come from torchlight.

But nothing is there. No light flows into her veins to settle in her chest. Frowning, she stretches up even higher, as if it's only a matter of distance. Disappointment washes over her as she lets her arms drop and float. It's fake, she realizes, turning in a slow circle, her body rocking with the waves.

Wading closer, she speaks to him, "None of this is real."

His smile is wry. "Not bad for an imitation, right?"

Turning away from him again, she returns to deeper waters, pins her nose closed with thumb and forefinger, and ducks beneath the surface. An ethereal glow lights the water, and in it she can see shells and seaweed and the occasional tiny fish, all pulled along by the currents. Every detail one might expect—and yet, how far out do these details run? Bobbing back up and taking a breath, her eyes sweep across the horizon and then over the beach, past Cain. She startles when she spots a fire a short distance away; in her excitement, she missed it entirely. The orange glow highlights a woman's silhouette as she moves back and forth, arms swinging over one shoulder before driving forward and down.

Curious, Chloe wanders to shore, her clothes clinging like a second skin.
Cain follows her gaze. "We should go," he says, pushing to his feet.

But he doesn't stop her as she slogs through the sand toward the firelight. When she nears, the woman's sobs become discernible over the rhythmic ocean. The axe in her hands takes shape, as well, along with the meaty thunk of muscle and the wet crunch of bone ruptured by the bit. The broken bodies of a man and woman lie at the woman's feet, their blood and viscera painting the sand around them.

"Stop!" Chloe cries, even though she knows it's too late. She stumbles forward, arms outstretched. "What are you—"

The woman turns, light skin and dark hair shining beneath the moon. She screams in a language Chloe has never heard, but her intention is obvious—a plea. For help or mercy, Chloe can't tell, but it's a plea nonetheless before she turns back to her grisly task. Nausea coils high in Chloe's stomach as she slows to a stop several feet away. Long ago, she lost count of how many dead bodies she had seen, how many macabre crime scenes she had stepped foot in, but this is different. This is raw and live—and, she thinks with increasing terror, a loop to be played and replayed.

Cain walks up beside her and watches the gruesome display. His obvious indifference reminds her of Lucifer's on a crime scene. And why wouldn't it? This brutality is something they are well familiar with, she imagines. She shivers as wind cools her wet clothes.

"Why did you bring me here?" she asks.

"I thought you'd enjoy the beach."

She had, hadn't she? "And you didn't think I would mind the murder?"

"This happened a long time ago, Decker. Thousands of Earth years ago. Plenty of people die horrible deaths." His jaw clenches. "You can't cry over it forever."

"But—"

"There's no saving them or her," Cain insists. "She has to figure out how to free herself. Like I did."

They leave the woman to her carnage.

***

Cain takes her into other Hell loops, and this, Chloe learns, is why he left the tower so frequently. He was searching for places she would like. It's sick, and she knows she should take no pleasure in the "gift," such as it is—and yet she travels more in Hell, without the bounds of money or time, than at any other point in her life. And though the loops are smaller than she initially realized, they are also more fantastic than any documentary or museum or tour. They are replicas of the past, as extracted from the deepest memories of tortured souls. Cain points out the occasional embellishment, but Chloe can't find it in herself to mind. The suns and moons and stars housed within may be counterfeits, the foods may turn to ash on her tongue when she dares to taste them, and the main characters may not always behave as they did in real life, but she's nonetheless drawn to the artificial light and the generated people. Anything to escape the grim darkness of the tower, the monotony of games.

In the loops, she sees teams of men hefting stones to build the pyramids of Giza, hears the rattle and drum and chant of Hopi women dancing. She sees emperors and kings, rebels and
peacemakers. Hanging gardens and rolling sand dunes, snow-capped peaks and emerald valleys. History splays out before her, unwinding the secrets of humanity's ancestors across time and space. There are no perfect humans, but there is so much beauty, if only she will avert her eyes from bellies bloated with hunger, from swords plunged between ribs and clubs raised high. If only she will close her ears to cries and screams and all the multitude of depressing regrets.

To think, these loops are handpicked. There must be far worse in Hell.

It's impossible to ignore the suffering—at first—but just as there are no perfect humans, there is nothing a human cannot adapt to. And so, as she eventually became somewhat immune to the sight of stiff, dead bodies as a detective, she also becomes immune to their brokenness in Hell. At least, this is what she tells herself, when she's able to ignore the anxious knots in her stomach.

They sit atop a slanted sod roof in an old Nordic village. It's very cold, but she's learned to recognize the lies loops tell, and so feels only a slight chill. Beside the log house, a lightly-armored man crunches through frost-covered grass, his leather boots creaking as he makes his way toward the thick conifers looming at the village's perimeter. He holds a shortsword low at his side. A short time later (Chloe doesn't know how long, and it sometimes seems to change), a strangled cry rises up from the nearby woods, followed by mournful wailing. The loop resets, and leather creaks as the man passes by, crunching through frost.

Chloe keeps her chin lifted toward the false sky, willing herself to ignore the rest. Here, in this assembled place and time, the Milky Way is on grand display: a brilliant, puckered scar emblazoned across midnight, between millions of other spattered constellations. If she strains her ears, she swears she can hear past the crunch of the boots and the wailing in the woods, to music, lilting with a playful swagger. God-given, I'm afraid.

Where's Lucifer?

Instead, Cain speaks, "You know, you told me once to think about what I really want." The loop resets, and leather creaks. "To not do anything I would regret."

"Did I?" she says, not because she's forgotten, but because she wishes he wouldn't remember.

"There are lots of things I should have done differently in my life, Chloe. I know that. But meeting you—bringing you here, to be with me, I can't regret that." His voice is soft. It's the voice he uses in the darkness of night, when he makes all his best promises. He believes them when he speaks them, which only serves to make his promises seem all the more genuine. "I haven't been this happy in a long time," he continues. "And I think you feel the same way."

Sometimes, she has felt something akin to happiness. And she's so tired of fighting, so tired of being afraid. Tired of waiting. And, tired as always, she is slow to reply and instead hums noncommittally.

Maybe he thinks she's wholeheartedly agreed with him, or maybe he doesn't care, but in the next moment, he scoots closer and wraps a heavy arm around her shoulders. Chloe stiffens, sitting up straighter beneath the embrace, her eyes locked on his. She is suddenly very awake.

Cain searches her face, his own hardening with displeasure. "This is about him, isn't it?" he says, arm dropping away.

Chloe hugs her middle. "It's not, but I know nothing I say will make you think it isn't."

Maybe because that's a lie. It is about Lucifer—partly, at least. It's also about Trixie, all her friends,
her career. All the things Cain has stolen.

But what scares her most, the real reason she stiffens, is the fear that all those things have begun to matter less, that her world has become the man, the creature, beside her. Logically, she knows little time has passed on Earth, but in her heart, Trixie must surely be nearing adulthood, and Lucifer is a figure from a strange dream. Too large, too fantastic for her memory to hold. Sometimes, in those rare hours when she still sleeps, she startles awake, sensing the brush of a warm feather, the ghost of laughter breathed against her thighs. How it made her laugh, too. And she's filled with longing because the details of his face, angelic or otherwise, have begun to fade. She remembers him in touches given and received, in the obnoxious crinkle of chip bags in her squad car, but there's a blurriness now that softens his edges like a photograph taken out of focus.

Cain's face is all she sees. And she's begun to think things she knows she shouldn't. He could be a worse captor, couldn't he? So often, he is kind—sweet, almost. And now she knows some of what he has been through, how unfair his curse was. These facts clash with everything else she knows, leaving her confused and disgusted with herself. This isn't what she wanted. But what if this all there is, all she gets? This shred of companionship in the darkness.

Even as she knows what's happening, she can't seem to stop it.

Before she became a detective, she was one of the officers involved in a high-profile rescue of a young woman who had been trapped in a man's basement for three years. The woman was found, only because a perceptive mail carrier overheard an especially hostile argument and thought to report it. As the only female cop on the scene, the other officers encouraged Chloe to go in first, thinking a woman's touch was needed. And maybe it was, in the long run, but in the moment, the bony, sunken-eyed woman wasn't grateful, wasn't happy to see anyone.

"You don't understand," the woman said. "I love him."

How little Chloe respected that woman. How thoroughly she believed she would never be like her.

***

Time passes, flowing over and through Chloe without meaning. In one loop, simulated sun shines. In another, a crescent moon winks. And still the mountainous hallways, the streets of Nox, are dismal and gray. That time is fast or slow here, and sometimes neither or both depending on where she stands, doesn't matter if she never leaves.

When they're not exploring Earth through the memories of tortured souls, they play by the fire. She's gotten better at Cain's games and no longer needs to put all her focus on them to win, which gives her the space to watch him whenever he looks at the board, now with his own need to focus. If this is all there is, what's wrong with looking? She always found him interesting, at least: broad and hard, hiding something beneath the surface. And, well, she loves a good mystery, but is he really a mystery anymore?

She enters the throne room on feet booted in Hell's softest leather. Pausing in the middle of the cavernous space, she turns and stares at the imposing silhouette with its glowing back. Drawn to the fire, she drifts forward and floats up the dais. Turning, she lowers herself into the seat, her back straight, her arms settling on rests. She glances down, to where her boots fit in a worn groove in the stone, and for the briefest moment her heart aches as she imagines larger, polished leather dwarfing her own.
But he's not here, is he?

Caressing hellstone, she imagines what it would be like to accept this fate instead, to put an end to her own passivity and walk the streets of Nox like she owns them. To take control of her life, whatever it has become and is becoming.

"You look like my queen."

Chloe jumps to her feet guiltily. Squinting at the shadows, she watches as Cain slips from the darkness like oil parting from water. Marching forward like a soldier, his steps heavy in the room, he ascends the dais, where he kneels at her feet and bows his head. She stares at the curve of his spine, imagining black leather wings. And she wonders how many he has pledged fealty to before, if he's ever kept his word. But then he's waited for her, hasn't he?

For a long moment, whatever long moments are in the depths of Hell, they stay frozen in place. And then Chloe makes her decision, taking hold of the future circumstance has given her. Reaching down, she slides fingers into Cain's hair, spilling ash to the black floor. He leans into her touch as she trails fingertips across his cheek and then tugs at his chin to look into eyes painted by pitch. Using both hands, she clutches at his jaw and pulls, encouraging him to stand. When he stands tall, he looks down at her, the muscles of his neck bunched tight. He barely breathes.

Standing on tiptoe, Chloe lightly kisses the corner of his mouth, as if testing them both. His lips part in surprise, but he remains frozen in the overheated room. She almost wishes he would move, so she could be done with all the pain and confusion; the agony of wanting things she shouldn't or can't have. When it becomes obvious he's going to remain still, she lets her fingertips graze across his shoulders and sweep toward the hollow of his throat. One hand drifts toward his heart.

Cain snatches hold of her wrist, and though Chloe looks up at him in surprise, she also slips into another place and time, away from this funhouse mirror. Don't. Please. She squeezes her eyes shut before blinking them open.

"What is it?" she whispers.

In lieu of speaking, Cain yanks her forward and pushes his mouth to hers, swallowing her gasp. It isn't a gentle kiss—Marcus Pierce rarely kissed gently—but then she doesn't want it to be. She wants to cauterize every gentle thing left inside of her because nothing gentle belongs in this unholy place. He holds her to him, and she kisses him back hungrily and angrily.

She's missed being touched. Has hated the loneliness of her own desire as she's stolen away to her room and pressed fingers between her thighs, her fantasies a confusing, tangled mess of wants and fears. Of Lucifer's light and Cain's shadows. And pleasure is never entirely realized here. It's always missing something, always leaving her just this side of discontented.

Cain's hands sweep beneath her tunic, running up the skin of her back, and it's so familiar that it reminds her of those weeks when she tried to love him, and did love him, at least a little, enough to try saying yes. And, suddenly, everything feels wrong. This isn't her. Or rather, it is her, and that makes it worse. She has fallen into the same pattern—of settling, of trying to work within unwanted parameters. As if her desire is a small thing to be shelved. It's wrong now, as it was wrong then. The wrong hands, the wrong mouth, the wrong place and person. And she's ill with it. Ill, too, with how much she wants it, if for no other reason that it is a path forward.

She jerks back and turns her face. His lips drag across her jaw. "Stop."

She's shocked, but grateful, when he does. Breathing heavily, Cain steps back to the edge of the
The problem is, she does, a little, just like last time, and she hates herself for it. She presses a hand
to her stomach, fearing she might throw up. Fearing she might go to him again. Her body is hollow
with the ache of it.

"I thought we were past this!" Cain yells, his voice echoing. She winces. "What will it take for you
to understand that I love you?" He advances on her and she shuffles back until her boot heels hit
the edge of the throne. "I've been patient. I've been kind. I've done everything I should."

Chloe swallows and looks away. Speech is impossible.

"Don't you get it? It's all rigged," he says, his words an echo of Lucifer's. "By God. By all his
children. Humans are toys to them. We always have been and always will be. Some experiment,
created to live and die and reap a cosmic reward or punishment. The only way to break the cycle is
to beat it, Chloe, to become what they never expected us to be. We could break that cycle. You and
me."

Silences lingers as she stares at the dip in the stone between her feet.

"I'm sorry," Cain says.

Reluctantly, she looks up into his eyes. His expression is soft and sincere as he reaches out and
runs knuckles down the side of her cheek. Maybe he is gentle. Maybe she can be gentle with him.

"I shouldn't push you," he says.

She relaxes a little, despite the thudding of her heart and the twitches rippling through her muscles.

"It's okay," she whispers, touching his wrist. "Maybe we can play a game?"

His boy scout grin stretches wide. "You got it. Chess?"

"Okay."

"I'll get it set up."

Chloe stays rooted in place, her calves pressed against the throne as he jogs down the dais steps.
He glides back into the shadows, and she begins to forgive him and doubt herself. And it's then that
she realizes she is the woman in the basement.

***

She can't stay. She can't. Hell is less terrifying than trusting herself or him.

Scrubbing tears from her face, she looks around her bedroom, as if it might lend her advice. But,
really, she knows what she must do, or at least try. Again. It will help that she knows more about
Hell's mechanics, how demons are to be avoided at all costs. It will help that she knows there's less
sprawl behind the tower than in front of it. How she will survive the rest, she doesn't know, but she
might be able to hide in the loops.

For how long? How long has she even been here?
Having heard Cain leave some time ago, she slips out of her room and shuts the door quietly behind her. Pausing, she stares into the dark hallway. She's never been in his bedroom, and she thinks, again, of giving in, of trying to make things work, but just as quickly she turns, padding on soft leather to weave down the tower's many floors. She knows the darkness by heart, where there are depressions in the floor she could trip on and which doors creak.

She doesn't look at the throne as she passes it, lest she be drawn in again.

This turns out to be a mistake.

"Where do you think you're going?"

Chloe halts in the middle of the room and looks over her shoulder. Cain's face is obscured by shadow, but his clawed wings fan out over the arms of the throne. The strategic fire pot backlights them, turning the wings blood red.

Panicked, Chloe leaps forward, making a run for the foyer, but Cain is faster. She hears his lunge, the mighty beat of his wings, and the stomp of his boots as he lands behind her and snatches the back of her tunic.

"Let me go!" she yells, twisting to try to loosen his grip.

Instead, he clamps a hand over her mouth and draws her close. She struggles as he drives her up the long stairwells once again. Up and up they go, on a long journey of tooth and claw. They pass the floor with their bedrooms and climb higher still, to the uppermost torture chamber with its vast array of tables and beams and wheels and pokers. Chloe's eyes stretch wide as she screams behind his hand and kicks. He grunts as she beats her heels into his kneecaps, over and over.

But he doesn't move her to any of the torture devices. He takes to the stagnant air, flying toward the polished, domed ceiling. He flies with purpose, toward a particular region of the ceiling, and in the dim light she spots a fine line, a seam, where a square door is carved into the stone. An attic, she thinks, and is reminded again of the girl in the basement.

Cain transfers her weight to a single arm, and she clings to him helplessly, wrapping her legs around one of his.

"I won't try to escape anymore!" she cries. "Please, I promise!"

With his free arm, he reaches up and shoves the door in on itself. It slips into a track, and he slides it to the right. Lifting her by her waist, he shoves her through the small space. She has no choice but to grab hold of the handlebar she finds at the door's edge. Her breaths tear from her lungs in ragged puffs as she steps inside this new room and immediately scans it for a weapon. Even in the very lowlight a lone mounted torch provides, she can see the space is a mess, all overturned shelves, torn fabrics, and loose papers. Pieces of a life, upended.

Cain slithers inside before she finds anything to use against him. "This is for your own good," he says. "War is coming. It's not safe outside."

"And it's safe inside?" she spits, feeling an old fire resurface.

Grabbing her chin, Cain forces her to look into his eyes. "You may not love me yet, but let's not forget you kissed me." He views it as a victory, and shame swells within her.

Smiling, he lets go of her roughly. As she stumbles back, he bends and slips out of the hidden room. Chloe drops to all fours and peeks out from the square door, watching as he leaves the large
torture chamber. She's very, very high up. Too high to jump without risking death in Hell. She
could try it, she thinks, but slams the door shut on its track before the thought can go any further.
She sits back on her heels, adrenaline still pumping from the arduous ascent.

After a while, she turns from her place on the floor and looks at the ransacked room. Curiosity
sparks in her. Where is she?

Slowly, it dawns. They had to fly to get into this room. And though it's a destroyed mess, she sees
small signs of Earth everywhere—the scent of dirt and dust, the pops of color—not buried in some
loop, but truly here, in the heart of Hell. Despite the situation, she lets out a small, joyous cry
because she knows exactly where she is.

This is Lucifer's room.

***

Many things are broken in the room, torn apart by careless hands, but many others are not.

Chloe finds yellowed books by famous authors, and others printed in languages she can't read.
Women's magazines from the 1800s, the 1940s, the 1970s. And whole fallen racks of clothes. She
sorts through them, opening garment bags, boggling at expensive fabrics from times gone by.
Many, many suits of a variety of cuts. Three furs that would be far too hot to wear in Hell, but are
here just the same. Incredibly soft silk robes. She pulls a black robe with blue accents free from the
wreckage and slips it over her shoulders. Holding the silk up to her nose, she sniffs at it. Really, it
just smells musty, but she can pretend she smells something else: a hint of woodsy cologne, soap,
or even cigarette smoke.

In the center of the room, she finds a sitting cushion and clears it of books and papers. Setting up
there, she draws things to herself in batches, memories of Lucifer flooding her senses with each
discovery.

She picks through vinyl records, sad that the hand-crank record player is destroyed beyond repair.
She hasn't heard music in years, not even in any of the Hell loops Cain has taken her to.

Lucifer's fondness for blues and rock extends even into Hell. Pink Floyd, B.B. King, Fleetwood
Mac, the Sex Pistols, Queen, Hendrix, and Heart; Spanish and German and Russian artists she's
never even heard of. She trails her fingers down the face of a colorful Rolling Stones album before
flipping the cover over and laughing at the last track. "Sympathy for the Devil," of course. Her
cheeks hurt from smiling.

How long has it been since she really smiled?

And this, she remembers, is love. This kind, soft creature that is too big to be caged, and too bright
and fine to be seen except from the corner of an eye. A creature that survives only where there is
freedom and laughter. Where the hold is never too tight, and the doors are never locked from the
outside. She smiles. If there are doors at all.

She caresses the soft robe and laughs as she thinks how many must have adored him in it, though
probably more adored him out of it. And all of this, more than anything she has shared with Cain,
feels like intimacy. This knowledge of another, this friendship, beating in tandem with her heart.

Carefully picking her way through the scattered debris, she stumbles upon a clay tablet and frowns
as she lifts it. A primitive language has been painstakingly chiseled into the tan clay—some sort of
list, by the looks of it—an early ledger, maybe? Rummaging beneath the overturned shelves nearby, she drags out other tablets, scrolls, and journals. All indecipherable.

Grunting, she hefts another fallen shelf and shoves it aside. More journals lie beneath it. She picks up the tablets and flips through old paper and even older animal hide, encountering one writing system after another, until finally she finds one where she recognizes some, though not all, of the letters. A precursor to Greek and Latin?

"What were you writing about?" she whispers, fingers trailing the cascading words.

Before she quite realizes she's doing it, she's sorted the tablets and journals into stacks, as if she's back in the precinct, making sense of evidence. Tablets stay together because there's no chance she'll understand them. Scrolls and journals are grouped by their style of alphabet, as best she can follow it. A few appear to be in Chinese, but Lucifer clearly had a penchant for those writing systems that would one day twist and turn and deliver onto Earth the Romance languages.

And then she finds it: something written in Latin. The letters are somewhat familiar, largely because she knows Lucifer's handwriting, but they are a capitalized, jumbled mess without any spaces outside of the line breaks. She hunts for anything that might stand out until at last she loses focus and her vision blurs.

Only then do her eyes latch onto a word: INNOCENS.

"Innocens? Innocent?" she says aloud, brows knitting together.

She follows letters with a finger, parsing out consonants and vowels with difficulty. Each new line starts differently, but she notices a pattern. They end in one of three ways, with INNOCENS, NONLIQUET, or MENSREA. Names, she realizes. Each line must start with a name. And mens rea, literally "guilty mind," she knows from working with lawyers. It's the idea that intent matters in crime. An accidental killing or killing in self-defense is not the same as a spiteful, premeditated murder.

The significance of the book in her hands hits her. She looks up in shock, her eyes latching onto the tall stacks she has constructed. These aren't ledgers. These are records of the souls in Hell. Judgment books. There must be hundreds in this room. More than anything else, there are books.

But...Lucifer doesn't decide who goes to Hell. An individual soul's conscience decides. She looks back at the list, biting her lip. That means these are retroactive judgments—utterly personal and utterly pointless. But Lucifer kept them, just the same. And this she understands, for how many times has she lain in bed, thinking back on mistakes she made, that allowed killers to go free or perhaps put the wrong person behind bars? How often has she wondered if it was wrong to pull the trigger? If some word might have been said that could have changed everything? There's no going back, no fixing some things, and yet there's nothing more human to her than dwelling on what-ifs. And how much more skeptical has she sometimes been of the questionable decisions made by others?

Chloe draws the journal close to her chest, overcome with a loneliness shared across space and time. She didn't know Lucifer understood this pain, didn't know they had this in common. His early preoccupation with who did and didn't deserve punishment takes on new meaning, as does, she thinks with a tired laugh, his aversion to paperwork.

Setting aside the journal, she stands again and continues her exploration, sliding a hand across the shadowed walls to save herself from tripping over clutter. As she moves toward the darker end of the room, her hand suddenly dips into air. She scrambles to keep her footing, then drags her fingers
along the edge of the wall. There's a door cut out here.

Retrieving the torch from near the attic room's square entrance, she weaves her way toward the passageway. An overturned bookcase lies before it, suggesting the opening was once hidden. Raising the torch, she steps inside a long, dark, and narrow hallway. Once, such spaces would have terrified her, but Hell and the tower are full of such spaces.

The hallway spits her into a tiny, low-ceilinged room, where there is nothing inside but a black piano. "Lucifer," she breathes, and quickly stuffs her torch into the lone wall sconce she finds.

Settling on the piano bench, she lifts the fallboard with reverence. The instrument is sure to be horribly out of tune, but she'll take what it and her shamefully limited repertoire can give her. *Music!* She finds middle C and presses the white key twice in quick succession and then holds the third press. "Heart and Soul"...except the notes ring oddly, warbling as if heard beneath water, the timing all wrong. Because Hell steals music, too.

Chloe slams the fallboard shut. Leaning her elbows atop it, she rests her face in her hands and screams.

Chapter End Notes

Many thanks to Obli and Yah, for tolerating how I break up scenes and hurl them their way.
AROL contains a lot of darkness, but there's a particularly dark kind of death somewhat graphically described in this chapter. If you're one for content warnings, [click here](#).

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#).

Cain doesn't visit. Chloe is grateful for the space, though she suspects it's intended as punishment—and it is that, too. No matter how comforting and grounding Lucifer's earthly possessions are, they don't replace companionship, and the fear of being alone for weeks or months or years is very real. As are all the excuses her mind concocts for Cain's cruelty. What choice did she leave him? What if there is a war brewing? Would it really be so bad to believe he could be better?

It's hard to keep track of what is true or false in Hell, so she tries not to think about it at all.

The urge to clean the ravaged room is immense. She has no doubt Cain is the one who wrecked it. Lucifer would never leave something so messy for so long. But the disarray helps obscure the project she's started, in case Cain decides to visit, and so she leaves the mess where it is.

She's going to escape, at least one more time, if it's the last thing she does. She wouldn't be John Decker's daughter, if she didn't try.

"Like this," her father said, curling her fist and guiding her right arm through a punch. "Good," he laughed as she pummeled his open palm with the abandon of an eight-year-old. "Just remember, if you fall, get back up and don't stop swinging."

"Ms. Jarvis says it's wrong to hit."

"Well, it is, monkey. Don't go looking for trouble. But there's nothing wrong with standing up for yourself."

Chloe drags Lucifer's clothing into the claustrophobic piano room. Sitting amid a dense sea of expensive wool, cotton, silk, and fur, much of which likely has historical value, she knots pant legs and shirt and jacket arms together into a poor man's rope.

She talks to an imaginary Devil as she destroys his things for her cause.

"You would hate this," she chuckles. "But you'd let me get away with it."

She tells him how infuriating he was when they first met. How she was repulsed, even as she walked over his thresholds and he kept riding shotgun. How, seemingly overnight, he slithered into her dreams and became someone she trusted and desired for reasons she didn't understand. Sometimes she thinks a soul-deep part of her always knew he was telling the truth. That part of her that didn't mind descending Lux's spiral staircase, only to find herself in an M.C. Escher painting.

If she had never laid eyes on Lucifer Morningstar, she wouldn't be in Hell.

*But life would be rather boring without me in it,* Detective, Lucifer's apparition says.
"I know." She jerks at fabric, tightening a knot.

When all the shirts and pants and jackets have been tied together, she leaves the piano room and slides open the convex door that looks over the tower's expansive torture chamber. Lying beside the open space, she listens closely for movement. She stays there for a long time, drifting in and out of the restless sleep Hell offers. She hears nothing, save for the steady beating of her own heart.

Every escape attempt is a risk. Cain could be lying in wait again, anywhere in the tower. He could lose his patience with her, far worse than he already has. All of her hard work might be for nothing. But she has to try.

After checking her knots again, she loops and ties one end of her makeshift rope to the wooden foot of a sofa laden with Lucifer's judgment books. She tugs on it, hard, leaning all her weight against it, and is pleased to find it holds.

Now or never, Decker.

Peeking her head out from the hidden room's door, she lets the colorful rope drop. It flops down heavily, excess fabric flapping. She grimaces when it stops at least twenty feet short of the floor. She could draw it back in and improve its length by tearing and repositioning some of the excess fabric, but leaving sooner than later always seems the better option.

With one more hesitant tug to the rope, she grabs hold tightly and begins to shimmy her way out of Lucifer's room.

*Don't look down. Don't look down. Don't look down.* But as the rope above her lengthens, and then lengthens some more, looking up isn't much better, especially when it swings with her body weight. The panoply of fabrics soaks up the sweat from her palms.

It takes a small age to reach the bottom of the rope. When she finally does, she dares to look down. Not a small drop, but it could be worse. Setting her jaw and taking a deep breath, she lets go. Her soft leather boots clap hard against the stone floor, sending a deep, painful jolt into her knees that throws sparks of light across her vision.

Straightening with a wince, she looks around the torture chamber. There are no small weapons here, but there are pokers and other tools. Still, from her one stint in the wilds of Hell, she knows how useless a weapon would be against demons, not to mention Cain. Her best bet is to avoid both, to blend in until she's far enough away from Nox. She glances up at the rope of fine clothes. It will be a dead giveaway that she's escaped, but there's no avoiding it.

Turning away, she begins a slow, creeping descent out of the tower.

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If Cain is anywhere inside, Chloe doesn't see or hear him. She tiptoes through the shadows, refusing to entertain the thought that he might be letting her go for his own reasons. She slips past the tower's giant, imposing door and closes it as quietly as she can. Outside, Nox is burning. Not near the tower or what might be called the city's central district, but ominous, black plumes rise in the distance. The smoke burns her throat and lungs, mingling with the pervasive scent of decay.

No demons loiter near the palace steps, but she maintains a steady, purposeful gait as she departs and rounds the massive structure that has been her home. Maybe war really is raging, but on the backside of the tower, the ash-filled streets are silent, and the sky is as dull as ever. Empty, gray
businesses stand beside empty, gray dwellings, the monotony only broken by the charred skeletons of buildings that were burned long ago in other demonic conflicts. She drifts past the drab shells like a lingering ghost of an apocalypse, afraid to make any sound.

The farther she wanders, the more the tower shrinks behind her, but she doesn't look back.

When this side of the city ends, it does so abruptly, walled off as it is against a massive chain of black mountains. Chloe gravitates toward a skinny crevice she sees cutting through the rock. Peering into the narrow space, she's met with deep shadows, but even then she can see there isn't total darkness, that the tunnel must open up somewhere. She bites her lip. There are only two choices: she either goes through the mountain or around it. Around would take a long time and leave her exposed to the city, which looks empty, but may not be, in fact. And while her sense of direction in Hell is poor to nonexistent, traversing the barren land with Cain has taught her little exists outside of Nox other than the corridors of the damned she's looking for. Through is likely to get her where she needs to go.

Glancing up at the thick clouds above, she slips into the tight space, her back pressing against coarse, jagged rock. Raising one hand above her to watch for diminishing headroom and raising the other to touch the wall in front of her, she inches sideways, instep to instep. The deeper she goes, the darker and hotter the mountain becomes, the harder it is to breathe. Sweat runs down her neck and between her breasts as she crouches slightly to accommodate a lower ceiling.

"You can't die," Chloe whispers to herself, and her voice is loud in the shadows. "You're here for a reason."

But the words settle over her like lies.

The rock becomes hotter still, giving off a faint internal glow of fire that turns the darkness wine-colored. It sears her palms and back and knees until she's left hissing and moaning against a sudden burst of humidity. Gasping for air, she stays the course, moving faster to avoid passing out.

When gray light pours in on her left, Chloe cries out in gratitude. The heat lets up gradually, the cooler rock both soothing and irritating her tender flesh.

Finally, the crevice opens onto the other side. It's much shorter on this side of the mountain, forcing her to lie on her side and slither out like a snake wriggling from a hole in the ground. Ash clings to her damp skin, painting half of her gray and black. She collapses tiredly and for a moment she stays where she is, her torso free from the mountain, her legs still buried within it. She rests her face in the crook of an arm, her breath stirring ash. Exhaustion drags at her—not only from surviving the cleft, but from everything else, too. From fighting Cain and herself, from all her longing.

It's a soft rapping sound that eventually impels her to look up. As she suspected, a monstrous passageway stretches ahead, its belly full of doors trembling on hinges. The sight of them is more frightening now that she is alone, but she knows they're her best bet to stay hidden from Cain and keep what is left of her sanity.

With a soft groan, she gets up and keeps swinging.

***

Hell loops are different without Cain's curation. He found loops that were beautiful, even if
horrible things happened within them. But as Chloe roams from one loop to the next, she witnesses both the true depravity of humans and the same appalling unfairness of a guilt-based system that burdened Lucifer. And then there's the cleverness of Hell's rotten machinations. Not all loops replicate reality. Many replicate anxieties and horrors. Whatever will punish best.

There's no rhyme or reason to her navigation. She enters and leaves whenever the mood strikes, always careful to look both ways—and up—before wandering into a new loop. The more she sees, the more Hell takes on a strange, shadowed personification. Sometimes she thinks if she only closed her eyes and reached out, she might hold hands with its darkness.

Chloe opens a rickety wooden door and steps inside, squinting beneath the white hot brightness of an ersatz sun. Fine desert sand replaces fluffy ash, though the hot winds feel much the same. Shading her eyes, she looks around, spotting arid, orange-brown mountains. Fragile trees reach out from the harsh earth, their arms clawlike in their desperation. It's so dry that barely any scrub has survived.

"What, no mirage this time?" she jokes, maybe to Hell itself.

Having had her fill of hot, hostile climates, she turns to leave when the piercing cry of an infant carries on the wind. She pauses, one hand resting on the door handle to the loop. Does she really want to know why there's a child crying in a Hell loop? Cain was right. People die horribly all the time, all throughout time, and there's no fixing the pain here. It's old pain, even if it's constantly revived and relived.

She presses on the handle, and a second cry lances through the air. Memories of Trixie blossom across her mind, and before she consciously decides it, she's turning back toward the loop and shuffling through sandy dirt. She follows the cries, navigating toward the stubby, burnished mountains. Early days of motherhood fill her head. Memories of backwards baby clothes, of five loads of washing, of weeping in tandem with the tiny girl wedged in the crook of her arm.

As she nears the small mountain range, the crying splits into two distinct sounds; there is more than one child. Her boots touch down on solid stone when a naked, dark-skinned woman exits from a cave and raises her hands to her mouth. She yells in a language Chloe doesn't know, squeezing all the sound she can from her small body. Blood paints her stick-thin thighs, and her breasts sit heavily over a puffy, drooping stomach. Gasping quietly as understanding hits her, Chloe rushes forward, for a moment forgetting she's in a Hell loop at all.

Rocks crunch beneath her boots, and the young woman startles, turning in Chloe's direction. There's a carefulness to the defensive crouch she makes, and her close-cut hair shines with sweat. They stare at one another. Chloe holds up her hands, and slowly the young woman relaxes, though her mouth remains open and her eyes are wide with shock. Speaking rapidly in a sing-song voice, she waves a hand, urging Chloe to follow.

The cave is shaded, but far from cool. At its mouth, the young woman points to two tiny newborn babies who lie swaddled in what must have been their mother's soft, animal hide clothing. For now, they've fallen quiet and gurgle peacefully in their sleep.

Chloe is surprised the woman is open to her being here, but then her situation seems dire. The cloying scent of blood and afterbirth permeates the cave, and several feet inside, Chloe spots where the birth took place. She shudders to imagine how frightening it was. It was frightening enough to give birth with Dan by her side and a doctor she trusted watching her vitals.

The woman points at the infants again before pointing twice to the desert outside, her arm jerking hard with the motion. She says several words and looks at Chloe expectantly.
"I'm...sorry." Chloe shakes her head. "I don't understand."

She says something else and reaches out to tentatively touch Chloe's forearm with a fingertip before retreating with a giggle. Chloe looks down at herself, curious, then laughs. "Yeah, I sunburn easily." It's impossible to know where or when she is. For all she knows, light-skinned people are a strange myth to this stranger, or maybe they are potentially something far worse.

Sighing, the woman lowers herself gingerly to the cave floor. Chloe grimaces, thinking of all the bacteria, and with only a moment's hesitation pulls off her threadbare tunic. It feels strange to be bare-breasted, but then if she could do it for Hot Tub High School, she can do it for this naked soul. No matter how pointless the effort. She mimes sitting on the tunic before offering it to the woman, who takes it with a frown, but after a moment seems thankful to have it.

They're silent for a while, until Chloe pats her chest. "Chloe," she says slowly. "Chloe."

"Klo-ee."

Chloe gives a thumbs up, then, realizing that may not translate, simply nods and smiles.

The young woman touches her own cheek. "Abeni."

"Ah-benny?"

Abeni nods once and smiles brightly, revealing a crooked tooth that softens her angular features. Chloe's heart clenches. How old is this—was this—young woman? Seventeen, maybe eighteen? Hardly a woman at all. One of the twins begins to stir and make noise. Abeni lifts the child, a boy, and stuffs a nipple into his mouth, promptly shutting him up. If these are Abeni's first children, she's certainly seen this method employed before.

They sit in oddly companionable silence that is only broken up by the needs of the children or by Abeni's periodic calls from the mouth of the cave. As time passes, Chloe grows wary of those calls, how no one ever replies. The urge to flee from the truth increases as the counterfeit sun slides toward the horizon.

But then Abeni lets her hold the children, both the boy and the girl. They don't seem to have names yet, or if they do, Chloe hasn't understood. But she understands rocking them, remembers the gentle motion Trixie liked best. Aspects of motherhood were hard for her—the pregnancy, most of all, but the early years, too, especially how it affected her work and the way other officers and detectives viewed her. It was easier once Trixie had a mind of her own, even if she was constantly trying to out-stubborn Chloe herself. This, though, Chloe thinks, this desire to hold and shelter something small and defenseless, is easy and in nearly all humans, and the softness of it brings tears to her eyes, even if none of it is real.

She misses Trixie.

They rest in the cave, at least Abeni and her children do. Chloe sits at its mouth, watching the stars, watching for the horrors Hell will surely hatch. Is it possible to disrupt a loop? She can't imagine Lucifer never tried.

The night passes faster than feels normal, maybe simply because Hell doesn't deem it necessary for punishment. Abeni's flesh is waxy in the morning light, and she hisses each time she sits or moves. Infection. The scent, the heat of fever, rolls off her in waves, but still she feeds the children, fear and desperation growing in her eyes. Chloe takes them after each feeding, doing what she can to keep them clean and to let Abeni rest.
But rest isn't food or water or family, and by afternoon Chloe ventures into the scrubland, searching for what she knows will not be there. For all the things Hell does not provide, all the things Abeni's actual life probably didn't provide, either. When she returns empty-handed, she finds Abeni sitting on her heels, looking down at the boy and the girl with a deep, thoughtful frown.

Another night passes, and Abeni trembles with chills. Chloe shifts closer and curls herself around the other woman's much smaller form, despair squeezing at her insides. Leave, Chloe tells herself, over and over again. Leave and forget this place. This has already happened. There is nothing you can do. But she stays through the night and is there each time Abeni opens her eyes and draws the boy and girl to her.

The third day smells of death, and a vulture flies nearby, watching and waiting. Abeni senses the end, too, and before Chloe understands what is happening, Abeni tiredly unwraps the boy and the girl from her skirt and presses it over their faces. The babies' legs jerk.

Crying out, Chloe jumps up and shoves Abeni's hands away. "No!" she says, yanking the skirt away.

Abeni looks at her with dull, glassy eyes, but Chloe knows she understands. Pointing outside the cave, Abeni snaps, angry, accusatory words tearing from her dry throat. Chloe can imagine the accusations, even if she doesn't speak the language. Why are you here if you're not going to help? If I die first, what happens to them? Do they starve, do animals eat them alive?

Some deaths are worse than others.

Lifting Chloe's shirt from the ground, Abeni shakes it pointedly before covering the children. She sets her jaw.

Chloe pulls at Abeni's wrists. The keening of the children is deafening in the cave as the fabric lifts from their faces. "There has to be another way," she says.

But there isn't, and this happened long ago. These children are dead. Abeni is dead. Everyone Abeni ever knew is dead. Some of them may even be in Hell, struggling with their own guilt. Reluctantly, Chloe releases her and turns her face away as history unfolds.

The children die quickly, if not exactly painlessly. When Abeni pulls Chloe's shirt away from the twins, they stare at the still, round faces, at the chubby bubble cheeks. They were beautiful.

Abeni tosses the shirt aside, throws back her head, and wails, more wolf than woman. She holds her head and tugs on her short, tightly curled hair. And there is nothing Chloe can do to fix this, even as a word sits on her tongue. Innocent. She understands the guilt, but not the punishment.

Going to Abeni, she gathers her in a tight embrace, holding to skin that is far too hot. Tears and snot wet her shoulder.

"You didn't know what to do," Chloe soothes, crying with her. "There wasn't anything else to do. It was an impossible situation."

As she holds Abeni, she feels the loop quiver at its edges, preparing to restart, but she holds onto Abeni with all that is in her, as if to tether them in place, and the loop seems to settle. They stay there for a moment, suspended by grief, until finally Chloe carefully scoops up the girl and presses cooling flesh to her breast. Nodding, she encourages Abeni to lift the boy.

Drawing them out of the cave, she guides Abeni to the single tree she found that has managed to keep some of its green. Kneeling beside the slender trunk, she sets the girl aside gently and begins
to claw at the ground with both hands, scooping away pale, dry earth. Abeni nods, understanding, and joins her in digging, though her movements are sluggish.

When the hole is deep enough for two small bodies, and deeper still to deter scavengers, they lower the boy and the girl into the ground, turning them toward each other so they won't feel alone.

This is foolish, Chloe thinks. These children aren't real. They were never alive, at least not in this Hell loop. But, then, they felt real and looked real and needed things, didn't they? For a little while, weren't they real to this soul, to Chloe herself?

They rake dirt back into the hole, hiding the round faces from the harsh sun and unfair world. With the small grave complete, Abeni bows forward and presses a kiss to the ground. She whispers something, her breath shifting crumbs of sandy dirt.

Using Chloe's shoulder for support, Abeni rises and stumbles back to the cave. Though the irony isn't lost on Chloe, she worries the young woman is dying and follows to care for her.

In the cave, Abeni only smiles, showing her crooked tooth, as she slides down a wall to sit. She says something and pats Chloe's leg.

"I wish I understood," Chloe says, trying to convey her sincerity through tone.

Nodding, Abeni mutters something else, lies sideways, and closes her eyes.

Chloe squats beside her. "Abeni?" She presses fingertips to her neck, searching for a pulse, while also uncertain of what pulse she should expect in the afterlife. Frowning, she presses hard, putting all her focus on the task.

All of a sudden, the loop rumbles and the ground begins to shake, knocking Chloe on her bottom. "Shit," she mutters, knowing an earthquake when she feels one. The Hell loop continues to rock in protest as she crawls to Abeni. Curling over her, she covers their heads and necks.

No matter how many earthquakes Chloe has survived—a lot; she is a child of California—the big ones always feel a little bit like like Mother Earth has tired of her children. But Hell isn't Earth, and as the tremors roll through the ground, Chloe fears for her life; fears she, too, will be stuck in this dismal loop.

But the shaking stops as suddenly as it began. When Chloe opens her eyes, it's darker, as if night has fallen—or this is what she believes, until she sits up and looks over her shoulder, out the mouth of the cave and into a well of uninterrupted darkness. No sun, no desert, no fresh grave. As if Hell has unraveled the scene to reveal its empty core. Breathing hard, Chloe glances at Abeni. A strange, ambient glow suffuses the cave, maintaining visibility.

"Abeni?" She doesn't expect a reply, and the young woman doesn't move. To Chloe's surprise, she does find a pulse—very faint, but there—and little puffs of air pass Abeni's lips.

Heart beating hard, Chloe turns toward the cave's mouth. The loop has stopped. Hopefully Abeni is resting as peacefully as she seems to be.

Covering Abeni with her animal hide skirt, Chloe collects her soiled tunic, slips it over her head, and stands, one hand holding firm to the rough cave wall. There's only one way out, she thinks, as she creeps toward the darkness. In the black distance, a rickety wooden door floats, waiting, glowing with the same eerie aura as the cave. She looks down at the emptiness inches away from her boots.
"I won't fall," she says. "There's ground. I just can't see it."

In the past, Chloe needed evidence. But Hell clearly doesn't abide by the usual laws of physics. So, she sucks in a deep breath, lets go of the cave wall, and rushes forward with a yell, jumping into the darkness. It holds her at once, wrapping around her flesh to suspend her in the nothingness. She lets out an astonished, high-pitched laugh as she feels weightless, but also contained. Keeping her eyes on the wooden door, she walks forward, as if expecting an invisible ground to meet her, and it does.

The walk is long and terrifying, but eventually she is close enough to lean forward and grab hold of the door handle. She presses on it at once, opening it wide. The grayness of Hell lies beyond, remarkably unchanged compared to Abeni's loop. Chloe slips past the threshold, but pauses long enough to look back at the floating cave. From this angle, she can't see Abeni, but she knows she's there.

"Thanks for sharing them with me," she whispers, and closes the door.

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Having never spent so long in a loop before, it takes Chloe a while to remember Abeni's world wasn't real, at least not here and now, in Hell. Still, as she returns to wandering and hiding from Cain, her head is full of possibilities. What if Abeni's loop is proof Hell can be changed? How many others might be freed from their torture?

But Hell reminds her that not everyone is innocent, that some souls feel guilty for truly evil acts—and sometimes only a sliver of guilt, then, maybe only because they got caught or didn't achieve exactly what they wanted. Occasionally these souls see her on their periphery and turn from their recurrent sins to look at her with interest, as if they know she is alive and they would like for her to be less so. Innocent souls may be caught in Hell's crossfire, but some earned a place here.

Did Cain belong in Hell? Chloe isn't always sure, and the fact that she isn't, even knowing his laundry list of sins, is upsetting, and so she sets the thought aside.

Faded wooden boards creak beneath her boots as she enters the living room of an old farmhouse that reminds her of Bruce Wilson and his sunflower farm. Three vacant chairs circle a central wood-burning stove, the round belly of which is filled with crackling, golden flames. Chloe passes the sitting area as quietly as possible and enters a connecting kitchen, where she finds an old wooden cutting board laden with turnips, hard cheese, and a thick sausage that has already been sliced three times.

Chloe slips down a hallway. It's hard not to feel like a trespasser in these smaller Hell loops, but curiosity tends to draw her in despite the discomfort. After years of arriving on scenes after a crime was committed, she can't deny there's something interesting about seeing how crimes unfold. What detective wouldn't want to understand this?

She finds the heart of the Hell loop in the second story of the house. A young man in blue coveralls that smell of motor oil holds an old pistol aloft, aiming it at the middle-aged man at the far end of a long hallway. They're clearly related—father and son, maybe. One thickly bearded and bellied, the other scrawny and sporting scraggly, auburn chin hair that matches the mass of red curls on his head and the freckles on his cheeks. Many differences, but they have the same face shape, the same nose. There's no escaping their relation.
Chloe moves behind the gunman, coming up along his side quietly. He doesn't see her at all. His focus is on the man across from him, whose arms are raised slightly in surrender.

"Rory," the older man soothes in a gentle Irish brogue, "can't we go to the pub and talk this out?"

Rory replies with gunfire. It's so sudden, so brutal, that Chloe jerks in surprise, belatedly covering her ears. Some of the crimes she sees in the loops are like this—cold, precise. She moves to the mouth of the hallway as Rory stomps down it. He fires three more times, point-blank, the sound in the farmhouse deafening. When he's done, the older man's face and chest are little more than torn chunks of meat. Shaking her head, Chloe is ready to return downstairs and leave the loop when Rory begins to speak.

"The pub was always the problem, Da," Rory says to the corpse. Swaying on his feet, he drops the gun, which lands on the hardwood with a loud clunk. He stumbles until his back hits a wall and he slides down to the floor. "You know I still can't write more than a sentence without my hand cramping?" He flexes the fingers of his right hand. There's visible stiffness to the movement. "Sure learnt me when you smashed 'em, huh? What'd I do, then? Talk back? Not dress in me Sunday best fast enough?" A tired laugh puffs out of him.

"Mam'll call the sheriff when she finds ya. Be all tears, I bet. Jack was this and Jack was that. Perfect grievin' widow." He nods to himself and brushes a red curl away from his face. "She prolly will be sad. Don't matter. At least when she has the babe, you won't be around to be hitting him, too." He looks up at the ceiling. "God, forgive me."

The loop shudders, ready to begin again.

"Rory?" Chloe calls, holding him in the moment.

Rory looks up in surprise. "Jesus fuckin' Christ!" He scrambles to his feet, trying to block the corpse of his father with his body. "Who the hell are you?"

She steps closer, a hand outstretched between them. "Can I talk to you about your dad?"

Innocence and guilt, right and wrong, are not always easily determined. And this, Chloe realizes, as she goes to this trembling son, must be the meaning behind Lucifer's third category for the damned. *Non liquet*.
shine with chrome. Feeling a little like she's stepped onto the set of *Happy Days*, Chloe edges out of the way as a cute waitress in a skirt and knee-high socks rushes outside with a greasy bag of food, to where old gas guzzlers wait, engines running, their drivers puffing at cigarettes.

Then Jerry Lewis' "Great Balls of Fire" begins playing on the jukebox. Out of tune, and the timing's all wrong—sometimes fast, sometimes slow, and with that underwater warble that drives her mad.

"Really?" Chloe cringes, while no one else in the diner seems to notice.

"Hey, everybody!" Standing from his booth, a boy in a blue-and-white letterman jacket waves his arms. "I got a question for my girl!" The diner explodes in whoops of excitement, and a wolf whistle pierces the air as he gets down on one knee. He fumbles with a ring box he pulls from his pocket. "So, what'd'ya say, Nance? Will you marry little ole me?" He grins.

Chloe always thought boys who knew they were charming were trouble. Considering she's in Hell, she can't say she was wrong about that one.

Nancy sits facing Chloe, so she sees when the girl looks at the boy, wide-eyed, before glancing around the room, at the many curious faces staring out from under curly hairdos and pomade-slicked trims. Everyone is white, and there's a certain expectation of good white girls like Nancy who date local darlings.

"I—" She swallows. "Well, yes, of course I will, silly."

The boy slips the ring onto her finger, and everyone claps while Chloe stares at them, open-mouthed. When the commotion has settled, and the two newly-engaged teens have reestablished equilibrium over burgers and fries, as if they haven't just made a major life decision, Chloe marches forward.

"How old are you two?" she demands, coming to stand at the end of the table with her hands folded in front of her.

"Huh?" the boy asks dully, coming up from a chocolate milkshake. "I mean, ma'am?"

Oh, wow, she's a *ma'am*. Guess that tells her how old she is. Except, in reality, she wasn't even born when this happened on Earth. She scowls at him. "I need to talk to your girlfriend."

"Fiancée!" he corrects, flashing a grin.

"Yeah, well, she and I need to have a chat."

He looks confusedly at Nancy, who shrugs. If either of them notice she's not exactly dressed for a diner (from any era), they don't say anything. Giving one final slurp to his milkshake, the boy slides out of his booth and goes to join a table at the other end of the diner, where five boys are stuffed into a booth that seats four. Chloe slides into the seat across from the girl, who stares at the diamond on her ring finger.

"Hi," Chloe starts, holding out her hand. "I'm Chloe."

They shake. "Nancy."

"Quite the rock," Chloe comments.

"Yeah, it's real pretty, isn't it?" Nancy stretches out her hand to admire it from a new angle.
"Is this what you really want?"

The girl's full-lipped mouth goes O-shaped as she glances around. "Of course it is. Ron's a great catch. All the other girls are jealous." She smiles slightly. "And he's sweet to me. Just swell."

"Sometimes that isn't enough," Chloe sighs. "I was married to a sweet guy, and—"

"Oh, jeez, I'm sorry for your loss."

"Oh, no. He didn't die."

"Do you mean you're"—Nancy lowers her voice to a scandalized whisper—"divorced?"

"Yeah," Chloe answers dryly. "It's really not the worst thing. Actually, we're pretty good fri—"

"My daddy says divorce is ruining the country."

Where's his Hell loop? Chloe thinks, rolling her eyes.

She opens her mouth to reply, but then hesitates. She wants to be modernly urbane, to tell this girl to drop the boy and get an education and forge her own path, but she suspects none of it would stick. She hasn't changed the events, the sources of guilt, in the Hell loops she's altered, not really. She's only helped souls work through what they regret, to accept the choices they've already made, because there really isn't any going backwards. Nancy probably married Ron, having agreed to the proposal in a diner just like this (warped music aside). Who knows why she came to regret it? But it's hard to see how it should send a person to Hell.

And so, like any good detective, Chloe begins digging for the truth that might help set Nancy free. There's a lot to untangle. Small town politics. The fact that Ron is popular and handsome and on the swim team. The fact that Nancy's father works for Ron's, that their mothers have been best friends since childhood. There are so many reasons Nancy might want to say yes, and so many reasons she might want to say no. But that she did say yes is what her soul feels guilty about and regrets.

Chloe teases at that, and teases some more, hoping to understand the future Nancy loathed enough to go to Hell for. Was Ron a bad husband? Did she love someone else? But the loop resets again and again, playing the same broken music, the same wolf whistle, the same slurp of a milkshake.

Nancy never does break the cycle.

***

A heaviness weighs on Chloe's heart as she opens a rusty metal door and squints against the bright yellow light of another false sun. Considering more crime happens early at night, a lot of guilt seems to be felt during the light of day. Standing on a sidewalk, she looks around the Hell loop in surprise, her sadness temporarily forgotten as she recognizes L.A.'s high-rises.

"Help! Help!"

Unable to stop herself, she runs toward the cry, around a building corner that spits her out on a street weirdly devoid of all but two cars, one of which has been flipped onto its head. Flames writhe along the car's undercarriage, sending smoke billowing in all directions. She rushes forward as a man crawls from the vehicle, his hands and knees crunching through glass.
When she sees his face, she staggers to a stop, her eyes going wide. She knows this man. This is the professor—Jason Carlisle. The one who injected her with poison. Who nearly took everything from her.

She watches as he turns in the rubble, ignoring the pleas of the driver. "My arm's stuck!" the other man cries.

Carlisle reaches inside the vehicle, past the pinned driver, and retrieves a leather briefcase. The briefcase where his laptop was stored.

"Hey, man, you can't leave me here!"

But Carlisle is already on the move. He runs away moments before the car explodes, instantly killing the man who was trapped. Carlisle stops at a nearby sidewalk as a crowd of people walk toward him with purpose, their faces contorted by disgust. She's seen this before, in other loops, how Hell sometimes uses blunt, over-the-top shaming techniques. She sees it most in the loops of those she senses are less repentant.

"Coward!"

"Killer!"

"Murderer!"

Chloe strides forward, a white-hot rage seering the edges of her vision. As Carlisle protests the crowd's accusations, she grabs him by his velvet-coated shoulder and yanks him around to face her. His eyebrows lift high.

"You," he breathes in shock, moments before her fist meets his face.

He stumbles back, holding his nose, and pain explodes across her knuckles. Blood drips over his lips and chin as he raises his other hand in self-defense. Shaking his head rapidly, he drops to his knees before her and folds his hands, as if in prayer. He crawls forward and begs, "Please, you must forgive me!"

Good. He remembers her, too.

"You nearly killed me to prove some stupid point," she says, her voice cold. "You nearly took me from my little girl."

So much anger boils within her. Anger at this man, anger at Cain, anger on behalf of all the souls here who've committed far less heinous transgressions.

"B-but I gave your partner the formula to the antidote!" Carlisle cries. "I saved you in the end! That has to count for something!"

"You didn't save me," she spits.

He pales as despair washes over him. "Maybe he didn't get to you in time, and you've ended up here, too. Did... Did he send you?"

But Chloe has frozen, breath sticking in her throat as she's begun to cobble together dates and events that feel like they happened years ago. Pierce's betrayal, Lucifer's wings, Candy freaking Morningstar, the hospital after her poisoning... He'd said the strangest thing when she woke up. She's never forgotten it.
"You didn't die, after all. That makes one of us."

"Team effort," her ass. He did save her. She never imagined it was like this. And without his wings. She didn't even know who he was back then. Not really. What a stupid, stupid Devil. But she feels herself smiling, and she's lighter, so much lighter, as though she's found wings of her own in this miserable pit. If he did this for her, back then, before everything else, there's no question he's coming for her now, is there?

Carlisle misreads the expression on her face. "You'll forgive me?"

Chloe blinks, returning to the present in the loop. She glances at the generated crowd behind him, which has quieted and stilled. "It's you who has to move on," she says.

"But you'll help me?" He licks blood from his lips and squeezes his clasped hands tighter. "Please."

She narrows her eyes, her anger burning hotter still. "You not only could have killed me, you could have killed Lucifer, too." And then he really would have been trapped here, in this awful place, forever.

Carlisle shakes his head. "No. No, you don't understand. I didn't mean to."

"You know," she says, tilting her head, "I think I do understand. Your work and life were always more important. It didn't matter who you stepped over to get where you wanted to go, who you hurt. And you thought you could get away it, even at the end. You thought it was just over." She leans forward, putting her face inches from his. "It's not, though, is it?" Leaning back again, she smiles. "I think I'll let you stew a little longer, Professor."

"What? No! No!"

Turning, Chloe walks back to the corner. The edges of the loop wobble as she shoves past the Hell loop's door, fire burning in her veins while she flexes her fingers. Carlisle is lucky she doesn't have her light. They probably both are. She's not entirely sure what she'd do to him.

She fumes as she kicks through ash, looking aimlessly from one door to the next. She's so caught up in her anger that she forgets to be cautious. That is, until a giant, winged shadow sweeps over her, blocking ambient light.

Cain lands before her, looking haggard and annoyed. His black wings fold behind him, the claws curved and sharp above his head. She could run, but for some reason she doesn't. Maybe she's just goddamned tired of running, whether it's down the tower's steps or through a dark mountain crevice or from one torture chamber to the next. She looks him in his black eyes, and for the first time in a while, sees him just as he is.

"You were a pain to find," he says, reaching out and grabbing her by a bicep. "You're lucky I got to you first."

"Am I?"

"The demons would tear you apart at the best of times, Decker. Now's not the best time."

Decker. So they're back to that. Of course they are. Little punishments for her freedom. "And you would never, would you?"

"Have I forced you to do anything you didn't want to do?" he asks, his mouth inches from hers.
How easy he'd made it to close that distance. Now, Chloe laughs against him. "You know he's coming for me, right?"

"Oh, yeah?" Cain chuckles with her. "Then where is he? Look around you, Decker. It's just been you and me for years. It'll be you and me until the end of time."

She reaches up and touches his face. "He's coming for you, too."

"Then I'll kill him," Cain says.

"That's not what happened last time," she says, and smiles coldly at his uncertain expression.

Cain lifts her in his arms, preparing to take flight. "Things change."

***

The gates of Hell blast open on their hinges. Lucifer barrels through the tunnel beyond, spinning haphazardly, his wings jerking with spasms. Maze flies out of his arms as they pass the portal's threshold. He lands on his back as she rolls through the ash to her feet and spins to face him.

"What the hell was that, Lucifer?"

He breathes a nervous laugh. "Bit ass over teakettle, wasn't it? Sorry for the emergency landing."

"You said you were able to fly when you went up to the rooftop."

"Yes, well, I didn't say how far or how high I went, did I?" Rising to his feet, he brushes ash off his suit with distaste, thinking with some awe of how many suits he ruins for Chloe Decker. Not that he has regrets. Sighing, he gently shakes out his embarrassingly stumpy feathers.

Maze isn't done with him. "You mean to tell me, you brought us to Hell and you can't fly?"

"I got us here, didn't I?"

"We could have gotten stuck in the portal."

"And yet we didn't," he sing-songs.

She crosses her arms over her chest. "Can you even get us anywhere else?"

Lucifer purses his lips. "All right. Fine. I may be slightly, temporarily, gravitationally-challenged," he admits, stretching a wing with a wince. "But that'll improve in no time, I'm sure. Now, come on, chop-chop. We don't have time for you to be ableist, Maze. We've a long way to go, a castle to storm, a sociopath to incinerate, you know the drill." He walks away, in the direction of Nox, the laces of his patent leather shoes collecting ash.

"If Cain doesn't kick your ass, I will," Maze grumbles, following him.

"Yes, yes, you can ask Chloe if you can have a round at my backside when we get home." He grins slightly before a scowl twists his mouth as he looks out over the gray mountains.

Lucifer hates Hell.
Thanks, as always, to these two nerdy ladies: Obli and Yah.
Ego Death

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Amenadiel drifted in his father's mind, his soul bowing beneath the weight of God's grief and despair.

And the time came when God no longer prayed to those he believed had made him. He awaited their punishment.

While he waited, he sent his spirit into Creation, where he watched the world from his human children's eyes. And he saw how their bellies distended with hunger, how their skin pocked and their bones bent from malnutrition. He saw how diseased blood spilled from their lips and welts festered between their thighs. And he saw how their misery rippled beyond themselves, how as they spread across the face of their planet, they tore through ecosystems, hunted animals to extinction, and drank of the water they relieved themselves in, making themselves sicker and sicker.

The Flood was forgotten, and violence was without end: slaves and masters, hands raised against children, sex used as a weapon, the endless creativity applied to torture. Some humans even came to find pleasure in the pain, and these were more likely to survive and have offspring, for the world he had Made was unkind and punished the vulnerable. Battles and wars, waged first with stone, and then bronze and iron, turned to gunpowder and took to the skies. Often, it was greedy men who bought their power with the blood of pawns, but there were other wars, too, those fought over some notion of God himself.

Cherubim built continuously as human souls filtered into Heaven in growing numbers. But Hell filled up more, for pain rots its host and spreads like cancer, while joy slips like sand through a sieve.

Sometimes there were little sparks of light among his creations. Healers who shared their knowledge without want of payment, warriors who broke chains, mothers and fathers who bade their children to love one another and the world they had been given. And there were the lovers who loved, as he and Ishtar had in the beginning: without reserve.

But then they split the atom, and God wept, for he knew that they would destroy themselves, as he had destroyed all that was dear to him.

***

"Father, you haven't held audience with the host in a long time."

God turned to Gabriel, his eyes rimmed red after days or weeks or months of staring at his recalcitrant Creation, of looking upon the wasteland humans called Hiroshima. A half-empty bottle of wine stood precariously at the edge of his worktable. Fermentation might be the best invention humans had ever come up with, but even that venture had a way of killing them. That was on him, he supposed.

"I don't desire to hold audience with anyone," God replied.
Gabriel shuffled closer, pale blue feathers whispering across marble. "We need guidance, Lord."

"Do you? And why do you think I have any to offer?"

"You are the Most High."

All these names and titles. He wasn't even sure how most of them got started.

"The answer is no, Gabriel," God sighed. "No, I won't make an appearance. No, I won't resolve disputes. No." He waved a hand. "You handle it."

"I could never—"

"Couldn't you?" God interrupted. "Hasn't that been exactly what you've been doing for—"

For, well, how long had it been—ten years, a century, more?—since he walked the gleaming streets of the Silver City or sat upon his throne before the gathered host? Time was sometimes a hollow blur to him, but that didn't stop the universes from expanding, the worlds from turning, his children from delighting in fulfilling their purposes. And his gods...well, he assumed they had been having a good laugh at his expense for quite a while.

"Father—"

"Leave me."

"But—"

God launched himself forward, knocking the legs out from under his stool, which went tumbling to the floor with a clatter. He advanced on Gabriel angrily. "Stop trying to fix this," he growled, pointing a finger. "There's no fixing any of it."

Gabriel subsided, head bowed, but he didn't leave. Instead, he shuffled from one foot to the other, his mouth working, opening and closing with indecision.

"What?" God spat, having no patience.

"It's only— Father, Uriel might help?"

Uriel, the child God wanted to blame for all his woes, for it was Uriel, more than any other, who had helped craft the details of the Plan. But God knew, deep down, it was unfair to lay the blame at his strange son's feet. Uriel merely helped guide what God himself set in motion, back in those days when he was convinced, much like crusading humans, of his creators' desires.

God stared at Earth, an ache in his chest. Perhaps Uriel could help make things right. And then—And then God could rest. Yes, he would like to rest and be done with all of it. Peace settled over him at the thought.

Gabriel swayed a little. Smoothing a hand over his robes, God reined in his glory and sent for Uriel.

***

God waved his wine bottle toward the display of Earth. "It's broken," he said without preamble. "All of it's fucking broken."
Uriel nodded, his hands buried deep in his black coat's pockets. How he managed to live in paradise, surrounded by beauty and artisans, and came to the conclusion his attire was at all adequate, God would never know.

"What would you have me do, Dad?" Uriel asked.

"Fix it."

For a moment, Uriel was quiet as he stared at Earth. "This choice you're making... Your patterns change greatly."

"My patterns?"

Uriel looked him in the eye. "I see you dying if I help you heal Creation."

God stood very still, aware as he was of having his desire on display. "I won't be needed if equilibrium is achieved," he said a beat later, and the thought again brought him peace. He was unbearably old and unbearably tired of himself and his failings.

"This is delicate work."

"When isn't it?"

"I need time to see all the patterns," Uriel said.

"Whatever you need," God replied, and drank deeply of his wine.

 Uriel departed from Heaven, and he was gone for many years. God considered looking for him, but couldn't find the energy required to do so or even to send one of his other children out on the task. He spent his time lying in bed, resting restlessly, or staring at his many mistakes, bottle in hand.

When Uriel finally returned, the lines of his face seemed deeper, though it was unlikely any changes were permanent. God decided it was merely a trick of the light in his workshop.

"Well?"

"The worlds need a new celestial."

"Your mother's in Hell," God said. "I can't make an angel without her."

"Not a new angel. A human."

"A human," God scoffed, and looked upon Earth with wry amusement. "I can give you four billion reasons I'm not in the business of blessing wombs anymore."

"This human would be different," Uriel explained. "A Word needs to be spoken onto the child's being."

God pulled his gaze away from Earth, to look at his small, strange son, upon whom he had placed all his hopes. "What kind of Word?"

"The human needs purpose."

His children didn't fully understand the depth of the gifts that gave them purpose, but he suspected Uriel understood more than most because of his own gift.
"Purpose is the root of immortality, Uriel."

The only immortality, outside of his and Ishtar's, and the blunt punishment that was Cain's mark. Angels had purpose, as did some other creatures—demons, even, in their own hedonistic way—but never a human. Humans were made in his image and meant to find their own reason for living and creating. Even when they did find purpose, it wasn't the same and had a way of changing across their short lifespans. It wasn't intrinsic to their being. Without a purpose to tether them, they slipped out of time and died, as he had intended for them to. And then they went one of two places.

"This is your best chance to right wrongs," Uriel said, spreading his hands as he shrugged.

The urge to reprimand him for his impudence was great, but God let it slide. "And what concept is needed for this human's purpose?" he asked, for Words had no direct translation. They were ideas, complex desires encoded in a language that bent the laws of universes.

It wasn't love that Uriel claimed was needed, nor hope, nor faith. It was a rebalancing of the scales. Someone driven and haunted by right and wrong.

"How long will this take?" God asked.

"I'm not sure," Uriel said. "Too many variables. But the human must grow to adulthood first. If you send Amenadiel with the Word, I can give you updates as I learn more. I found a family in Los Angeles that—"

"Los Angeles," God huffed. "I appreciate the irony." He leaned back against his worktable and took a long swig from a fresh bottle of wine, his eyes settling on the cot wedged into the corner of his workshop. "You and Gabriel can handle this without me, can't you? I'd rather sleep."

Uriel shook his head. "Dad, there are many variables—"

"Yes, you said."

"I see Mom being a problem. Maybe. It's hard to say."

"Your mother?" God said, incredulous. "Samael would never let her out of Hell."

"I know, but about Lucifer—"

"Lucifer." God rolled his eyes at the name.

"The Word will draw him."

God waved a hand, unconcerned. "He returns to his post eventually—or Amenadiel helps him do so. I'm sure you've got all of this under control, son." Already, he was making his way to his cot.

Uriel bowed his head. "Of course. I'll do whatever it takes to see your will done."

God set his wine aside and lay on the cot, drawing his robes close like blankets. "Wake me when things have improved—and no sooner."

***

God's words echo. Wake me. Wake, wake, wake. A vortex pulls at Amenadiel, drawing him forward, until suddenly the vivid present pops into being. He blinks into awareness, a familiar face
coming into focus above him. "Charlotte?" he rasps, his throat so dry her name is barely a whisper.

"Amenadiel!" She grabs hold of his shoulders. "Are you okay?"

"I'm...all right." Physically, anyway, even if he is lying amid marble crumbs, torn scrolls, and splintered wood. Even if the headache pounding at his temples is cartoonish in its proportions.

Charlotte helps him sit up, and they turn as one to stare at God's still form. Amenadiel frowns, a shudder purling through his body before he can stop it.

"Gabriel said we shouldn't move anything," Charlotte says, turning her nose up at the surrounding mess.

"I realized what was happening was the Lord Almighty's will," Gabriel explains from where he slouches on a stool by the display of Earth. "I do not interfere with Father's will, however much I do not understand it."

If only he knew the whole truth, Amenadiel thinks.

Charlotte glances at Amenadiel from the corner of her eyes. "Your brother's a real piece of work."

"I heard that, human."

"I didn't whisper."

Gabriel opens his mouth to reply when God stirs and groans, surprising them. With a gasp, Gabriel drops to the floor to attend his father. "My Lord," he breathes, touching God's fine robes with concern.

"Oh, get off me," God grunts. Batting Gabriel's hands away, he sits up and pins Amenadiel with a deep, imploring look. "Do you understand now, son?"

Amenadiel holds his father's gaze as gooseflesh prickles across his arms. Does he understand what he has seen? Is it possible to understand something so vast, unfair, and painful? Something that completely rewrites his understanding of himself?

After some consideration, he says, "You're giving up."

Charlotte looks at Amenadiel sharply.

God is the first to break eye contact. "That's one way of putting it," he says. Holding onto the edge of his work table, he pulls himself up to stand, Gabriel hovering beside him. Once upright, he sighs over the virtual Earth.

Amenadiel pushes to his feet with Charlotte's help. Stepping closer to God, he says softly, "They need you, Father."

Doesn't everyone need God in their lives? Doesn't he?

"Without Uriel, there's no hope," God says. "There is only entropy."

"There's still Chloe."

God breathes a harsh laugh. "I doubt Samael's little girlfriend—a detective, you said?—will fix things." He shakes his head. "What was Uriel thinking?"
"Surely she—"

"It's past time for you to go, Amenadiel. Take your human friend with you." God raises a brow at Charlotte, noticing her only now. "You got in by the skin of your teeth, didn't you?"

Charlotte takes a step back.

"But, Father," Amenadiel starts.

"You must leave, Firstborn," Gabriel says, putting a hand on Amenadiel's shoulder.

Amenadiel shrugs him off and glares. "You never should have kept this from the rest of us, Gabe."

"He was following orders," God says. "Now, go. You got what you wanted. It's no one's fault but your own if you regret it." As Gabriel ushers them from the room, God calls out, "If your brother is still on Earth, he needs to return to Hell!"

They exit through the round and empty waiting room, Gabriel trailing at their heels like a bristling guard dog. When the blue door to the Great Tower slams shut at their backs, Amenadiel and Charlotte glance at one another before beginning the long walk back to the residential districts, forgoing flight by unspoken agreement. They don't speak at all, in fact, though Amenadiel senses the questions bubbling beneath Charlotte's surface as her heels click and clack against the Silver City's pristine streets.

He's struck again by how different Heaven looks as his understanding of it evolves. It's a beautiful place, clean and full of natural wonders and creature comforts, but it's wrong, maybe, to think of it as paradise. To pretend no battles have been fought here. To ignore the unhappiness that tore his family apart.

As they move deeper into the angelic district, several angels fly low, watching with curiosity and not a small amount of judgment as their eldest brother walks beside a human soul. This mixing of the races isn't done and isn't normal. That Amenadiel walks at all in Heaven isn't normal. Soon, it will be all any of them talk about.

Let them see and talk, Amenadiel thinks, his belly full of bitterness. We're not above any of the humans. Even Father... But he shuts down the thought before it can spiral out of control, the blasphemy too troubling to entertain, especially in public.

Charlotte's gaze flicks up nervously. "Do we...need to be concerned?"

"They would never harm a human soul," he answers, but grimaces as he considers the only thing stopping some of them might be Father's cardinal rule against it.

It takes a long time to walk to the human district from the Great Tower, but it's time Amenadiel needs to begin sorting the jumbled thoughts in his aching head. When they reach the invisible line between their heavenly worlds, they stop and look at each other. Their audience of angels hovers above and behind Amenadiel.

"Are you going to tell me what happened in there?" Charlotte asks, keeping her voice to a whisper. Wilting a little, she admits, "I'm dying to know."

He probably shouldn't tell her anything, but he can't imagine carrying the burden alone. He smiles tiredly. "Do you still have wine?"

She returns his fragile smile. "Bottomless rosé in Heaven, right?"
"Right." The wine has certainly been bottomless for his father.

Ignoring their onlookers and a sudden burst of jeers, Amenadiel crosses into the human district and enters Charlotte's apartment complex. Inside, they settle at her kitchen table with a bottle of wine and two glasses. She listens intently as he attempts to make sense of all he has learned.

It isn't easy, but then facing the truth rarely is. *Everything* he has ever done has been in service to his father. Even when he wasn't sure what was required of him, he moved forward as best he could, holding to faith. Now, he supposes he inherited that trait from God himself, and the thought twists at his stomach uncomfortably. How pointless his service has been. His father was never all-knowing or infallible. He falters as much as the rest of them.

When Charlotte interrupts, it's with the pointed questions of a lawyer who misses no details. "Does this mean Chloe is immortal?"

"I... It's likely." Lucifer will be pleased. Even more so when he realizes Father never made her for him. And less so, when Amenadiel has to cart him back to Hell. Again. *Does* he have to? The question terrifies his soul. Only one angel has ever directly refused an order.

"Guess I won't be seeing her any time soon." Charlotte leans back in her chair. "Too bad. She was fun when she let loose a little. What do you think she's supposed to do?"

"I don't know," Amenadiel answers. "Set things right? Whatever *that* means. Father doesn't even seem to know what he was doing when he had Gabriel direct me to bless the Deckers. Only Uri had any idea of what was going on."

"And he's dead," Charlotte says bluntly.

"Yeah. Uriel's dead." He sighs. Did it have to be this way?

She pours more wine, a thoughtful expression tilting her brows. "Assuming Chloe fulfills whatever it is she was made for, what then?"

Amenadiel thinks back on the memories his father shared. "Uriel...he saw Father dying if things were set right."

But just how good was Uriel at reading patterns? Not good enough to be alive.

Charlotte's glass thunks against the table as she sets it down, hard. "God can die?"

"I don't know," Amenadiel answers again, feeling hollow. "Father says he won't be needed if 'equilibrium is achieved.'"

Charlotte stares at him. "Uh, that sounds like he *wants* to die," she says, lowering her voice as she glances toward the nearest window.

"What? No." Amenadiel shakes his head. "No, I'm sure that's not it."

"Really? Because you said he's been in bed for decades, that he drinks too much, and that he's given up on his favorite project. Doesn't exactly sound like a happy guy. Deity. Whatever."

"But *suicide?"*

Father had always hated the concept, the sharp refutation of life, and few of those souls made it to Heaven; nearly all regretted their decision in their final moments, the guilt of which sent them to
Hell. But, Amenadiel considers, what he knows of his father's feelings on this matter comes from long ago, back when humanity was young and his mother was still in Heaven. He shoves his wine aside as he remembers holding her, trapped in a clay jar.

"We can't let God off himself, can we?" Charlotte says.

"There's no stopping Father once he's made up his mind." He sees that now.

"But wouldn't it be kind of...bad for Earth to lose both the Goddess and God?"

It would, wouldn't it? Or does it matter at all? Humanity has been without God for decades, and his mother never cared for humans in the first place. It's not as if having Father active in human development has always been beneficial for them, either. He sees that now, too.

An uncomfortable chill crawls up his back and through his concealed wings as he remembers Lucifer at the gates during the Flood. From his own perspective at the time, it had been foolish and funny—his exiled, disheveled brother causing an uproar because he lacked faith in Father's infinite wisdom and divine Plan. But from God's perspective, it had been a damning wake-up call from a child that bothered him every time he was confronted with his existence.

There is no infinite wisdom, and the divine Plan is little more than divine hopes and wishes. Blundered prayers to unknowable gods.

"Humans might survive on Earth without Father, but the power vacuum in Heaven would be bad," Amenadiel says finally.

"Right. Your family doesn't really strike me as pro-democracy." Charlotte taps a finger on the table as she thinks. "Who else knows or might suspect he wants to die?"

God does want to die, doesn't he? The more Amenadiel sits with the idea, the more he recognizes it's probably true. All the signs are there in his father's memories, in his present actions. Amenadiel has seen that dejectedness before—in Lucifer.

He has no idea how to feel about any of it. Numbness is all he's left with.

"We're the only ones who know," he says. "Maybe Gabe." But who can tell what his brother is aware of at any given time?

"So how do we stop him—keep Chloe off whatever path your brother Uriel thought she'd end up on?" She breathes a laugh. "Get the cherubim to whip up a God-sized antidepressant?"

Amenadiel's mouth quirks. "I—" But he stops because for the first time in his existence, he has no answers, not even speculations. Father isn't testing him, and he knows better than to believe the choices he makes are good and right, simply because he is God's firstborn.

"I don't know what to do," he confesses. He looks at Charlotte, distraught. "I'm not even sure who I am now."

Chapter End Notes

to Obli and Yah.
Pausing on a rocky outcrop, Lucifer studies his smoldering kingdom, searching for the least dreadful path forward. He'd rather not lay claim to the heap, but there's no denying it belonged to him, and can again, if ever he desires to rule the miscreant masses once more. Not that there is any chance in actual Hell of that happening.

Although he made it a point to explain to Izzy and Ella how complicated retrieving Chloe might be, he nonetheless hopes this will be a quick visit. Whisk Chloe out of harm's way, rip Cain limb from bloody limb, and Bob's your uncle. Perhaps toss the beefy leftovers into a lightly roiling volcano for good measure. First-murderer-stew has a nice ring to it. Bring out the swill, stir up an orgy, and you've got yourself a party, even if the venue lacks a certain je ne sais quoi.

In the distance, black smoke curls near Naga Lake, a massive molten basin so named for its serpentine shape. It's been a long time since Lucifer has seen such smoke plumes, but he knows well what they signify. Hell's creatures are playing at war. He supposes it was to be expected in his absence.

Filled with amoral demons and the most powerful of Dad's rejects, who have survived by virtue of being pawky little profligates, Hell is a literal hotbed of contention, not least of all because ennui sets in rather easily on the drab plane. Between the bloody Sheol Affective Disorder and how few resources and landmarks there are to fight over, chaos tends to be its own reward. Anything to avoid boredom, numbness.

The only way he encouraged peace was to distract Hell's denizens with all the gambling, drinking, sex, and torture projects he could rustle up from nothing. And that peacefulness was only ever consistently maintained in Nox, Hell's lone city, his city. War didn't break out under his rule, but conflicts were not uncommon in the outer corners of the realm, where some demons fancied themselves archdukes who would eventually vie for his throne. He sighs, a rare moment of his age and agelessness sweeping over him like a chill.

"How's it feel to be home, Mazikeen?" he asks, adjusting a cufflink as he sets forth once more.

His oldest confidant is quiet for a long time as she follows him—she's been quiet since they arrived, actually—the only sound the shushing and grinding of her boots and his Oxfords as they shuffle through ash and slide along bits of loose hellstone.

"It's different," she answers gruffly.

"What," he says, glancing back, "not the raging dumpster fire you know and love?"

Maze snorts. "I guess there's just a lot for me back on Earth, you know?"

Yes, he knows. Names and faces come to mind instantly. Miss Lopez, Linda, Beatrice—the latter more for Maze than himself. Even the Douche and his witch sister.

He considers gloating about how right he was, about how Hell has become no place for its most notorious demon, but a pang of sympathy holds him back. "Can't quite go home again, can you? Figuratively, for you, of course. Literally, for me."
The most unlikely of expats, they've made Earth their home.

"Can you fly yet or what?" she asks, scowling at the smoke plumes.

Lucifer stretches his wings. His muscles are sore, as are the feather follicles which dapple his flesh, but the feathers themselves have lengthened and strengthened nicely since their arrival. Smirking, he flaps his wings once, stirring ash toward Maze, simply because it amuses him to annoy her.

"Seem limber enough. Shall we give it a try?" he asks with far more cheery confidence than he feels.

"Depends," she coughs out, waving the cloud of ash from her face. "You gonna drop me again?"

"Not if I can help it," he drawls, rankled by her tone. As if he wants to be grounded when Chloe is stuck in Hell with that tossing, ham-fisted chiropteran. He tugs on his waistcoat and suit jacket in irritation.

Maze steps up to him and puts her arms around his neck, giving him a cautionary glare. Flashing a sharp grin, he scoops her up and, with only a slight wince, extends his wings wide and high before striking down and lifting them into the foul-smelling air. He soars up and out, toward Nox, but his flight is clumsy and prone to a midair turbulence that only eases when he's able to glide. He struggles on, gaining altitude, a point near his left wing's wrist afame, as if a damaged nerve has yet to heal.

They dip precariously before he catches a current of air.

"Fuck, land already!" Maze yells near his ear. When he doesn't comply, she smacks his chest twice. "Land, you idiot!"

"Not yet," he barks. He can go farther. He will go farther.

He flies hard, his eyes skating over Hell, following the tangle of vein-like passages, until he sights in the far distance the twisted streets of Nox, with its central black jewel, the formidable spire he built with his own two hands. Chloe must be inside. The only way Cain could have gotten to his Pentecostal coins in the first place was if he had set up shop in the Black Tower.

When he's almost convinced himself the pain in his wing is background noise, the muscle suddenly seizes up, spasming violently before his entire wing draws in toward his back. Lucifer cries out, cursing at the same moment Maze begins hollering directions at his throat. As if that helps. As if she's ever flown herself.

Not that he has better ideas as he flaps his right wing for all he's worth. The motion sets them circling, anticlockwise, but their trajectory remains the same. They're going down, and not in a fun way. At least this time he's not so vulnerable.

He jerks his body to take the brunt of the inevitable force, and barren, mountainous land rises to meet him like a geographical punch. Landing on his back, halfway down a soul-filled mountainside, the impact knocks the wind out of Lucifer and Maze as ash explodes around their sides. Where it's pinned beneath him, Lucifer's injured wing screams in pain.

Maze slides away from him. "What the fuck's wrong with you?" she demands, chest heaving.

Lucifer scrubs a hand over his face, irritated with Maze, his bloody wings, the whole blasted situation. "You'll recall I made no promises about flight safety." He looks at her pointedly. "But I didn't drop you, did I?"
"Dropping yourself counts as dropping me." She glares, and he glares back, until she jabs a finger so close to his face that it makes him blink. "You weren't ready to come back. We should have stayed in Tijuana."

"I couldn't stay any longer, Mazikeen."

They look at each other, stuck at an impasse. A highly irrelevant impasse, if you ask him. They're bloody well here now.

"You wanna rest?" she asks a moment later.

"No," he says, but neither of them moves.

Silence settles, enough so that the soft rattling of the doors to nearby loops can be heard. Letting one's guard down in Hell can be dangerous, though the plane is vast enough that it's rare to encounter demons out in the wilds, this far from Nox. More precisely, rest in Hell is pointless, or nearly so. It doesn't satisfy or rejuvenate the same way it does on Earth. He will heal here, but bumbling around won't speed up the process. And so, onward march.

"Do you want me to look at your wing?"

"I'm fine." Ignoring her disgruntled expression, Lucifer forces himself to sit up, taking a moment to manually maneuver his wing, his jaw locked tight against the pain. These days, he suspects the annoying buggers only ever take longer to heal because of his complicated feelings about them. Utter rubbish, but then divinity usually is.

He looks around, getting his bearings. Even for the Devil, Hell is a meandering place. Souls have always been relatively easy for him to locate once he met them, or if he knew them in life, and he did make strides for a time to organize the damned according to their sins (a mostly failed effort, that), but it's easy to get lost if one has no clear destination in mind. Nox is on their left, and yet there's something about this particular spot, about the shape of the mountains, that gives him pause...

"Where are we, Maze?" No one knows the layout of Hell like a demon.

"Was wondering when you'd pick up on it."

Lucifer glances at her before looking back to the mountains and the nearest loops' doors. "Aren't we near—"

"We're where you think we are," she says, spinning a demon blade around a forefinger.

Grinding his teeth and rolling his shoulders, Lucifer forces his wings into hiding and rises to his feet. He holds a hand out to Maze, the wheels of his mind turning at high speed as he draws her upright. A question has troubled him ever since he woke in the De la Cruz laboratory to Cain's ugly mug, and certainly since realizing his nightmare about him was no nightmare at all: How exactly did Cain alter his form?

There are several possibilities, of course. Black magic originated in Hell and can prove to be very powerful—but powerful enough to give rise to a creature that might rival the Devil himself? Not bloody likely.

No, this reeks of twisted celestial nonsense, of which some still exists in Hell, even after all these years. It lingers from a time when dear old Dad, in all his infinite wisdom, thought sentient creatures deserved raw power like his own. Humans are fortunate Dad didn't make the same
mistake with them. They'd have all destroyed themselves ages ago.

Lucifer stuffs his hands into his trouser pockets. "I think we're due for a little visit to see Grandmother, don't you?"

"What about getting to Nox?"

"Well, as we've established, I'm quite pedestrian at the moment. Nothing wrong with a short stop along the way," he says, arching a brow. Besides, if the old crone is in cahoots with Evil Batman, better to find out now, lest it bite him later.

"Did you hit your head too hard when we fell?" Maze snaps. "Not only are you out of commission, we haven't been here in a long time. We're at a disadvantage."

"You think I've grown soft," he says, and there's an edge to his tone, a reminder that he earned his place here, angel or no. When she doesn't respond, he steps closer, invading her space. "We both know I'm more than the wings Dad pinned on me. So. Do you have my back or not, Mazikeen?"

Her lip curls as she stands a little straighter. "I'm here, aren't I?"

"Excellent," he says, nodding his chin and bringing his hands up in a single clap. "To Grandmother's house we go."

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There is no part of Hell Lucifer enjoys, but there are some areas he especially dislikes and has made a point of avoiding. The jagged edges of the dark mountain ranges become more familiar and haunting with each step, until finally he stands upon a hill, looking down on a roof made of bones. Eat your heart out, Frank Lloyd Wright—perhaps literally.

He can count on one hand the times he has seen the macabre construction since he was kicked out of the Silver City. He's not afraid of it—he doesn't fear much after eons in Hell—but he is unnerved by what it represents. Few creatures predate this plane's existence, but the old crone is one of them. As one of the only creatures remaining from Heaven's universe, she is also one of Hell's oldest residents. Her shanty was here when he fell.

A cratered pit lies a short distance from the back of Grandmother's house, collecting ash which hot winds occasionally lift and carry away. Even after all this time, Lucifer remembers the excruciating pain of impact. Father forced him into Hell, not through the gates, but through a rip in space and time and right through the plane's loathsome atmosphere, which burned him bright on entry. On the ground, ash stuck to his raw flesh, and the poisonous air was an acid bath.

Sometimes, now, he wonders: Were the burns real or a manifestation of his grief and anger? There's something he has no desire to unpack in therapy. The burns certainly felt real. Real enough for them to linger, for him never to forget them. For the scars to burrow deep beneath his skin, ready to torture others as he himself has felt tortured. Shunned. Vilified.

They descend the hill and make their way toward the crooked shack. Latticed, twisted spines and curved rib cages stand out, pale and alien, against their charcoal surroundings. Some of those bones might belong to one or two of Maze's siblings, not that she has any allegiance to them to care. Demons only pledge allegiance to those who earn it, and no one earns it by dying and becoming some old loon's wall cladding.
The bony door to the shanty opens a crack, and a light-skinned face, topped by white, writhing strands of hair, pops out like a marionette head peeking around a puppet theater curtain. Old Wrinkly's mouth stretches wide in a toothless grin.

Stopping several meters away with Maze, Lucifer bares his teeth in a smile of his own. "Hello, Grandmother," he greets. "I believe I might have a bone to pick with you."

Wheezing a laugh, the crone worms her way from her home on limbless legs of coiled smoke. She careens closer, a long, pancake-thin breast sliding over her rag-covered ribs and belly as she moves. She stops, hovering in place—and well out of reach.

"Never been one to bother updating a wardrobe, have you?"

"My bones said you would come, Lightbringer."

"Hey!" Maze jabs at the air with a demon blade. "You'll address your king properly."

Lucifer glances at his right-hand demon, a strange sensation creeping through him, as if pieces of himself are colliding. He is the Lightbringer, is he not? The Devil, too. He is all these names, all his histories.

"My apologies, my lord," Grandmother coos, offering a patronizing bow of her white-haired head.

"Better," he says, shedding his discomfort beneath an august air. "Now. Whilst I was away—"

"You were gone many years, lord."

"Don't interrupt." He pauses to ensure she obeys, before continuing, "Let's cut to the chase. Eaten any fat, juicy hearts of late?"

Grandmother smiles her toothless smile, her body twisting. "One or two."

"Give or take a dozen, I'm sure. And, tell me, have you been a good little vulture in my absence? If you'll recall, we have a standing deal, you and I," he says to her with an open palm. "No altering or eating soul hearts, in exchange for your life and an all-you-can-eat soulless-creature buffet."

The grandmother longlegs to Hell's pesky spiders—useful, but potentially troublesome in her own right. Potentially very, very troublesome.

"Demons never tasted as good." Large, black pupils flick toward Maze. "Too gamey."

"Be that as it may," Lucifer bites out, "it's unwise to break a deal with the Devil. Catastrophically so."

"I broke no deal, my lord."

He searches her pale, cadaverous face. "The full story," he demands, "or I'll make you tell it."

"You said I couldn't take soul hearts," she says with a smack of her gums. "You never said anything about those freely given." She touches her mouth. "I was so hungry, lord, and you made a very bad enemy." The wrinkles around her eyes bunch with her amusement. "He lets me do as I please."

"I see."

Lucifer struggles to mask his revulsion as everything clicks into place, confirming his worst
suspicions and fears about Cain's escape from Hell. If he had been here, if he had at least paid closer attention, none of this would have happened. Lesson learned. No topping mortals—well, at least not with a knife to the chest.

Recovering, he chuckles mirthlessly. "I was a rather young Devil when we made our deal, wasn't I? Not so good at closing loopholes." And he'd had so little to lose—nothing at all, really. What had he cared if there were loopholes? Maze breathes raggedly at his side, bloodlust tugging on her nature. "I'm much better at closing them now," he says. "Permanently."

A satisfying look of unease passes over the crone's face. "You would end me, when I've broken no deal with you?" Grandmother challenges, wisps of smoke twisting tight like a spring. "What will the demons say? They're already so agitated, lord."

"We'll say fuck you," Maze quips. "Why would we care if you're dead?"

Grandmother smirks at her. "You don't speak for the demons, Mazikeen. You're...tainted by light."

"You wanna come over here and say that?"

Holding a hand up for Maze to back down, Lucifer takes a step closer to the crone, though some distance yet separates them. He slips out of his suit jacket and lets the Armani drop to the ash. "Have you forgotten why my father sent you here?" he asks, freeing cufflinks. "You added one too many floors to your Tower of Babel. You know, I could sympathize with that when I was sent here, despite our differences and your...appetites. After all, no one knows better than the Devil that God's no fan of tall poppies." He huffs a laugh, rolling a sleeve. "But now you've built your tower too high here, in my domain. Hell isn't meant to cross the gates, and for facilitating that—not to mention personally inconveniencing me while on vacation—I'm afraid you've gone a bit too far."

It's been a long time since he doled out punishment so severe, but as he stares at the crackers crone, his mind fills with his fall, with Cain, with Chloe, and this feels right. A duty of his own making, if not Dad's. He reaches toward his back and retrieves one of the demon blades tucked against his belt. The metal is hot to the touch, especially in Hell. Slipping a forefinger through the safety, he twirls the weapon into a tight grip.

"You think you can kill me, Lightbringer?" Rising high into the air, the crone looks down on him with a feral grin. "I was given the Word—"

"And I'm a quick learner," he snaps, barely containing his anger.

A small bluff. He will never be fluent in the Word, but he's pilfered what he could, even if it's never been of use. No matter. He has other knowledge—knowledge which has been hard won over time.

Hissing, the crone stretches stick-thin, blue-veined arms. Her mouth yawns wide, as if she is a snake unhinging her jaw. Lucifer grins as a high-pitched keen tears from her throat before, suddenly, the Word, made foul and unholy in her mouth, begins to tumble forth in a droning chant.

Lucifer lobs his demon blade without hesitation. It twirls, end over end, like the spoke of spinning wheel, until the sharp tip sinks into Grandmother's throat with a wet thwack. Maze laughs as the crone clutches her neck in surprise, Words dying on a rasp.

"What was that, Nan?" He glances at Maze, who grins. "Did you hear anything?"

"Nope," she says.
Grandmother grabs the knife by its hilt and yanks it free from her withered flesh. Air whistles through the thin slit before black blood runs down her chest and torn, dirty rags. Gurgling, she reels left and right and raises the knife threateningly.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you," Lucifer warns. "You don't have to bleed out like some common creature, you know. You've had a good run, and I have places to be. I'll make this quick."

But the crone rushes forward, spilling vile blood, the whites of her eyes showing with madness and hunger.

Maze crouches at Lucifer's side, ready to defend him, but he acts quickly, grabbing his second blade and sliding its infernally sharp edge across his left palm. Blood wells and spills over, painting the ash crimson near his shoes. With Grandmother near, he flings blood toward the ash beneath her curled limbs of smoke and twitches his fingers, breathing a word from an ancient language. Not one of his father's, or one of man's, but one of his own, forged in Hell. A costly, crude tongue woven from pieces of himself and made to beat Gehenna's shadows into submission.

The ash lifts, as if drawn up by an invisible vacuum. It sparks in the air, catching fire. Golden flames burst to life, rising high and bright, washing the dull plane in color. Wheezing, Grandmother panics, drops the blade, and stretches to fly higher, but with another utterance, another twitch of his fingers, Lucifer sets the vibrant flames to curl over her like an ocean wave. She flails as the fire fences her in on all sides, hiding her from sight, and he lets his hand drop to his side, where he digs his nails into the wound to keep his power flowing.

Maze folds her arms, the hooked shape of her daggers peeking out from the stance. "Too bad we don't have time to torture the old bitch."

"Pity," he hums in agreement. "Suppose she'll give me the Word she used to raise Cain?"

"Probably not," Maze says wryly. "Also, you cut her windpipe."

Lucifer sighs. "Well, no need to drag this out, then." He takes no pleasure in destroying creatures, not really, but he's never been one to lose sleep over executing one so meddlesome, either. He won't have her interfering with the rest of what he has to do here.

Staring into the flames, he uncurls the fingers of his wounded hand before closing them in time with another breathed word. The fire grows hotter, turning a brilliant ultramarine, then collapses in on itself like a star freezing to death in the depths of space. The flames dim, dying down to embers before cooling. They leave behind nothing but the hard hellstone that typically lies beneath the ash. No rags, nor flesh; no bone.

"So it goes," Lucifer murmurs, swaying slightly. He looks at his hand and watches as the edges of the knife wound meet and knit together. The dark scar fades into smooth, unblemished skin.

Maze grabs his arm, steadying him. "You need to save your strength."

"I couldn't let her live."

"No one's saying she didn't have it coming, but you didn't have to kill her that way. Hell, I could have killed her after you shut her up." She rolls her eyes.

"No, you couldn't." Lucifer flashes a smile. "It was personal." Breathing deeply, he looks up, past Grandmother's empty house of bones, in the direction of Nox. "Shall we?"
The crone is old news and doesn't enter Lucifer's thoughts again. There is only Chloe, only Cain, and perhaps, most of all, Hell itself. The underworld is as much a state of mind as it is a macrocosm for the damned. It presses upon its inhabitants, convincing them, rightfully, that darkness is all that remains. Pleasure is limited. Pain is infinite. That does something to the psyche.

As he walks beside Maze down ashen, door-lined channels, his mood darkens. For years, he's only gone to Hell for Chloe's sake—and once to meddle in Cain's sorry affairs, to prove a ridiculous point to Dad, who of course didn't care one whit about what he'd done. That aside, the fact of the matter is that the longer he's stayed on Earth, the easier it has become to pretend Hell isn't so significant anymore. After all, he's retired! Moved to cooler climes! Oh, moments of his eons spent in the inferno creep up on him, and he's certainly not one to let a devilish pun pass him by, but to some degree the Devil had, well, moved on to much greener pastures—or, more commonly, beachfront properties and sprawling estates. Chloe Decker's miraculous legs around his waist.

But it's all very real here—the heat, the ash, the doors clattering on their hinges—and the longer he traverses these ancient passageways, the more he is forced to face, yet again, the ugliness and hopelessness of his father's design. The ugliness and hopelessness of his inability to change any of it. Remembering, truly remembering, that actual Hell comes with the territory of who his father made him become turns out to be rather unpleasant. And all these emotions... Well, once you open the floodgates, you're bloody well screwed, aren't you? It'd take literal ages to rebuild his former defenses.

What has become of Chloe here?

Maze, who is in no less of a sour mood than he is, stomps ahead with purpose. But then her surliness seems to break, when at the top of a mountain, she looks back at him and announces, "I can see the tower."

"It's about time!" The news revives him, as well, and he hurries to join her, slipping and sliding against the ash and loose rock.

"Don't get too excited," she warns, nodding her chin toward the obvious smoke rising up along Nox's edge. Off to the right, a fire rages.

"Oh, I don't know." Lucifer stuffs his hands in his pockets. "Like old times, isn't it?"

"Yeah. Yeah, it is." She pants through her teeth like an eager hound, waiting to be loosed on the foxes. "Does this mean you want us to fight our way through?" There's an unspoken please.

Demons.

"So long as I can't bloody fly," he says, unfurling his wings without preamble. There's very little pull or pinch in the left joint now, but it's still there, still a flight risk. Tucking his wings back into place, he eyes the war-torn landscape and shrugs. "Faster to go through than around."

They continue on, descending one mountain, only to climb the next. As they near the smoke, the sounds of battle rise up, savage and raucous—howls and screams, clashes of metal on metal. Wriggling on their bellies through the ash, they peek around a large hunk of hellstone and look down on the city. Even without the smoke obscuring details, it's hard to follow armed conflict, and, anyway, there aren't always sides to choose between in Hell. There's great variation in the demonic horde, but they never fight according to race and rarely over ideology. Sometimes they are just
individuals, exploding with energy, like a pot of water left to boil over. The only way to put a lid on it is to subdue it, either with brutal force or with distractions.

"Ready?" Lucifer asks, his blood pumping hard.

Maze's teeth glint in the shadows. "I was born ready."

With a nod to each other, they stand as one and run forward, leaping off the stumpy mountain peak. Maze lets out an ear-splitting battle cry, landing on the back of one who, in some twisted way, could be a distant cousin or sibling. The wild-eyed female drops beneath her with a snarl as Lucifer touches down in a gap between two demons, who reel back, startled to see the face of a familiar king.

One of them raises his hands in surrender, and Lucifer sighs in disappointment—that is, until the other lands a punch to his right kidney. He spins on his heel, grinning maniacally, and grabs the bald-headed demon by his throat, squeezing him like one of Daniel's desk toys.

"I have. Had. A. Very. Stressful. Millennium!" he bellows over the din, punctuating each word with a bone-jarring shake. "And now I come home to this!" He lifts the demon high, using him as a full-body shield against another who wields a club.

Violence isn't exactly Lucifer's jam, but there's satisfaction to be found in a job well done. And is there any more definitive sign of a job well done than surviving, while your opponent drops to the ground like a sack of potatoes? Hellfire burns in his eyes as he weaves through the entangled horde with Maze, always knowing where she will be, without ever looking. They have reined in chaos hundreds, thousands, of times together in this pit of despair.

Maze lets out a loud hiss, drawing Lucifer's attention. "There are demon blades!" she yells, backhanding some sod who has little more than a skull for a face. She unsheathes her own blades as blood drips down her side from a cut that has sliced through her leather corset.

"What?" he rasps. Sweeping beneath an oncoming punch, he kicks a demon into the gnarled mess of a nearby brawl and laughs as he bowls a strike.

"Look for yourself!" Maze shouts at his back. "I've seen"—she grunts, taking a kick to the chest—"at least five!"

Lucifer focuses, and now that he's looking for them, he does indeed spot the telltale silver-veined gleam of malam flashing between demons. Alarmed, he draws one blade, but keeps his other hand free. "How in the hell did they—"

"How do you think?" Maze snaps.

What madness has bat-arsed Cain been up to? When he left, there were few demon blades in existence, by design. The urge to find Chloe and escape ratchets up, tenfold, as he looks out across the battlefield while fending off more demons. This is a massive battle, reminiscent of those waged in Hell's early days, and it's pushing toward Nox. Do some of the demons here have a goal in mind? Are these troops belonging to one of the archdukes vying for power, or is it merely chaos as usual?

"Ah, you there." He grabs a short demon in passing, lifting him up by his roughspun collar as though he were a cat. "What's all the fighting about, Tyrion?" he demands, shoving another demon aside.

The squat demon opens his mouth and hisses out a forked tongue.
"Oh, well, you're bloody useless," Lucifer gripes, and tosses him like refuse.

All of a sudden, thunder rumbles. It's a completely alien sound in Hell that causes an immediate, confused lull in the fighting. Demons murmur uncertainly, fearing volcanic eruption. Lucifer looks up in the direction of the sound, toward Nox, as a loud, crumbling crack issues through the air. He watches in awe as polished hellstone blasts out from the top of the Black Tower, revealing a bright, harsh beam of light that pierces the dark sky like a beacon. Large hunks of black stone plummet to the ground.

Even after the last stone has fallen and the light flickers off, his mouth is stuck in a fond smile.

"Go get her," Maze says, knocking a demon sideways moments before a knife slits his throat. The world comes back into sharp focus. "Can you fly?"

"Yes," he says, his eyes drawn back to the tower. With a roll of his shoulders, Lucifer unfurls his wings. Several nearby demons stop and stare, slack-jawed. Flexing his left wing, he grins when it no longer pains him. After shoving his demon blade against his belt, he reaches for Maze.

"Leave me!" she shouts. "I'll make sure this doesn't make its way to the tower."

He hesitates. It's an absurd thought, leaving her here to the rotten masses. Then again, if anyone other than the Devil himself can bring them into line, it's Mazikeen, the brightest and most ferocious of them all.

"Go!" She shoves at his shoulder, her fingers catching on feathers in a way that makes his stomach turn with recent memories.

"I'll come back for you," he promises, sweeping a demon aside with a wing.

"Good. I wanna go home!"

Understanding passes between them, and he nods once before shoving off and surging into the air. His wings hold, limber and strong, as he darts toward the tower Chloe has begun to break.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks be to my fellow Hell-bound betas, Obli and Yah.
The light flowing through Chloe's fingertips collapses at the same time her vision blacks out. When her sight returns a few moments later, the room tilts, and she sways with it, staggering backward, feet tripping over strewn artifacts. Slumping down onto a cushion, she curls forward, blood dripping from her nose. It falls, tip-tapping onto a green-striped Marvin Gaye album, where the red soaks into the cardboard and blooms outward. Her empty stomach pitches as pain ripples through her head, reminding her of healing after Shayna de la Cruz shot her. How many years ago did that happen? Was it years ago on Earth?

Dragging a wrist across her upper lip, she focuses on what matters: it worked. It really worked. She has light. She breathes out an exhausted chuckle. All it took was utter desperation to figure it out. Buried deep within, her light is almost impossible to access, and the cost to using it is high, if all the pain and blood are any sign. But Trixie was right all along. She has light.

Trixie... Tears spring to her eyes. How much of her daughter's life has she missed?

With effort, Chloe forces those thoughts aside. They can't help her. Swallowing back blood and licking her dry lips, she looks at the large hole she blasted into the tower wall. It's crude and jagged, but big enough to climb through, with the fissure running from the top of the spire, all the way down to the floor. Ash has already begun to float into the space, drifting in on hot, dry winds. Now what? There aren't any more clothes to make another rope. Cain made sure of that. Even if she had a rope, she's not sure her right wrist would hold out on the journey down. It still throbs where she landed on it when he threw her back into Lucifer's room. Whether Cain's affections have ever been real or not—she doubts she'll ever know—his patience has run out. The small acts of kindness are slipping, and he's planning to isolate her more. She's worked enough cases to know how this story goes.

"No one's ever made me feel the way you do," Cain said before he left her again, and the notion clearly vexed him.

She'd climbed to her feet. The wise thing would have been to de-escalate the situation, but she wasn't feeling very wise at the time. "You don't get to blame me or anyone else for your feelings or all the things you've done, Cain."

"Maybe," he said, thoughtful but unbothered by his sins. Crossing his arms over his barrel chest, he looked down at her, his brows drawn close together. "You know where I've been going, Decker?"

Not far enough away, she thought.

When she didn't reply, he stepped closer, black eyes suddenly sincere, claw-tipped wings scraping against the hidden room's stone floor. He took hold of her shoulders, his hands dwarfing her bones.
"When I've not been putting out fires with the demons, I've been building something for us," he said. "A fresh start. This city's dead, anyway." He cupped her cheek. "When I'm finished, I'll come get you. You'll see. We just"—his gaze flickered to the creature comforts in Lucifer's room—"we need to get away from all of this."

Now, fear makes her heart race. What if Cain takes her somewhere Lucifer can't find her? Is that possible? Chloe rests her forehead in her hands. When Cain comes for her, maybe she can find her light again and— But what if he doesn't die? What if she isn't strong enough to pull this stunt again? And if she—

"Need a lift, Detective?"

Chloe freezes, willing her mind to stop playing games. He's not here, probably. She's just finally lost it and is hearing things. Slowly, she looks up toward the opening in the black tower. A familiar, lanky form stands just inside the room, leaning against the wall in a pose of affected nonchalance. For a moment, Chloe forgets how to breathe.

Curls poke up from his head, looking an awful lot like horns, and at his back, long, luminescent feathers shift in the breeze. He looks like, well...hell. His face is bruised, his bottom lip swollen, and he's down to his pants, dress shirt, and shoes. Every inch of him is covered in a thin layer of gray ash. And he's the most beautiful thing she's ever seen.

Unable to believe her eyes, she whispers, "Lucifer?"

"Hello, Detective." He gives her a frail smile and glances about the room. "I see Earth's first murderer has been redecorating."

Before Chloe even realizes it, she's moving, lurching up and stumbling over the broken pieces of his old life. She stops in front of him and clutches his arms, her lips parting as she looks into soft brown eyes. It's a gaze she can't get lost in, because she finds a part of herself held in it, whole and safe. Tremors tear through her limbs as she reaches up and touches his chest, the thick stubble of his jaw, the curls at the nape of his neck. He's everything she remembers, but after so much time in the dark, the light she senses beneath his surface is almost overwhelming. To touch him is to dip her hands into a flowing river of starlight. It's a living thing, thrumming beneath his breast, through his veins, inviting and enticing, though she doesn't pull it to herself. She fears she wouldn't know when to stop.

"You're real," she breathes.

"I would never leave you here," he says, letting her explore. He makes no move to touch her. She closes the distance, throwing herself so hard against him that breath rushes out of him. Clutching the back of his besmirched dress shirt, she breathes him in, past all the sulphur, and listens to the steady, hard thump of his ancient heart. Slowly, carefully, his arms encircle her, and he bends until his chin drops to the top of her head.

"Where is he?" he asks, his words a low, comforting rumble.

"I don't know," she says, "but he might have seen what I did."

"It was quite the show. Wherever did you find a light source in Hell?"

She's glad he doesn't chastise her for trying something potentially foolish in desperate times. "In me," she answers, sheepish. "Wish I'd figured it out sooner..."
"Is that why you're bleeding?" He tilts her chin up and runs a thumb beneath her nose. His fingertip comes away red.

"Oh," she murmurs, seeing the wet bloodstain on his shirt. "I thought it'd stopped."

Lucifer studies her, and she feels questions boiling behind his lips. "Well, no need to exert yourself now," he says a beat later. "I'm here. We'll pick up Maze and be on our way."

Maze is here, too? "But Cain—"

"Not to worry, Detective," he says, embers sparking in his eyes. "Rest assured I will return and deal with Man-Bat."

"No." Chloe pulls away more to look at him firmly. Concern flickers across his face before he hides it beneath a neutral expression. "We stick together."

"Ah." Lucifer's mouth twists as they get stuck in a staring contest. "Very well," he relents a moment later, seemingly caught between a desire to keep her safe and a desire to honor her wishes. "But I'm getting you both to the gates first."

Releasing her, he strides across the room, feathers brushing the floor, and looks at the wall above the broken hand-crank record player. He runs his fingers over the stone, as if searching for something. When it appears he's found it, he draws back his right arm and slams the heel of his hand into the wall, which cracks and crumbles beneath the force. Digging in the rubble, he draws out a small wooden box.

Chloe watches with interest. "Didn't think you could fit any more secrets into this room," she says softly.

"Walls are excellent hiding places." Blowing dust from the box, he glances at her from the corner of his eyes. "I suppose you know all the other secrets now."

As if she'll ever know everything. But she knows what counts.

"You have a good heart, Lucifer," she says, thinking of all the love and pain hidden in this room. How he keeps coming back to the one place he hates most, just for her.

Avoiding her gaze, he quips, "Oh, you know that organ's hardly my most interesting."

He opens the box. When he holds his hand above it, two small discs suddenly lift and float in the air. They follow his palm, levitating as he turns it. He sets the box aside on an overturned shelf.

Curious, Chloe wanders closer, feeling a little like a child marveling at a magic trick, even as she knows this show of power is no trick at all. Upon closer inspection, she realizes the discs are coins and squints at them, trying to make out their engravings as they spin slowly in the air.

"I think I saw you with one of these once." Just once, early in their partnership, and never again.

"Did you now?"

"You hid it when you saw me approaching."

"Well," he snorts, "you wouldn't have believed me if I'd told you what it was, anyway. Tokens for the damned, by the by. Namely, a little insurance policy for moi. With one of these bad boys, I could come and go when I pleased, no matter what tricks Dad pulled, no matter if I didn't have my
wings. Probably should have brought them all to Earth with me when I left for good... Suppose even I didn't believe my stay would be so permanent."

"Is that how you got back to Earth the first time?" she whispers. "When you saved Trixie and me?"

"Mm, I thought that was Dad's doing," he says, pensive. "Now I'm not certain... The coin you would have seen was spent. I was never quite sure why." The corner of his mouth quirks. "Devilry is hardly an exact science."

"You made these?"

"With my own blood."

A shudder passes through her because he doesn't lie. This must be how Cain has moved freely between the planes—and what he forced down her throat to get her here. "They've been here the whole time?"

"Yes," Lucifer says, shaking himself, "but don't feel bad about it, Detective. You'd never have found the gates on your own to use them. Hell's a bastard to navigate, and it's not as if the exit is lit up by a sign." He stares at the coins with her. "If something goes wrong whilst I take care of Adam's wayward child, you and Mazikeen will leave. Press a coin to the gates, and they'll open for you."

Chloe shakes her head. "I'm not leaving you here, Lucifer."

The coins drop to his palm as if whatever invisible strings that helped them defy gravity have been cut. They clink together as they land. Bending, he grabs her hand and turns it, smacking one into her palm, where it lies flat and warm against her skin. She looks at the coin's face. There's a goat, of all things, on it.

"I thought you hated goats."

"Yes, well, not as much as I enjoy irony. Rank beasts aside, you will leave with that, if you must," he insists. "If we can't make this deal, I'm taking you home now. Whatever that creature might have been saying to you here, Hell is no place for you, Detective." He cranes his head to catch her gaze.

Her fingers close over the coin. "Hell's no place for a lot of the souls here," she says, longing to tell him about Abeni and the others, but knowing now isn't the time.

"No, it's not," he agrees, and there's a tiredness in his spirit that pulls at her. Hell is no place for the Devil, either. "So, do we have a deal?"

"Deal," Chloe murmurs, fighting the urge to cross her fingers behind her back. She tucks the coin against her roughspun pants and rolls the waist, carefully knotting the drawstring around the object to hold everything in place.

"Marvelous. Let's get a wriggle on." He raises a calming hand between them. "I'm going to pick you up and fly now."

"Okay."

Even with the warning, she lets out a gasp when he scoops her up, maybe because she still doubts the reality of him being here. Maybe she fainted when she used her light and this is all a dream. If it is, she hopes she never wakes.
Lucifer stands at the edge of the broken spire and stretches his wings. "Ready?" he asks, his grip on her legs and waist tightening as he scans the horizon.

"Yes," she breathes, tasting freedom.

He lifts off, arrowing through soft-falling ash, and her stomach sinks with the quick jerk upwards.

Lucifer flies with the smooth power of a dagger slicing the air. There is a simple joy to his movement, a gladness in his sinew, even here. He glides and arcs in wide circles, his heart pounding, his breaths strong and deep in his chest. What Cain has tried to become, Lucifer has always been, maybe even without his wings. The Devil, maybe, but the light of *The Star*, too—*The Star*, first.

Hell sprawls beneath them as they move toward a line of thick, black smoke on Nox's rough border. "Maze is in all that?" Chloe asks above the wind.

"Having the time of her life, no doubt," Lucifer says, grinning slightly, and she realizes it's the first real grin she's seen on him since he arrived. "We split up. Wasn't sure how easy it'd be to get you, and that lot is moving toward my tower."

"What are they fighting for?"

"Death to monotony?" he guesses wryly. "Demons hardly need a reason."

She takes in his explanation without comment. Resting her chin on her arms where they curl around his neck, she watches his white feathers shift and flex. Ash slips from him with each great beat of his wings, and though there is nothing but Hell's grim ambient light for the soft vanes to reflect, they are no less brilliant here. No less a remnant of a Heaven she can't fathom, especially after so long in Hell.

Something dark peeks through the thick clouds above. Tensing, Chloe squints and searches frantically.

"What's wrong?" Lucifer asks.

Gooseflesh sweeps down her arms and legs. Her eyes jerk back and forth.

"Chloe."

She twitches to attention. "I think he's above us."

Lucifer glances up, mouth set in a hard line. Without warning, he arcs to the right, toward a ridge of black mountains, and dives. Chloe's stomach flips again, but the move has what she imagines was the intended effect. Black, clawed wings pierce the cloud cover as Cain descends in pursuit. His body bobs with his frantic, spastic flight.

"It's him!"

"Hold on!" Lucifer shouts.

His wings fold, drawing close to his back, and they plunge toward the dark, ashen grounds of Hell. Chloe's eyes roll back in her head at the sudden change in speed and altitude, her hold slipping from his neck. She regains consciousness on a cry and claws at his shirt with sweaty palms. Above, Cain falls, too, gaining on them.
Before they reach the ground, Lucifer rotates and draws up his legs to land on his feet. He sets Chloe down, and she sways, but quickly steadies, holding onto his forearm for support. All around, doors rattle with the nightmares of tortured souls.

"Hide!" he yells, his wings already spreading again. Her hand slips from him. "I'll find you!"

"Lucifer!" Cain roars from above. He hovers no more than fifty feet above, ready and waiting for a fight.

Rooted in place, Chloe watches Lucifer rise into the air with a feral, determined glint in his eyes. He wastes no time on his usual favored monologuing, instead colliding with Cain like one missile slamming into another. Darting and weaving like vipers in a pit, they soon become a thick, tangled braid of black and white.

Chloe staggers in labyrinthine circles, her head tilted back as she tries to follow their twists and dives high above the mountainous corridor. It's soon obvious only Lucifer has experience with aerial fighting. As he flies, he attacks with all four of his other limbs, grappling and punching with his hands, hooking his legs with Cain's to disturb the balance of bat-winged flight. He is an explosion of silken, lethal movements that might be beautiful if the stakes were not so high.

But what Cain lacks in skill, he nearly makes up for with economical agility. The two strike and part, strike and part, but Cain can turn on a dime and angle his body in unexpected ways, which soon he recognizes as his strength. Their combat becomes increasingly more frantic and vicious, and during a small pause in movement, Chloe catches sight of black, curved knives in Lucifer's hands. She's never seen him fight with weapons before and doesn't know whether to trust it after years of telling him, no, he couldn't have a gun.

Cain darts forward, and Lucifer swings a blade like a scythe. At the last second, Cain curves a wing, and the knife misses his throat as he slips around to Lucifer's back. Lucifer jerks away clumsily and flips onto his back in midair while tucking his wings in alarm. Chloe gasps as he drops before catching himself and rising again. His back, she realizes, feeling panic of her own. He's afraid of having his back exposed, and Cain knows it.

She rubs her fingers against her palms nervously as they hover in stasis. If they were just a bit more still, she might—what? Risk Lucifer's life by drawing light from him? Risk her own, trying to access that hard-to-reach place in herself again, so soon? She bites her lip, uncertain.

Newfound confidence turns Cain brutal. He rushes Lucifer again, a slight difference in their altitude giving him an edge. Lucifer dodges, awkwardly arcing away, but not before one of Cain's claws catches his left wing. A moment later, a stripe of red runs wet and bright down white feathers. Even from the ground, Chloe can see how the wing trembles a little more than it should.

"No," Chloe breathes, realizing how dangerous her proximity could make the fight. Stay and wait things out, try to help? Go and risk getting separated or worse, again? There's no right answer. But Lucifer's next move takes the agony of choice away from her. Crossing his ankles, he soars high, surging like a bullet past Cain, toward Hell's dark, woolen sky. Distance turns him smaller until finally he disappears, pulling up into the cloud cover like the tail of a cyclone bound for home. Cain launches after him, vanishing several moments later.

Chloe watches the still, thick clouds. All is quiet, save for the clattering doors and the drumming of her heart.

"Come on," she wills Lucifer.
On her next breath, they burst from the blanket of gray, tumbling in a convulsing knot of wings. Gravity seizes them as they grapple, sucking them toward the ground. Cambering a wing, Cain lands atop Lucifer, forcing him into a defensive position. Cain stretches ragged, torn wings and drives them forward, cocooning Lucifer's body, leaving only his scarlet-spattered wings exposed. As they near the ground, Chloe hears Lucifer's agonized cry when Cain's claws tear through the tender underside of his wings.

A demon blade tumbles to the ground. Its tip sinks past the ash and drives into the underlying hellstone. Cain flings Lucifer away from him, and Lucifer falls, his bloodied wings folding up around him, the feathers snapping in the breeze with his downward velocity.

"Lucifer!" Chloe screams. "Fly!"

But he doesn't wake. He falls with the bonelessness of one knocked unconscious, or worse.

When he crashes to the ground, ash bursts up around him and loose hellstone breaks off from surrounding mountains to tumble to the ground. Chloe races forward and drops to her knees, sliding through the ash until tightly-interlocked feathers slow her movement. Leaning over Lucifer's body, she grabs his face and shakes him gently. Blood seeps from deep cuts all over his body, but most especially from his palms, turning the ash around him a dusty red. His left wing crooks off him at an odd angle, as if a joint has been dislocated or a bone has been broken. Memories of the time he was sniped in Colinda swim to the surface of her mind. She doesn't dare think about his spine after this fall.

He finally comes to, gasping awake like a dead man resuscitated on an operating table. A light, rose-gold fire she's never seen before writhes in his eyes. "Chloe," he breathes, and she's grateful when he moves, gripping one of her arms with a blood-wet hand. "You have to hide."

Leave him here? To go where?

She opens her mouth to say something, but freezes as Cain suddenly swoops down fast and low into the line of her vision. He darts like a raptor, and at such a high speed that she isn't able to move away in time to avoid him jabbing his hands beneath her armpits and jerking her up into the sky. Blood smears down her right arm as she's ripped away from Lucifer. He cries out on the ground and struggles to get to his feet with his broken wing.

In the air, Chloe pushes at Cain, trying to break free, but his hold is strong as he draws her close. His arms encircle her waist, holding her to him in an uncomfortably intimate embrace.

"Let me go," she growls.

"Probably not something you should say when you're this high up, Decker."

But his hold doesn't loosen, and the threat feels idle, almost tired, as they gain altitude. It's like they're back in the black tower, getting in each other's head as they shift pieces of bone and stone across a handcrafted board.

She takes in his appearance. Lucifer's not the only one who's sustained injuries. Cain's wings are shredded in several places, which slows his flight, and he's covered in deep cuts, from his face to his arms, and probably his legs, too. But his flesh isn't bruised, and he doesn't bleed. Instead, his wounds are clotted with something viscous and black and very, very abnormal.

Wind catches at his roughspun shirt, and a rip in the fabric flaps near where they're pressed together, revealing a strange dip to the left of his sternum. Narrowing her eyes, Chloe reaches for it,
yanking the fabric aside, and stares into a strange, open cavity where his heart should be. A long

time ago, she might have frozen in place to see such inhuman horror, she might have even

screamed, but Hell, with its torture-filled loops, has changed her. Curiosity outweighs the slight
disgust turning her stomach.

Cain watches her closely.

She stares back and wonders how much of the Marcus Pierce she knew is still in there, how much

of the hardworking farmer boy is there. If any of that was ever real. "What did you do?"

"I did what I had to," he insists, a look of betrayal on his face. He slows their ascent until they're

left hovering. Below, Lucifer is a small figure, noticeable mostly by the white of his wings, which

contrast with the darkness of Hell.

"Okay," Chloe replies, falling back, as she so often does, on police training. "I get that, but you

know this has to stop, don't you? This isn't even really about me."

"Yes, it is," he says sharply.

"No," she says, shaking her head. "It's not. You have to let me go. You have to let him go. Lucifer,

Abel, all of it."

"I can't." Raw, uncharacteristic grief steals over Cain's battered face. "I can't stop. It's always been

this way and always will be."

She's not sure what "it" he's referring to—his cursed life or maybe something bigger—but she

knows what it reminds her of.

"Like a loop," she mutters, and feels the ghost of Abeni's crooked-toothed smile.

Stillness settles over Chloe, the sense that she is, somehow, exactly where she should be. A

nonbeliever for most of her life, moments like this have been few and far between for her, but felt

more acutely for it. She hears her breathing and Cain's, the flapping of his wings; feels the

thudding of her heart and now the unmistakable absence of his. And it's like signing up for the

police academy after visiting her father's grave on an ordinary Sunday afternoon. It's that last jolt of

fear behind a blue curtain before she hears Trixie's first cry. It's touching the scars of a man she

barely knows and kissing his burned mouth when she finally accepts the truth. It's being afraid of

herself as she clings to a demon's hands beneath a glowing moon. It's helping a long-dead soul dig a

grave.

So long as Cain is alive, he wreaks havoc. He puts everyone who matters to her at risk. It has to

end.

In the distance behind Cain's head, the broken tower peeks up from fractured Nox, which itself

peeks up from a miserable plane of shadowed mountains. And she thinks maybe, just maybe, she

can stop him. She can break his cursed cycle.

He locks eyes with her as she slides her hands up from his shoulders. Resting one in the middle of

his chest and cradling his jaw with the other, she hunts deep within herself, sifting past her

defenses with dogged determination. A very fragile pool of light, something that comes just from

herself, waits for her and she opens up to its fire. Pain explodes through her head as the light rushes
down the veins of her arms and tingles through her fingertips. Opalescent specks illuminate Cain,
painting him in brilliance. She sees him in double.

Tears gather below his black eyes, settling along lashes too soft for his monstrous face. "Chloe..."
His wings beat slowly, tiredly, as if he is full of longing and regret. Maybe it's another calculated manipulation, but if it is, he seems to believe in it, too.

"It has to stop," she breathes.

How many have died because of him? How much longer would he fight Lucifer and hold her hostage?

With a breath, Chloe tears down the last piece of herself that holds back the flood.

The band of prismatic colors narrows into white, hot light. Cain jerks back in shock, but he doesn't drop her, and she holds tight and focuses. He gasps, his face pinching with pain, and the hands holding her finally loosen, so that she's forced to wrap her legs around him to keep from falling. He shoves at her, frantic, but it's too late. He screams as the light pierces his skin and bursts through the vessels of his body, racing through black blood.

They begin to fall, spinning and tumbling, and Chloe sinks ever deeper into that vulnerable well of herself that not even she can name. At Cain's back, his black wings lighten to a dull gray and begin to smoke, combusting from within.

Abruptly, she loses consciousness, or something akin to it, as a shadow rises up from Cain's withered soul to press upon her. It pushes with a snarling vengeance, and in its fierce resistance what remains of Chloe recognizes the timbre of Hell and the darkness which ripples along the edges of its loops. It wriggles after her like an antibody attacking a virus and yawns wide a black maw, ready to devour her and pick her bones clean. The ancient mouth closes round her, all teeth and tongue, and she senses she could defeat it, but only by losing herself.

Chloe doesn't want to die. She wants to see Trixie grow up, and there are still mysteries to solve, adventures to go on. Throwing out a desperate hand against the belly of darkness, she quests for light.

A brilliant sun shines from where it's caught in her orbit, pounding with the drumbeat of Creation. Reaching for it, she pulls hard and feeds its light through herself, like a thread slipping through the eye of a needle. There is ecstasy to be found in this light—how it filters through, ancient, warm, and sweet. She's longed for it, basked in it, since the moment she happened upon it.

And for a short time, at least by Hell's standards, Chloe Jane Decker ceases to exist as she becomes a conduit for this raw power, a field dressing draped over a wound that has already festered for eons. The light pierces through her, straight and true, chasing the remnants of a broken man and the Hell within him. Shadows skitter, pressing into far corners felt but not seen, where they fade and vanish.

Then there is only starlight and freedom from the containment of self. There is only glory.

Chapter End Notes

(1) **HEY, psst**, if you're into writing or reading naughty content, I'm organizing **Fuckruary**, a month-long NSFW writing challenge for the *Lucifer* fandom. You can read **rules here** and get **inspiration here**. Let's scandalize the Lucifer tag on AO3, come February 1st (pun intended).
(2) Big thanks to TheYahwehDance (blame her for this cliffhanger), ObliObla (fuck the word "anymore," my Achilles' heel, even as an editor), and Hircine_Taoist (go read her Caging the Devil sequel!).
"Time to wake the fuck up, Decker!"

Chloe is thrown back into her body as a hard smack lands on her cheek. Suddenly, she feels she has a face that can be slapped and a body that's filled with a hammering heart and lungs that expand and deflate and burn with each gasping breath.

"Mazikeen!"

"What? You got any better ideas?"

"Give her some bloody time, perhaps?"

"We're not in any shape to fight the horde coming our way. And it's a long walk back to the gates."

"I'm well aware."

Sensation returns in increments until Chloe groans and blinks her eyes open, only to squint against Hell's toxic air. Lucifer's cut-and-bruised face eases into focus above her, and upside down, making her realize her head rests on his lap. A giant purple bruise has begun to blossom around his right eye, and his left wing sits unnaturally low over his shoulder, still wounded.

"See? Slapping humans around always works," Maze says from somewhere nearby.

Lucifer gazes down at Chloe. He looks tired, but the small smile he gives her is genuine. "Hello."

"I felt you," she whispers, unable to disguise her awe. Even now, she feels his light, mingling with blood beneath the surface of his flesh.

"Yes, that was quite the deep tissue massage."

She studies him. What must it be like, that another person can access parts of him that even he can't anymore? "Are you okay?"

"You're lucky this place was lit up like a runway," Maze butts in, coming into view as she squats down beside Chloe. Like Lucifer, she's bruised, scratched, and swollen. Unlike Lucifer, she seems to wear it as a badge of honor. "Pretty sure you were minutes away from getting both your asses killed before I broke your connection."

Chloe looks up at the dark clouds. "Did I fall?"

"I don't know," Lucifer answers. "I lost consciousness."

"You were here when I found you." Maze rests her elbows on her knees and shrugs slightly. "You're not paralyzed. Anyway, you've healed from worse."

True, but her back does hurt. A lot. "What about—" Chloe swallows and licks her lips. "Is he gone?"

"See for yourself," Lucifer says, nodding his chin to the right.
She turns her head, ignoring the twinge of pain in her spine and the vertigo that accompanies the movement. Something wet trickles down her lip. There's the sound of fabric tearing, and then dirty cotton presses against her nose. "Thanks," she murmurs, lifting a quivering hand to hold it in place. Her eyes fall on a lopsided pile of ashes a short distance away. Unlike the gray ashes they rest on, Cain's ashes are a curiously pristine bone white. "W-we did that?" she stutters.

"Mm, barbecued old Ham Hands to a crisp. Not even a hock left to remember him by."

"Wish I'd gotten here in time to see you fry him," Maze grunts, nostrils flaring. "Did he scream lots?"

Chloe doesn't reply. She stares at the heap, uncertain of her feelings. Anxiety over the power that flowed through her? Relief that he's gone? Sorrow that it came to this? That so many people were hurt along the way...

His last word was her name.

And he did scream. She doesn't think she'll ever forget the sound, or the way his flesh smelled as it melted and burned.

"We should get moving," Maze says. "I wanna be out of here before more demons come sniffing around. I already had to kill a dozen on my way over."

"Aren't they...your siblings?" Chloe asks, horrified.

"Some of them. What's your point?"

"We'll leave when the detective's ready," Lucifer replies testily, combing fingers through Chloe's hair to part knots. She's not sure he even realizes he's doing it, which makes it all the more soothing after so many years of fearing the possible expectations of touch.

"But—"

As they bicker, Chloe struggles to make sense of the situation. Leave? The idea, sweet as it is, doesn't seem real. Who gets to leave Hell? Not the souls bound here. The Devil, she guesses, privileged Mazikeen. Now her. And Cain figured it out, didn't he? He wanted freedom as much as any of them—and revenge. She continues to stare at his remains.

A hot wind courses through the corridor, stirring and lifting the fine white ashes. The particles float a few feet off the ground, where they separate and whirl like snowflakes in a storm. She waits for some sort of existential poetry, for the wind to carry them off, but it never happens. Instead, the ashes continue to float and swirl, even as the wind dies down.

"Is that—" Chloe interrupts Maze and Lucifer before breaking off and frowning. She uses one of Lucifer's outstretched legs to help drag herself up until she sits. "That doesn't look normal."

Lucifer follows her gaze and straightens in alarm.

"What's it take to kill this asshole?" Maze's blades make a metallic schwing as she draws them.

"Never a good sign when Hell's feeling creative." A hand curls around Chloe's shoulder, holding her back from making any sudden moves to investigate—which she very well might have been planning to do.

The ashes spin, funneling into a miniature tornado, where they coil ever closer to the eye of their
storm. At Chloe's side, Lucifer sits, still and alert, the feathers of his uninjured wing ruffling as they curl toward her.

"Want me to stab it?" Maze asks, glaring at the suspicious oscillation.

"Whilst I appreciate your enthusiasm, Mazikeen," Lucifer replies, holding up a hand, "let's not poke the bear before it's even taken shape."

"What?" She juts out her chin. "It's called a preemptive strike."

The twirling ashes coalesce into a long skinny rope that winds in place, until, as if a match has been struck, the rope suddenly sparks and catches fire like a line of sparklers on the Fourth of July. Chloe jumps in surprise, dropping her makeshift handkerchief. In her periphery, she sees Lucifer's narrowed gaze.

Before she can ask him what he's thinking, an ear-piercing crack claps through the door-lined passageway, followed closely by a loud whoosh as the flaming column of ashes rockets upward. Their heads jerk back to watch its vibrant ascent. The glowing arrow pierces through the cloud cover and disappears.

For a moment, all is still as they stare at the iron sky. But in the next breath, a flash of white blankets Hell's unforgiving canopy and spreads like electricity through a network of veins. Chloe cringes away, blinded by the change in light. It's not unlike the filtered brilliance from Lucifer that devoured the darkness of Cain's soul. Even when her vision begins to return, the blast lives on as a duotone afterimage burned on her retinas.

Maze shakes her head and blinks rapidly. "Screw this. We need to get out of here." Standing, she reaches to pull them up from the ground.

But more bursts of light begin rolling through the sky like cosmic fireworks, until seconds later there erupts a ground-shaking sonic boom—one after another, after another. Far from helping Chloe and Lucifer up, the tremors send Maze tumbling back. Chloe scrambles to cover her ears as the cannon-like blasts reverberate through the shadowed plane, bouncing over and between the black mountains.

"What's going on?" Chloe screams, but if either of her companions has an answer the sudden and far more dramatic crack and rumble in the ground beneath them prevents them from speaking.

Lucifer grabs Chloe and Maze by their wrists and draws them close to his sides. Pushing them to the ground, he squeezes between them and drapes his wings over their heads, wincing when his left doesn't quite cooperate. Chloe curls into him, covering the back of her neck as Hell sways and crumbles around them. Her eyes find his beneath a shield of thick feathers. He looks as confused and afraid as she feels.

Chloe has lived through many an earthquake, but the turbulence razing Hell seems to last forever. But just when she believes it won't ever end, the quakes ease, the destruction softens, and finally Hell rediscovers its improbable equilibrium.

They peek out like gophers from the shelter of Lucifer's wings. Soft light kisses the black mountains, which, for once, cast logical shadows. With each other's help, they stand on shaky legs and squint up at a giant star in the sky. Chloe's mouth hangs open. Hell has a sun. Its radiant rays filter into her, bright and replenishing.

Lucifer is the first to speak. "Well, that's just great, isn't it? A bloody Cain ornament."
Maze stretches out a hand, palm up. "There's no ash," she says, full of wonder.

Chloe looks around. It's true. The constant, almost imperceptible, ashfall has come to an abrupt stop. She sniffs the air. Is it just her mind playing tricks, or is it actually cleaner? But as different as the atmosphere may seem now, the doors to the loops still shake on their hinges. She can't decide if that's more or less horrifying in broad daylight.

"No," Lucifer says, shaking his head. "No, no, no. I don't trust this." He turns to her, brows furrowed, his breathing uneven. "Tell me everything that happened when you were stuck flying with First Murderer Air."

Licking remnants of dried blood from her lip, Chloe recounts what she remembers, describing as best she can the strange nature of an ability she doesn't even understand herself and the slightly less than corporeal direction the conflict went in. "There was something in him," she says, shuddering as she recalls the hungry shadow. "That's why I reached for you. I...needed help." And though she doesn't say it, she knows he is the only way she survived.

"Right," Lucifer says, but it's obvious he's as clueless as she is.

"The demons have a myth," Maze says, "about Hell being a living creature." She shrugs. "Maybe Chloe killed it when she killed Cain."

Chloe tucks grimy hair behind an ear. "I have...felt something here sometimes."

"There's no old man in the ground," Lucifer says with a roll of his eyes.

"Maybe not," Maze admits, "but you don't know how God made this place. Who's to say he even knows what he made?"

Lucifer shoves his hands in his pockets. "You may be on to something there," he concedes. "Dad was always more the 'act now, think later' sort."

Maze shares a look with Chloe.

"What if Hell's changing?" Chloe suggests. She glances at the sun, warming to the idea beneath its brilliance. "I mean, it already has, right? What if— Lucifer, there's something I have to tell you." Excitedly, she tells him about Abeni, about souls resting in peace in their loops. "What if that's why I'm here?" she says, tears springing to her eyes. "What if I needed to be here?"

She expects him to be shocked by her news, to at least share in her relief and hope, but stormy rage descends upon the Devil's face. "Are you asking what if everything happened for a reason?" he grinds out, his cynicism thick. "There's no rhyme or reason for any of this, Detective. Not with the thousands of years of their torture or with you putting them to bloody rest, however you were bloody able to do it." He points at the sun accusingly. "Whatever comes, it's always more games."

"Lucifer," Maze cautions, her eyes fixed on Chloe, who feels herself slumping with dejection.

"Do you realize how long I tried to change this place?" he continues.

"I know," Chloe says, thinking of his judgment books. "I know, but now it is changing, Lucifer. That has to count for something, doesn't it?"

"The only thing it counts for is bloody...dramatic irony," he spits out. "At my expense! As always!" He throws his hands up and begins to pace, his wings dragging lines through the ash. "You know, I tried to give this Dadforsaken heap a star shortly after I arrived—thought it might
spruce it up a bit. I'm the bloody Lightbringer, after all. It's. What. I. Do. Or did, at least. Before."
Frustrated by his flagging, injured wing, he snarls and, with a series of grunts and expletives,
manages to tuck his wings into his back. "You know what I discovered?" he says once he's less
angel, more dirty, raving man. "I couldn't do it anymore. Couldn't fly high enough, and my light
was...entirely inaccessible to me. Suppose it was one of those things dear old Dad penned up in me
before he cast me out. What a laugh he must have gotten over that one." His grin is a hard
container for his pain.

Chloe touches her fingertips to his right hand. "I can access it."

"Yes," he says, coming to a stop to look at her.

"I guess"—she glances up—"in a roundabout way, we made that together."
The whole concept makes her dizzy. Makes her question everything.

"A star out of the ashes of a bastard," Maze comments, nodding her approval. "Not bad, Decker."

"Yes," Lucifer agrees, looking down at Chloe's touch, "and to what end, Detective? What part of
his Plan are we trapped in now?"

Chloe has nothing to say to that. She can't pretend to understand what's happened here. She can't
pretend to understand God, or to like what she thinks she understands about him and this place he
created.

Lucifer sighs. "Let's get you home, Detective." He glares at the sun. "Before you get a bloody
sunburn."

"But what about—"

"All the poor, tortured souls?" he guesses, his tone wry. "They'll still be here when I'm sent back,
won't they?"

With that, he turns on his heel and sets out tiredly. Maze looks at Chloe and gives a small shrug
before following. Chloe looks around, as if answers might be found in the completely arbitrary
corridor they'd found themselves in, but Hell is still Hell, even beneath the light of a new sun. It has
no answers.

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The walk to Hell's gates is long, arduous, and surly. Every so often, Lucifer unfurls his wings, only
to test and curse the injured one, his mood growing ever more prickly. The damaged joint heals
slowly, and the Devil whines about the lack of alcohol to soothe his discomfort. Chloe remains
quiet, her head filled with thoughts about the meaning of her life and Hell and Earth.

Something Cain said once nags at her. *The only way to break the cycle is to beat it.* Shading her
eyes, she looks up at the sun. Is this breaking the cycle, or are they still pawns caught in a far
larger game?

Hell develops a day and night cycle, though they don't stop long enough to determine its hours or if
those hours have any consistency. The sun rises and sets, leaving behind the old ambient light in
place of a moon it doesn't have. It's warmer during the day, cooler at night, but still hot the whole
damn time. All of it unnerves Lucifer and Maze, who watch the star with mistrust, as if expecting it
to collapse at any moment.

Late in the afternoon of Hell's second full day, they stop on a mountain peak near a burned out region where demons have been warring. Lucifer hangs back with Chloe in the mouth of a cave while Maze scouts the area for trouble.

"You've been quiet," Lucifer observes, half his face cloaked in the cave's shadow. He sits across from her, long legs folded, elbows on knobby knees.

"So says the most talkative person I've ever met...who hasn't had much to say lately." He scoffs, and Chloe smiles a little. "I think we both have a lot on our minds."

He hums his agreement, his eyes focused on his ring, which he nudges round and round with his thumb.

She fidgets with him, dragging a finger through a patch of dust that mars the hellstone. She draws a face and gives it devil horns before wiping it out with the flat of her palm. "Lucifer, how long have I been here?" It's the question she's been working up the courage to ask.

"Less time than you think, I'm sure," he says, and she exhales loudly. "When we make it earthside, at most a few days will have passed since you were taken."

"What?" Chloe clutches her stomach, her face crumpling. "But I've been here for years."

Lucifer purses his lips, empathetic. "It can feel that way, yes."

"But..."

But nothing. Lucifer had told her once that time did funny things in Hell, but there's no conceiving of this sort of time difference—all those months in the windowless tower with Cain, the years of roaming the loops with him, the weeks of roaming them herself before he recaptured her. Lucifer may not lie, but she won't believe him until she touches Trixie's unchanged cheeks.

"I'm sorry you had to see this," he says.

Chloe leans back against the cave wall, flashes of torture screaming through her head. "I saw awful things before Hell."

"It changes you," he insists, dropping his hands and looking at her. "Seeing so much of it."

"It does," she agrees, knowing they're no longer talking about her exactly. "But maybe it can be different? Maybe some things can be healed?"

She loses him as he turns his head to look out of the cave's mouth, his gaze distant.

Maze climbs up to the cave some time later, her face pale and drawn in the low light of Hell's evening.

"What's wrong?" Chloe asks.

Maze looks to Lucifer, stunned. "Demons are dying."

"Well, they're bloody stabbing each other to death with demon steel, aren't they?"

She shakes her head. "No, I mean... They're sick."
"Sick? Demons don't get sick."

"Well they do now," she says. "Some of them, anyway."

He glances at Maze out of the corner of his eye. "How do you feel?"

"I'm fine," she answers, and tension bleeds out from him.

Having not forgotten her run-in with Nox's demons, Chloe can't exactly feel sad that some of them are dropping dead, but she still offers a hypothesis. "Could it be the light that's making them sick?"

Maze shrugs. "Maybe. Some think that's it and are trying to move into caves or underground. The wars are over."

"What, on account of the weather?" Lucifer jokes.

"Yeah."

"Well." Lucifer looks over the stretch of Hell they can see from the cave, the muscle at his jaw twitching as he grinds his teeth. "It's not our problem. I'm not their king."

Chloe wonders if it's that simple, and Maze looks at him askance, but neither of them says a word.

On the third day of sunshine and traveling on foot, they crest a hill and there stand Hell's gates, pinned between the two squat volcanoes Chloe remembers. The gates look different in the sunlight, less menacing and more like props from a B movie set.

"Oh, gosh, about bloody time," Lucifer exclaims, lighting up with his usual verve. He sweeps down and grabs Chloe's hand to pull her along with him.

Something unwinds from her as she jogs to keep up with his long strides and giggles as they skitter through the ash. Behind them, his wings unfurl with the snap of a picnic blanket, and Maze curses, narrowly avoiding being smacked.

At the gates, Lucifer lets go of Chloe's hand, unsheaths a demon blade, and slices open the swiftly-fading scar on his left palm. He hisses slightly as blood collects in the lines of his flesh. "Shall we?" He doesn't wait for a response before pressing his wounded hand to the gates. The massive doors creak and fling open on their hinges, revealing pure, white light that rivals the rays from Hell's new sun. Lucifer opens his arms dramatically and waggles his brows. "Hop aboard, ladies."

Maze rolls her eyes, but jumps up to let him catch her. He tucks her into the crook of one arm as if she weighs nothing. "You're sure you'll get us through?"

He flexes his bad wing, and the joint seems to hold. "Maze, I'll do anything for a shower and a drink right about now."

Chloe half listens to them as she looks over Hell. It's still gray, still dismal, still makes her stomach turn with disquiet. She can't wait to leave it behind and pretend it never happened. Cain is gone for good, she thinks, and Abeni is at rest, and— And there's still so much work to be done here, isn't there? All these souls, and more souls entering all the time.

"Detective?"

She turns back. His eyes are full of fear and uncertainty, while Maze glares from her perch on his left.
"What you're feeling right now," he says, "that urge to stay? That's just Hell. Ignore it."

He doesn't understand, doesn't see what she sees—what could be.

Chloe smiles slightly to put them at ease as she goes to Lucifer and grabs hold of his shoulder. She hops, and she sucks in a breath as he catches her. His eyes flick back and forth between her and Maze.

"This is quite the sandwich I'm in."

Laughter bubbles out of Chloe. He looks terrible, and if a literal angel of God looks terrible she can only imagine how she's fared. "Let's go home, Lucifer."

It's the answer he seems to have been waiting for as a grin stretches his mouth wide. His teeth are very white against all the smudged ash.

"Very well," he says, and flies across Hell's threshold.

With Cain, falling into Hell was a chaotic tumble into darkness. Escaping with Lucifer is a gentle glide through white light. Chloe watches his face and the steady beat of his wings as they sweep through the empty portal like ghosts in a hall. The smooth passage is short, over in the span of several breaths, as they press against a thin membrane, the veil between worlds. The film clings and conforms to her skin like an expanding soap bubble. Panic rises as the diaphanous substance covers her mouth and nose, but then, just as quickly, the bubble pops and Los Angeles at midday bursts into existence beneath them. Chloe cries out in surprise, and Maze throws a hand toward her, clamping hold of her shoulder, lest she consider flailing as an option.

Lucifer grips her as tightly as he can with one arm. "It's okay," he murmurs. "I won't let you fall."

Chloe barely hears him, barely feels Maze's steadying hand, as she is dipped into a world of sensation. Earth's sun beams above, its light reflecting off fluffy white clouds in a sky blue bowl. Below, steel and glass glitter and gleam between spots of color which grow more vibrant as they descend. Snaking asphalt curls around clusters of houses Chloe can't afford, amid rolling green scrub peppered by palms. There's no ash in this city she knows like the back of her hand, no rotting egg filling her nose, only hot metal, sunbaked concrete, and vehicle exhaust intermingling with the salt of the Pacific. Home, home, home.

And it's so cold. She shivers as Lucifer angles them toward his building, flying faster at the low altitude to avoid being seen. Through a veil of stray hairs snapping in the wind, she considers the art deco architecture of his home as they near. She'd always thought Lucifer so vain, living in the penthouse apartment of a skyscraper, but now she knows the building is squat compared to the dizzying heights of Hell's black tower.

The soles of Lucifer's dress shoes smack against the black marble of his balcony. Maze leaps away from him at once, spry as a feline and as fickle about being held. With only a mild twitch of his brow revealing any lasting pain, Lucifer draws his wings into his back before carefully setting Chloe down. His hands linger on her waist briefly, then divert to his pockets. She leans against the balcony railing, breathing unevenly and feeling out of sorts as Maze yanks open the glass door to the penthouse and strides toward the bar, tracking ash on the floor as she goes. Chloe's eyes skirt over her surroundings, over the cushioned rattan furniture, the green potted plants, the warm gold sectional waiting just inside. Everything is so colorful and lush and clean.

Lucifer hovers, watching her. "Can I get you anything?"
Chloe looks up at his scruffy beard and red-rimmed eyes. He looks exhausted, but she thinks she could demand anything in the moment, and he'd procure it. "I want to see Trixie." At the thought of her daughter, her eyes widen as a dozen other responsibilities crash into her at once. "I need to call Dan—he'll be freaking out." She shoves away from the balcony and steps into the penthouse, frantically looking around for a phone she doubts is near. "Izzy and Ella need to know we're back, too. And Linda was—"

"Chill, Decker," Maze says, her arms overflowing with liquor bottles when she turns around. "I'll let the others know we're home safe."

Chloe's shoulders slump with relief. "Thank you."

Maze looks her up and down. "Maybe shower before you see little human." She turns toward the elevator, bottles clinking as she walks. "I'm out."

"Where are you going?" Chloe asks, alarmed. Everything is happening so fast, too fast.

"To shower and get laid," Maze answers, as if it's the most obvious thing in the world.

"Oh." Chloe blinks. "Uh, have fun? And you're sure you don't mind getting in touch with—"

"Relax." The elevator door begins to slide closed over Maze's nodding face. "I got this, Chloe."

Chloe stares long after Maze is gone, oddly stuck on the whole concept of elevators—how absurd, how useful. But then every creature comfort she can imagine is here in the penthouse, and any which might not be could be delivered with ease, bought with money or favors or a sly grin from the Devil at her back. It's the tower's hidden room on steroids. She can't decide if that's pleasing or overwhelming. Maybe both.

Lucifer clears his throat. "I'll go prepare the shower for you." She turns in time to see his gaze sweep over her. "I'll make sure it's warm enough."

"Thanks, I'm freezing," she admits, hugging her waist. Or maybe this is shock.

He nods. "I've started up the fires."

True to his word, she sees the numerous fireplaces in the penthouse now swell with dancing flames.

As he climbs the few steps into his bedroom, a heavy flap sounds at the open balcony. When a dark, black-winged figure touches down to the tile, Chloe gasps and staggers backward until her bruised spine collides with the edge of the bar.

Lucifer spins on his heel, fully alert, before wilting, if only minutely. "Amenadiel."

Amenadiel? Chloe's brain trips over the idea. Of course. Of course Amenadiel has wings, too. Trying to calm her racing heart, Chloe squints against the backlighting of the outdoors as the black wings—feathered, she realizes, and yet so unlike Lucifer's—draw into the figure's back and disappear. Amenadiel passes the threshold into the penthouse, his familiar face coming into view. Her head tilts. He's wearing...a dress?

"Brother, we need to talk." If Amenadiel notices the state of Lucifer's face and clothes or the way Chloe clings to the bar counter like a limpet, he doesn't say so.

Lucifer straightens, the fingers of one hand clawed against the sandstone of his bedroom's open
doorway. "You know, I have to give you credit. You've a lot of nerve coming here. In fact, I think I'd like to revoke visiting privileges now, so if you would kindly turn your tail feathers—"

"It's about Father," Amenadiel says, clearly distressed.

"Oh!" Lucifer laughs. "Well, why didn't you say so? I care even less. Right, glad that's cleared up. Stellar chat." He jogs down the three steps to his bedroom and goes to Amenadiel. Grabbing his brother's shoulders, he attempts to turn him around. Amenadiel doesn't budge. "Come on, then," Lucifer sighs in frustration. "Off you pop back to the Silver City like a good little boy."

"Luci—"

Lucifer's hands drop from Amenadiel's shoulders. "Don't Luci me," he snaps, bristling. "I prayed to you," he accuses, "and you didn't come."

"I—" Amenadiel shakes his head, bewildered. "I couldn't."

Frowning, Chloe reanimates and pushes away from the counter. "I prayed, too." Lucifer looks at her, his brows furrowing. The long stretch of time she experienced in Hell has done little to diminish the disappointment she felt when all her prayers went unanswered. None of this would have happened if Amenadiel had come to her aid when she was trying to find Lucifer. Maybe he wasn't open to receiving her prayers, but she had hoped...

Amenadiel startles. "Chloe?" Though he seems to trip up on her appearance, he doesn't comment on it. "You don't understand. I couldn't hear you. Either of you. Not truly. And even if I might have heard bits and pieces of your prayers, Father had me—" He licks his lips, searching for words, before his gaze settles on Lucifer. "He had me trapped, brother."

"Trapped," Lucifer echoes dully, though Chloe can tell Amenadiel has his interest now. "What, in a bloody headlock?"

Pain throbs through Chloe's temples. She's not sure she ever really imagined what returning to Earth would be like, but seeing Amenadiel for the first time since before Charlotte Richards died, since before she knew The Truth...is not it. She finds herself turning toward the bar, her sights set on the nearest bottle of hard liquor. Lucifer glances at her when he hears glasses clinking and liquid pouring.

"He...took me into the past," Amenadiel continues, "into his memories—"

"Sounds dreadful." Chloe sidles up to Lucifer and hands him a full glass of whisky before sipping from her own. He murmurs a bemused thank you, and she hums. Dry, smoky liquor coats across her tongue and burns as she swallows. It's possibly the best thing she's ever tasted.

"—and he revealed everything to me. Luci, I finally understand—all of it!" Awe suffuses Amenadiel's tone but seeps out of him quickly as his shoulders draw inward. "Or, I...understand how truly wrong I've been. About everything. How little I've known this whole time. I've been trying to make sense of it all, but..."

"Riiight," Lucifer intones, eyes narrowed. Rallying, he claps a hand to Amenadiel's shoulder and takes a quick swallow of his drink with the other. "Well," he says, coming away from his glass, "you know what they say, brother: The first step to making amends is admitting what a tremendous dick you've been—the bad sort, that is." Chloe snorts into her glass as Lucifer tries to steer Amenadiel toward the balcony once more. "Now, in case you've not noticed, we look like
Amenadiel shrugs off Lucifer's hand and blinks at them in confusion. He shakes his head, as if trying to dislodge the inconvenience their appearance presents. "But I need your help," he pleads. "We have to talk"—he glances at Chloe somewhat apologetically—"alone. I'm sorry if you've been going through a lot, but—"

"Oh, yeah," Chloe laughs, rolling her eyes, "just actual Hell." She looks at her nearly empty glass in surprise. So much for pacing herself.

"I'm sure that was tough. But what's happening in the Silver City is of the utmost importance." Amenadiel pauses and squints at Chloe before his eyes stretch wide. "No..." he breathes. "What do you mean you've been in Hell?" Reaching out, he tugs at the chest of Lucifer's shirt to examine the ash. "What have you done?"

Eyes narrowed, Chloe stretches out a hand and gently pushes him away from Lucifer's shirt. "What we've done is survive."

Amenadiel looks between them a moment longer before closing his eyes and puffing out his cheeks with a heavy breath.

"Is, uh, something wrong with him?" Chloe mutters. Amenadiel's eyes snap open as both men startle beside her.

"Chloe?" Amenadiel confirms, bug-eyed.

"Yeeeah?"

"Are you still having"—Lucifer twirls a finger sideways—"angelic difficulties, brother?" He grins slightly. "No shame in it, of course. Happens to the best of us."


"Well, then, infuriating, isn't it!" Lucifer barks a laugh, bending at the waist with his amusement. "You can't stand that your gift doesn't work on her, either!"

"What doesn't work on me?" Chloe asks.

Amenadiel's hand flashes out and grabs Lucifer's tumbler. He tips the glass over, and Chloe watches in shock as the golden liquid cascades sluggishly, as if pouring in slow motion. It takes her a moment to realize that's exactly what's happening.

"Wow," she marvels, "you can...slow time."

"Oh, it's not that impressive," Lucifer splutters, fumbling to snatch his glass back and hold it under the flowing liquid.

Amenadiel lets go of whatever hold he had on Earth's natural clock, and the whisky splashes into the tumbler, droplets sloshing over the lip. Lucifer promptly drinks it all.

"My gift should work on you. You've changed," Amenadiel says to Chloe, and she feels shy beneath his piercing gaze. "That's...not good." His frenetic behavior seems to melt out of him as he adds solemnly, "We need to talk. All of us."

"And again," Lucifer says, beginning to turn on his heel, "we're busy."
"Father wishes to die, Luci."

Lucifer and Chloe freeze and stare at Amenadiel. For a long moment, crackling fire is the only sound in the room. Then Lucifer scoffs, "What are you bloody telling me for? I mean, I thank you for giving me enough of a heads up to plan a party, but, really."

"I wanted you to help me...stop him," Amenadiel admits, his voice low with sadness. "Now it may be too late. Too much happened while I was gone..."

"Brother, you know I'm not in the business of denying people their desires. Far be it from me to stop Dad from buggering off with a celestial noose."

"You don't understand, Luci. Father's been trying to fix things, to make up for past mistakes. With Uriel's help."

"Well, good luck with that," Lucifer says, his shoulders stiffening. "Uriel's gone."

"Yes," Amenadiel agrees softly. "But he helped set everything in motion." He turns to Chloe. "Even Chloe. I believe that was his most important of tasks, brother."

Lucifer looks at Chloe, his face slackened by surprise. "But he threatened her." Chloe's eyes widen. "Why?" Lucifer demands.

"I don't know," Amenadiel answers. "Maybe it had to be—or maybe Uri miscalculated. What matters is, Chloe, you were created to change things, to fix them. That's good, but...Father believes he can rest if things are set right." His brows pinch. "I believe he longs for...permanent rest."

An uncomfortable knot twists in Chloe's stomach. It's one thing to entertain the thought that everything happens for a reason. It's another to know it might be true. Anger and determination war within her. She's angry to be a pawn, even as she feels determined to see fixed what God has broken. Because somebody needs to.

"You can tell your dad Hell is changing," she says with the firm, commanding voice of a cop.

Lucifer stuffs his hands into his pockets. "It's true," he confirms. "I...don't know what's happening there, brother, but it is changing."

Neither of them elaborates how and Amenadiel doesn't ask. They don't even tell him about what's been done to Lucifer's feathers or how Cain was behind it all. Chloe isn't sure why. Maybe they don't think Amenadiel would understand, or maybe it's that they don't think he deserves a further explanation.

"I see." Amenadiel looks down. "There's no stopping it, then."

"I'm not sure what you thought I could do to help, anyway," Lucifer chuckles. "It's not as if Dad has ever listened to me."

"The others don't know yet."

"What happens to the Silver City if Father dies?"

"Oh, I don't know," Lucifer says, "dreaded democracy?"

Amenadiel scowls at him. "Be serious. There are human souls here and in the Silver City. The worlds cannot afford to have us fighting like we used to."
"Well, you've your answer, then, don't you?" Lucifer says. At Amenadiel's confused expression, he explains, "It's up to you, brother. You're the only one any of our brothers and sisters will listen to. Hell, even I listen to you sometimes." He smirks. "Against my better judgment."

Nodding, Amenadiel rests a hand on Lucifer's shoulder. "I'm glad you're both okay. I'm...sorry I didn't come when you called." His gaze shifts between them, contrite. "For what it's worth...I am always listening. When I can."

Amenadiel turns and walks to the balcony. His wings unfurl, the color of dismal hellstone, but more beautiful than anything that existed in Hell before Lucifer's fall. Chloe watches him take to the sky, her chest tight with some complicated blend of wonder, sadness, and trepidation.

"Should we be concerned?" she asks.

Lucifer stares at his empty balcony. "Truthfully," he says, turning, "there's no telling with Dad."

Great. "Do you think he really wants to die?" What does it even mean that God would want to die?

"It's possible Amenadiel has no idea what he's talking about. It wouldn't be the first time..." He trails off, lost in his thoughts until he shakes himself. "You must be miserable," he says, quickly setting aside his glass on the nearest side table. He strides toward his bedroom. "Let's get you settled in, shall we?"

Between the fires and the whisky, she isn't exactly cold anymore, but she still feels jittery and overwhelmed. And Amenadiel's visit did nothing to help with that. Setting her glass beside Lucifer's, she follows into his bedroom, drifting past luxury after luxury as if in a dream. She passes through the short hall and large dressing room and enters the expansive bathroom with its black, darkly-veined marble.

It could be a claustrophobic and dreary room, like the closed-off boxes of the black tower, if not for the flattering lights, porcelain sink and clawfoot tub (the latter large enough for at least three), potted plants, gleaming fixtures, and the bold bamboo accent wall. She's stunned by the opulence of it, maybe even more so than when she first used his bathroom, years ago.

Lucifer leans into the glass-walled shower, jerkily fiddling with buttons and checking water temperature. Beneath the steady rainfall spray, steam rises up from the floor.

"Right," he says, backing away from the shower, "you know where everything is, of course. Mi casa es su casa, Detective." At that, he moves to rush past her through the doorway.

"Wait." She reaches for him, her fingers brushing against the length of skin below his rolled up shirt sleeve. "You don't want to stay? You need a shower, too."

"Oh, that's all right." He pats her knuckles. "I'll have a rinse-off in one of the other showers."

Chloe pulls her hand back, uncertain. "Did I... Have I done something wrong?" Panic tickles as her mind fills with a kiss she regrets.

"What?" Lucifer shakes his head. "Don't be preposterous."

"Then... Why don't you want to stay?"

"I thought you might like some space, Detective. I can't imagine you've had much. That he—" Lucifer quiets at once, his nostrils flaring. "That he honored your wishes."
"I'd like you to stay," she says, "if you want to."

The thought seems to trouble him. He looks over her face, searching for something, and her guilt over Cain's mouth grows. "Very well," he says softly, his hands lifting to the buttons of his shirt. "Tell me if you change your mind."

They undress quietly. Drawing the dirty tunic over her head, Chloe catches sight of her half-dressed form in the large vanity mirror. Amenadiel must have been stressed not to say anything about the way they look, especially her. She rubs at the grime on her cheeks and the flecks of blood clinging to her nose. Her hair is long, thin, and matted into clumps by oil and ash, the gold highlights she favors long since gone.

At her back, Lucifer wanders into the shower without comment. She follows the lines of his body, hunger in her eyes. With a sigh, she kicks off her roughspun pants and stares at what years in Hell has done to the rest of her. She's bonier than she'd like, all jutting hip bones, and she's always preferred a close trim between her legs. Not this...thicket.

"I'll be out soon, if you'd prefer to shower alone," Lucifer says. Through the lightly-fogged glass, his back is turned to her as he washes his hair.

She watches the roll of his muscles before looking back to herself. "I just...look awful."

"Well, you've been to Hell and back. Rather hard to look dashing." He pauses, and the rich scent of vanilla hits her nose. "But if it's any consolation, Detective, I've never minded a savage woman."

Chloe snorts, hating, somewhat, that it is a consolation. Leaving the mirror behind, she goes to join him in the shower. He turns and looks down at her as the spray from the multiple showerheads changes. They stare at each other, and she trembles beneath the water, not because of its temperature, but because she had almost forgotten what it meant to feel clean.

"Would you like me to wash your hair?" Lucifer offers.

She nods and turns for him. He combs tangles from her hair as he had in Hell, and then gently kneads shampoo into her scalp. He has a masseuse's touch—a torturer's, too—knowing just how much pressure to use, when and where. Closing her eyes, Chloe breathes a sigh, a familiar heat rushing low between her hips, sweet and intense in a way it hasn't been for a very long time. When the last of Hell is rinsed from her head, she turns and glances down between them, curious. She smirks.

Lucifer looks down with her and clears his throat. "Sorry," he murmurs, and moves to leave the shower.

"Hey, it's okay." Chloe grabs hold of his hand. He hisses, his fingers flinching. "Oh!" she cries, turning his palm over. All that remains of the deep cut he made into his flesh to get them out of Hell is a thick, puffy scab, but it's large and red and clearly would be sore. She cradles his knuckles and trails her fingers over his, trying to soothe. "Should we separate so you can heal better?"

"No," he says, the single word choked.

"Okay," she whispers, and gently tugs on his wrist. "Then stay."

They wash separately, the heated moment shelved. But, quietly, it grows in Chloe as she luxuriates in clean water, rich scents, and furtive glances at smooth skin. She loves the way he moves and gets sidetracked on occasion, memories of their time together, so long ago for her, swelling through her like a wave.
When they get out of the shower, Lucifer wraps a towel around his waist and reaches for the lotion he used on her when she burned beneath the California sun.

"This is a very old salve," he says, opening the jar as she swaddles herself in a plush bath sheet. "Oh, this company has plastered their logo on it," he continues with a small scoff, "but it existed in ancient Egypt. A little soupre, perhaps, but more or less the same ingredients. Ramesses was very fond of it." He grins slightly. "Very fond of it for all manner of things, actually."

Scooping some of the salve out of the jar, he rubs it into his hands, taking care to press it into the healing knife wound. "I've always liked how it felt after being in Hell." He looks up at her. "Would you like some?"

Chloe nods.

"Sit, then," he commands softly, nodding his chin to the chair settled against the bamboo wall.

Strange shivers course through her body as Lucifer kneels before her and sets the jar on the floor. "I'm starting with your feet," he announces, and lifts her left foot into his hands. She trembles as he kneads into her arch. Rose oil and herbs mingle with the remaining steam.

Fingers brush across the tops of her toes, light, though not light enough to tickle. "Did he..."

Cain flashes in her mind's eye. Chloe... And she hears his scream.

"No," she whispers, eyes burning. "He had too much pride."

Gently, he rests her foot onto the floor and reaches for the other. "I'm glad."

Chloe tries to contain her tremors as he massages her flesh. She feels like her soul could jump out of her skin at any moment.

"I kissed him," she blurts out, her face crumpling. "I'm sorry. I wish I hadn't."

Lucifer huffs a small laugh. "No doubt," he says with a sly grin. "I'm a far better kisser."

The reply isn't what she expected. Slowly, her mouth twitches. "You are," she says, and the pain and fear she felt standing before Hell's throne in the wrong person's arms crumbles a little.

Lucifer's eyes cut up to hers, some old mischief restored in their depths that leaves her overwhelmed senses even more confused. "Care for a reminder?"

Desire thrums through her veins. "You don't have to ask."

He sets aside her foot and leans up. The muscles of his stomach press against her knees as he settles his hands on either side of her hips. "Humor a Devil."

"Okay," she breathes.

"Okay, you'll humor me," he says, grinning, "or okay you desire me to kiss you?"

"Shut up," she laughs, and closes the distance for him.

The kiss is soft and careful, and the tenderness of it leaves Chloe aching for more. She claws at his hair and back, drawing him closer as she pours herself into touch and tongue. He's the first to break away, his breathing unsteady.
"Chloe..." He rests his forehead against hers, his hands framing her cheeks. "You wanted to see Beatrice," he says, and it clearly pains him to remind her.

"Trixie!" she gasps, shoving him back gently. She stands at once, and her towel falls. They pause for a moment.

Lucifer groans up at her.

Laughing and suddenly full of energy, Chloe jogs from the bathroom to the closet, where she grabs the first of everything she touches from her designated corner and drawers. She dresses with haste, keeping a watchful eye on Lucifer to ensure he, too, is moving swiftly. "Do you have your phone?" she asks, rejoining him in the bathroom as she scratches at her ribs in irritation. "I know Maze said she'd contact everyone, but I don't even know where Trixie is right now." Which makes her feel terrible.

"No, Isabel and Miss Lopez took my phone and your backpack before Maze and I left for Hell. We'll call Daniel from downstairs."

Chloe nods, distracted, and scratches at her waist.

"Are you quite well?" Lucifer laughs, sweeping product through his hair.

"This shirt itches," she complains.

"The salve would've helped your skin," he tsks. She glares at him. Laughing, he grabs her hands. "Wear one of my shirts."

"I'm not wearing one of your shirts out," Chloe says, scandalized.

"Yes, whatever will the neighbors say?" He snorts at her sour look. "There's a reason I wear very nice things, darling. Hell is irritating."

She relaxes in his grip. "Oh. Even for you?"

"Perhaps not in the same way, but irritating enough, certainly." He lets go of her hands. "I'll fetch you something."

He returns a moment later with a plain white shirt. Having removed her tee, she slips her arms inside the sleeves of his dress shirt and begins buttoning the front, while he rolls the sleeves up her arms.

"Leave a few buttons undone," he instructs. She cuts her eyes up at him, and he laughs. "I'm not suggesting you show off your assets—although, far be it from me to complain. Just leave it unbuttoned at the bottom." When he's finished with the sleeves, he moves to the loose shirt tails, twisting them and tying a knot that settles low across her right hip and turns the shirt into something more form-fitting. "There," he announces, standing back with his hands on his hips. "Almost good enough for Lucinda."

Chloe turns to the vanity mirror. She looks little like she remembers from her time before Hell, at least to her own eyes, but she's clean, and the knotted dress shirt can pass for an intentional fashion choice. She braids her hair sloppily, worry twisting in her breast as she blows air past her lips.

"What is it?" Lucifer asks.

"I don't want Trixie to know what happened," she says. "Not the details, anyway. Ever."
"So we won't tell her the details."

"I just..." She grips the bathroom counter with her fingertips, trying to ground herself. An old mantra returns to her head. *I am Chloe Decker, daughter of John and Penelope Decker. I am thirty-eight years old. I have...* But try as she might, she can't quite carve off the part of herself that walked into Hell loops and wrestled with Cain.

"I just hope I can be normal for her."

Lucifer rests a hand between her shoulder blades. "All that will matter to your offspring is that you are home." He gives the end of her braid a gentle tug. "Come on, then. Let's find out where the urchin is."

As they load into the elevator, Chloe clings to Lucifer's uninjured hand. She survived Hell. How hard can it be to survive Earth?

Chapter End Notes

(1) ObliObla and TheYahwehDance: Heart eyes, motherfuckers.

(2) Fuckruary inspiration is a go. Want to write for it or help spread the love (ayyy)? You can reblog this rules post.
Lucifer parks the Corvette behind Dan's SUV and cuts the roaring engine. In the passenger's seat, Chloe sits with a large, steel salad bowl chilling her legs as she stares at her mother's beach house. Late afternoon sunshine washes the rustic, cream-colored siding in warm peach and salmon hues that contradict the cold dread Chloe feels. She isn't sure she can face her daughter. Or her ex-husband. Or her mother. Of all the days for them to organize a family dinner. Of all the days for her to agree to it.

She might puke. What would she even puke? She hasn't eaten in years.

"Brings back memories, doesn't it?" Lucifer sighs dreamily.

Chloe twitches, unused to having real company. "What?"

"Well, you were living here when we first met."

"Oh. Yeah. Yeah, that was a long time ago." But it wasn't, really, was it?

Lucifer doesn't correct her as he turns and leans his arm on the back of their seats. "Some of our best firsts were had here, actually."

A little of her anxiety melts away as she snorts. "Oh, you mean, like, the first time a crazy man I barely knew visited me, even though I never gave him my address? Or are we talking about the first time you broke into my home?"

"One," he says, holding up a finger, "wasn't crazy, was I?"

"Mm, debatable."

He holds up a second finger. "Two, I didn't break in. The door was unlocked."

"Sure. By you."

"Really, that was the first time you didn't appreciate my exceptional culinary skills. And the first time you thought about shooting me—"

"Definitely not the first time."

"—but instead you very generously gave me a peek of what was to come. Many times."

Rolling her eyes while doing her best to ignore the pleased butterflies twirling in her stomach, Chloe shoves open her door. Her improved spirits diminish in increments as she walks up the short driveway and the wooden porch steps, to the faded, sea-green door. Lucifer catches up to her and settles a hand low on her back. She inhales shakily as she glances at him.

"How do I look?"

"Lovely." She glares at him, unconvinced. More seriously, he says, "You'll be fine, but say the word, and we'll leave."
Though she can't imagine taking him up on the offer, it comforts her, and she nods. Here goes, Decker, she thinks to herself, shifting the salad bowl to one arm as she raises a fist and knocks.

She hears Trixie before she sees her. "I'll get it!" is followed by a mad dash of feet clomping downstairs and across the living room.

The deadbolt snaps, and the door swings wide. Trixie's mouth falls open in a perfect 'O' as she freezes—and then she screams, launching herself at them, her skinny arms stretching wide.

"Oh, dear," Lucifer says, leaning away. "Hello, child."

"You're here! And you're both okay!"

Chloe fumbles, shoving the salad bowl at Lucifer so she can throw her arms around her daughter.

"We're here," she gasps into Trixie's hair as Lucifer extricates himself from the group hug with an awkward pat to Trixie's head. "I've missed you so much, monkey."

She's still ten. She's still ten. Time, or at least Chloe's perception of it, buckles. Hell is real, but it's a lie, too. Of course it is.

Dan comes jogging downstairs, a look of concern on his face that morphs into one of pure relief. "Thought I'd let you be a surprise," he says, nodding his chin at Trixie. "Didn't know she'd scream."

Penelope and Izzy follow close behind him, and soon they all cluster together at the entryway. As she clings to Trixie, Chloe finds herself touched by gentle hands, her cheek pressed with soft kisses. And it's both too much and not enough.

"Welcome back," Izzy says, smiling with lips painted dark, wine red.

"Hello, witch," Lucifer acknowledges beside her.

Her smile widens. "I knew you'd make it."

A shiver ripples through Chloe as Dan rolls his eyes. "Leave them alone, Ozzy."

Reuniting with her mother is the hardest. Pleased as Penelope is to see they are both well and safe, she is also oblivious to the dangers they've faced. Having lost a husband to police work and watched a daughter heal from gunshot wounds, it isn't that she isn't aware of the danger, but that she chooses to ignore it. She would be this way, Chloe thinks, even if she knew more of the truth. After a quick hello kiss, her mother sweeps away to the kitchen, pulling Izzy along by her elbow.

"Hey," Dan breathes when it's finally just their small, disjointed family and Lucifer. He enfolds her in a hug, squishing Trixie between them, who lets out a small, delighted giggle. She hasn't let go of Chloe yet.

Chloe rests her chin on Dan's shoulder. She spoke to him on the phone earlier, but it's not the same, and she's not entirely sure what he knows, or if he believes anything he's been told. She pulls away a moment later, feeling uncomfortable with Lucifer standing like a fourth wheel next to them.

Dan finally acknowledges him, his bushy brows drawing close. "I'm... We were, uh, you know, worried for a while there."

Lucifer sniffs. "Yes, well, you should know by now that it takes a little more to exorcise the Devil,
Daniel." With that, he pushes his way inside, knocking Dan with the salad bowl in the process. "Penelope, darling! Dearie me, those thighs look like they could use a good rub!"

Chloe stretches her neck to look inside the house.

"Chicken thighs," Dan explains, already exasperated. "He's talking about chicken thighs."

Chloe stays on the porch with Trixie long after even Dan returns inside. She sways with her daughter, pulling her away from the open doorway, until there is only the two of them and the glorious heat of the sunset. She clings to flesh and bones and breathes in the faint citrus scent of Trixie’s shampoo. Time flows differently on Earth, or maybe it’s that living things flow differently through it, and though she knows change is inevitable and good, she wishes she could stay here, swaying forever with a ten-year-old girl.

"I had lots of nightmares while you were gone." Trixie mumbles the confession against her breast.

"I'm sorry I wasn't here," Chloe whispers, fingers clutching tighter. "Do you wanna talk about it?"

"You were stuck somewhere really bad," Trixie whispers back, "and everywhere you went, a shadow followed you."

Pulling back, Chloe cradles her daughter's cheeks. They're both crying, but it's okay, she thinks, or will be. "The shadow's gone, monkey."

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Standing beside the small, rectangular dining table, Chloe watches as dish after dish is brought from the kitchen. Soon, pan-fried asparagus, a medley of corn and red peppers, creamy mashed potatoes, and herb roasted chicken join the large salad bowl of greens. She's not sure what overwhelms her more, the color or the scent, or maybe the way her mouth waters uncontrollably. For the first time since her earliest days in Hell, hunger clamps at her belly.

"Here," Lucifer says, coming to stand with her. He pushes a glass of wine into her hands and lifts his own in mock cheers. "This will help."

Chloe tips back the glass without hesitation. Her eyes widen as the heavy Merlot hits her, tasting of rich berries and plums and a hint of oak. She swallows and looks at Lucifer as though she’s had a revelation. "This is the best wine I’ve ever tasted."

"This is nothing, darling." He grins. "We should pop down to my wine cellar soon, find you a real vintage."

The innocent offer—well, as innocent as any offer Lucifer ever makes—is far from chaste in Chloe's mind. Wine glass held close to her mouth, she eyes him from the corner of her vision before her focus swivels back to the laid out food. When a hand settles between her shoulder blades a moment later, her focus is broken again as she jerks away.

"Oh!" she cries, narrowly avoiding a wine spill when Lucifer steadies her wrist.

"Jumpy!" her mother laughs. "Didn't mean to scare you, pumpkin." She squeezes Chloe's shoulder and guides her forward. "Sit, sit, sit."

Chloe eases into the seat nearest the corner. Lucifer sits across from her, his head tilted, his
piercing gaze drilling a hole into her face.

"What?" she asks, feeling defensive.

"Daniel, bring the wine," Lucifer commands loftily, his eyes not leaving Chloe.

"I'm not your butler, man," Dan complains, even as he brings the wine bottle with him to the table and sets it down with a hard clunk. Lucifer immediately lifts it and pours more Merlot into Chloe's glass.

She laughs and pushes the bottle upright. "I have plenty."

"It pairs well," he murmurs, as if this is an explanation for his weird behavior.

Trixie plops down next to her mother, and Dan settles next to Trixie. Lucifer grimaces when Izzy sits beside him with a Cheshire grin.

"What am I, downwind?" Lucifer complains. "You reek of incense."

Dan drops his fork on his plate and points at Izzy. "Told you."

Chloe snorts as she piles more potatoes onto her plate. She has no idea why they're taking so long to serve themselves.

"Well, I think it's a lovely scent," Penelope says.

Trixie pipes up, "Can I say grace?"

Penelope smiles. "Oh, isn't that swe—"

"No," Chloe says firmly as she spoons corn. "We don't say grace."

Dan looks at her over Trixie's head. "Chlo."

"Don't," she snaps, looking down at her overloaded plate. Anger boils in her chest. It's so disproportionate to the situation that she pulls her hands away from the table and curls her fingers into her palms, not entirely trusting herself.

"But Jessica and her brother take turns saying grace with their family every night," Trixie argues. "And we know God is real because Lucifer is—"

"I assure you, urchin, Dad isn't listening and does not care one whit about the food you eat or have access to."

"Oh, that's awful," Penelope chastises as Chloe is reminded of an old conversation had in the dark.

"Well, the truth sometimes is, isn't it?" Lucifer returns. He picks up the dish with the asparagus.

Penelope reaches over and pats Trixie's hand. "Honey, if you want to say grace in my house, you can."

"Nah, it's okay," Trixie says, shrugging off the tense moment with the accidental aplomb of youth. "Can I have extra potatoes?"

The moment it becomes socially acceptable to eat, Chloe digs in. At the very first bite, she moans quietly, her interest in the table conversation blown. Distantly, she knows there is talking around
her—can hear the steady rise and fall of voices she loves—but the words may as well be from another language considering her lack of comprehension.

There is only texture caressing her senses, only flavor bursting across her tongue. Sweet corn, the silken texture of melted butter, heavy garlic, the soft leather of asparagus. She carves into the chicken thigh on her plate, watching clear juices spill from the lightly-browned skin and collect in rich, creamy potatoes. Her lips wrap around her fork once more, and her eyes drift closed at the salt, the green bite of herbs, the sweet tartness of lime.

Beneath the table, Lucifer taps the top of her sneaker with his shoe. She looks at him sharply, almost frustrated that he's interrupted her pleasure. His eyes are crinkled at their corners, his mouth twisted, as though he's barely holding back laughter.

"Enjoying your dinner?" he asks.

Chloe grunts an affirmative and looks back at her plate. The fork and knife in her hand are an unnecessary extra step. She lets them drop with an unceremonious clang before taking the chicken thigh in hand and bringing it directly to her face. She tears into the flesh with gusto, not caring when her fingers and mouth become slippery with grease. When her teeth strike bone a few minutes later, she groans and drops the naked remains to her plate. Buttery herbs cling to her fingertips, and she lifts them to her mouth, her eyes suddenly seeking Lucifer across the table. He watches her with arched brows.

"Chloe." Dan reaches across Trixie and grabs her wrist, and suddenly the rest of the room explodes into focus. "What are you doing?"

She pulls her wrist from his hold quietly, her eyes skirting over her family. Her mother looks at her in confusion, Izzy deliberately focuses on her plate, and Dan stares at her in reproach, like he doesn't know her at all. Trixie lets out a small giggle.

"I'm sorry," Chloe murmurs, quickly wiping her hands on a napkin and scooting away from the table. "Excuse me." She rushes toward the stairwell.

Stumbling upstairs, she makes her way to the small, teal bathroom that was hers when she and Trixie lived here. She fumbles with the doorknob and slips inside, locking the door behind herself.

Too much, she thinks, gasping for air as she leans against the door. Too much of everything. Happiness and sensation and desire and even, somewhere deep, a flare of grief for someone she should not grieve at all.

A gentle knock sounds on the door and vibrates against her spine.

"I'm okay," she calls out, her voice strangled.

"Darling, you are not. Open up."

Pushing away from the door, Chloe turns and opens it. Lucifer shoves his way inside before she can revoke her invitation and closes the door behind himself, locking it once more. The bathroom is small and narrow, and he takes up a lot of space as he stands with her at the pedestal sink.

"What's happening to me?" she whispers. Her eyes become glued to the hollow of his throat, where it peeks between the open buttons of a cobalt dress shirt. Even the color is distracting—so bright and bold and true that she almost wishes she could consume it, as well.

"Well, I'm no doctor, but you have been through Hell lately." His smile is faint and tinged with
regret. "It has a way of making you...insatiable for a while."

She palms her forehead. "What, like, five years of endless partying insatiable?"

"Oh, I'm sure it won't be quite that bad. You weren't down there nearly as long as I was last time, but, look, I won't lie: a good shag and a stiff drink go a long way. Happy to help with both, of course."

She rolls her eyes and narrowly resists the urge to pounce him. "This happened to Malcolm, too, didn't it?"

"After a fashion. Don't imagine you'll go on any killing sprees, though. Not feeling the urge to shoot me again?"

"Not right now," she jokes.

"Touché."

She licks her lips, her body trembling with sensation. "I just want..."

He leans closer until she can feel the heat of his body. "Yes?"

But words are lost to her. Are there even words for this feeling, this sensation of falling in love with life itself?

"Do you want me to tell you what I think you want?" Lucifer asks, and she nods. "You want every taste," he says, reaching up to touch her bottom lip, "every touch, every sight and scent and sound. You want it all, darling, and all at once. It's an impossible desire, but why should that stop you from trying?"

A tear skitters down her cheek, and she claws it away. "I have to get through this dinner," she says, turning away from him with an uneven breath. "I have to be normal for Trixie."

Smacking the faucet handle, she leans over the sink and splashes cold water onto her face, but even this sensation is overwhelming—cool and silken and clean. She stiffens when one of Lucifer's hands falls to her lower back, large and heavy and warm. She holds her fingers under the water, avoiding his gaze in the mirror.

"I could help, you know."

Finally she meets his heated stare before quickly looking away, back to her reflection, where she's met by her own dilated pupils and dull brown hair. "I'm not sure you could."

"Are those betting words?"

Rolling her eyes, she laughs a little. "Look, I'm not having sex with you in my mother's bathroom."

"Who said my clothes need to come off?" He licks his upper lip and quirks a brow. "You know I'm a giver."

Chloe's mouth goes dry. She should not do this. She should not. "Please stop talking." She smacks the faucet handle in frustration, cutting the flow of water.

"Oh, but see, now you're thinking about it," he tsks close to her ear, his hand drifting over the curve of her ass. "It's only natural, of course," he says, lips brushing against her neck. "I am the best."
She almost wishes he was lying, but he of course doesn't do that. "Okay, fine," she breathes. "Okay, fine,' what, darling?" he teases.

"Just." She lets out a shuddering breath. "Help me. Please."

"Lovely," he chuckles. "Now, come here." Spinning her around, he pushes her gently against the sink and wedges his legs between hers.

Chloe's hips lift in anticipation as another lustrous pleasure catches her eye. Gripping Lucifer's face, she drags him to her, kissing him. This kiss isn't nearly so soft or careful as the one they shared in the penthouse. When she pulls away from him to speak, they're breathless.

"I thought about you a lot," she confesses against his mouth, "but I could never..."

"Infuriating side effect, isn't it?"

He's hard at her waistline, and she wedges a hand between them, touching him through his slacks. Exhaling heavily, he grabs her wrist and presses her hand to the edge of the sink, dark eyes pinning her.

"Let me be a generous Devil, please."

He doesn't say please often.

"Okay." It's the only word she seems to have right now.

Cupping her jaw with one hand and holding her waist with the other, his mouth falls to hers once more, all smooth lips and prickling stubble. Firm, but gentle, and Chloe rises into it, hungry, so hungry, for the home he is—a home without locks, without doors. So different from...

Squeezing her eyes shut, she melts beneath him as he makes promises with his tongue. She shivers as his fingers slide along the edge of her jeans, only to stop at her middle and pluck free the button without ever releasing her from their kiss. The zipper is loud in the small bathroom.

"Do you think you can be quiet?" he asks against her lips.

"I..."

"Right," he laughs. Leaning back, he looks around the bathroom thoughtfully before letting out a small, triumphant "ah-ha!" Nabbing a white washcloth from a floating shelf near the shower, he shakes it free from its fold before rolling it long-ways and folding it over. He looks at her with a twinkle in his eye. "Open up," he says, and she obeys, even as her brow furrows. He wedges the rolled cloth between her teeth. "Bite down."

Chloe follows his lead, turning her nose up slightly at the dry terry cloth and the hint of lavender laundry detergent on her tongue. Mostly, though, she can't take her eyes off Lucifer. There's always something oddly intimate about his improvising, and she has no idea how his past lovers never picked up on it, or, if they did, how they were ever willing to let go of it.

He brushes hair back from her face. "Now, I'll try not to make you scream," he jests, "but no promises. That'll only muffle."

A bright, wide grin lights up his face when she rolls her eyes. Her laughter comes out as a sharp puff of air through her nose.
Lucifer kneels before her, his eyes on hers as he tugs her jeans and panties down to her knees. She feels...wobbly and slightly disoriented, like she might break without his touch, but also break beneath it. He glides his hands up her thighs, to her hips, which he grabs and cant forward. For a moment, she's as self-conscious as she is aroused out of her skull. She pulls the washcloth from her mouth. "Sorry about—"

Laughing, he finds her hand above him and shoves it back toward her face. Taking the hint, she returns the washcloth and shuts up.

Her spiraling thoughts screech to a halt when he kisses the hair at her pubic bone and nuzzles his face against her with a small moan. She closes her eyes and lets her head fall back as Lucifer's tongue parts the seam of her sex, drags upward, and circles her clit. Circling, circling, but never quite touching. She bites down on the washcloth and breathes out hard as he brings two fingers into play, massaging, running them between her labia. And then his tongue goes where she so desperately wants, pressing hard, his lips closing on her. When her legs begin to shake, his hands move to her ass to pull her closer and take some of her weight.

Chloe forgets she's in her mother's bathroom. Forgets the dinner she scarfed down, her family. This feels like a new experience, big and profound, and so good, so much more than she was ever able to find in Hell. When her release hits, she grinds her teeth into terry cloth and holds him to her by his hair, his dark, hooded eyes locked with hers. She feels more than hears his chuckling as he kisses her down from her high, his tongue darting deep, hungrily, as eager for more as she is eager to give. Gently, she pulls him away from her. She's made him a mess, but a good mess.

She breathes heavily as she looks at Lucifer, feeling fragile. He smiles at her and squeezes her thighs. It's one of those soft smiles that surfaces when no one else is around. Running a hand along her bare hips and up, between her breasts, he reaches toward her chin and snags the washcloth, tugging it free from her mouth. Leaning forward, he reaches around her and wets the cloth before wiping off his face and then sliding it between her legs. With someone else, the move might seem awkward, clinical, or even rude. With him, it's painfully considerate and affectionate, and her eyes are left burning with unshed tears. He drags her panties and jeans back into place, zips the zipper, buttons the button.

"Better?" he asks, rising.

Chloe nods shyly. "I...thank you?"

"Any time, darling. Truly."

"I think I'll take you up on that later."

"Lucky me."

Tugging on a belt loop, she grins up at him. "I need to return the favor, too."

"I won't complain."

She kisses him slowly, tasting herself on him as she tries to show him her love. Heat rises between them again and before she quite realizes it, she's grinding against him, lost to sensation. He groans against her ear, fingers snaking beneath her shirt and then the cup of her bra.

Knock, knock, knock.

Chloe stills. She is suddenly very aware of where she is. Very aware of her father's face in a family picture mounted above the toilet.
"Hey, Chlo? You okay in there?"

Lucifer snorts as she claps a hand over his mouth. "Fine!" Chloe shouts. "I'm fine!"

"Did Lucifer check on you?" Dan asks.

"Uh, yeah," she answers, voice pitched high. "Yeah, he did."

Lucifer pulls away from her hand and adds, "I was very helpful, Daniel!"

"Shut up," she gasps.

"Oh," Dan says on the other side of the door. "Uh... Okay. Great. Um, we're, uh— Ice cream is for dessert."

Once the last stair creaks, Chloe smacks Lucifer's arm.

"Ow," he whines.

She sighs as she washes the cloth, wrings it out, and awkwardly hangs it to dry. As they take turns washing their hands, she asks, "Is ice cream going to be as good as everything else has been?"

"Darling, there's nothing like sugar." He pauses, considering. "Well, I suppose there's cocaine. Don't imagine you'd want to try it?"

"No."

"Fair enough."

He opens the bathroom door, and they step out in time to hear Trixie's delighted yell. "I want a cone!"

A conflicted expression crosses Lucifer's face before he lengthens his stride toward the stairs. "We can't let them give you a cone."

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She narrowly makes it through ice cream—in a bowl—and a game of Jenga before Trixie starts to yawn, even as she insists she isn't tired. While Lucifer and Penelope put away dishes and debate the merits of a movie franchise Chloe has never even heard of, Izzy plays another round with Trixie, and Dan pulls her outside under the guise of getting something from his car. They don't even make it down the porch steps before Chloe is well aware this is not about retrieving anything from the SUV.

"Uh... I don't know how to say this," he starts, scratching the back of his neck as they stand beside his vehicle. "Are you...okay? Izzy's been weird about Tijuana, and you didn't call the past couple of days, and"—he lowers his voice—"now there's more firefly heroin that's showed up in a tox report Ella got back."

He doesn't know what happened, Chloe realizes. She grimaces as she works to make sense of the tangled timeline in her head.

"It'll take a while to get rid of what's left on the street," she says.
Which means more people will suffer.

"You guys really destroyed the De la Cruz warehouse?"

She struggles to hide her surprise. They destroyed the warehouse? That would be Lucifer's style, Maze's, too. "Uh, yeah?"

Dan purses his lips. "Fuck, Chloe, you know how much trouble we're in if anybody ever finds out about all this? De la Cruz is a millionaire. Millionaires have long reach."

Chloe chuckles and shakes her head. Perspective is everything, and earthly troubles seem trivial in the grand scheme of Heaven and Hell.

"It's not funny," Dan growls. "You guys pulled all sorts of shady shit down there. And, hey, you got Lucifer—no idea why an angel of God or Satan or whatever needed your help, but okay." He holds up his hands. "I guess I'm glad. But now you're back here and—don't get me wrong, Chlo—I'm thankful. I didn't know what I was going to do, what I'd tell Trixie if you didn't make it. But you're acting... You're acting like him. I mean, sex in your mom's bathroom? Seriously?"

"Jealous?" she snaps, and is horrified it comes out of her mouth. "I'm sorry. That was out of line."

"Are you on something?"

"No." Leaning back against the cool exterior of Dan's SUV, Chloe folds her hands together and sighs. "You could test me."

"I don't wanna test you. I just... What's going on?" he asks again.

Though it's distant to her now, she remembers what it felt like to be in Dan's shoes, albeit even less informed than he is now. How scary and confusing it was to watch the partner she cared for and depended on down liquor like water or exit precinct bathrooms, snorting and wiping his nose. Scariest of all was the completely unexplainable behavior, all the strange things he said, while assuring her he never, ever lied.

She could tell Dan the truth, but even knowing what he does, he could never fathom it. No one can fathom Hell until they've been there.

"I'm caught up in things," she admits, and an ocean breeze chills her arms.

"What things?"

Chloe tilts her head and gives him a sad smile. "You know what I mean."

Her ex-husband holds himself a certain way when he's stubborn and afraid, and he stands that way now, his chest puffed out. He wants to be an atheist, when nothing around him, not even his own flesh and blood, allows for it.

"Dan? I need you to listen to me—like, really listen."

He folds his arms over his chest, but nods. "Okay."

"You can never feel guilty. Just do your best. Things happen. Anything you think you screwed up in our marriage, it doesn't matter anymore. And Trixie will be fine. Charlotte...there was nothing you could have done." He glances away. "Just move on. Don't look back."

"You're sure you're not on something?" he jokes, though there's no humor in it.
"I'm serious."

"Sure. I hear you." They're quiet for a moment, old lovers and friends who are swiftly becoming acquaintances. "I've got Trixie, okay?"

Translation: You're not fit to have her.

Chloe looks down. "Things will... Everything will be normal again soon."

"Just call or visit when you can, okay? She's really missed you."

"I've missed her, too," she says, her voice breaking. She wishes she could share this with him, all the fear and agony she felt about missing out on Trixie's life, but he wouldn't understand. No one, not even Lucifer, can understand that.

***

"My place or yours?" Lucifer asks when they later return to the Corvette.

"Yours." Chloe can't stomach the thought of being surrounded by Trixie's drawings, not after how upset her daughter was that she wouldn't be going home with her.

When they make it onto the highway, Lucifer rests a hand on her leg. "This will pass, you know." He glances at her. "It won't take five years, either."

"I know." It has to pass, right? Even Lucifer has impulse control, at least when he wants to.

"One morning you will wake up and won't feel like a stranger in your own skin anymore." He shrugs a shoulder. "Until then, enjoy the ride. And by 'enjoy the ride,' I of course mean enjoy riding—"

"I get it," she snorts, while worrying the ring on his middle finger. "I'm sorry you went through this alone."

Lucifer grins. "Oh, I was hardly alone."

"True," she laughs.

But she knows it's not the whole truth, either. Maze had her own hangups, and no human really knew him before Linda. His secret room in Hell had revealed to her both his immense loneliness and his fear of being known.

He taps her leg with a pointed finger. "I know just the thing to cheer you up. Let's pop into Lux when we get in."

"Oh, I don't know, Lucifer," she sighs. "I think I've embarrassed myself enough for one night."

"A den of sin would do you good." His smile is brilliant in the night. "Trust me. There's nothing like music after a stint in Hell."

Music! She reaches for the radio controls, but Lucifer intercepts her.

"Lux," he reiterates.
A short while later, they pull up to the side of his building. Lucifer hands a valet the keys to the Corvette and guides Chloe past a long line of clubgoers who are dressed far more appropriately than she is. Of course, the man beside her is always dressed for a night on the town, a fact that only worsens her anxiety. She doesn't belong here.

Chloe holds back at Lux's golden, art deco entrance. Unperturbed, Lucifer turns, smiling and holding out a hand. She hesitates, but then one of the doors swings open, and a young white woman in a bright red dress exits on a wave of guitar and drums. The bass rattles through the ground to the click of her heels, and it is all rhythmic, not the least bit disjointed. The door swings closed once more, muffling nearly all the sound, and Chloe drifts forward, her hand slipping into Lucifer's.

Inside, the music is loud, but clear. She's beyond being able to tell if it's a song she likes or dislikes, because, most importantly, it is a song, not some broken tune used to torment. Lucifer pulls her to the dance floor, where the crowd undulates, shoulder-to-shoulder and hip-to-hip. Clubgoers part before swirling around them, incorporating them into the flow beneath colorful strobe lights.

A knot untangles inside of Chloe. There's an energy here she's never noticed before—the vibrancy of the living. There's freedom in enjoying a space with those who have no concerns, at least in the moment. No concepts or fears of a permanent afterlife. No judgment. And it's easy to slip into this false security, to glide and grind to undiluted desires and pleasures.

Her mouth finds Lucifer's as they move, and his hands find her hips, her waist, her ribs. And where she begins and he ends, where their limbs separate from the limbs of those around them, is all nebulous. Minutes pass, then hours, and there is none of Hell's torpid oppressiveness. There is only movement, only being alive.

She pulls away from him during a song change, her eyes falling onto an olive-skinned woman who has been watching them at the edge of the dance floor. She's long and shapely, her thick, brown hair cascading in waves past her shoulders. What would it be like, to peel that green dress from that smooth skin?

Chloe drags Lucifer's face down to hers. "Do you think she'd come upstairs with us?" she asks, giddy, as she glances at the other woman with a smile.

Lucifer stares at Chloe, his mouth falling open. "Are you...?" He waves a finger between Chloe and the other woman.

"You said we could play," she says, leaning up to kiss his throat.

"Right... I-I did say that, didn't I?" He shakes himself and leans away from her mouth. "Chloe, stop."

She pulls back, disappointed. "Why? I thought..."

"Whilst I'm sure I will be asking myself that very question tomorrow, and as much as you do have my"—he glances down—"full attention, now perhaps isn't the best time for you to amble down both sides of the street."

"But—"

Taking hold of her shoulders, he turns her away from the dance floor. "Let's-get you upstairs, you nympho." He shakes his head as he pushes her along. "Gosh, was I like this when I retired?"

In the elevator, Chloe presses close, her fingers tearing at his belt buckle to the tune of delighted
laughter. The steel clinks, his zipper purrs, and soft wool rustles. Lucifer makes a strangled sound as she drops to her knees and drags his pants down to his ankles. Their eyes meet as her lips close over him.

"I think I'm about to have the best night of my life," he says, maybe just to chronicle the event.

***

But it doesn't stop after one night. Chloe ricochets from one pleasure to another, trapped by her own desires, which prove exhausting in their seeming inexhaustibility. No experience is too small or too large to excite. No desire too absurd for the Devil who has seen it all.

There is the smoke and sting of alcohol, the juice of strawberries licked off swollen lips, the thick stickiness of peanut butter, the fleshy crunch of a pomegranate pried opened. Every texture holds a story—cool marble, soft grass, sand between her toes, seawater sliding around her limbs, fragrant oils pressed into skin, rain rolling down her cheeks. The Earth breathes ozone, and she weeps at the scent of a rose handed to her over breakfast.

Silence is rarely tolerated in their bubble. Music blasts from Lucifer's sound system, on the radio in his car or hers, and she finally has sex to Eagle-Eye Cherry, though not without a little teasing. She wakes to clever fingers dancing across black and white keys, or down the ivories of her spine. At night, she calls Trixie through the fog and listens to her sweet voice, and then she sleeps to lullabies sung in ancient tongues which long ago ferried across the River Styx.

They take the Corvette out of the city in the middle of the night, and she drives on a long, empty highway, her foot pressed hard to the accelerator, her newly-highlighted hair blown back as Lucifer yells, "She'll go faster!"

And she is tempted, like Cain's mother was so long ago.

In sleep, they often find nightmares, and Chloe realizes she is not the only one who is troubled and untethered. She wakes beneath protective wings released in the dark, to prismatic colors reflecting off brilliant feathers. They don't say anything when it happens, only seek out each other's hands and bodies in the darkness. And it's frightening, the depth of this connection.

The possibilities of it stretch before Chloe, more real than what life before Hell would allow her to understand. He is the Devil, an angel, and she is...according to Amenadiel, a catalyst for change. It may be a relief for Lucifer that she was not made for him, but it is also proof that her life is not quite her own. How much of her life has been guided by hands she has never seen?

Instead of falling back into Earth's time, she feels herself slipping out of time altogether.

Will she watch as everyone else she loves dies? Mothers should not bury their daughters.

Is this what God desires for her? Does he even have any desires left?

She dreams of Abeni and of the leering souls who revisit their sins or have their sins visited upon them. And eventually Cain appears to her, through a wooden door in Hell, where he toils beneath a sun and weeps as he presses seeds into a cursed ground. Her heart aches as she joins him, kneeling in the parched earth.

"I'm sorry," she says, and doesn't fully understand her own apology.
He turns to her, his eyes no longer black, but instead the crystalline blue she remembers from very long ago. He pulls her to him, and she goes willingly, as she has before, and he rests her on the ground that will kill his people, where he will find a stone that fits his hand and water the earth with his brother's blood.

"I will always be with you," he says against her mouth.

She jolts awake, shoving aside sheets and an unwieldy wing.

Lucifer snuffles from sleep and sits up. "Chloe?"

She staggers to the bathroom, black marble chilling her toes as sweat breaks across her skin. She falls before the toilet and heaves, the bullet necklace Izzy held for her clinking against the porcelain. Everything she ate the night before comes up, half-digested and acidic, but in its wake she swears she tastes ash and that the scent of brimstone penetrates her nostrils and haunts her brain like an amoeba.

Soft footfalls sound at her back, followed by the susurration of feathers sweeping the floor. Wiping her mouth self-consciously, she flushes the toilet and looks up at Lucifer. In the moment, he is comically otherworldly, bright wings folded close to his back, sculpted body on full display, but also very cozily at home, hair pressed up on one side, eyes red-rimmed from sleep. He holds out a glass of water.

"Are you okay?" he asks.

"Yeah." Chloe accepts the glass and rinses her mouth. "Sorry," she says. Somehow, even after all they've been through together, she is a little uncomfortable with her humanity in the presence of an angel, a notion which seems to amuse the Devil.

"I own a nightclub. Do you know how many women have yacked up in this building?"

She huffs tiredly.

His dark eyes hold her gaze. "Come back to bed, darling."

Chloe is grateful he doesn't pry for details. All she wants to do is forget.

She rises from the floor stiffly, brushes her teeth, and returns to the bedroom. Lucifer waits for her, though maybe not as she expected. Stopping at the foot of the bed, she stares at his starfished form and the wings which spread wide and drape across the floor. In true testament to the hedonistic—she counts in her head—twelve days she's had, he is not the least bit erect.

"Where am I supposed to sleep?" she laughs.

He yawns and lifts his hands, grabbing at the air, before letting them drop down against his wings. Despite lingering queasiness, a smile breaks out across her face as she climbs between his legs and carefully straddles him, wincing as she feels feathers bend beneath her knees.

"Doesn't this hurt?"

"Feels like a massage," he rumbles, and pulls her down to him.

She rests her head on his chest and presses a kiss over his heart; the lingering scents of his soap and cologne chase away brimstone. His hands clasp around her back and then, unexpectedly, he curls his wings around her. They lie warm and heavy and soft against her back and legs. And she feels a
little less like a stranger in her own skin.

***

Chloe wakes alone from a deep, dreamless sleep. Morning sunlight spills across the black sheets and fuzzy comforter which have been draped over her. She listens as voices travel inside from the open balcony before sitting up and reaching for a silk robe that swallows her limbs. Wrapping it around herself tightly, she knots its sash and tiptoes to the bedroom's balcony entrance.

Amenadiel says passionately, "Luci, he wishes to meet her."

"No," Lucifer says firmly. "No. And have I mentioned, no, brother?"

"But don't you see? This is good."

"Oh, really, how do you figure?"

"Chloe can talk him out of wanting to die!"

"Why do you even care?" Lucifer counters, his voice raising an octave. "You said it yourself. You know the truth now. Dad doesn't have a plan, and he does whatever the hell he pleases."

"I told you why. Already, the others don't understand."

"Ah, so they know about Dad, then? Lots of weeping and gnashing of teeth?"

"They're afraid, brother."

"Mm, well, that's tragic and all, but Heavenly affairs have not been in my wheelhouse for millennia."

"This doesn't have anything to do with you. This is between Father and Chloe."

"Right," Lucifer scoffs. "And you lot think I'd not be going with her?"

"You know you're barred from passing through the gates of Heaven."

"And you know I'd never let her go into that viper pit alone, brother."

"There are billions of human souls in the Silver City, Luci—Charlotte among them."

"And there are billions more in Hell. Your point?"

"The point is I can take Chloe to the Silver City, and no harm will come to her. I'll return her safely."

"Perhaps I've not made myself clear. N-O, brother—spells sod off."

Sensing their argument will only escalate, Chloe pads out onto the balcony, winding around potted plants and the edge of the hot tub. They look up as she approaches. Amenadiel is in the same dress-like garb as when they last saw him. He looks strange and overdressed next to Lucifer, who has wandered out in nothing but scarlet boxer briefs. A half-smoked cigarette is wedged between two of his fingers. Smoke curls high before it's carried off by the breeze.
"Do I get a say in what happens to me?" Chloe jokes, arms hugging Lucifer's robe to her middle. They have the decency to look sheepish.

"Of course you do," Amenadiel says, stepping toward her.

Chloe moves closer to Lucifer. "Your father, God, wants to see me?"

Someday, maybe, her life will slow down, but she resigned herself some time ago to the insanity. The Devil, her own body turning against her, Cain, Hell—why not Heaven and God himself, too?

"That's the gist of it," Lucifer says tightly, and puffs on his cigarette. He blows the smoke away from her. "You've been a good little miracle, presumably, so the bastard's taken an interest. Typical."

Amenadiel glares at Lucifer before turning a much softer gaze onto Chloe. "I need your help convincing Father not to take his life."

"What's in it for me?" Chloe asks.

Lucifer snorts beside her, coughing smoke. "She has a point, brother."

"I—" Amenadiel looks at her in confusion. "What do you want?"

"Two things." She draws in a shuddering breath. "Is my dad in Heaven?"

"I would need to check," Amenadiel says gently.

She nods, not liking the answer, but accepting it. "If he is, I want to see him."

"Okay, and what's the second thing?"

"Lucifer comes with me."

"Hah!" Lucifer grins down at her fondly. "You're getting quite good at deals, aren't you?" He smirks at Amenadiel. "She has all the bargaining chips, brother."

Amenadiel's expression turns haughty. "There's nothing stopping me from taking her to Father right now."

"Well, best of luck with that," Lucifer chuckles. "She Kentucky Fried Cain when he tried to make off with her like a bat out of Hell."

That seems to give Amenadiel pause, and he looks at her thoughtfully, maybe less as a human and more as an equal. "Chloe," he starts, his more diplomatic tone returning. "Lucifer isn't allowed in Heaven."

She shrugs. "Then I'm not going." Lucifer stands taller beside her, his smile easy.

"All right," Amenadiel relents. "All right. I'll see what I can do."

Shortly thereafter, they watch him fly away on feathers the color of shadows.

Chloe slips an arm around Lucifer's waist and squeezes his side. "Make me breakfast?"

"Absolutely." He smiles as he drifts away from her, back into the penthouse. "How does French
"toast sound?"

"Perfect."

She remains on the balcony, looking out over the city. There are millions of souls in L.A. alone, and none of them really have a clue what awaits them after they die. She sighs, thinking of her father. Will Amenadiel even find him in Heaven? She knows all too well how easy it is to feel guilty as a cop—and as a parent. As she often does, she wonders how different her life would have been if John Decker had never died.

But parents don't need to die to be absent, do they? Her heart aches as she thinks of Trixie and what the past few months have been like for her—what the past few years have been like. Chloe isn't sure there's any way to make up for all that's happened.

Turning back to the penthouse, she notices Lucifer left a glass on one of the outdoor tables. A finger of whisky remains in the tumbler, and she lifts the crystal to her mouth before pausing and reconsidering. It's not even noon yet, she thinks. She should probably sober up if she's going to meet God.

Chapter End Notes

**UPDATE (Feb. 23, 2020):** Poisonofgod gave me a lovely birthday present based on a scene in this chapter. Make sure to kudos her work!

Thanks to Obli and Yah for listening to my endless whining.
Heaven Knows

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Whatever lay dormant in Chloe had been woken. Amenadiel knew this as he returned to Heaven after seeing her ash-covered skin and smelling the rot of Hell on her and his brother. He’d thought Lucifer would know what to do, would have some gum to plug the hole in the proverbial sinking ship. He could admit now that there had been many lies told about his brother—quite a few tall tales Amenadiel had spun himself—but it was no lie that the Devil was crafty. And so he’d hoped against hope that his clever sibling would know how to save God.

But it was too late. Chloe Decker was full of purpose, a miracle sparking change—in Hell, of all places.

Had Uriel seen this coming?

Amenadiel tore through the angelic district at dizzying speeds, his eyes burning with a pain he had no words for. He landed hard, stumbling at the border to the ghetto, and tucked away his wings.

Charlotte. He had to see Charlotte. Who in Heaven could better understand the complexity of guilt and regret than one who had so narrowly escaped Hell? He entered her building, suffered the long elevator ride up, and pounded on her door with a fist. She opened it a moment later with a frown that turned into an expression of concern as she pulled him inside.

"Lucifer didn't know what to do," she guessed, blue eyes searching his face.

"I-I think I've killed my father," he whispered.

For who spoke the Word over Penelope Decker?

Charlotte drew him into her small living room, with its plush, white furniture and colorful modern art. They sat on the sofa, and she touched his arm. "I don't understand," she said gently.

"Hell is changing," he said with a deep, disbelieving sigh.

"Hell is changing?" she repeated, her face twisting with her confusion. "How?"

Amenadiel shrugged. "Chloe."

"Chloe was in Hell?"

"Both of them were—her and Lucifer. They'd...just gotten back from there when I arrived." He shook his head. "I missed my chance, Charlotte. There's no stopping Father now. This must be the change Uri was orchestrating."

Charlotte remained quiet for a long moment. "Hell needs to change."

"But at what cost? Father's life?"

She pulled away from him and looked down while folding her hands in her lap. "You don't know what it's like in the loops. It's no vacation."

Amenadiel couldn't fathom Hell, could only imagine the agony of losing his last parent, no matter
They did not tell God or anyone else about Hell, and for a while, Amenadiel tried to pretend none of it had happened. That his Father had no desire to die, that he never barged into the Great Tower, that Lucifer never retired from Hell or met Chloe, that, maybe, Chloe was never born at all. But a voice within, which sounded an awful lot like Linda's, challenged him: *Is that what you want, for nothing to change?*

But desire had little to do with it, at least in Amenadiel's life, and change continued to come, no matter what, rolling along on patterns he tried and failed to predict. That had been Uri's gift, not his.

Michael was the first to swoop in with questions and suspicions. He threw open the door to Amenadiel's apartment one evening and marched inside, the leather and metal of his accoutrements creaking and jangling beneath his carmine feathers.

Amenadiel startled, looking up from a copy of *Being Your Own Guardian Angel*, a *New York Times* bestseller that, so far, was entirely unhelpful with its advice to eat more greens and go to bed early and without anger.

He cut Michael a wry look. "Ever heard of knocking, brother?"

"Why would I knock?"

Amenadiel jabbed a bookmark between two pages and let the book drop to his table. "Because you don't know what someone might be doing behind closed doors?"

"Only God needs privacy." He picked up a box of playing cards from the kitchen counter and sniffed at it.

Michael had left Heaven all of five times.

Amenadiel scrubbed a hand over his bald head, uncertain whether he should curse his brother for being obtuse, or curse himself for now having a mind that feared things like getting caught with a hand up his robes—something he'd *never* done before lying with demons and therapists and thereby awakening his flesh. He could almost hear Lucifer's laughter. *Always knew you were a wanker, brother."

"Never mind," Amenadiel sighed. "What do you need, Michael?"

His brother set aside the playing cards and stood straight with hands at his sides. "I was patrolling the border between our kinds when I overheard human souls saying strange things about Father."

"Humans say and do strange things," Amenadiel evaded.

"Yes, but then I heard *others* saying similar things."

"Oh?" Amenadiel hid his concern. "What things?"

"They say Father is *unwell.*" Using that word in the same sentence as God clearly confounded him.
"Why would they be saying this?"

Amenadiel wasn't lying when he said he didn't know. How and why would humans know anything? Charlotte wasn't talking.

"Gabriel will not let me in to see Father." Blue eyes narrowed. "But you spoke with Father recently, did you not?"

Subtle accusation colored his tone, but Amenadiel only smiled. "I did."

"And?"

He considered lying, but then he would be no better than Gabriel and Uriel with their secrets. "He could be better, Michael."

"It's true, then. God is unwell?" He frowned. "Who has made him ill?" The unspoken question: Who can make him ill?

"No one, brother. It's... Father is..." What? He stared at the colorful, hopeful cover to his book. "I am trying to figure out how to help him."

"All of God's children will help."

Amenadiel eyed his bulky sibling carefully. "It would be best if the others don't know Father is struggling." He reached for something Michael would understand. "It could cause turmoil." Especially if God learned Chloe had found her purpose, if all of Heaven knew just how unwell God truly was.

Michael didn't like it, but he was a veteran of the old wars, and like Amenadiel, a primary reason they'd drawn to a close in the first place. "I will keep this secret for now, brother. But only for a time."

***

Gifts were the first sign that the cat was out of the bag. The prayers and tithes came in the night, flown in by cherubim from far-flung corners of Heaven, until all manner of letters, trinkets, fruits, and flowers rested upon the doorstep to the Great Tower in a heap as wide and deep as an earthly sports field. As Amenadiel had long suspected, there were human souls who didn't quite understand the Heaven they had found themselves in, which helped explain why there were also offerings of shells, gems, and metal rounds, little approximations of currencies Amenadiel had seen on Earth throughout the ages.

Never mind that God wanted for nothing—and cared for about as much these days.

God wished to die. It must surely have started as a whisper, a rumor no one in the Silver City gave credence to when it was first heard. But then perhaps a few began to wonder, as Amenadiel himself had, how long it had been since God was last seen or heard. Heaven had long functioned on blind faith alone, without God's glory to oil its hinges. Had really none of them, human or angel, cared enough to question that?

Amenadiel wasn't sure how word of God's intentions got out, and Michael was never able to determine the source of the humans' knowledge. Neither Amenadiel nor Charlotte nor Gabriel told a soul of Father's state, even after Amenadiel learned that Hell had changed. He eyed the cherubim
with mounting suspicion. As far as he was aware, the chirruping language of Heaven's worker bees had only ever been decipherable to God and Lucifer; it was not human or angelic to be "translated" by Heaven. But he also supposed humans were innovative and had a long history of working around language barriers. Perhaps it wasn't surprising at all that they were the first to know the truth.

However they came by it, their knowledge spread quickly to the angels. Amenadiel himself only became aware of the situation on his morning visit to the Great Tower. Since God had released him from his memories, he had spoken to Gabriel daily—whether either of them liked it or not. Father, for his part, had had no desire to see him again, and in truth Amenadiel had not pushed for another visit. It was one thing to want his father to live. It was another to have a relationship with him.

On this day, though, angels flitted about the base of the Great Tower, some staring at the great pile of goods, others with their noses stuffed close to papers meant for God's eyes. A few angels chomped on fruit found among the heap.

When Amenadiel came to a stop and hovered with his siblings, his rust-haired brother Barachiel looked up from the lyre he was artlessly plucking. Great. The family gossipmonger was the last angel one wanted to see when trying to keep anything under wraps. "Brother, you've spent a lot of time with Father of late, haven't you?"

"I have seen Father, yes."

"Not even Gabe will see us," a sister whined above them.

Holding the lyre in the crook of one arm, Barachiel extended his other downward, an open palm indicating the offerings. "What is all this, Meni?"

"Is it true?" another brother asked in a quiet voice. He waved an unfolded sheet of paper. "Father wants to...die?"

Dozens of angelic heads turned toward Amenadiel, searching for answers he did not have.

***

Chaos ensued. From his apartment situated beside the invisible line that divided their species, Amenadiel was perfectly positioned to see the growing fear, melancholy, and anger of all Heaven's residents.

The ghetto turned quiet with nervous energy that was an echo of humans' animalian past. During the day, subdued human souls stayed in their homes. Only at night did some surface to speak softly in groups of two or three, as if whispers and shadows might protect them from the oncoming storm. Amenadiel felt for them but had no words of comfort to offer, not when he, too, felt like hiding in the shadows.

On his side of the line, his brothers and sisters fared no better as they darted at incredible speeds through the city, on what he suspected were futile quests for answers. In their wake, Heaven's immaculate streets became littered with the discarded missives and newsletters, which slowly fell from the skies. Cherubim rushed in and cleaned the mess multiple times a day.

In the Central District, the gifts kept coming, and the Great Tower's round waiting room filled with ruffled feathers and occasional outbursts. Gabriel was much more eager to contend with Amenadiel now and ushered him daily, and without complaint, into the hollow body of the tower. Their
siblings took issue with the special treatment, but were also too afraid to rock the boat just yet. Especially with Michael nearby to keep the peace.

Not good, Amenadiel thought. A misunderstanding, some blame, and the more easily agitated might fall into ill-begotten blows.

Inside, the tower was filled with yet more gifts.

"Father says he does not want any of this," Gabriel said, toeing a wilted bouquet of purple saffron crocuses with a sandaled foot. It struck Amenadiel as a strange offering for the one who had orchestrated the creation of all plant life, but then humans had always had odd religious notions about the divine. "What shall I do with it?"

Amenadiel frowned. "Save the letters." Perhaps he'd read them. It felt like someone should. "Have the cherubim store them...somewhere. Everything else..." He shrugged, overwhelmed. They were quiet as they looked upon the mountains of spurned odds and ends. "How is he? Will he hold audience?"

Of course, what could Father say that would soothe them now? Just kidding?

"He rests."

"Or drinks?" Amenadiel said, his tone wry.

Gabriel hesitated, but nodded. A change had been slowly working its way through God's messenger. He no longer swooned from the long exposure to glory. Now, his baby blue wings drooped from exhaustion, not ecstasy. Amenadiel understood all too well. It was nearly as hard to face the imperfection of God as it was to face his power.

When Gabriel spoke again, it was with a wary, upward glance to Father's workshop. "This cannot go on."

"No," Amenadiel agreed.

It's up to you, brother, Lucifer had insisted.

How much worse would this be if they all knew Hell, the tail to Heaven's head, had changed? Amenadiel and Charlotte guarded the secret like the poisonous treasure it was.

"Sometimes I wish Mother were here," Gabriel confessed softly.

Amenadiel clasped his little brother's shoulder. Mom's bottomless anger and bitterness after millennia in Hell would really be the last thing they needed. "It's better that she's not, Gabe."

***

It's up to you, brother. The truth of Lucifer's words weighed heavily on his heart as he organized an assembly in the Hall of Being, where a virtual Earth spun on its axis and danced around the sun the Lightbringer bore.

He called forward twelve angels: six, including himself, considered vital to Earth's or Heaven's well-being, and six chosen by casting lots. It was neither fair nor completely random, but that did nothing to stop the first gathering from turning into a largely incoherent shouting match over who
was present and who was not and why that was and Amenadiel, where is Dad, how is Father, what are we going to do?

What are we going to do, when spoken by certain mouths, has a funny way of meaning what are you going to do? Amenadiel had no idea, but pretended otherwise.

In private, Charlotte counseled him.

"You have to tell God about Hell," she concluded after he'd recounted the mess of the first meeting of angels. "And next time you should take me into one of your meetings. You need a lawyer."

"But if we tell Father..." he trailed off, slurring after two bottles of rosé.

"The best offense is a good defense," Charlotte said, somehow mostly sober. She plucked a grape from a stem. "The longer you keep the truth from him, the more dangerous it becomes. For everyone. And I, for one, kinda like the afterlife—this one, anyway—now that I've gotten used to it. It's a little...duller than I expected, but better than nothing. And I'd rather God not take us all out in some heavenly murder-suicide."

And so he went to Gabriel the next day and said the only words that could possibly intrigue his father: "Chloe Decker has changed Hell."

"Bring her to me," God commanded in his workshop, his long fingers wrapped around the slender neck of a wine bottle. He didn't turn away from his private display of Earth, where he watched throngs of people meander through the hazy, clogged streets of New Delhi.

Look at me! Amenadiel wanted to shout. Look at what you're doing to me! But he could not find it in himself to form the words.

He tried to find a silver lining. He even allowed himself to become hopeful. Chloe was very good at what she did! Very good at talking people down from their situations. She'd figure out a way to help Father.

But when he went to his brother and the miracle he had whispered into being, Hell wasn't the only thing that had changed.

"What's in it for me?" Chloe Decker asks, when he tells her God wishes to meet her.

She makes deals like the Devil, like one who has been burned.

God returns to being unwilling to see Amenadiel, and so he calls the disgruntled council together once again. This time, he brings Charlotte.

"What's she doing here?" the angel Raphael asks.

"Advising me."

Phanuel, who designed the blueprints for human creation, chuckles. "We'd heard all those rumors you'd fallen during your time on Earth, brother, but this is quite low, indeed."

"Enough!" Amenadiel shouts, spreading his dark wings wide in warning. "She is here because we must all live together, with or without Father. You are not above her."

The table goes quiet. Far from being afraid of his outburst, Charlotte bares a cool, tight-lipped smile to his siblings, and to Phanuel most of all. The viciousness of it goes well with her bright red
Amenadiel calms and says, "Chloe Decker will not agree to see Father unless her terms are met."

Dark-haired Kerubiel, who directs the focus of the cherubim who construct the city, laughs. "A human dares to defy God?"

"That's what happens when they lie with Sam," Raphael says, and rolls her eyes.

"What are this human's terms?" Michael asks.

"She wishes to see her father, John Decker—"

"I've checked the Hall of Records," Charlotte interrupts, sounding official. "He's here."

From where he sits on Amenadiel's right, Michael rubs at his jaw, clearly dismayed by the request, but not outright refusing it. "Is that all?"

"No," Amenadiel admits hesitantly. "She also wants Lucifer to come with her."

The table goes still and silent—and then erupts into laughter and shouts. Sighing, Amenadiel waits it out.

"This cannot be tolerated," Michael decides when the table has quieted once more.

"He spat at Father's feet," Amenadiel says. "How much worse have we done to each other?"

Michael lifts his chin. "We have not denied our purpose or insulted Father. To insult God is to insult Creation itself."

Where did all these supposed axioms come from?

"Father is...in his works," Amenadiel agrees slowly. "But the creatures he set into motion—that we set into motion—they are their own, brother. Bigger than all of us, perhaps even bigger than Father himself." He looks around the table, pausing on each face as they grapple with the near-blasphemous claim. "He has given us all free will." Some of his siblings sigh and roll their eyes, as if to say this again. "They find their own purposes. Creation defines itself, and you would know this, if you would go live among them and see."

"Who would want to live among them?" Raphael says with a grimace. "It's enough we're always rerouting asteroids and containing fires. Do they have any clue how much work we do?"

"No...?"

Phanuel sniffs. "What is it exactly this little human can tell God, anyway?"

"She may be able to help Father," Gabriel says, agreeing with Amenadiel, at least in the moment. "But her visit is not for us to decide. Father wills to see this one human child, and so it shall come to pass."

"I don't know," Phanuel says, crossing spindly legs and rubbing at a black pencil mustache. "Humans are getting uppity, if you ask me. In fact, that one," he continues, pointing toward Charlotte, "is walking on our streets. I don't know why she thinks she's welcome. She has perfectly good streets of her own."

"Maybe I like your streets better," Charlotte says, grinning.
"Come on, Mikey," whines Azrael, the angel of death. "Wouldn't it be cool to see Lucifer for at least a little while? I mean, it's been a really long time."

Amenadiel studies his little sister, intrigued when she uses Lucifer's chosen name. She always had a soft spot for their wayward brother, and if the loss of her blade has caused her any angst, she doesn't seem to hold it against him now.

"No, it would not be cool," Michael says. "Our brother could start a rebellion." He looks around the table. "Who's to say, in a moment of weakness, some of you would not consider joining arms with the Lightbringer?"

"There's nothing to fight over," Amenadiel says, his voice strong. "We were fighting for things we already had, if only we would have claimed them for ourselves."

Michael taps a finger atop the table once, twice, thrice, in thought. They all watch and wait with bated breath. What the general says, goes, at least on matters of God and Heaven's safety.

"I will allow him in celestial chains."

The table is very still and quiet, and this time no shouting is soon to follow.

Amenadiel shakes his head. "Brother, he won't like that..."

"He will like the wrath of God even less," Michael says, referring to himself and his sword. "Sister's blade was not the only weapon that can snuff out a light."

"Well," Phanuel begins before Amenadiel can say anything, "all those in favor of watching Beelzebub himself hobble around in chains say aye." Smiling gleefully, he waves a hand in the air.

The ayes have it.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to Obli and Yah for helping me iron out this tense situation. And by "tense situation," I mean literal tenses; they were a situation.
Chloe pushes her cleared plate aside, feeling fat and happy. Lucifer's French toast is, well, sinful, but the best thing about today's breakfast is how it isn't immediately followed by a desire for more—more food, more drink, more pleasure. She feels...satisfied, if on edge about Amenadiel's visit, which gives her hope that the worst of her post-Hell binge has finally passed.

"How long do you think Amenadiel will take?" she asks.

Lucifer swirls a fingertip through the remaining pool of syrup on his plate. "Don't imagine it will take him long to locate your father. They like their order in the Silver City. I'm sure there's someone who oversees records or there will be some system in place for finding him."

Chloe takes heart in how certain he is that her father will be in Heaven.

"Now, getting the others on board with letting the Devil past the gates..." He sighs. "That might take him a while." He sucks his syrupy finger into his mouth before popping it clear and adding, "Mind you, time doesn't work the same in Heaven, so he might return at any moment."

She groans. "More supernatural jetlag?"

He grins. "Do you know, I suppose it is."

"Does time run faster or slower there?"

"More it simply is—well, until it isn't." He shrugs, as if this all makes perfect sense. "It does its own thing, but there's no real reason to track it there and there's no way to convert it."

"Great," Chloe says dryly as she slides off her bar stool and takes their plates to the sink. "I wasn't finished with that," he whines.

"It's just syrup."

"And I've no risk of diabetes." Chloe rolls her eyes at him, and his grin broadens. "Look at you being a killjoy. You must be feeling better."

"Uh-huh," she says, but he's right. She feels like her old, responsible self as she rinses the plates and loads them into his fancy dishwasher.

When she turns back to the kitchen island, it's to the Devil drizzling syrup straight into his mouth. Ignoring the Luciferness she understands all too well now, she says, "I just want to get back to normal after this." They're quiet for a moment as they consider the unrealistic tenor of her desire. "We need to figure out what to do about the remaining Firefly and the De la Cruzes."

The metal lid to the syrup dispenser clatters closed. "Oh, that." Lucifer licks his lips and laughs. "I've had dealers buying up Firefly when possible, and Hector de la Cruz won't be bothering anyone soon enough."

She narrows her eyes, even as her heart feels fond. "What did you do?"
"Well, my dear," he says, spreading his arms wide, "you're looking at Mejor Farmacia's most powerful shareholder."

"You're moving in on Hector's drugstore chain."

"I'm going to boot him out," Lucifer confirms, smug in his devilry. "And then I'm going to cut off his access to divine goods and wreck his other bloody investments." Tipping the syrup dispenser, he puts another drop of sweetness on his fingertip. "Do you suppose Hector and Shayna will like living in a tent city with all the addicts they've bilked?"

Once, she would have been horrified—and, okay, a little intrigued—by his scheming and the far reach of his money and power. Now, it seems...practical. The law would not be on their side. The law can't even begin to understand their side. But men like Hector need to be stopped. It's a moral struggle she imagines they'll face many times going forward.

"Don't mess with the Devil," she hums.

"Certainly don't pluck his feathers and shoot at his favorite people," he rumbles. "I'm not above holding a grudge."

"No, you're not," Chloe says, and tries not to think of his oldest and biggest grudge of all.

***

There's no word from Amenadiel after breakfast, so they try to live as if it's any other Normal Day on Earth. As if they aren't the Devil and a miracle who have been to Hell and back, only to live the last two weeks in a weird bubble made of Chloe's insatiable desires.

Trixie squeals when they pick her up from school in a blood red Mustang—or, as Lucifer calls it, "the closest thing to a minivan" in his collection. They have pizza before seeing a movie, and for a while, they're just another blended family, albeit a little quirky. At least until Chloe sees something that reminds her of a Hell loop or of her impending appointment with God, and the illusion splinters. But that's life now, an endless series of splintered illusions.

"Why can't we go home?" Trixie laments when Chloe later holds her outside of Dan's apartment.

She smooths her daughter's hair. "Oh, monkey. Lucifer and I are really busy right now. I'm sorry I'm not being very reliable lately." An understatement.

"Are you on a case?"

"Sort of," she says.

Trixie narrows her eyes. "I don't care. I wanna go home."

"Soon, baby."

That becomes the operative word of the night after Lucifer brushes his teeth and folds his hands in disgruntled prayer. When he opens his eyes a few moments later, he lets out a disgusted scoff.

"Any news?" Chloe asks.

"He says 'soon,' whatever that means."
"That's it?"

"Mm. He pulled the celestial equivalent of hanging up on me." Leaning against the marble vanity, he clears his throat. "I don't much care for being left in the dark. You could still refuse, you know. Whenever he returns, I would never let him take you against your wishes." He smiles faintly. "Not that I think he could."

Chloe screws the cap on a canister of lotion and studies him. As the day has progressed, tension has stiffened his shoulders, and there's a wary watchfulness to his gaze. What they're about to do has finally hit him. The Devil, in Heaven: it's just not done. She can't even begin to understand what he's feeling. In a way, she isn't even quite sure what she's tentatively agreed to do.

She leans on the vanity beside him. "I want to see my dad, and I may not get to after this..." She gives him a watery smile. "If I have to go through your dad to do that, I will. If you can stomach that."

"You deserve better than this," he sighs. "Better than getting caught up in all this bollocks. Hell was enough." He looks down at her, eyes soft and lips parted. "I'm...I'm sorry, Chloe."

"I'm not." At least, she isn't about him. "You get to put up with me for a long time after all this is over."

"Assuming Dad doesn't set off Armageddon on his way out." He looks away from her. "Immortality didn't suit Cain, I think."

"He didn't have what I have."

Would it have mattered? Could Cain have been a better person under different conditions, with the right love, with enough rain for dry crops? There's no telling, and her opinion on the matter changes frequently and in ways she sometimes wishes it wouldn't.

Strong fingers curl around hers, grounding her to the present. "Promise me you'll be careful when you meet my father."

"I promise," she whispers.

***

Another day passes. Now that her brain no longer coasts from one pleasure to the next, Chloe is eager to return home, be a mother, and get back to work, but it would be wrong to jump into anything, only to leave in the middle of it. And so she sits with Lucifer on the sixth floor as Maze tells them in no uncertain terms that they're idiots for agreeing to go to the Silver City, but she also assures them she'll keep the business running with bounty hunting in the interim. Lucifer says money isn't an issue, and Chloe suffers the blow that deals to her pride, at least for now. Difficult times and business partners aside, the bottom line is she simply misses solving mysteries. She misses...her old life. It was far less complicated.

She tries not to think of Hell, even as it continues to haunt her dreams.

When Amenadiel finally returns on the third day, he is still enrobed in his blacks and grays, but now also wears a somber expression. He lands on the balcony, tucks his wings into his back, and steps into the penthouse as though he's come bearing bad news.
Music peters out as Lucifer glances up from his piano. "Well. You look like someone gave the stick up your bum quite the stir, brother."

"Is everything okay?" Chloe asks more charitably. On the sofa, she sits up straighter and sets aside the book she's been struggling to read.

Amenadiel gives a slight nod. "I found your father, Chloe."

She lets out a breath she hadn't realized she was holding. Amenadiel gives her an almost sad smile which remains on his face as he turns to Lucifer.

"But I can't visit, can I?" Lucifer scoffs before his brother can say anything. The fallboard claps shut, and he leans his forearms against the top of the piano. He taps his fingers idly against the lip of an empty crystal tumbler. "What would I even want with Heaven, hmm? Never brought a war to the gates, have I? You lot would bloody remember if I had."

"The council I formed—"

"Ooh, council, is it? Look at Big Brother Amenadiel setting up a government, all proper. Real pain in the arse, isn't it?"

"—they're willing to let you enter, Luci."

Lucifer draws back in surprise before narrowing his eyes skeptically. "That so?"

"What's the catch?" Chloe asks.

"Lucifer will be treated as one who...broke the law." A chill sweeps down Chloe's spine as he looks back at his brother. "The council decided you need to be shackled in celestial chains if you are to enter."

"What!" Chloe expects Lucifer to explode with the same indignation, but he doesn't, and when she turns to him, she finds him watching her.

"Your call, Detective," he says, his mouth tilted by a soft smile.

Her stomach flips as she shakes her head. She can't let him be treated like this, just to see her father. And especially not after what happened to him in that damn Tijuana warehouse. "This isn't right."

She glares at Amenadiel. "This isn't right."

"It's the only way," Amenadiel says, and though there is regret in his tone, it does nothing to mollify her.

"They don't concern themselves with fairness," Lucifer says, and Amenadiel looks down at the floor. "But it's fine."

"No, it's not." Her throat tightens with her anguish. She's fully prepared to refuse the offer, if it can even be called one, when a thought stops her short. "Do you have the chains with you?" she asks Amenadiel. The question surprises both brothers.

He shakes his head. "Divine objects are not meant for Earth."

"And yet here stands a tool," Lucifer huffs.

"The chains are waiting at the gates." Amenadiel perks up with sudden hope. "Does this mean you're still considering it? I didn't expect either of you to be open to this. But this is good, Chloe.
Father needs to see you."

God isn't much of a factor in her decision making, but she keeps that to herself.

"We can leave Heaven at any time?" she asks. "Nobody will force us to stay?"

"Of course not. If anything, our siblings will be eager to see Luci go."

"Oh, well, the feeling's mutual," Lucifer cracks.

"Give us a minute?" Chloe says to Amenadiel. Rising from the sofa, she goes to Lucifer, whose brow has quirked with curiosity. She grabs one of his hands and tugs him away from the piano bench, up to his bedroom, through his obscenely oversized closet, and into the bathroom, where she shuts the door.

He grins beside shelves filled with plush bath sheets. "I know that look. You've got a plan."

She grins with him. Turning his hand in her own, she slides fingers over his palm and gently releases the hold on her light. Prismatic colors peek out between their flesh.

Lucifer flexes his fingers. "You've no idea how strange that feels." He tilts his head. "Actually, should try this elsewhere, really. Give the old pickle a tickle."

"Can you focus?" she snorts, even as his humor eases the tightness in her chest. "Do you think I could get through celestial chains if we needed me to? I got through the chains from Hell..."

"That's your idea?"

"Yeah... Do you think it'd work?"

"I'd be surprised if it didn't," he answers hesitantly. "But best not to cause a kerfuffle in the Silver City, love. Trust me on that."

Chloe draws back her light and sandwiches his larger hand between both of hers. "I know. You don't want me to go in there, guns blazing. And I don't either. I'm not looking to piss anyone off. But you have to know I'd never let them cuff you if I didn't think one of us had a key, right?"

His expression softens in that way it does when he wants to tell her he loves her but doesn't always know how. Instead, he jokes. "First you tried to put me in cuffs; now you don't want me in them at all. Very mercurial of you, Detective."

"Well, you grew on me. Like a tumor." Patting his hand, she chews on the inside of her cheek, thinking. "I'll find a way to test it when they cuff you. If the chains don't respond to me, we leave. Got it?"

Lucifer frowns. "But your father..."

"I know." She nods, holding back sadness. "I want to see him, but if I don't... I don't. It's not like I ever thought I would, Lucifer. I didn't even believe in an afterlife."

"But this is different. You know now, and you know you may not..."

That she may not die. Ever.

"Yeah," she whispers. "But my father hated when innocents got caught up in the system. As far as I'm concerned, you're innocent, or you've at least served your time and then some. I wouldn't be his
daughter if I didn't care about that." She squeezes his hand.

"Well." He draws a deep breath. "I suppose it's time to take this old dog to Heaven, then, isn't it?"

Stretching up on tiptoe, she kisses him gently. "You know I've got your back, right?"

Lucifer touches the side of her face. "And I yours, Detective."

They return to the living room and announce they're ready to leave.

Amenadiel's shoulders sag with relief. "Thank you, Chloe." He ducks his chin, acknowledging Lucifer. "And thank you, brother."

Lucifer lets out an exasperated sigh. "Let's just get this bloody over with."

After a small break for a flask refill, they file out onto the balcony. Two sets of wings unfurl and spread wide before Chloe's eyes, one set glowing bright beneath the sun, the other swallowing the light like a soft shadow. No matter how long she lives amid such wonders, she thinks they will never fail to steal her breath away. It's only when Lucifer sweeps down and takes her into his arms that her awe is disrupted.

"All aboard," he says, though the humor doesn't quite reach his eyes.

As one, Lucifer and Amenadiel lift into the sky above Los Angeles, toward a plane Chloe cannot see, but knows is real in the company of angels. High above the sprawling city, right as the air chills, they press into a membrane, just like before, when Lucifer brought her and Maze out of Hell. Chloe squeezes her eyes shut as the thin, invisible film clings and slides across her skin—sliding, sliding, and stretching until, pop, Earth is gone. Lucifer grips her more tightly as they pass through another blindingly white void, which pops again and spits them out, high above an expansive field of emerald green grass. Very, very high above.

Chloe gasps and whips her head around, taking in the wonders of another new world. The field below drops off suddenly, like a sharp cliff, into a blue-black sky filled with distant stars. It's so surreal that her brain doesn't quite believe what she's seeing.

Lucifer's fingers dig into her flesh. "I've got you," he reminds her, bright wings beating steadily.

"How can I... We're breathing up here?" she asks shrilly. "How am I not freezing?"

"Oh, see, that's interesting," Amenadiel says. Chloe startles as his voice carries from where he flies above them. "We are actually in Heaven's atmosphere now. As it is, the universe of our birth operates on different laws from yours, Chloe. Our brother Phanuel estimates that—"

"No one bloody cares what Phanny thinks," Lucifer drawls.

"He's on the council, brother."

"Not by popular vote, I imagine."

Though Chloe has never even heard of Phanuel, Amenadiel's silence is reply enough, and the brotherly spat helps ground her to this new reality.

They speed above the sweeping, empyrean plane suspended in the dark void of space. Her eyes burn as she stares, unblinkingingly, at Heaven—a real place, just as real as Earth or Hell. And like Earth, the heavenly plane is a green and blue tapestry, peppered by gray and white-capped
mountains, and shrouded by a blanket of cotton ball clouds. Unlike Earth, it is not a globe, but a flying carpet textured by topographical lumps and bumps. As though it stretches on forever, she can't see the other end of the plane at all.

It's obvious by the way shadows play on the landscape that it's early evening in Heaven, though how, she's not sure, for as in Hell until recently, no sun directly brightens this corner of Creation. Beyond the giant field of grass, white marble spires stand tall in the distance, off-colored by dwindling daylight, and farther still she sees steel skyscrapers reminiscent of those from New York or Chicago. Through all this, and even from far away, there's no doubting where the heart of the Silver City lies, for one tower rises higher than the rest, an ivory counter to Hell's ebony citadel. Like father, like son, Chloe thinks, though she will never dare to say it.

"Do we just...fly in?" she asks, craning her neck.

"Ah, no." Lucifer nods his chin to the right as they begin their descent in earnest. "Welcome to the biggest, snobbiest gated community."

Chloe looks to where he indicated. She's been so busy marveling at the city that she's failed to notice the two giant gates wedged between rolling, grassy hills below. The gates shimmer with the iridescence of opal or mother-of-pearl and couldn't be more different from the imposing iron of Hell's barrier. And yet, Chloe thinks, the gates in either afterlife are really the same: a means to restrict freedom. Hell's gates are about keeping souls in. Heaven's are about keeping souls out.

As they near the ground, she spots strange, translucent forms passing, like ghosts, through the closed gates. She watches, slack-jawed, as the forms take on a more substantial, human shape on the other side of the pearlescent bars. They walk, as if on autopilot, to a destination beyond. She knows without asking that these are souls who managed, somehow, to die guiltless.

Lucifer and Amenadiel land on the soft, grassy earth, not far from the silent queue of disembodied souls. Lucifer continues to hold Chloe as they watch the ghosts pass through to the other side. She feels a strange camaraderie with him and imagines he's thinking of Hell loops, too. How lucky these souls are to have avoided that fate.

Amenadiel bows his head and folds his hands for a brief moment before announcing, "Michael will be here soon."

That gets Lucifer's attention. "Whatever for?"

"He has the chains."

Chloe wriggles and hops out of Lucifer's arms. Holding onto his forearms until she finds her balance on the soft grass, she looks up at his thunderous expression. "I'm guessing you and Michael don't get along."

"You could say that," he says, jaw clenched. "He rounded me up for Dad, once upon a time."

"Another grudge."

She grabs one of his hands and squeezes. "We'll leave if we need to," she says, and ignores Amenadiel's worried glance.

The angel Michael appears a short time later. Chloe startles when he lands suddenly on the other side of the gate, with the speed of a bullet and the soft-footed landing of a nimble cat. Scarlet-winged, lightly tanned, and built with the solidness of a redwood trunk, Michael doesn't quite look like he could be related to Lucifer or Amenadiel, except for his height, ostentatious leather and
steel garb, and the imperious way he looks down his broad nose as he takes hold of one of the gates and draws it open. The souls continue to pass through, undisturbed, as he closes it behind him. Not that he pays any attention.

With a face set in what appears to be a permanent scowl of seriousness, he marches past Amenadiel to Lucifer. They are almost exactly the same height, leaving dark eyes to stare into deep blue. From a buckle at his waist, Michael removes a coil of long, shiny chains that end in four cuffs, one for each wrist and ankle.

"Your wrists, Samael," he demands.

"His name is Lucifer," Chloe snaps, even as her brows furrow. Michael's accent is unlike any she's ever heard, and she has the distinct and disorienting impression that he's speaking another language altogether, though she understands him perfectly.

Michael turns to her with a disdainful expression that suggests he is inconvenienced by her existence. "You must be the miracle."

"She's Detective Decker to you," Lucifer says tartly, as he lifts his wrists in an unhelpfully limp manner. "How's Dad's boot taste these days, Mikey?"

Ignoring the barb, Michael shoves back the sleeves of Lucifer's jacket and shirt, and clamps shiny cuffs around his wrists. "Ankles now," he says, drawing out the connecting chain until he has hold of the other two cuffs. "If you attack my person in any way, retaliation will be swift."

Lucifer sniffs. "I wouldn't dare expend the energy."

He's all quips and subtle uncooperation, but Chloe senses the tension vibrating beneath the surface of his designer wool and cotton. It feeds her own tension, and she touches his elbow gently to comfort them both.

When Michael has finished cuffing him, he stands once more and glares at his brother. "Withdraw your wings, heretic."

"Michael..." Amenadiel appeals.

"He must not fly in the Silver City," Michael barks.

Lucifer scoffs. "'Fraid I might beat you in a race, brother? You never were the fastest—and certainly not the brightest."

"Withdraw. Them." Michael's right hand falls to the hilt of the sword that's tucked into a scabbard at his side. "Or would you rather I shackle them as well?"

"Why don't you just cut them off me?" Lucifer taunts, leaning forward, his teeth bared in a savage grin as he glances at the sword. "See what happens."

"Luci—" Amenadiel starts.

"He doesn't mean that," Chloe says in a rush, her fingers digging into Lucifer's arm. She looks up at him. "Lucifer, put your damn wings away."

He scowls for a long moment, long enough for her to feel the fight go out of him. "Very well," he relents, and shrugs his shoulders. The ivory brilliance of his feathers withdraws and disappears. "Happy now, *sir?*"
Disgusted, Michael shakes his head and turns on his heel. "I will be watching him," he warns Amenadiel, before throwing the gate open and leaving it ajar. Still, the hazy souls filter through, unaware.

"Come with me," Amenadiel says, and Chloe notices he, too, has tucked away his wings.

"One minute," she says shakily. Turning to Lucifer and shielding his wrists with her body, she takes hold of the chain links binding the cuffs together. Lifting her other hand above a link, she focuses her light, wincing when the polished metal briefly reflects. But a moment passes, and she exhales as a miniscule bend appears in the metal. retracting her light, she looks up at Lucifer with a sly, pleased grin. It all comes so easily now, this terrifying gift within herself.

"Rebel after my own heart, aren't you?" he says.

"Maybe," she admits. "You sure you want to do this?"

"I'd rather a hornet's nest down my trousers, but we're here now." He steps forward and frowns when he realizes the chains require him to shorten his stride into a slight shuffle. He jerks his head toward the gates. "Come on, Detective."

***

As with the Devil and Hell, Heaven both is and isn't what Chloe expects. It's as clean and pure as Renaissance painters believed it would be, full as it is of unblemished marble, polished stone and wood, gushing fountains, and crisp-scented fruit trees. But it's also more of a sprawling metropolis than she could have ever imagined—not that she spent much time thinking about Heaven as a nonbeliever or as a captive in Hell. It's only that, after years of Lucifer's ranting, she didn't expect Heaven to be quite so...well, nice.

Tall buildings reach toward the strange and partly artificial sky, to soft clouds floating through dusk. And the Silver City could be any other city, though far cleaner, if not for the little quirks that give away its otherworldliness. Large balconies and other platforms jut out from towers and buildings, and Chloe watches in wonder as cherubs, just like those from all the famous paintings, buzz back and forth on small wings, landing and taking off. Then there are angels... Angels, with their bright and colorful wingspans that stretch wide as they soar. As far as she can tell, they're the only ones walking here at all.

Chloe glances at Lucifer, and her heart clenches at his expression—the tightness of it, the bitterness. Maybe Maze was right. They never should have come.

"Has it changed a lot?" she asks, simply for something to fill the silence.

"Yes and no," he answers, chains rattling with each step.

"Lucifer...left before human souls were allowed to enter the Kingdom of God," Amenadiel says.

"Ah, yes," Lucifer says, "when I popped off for my little vacay to Hell."

Amenadiel sighs and guides them deeper into Heaven. A short distance ahead, a woman—a human soul, judging by her grounded disposition—rises from a park bench beside a fountain. Dressed in a curve-hugging black dress, saunters toward them in black stilettos, blond hair shifting along her shoulders. A bright smile stretches her mouth wide.
"Is that—"

"Charlotte?" Amenadiel says, grinning. "It is."

Chloe can't stop herself. She rushes forward. "Charlotte!"

The other woman laughs, looking and sounding younger than Chloe ever knew her to be on Earth. "I was wondering when you'd realize it was—" She exhales in a gust as Chloe yanks her into a hug. "Been spending a lot of time around Ella, huh?"

"Sorry," Chloe chuckles, releasing her at arm's length. "I'm just so glad you're not—"

"In Hell," Lucifer interrupts, coming to stand beside them. His smile is soft. "This afterlife suits you much better, doesn't it?"

Amenadiel nods. "Charlotte has been indispensable since I returned to the Silver City with her."

"Oh, well, as long as she's useful, brother," Lucifer says dryly.

"I'm so sorry I didn't figure everything out sooner," Chloe says.

What if she had? Would Charlotte be alive? Would Chloe even know Lucifer is the Devil? Would she have still woken with sunlight in her veins?

Charlotte only shrugs. "It's fine. Besides, there's plenty to keep me busy here."

"Really?" Lucifer asks, intrigued. "Up to no good already? Thought you'd be minding your P's and Q's after the dearly departed detour through my old hood."

Charlotte's disquieted smile at the reminder of Hell slowly turns vicious. "Eh, you know me. I don't like to sit still. Anyway, someone has to advocate for the ghetto. Turns out there aren't many lawyers in Heaven."

"Imagine that," Lucifer says.

"The ghetto?" Chloe's brow furrows as Heaven's nice veil is peeled back.

"Yeah, and...speaking of," Charlotte says, "let's head that way now. We're attracting an audience."

Looking over her shoulder—and then up—Chloe is astonished to see a horde of angels gathered in the air. Word of their arrival has officially spread, and it's as if every type of bird on Earth has chosen to flock with one another, to watch like vultures beneath a colorful patchwork quilt of wings. There are so many angels—dozens, if not hundreds, with more joining at the edges of the crowd with each passing moment. Chloe turns to Lucifer in concern and finds his dark eyes shining like embers.

"Brother, let's keep moving." Amenadiel says uneasily.

"Traitor!" a soprano voice rings out. Others echo the sentiment.

Chloe reels back, shocked. In all the time she has known Lucifer, only Cain truly hated him. If anything, Lucifer is well-liked by nearly everyone. Even Dan doesn't mind him that much. Mostly.

"Yes, yes, the wayward son has returned!" Lucifer shouts at his family in his usual cadence, but with the odd accent Chloe heard from Michael. His chains rattle as he lifts his hands in a gesture
she isn't familiar with but knows can't mean anything nice. "Get a bloody good look, why don't you!"

"Lucifer," Chloe snaps, clutching his arms and dragging them down. "Stay calm."

"They know nothing," he spits at the sky.

"No. They don't," she agrees, "but I know."

His chin drops as he looks at her, eyes burning with hellfire. She squeezes his arms, where his sleeves are bunched above celestial cuffs. "Yes," he says somewhat sheepishly. "Yes, I suppose you do."

"Most of them are a bunch of blowhards, anyway," Charlotte pipes up, not bothering to lower her voice.

Lucifer snorts, and his fiery gaze fades to warm, dark brown. His shoulders relax. "You have been missed, Ms. Richards."

"Back at ya," she says, grinning. "Heaven could use one of your parties."

"Yes, this lot wouldn't know a good time if it rode their faces," Lucifer laments, turning his back on his family.

"I'll deal with them," Amenadiel announces tiredly as he unfurls his gray wings. "Charlotte will see you to your father, Chloe."

He takes to the sky, a lone angel against a mob. Before she turns away from the commotion, Chloe can't help but notice how the angels swivel toward their eldest brother, as though he is a lighthouse and they are ships lost in a stormy sea.

Chapter End Notes

So...I'm back! *Sort of*?! Bear with me. *Fuckruary* took a lot out of me (oh my), and then covid-19 was like, "Hey, *sup*? What if I come to Seattle and rock your world?" So I fell behind on replying to comments and writing and just generally being a functioning human bean while I did what I could to prepare my household and my family from afar. Let's face it, I am an even bigger WIP than this fic, and so far I've not found a good beta for myself. This is true flying by the seat of my pajama shorts.

In other words, expect my weekly schedule to be a little up in the air for now, but I'm trying, and I don't leave things unfinished. I'd rather be a little slow and get things right, this close to the end.

Anyway, doubt your lizard brain. Stay indoors. Wash your hands. Love your neighbors, your elders, and the good folks on the front lines—just love them from afar for now. ✌

—Matches

P.S. - Thanks to Obli for helping me get Kansas out of my head.
Charlotte leads them past towers and dome-shaped halls while explaining the segregation between human souls and angels.

"Apartheid in Heaven," Lucifer scoffs, "and I'm the bad guy? If there's one good thing I might say about Hell, it's that there is equal opportunity torture."

"Yeah..." Charlotte cringes at the mention of Hell. "I probably don't have to tell you that your family is, uh, a little set in their ways."

Chloe feels the rusty wheels of her detective training squeak to life, and she digs for more information from Charlotte. In doing so, she learns there's no money in Heaven, no want for anything, and yet there's a growing sense that something is missing or wrong. Maybe it's the separation between species, or between God and his creations. Maybe it's something else. But Charlotte has had her finger on the pulse of it since shortly after she arrived. She claims she would have been bored otherwise.

"And now things are tense because God's planning to...you know."

"Top himself?" Lucifer suggests. "Take a celestial toaster bath? Self-conclude?"

"You get that Chloe's here to talk your father out of that, right?"

Lucifer doesn't reply.

When they cross the invisible border into a world of modern human architecture, the landing platforms disappear from the sides of buildings. Instead, the ground floors of skyscrapers are home to eateries and galleries and other familiar creature comforts common to Earth. It looks like it should be a lively area, but it's quiet, Charlotte tells them, since news of God's despondency. Many of the souls here are worried.

"Did they only get the memo now?" Lucifer wonders. "The last time any of these bastards were in a decent mood, I was busy with the Medusa merger."

His eyes dart left and right, taking it all in, and Chloe can't help but think he is as amazed as she is. This is the ghetto? There is abundance here—luxury, even. In Hell, there is only poverty, an abject absence of anything that might content or please. She went years without eating or sleeping or feeling any kind of joy there. In Heaven, there are bistros.

Charlotte has them turn left. A few blocks away, the tall buildings part to accommodate a transit hub with an arched pedestrian bridge. Beneath the bridge lies a train station that has neither barred turnstiles nor ticket machines, only a platform for a train at what is clearly the first—or last, depending on perspective—stop in the human quarter. A single steel beam track runs to the right and disappears around a bend.

"Your father lives in the sticks," Charlotte says, touching a palm to a screen on a small stand. It lights up blue.

"He does?" Chloe jumps in surprise as a single train car, shaped like a bus-sized silver bullet, zips from around the corner and stops on a dime before them. Despite its speed and size, the loudest sound it makes is when its doors slide open with a soft shhhp.
Lucifer turns up his nose. "Isn't there some other way to travel?"

"Other than you flying and ruffling Michael's feathers? Nope," Charlotte says, stepping into the train.

Chloe rolls her eyes at Lucifer. "You'll survive, Your Highness," she says, and pulls him along.

Twelve oaken benches, polished to a warm golden luster, line the sleek car, six on each side. They settle on a bench across from Charlotte's, and the train departs with no announcements, cheery bell ringing, or horn blowing.

"Do we know which stop to get off at?" Chloe asks, watching the steel and glass speed by the windows. Car-bound daughter of Los Angeles that she is, she can count on one hand the times she's taken the metro, and two of those she botched her journey so badly that she had to pay for a taxi.

"There's only one stop," Charlotte says. "Whatever stop you have in mind. Amenadiel and I found your father in the marshlands, so that's where we're headed."

"So you mean... The train... It just knows." A single, hysterical laugh spills out of her.

"It just knows," Charlotte confirms, shrugging a shoulder. "There's a lot that works like that in Heaven. I...think I'm getting used to it."

"Thy will be done," Lucifer murmurs wryly. At their confused expressions, he clarifies, "Self-actualization."

"Maybe," Charlotte says. "Your dad doesn't tell us."

His lips twist into a bitter smirk. "Not his style, no."

They pass through a squat and sprawling suburbia filled with cobblestones and colorful buildings and are later thrown into a world of empty green fields and forests tinted warmly beneath the abating light. The train stops shortly thereafter. Chloe gets the impression that they've traveled far in little time, but when they disembark, night has fallen sooner than she expected, sooner even than the view from the train car's windows suggested it had. It leaves her with the disorienting sensation that she's crossed several time zones without realizing it.

Blinking through her confusion, she breathes in crisp, clean air. The environment here is completely different—cooler, balmier, and wild with the chirping of crickets and the croaking of frogs. It's a far cry from what she's used to in Los Angeles.

Globe-bulbed street lamps light the small rural station in a soft yellow glow, and when she looks up at the sky she discovers the veil of artificial daylight has been drawn back to reveal a tapestry of stars and planets set in unfamiliar places. There's no telltale orange-red Mars or Mercury, no brilliant Venus, no Dipper, but there are other constellations and sparks of color; there's even a diffuse halo that gives the impression of a moon that is not there.

"Did you make these stars, too?" Chloe whispers, head tilted back as she marvels at the foreign sky.

Lucifer stops and gazes with her. "Some of my early tinkering is floating about, but it counts for very little of it," he says, as if creating stars is a craft hobby like scrapbooking. "Most of these were here when Mum and Dad woke."

"Are there others...out there?"
"You mean aliens?" He looks down at her, eyes crinkling at their corners.

She snorts. "Yeah, I guess so."

"There are others, yes," he confirms, a strange note to his voice. "Dad toyed with the creatures in this universe before he had us build yours." He looks away. "Some of them are sentient. Some of them are in Hell. Or were."

Chloe shudders.

"This way," Charlotte says, waving them forward.

The street beyond the station is narrow and no more than packed, flattened earth lined with reeds and cattails, and freckled by the U-shaped prints of horseshoes. Little winding dirt paths peek from the overgrowth, stretching toward what Chloe assumes must be residences.

"Are you sure my dad lives here?"

Charlotte turns them onto one of the skinny paths. "Not what you expected?"

"I just...never knew he liked places like this."

SoCal isn't exactly known for its wetlands, though there are a few. As far as Chloe knows, her father never even visited anywhere like this, though she guesses he went places with her mother, back when he hadn't settled into his career and Penelope Decker was on the convention circuit as a sort-of starlet with a weird cult following. Something tells her that her father never would have traveled at all if not for her mother.

Fireflies wink gold between willow-armed swamp trees and tall grasses, while a nervous pit grows in her stomach. "Does he know we're coming?" she asks, fretting they're imposing.

"We told him. He's excited to see you."

"Does he know I'm..." What? A freak of nature?

"He knows about the blessing, the general idea of it," Charlotte says with the careful tact of one who knows her way around a courtroom. "If that's what you're asking. We didn't tell him anything else."

Chloe bites her lip. "And when do I have to meet God?"

"You don't have to do anything," Lucifer protests, chains clinking as he walks on her left.

"I made a deal," Chloe reminds him, and knows he understands by the set of his jaw.

"You'll stay with your father tonight," Charlotte says. "Amenadiel will take you to see God tomorrow."

There's a sentence Chloe never expected to hear in her life.

The dirt path and woods open onto a clearing where the reeds grow thicker, and the pleasant babel of the frogs and crickets crescendoes. A small two-story cabin, its windows aglow with lamplight, stands beside a wooden dock that stretches over a lake so still it reflects the stars. Water gently laps at the swamp grasses and the dock's weather-worn legs. Chloe never imagined her father in any paradise, especially one like this, but there's no denying this is a paradise.
"Well, this is where I leave you," Charlotte announces, taking a polite step back.

"Don't you want to stay?" Chloe asks, though she's not sure why. Maybe she's just stalling. How do you say hello to a father you last saw lying in a casket?

"Family reunions aren't really my thing—that goes for my own family, much less anybody else's. No offense." She looks at Lucifer. "You would not believe who made it from my family tree."

"Oh, I bet I would," he chuckles. "Guiltless doesn't always mean good."

Chloe frowns. "Will we see you again, Charlotte?"

"Maybe," she answers, "but you'll be busy tomorrow, and then..." She shrugs and smiles wanly.

"So this might be goodbye." Chloe's eyes sting as she considers it could be goodbye for a very, very long time. Maybe forever. Which is no different from what she first believed when Charlotte died, but that was before she knew the truth.

"Goodbyes aren't really my thing, either." Charlotte angles her body sideways, preparing to return to the path they came from. "I think I've got a bottle of wine calling my name... Take care of each other, will you?"

"Definitely," Chloe says without hesitation.

Charlotte wiggles her fingers, and they watch her leave. Somehow she still saunters in her stilettos, even on clumpy dirt.

"Farewell, Charlotte," Lucifer sighs.

They stand there until they can no longer see her moving through the darkness.

"She'd never have escaped Hell if you hadn't helped her," Chloe comments.

"Ah, well," Lucifer says, "I didn't do much, darling. Just a little nudge in the right direction, is all."

Chloe hums. Isn't that what so many of the souls in Hell desperately need?

Lucifer holds out a cuffed arm toward her father's slice of paradise. "Time to reunite with Papa Decker?" he asks. There's a small, anxious lilt to the question that echoes in her gut, but she tugs on her shirt and nods.

On the narrow porch, not far from a potted plant and a rocking chair, Chloe knocks on the cabin door and waits, feeling the same nervous energy as when she knocked on the door to her mother's beach house a couple of weeks ago. Except it's worse. Much, much worse. In the span of seconds, she imagines a dozen horrible scenarios: that her father's shirt will still be bloody, that two holes in his chest and abdomen will gape and ooze; that he won't remember her and won't be glad to see her; or worst of all, that it's not her father in this cabin, that he really is in Hell.

Boots thud on wood flooring, leaving her feeling faint. The door opens a second later, and Chloe's heart lurches. John Decker beams at her—and not the John Decker she remembers lying in a casket, but the kind-faced father from her childhood. No gray in his hair, laugh lines so fine as to be nonexistent.

He shakes his head, still smiling. "Look at you, monkey."

"Dad," she breathes, and throws herself at him.
Deep sobs wrack her ribs and pour from her throat. He holds her and shushes her as she clings to his shirt, which smells of an old, familiar cologne. If she just squeezes tightly enough, she thinks she might drag his soul into herself and steal him back to Earth. Eventually, though, the tears subside, and she backs away, embarrassed.

"Sorry." Beside her, Lucifer clears his throat, and his red pocket square dangles before her. She smiles weakly and takes it.

"No need to apologize," her father says. "Can't say I meant to leave the way I did." He sniffs roughly and studies Lucifer with suspicion. "So this is—"

"Lucifer," Chloe interrupts, thinking she might as well rip the Band-Aid off herself.

"Right. They warned me."

She holds to the silk square tightly. "He's my...boyfriend."

It's a word for sixteen year olds that's inadequate for all they are and have been through, but Lucifer grins proudly nonetheless.

"Pleasure to meet you, Officer Decker." Metal clinks as he extends a hand in greeting; his other is forced to lift with it.

Her father doesn't take it. "You've got a bit of a rep," he says, looking the Devil up and down before quirking a brow at Chloe. "He's in chains, honey."

"He's innocent."

"Mostly," Lucifer says with a flirtatious grin, letting his hands drop.

"Uh-huh," John replies dryly. "And just to confirm, you are the Devil? As in the guy from those stories I never believed in until I kicked it and ended up here?"

"I... Well, y-yes, sir, I am that," Lucifer stammers. "But I assure you what you might have read or heard about me isn't precisely true, and I have the best intentions for the det—for Chloe." He nods repeatedly under her father's placid gaze, but soon the silence breaks him and the confessions start. "In case you're concerned, I am not in the business of bartering, buying, or stealing souls. I don't look like a goat, anywhere; don't eat small children, didn't actually attempt a coup against Dad, no matter how much he might have deserved it. I do, perhaps, have a few bad habits, such as—"

"Okay, Lucifer," Chloe interrupts. She struggles to contain her laughter, and judging by her father's face, it's a near thing for him, too, which only makes her smile more. He'd always been a little old-fashioned when it came to her dating—not because she was a girl, but because he saw horrible things on the job. But at the end of the day, he respected her decisions, though she can tell this one might be pushing it a little, in the same way whipping her top off for Hot Tub High School had. She loops her arm with one of Lucifer's. "Can we come in?"

Her father rolls his eyes. "Get in here already." He glances at Lucifer. "Yeah, you too."

The cabin isn't Chloe's idea of heavenly, but it's obvious the solitude suits her father. It's homey on the inside, filled with quilts and worn furniture, a boxy TV that looks like it time traveled from their 1990s family living room, and a stack of fishing poles jammed into a corner. She wasn't even aware he liked to fish.

In some ways, it's so unassuming that it's easy to forget they're in Heaven. She can almost pretend
John Decker is still alive and she's visiting him somewhere on Earth. It's a nice delusion.

Now, he claps his hands together. "Anybody up for a beer?"

"There's beer in Heaven?" Chloe's brows lift.

"Heaven may be boring, but it wouldn't be Heaven at all if it were a dry plane," Lucifer says, scandalized. At that, he awkwardly removes his flask from his suit jacket and gives it a shake, sloshing liquor in steel and setting his chains to jangling. "I'm covered, thank you."

"Uh-huh," John says, still skeptical of Lucifer's restraints. "Chloe?"

"Um, yeah, sure. Thanks." She's never had a drink with her father. Never got the chance.

He clears his throat. "What about an egg in a hole?"

"A what in a what now?" Lucifer says.

Tears burn Chloe's eyes again as she nods. "I'd like that a lot, Dad." She glances at Lucifer. "The Hawaiian bread sandwiches I make."

"Ooh." He grins at her father, laying his charm on thick. "Can I get me one of those, as well, Officer?"

They stand around the small kitchen while the sandwiches fry on a hot plate, making awkward conversation about nothing really at all. This isn't how family reunions are supposed to go—not with the Devil by your side in Heaven. The eighteen-year gap is just as acute, Chloe thinks, even without her confusing stint in Hell. She isn't a young actress anymore. She's not even a detective for the LAPD. She isn't sure what she is or isn't.

When the sandwiches are finished and plated, they return to the living room and sit in old recliners that are softened by age. Lucifer settles next to the wood fireplace, which crackles with flames, and stretches out his long legs. For a while, they're silent as they eat and sip their drinks.

"Are you happy here, Dad?" Chloe asks suddenly.

"It's Heaven, honey. I can't complain." He looks at Lucifer. "Better than the alternative, I bet."

"It is that," Lucifer says. "For you, at least." But then his eyes focus on her father closely. "And yet that's no answer." He leans forward. "What is it you desire that you don't have here, John?"

"Lucifer."

But unlike his daughter, John Decker's soul falls easily under the Devil's spell. "Penny," he answers on a sigh. "I miss Penny all the damn time." And then he blinks and blushes bright red.

She's never seen her father blush.

"Well." Lucifer's smile is soft as he relaxes. "It's understandable you'd miss the Vampire Queen."

The blush fades, and her father grins at Lucifer for what might be the first time. "She was real good in those, wasn't she?"

Chloe watches, aghast, as her dead father and the retired lord of Hell gush over her mother's B movie career. They know all the plots, all the characters, all the taglines. She knows most of them, too, but feels no fondness for them, maybe because of how driven her mother was to have her join
Hollywood's ranks. But seeing two of the most important men of her life get along soothes a part of her soul she hadn't known needed soothing.

"How's your acting going?" her father asks a while later, and takes another sip of his beer.

"Oh, I'm..." Her heart beats fast. "I'm not acting anymore, Dad. I'm a detective."

"And she's bloody brilliant at it," Lucifer interjects.

When her father doesn't say anything, she keeps talking. "I used to be with the LAPD, but"—she glances at Lucifer—"we've gone freelance. Or we're trying to." If they could just catch a break.

He looks between them, opening and closing his mouth several times. To be fair, even to her it's still strange that the Devil likes to solve crime by her side. Finally, he says, "I didn't want you going into law enforcement, you know. Undercover work is dangerous, honey. And the whole damn department is corrupt, whether you're in it or not."

"I know that, Dad." Irritation pricks at her. "I'm not a kid or a rookie." She doesn't bother revealing she gave her life for a case. He may know she's a miracle, but he doesn't have to know everything. The only difference between the two of them is that something has brought her back at least once. "And I figured out what happened to you," she continues, "with the deputy warden."

"You did, huh?" Her father grimaces. "He in jail?"

"He's old borscht by now," Lucifer says, voice cold. "Likely in Hell."

"Russian mob did him in," Chloe says more softly. For the first time, she wonders about the details of that.

Tense silence follows. Finally, Chloe's father clears his throat. "So, tell me about being a detective."

She starts from the top, explaining how much she'd missed him after he was gone, how she'd bounced around from one job to the next, all the while knowing what she really wanted to do. She just hadn't wanted to do it to her mother. But in the end, she followed her heart. There was training and not-so-good-natured hazing; all the struggles of being a young woman with a "torrid" acting career in a department full of macho men. And then she settled into the work, and she was good at it.

"Oh!" she gasps, yanking her phone out of her back pocket while praying it will work. "And I have a little girl. You're a grandfather!" The device works, though the battery is low and there's no reception. She pulls up pictures of Trixie and smiles when he first marvels at the device and then tears up at the photos.

"She's his?"

"Uh, no." Chloe snorts at how relieved her father looks. "I was married before."

He gives her a sad smile. "Didn't work out, huh?"

"Not really," she says. "I think I was looking for something different."

"One of a kind, even," Lucifer jokes, one side of his mouth kicked up. Eyes shuttered, he's toed off his shoes and slouched in the brown recliner to rest his head. He looks like he's minutes away from falling asleep.
Chloe rolls her eyes at him, anyway.

Turning back to her father, she tells him about Dan Espinoza, who'd seemed like a good match at the time. Safe. Familiar. She leaves out the bad parts, deciding they're not worth talking about anymore. She tells him about cases, instead—the weird ones, the funny ones, the ones she thought would kill her, but didn't. And then she tells him about the Devil, who snores softly a few feet away, about how he kept showing up for a job he didn't have. About how he's saved her, over and over.

"You've got that look," her father chuckles. "Like with Cameron."

She scrunches her nose at the distant memory of her first boyfriend, but she doesn't deny she's in a deep, irrational love. Nor does she explain that, to her, those feelings have lasted for many, many years, that they pained and soothed her in the darkness of Hell.

"Will being with him give you trouble here?" He keeps his voice low.

"I don't know," she answers just as softly.

"Don't care, either, do you?"

"Not really."

Though he frowns, he nods, as well, accepting it.

When she feels she's out of stories, she realizes it's late. In the silence, she hears soft rain pattering on the roof and windows.

"Sorry for rambling," Chloe says, even though she doesn't want to say good night. "You're probably tired." She looks at Lucifer, who's gone boneless. Emotional exhaustion, she thinks, and weariness echoes in her body.

Her father doesn't reply for a long time. And then he asks a question she wishes he wouldn't.

"Hey, monkey, what's going on? That angel Amenadiel told me you're up here to meet God. I've been here a long time, and even I haven't met the head honcho, though I haven't gone looking, either." His brows furrow, and she waits as he sorts out his words. "You were always our miracle. We didn't know you were a miracle. A real one. We didn't believe in those things."

"I don't know what it means," she answers. It's evasion of Luciferian proportions.

Blue eyes study her, looking into and through her, and she knows it's the look she pins suspects—and sometimes the Devil—with. "You've got an idea, though, don't you?"

Chloe avoids his gaze, focusing instead on the long-empty beer bottle wedged between her knees. It has no brand, no label at all. Just beer. Just the best damn beer she's ever tasted, and that's having drunk some of the most expensive, award-winning beer available in Lux. She tries to hold on to the glass, to the present, but her mind wanders and lands, as it so often does now, on Abeni, stumbling out of the mouth of the cave.

Every crime scene breaks her heart.

"What is it?" her father presses. He leans forward and grabs one of her hands.

It's a strong, young hand, but she thinks if he passed the gates, he would be a mere wisp of a soul, a
crab in search of a shell. She squeezes his fingers to know that here, in this place she'll probably never set foot in again, he is whole.

With a quick, nervous glance toward Lucifer, she whispers, "You know how the wrong people sometimes end up in prison?" Her father nods. She hesitates to tell him the truth, even as she longs for his advice. "Hell's like that," she says finally.

His fingers become clammy, and for a moment, she thinks about how strange it is that Heaven maintains this human trait. Or maybe it's just self-actualization, a soul's infuriatingly resilient muscle memory of inconvenient sweat.

"He took you there?" her father bites out, looking like he's seconds away from launching himself at an oblivious Devil.

"No!" She shakes her head. "No," she insists more softly. "He got me out."

Her father subsides and looks between the two of them. "Okay, you better start talking."

With great reluctance, Chloe tells him about Hell, condensing the details of how she got there and how long she was held captive, much less what the experience is still doing to her psyche. Instead, she tells him about the loops, about how they work and how they might be changed. She leaves out her gift and the strange, bright sun that they left floating above Hell. It makes it easier to pretend she's still the daughter he knew, even if she has been dragged across time and space.

"I think I have to try to get"—she swallows, struggling with the word—"God to change things." It's the first time she's voiced her desire. She picks at the navy, crocheted blanket hanging off the arm of her chair. "What am I supposed to do if he says no? If he just...doesn't care and leaves us like this?"

"So that rumor about him wanting to..." He father waves a hand. "That's true, huh?"

She nods. "That's what we've been told."

He leans back in his chair, looking shocked, but also pensive. "You're in real deep, aren't you?"

Chloe breathes a laugh. "Yeah."

Her father shakes his head. "I don't know what to tell you, monkey. You just gotta do the best you can, I guess. Within reason." He points a finger. "Don't be a hero."

Ironic, coming from him. Words, too, that she's said to others.

"But what if doing my best isn't enough?" she despairs. "What if it's never enough?" Even here, she feels some distant echo of Hell's weight as it fills with more souls. She has no idea how Lucifer has lived with it. Well, other than through booze and sex.

"Sometimes our best isn't enough," her father admits sadly. "But helping one is better than—"

"—helping none," she finishes with a small smile.

Lucifer chooses that moment to let out a loud snort before smacking his lips. They snicker, the seriousness of their conversation fading.

"Come on, let's get your guy a real bed," her father says, pushing to his feet. He looks at her awkwardly. "Same room for you two?"
She laughs. "Same room."

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Morning comes too soon. Where her arm hangs over Lucifer's side, golden light streams through the bedroom window, tingling as it touches her skin. Chloe breathes deeply in the stillness and listens to soft, melodic birdsong. There's something clean and warm to Heaven's air, something that reminds her of the way Lucifer smells beneath his cologne and soap. It is a scent that whispers all is well in the world.

The peace is disrupted when Lucifer jerks and gasps awake. All is not well in his world. Heart thudding, she smooths her fingers over his rumpled shirt, which was impossible to remove because of the chains. "You're okay," she whispers, while his back rises and falls rapidly against her chest.

"Heaven is bollocks," he grouches, letting his head fall back to the pillow.

They get up and cook breakfast with her father, but Lucifer struggles to help with his restraints. Frustrated by the limitation and his unkempt appearance, he soon leaves them for the dock, muttering familiar curses in that unfamiliar accent. The screen door slams, and he curses again.

"He always this prickly?" her father asks, eyeing the door skeptically while turning sizzling bacon in a pan. It's so weirdly domestic that she stares for a beat too long.


Foggy mist, tinged orange and pink by early morning light, hovers above the lake when they join Lucifer. They sit on the dock's edge, plates in their laps, feet swinging over water kissed by fish. Birds sing to each other the way Chloe imagines they must have when Earth was young, before pollution, maybe even before humans. And though she believes she understands Lucifer's scorn for Heaven, she can't share it in the moment, not with her father sitting next to her and paradise pleasing her every sense.

But none of it can last.

Amenadiel arrives shortly after breakfast, and she stands in the living room, her throat closing as tears fill her eyes. She can't look at her father; she can't bear to see him crying, too. He seems so alive next to her, as alive as she feels, but he isn't, not really, and they will continue to be separated by the indifferent laws of universes.

Lucifer glances between them, frowning. "Brother," he appeals, his tone turning silken, "perhaps we could come to a new agreement, stay a few more days here? I'm sure Dad will still be a sad sack, then, and we did arrive rather late last night."

Chloe's heart aches to know he would make such a sacrifice for her.

But the set of Amenadiel's mouth is answer enough before he shakes his head. "This is the time the council would give you." He looks at Chloe, and then at her father. "I'm sorry. If it makes you feel any better, you are the only humans who have ever been reunited this way."

No. It doesn't make Chloe feel better. Not at all. And when she clings to her father's neck, she's too upset to be embarrassed by her babbling.
"Love you, monkey," he says into her hair, and the words turn her into a five-year-old again, into an agonized limpet pleading with him not to leave her behind on her first day of kindergarten. She gasps into his shirt collar, and she's nineteen again, making wishes over a dead man while camera lenses zoom in on her grief.

But this time she's the one who's leaving. "I love you, too, Dad." He tells her he is proud of her, to do her best, to do what is right. "I will," she says, terrified of the promise.

When he lets go, her father clears his throat and holds out a hand to Lucifer, who gives a perplexed, lopsided grin as he takes it.

"Don't fuck it up," John Decker says, and a loud snort burns Chloe's nose.

"I—" Lucifer swallows. "Yes, sir, Officer."

Her father rolls his eyes. "You can call me John."

But Lucifer never does.

The door to the cabin closes behind them a short while later, and Chloe doesn't look back as she takes Lucifer's hand. The celestial cuff lies warm between their wrists as they trudge behind Amenadiel and leave her father behind.

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In the Silver City, the cerulean sky is alive with soaring, motley-winged angels. Chills sweep through Chloe as she gazes up at the swarm, which is so thick it obscures visibility of the massive, marble tower that serves as the city's central focal point. There must be thousands. They fly above and below one another, circling like great, frenzied carrion birds. Cherubim, with their fluffy, petite wings, weave between the larger angels, flinging themselves into and away from the throng.

It might be beautiful if it wasn't so terrifyingly alien.

Chloe slows to a stop beside a crystal fountain. "Is this, like, a ritual or something?"

"No," Amenadiel sighs. "It's fear. With both of you here, I think Father's intentions are finally real to them."

Water mists across her cheeks while she stares at the angels. "You have...a lot of brothers and sisters."

"Yes, Mum and Dad bred like celestial bunnies," Lucifer agrees with a disgusted look. He twists his bound form toward Amenadiel. "Seriously, who invited the whole bloody host, brother?"

Amenadiel scowls back at him. "Don't look at me. Our arrival last night caused a commotion. And by our arrival, I don't mean my arrival."

At this, Lucifer grins. "Admit it. You've all been bored out of your feathered skulls without me."

"I think they're more interested in Chloe meeting Father today than they are any trouble you might be getting up to," Amenadiel says dryly. "Come on, let's keep moving."

But movement proves difficult, the closer they get to what Amenadiel calls the Great Tower. The swarm thickens, assaulting the senses with its overbearing presence. Angels shout to be heard over
the heavy beating of their wings, which stir the air and send loose strands from Chloe's ponytail flying around her head. With the skies overfilled, many angels are even on the ground, milling shoulder to shoulder and wing to wing. They block Chloe's view of the tower, but sometimes, when the crowd parts just so, she spots hilly piles of goods littering the ground beyond. Offerings?

Before she can ask about it, an angel lands abruptly beside Lucifer, one green-and-navy wing thumping into his side. "Watch where you're bloody landing!" Lucifer snaps, his own shoulders twitching.

"Samael," the brown-skinned woman gasps before launching back into the air.

His name is soon hurled between the masses, juicy gossip on some tongues, a curse on others. On the tail of it, she hears her own name and the word "miracle."

Lucifer bares his teeth in a silent snarl. "Have we seen enough yet, Detective? These cuffs are chafing."

Amenadiel looks concerned. "You can't leave yet. Father needs—"

"I know I made a deal," Chloe interrupts him, speaking loudly enough to be heard. She touches Lucifer's elbow. "And I got to see my dad and bring you here."

"Yes, but deals are really my thing. Detective, not yours," he says, looking as stressed in his rumpled clothes as she feels. "You can break one—break as many as you like! These self-righteous gits expect no better of humans, I assure you."

He doesn't understand. She looks toward the tower she can barely see through the crowd. She has questions for God—demands, even—and they press on her as she nears the Great Tower. Adrenaline pumps through her veins until everything is sharp and in focus.

Recognizing her stubbornness, Lucifer pleads with Amenadiel. "It's too bloody packed. We need to fly, brother." Another angel jostles him, and Chloe clings to his elbow more tightly.

"No flying," Amenadiel insists, but he stretches a dark wing at their backs like a shield. "Michael would—"

"Yes, where is Michael? Shouldn't he be keeping the pea—"

Lucifer's words are cut short as an angel lands hard in front of Chloe, her sandals clapping on the ground. The light-skinned, blond-haired beauty regards her with large and curious brown eyes. "Miracle, you must send word to Father for me."

"Oh, bugger off, Kab," Lucifer spits.

The angel turns on him like a viper. "Silen—"


"Miracle," says another from above.

Chloe presses into Lucifer's side, unnerved by the zeal in his brothers' and sisters' eyes.

"Stand back!" Amenadiel booms, beating his shadowed wings in warning. But whatever sway Heaven's firstborn held the night before has now disappeared, and he is left shouting at those who will not hear, even if they can.
Angels speak over each other, begging Chloe to intercede, to remind God of the wonders they have made for him, to offer their love and gratitude and service. The desperation, the sickness, of it curls in her stomach like spoiled food. This isn't a family. It's a cult fearing a leader's demise.

At her back, Lucifer trembles as he struggles to contain his wings. "Detective..."

Where's a riot shield when you need one? Holding to Lucifer with one hand, Chloe lifts the other, preparing to help push their way through. She's barely taken a step when fingers clasp around her wrist and yank her forward. Knocked off balance, she stumbles, gasping at the strength of the pull.

"Chloe!" Lucifer shouts, and she feels him grab the back of her shirt, only to lose his hold a second later. Her t-shirt sits strangely on her skin when he releases her, its threads stretched.

The crowd consumes her, drawing her into its churning belly. Chloe yells and cranes her neck over her shoulder, searching for Lucifer, but the mob shifts, and she's on her own.

"Let go of me!" she snaps, twisting free from her captor, who remains unseen between two other angels in front of her. Her light trembles within her, longing to be loosed, but she holds it close to her chest as she moves in a new direction. What might happen to Lucifer if she makes a scene, if he makes a scene?

"Is that her?" an angel asks.

"There she is!"

Chloe ducks and darts away again.

She tries to shove her way back to where Lucifer and Amenadiel were, but the crowd pushes and pulls her in new and different directions like crazed fans in a mosh pit. Bare, booted, and sandaled feet narrowly miss her head as angels fly low above her. She dodges and weaves, stumbling over and around small mountains of smashed fruit and crumpled letters, broken instruments and trampled trinkets. Many of the angels are taller or bigger than she is, and she collides into their sides or backs, where she sputters on feathers and oddly woven fabrics and leather. At least none of them recognizes her now. There's too much yelling, weeping, and even singing to notice the human in their midst.

An angel's heavy wing sideswipes her, shoving her to the left. She slams into something solid with a pained gasp. Turning with a reflexive apology on her lips, she realizes she's crashed not into another angel, but against a solid wood door embedded in gray-veined marble. Without hesitating, she twists the crystal handle and, finding the door unlocked, pushes inside.
The peacefulness within the Great Tower is jarring. Ambient light filters through stained glass windows, bathing the hollowed out middle of the tower in soft pastels that complement the golden flames rippling atop mounted torches. Leaning against the wooden door, Chloe breathes heavily as she ducks her head in prayer. *Everything's okay,* she tells Lucifer. *I'm in the tower.* Gently, she reminds him not to do anything stupid. And that she loves him. Which is *why* she doesn't want him to do anything stupid.

When she drops her hands and opens her eyes, an angel is standing no more than twenty feet away, studying her. Gasping, Chloe throws a hand up in self-defense. Only years of de-escalation training keep her from blasting a hole in his middle.

"*Jesus,*" she breathes, and then cringes. Who even knows how Jesus figures into this family. *"Sorry."*

The white-robed angel has a soft face that matches the almost downy texture of his baby blue wings. They twitch slightly before he speaks. "Chloe Jane Decker, daughter of John Curtis Decker and Penelope Nicole Hammond?"

Wow. "Uh, yep, that's me." She lowers her hand. "Who are you?"

"I am Gabriel, the ears and tongue of the Most High."

"O-okay."

"The Lord your God is waiting, Chloe Decker."

"Right..." She nods and swallows, feeling uneasy as she eyes the shelves of books and scrolls winding around the tower's interior. Ella would love this place. Chloe can't wait to leave. "You can take me to meet him when Lucifer gets here."

"Father is not seeing Samael. He, like all the rest, will be turned away from the Tower of the Lord. You, however, are a valued guest."

Lucky her. "Is that why they're all outside?" she asks, unable to turn off the part of herself that will always be a detective.

"Yes."

"And they just...obey?"

"Why would they not, Chloe Decker?" But Gabriel's jaw twitches as he grinds his teeth. Interesting.

"Chloe's fine—just Chloe—and I really think you should go get Lucifer." Even with her prayer, he is *not* going to behave, she fears.

Gabriel sighs deeply and points to a door on the right. "I will allow him in the waiting room, human, if you—"

"It's Chloe."

He purses soft lips. "I will make a place for him, *Chloe,* if you will take the conveyor to the top."
He nods to a wooden panel on the wall to their left—a door to an elevator, she realizes. "The Lord waits in his atelier. Do not delay."

Before she can ask what an atelier is, Gabriel turns away and disappears through the waiting room door. She opens her mouth, then closes it and shakes her head. Lucifer and Amenadiel are practically normal compared to their other siblings.

Chloe bites her lip, hesitating. She longs for Lucifer's support as she tilts her head back and looks at the tower's top floor, where several landing platforms extend for angels who are no longer allowed inside. But if he won't be allowed to join her...all the more reason to get this over and done with. She sends him another prayer she hopes—but doubts—is reassuring and floats toward the elevator as if in a dream.

The buttons on the operation panel are all familiar, and she presses the one for the top floor before leaning against the cabin wall. She wonders what God will be like, what she'll make of him. She's imagined their meeting ever since she agreed to it. How she might shame him for all the evil he's allowed, how she might need to break up a fight between him and Lucifer—at least that's not a concern right now. She's even imagined the mortal sin of punching His Holiness in the face.

She's pretty sure he deserves it.

But now that the moment of truth has arrived, she's terrified. This feeling twisting inside her must be what people felt in the moments before the axe fell or the wood crate was kicked out from under them, plunging them into the strangling clutches of a noose.

On the top floor, she steps out of the elevator car and wanders to the edge of the walkway. Leaning against railing, she looks down the long, cavernous belly of the tower. It does nothing to soothe her nerves.

"Hello?" she calls. Her voice echoes.

Several doors line the long, circular hallway, but warm light glows beneath only one of them. She gravitates toward it, heart pounding, her breaths tiny gasps that are loud to her ears. Before she can overthink things, she knocks—and knocks again when no one answers. She looks up and down the hallway, ensuring no other rooms are in use. They don't seem to be.

Cringing, she tries twisting the crystal handle. It turns, as unlocked as the door into the Great Tower was.

The room beyond is massive and has a vaulted ceiling that reaches up to a dizzying, domed point. More shelves stacked with books and scrolls line the walls, while a narrow cot is wedged into a far corner. But it's the mammoth table, as large as the main room of Lucifer's penthouse on Earth, that draws her attention. A holographic display of a city plays out above the table's finely-crafted, gleaming wood. She can make out the shapes of humans, no bigger than fire ants, walking the daytime streets of a busy metropolis—Tokyo, maybe? She thinks she recognizes the buildings from pictures.

Her gut tells her it's not prerecorded footage, but rather a feed of a real place in real time. Satellite footage and shots are frequently utilized by law enforcement, but this is the stuff of science fiction.

A dark-haired man sits in a stool before the table and its breathtaking visual. Robed in white and purple, he hunches, dwarfed by the brilliance. His head is bent in a way that suggests he's fallen asleep while holding his chin, and his shoulders lift and fall gently as he breathes. Beside him, a long-necked bottle stands on the edge of the table.
Chloe clears her throat. "Excuse me?"

The robed figure startles with a snort and sits up so quickly that he nearly knocks over the bottle. He snatches hold of the neck and rights it.

"Sorry," she rushes to say. "I'm looking for—" A hysterical laugh burbles up. "Well, I've been sent to meet—"

The man turns to face her, curiosity written across his beautiful features. "You're here to meet me, my child." He slides from the stool and stands straight. He is at least Lucifer's height and carries a similar larger-than-life presence that hits her like a gust of wind. She would almost swear he is haloed by light.

Chloe freezes, her eyes widening. This man is no acolyte. He's no man at all. "You're... You're..."

This is God. She knows it in her atoms.

As with the Devil, she had preconceived ideas about what God must look like—wrinkled, wizened, maybe a long, white beard. But God is no Father Time. He is wingless, tall, and unnervingly handsome, cut like the warring heroes and capricious gods of Greco-Roman reliefs. His beard is dark and neat, just thick enough to reveal a tight curl, and a complement to his head of unruly, black hair. If not for the bold streak of white at his temple, she would think him a man no older than forty-five.

There is no mistaking his relationship to Lucifer, although someone might be forgiven for assuming they are brothers.

But the longer Chloe falls into the depths of familiar brown eyes, the more she senses the vast difference between Holy Father and unholy son. Stare at Lucifer too long, and you'll be drawn in like a fish on a hook. But the animal in her trembles before the face of God, begging her to kneel, to run, to hide. Then the fear passes as quickly as it came, leaving behind a no less overwhelming gladness. Tears stream down her cheeks, which ache as she smiles and laughs. She has a soul-deep desire to sing and dance, and maybe, for a while, does both.

If Lucifer is a river, God is the ocean, and she is drowning.

"Peace be upon you," God breathes, and everything stills.

Chloe's mind clears at once with the crisp clarity usually only multiple cups of coffee afford her. As if God is a puppeteer who has righted her marionette feet.

"I'm here," she says in a hushed voice, if only to remind herself that she is alive. "I'm here."

"You are, aren't you?" Amusement plays across God's doppelganger face, and his otherworldliness recedes that much more, until it's hard to remember why she ever thought he was intimidating. "Come. Eat and drink with me." He nods to a rectangular table set off to the side. Large tomes and haphazardly coiled scrolls litter the space. "You may call me Father," he says in that imperious celestial accent. His robes glide across the marble floor as he traverses the room.

The words are like a splash of ice water across her face.

"You're not my father," she says, folding her hands in front of herself as she remains in the doorway. "With all due respect. Sir."

"Lord, then." God sinks into one of four chairs that surround the messy table. His mouth quirks as
he regards her. "Now that the glory has faded, I can tell you don't like me very much, do you?" Her body breaks into a sweat as he crosses his legs and smooths his robes. "You've been very angry with me for a while now. I can feel it."

Can he read her thoughts? No, she decides firmly. Believing otherwise will make her go insane.

"It doesn't matter what I think," she says carefully, while daring to walk deeper into the fantastical studio. On her left, people in Tokyo live their lives, oblivious to the Almighty's watchful eye. "It matters what you think and do."

"Did you read that on a throw pillow?" God quips. "Don't tell me you're one of those humans with the Chicken Soup books."

The biting remark is so similar to something Lucifer might say that she nearly laughs, but on closer inspection the joke doesn't land right—doesn't, in fact, feel like a joke at all. It feels like judgment.

"I don't have any of those books, no." But she doubts he'd think much of her small library with its special edition of The Class of 3001 series. Even she has to admit the last book sucked.

"In that case, I value what you think." God waves a hand to the chair across from him. "So, come, sit and tell me why you've been angry, my miracle child."

None of this is going according to plan—what little plan she had other than get in, see her father, say her piece to the man behind the curtain, and get out. Now, she feels like some green detective, thrown by an unexpected twist in a case. Drawing a deep breath, she thaws herself and goes to sit across from God himself, her posture painfully rigid.

Chloe jumps when he snaps his fingers. Stubby-legged cherubim glide through the open doorway moments later, chirruping like humanoid birds. God demands wine and refreshments without so much as a please or thank you, and off they flit, worker bees on a mission. Chloe watches them fly from the room.

She wonders if they are slaves.

"Well?"

Blinking, she turns back to him. Here's her chance to air her grievances and ask for the changes she told her father were needed. But talking to God feels nothing like talking to self-righteous angels or sociopathic demons. Her throat goes dry, even as beneath the protective cover of the table she drags sweaty palms across the thighs of her skinny jeans. "You won't hold anything I say against Lucifer?"

Where God's fingers drum on the top of the table, his rhythm falters. "I was not pleased to see my other children allowed him entry," he says. "But I've left Samael alone in my kingdom since you've arrived, have I not?"

"Yes, but——"

"You have my word he will leave here as he came."

"You won't try to send him back to Hell?"

"Someone needs to guard the gates. As I understand it, you, of all humans, should understand Hell's function now."
"More than you think," she says, unable to smooth the edge of her tone. "Don't send him back to Hell. I-I won't stay if you don't agree to that."

"Fine," he snorts. "Neither I nor my children will send him back."

Narrowing her eyes, she hunts for signs of deception. She has faith in the Devil's word. His father's...she has her doubts. But she allows herself to relax. A little.

She picks at the skin on the edge of her thumb. "Why do you even care that I'm angry? You've never cared that Lucifer was angry."

He counters the question with another. "Why do you think you were Made, Chloe?"

She squirms under God's piercing gaze. "Amenadiel said I was created to...fix things." Her hands tingle with the memory of Cain's destruction. "But I don't know what that means."

God's mouth lifts in a wry smirk. "Would you believe I don't either?"

"That's...not comforting."

"I imagine not, but such is free will." His smirk softens into what almost counts as a smile. "You are the first and only human to have divine purpose. The most I can tell you is that everywhere you go, you will be motivated to right wrongs, big and small, because that is what is stamped upon your soul. You were created to, with any luck, right my wrongs. Thus my interest in your opinion on the state of things."

Chloe stares at a large, leather-bound book on the table, the meaning of her life warping into a shape she's not sure she likes. I believe in right and wrong, she's told Lucifer and Cain and others. That was always true, even before she knew there was an afterlife, but the depth of the feeling had been hard to explain. As were all the things she'd been willing to do for what she believed in. Things that, sometimes, she knows or suspects are wrong, in and of themselves. Things that happen when there is no right answer.

The cherubim return. There are four of them this time, all carrying or helping to carry one item or another—a platter of fruits, cheeses, and breads; a bottle of wine and two glasses. God sweeps an arm across the table, shoving aside books and scrolls to make room for the platter. The glasses are set down, and he plucks the bottle out of tiny hands. The winged creatures bow in the air.

"Thank you," Chloe murmurs as they depart, feeling someone should be polite.

"Wine?" God asks, already pouring. He stops only when it has nearly reached the lip. After filling his own glass to its brim and stuffing several olives into his mouth, he raises his dark brows at her. "Go on. Be honest."

Though the thought of drinking turns her stomach, Chloe clings to the stem of her overflowing wine glass. Here's your chance, Decker, she thinks to herself. She tries to consider her words carefully, but instead she sees faces in her mind's eye. Faces of the dead.

"You let horrible things happen to us," she blurs, unable to soften her words.

"You do horrible things to yourselves," God replies, spreading soft cheese on a triangle of flatbread. "I've given you a habitat, if you can keep it. No more, no less. How you choose to utilize your free will is on you. Personally, I advise against nuclear warfare."

She's heard this argument before, albeit from history's underdog.
"You've abandoned us," she argues, feeling bolder. "At the very least, you've abandoned your children." Lucifer, most of all.

"Do you think you could have done better?" he asks, with the tone one might use for discussing the weather.

Chloe pauses, uncertain. Once, she would have said yes, but that was before everything supernatural unraveled her life.

"I think I would have tried to do better."

"Trying looks different after billions of years."

"Lucifer still tries." God's vexed expression raises the hairs on her arms. "Just... Why even make any of us if you're going to let us screw everything up and die? And to, what, go to Hell?" She spits the last word.

"Not everyone goes to Hell," he reminds her. "I'm told your father didn't." He crunches on a cucumber. "Do you know where I came from, my child?"

She frowns, caught off guard by the change in topic. "No?"

"Nor do I." He shrugs. "But I think I came from something. Or I used to think that," he says, and takes several loud gulps of his wine. He refills the glass immediately. "The question was what made me—who, why. That's what all of this is about, my child." He waves his glass toward the display of Earth. "Answering the call of Creation with creation, trying to know my makers—if I have any." He scoffs. "Oh, don't look at me like that. You can't pretend humans haven't tried to know me in much the same way. Moses came very close before the whole burning bush debacle confused him for life." He rolls his eyes.

"That was real?"

"What I'm saying is I made it in your nature to create, to desire to create and know something bigger than yourselves—to know me. Love me, hate me, all you like, but you are all, one way or another, Made in my image." He pushes the platter toward her. "Are you not going to eat? The hummus is divine."

Chloe ignores the food. He reminds her of Professor Carlisle and his poisons, willing to sacrifice everyone and everything to prove a point. She doesn't regret leaving him to his Hell loop.

"Do you honestly think any of that excuses you?" she asks. "While you were busy trying to find yourself, people who don't deserve to be in Hell were being sent there because of your...design. And, sure, there are awful people in Hell, too, but even some of them are probably redeemable." Was Cain? Her heart beats fast. "They have to be. Let them serve their time, learn from their mistakes, and have something better than an eternity of torture. The punishment doesn't fit the crime."

"Well. You are impassioned, aren't you?" God chuckles against the mouth of his wine glass. "It always comes back to Hell, doesn't it? No wonder you and Samael get on so well. Uriel did warn me this could happen."

"His name's Lucifer," she spits. "And Hell's a horrible place."

"Yes, and it's changing, I hear. Thanks to you. Just as it was supposed to."
"Not enough," she argues, and the truth of her words blossoms into guilt. "And whatever happened there couldn't have happened without Lucifer's help."

"Yes... He has his mother's light. Interesting how you can access it. Maybe it was meant to be." God sets aside his glass and glances toward the ceiling in a way that is all too familiar. He sighs, and though he may not be old Father Time, weariness betrays his age. "You know, I believed Uriel was giving me a means to solve humanity's problems when he had me craft a blessing for your mother." He looks at the holographic display. She's surprised to see it's almost nighttime in the city now. "Instead, it would seem the problems were always cosmic in nature. Perhaps I should have expected that." He purses his lips briefly before turning back to her. "But things seem to be going in the right direction, finally."

"So that's it?" Chloe shakes her head in disbelief. "You'll just check out now and leave us to clean up the mess?"

"It is your purpose, my child, and it will haunt you if you don't see it through. You were Made so I could rest."

Beneath anger over his arrogance, a strange sadness grips her. "How can you not want to stay?" she asks, bewildered. He's right. She doesn't even like him. But what will happen to all the lost angels at his door if he ends his life? "I can't begin to understand why you made humans and Earth the way you did, and I hate how you made Hell and sent Lucifer there—"

"So you've expressed," God says tightly. "Thoroughly."

"But you've made so many wonderful things, too. You gave me—" Chloe swallows around pain. "You made a world where I have an amazing little girl. That means something to me. How can things like that mean nothing to you? Don't you care?"

"I did, once."

"What, and you don't now because you've lost your faith? All your children have to suffer for that?" Her brows furrow. "You don't need me to make this right. Maybe you never did. You can choose to make this right yourself."

God's grimaces. "I can't."

"Why not?"

"Because I'm not whole anymore!" God shouts, slamming his hands against the table. His words shake the room and toss wine from Chloe's glass. Scrolls unwind, roll across shelves, and tumble to the floor.

White knuckling the table, she nods through her fear. "Okay."

"To create a universe takes more energy than you're capable of understanding," he snaps, and shoves away from his chair. He drags the wine bottle with him and goes to stand before shadowed Tokyo. "Hydrogen, carbon, all those elements you humans think you understand, they're just building blocks to be put together or pulled apart. All my children do—all you do—is manipulate them." The wine bottle thunks into place beside the one left out from earlier. He leans against his worktable. "But there are other things... Things not made from what exists naturally."

Chloe tries to keep up. "Divine things?"

"New divinity, yes. New beings, certain objects. Those often require self-sacrifice before they can
"Like angels," she whispers.

"Like angels," he agrees.

She thinks of Lucifer's coins and the Devil's blood. "What's the sacrifice?"

"A piece of who I am. A piece of Ishtar before I..."

"Before you sent your own wife to Hell?"

"Samael's told you quite a lot, hasn't he?" He bares a thin, bitter smile. "Ishtar was instrumental. She didn't help me with Hell, and you know how that went. So you see my dilemma, miracle child. We lost ourselves to Creation. It's not as simple as changing my behavior. My gods, if they ever existed, are silent, and I'm a cripple. I can't guide anyone, not for long or far.

"You're asking me to make a new Plan using gifts I gave away. Uriel... Uriel had eyes to see, but now he's gone. Perhaps I could be whole again, be what I was before all this...madness. But then I would have to take back what I gave to my children. I wonder... Would you steal from your child?"

"No," she answers immediately. "But w-what would happen to them?" She rises and joins him at his worktable. "They'd lose their gifts?"

"They would lose their purpose, yes, and subsequently their immortality. Self-actualization would do the rest, I imagine, and they would eventually succumb to death, being lost to the same cycle you humans are. Some would perish and arrive back here—most, likely, would not. And Earth would not last a year without angelic aid. But I would regain my original strength. I wouldn't be so...tired anymore."

"There has to be some other way. Maybe if—"

"Would you rather be Unmade with me?" God queries tartly. It's hard to determine if the question is legitimate or a threat.

"No," she answers.

"I didn't think so."

Reaching out, God stretches his fingers wide and pinches the hologram, zooming out and away from Tokyo. Japan takes shape, and then the ocean around it, and the continents, until finally there is Earth and its black, star-speckled space.

"I should have been satisfied with what I had. I should have stopped. It was a mistake, Making your universe," God says, and Chloe tries not to let the implications frighten her. "But it is beautiful, isn't it? In its own way."

"Yeah," she whispers, eyes filled with the blue and green of home.

He withdraws farther, to familiar planets pirouetting around a gleaming sun. "Samael was so proud of his stars." He touches a finger to the central light, as if to caress it. "They are most wonderfully made."

With a trembling hand, Chloe dares to touch God's arm. Some part of her expects to be zapped and blasted across the room, but he feels like a man, like flesh and blood and bone. "You could tell...stand alone."

"Like angels," she whispers.
Lucifer that yourself," she says softly.

If he hears her, he doesn't acknowledge her words. "You'll do what you can to fix things?" he asks. "You and...Lucifer?"

"I—" What sort of question is that? She'd imagined making demands, not taking requests. "I don't even know where to begin. Or what I'm supposed to do." But her mind is filled with the tortures of Hell loops. "We need help."

"I have none to give," he says. To his credit, he sounds full of regret. "I live in the past, with my mistakes."

"We can work together," she insists, because it feels like the right thing to say.

"Perhaps." But God only scowls. He lets out a long, deep sigh. "Well. Now you understand, don't you?"

"I guess." In a way, she wishes she didn't. What's more human than making mistakes you can't come back from?

"Good," God says, nodding. "Then leave me."

Chloe huffs and lets her hand slide away from him. She wants to be angry, but instead she feels numb. "All right," she says. "I'll get Lucifer, and we'll leave."

"Wait." When she's halfway across the room, God looks at her over the purple fabric draped across his shoulder. He gives her a benevolent smile, one she senses he hasn't worn in a very long time. "It was nice meeting you, Chloe Decker. You are more interesting than I expected you would be. May you have better luck discovering yourself and changing things than I have."

She looks into his eyes for a long time, as long as her bones and sinew can stand.

"Thank you for making us," she says, and turns away.

***

True to Gabriel's word, Lucifer is in the waiting room.

"Detective!" he calls as soon as Chloe pushes at the door.

A relieved smile lifts her lips until she steps inside the room. She stops abruptly and blinks at the state the Devil is in. Sitting on the tiled floor in the round and strangely empty room, his bound ankles jut out before him. On his left stands Amenadiel; on his right, Gabriel. They offer Chloe hopeful and then sheepish expressions as she shakes off her initial shock and goes to stand before red-soled shoes.

Clothes untucked, wrinkled and torn, their faces bruised and bloodied, the three brothers look like they've been in a hell of a bar fight. At first, she thinks the angelic mob outside must have turned violent, but then she notices marks on Gabriel's neck that look suspiciously like the chain links connecting Lucifer's cuffs.

So, not too far off from a bar fight, then, though they seem to have come to some sort of truce.

"Are you all right?" Lucifer asks, hair swirled in unkempt curls. He's got a purple shiner and a
busted forehead, but even now he looks like the truest son of God.

For as long as she lives and loves him, she'll never mention the resemblance.

"It looks like I should be asking you the same thing." She narrows her eyes at them, feeling like Wendy with her Lost Boys.

Lucifer searches her face. "Dad didn't do anything to you? The building shook."

"I'm okay," she assures him softly. "Really." She holds out her hands, which he takes with his bound ones. His brothers help him stand without prompting. "He wasn't going to let you in, anyway." Because he's a bad father, she thinks. Or a coward. Or both. She can't decide.

Gabriel sniffs through a stuffy, swollen nose. "I tried to tell him. It is a great honor that he is allowed here at all."

"Oh, having you ruin a perfectly good Armani is a great honor, is it?"

"Chloe." Amenadiel's serious tone quiets his brothers. "Did you talk Father out of it?"

"If you didn't," Lucifer says, "what do you think of a celestial-themed party at Lux for when he does the deed? I'm thinking of getting those sexy little wings for the dancers."

She glares.

He looks genuinely perplexed. "What?"

"I'm not sure if I got through to him," she answers Amenadiel, and touches his arm in sympathy. She's not even sure why God wanted her here—to size her up, it seemed. "I don't know if there was anything I could have said."

"Oh."

"I'm sorry." She squeezes his arm before releasing him. "I think it's also time for us to go. "I think it's also time for us to go." Gabriel watches with concern as his older brother's face falls. "Will you... Will everything be okay?"

"I..." Amenadiel stares blankly past Chloe's head.

"The Lord will do what is best," Gabriel says, though he doesn't sound particularly convinced.

"You have the council now, brother," Lucifer reminds Amenadiel, his tone gentle. "Surely between a dozen of you and Charlotte Richards, you'll make a few good decisions. They'll all be hers, of course, but she'll let you take some credit if you ask nicely."

Amenadiel's mouth twitches. "Yes, there's the council. And Charlotte. She is a very good human, Luci. I'm glad she's not in Hell."

"Yeah, nice that she got a chance not to be," Chloe bites out.

"Yes," Amenadiel agrees, missing her point.

"Right, so, our work here is done, then," Lucifer says breezily, while picking a knot of lint from his sleeve. "Time to free the Devil at last and let us power couples be on our merry way."

Reluctantly, Amenadiel nods. "I'll see you to the gates. Michael will come to release you then."
At the wooden door Chloe entered, they say goodbye to Gabriel, who waves absently, his mind already preoccupied. He takes to the air amid hued light in the quiet center of the tower. Returning to a father who can't love him like he should, maybe not even how he wants.

Outside, the horde of angels still swarms. Amenadiel keeps them close, and they're more careful as they push through. This time, Chloe keeps her head down and her arm looped tightly around Lucifer's. Though they are stopped several times, and murmurs and sometimes even shouts follow them, the multitude plays to their advantage as it swallows and obscures them over and over again. Farther out from the mass, where no angels bother to walk, but instead cast shadows from above, Lucifer ducks his head toward hers.

"Are you sure you're okay, Detective?" he asks.

"I am," she says, patting his arm. "It was just...like a dream, you know?"

"Not a nightmare?" he jokes.

"I don't know what to think about your father, Lucifer." Complicated might be the word.

"What's there to think about? He's a bastard."

But God's question haunts her: Does she think she could do better, in his position? She likes to think she would be kinder—is kinder—but she also isn't giving parts of herself away every time she does something. What would that even be like? Who would she become?

They walk in silence behind Amenadiel, deep in their own thoughts. He leads them on a meandering path, protecting them from the hubbub surrounding the Great Tower. There is no end to the Silver City's opulence, to the marble and glass, precious metals and gems. It is a gleaming city pulled from the pages of storybooks. Chloe's mouth drops open more than once as she marvels at each building, fountain, and work of art. It's deeply incongruous with the broken family and prejudices that exist here.

Rounding a corner, they come upon a giant staircase that's as wide as a house and a little more than half as tall as the Great Tower. It stands in the middle of the city block, a glimmering, pink-stoned, and doorless structure, with pearlescent stairs that seem to go on forever, but actually end when they meet a flat platform at the top. At the sight of the stairs, Lucifer stops so abruptly that he nearly puts Chloe off balance. Arm still looped with his, she stumbles to a stop beside him. His lips part as he stares.

She looks back at the building, perplexed. "So...no stairway to Heaven, then," she snorts, elbowing him. Just a stairway in Heaven. She expects Lucifer to laugh, but he doesn't.

Amenadiel turns back to them. His bruised face crumples as he glances between Lucifer and the blush-colored building. "Forgive me, brother."

Chloe frowns. "What is this place?"

"It's..." But Lucifer never finishes his sentence.

"Lucifer?"

Coming closer, Amenadiel claps a hand to his shoulder. "No one's around to bother you, and you know the way to the gates. Call me when you arrive, and I'll bring Michael."

Lucifer swallows deeply enough that it's audible. His dark, glassy eyes flit toward his brother.
before he nods a silent agreement. He looks grateful, even if he offers no word of thanks.

Amenadiel squeezes his shoulder, and with a step to the side, spreads his wings and takes flight, leaving them alone in the city.

"Lucifer?" Chloe queries again, clutching at his arm and one of his hands, trying to get his attention. "Where are we?"

"The king's throne," he says. "God's throne."

Chloe looks at the rosy structure and follows its stairs up to the platform. This is one of the most notably different architectural choices Lucifer made in Hell, she realizes. His throne was ominous and tucked into darkness, but it was on the ground floor.

"He used to sit in the throne?"

"Yes," he answers softly, falling into that strange accent. "We would all gather round, like good little angels, the whole host of us..."

She struggles to find the right words. "I'm guessing that meant a lot, didn't it?"

"Oh, yes," he says, voice dripping venom, "he would tell us the wonders he envisioned for us and all we were doing. It was..." He scoffs and shakes his head. "It was foolish."

She licks her lips. "I think he...might feel that way, too."

Lucifer huffs. "Bit late, really."

For a moment, they're quiet as they stare. Chloe stands with him, her anger at God uncomfortable and confusing.

"This is where I fell," Lucifer says.

_Fell._ It's capitalized in his mouth.

"Oh, Lucifer..."

He pulls away from her and shuffles forward to the tune of rattling chains. She follows him to the base of the giant stairway, where he drops to one of the lower steps and faces the adjacent glass building, which holds a massive, twisting bonsai in its center. Chloe sits beside him and wraps an arm around his back, unsure of what to say, but knowing she should touch him.

No one died here, but it feels like a funeral, as if they are mourning a boy named Samael. Chloe tries to imagine what he would have been like, before Earth and Hell, before all the pain and disappointment. As certain of God's greatness as all the other angels, she imagines; beautiful and arrogant and funny. She leans her head against his shoulder, knowing most of that is still there in who he's become. Horrible things have happened to him, but he hasn't lost himself. Not like God.

They sit for a long time, until early afternoon turns to late, and in the solemn space Chloe tells Lucifer about meeting his father. He listens without comment, a rarity for him.

"Do you believe what he told me?" she whispers. "About your gifts?"

"I don't know." He sighs. "Perhaps? He was... A long time ago, things were different. With Mum and him." He frowns at the Great Tower. "With all of it."
"He wants things to be different now," she points out, "but he doesn't seem willing to help us change Hell. I'm not sure he can..."

"Is that why you were willing to meet with him? To ask him about Hell?" Lucifer chuckles darkly. "Oh, darling, I could have told you that would be a waste of time."

"He seems to think we can fix it—that that's why your brother had Amenadiel bless my mother. That it's part of why I'm here."

"Yes, Dad is fond of telling us what our purpose is and should mean, but it's like devilry, dear. It's an art, not a science."

"But what if he's right this time?"

"Uriel didn't die to change Hell," Lucifer says bitterly. "Hell doesn't change, Chloe."

"But Hell has changed. You know it has."

His Adam's apple bobs as he swallows. "So what if Cain's ashes light up the sky? None of it bloody matters. You'll see. Souls will pop off to Heaven or Hell, just as they always have. Dad lives, Dad dies, it'll be business as usual in the end, and that's that."

"You don't know that," she insists.

"Trust me on this. I'm older than your planet and reigned in darkness for thousands of years."

Chloe rolls her eyes. Pulling the age card is low, but she drops the subject for the time being. In doing so, she notices a growing commotion in the distance. It's the sound of a crowd of people on the move. "Something's going on," she says, and as if in reply, several angels suddenly dart away from the swarm surrounding the Great Tower. "Any idea where they're headed?"

"Church?" Lucifer quips. "Hell if I know, Detective." He looks at her sidelong, a small smirk pulling at his swollen face. "Shall we find out?"

They shouldn't. Amenadiel left them with the assumption they would head toward the gates, which was a show of trust. But curiosity is in their nature. The Devil is in the details. "You sure?" she asks.

"Oh, a quick peek won't hurt." He pats her knee; a strand of chain tickles her thigh. "Come on, time to find out what the God botherers are up to now."

Slipping along the sides of buildings, they follow the sounds of voices and the soft, tapping crunch of many shoes, while above angels continue to pull away from the Great Tower they left behind. Two blocks away, Chloe stops beside Lucifer at a street corner and stares in wonder at a human procession that has dared to cross the arbitrary border between species.

The crowd is unlike anything she's ever seen and is made up of all races, heights, genders, and dress. A young Asian woman in a white tunic passes by, her neck stretched long by golden rings. Meandering behind her are twin brothers, who are shirtless, barefoot, and tanned a golden brown beneath their Hawaiian boardshorts. To the left of the twins and some distance ahead, the crowd parts around a giant red-haired man who carries a short black woman on his shoulders.

"Wow." And Chloe thought Hell was untethered from time and place.

"Ah, there's a chap to talk to." Lucifer grabs hold of her arm and pulls her into the stream of people,
some of whom curse the intrusion. "Excuse me, Rabbi!" he calls, sidling up to a bearded man in black.

The rabbi turns and squints up at Lucifer. "What are you doing here?"

"Well, it's not my preferred destination, but—"

"You're an angel. You fellows are never on the ground with us."

Lucifer sputters and glances over his shoulder to see if his wings have unfurled. "I'll have you know I'm more than—"

Chloe pinches his arm. "Good catch, Rabbi!" she chuckles uncomfortably, and stands just slightly in front of Lucifer to hide his chains. She's pretty certain the souls of Heaven wouldn't know how to deal with the actual Devil in their midst, and there's no need to draw attention to themselves. "Can you tell us what's going on?"

"Haven't you heard?" the rabbi cries, as if their lack of knowledge personally offends him. "We are blessed this day! His father walks among us!" Beside him, a Tibetan monk in bright red and orange robes smiles and nods in agreement. "The Lord was seen leaving his glorious tower just a little while ago," he continues, pointing a finger in the direction the crowd is headed. "Word got out fast. My friend and I have been waiting a very long time to see him with our own two eyes, you know."

"So...God's at the end of this line?" Chloe asks.

"He is!"

"Where's he going?"

The rabbi shrugs. "Does it matter? He is well!"

"Does it matter?" Lucifer scoffs. "Maybe he's chucking you into the desert for another forty bloody years. You considered that?"

"Thank you, Rabbi," Chloe says, and drags Lucifer back to the edge of the throng before he can cause more of a scene. "Maybe I did get through to your dad?" she says, her brows furrowing. "Maybe it's good he's out?"

"Or the bastard's up to something." He stops suddenly, his eyes sweeping over the procession. A young woman with long, brown braids almost runs into his back. She goes around him, scowling. "Detective," Lucifer says, a strange note in his voice, "I think I know where Dad's headed."

Before she has a chance to reply, he's already turning down a side street, his strides as long as the chains binding his ankles will permit.

Chloe tries not to jog beside him on principle. She hates when he does this. "Lucifer? What are you doing?"

"I want to know what he's up to."

In truth, she does, as well. "But what about Amenadiel? Don't you think one brawl was enough for today?"

"Well, if we run into any problems, you can break my chains, and we'll be in business like Bonnie and Clyde."
She glances at him in disbelief. "You know Bonnie and Clyde died in a hailstorm of bullets, right?"

Lucifer scoffs.

"Hey." Chloe grabs his elbow, and he slows infinitesimally. "You and your brothers fought because you were going to storm your father's studio, weren't you?" At his abashed expression, she nods. "We're not here to start a war, Lucifer. I know you don't like your dad—I don't like your dad—but if you can't keep it together if you see him, we need to leave now."

"That's why we're going this way, Detective," he assures her with a grin that cants sideways. "The sneaky way. No one has to know."

She pauses and bites her lip in concern before having to jog to catch up with him.

The Silver City and Heaven at large, judging by where her father lives—well, resides—doesn't abide by the same economic ebbs and flows that affect development on Earth. It's a place that shuns money, where beauty and comfort are front and center, and so it really shouldn't surprise Chloe when the neatly organized city blocks suddenly drop off into lush, green forests, but it does. How does zoning even work here?

"You think your dad's gone on a hike?" she says doubtfully, batting away branches and vines as she follows Lucifer into thick undergrowth.

He doesn't reply as he hustles onward with little regard for his already tattered clothes or her ability to keep up. Behind him, a tree limb he's brushed aside nearly smacks her in the face when it bounces back to its natural position.

It grows darker and cooler, the deeper they push into the woodland. But sweat still beads across Chloe's brow, and hair sticks to her neck as they stomp up a steep incline. The blue afternoon sky is obscured by a green canopy, in which birds dart and dance and sing. Somewhere on their left, water trickles through a creek—trickles and gurgles until it becomes the roar of a river. She's struck again by how a younger Earth must have been very similar, though with far more mosquitoes and predators. She glances at the stormy moue of Lucifer's face. Maybe there are predators here; they just know not to come too close to the Devil.

The dense forest butts against a rocky outcrop. Lucifer stops and looks left and right down the expanse of mountain.

"Don't tell me you're lost," Chloe pants, peeling her t-shirt away from her chest.

"This way," he says, veering right. Lifting his chained wrists as much as he can, he drags his hands across the face of the rock. "There's a... Ah-ha!" He tears away a tangled mass of ivy, revealing the mouth of a cave. "Here we go."

"In there? Really?" Chloe grimaces as she remembers slithering through the humid heat of Hell's craggy mountains.

"Promise there's a light at the end of the tunnel." He grins cheekily. "Actually, no reason you can't give us a bit of light in the meantime, Detective."

She narrows her eyes at him. "Okay, but only because this seems"—he shoves into the cave before she finishes speaking—"important to you." She sighs.

The clank of Lucifer's chains is loud in the narrow space, which is thankfully less narrow than the fissure she braved in Hell, but far from comfortable. He ducks low, avoiding the rocky ceiling, the
threads of his suit jacket catching on jagged stone. Behind him, Chloe loosens the hold on her light just enough to send pale gemstones of color across the sorrel walls of the cave. Her heart pounds, the deeper they go, the more they depend on her ability in the darkness. Still, they climb a slight incline.

"Lucifer?" she says, unable to mask her nervousness. Although the cave is cool, memories of hot hellstone make her back ache and sweat.

"Not far to go," he says, angling sideways to grab her nearest hand. She pulls back her light from the hand he's taken, and his fingers squeeze around hers. She relaxes marginally, trusting him.

Dim light appears around a bend in the cave a short time later. Chloe lets out a relieved breath.

"How do you even know about this place?" she asks, voice echoing.

"This is a very old part of Heaven," he answers softly. "I was often bored." He shrugs. "I liked to explore."

They straighten as they exit the cave. Chloe withdraws the rest of her light while listening to the frantic rush of the river. The cave has spat them out on a rocky ledge, and higher up than she expected, judging by the smattering of nearby treetops. Edging toward the lip of the scrub-covered shelf, she looks down and barely contains a gasp.

Below, a small clearing lined by woods on one side drops off into the nothingness of pure, black space on the other. Farther ahead, a skinny river runs between the trees, cuts through the clearing, and flings itself toward the stars. Where it leaps toward space, the water cascades at odd angles, defying gravity as it coils and spits.

Strangest of all is the shimmering oval hovering in the black beside the mystifying waterfall. Chloe misses it at first, but the artificial light of Heaven plays oddly there, catching on the edge of some frame and wobbling like a desert mirage.

"What is that?" she breathes, squinting.

"Home, I suppose," Lucifer answers, and she looks at him, confused. His eyes are glassy in the shaded, evening light. "Through there you'll find the Three Sisters." He glances at her and clears his throat. "You probably know them as Orion's Belt."

Chloe's head whips back to valley below. "That's..."

"A little known gate to your universe. The first one." He exhales a tired laugh. "Not that I can fly through it anymore."

"Lucifer—"

Her words are cut off as he grabs her elbow and yanks her away from the ledge. She hears it then, the soft rustling of foliage and the crunch of branches. Then God appears on the ground below, the edges of his white robes besmirched by dirt and leaves. Following close behind him is Gabriel on foot. Chloe frowns as God shuffles toward the river and the portal to the human universe. When he comes to a stop, Gabriel stands by his side.

"What's he doing?" Fear slips down the back of her neck.

"How should I bloody know?" Lucifer replies irritably. "You've had more contact with him than I have in the last, oh, twelve thousand years."
"You knew he'd come here."

"That was only a hunch."

Chloe rolls her eyes, but is thankful his stress is directed at her instead of his father. God may consider himself impaired, but she has no doubt he's still very powerful. Craning her neck, she tries to see where he emerged from the undergrowth, but the rocky mountainside juts at an angle that blocks visibility.

"This way!" someone shouts from high above.

Lucifer and Chloe rush to crouch between large, scraggly-armed bushes moments before three angels dive through the canopies of the tallest trees. Michael's vibrant, crimson wings contrast against the emerald forest. Amenadiel's shadowed feathers and the brown wings of another angel follow.

"Father!" the third angel calls, soprano voice ringing.

But God does not turn toward his children, and Gabriel's attention is singular. God stands before the glimmering gate. Chloe breathes unevenly, anticipating and fearing the moment he reaches through to the other side...and does what, exactly? Takes it all back?

Michael, Amenadiel, and the shorter female angel fall silent and linger behind God awkwardly. Amenadiel appears to say something several moments later, raising a hand between himself and his father before letting it drop to his side.

More angels barrel through the treetops and touch to the ground. Some speak or call out to God or Gabriel, but most fall into a vigil. Soon, the valley is filled with Lucifer's brothers and sisters, with their splendorous wings and curious robes and armor. They position themselves close together, between trees and along the sinuous river bank, while others hover or settle on thick boughs.

Somewhere nearby, singing mingles with the sound of the rushing water as the procession of humans pushes through the forest, and Chloe remembers her own urge to sing and dance before God. Now, though, as she looks at his back and the drooped curve of his shoulders, she sees only a man, albeit one with a very familiar regal neck and midnight curls. She peers at Lucifer amid the brush. His dark eyes, one racoon-ringed, focus on his father. He crouches on his heels, the fingertips of his bound wrists pressed to the dusty ground, as if he is a frog ready to leap or a bird of prey ready to take flight.

They watch and wait in the stillness. A soft breeze runs across the river, whispering through the grasses and leaves. Slowly, it strengthens, until the wind gusts, shaking the brush that is their shelter and flipping Chloe's hair in wild directions, tangling it with the shrub's prickly arms. God's ruined robes whip around his legs.

The tiny, mammalian hairs that dot Chloe's skin spring to attention, and she breathes in small, short bursts. Something is happening. Something is going to happen. The air is alive with it.

Humans file into the valley, intermingling with angels who sneer and tuck their wings closer to their bodies. The singing drops off in increments, until the only sounds that remain are the wind, the water, the snapping leaves.

God stretches his hand toward the portal, and Chloe leans forward, forgetting how to breathe. The gusting wind draws to a sudden stop, as if a vacuum has sucked all the air from the world. In the stillness, God collapses.
A loud gasp tears through the gathered angels and humans as he crumples, knees folding beneath him. A hissing static fills Chloe's ears, and maybe she blinks. Maybe she doesn't. But between one moment and the next, God's body disintegrates, settling into the ground like fine dust. His robes drop into a wrinkled heap, the purple abnormally bright against verdant grass. Gabriel falls to the ground and gathers his father's fabrics to his face, his blue wings flaring and curving around himself.

No one else moves. No one says anything. Chloe is as frozen by shock as the rest, her gut gnawed by an inexplicable grief. She's not sure she'll ever move again.

But then Lucifer leaps up and breaks the spell. A loud laugh tears free from his lungs, blowing their cover. It builds until it is a deep, unhinged belly laugh, until he's bent at his middle, wheezing. Chloe stands at once and tries to pull him away from the ledge to somewhere, to the cave, maybe.

"Lucifer."

On the ground, angels and humans stare in shock—at Gabriel's sobbing, at Lucifer's presence and outburst.

"Hallelujah!" Lucifer chokes out between laughs.

"Lucifer," Chloe cautions once more, grabbing his arm.

"What are you all standing around for?" he continues. "Someone fetch Nietzsche!"

Michael soars into the sky with a terrifyingly inhuman yowl. His sword sings as he draws it from its scabbard in the same moment Lucifer unfurls his wings. There are screams as humans scatter and angels rise into the air. Chloe flings herself in front of Lucifer, one hand outstretched, the other grasping blindly for the binding chain of Lucifer's cuffs.

"Stand aside, miracle," Michael commands, hovering in the air, his ankles crossed and sword pointed toward them. His face is drawn tight by rage.

"Release me, Detective," Lucifer says at Chloe's back.

"No," she says to them both, her heart pounding. Her fingers tremble with the effort to hold back her light.

Amenadiel darts up beside Michael, his wings even darker than usual in the dwindling light and beside Michael's crimson. "There will be no more war." He speaks so his voice carries. An uncertain murmur spreads through the angelic crowd, but Chloe can tell they're inclined to disperse.

"He dares befoul our Father's name," Michael says, sword unwavering. But the tightness in his face has twisted into something of pain.

"Father is gone," Amenadiel says, his hand settling over Michael's on the hilt of the sword. Tears gather at the edges of his eyes. "We are all these worlds have, brother. We are all each other has."

Chloe feels a soft shift of air behind her as Lucifer's wings sweep in toward his back. A shriek pierces the evening that is soon joined by a wail, and, weeping, Heaven's angels soar through the tree canopies, fleeing their father's unmarked grave.

Michael's sword arm drops. With a glare at Amenadiel, he sheathes the weapon, then digs into a pouch hanging off his sword belt. Retrieving something, he lifts his hand and throws the small
object at Chloe's feet. She flinches in surprise and glances down to see a silver key. Without another word, Michael's wings beat down. Chloe's hair flies back as he shoots upward.

Dropping down, Chloe snatches up the key and turns toward Lucifer. She grabs one of his wrists roughly, unsure yet whether the feeling boiling inside her is anger or relief. "We're leaving right now."

"It would be for the best, Luci," Amenadiel says, landing next to them on the scrubby shelf.

"Yes," Lucifer agrees, his mood shifting to something quieter.

Chloe jabs the key into a lock on one of his cuffs and glances up at his face as she turns it. He's looking down into the valley, an unnervingly empty expression on his battered face. She glances back, following his gaze to Gabriel, who lies on the ground, baby blue wings tucked close to his back as he stares at distant stars and clings to dirty robes.

And though Chloe can be assured her father is here in this uncanny paradise, she knows this grief all too well. She looks back to Lucifer's cuffs, her vision blurred.
Lucifer remembers Gabriel, despondent on the forest floor, and the way Michael's enraged face crumpled. He remembers Amenadiel's deep frown, the downward turn of his hairless head. The wailing in the Silver City, and the steady warmth of Chloe's hands. He remembers how, outside the gates of Heaven, beside oblivious souls drifting in, his eldest brother cupped his cheeks and spoke.

He doesn't remember what was said, only that his lungs burned as he listened. Nor does he remember unfurling his wings, taking flight, or passing through the barrier between worlds. But some things, like gliding through the air and drawing Chloe into his arms, are simple muscle memory.

His shoes touch down to the balcony tile with a rousing snap. The relief he feels being back on Earth sweeps over him pleasantly. He shrugs his wings away, and Chloe slides from his embrace, returning to her own two feet. It's daytime in L.A., and she squints against sunshine to look up at him, her pupils pinpointed and irises crystalline blue.

"Do you want to talk about what happened?" she asks quietly, hands on his chest.

The question is a right smack upside the head.

"Talk?" Barking a laugh, Lucifer pulls away. "Now's the time to celebrate, darling!" Walking past her, he shrugs out of his torn and rumpled suit jacket, tossing it aside as he steps into the cool shade of the penthouse. He always washes off the stench of Hell upon returning to Earth. Why should the fragrance of Heaven be treated any differently?

"Celebrate?" Chloe follows while he unbuttons his shirt.

"Mm." He glances at the antique mantel clock in his library. "Bit early yet, but I've never let a little daylight get in the way of a party." His shirt drops to the floor, and he reaches for his belt buckle. "Ooh, I know, I'll give Misty Canyons a ring! She knows everyone worth knowing in L.A., including yours truly." He toes off his shoes.

"Misty Canyons?" Chloe folds her arms as he drops his trousers.

"Yes, she's a porn actress with fabulous—"

"I know who Misty Canyons is, Lucifer."

He tilts his head and chuckles. "Do you now?"

Chloe raises a finger in warning. "All I'm saying is a party might be a little inappropriate right now." She shrugs. "It is for me."

Lucifer saunters toward her with a wolfish grin. "Well, what would be more appropriate?" he purrs, sliding his hands along her hips and beneath the hem of her shirt. "I'm not opposed to a horizontal party for two. Or vertical. Upside down, right-side up. Detective's choice."

"That's not what I meant," she says, fingers gripping his wrists to halt his exploration. He sighs. "I just think it'd be good to take some time to, you know, breathe."

*Millennials.*
"I'm not a bloody asthmatic." At her scowl, he rolls his eyes. "I've spent literal eons with that bastard hovering over me, so pardon me if I don't require weepy, human eulogizing now that he's gone. All I desire is to shower, pour myself a stiff drink, and kick back and relax for once. I'm truly free! No more wondering if or when he'll send me back to Hell."

She stares at him for a long time. "I don't know if it's that simple, Lucifer. My dad's been gone a long time, but seeing him again... It's hard. I can't imagine what you're—"

"The officer was a much better father figure, I assure you."

"I get that. Just...I'm here for you, okay?"

"Splendid," he says, grabbing her hand and tugging her along with him. "You can be here for me in my shower, then."

Beneath a hot spray of water, he sings until she cracks and laughs with him. Everything is looking up now. Lucifer is sure of it.

***

Each morning, bit by bit, Chloe reclaims her place in the human world. In some ways, it's easy. God was only a passing figure in her life, no different from a victim or suspect in a case. And as much as she's seen Hell and Heaven—and seen them change—it's business as usual on Earth. The sun rises and sets, like it always does. Now, she ignores its soft kiss as she tiptoes through her bedroom.

Lucifer has taken to spending his nights partying. He crawls into her bed in the wee hours of the morning, reeking of alcohol and full of sloppy kisses that worry and endear her. When he finally rests, he tosses and turns for hours and then sinks into a deep sleep until midday, his brows pinched and fingers clutching sheets and pillows.

This, apparently, is celebrating.

Does he dream of his father, like she dreams of hers? She can't decide if the loss of hers is better or worse the second time around. Not that her pain is the same as Lucifer's. She knows it isn't.

Sighing, she bends and lifts his foot from where it's slid free from the sheets and touched to the floor beside the bed. As she pushes his leg under the covers, he mumbles into the crook of his arm in what she thinks might be Hindi. She smooths the comforter over his shoulders. He can't live in denial forever. Eventually she'll have to be the bad guy and push him to face his feelings. For now, though, she tucks him in. His muscles are knots beneath her hands.

She wakes Trixie and throws together a breakfast that consists of more processed food than it should. They talk about normal things, like school, an upcoming karate tournament, and a boy Trixie insists she doesn't have a crush on (ew, gross) but probably does.

"Mom?"

Chloe glances over her shoulder while pouring herself a second cup of coffee. "Yeah?"

"Why's Lucifer so sad?"

Her eyes flick to the stairwell. "What makes you think he's sad, monkey?"
"His light looks funny." This is explanation enough in their strange world. "And Aunt Izzy called him *un cabrón depresivo* when she did a reading for him yesterday."

Chloe glances at the stairwell again. Now that her tarot business has picked up in L.A., Izzy doesn't get out of bed before ten unless she has to. "Why was she doing a reading for Lucifer?" Reaching across the counter, she uses her thumb to clear strawberry jam from her daughter's face.

Trixie shrugs and rubs at her face in annoyance. "She does readings for all of us every day."

Of course she does. "Well..." Chloe chooses her words carefully. "It's true Lucifer's going through a lot right now." So is she, but she pretends otherwise to have Trixie back in her life. "We need to be there for him."

Trixie's brow furrows as she considers this. "Could I draw him a picture?"

Chloe smiles. "You know, I think he'd like that. But remember what we talked about last time."

"Just because he doesn't say thank you, doesn't mean he's not grateful." Trixie rolls her eyes and hops off the bar stool. She turns toward her bedroom to get ready for school. "Maybe when he feels better he can talk to Samantha for me!"

"Who's Samantha?"

"She's a real b-word," Trixie gripes, and disappears into her room.

Chloe drags a hand down her face.

***

Lucifer celebrates his newfound freedom by floating between clusters of people, his grin wide, one hand clutching a tumbler, the other lighting on wrists and elbows and shoulders. No one knows better than the Devil how to make souls feel seen and desired.

For obvious reasons, there hasn't been much time for Lux lately. The nightclub runs smoothly in his absence, but he is well aware his establishment is chosen for a variety of reasons—and he is one of those reasons. He might not have trysts with strangers anymore, but he is still a musician and a consummate host.

Music rocks the building at all hours, the bass vibrating through his bones. When the mood strikes—or the snow hits, whichever comes first—his fingers fly across black and ivory keys, while sustained notes pour from his whisky-slicked throat. He calls in favors, and artists who have long outgrown nightclubs accompany him, relieved to pay off their old debts. He dedicates two in his employ to getting the word out for these impromptu performances, and to keep the club packed enough to violate fire codes. There are no cover charges for women, drinks are heavily discounted outside peak hours, and palms belonging to familiar LAPD faces are greased to get around draconian curfew laws.

A week into the party, Chloe begins to join him after the child has gone to bed and been left in the care of Isabel or Maze—or both, as the two seem to be spending *quite* a bit of time together recently. Lucifer can imagine how, and does so on occasion, usually throwing the detective into the fantasy for good measure.

Whenever Chloe enters Lux, his world tilts marvelously. The alcohol and drugs swimming through
his veins rocket through him in her presence, and he draws her to the dance floor, into dark booths, or beside him on the piano bench. He ignores her pensive glances.

On the tenth day of dear old Dad's rest, she dances with him, golden strands of hair haloing her face. He stares a little too long through an intoxicated haze, in awe and unnerved by how her entire existence was a very near thing. And Lucifer is grateful—and wishes he were not.

"We should get back to work!" Chloe yells over the music.

Work. Yes, work might be good. He smiles broadly as he spins her around and pulls her back. "That sounds like an excellent plan, Detective."

"Yeah?" she says. "Okay, great! Well, there's this client that—"

Lucifer doesn't quite listen. He slows with her at the edge of the dance floor, until their movements fall out of sync with the livelier music and grinding bodies. Resting his head atop hers, he sways in place, letting her words wash over him.

***

Life on the earthly plane takes on a familiar rhythm of work and play that suits Lucifer. The child is in school and otherwise having an extended stay with her mother. The detective is back in her element and eager to see their business earn money from more than Maze's bounties. (Why she cares about such trivial matters, he'll never know, but he does understand pride. All too well.) Lux is booming, and—bless industrialization—he spends nary a moment completely sober.

"I'm telling you, Decker, that bitch with the sunglasses did it."

"Oh, yeah?" Chloe says, sarcastic. "And what's that based on, Maze, demonic intuition?"

"Hey, don't knock it. I've tortured a lot of guilty people. Anybody who looks like that is up to something."

Lucifer quirks a brow. Mazikeen likely has a point.

Humming doubtfully, Chloe snatches the picture from Maze and pins it to the investigation board. "Pretty sure she just happened to be standing behind our vic. But, all right, Random Arboretum Lady is a theory." She digs into an evidence box and pulls out more photos. "Let's just explore all possibilities, okay? The Hudsons have waited a long time for their daughter to see justice."

Shoes kicked up on his desk, Lucifer watches dully as the two continue to bicker over the board and its faded but also distastefully colorful photos, which are courtesy of the late eighties, early nineties. There's one long-dead aspiring model and a multitude of related crimes against fashion, from frizzy perms and Hammer pants, to squiggly patterns and fluoro mistakes.

It's a decent distraction from...well, he isn't sure what, but he's enjoying it.

His phone buzzes with a message from a nurse who owes the Devil. The email doesn't bother with pleasantries: Shayna de la Cruz has been discharged from Mesa Valley Psychiatric Hospital.

That won't do. It's much too soon for Miss De la Cruz to be back on the streets, unsupervised. He hits reply and stares at the blank message field until he forgets what he planned to write. Something witty, no doubt. Something that would beat The Nail into submission.
"Lucifer," Maze snaps.

He looks up, glancing at Maze before falling into the detective's suspicious scrutiny.

"Did you hear what I said?" Chloe asks.

Lucifer pockets his phone and rubs his brow. Dropping his feet to the floor, he sits up, eager and attentive. "Run it by me again, Detective?"

***

Chloe dreams that Lucifer joined her in the Great Tower. She jerks awake, heart racing as the crash of bookshelves and the destruction of the holographic display echo in her head. Seeking comfort, she reaches to the other side of the bed, but her hand falls on undisturbed sheets. Waking alone hasn't been an unusual occurrence of late, but the dream makes it more disconcerting.

No messages on her phone. She's moments away from calling him when she hears the steady rise and fall of his voice downstairs. Letting out a relieved breath, she throws her legs over the side of the bed and goes to see what's up.

Lucifer sits wedged into a corner of her sofa, phone in hand after ending a call. He's still dressed in a three-piece suit, which is now rumpled after many hours of wear. The white dress shirt is loose and spills out from under his black-and-gray vest, which is partially—no, unevenly—buttoned. He's tugged his hair from the stranglehold of its typical product, but only front and center, leaving him with a curly faux hawk that might make her giggle in other circumstances.

In a word, he's a mess.

"What are you doing up?" she calls softly at the bottom of the stairwell.

He startles, as if waking from his own dream, and then smiles brightly. "Oh, I've not been to bed yet. Did I disturb you?"

"No, but...Lucifer, it's 4:00 a.m." Thank goodness Trixie sleeps through everything.

"Is it?" He stares at her blankly, then glances at his phone. "So it is. Gosh, no wonder I've been getting such surly responses to my calls."

"I bet." She shuffles toward him and sits on the arm of the sofa. "Who have you been talking to?"

He rests a hand on her leg. "Just a few people who owe the Devil."

"You're collecting on debts in the middle of the night?"

"I'm forgiving them," he answers cheerfully. "Call it Devil's Jubilee in honor of my own recent bout of good fortune."

Chloe's brows rise. "Lucky them." Reaching out, she runs a hand through his hair and squints at him. He's looked like this before, all dark circles around bloodshot eyes, the thickening beard. "You need sleep."

"I'm fine," he insists. "Just settled in with another cuppa."

"Wait..." She frowns. "We're out of the coffee you like. Are you drinking my instant coffee?"
Twisting in place, she snatches up his mug from the side table and sniffs at it. "Okay, that's just liquor."

"Well, I had to make it palatable, didn't I?" he says, taking it and downing the contents in three swallows. He lets the mug fall back to the table with a quiet clunk.

"Lucifer... We need to talk."

He eyes her warily, as though he is a caged animal and she is his captor. "About...?"

"About how you can't keep doing this."

"Doing what?"

It's impossible to tell how genuine the question is.

"Partying until you drop...but then not letting yourself drop? Slacking off on the job?" He splutters, and she hushes him with a finger. "Using when you think I'm not looking."

"Sobriety is overrated," he mumbles, before parting his lips and licking a line up her finger.

Rolling her eyes, Chloe withdraws her hand and wipes it on her sleepshirt, which makes him laugh. "I'm not trying to change you. It's just... You have to know this is you speeding toward a brick wall, right?"

"I'll have you know I helped Rodge write that."

"Huh?"

"Of course a child of the nineties has no taste," he sighs. "'Another Brick in the Wall,' love."

"Oh... Okay." Clearly she won't get anywhere with him right now. "Are you coming to bed?"

Lucifer slots his phone into a pocket and lifts his hips to stuff his shirt back into his pants. "I should be going, actually." Shirt haphazardly tucked, he stands and smooths his hair, which doesn't obey him in the least.

"What? Where?"

"Lux. Shipment of..." He hesitates. "Well, drugs, if you must know." She purses her lips, and he shrugs. "Consider who you're with, darling."

Chloe narrows her eyes at him, even as she knows he really is who he is.

"Anyway, this is me working. There's some Firefly to destroy with the lot. Amazing how easy it is to get hold of it now that old ham hands went up in a blazing glory." He barks a laugh and leans down to give her a quick kiss. "I'll be busy the whole day, I'm afraid." He begins walking toward the door. "May not be home tonight, either. Friday night and all. Big show. You should come."

She follows him. She can barely keep up with him when he's like this. "Trixie and I are busy tonight."

"Ah, well, another time, then."

Chloe doesn't bother pointing out how many nights she has been joining him at Lux. She needs a night to recharge. "You're still going with us tomorrow, right?"
He opens the door. "What's happening tomorrow?"

"Trixie's tournament," she says bluntly.

"Oh! Yes!" He karate chops the air with his hands as he walks backwards outside. "Right, that. Just how I want to spend my Saturday—watching scores of curtain climbers wax on and off." He waves to her as he hurries down the open hallway of her complex. "Get some more rest if you can, darling. You're looking a bit knackered!"

For a long time, Chloe stands in her doorway, feeling a little like a twister just blew through her living room.

***

The next day is alive with excited, pre-competition jitters. Trixie is bouncier than usual as she dresses in her gi and ties her blue belt around her waist. She looks less formidable than adorable, and Chloe spends twenty minutes taking pictures of her outside as she runs through katas with Maze.

It feels right, this little slice of normality. Or it does, until Trixie lets out a loud, dramatic sigh when they're all loaded into the Dodge.

Maze twists around in the passenger's seat. "What's got you salty, kid?"

"Lucifer's not answering my texts."

Chloe grinds her teeth as she pulls out of her parking spot. "Try not to take it personally, monkey. I'm sure he's just driving or something."

She's not sure of that at all, actually, and Maze huffs beside her.

"He supposed to reply," Trixie grumbles, and throws her phone to the empty seat between herself and Izzy.

Izzy shares a look with Chloe in the rearview mirror. The tantrum that's brewing will be epic if Lucifer is a no-show.

"I'll try to get in touch with him when we're there, baby."

"I'm messaging him now," Maze snarls.

Trixie only crosses her arms and scowls out the window.

The high school gymnasium where the junior karate tournament has been scheduled is located in the heart of suburbia and takes nearly forty minutes to get to because of traffic. Maze grins savagely as they pass cookie cutter houses with lawns that are far greener than local water restrictions should allow for. Chloe shudders. Years ago, Dan almost dragged her into a neighborhood just like this. The schools were good, and the streets were safe, but these places always set her teeth on edge. Now, she can't quite shake how disproportionately represented suburbia was in Hell loops she braved. HOAs and keeping up with the Joneses are literal Hell.

She hangs a right into the school's parking lot. Her eyes sweep over dozens of cars in search of a familiar Corvette, but it clearly isn't among all the practical sedans and minivans. Instead, she spots
Dan and Ella waiting near the door to the school. Trixie hops out of the car once it's parked and runs to hug her father and give Ella a high five.

"Thanks for coming," Chloe says to Ella as they wander hallways lined with blue and orange lockers. "Trixie's been looking forward to this for weeks."

"Are you kidding?" Ella says. "I love martial arts! *Crouching Tiger*, Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan, all the greats. They started somewhere, too, right?" Her sneakers squeak on the waxed floor as she staggers to a stop and looks around. "Hey, where's Lucifer?"

Chloe glances ahead, where Trixie is skipping beside Dan into the gym. "He's not here yet," she whispers. "Trixie really wanted him here."

"Oh, man, he's just running late, right?" Ella tugs on her cross necklace.

"Maybe," Chloe murmurs, staring at Ella's charm for a beat too long.

Ella can never know the whole truth. Having seen an angel feather heal a demon from the brink of death shortly before seeing Satan himself, she's more convinced than ever of divine plans and God's goodness.

Inside, Trixie runs to join her classmates while Chloe squishes between Dan and Ella on uncomfortable metal bleachers. Seated in front of her, Maze closes her eyes and appears to breathe in the lemon-scented cleaning supplies that don't quite mask the teenage sweat baked into the walls. At Maze's side, Izzy idly flips tarot cards. Chloe isn't sure what to make of their budding relationship, other than to wish her apartment walls were thicker.

They have to be the weirdest family here. And they're still missing the Devil.

*Where are you?* Chloe swipes, and hits send.

The tournament begins. An adult referee with a black belt starts off the sparring and declares winners for each round after consulting with a panel of three bored-looking judges. They begin with the younger children, who stumble about sweetly in their gis and padded helmets, while older children practice katas in the background. The gym is loud with echoing laughter, conversation, and bursts of clapping.

Chloe checks her phone at least once a minute.

Dan's here. She's here. Maze and Izzy and Ella are here. It's enough. But Lucifer is important, too, more than he realizes, and she doesn't miss Trixie's furtive glances about the gym, or when she stands on a bleacher and cranes her neck toward the hallway entrance. Her daughter has been hypervigilant ever since they returned from Hell and more recently from Heaven. She doesn't like when they aren't where she expects them to be, at least not without warning.

As older children begin to file onto the competition mat, Chloe's messages to Lucifer become more frustrated. *You're late*, she texts. She even considers praying to him, but this isn't an emergency, not quite, and a petty part of her doesn't feel like giving him that advantage. He should just check his damn phone and keep his appointments.

When the blue belts are called up, Trixie is one of the first to the mat. Chloe, Izzy, and Ella erupt into cheers and clapping, while Dan's whistle cuts through the air. Maze remains seated until Trixie's opponent, a boy with a shaggy, lopsided haircut, shuffles to the middle of the gym. At the ref's nod, Trixie and the boy bow to one another.
Maze jumps to her feet. "Destroy him, Trix!"

Trixie flashes a mouthguard-grin in their direction at the same time several parents twist around incredulously.

"Maze," Chloe gasps, tugging the demon by her arm, "he's ten years old."

"So?" Maze plops back to the bleacher and looks at Chloe over her shoulder. "None of that will matter when she's fighting over scraps, Decker."

"Nobody's fighting over scraps," Dan sighs.

Maze snorts. "Not yet."

Chloe and Dan hold up their phones and press record like the proud parents they are. Trixie darts around on feet that seem much lighter than the boy's, but Chloe chalks that up to her own bias—that is, until Trixie explodes with a series of vicious punches and strikes. The boy yelps and stumbles back, and Trixie follows him like a hound on the hunt.

The ref blows his whistle to put a stop to the onslaught, but not before Trixie swings her left leg up into the air. Her instep smacks squarely into the boy's face. His head snaps to the left before he sails sideways like a leaf buffeted by the wind. He lands on the mat hard and, after a tiny pause, bursts into tears. The gym falls silent except for the boy's sobbing; his mother runs to him. Chloe and Dan lower their cell phones. There's no need to compile further evidence.

"That's what I'm talking about!" Maze yells into the quiet.

A bald white man turns sideways on a nearby bleacher. "What the hell is your problem?"

Maze's eyes gleam as she licks her teeth. "Wanna find out?"

Trixie is disqualified—not that she cares, judging by her pronouncement that "participation trophies are for losers, anyway"—and Dan and Chloe get an earful from the boy's father. They leave for everyone's sake.

Outside the school, Chloe glances at her ex-husband, uncertain of how they should approach their daughter's use of force. There may not be any fighting for scraps, but years in law enforcement and the incident with Malcolm make it hard to feel too bad about Trixie being a four-foot-five menace.

Dan shoves his hands into his jean pockets. "I guess we should—"

He's interrupted by the sound of metal slamming into concrete. They look up in time to see Lucifer missing the turn into the parking lot. The Corvette bumps over a curb with bone-rattling intensity.

"Whoa," Ella murmurs.

"What the fu...dge," Dan says, glancing at Trixie. "Is he drunk?"

"I'll talk to him," Chloe says tightly. She yanks Trixie away from the edge of the concrete by the back of her gi.

"Unbelievable." Dan shakes his head. "I'd say I'd arrest him, but—"

"There's a lot going on, Danny," Izzy says. Beside her, Maze stands, arms akimbo, an exasperated expression on her face while she watches the Devil self-destruct.
Dan glares at his sister. "I don't need you taking up for him, too, okay?"

The Corvette's tires screech as Lucifer wheels across the parking lot at high speed and turns sharply toward the main entrance of the school. He slams on the brakes between two handicapped spots, parks, and throws open his door. He looks awful as he stumbles from the driver's seat. He's still wearing yesterday's suit, which Chloe realizes is actually Thursday's suit. Eyeliner is smudged beneath his lower lids, and his hair kinks and flops in all directions.

"Did I miss it?" he asks, accent slurred and vowels rounded. His eyes dart over their small gathering and land on Trixie.

"Sorry, buddy," Ella says. "We got everything on camera, though!"

Maze is less charitable. "Yeah, good job, asshole."

Trixie wriggles free from Chloe's hold on her shoulders. Marching up to Lucifer, she stops a couple of feet away and cranes her neck back to look at him.

"You were supposed to be here," she says, hands balling into fists beside her hips.

A belligerent, defensive mask descends upon Lucifer's face. "S'pose I lost track of time, didn't I?" He digs into a pocket and pulls out a money clip that's stretched wide by a wad of bills. "I'll pay penance."

"Why didn't you answer me?" Trixie whines, her voice breaking.

"I was...busy." His face twitches a second before his brows draw together. The hand with the money clip drops to his side. "Beatrice..."

"I wish..."

"Oh, now that's my language. Go on, child."

Trixie sniffs. "I-I wish you'd never met my mom!"

Lucifer leans back, as if struck.

"Trixie!" Chloe gasps. "You don't mean that!"

Rather than confirm or deny, Trixie lets loose a frustrated howl as she reels back and kicks Lucifer. The smack of shoe against shinbone is loud; the sneaker leaves behind dust on the dark fabric. Lucifer's mouth drops open, and there's a strange pause which follows before Maze cackles and Dan snickers with her.

"Bloody hell, child, use your words, why don't you?" Lucifer gripes, bending and favoring his leg. "I sure hope you won in there."

"She did," Maze supplies.

Chloe cuts her eyes at her amused ex-husband. "Trixie," she snaps, but in the same moment her daughter leaps away and makes a mad dash along the side of the high school. Her dark brown hair flies behind her.

"Oh, shiz, kid on the loose!" Ella yells.

"You stay here," Chloe commands, holding up her hands to Lucifer before taking off.
Dan runs beside her, calling after Trixie. Their daughter is fast, but hampered by shorter legs. They chase her around the side of the building, but it's soon clear Trixie's heart isn't in it. She slows to a jog and then stops altogether, sinking down to the concrete slab that surrounds the perimeter of the school. She folds her arms atop her knees and rests her forehead.

Chloe slows as well. She grabs hold of Dan's arm. "I've got this," she says.

"You sure?" He looks at her doubtfully, and it illustrates just how far she's fallen as a mother these last couple of months.

She nods.

Dan squeezes her shoulder. "Dinner together tonight?"

"Yeah. Thanks, Dan."

As she goes to her daughter, Chloe reflects that ten is turning out to be almost as difficult as the terrible twos were, but maybe that just has to do with all that's happened. It's hard to understand where Trixie is in her development. Her monkey can be such a big girl. But sometimes, like now, the world is bigger. So big that Chloe wants to roll back the clock, to a time when Trixie was small enough to be held, swaddled, and hidden.

She sits beside her daughter and glances up at the sky, where part of her is still convinced Heaven must be. How many times did her dad feel like this? How many times have the parents of her cold case victim wished they could go back?

"Lucifer should have told you he was going to be late," she starts, "but kicking him wasn't right. And what you said wasn't true. It was hurtful."

Trixie mumbles into her arms.

"I want you to say sorry when you see him next time."

An agitated, wet huff comes from the white-robed heap beside her.

"Trixie, I mean it."

She nods jerkily, and Chloe considers that good enough.

"We're gonna be okay, you know," she says, wrapping an arm around small shoulders. "We're just trying to figure out our new normal, and we're gonna make mistakes sometimes."

Trixie turns her head. Her face is red and wet. "You're gonna leave me for the bad place again."

A chill slides through Chloe's insides. "What makes you think that, baby?"

"I see it in my dreams," she answers with a shrug, and her words and eyes are too old for her rounded cheeks.

Chloe wants to tell her she's wrong. Instead, she says, "Wherever I go, I will always come back for you, monkey. Always." She squeezes her gently and gives a watery smile. "Lucifer wouldn't let me do anything else."

As Chloe enfolds her daughter in a tight embrace, she thinks of God and how hard it is to do right by children. Distantly, she hears the Corvette peel out of the parking lot. Some parents never get it right at all.
Chloe ensures the rest of the day is as normal as possible. There are chicken nuggets for dinner, and two rounds of *Clue* with Izzy, Maze, and Dan afterward. And for the first time since the beginning of Trixie's nightmares over the summer, Dan balances on one side of Trixie's bed, while Chloe fits herself on the other. A small mountain of stuffed animals lie wedged between them. There's no bedtime story, only small talk, only promises about Taco Tuesdays and the state fair and Halloween. Promises that will be kept.

"You were great at your tournament today," Dan says, brushing back Trixie's hair. At Chloe's cautioning look, he adds, "Maybe don't kick so hard next time, though? Unless it's a real fight, and then you can kick as hard as you need to."

They linger until Trixie falls asleep.

When Chloe gently slides the door closed behind them, she turns to Dan tiredly. "Can you stay the night? On the couch?"

"Uh..." Dan rubs the back of his head. "I guess?"

"I need to check on Lucifer," Chloe says, "and I'd rather it not just be Maze and Izzy here tonight."

Dan grimaces, whether at the reminder of Lucifer or the reminder that his sister is in bed with a demon, it's hard to tell. "Can't you call him?"

"No."

They stare at each other for a moment longer before Dan nods. "All right, Chlo. Go on."

At Lux, it's a typical Saturday night. People drink and laugh and dance, oblivious to the upended worlds spinning beyond them. Chloe stands at the edge of it all, searching. A bartender catches her eye across the room—Patrick, she remembers—and he glances at the ceiling. They share a faint smile before she heads upstairs. As she rides the elevator to the penthouse, she thinks of all the nervous moments she's felt in it, and of her ascent to God's studio. Her heart is heavy when the door slides open on an apartment lit only by its bar and fireplaces.

In the dark shadows, a bright, alabaster wing arcs high over the back of Lucifer's golden sofa, the wingtip pointed toward the mezzanine. She stares at it for a long moment. Of all the angel wings she has now seen, no others catch the light like Lucifer's do. Maybe because they don't have light hiding somewhere deep within themselves. Even from several feet away, she feels the warmth thrumming beneath his skin.

"Hello, love!" Lucifer cries, and an arm pops up near his wing, the hand waving briefly before dropping back.

She walks deeper into the apartment and rounds the end of the sofa. He's sprawled out in his wrinkled suit, wings spread wide and bent by furniture. He stares at her with glassy eyes, lips tilted by an intoxicated pleasure.

"Hi," she says, and sits close to his thighs. Long feathers twitch and settle around her calves. She takes one in hand and runs her fingers down the edge of the soft vane. "How'd you know it was me?"
"Xanies." He touches a finger to his tongue. "You here... I feel... very good." With effort, he stretches up a hand and before she realizes what he's doing, he squeezes her left breast. "Honk," he laughs.

Rolling her eyes and snorting, Chloe pulls his hand away and rests it on his waist. Leaning down his body, she unties his laces and removes his patent leather shoes. He reaches for her when she's finished, but she gently avoids him. Rising, she goes to the bar and locates a dishcloth and a bowl, which she fills with cool water. Returning to Lucifer's side, she sets the bowl on her lap and dips the cloth inside. As she wrings the terrycloth, water droplets sparkle beneath the room's firelight.

"What're you doin', De'tive?"

"Loving you," she says.

He watches her with hooded eyes.

Taking the damp cloth in hand, she leans forward and begins wiping his face, across his brow, over his cheekbones, down his nose. The white cloth comes away yellow and gray as she swipes beneath his eyes.

"You're wearing makeup," she observes, and turns to rinse out the cloth.

"Mm-hmm. D'you think I'm sexy?"

"Yes," she laughs, but sober quickly. "And I think you're tired."

"Pfft." He juts out his lower lip, and she sweeps at it playfully, making him sputter.

"I called Linda," she says. "She told me you haven't been showing up to your sessions."

Lucifer gasps dramatically. "I'm... suretain that's a... HIPAA violaration. Arrest"—he points toward the ceiling—" that woman."

"You'll get over it. Why haven't you been going?"

He shrugs a shoulder. "Nothing wrong."

"Right..."

He quiets under her care and closes his eyes. For a little while, he sleeps, maybe, but in time he stirs again, one wing fanning in a stretch. When he speaks, it's clear the drugs are already wearing off. "Does this mean the Devil's forgiven?" He chuckles to himself.

"I was angry with you today," Chloe admits, "but I've also been worried about you, so yes."

He scoffs quietly.

"Anyway, it's not me you need to say sorry to, Lucifer. Trixie isn't your kid— I know that—but she's my kid, and—"

"Does she hate me now?"

"No," Chloe answers softly. "She loves you. That's why it hurt, you know? She missed you. She's been missing both of us. And she's afraid of all the changes that are happening."

"I didn't mean..." Swallowing loudly, Lucifer grabs her wrist where it hovers near his face. "You
must know I'd do anything for—"

"I know," she interrupts. It feels like her insides are being scooped out with a rusty spoon. "And I know how much you have done, in other ways. From the very beginning." Her eyes sting as she remembers his red body, hanging on Cain's steel cross. For her daughter's sake. "But I think you know there's more to Trixie than her physical safety," she says, with one last pass of the damp cloth. "We all need people to show up and love us, too." She sets aside the bowl of water, leaving the stained cloth to float. When she sits straight again, she stares into the night beyond the balcony. "I'm sorry you didn't have that always."

Sitting up slightly, Lucifer grabs hold of her ribs and pulls her bodily toward him with casual strength. She lets out a startled laugh as she's dragged across feathers and loose buttons that catch on her clothes.

"Hi," she says again, lying atop him and speaking across the thick scruff of his chin. She shimmies her legs to join his on the sofa.

"Hello," Lucifer replies, in that tone of his that drips sin.

"What are you doing?"

Framing her face with his large hands, he pulls her into a kiss. It's hard and deep, and leaves her breathless and full of yearning. And still he deepens it as he unravels her hair from its braid and threads his fingers through the waves. She draws up her knees on either side of his body, until their hips are slotted together. His pulse hammers against her fingertips.

"We've too many clothes on," he says against her jaw, one hand sliding beneath the back of her shirt.

"I'm not having sex with you right now," Chloe counters, and then sighs as he unhooks her bra with nimble fingers.

He laughs against her throat. "Aren't you?"

She shouldn't, really. They should talk. But as his hands glide over her and grind her against his body, her thoughts slip. He kisses her until up is down and right is left, until her hips roll with a mind of their own. He drags her shirt off her back and throws her bra like it offends him. And for a while, it's all fun. For a while, she doesn't notice she's the only one reacting below the waist.

They part at the same time and look at each other a little awkwardly. Chloe breathes unevenly as she gives him a small smile.

"I..." he trails off. "My soldier appears to be on leave."

"It's okay," she says, touching his face.

"Darling, a lack of upward mobility is not my idea of okay," he retorts. She sits back on his lap, and he groans. "I mean, really, look at you." His eyes linger on her flushed breasts, which he touches and gives a conflicted expression. "Absolutely burning with desire, and here I can't even find a semi to park it."

Chloe snorts. "Lucifer, this just happens to men sometimes. It's no big deal."

"I am not a man," he reminds her with a snap. "And you know I am a big deal."
He is such a man. She holds up her hands. "Okay. But a lot's been going on. For, like, months." And especially more recently. "So, maybe this is normal."

"Not for me it isn't," he insists, his horror growing. "The Devil doesn't have...this happen—or not happen, as it were. Hell, I inspire formerly impotent men to rise to the occasion."

She reaches for her shirt where it's half on the floor, half draped on a wing. "Look, we can just cuddle."

Snatching the shirt from her hands, he tosses it in the direction of her discarded bra. "I don't want to bloody cuddle yet. I want to rail you." With a frustrated growl, his hands rush to her waist, fingers quickly plucking free the button to her jeans and yanking down her zipper. "Let me go down on you, at least."

"Stop," Chloe says, grabbing his hands.

"What's wrong with me?" he asks, searching her face.

She runs her fingers over his knuckles. Tears distort her vision. "Nothing's wrong with you."

"Then..." He shakes his head, bewildered. "Wait, it's making you cry. You poor woman."

"It's not that." Chloe shakes her head and drops forward to rest against him. She tucks her face into the crook of his neck. "You know I'm here for you, right?" she whispers.

"Let me go down on you, at least."

"Lucifer," she chastises, "there's nothing to make up for."

But she knows he doesn't believe her.

***

At Linda's office building, Lucifer forgoes the sluggish elevator, choosing instead to take the stairs at a brisk jog. Popping out of the stairwell, he nearly runs into a familiar face. He holds onto the shoulders of the other person to prevent their collision. The other winged person.

"Gabriel?"

"Greetings, Lucifer."

"What on earth are you doing on...well, Earth?"

He's not certain his brother has ever even been to Earth.

"I have been in a therapy session. It was uncomfortable."

"With Linda?" Lucifer glances toward the end of the hallway, half-expecting a portal to another dimension. "And, what, robes on, wings out?"

Gabriel shrugs. "Amenadiel sent me."

Lucifer lets out an exasperated sigh. "Of course he did. And you just went along with it, did you?"
"It is not for me to question our brother."

"Oh, no." Lucifer withdraws his hands and looks his little brother up and down in disgust while wiping his palms on the front of his shirt. "You can stop right there with your blind idolatry. Dearie me, you really do need help, don't you? A little deprogramming, perhaps?" Barking a laugh, he shoves past Gabriel and waltzes down the hall. He yanks open Linda's door and steps inside her office, only to crane his torso around the doorframe. "Get your own bloody therapist!"

The telltale rustle of feathers sounds with his peculiar brother's departure. Lucifer slams the door closed and turns to see Linda at her desk, regarding him with narrowed eyes.

"You don't have an appointment," she says.

"Why was my brother here?"

The doctor closes a folder. "It seems Amenadiel decided to send...many"—she chuckles darkly—"many, many of your siblings to me. So. I guess I'm a real therapist to the celestials now."

"This won't do at all," Lucifer says, appalled.

"I agree, which is why I've asked them to have Amenadiel find therapists in Heaven." She blinks and shakes her head. "Because that's where my new clients live. In the afterlife."

"Well, good. I was here first. I won't let them nick you."

"Nobody's taking me away from you, Lucifer. But I have agreed—for now, at least—to see them when I can, until they find replacements." She stands and holds up a hand before he can protest. "I know my limits. And our sessions will always take priority."

Mollified, the tension melts from his shoulders, and he sinks to the couch. "I don't know how you'll manage, Doctor. I mean, Gabriel alone wouldn't become self-aware if he ran into a mirror."

"Mm, some people need extra help, and that's okay." She sits across from him in her usual chair and smooths leaf-patterned dress over her legs. "I'm glad you decided to visit me today. Even if you didn't have anything scheduled."

Remembering the reason he's here, he swallows and rubs his ring with his thumb. "Yes, well, I'm afraid something horrible has happened," he says gravely.

Linda nods. "Chloe told me about your father's—" She pauses for a moment. "Is passing the right word?"

"Oh, that." Lucifer scoffs while pouring himself water. "No, no. That's old news, Doctor."

"Really? Because I think I'm still processing that one. Like, a lot. I mean, honestly, I'm not sure I ever got over how your mother—the literal Goddess of All Creation—nearly killed me and now has her own universe." She laughs a little hysterically.

"Well, that's you, isn't it?"

"I...guess you're right." Sitting up straighter, she holds out a hand in invitation. "Okay, you tell me, then. What's troubling you, Lucifer?"

"I couldn't perform last night."

"At Lux? Was someone else scheduled?"
"What? No. I'm not talking about musicians, Doctor. I'm talking about, well, my...bassoon, if you will."

"Bass—Oh!" Linda's brows lift high on her forehead. "Oh. Right. Okay. Well. I..." She frowns and leans forward. "Has that happened to you before?"

"Once or twice," he admits, discomfited. "But never without cause, Doctor." He pauses, thinking. "Usually the cause was Hell. Or syphilis. Very difficult to overlook syphilis, even when you know you can't contract it."

"Ah."

"But this absolutely should not happen with Chloe. I am Lucifer bloody Morningwood with her, or I normally am..." He frowns and tilts his head. "Should I try one of those no-fap things all the strange young men rave about? November's just around the bend..." His frown deepens. "Not that I've given the old garden snake a good tug recently." He stands up suddenly, pointer fingers jabbing toward floor. "Actually, just give me a tick, will you? I'll go see if I can't crack one off."

"Lucifer. Sit down."

Eyeing her warily, he eases back onto the couch. "So I shouldn't be wanking?"

"I...didn't say that." She clears her throat. "Let's just take a step back. You don't think there's a reason why you might be...struggling right now?"

He looks at her blankly. "Haven't a clue, Doctor. Life has never been better."

She nods and watches him with that perceptive expression she gets that makes him want to crawl beneath a rock. Crossing his legs, he leans into the cushions, away from the small woman who has always felt bigger than she is.

"Is that why you've cancelled your last three appointments?"

"Yes, I had no problems whatsoever until last night. Bit of a misunderstanding between the detective's offspring and me, but I'll sort that out soon enough."

"It's good you're maintaining your relationship with Trixie. I know that means a lot to Chloe. So, would you say you've been...happy, then?"

"Well, it's not every day the source of all your misery disintegrates into subatomic particles."

"Yes, that-that is quite the experience. Why don't we talk about that?"

"Not much to say, really." He uncrosses his legs, crosses them again. The room is uncomfortably warm—and nothing should feel uncomfortably warm to the Devil. "Dad was there, and then he wasn't."

"Was that shocking?"

"Why would it be?" He shrugs. "I hadn't seen him in thousands of years."

"It's not uncommon for people who witness the death of a parent to find the event deeply traumatic, even when they've been separated for a long time or when they expect it to happen. You've now dealt with two difficult endings with your parents."

He breathes unevenly. He could swear he feels Uriel's blood on his hands. "Mum's not dead," he
says, dragging his fingers over the knees of his trousers.

"No, but you'll never see her again."

"No. I won't." For a moment, he's silent as something flares wildly in his chest. "Bit funny about Dad, really. Most suicides end up with me, after all."

"You know, when we lose someone, really lose them, it's often the unfinished business that eats at us. All the what ifs, all the apologies that were never made. It's hard, living with that pain."

"The only unfinished business I had with Dad was giving him the war all the stories claim I started." He yanks off his dark gray suit jacket and tosses it to the other side of the couch.

Linda eyes the bespoke wool. "You had a chance to cause trouble when you were in Heaven. Why didn't you?"

"The detective—Chloe—was with me. And I did cause a bit of trouble. Had the black eye to prove it." He begins rolling up a sleeve. "Gosh, it's rather hot in here, isn't it?"

"Do you want to take a moment?"

"I want a bloody smoke."

"You know I don't allow smoking in my office."

"Right." Lucifer shoves his other sleeve up his arm. "I don't see how all this talk about Dad is going to solve the real problem, Doctor."

The doctor's heel taps on the carpeted floor. "There's Viagra," she says bluntly.

"I do not need that."

"I don't think you do, either. I think something else is going on, don't you?"

"Yes, and I'm paying you to find out," he says testily.

"You are. And what have we gone over in the past—about displacement, and avoidance, and denial? I think, deep down, you know what's going on here. Why you've been cancelling sessions with me, why you're feeling uncomfortable now and having sexual difficulty, maybe even why you've experienced some tension between yourself and Trixie."

There's a ringing in his ears as he stares at her. "What are you implying, Doctor?"

"I think you need to give yourself space to grieve."

"Grieve?" Lucifer echoes in disbelief. "I'm not heartbroken! I'm furious. What did I suffer all those eons for, huh?" He feels his eyes burn with his hatred. "And now Chloe's burdened with meddlesome gifts—she doesn't think I know how it is, but I do—and for what? For another experiment gone wrong? Fixing Hell!" He scoffs. "And he had the audacity to up and die? At will? After some bloody sob story about giving pieces of himself to all of us?" He heaves angrily and loosens his grip on the couch before he can tear the upholstery. Sitting forward, he pours more water into his glass. Some spills down the side of the pitcher and pools on the table.

"I know you're angry," Linda says, nodding. "I think you have lots of reasons to be angry."

"But?" he asks, voice clipped.
"But I think you need to ask yourself what it means—and, yes, how it makes you feel—to live without the specter of your father. If it's really all good feelings. And, if it's not, if it's really just anger that you feel."

***

Lucifer has no destination in mind as the Corvette purrs and growls down L.A.’s palm-lined streets. His fury eases with the cool kiss of the wind on his face and the sun dragging westward, until he's left with nothing but apathy. The kind of torpor he used to feel, sitting on his black throne in Hell, as demon after demon sought his permission or judgment, or whispered of upstarts beyond sprawling Nox. As the vile and unrepentant screamed in his halls and slaved in his mines.

The sky darkens, and he returns to Lux, feeling as though he's suffered one too many punches from Amenadiel. The door to the lift slides open, and he walks at once to the bar, tossing his jacket atop the counter. His flask has been dry for hours.

"Hey."

He turns, whisky bottle already in hand. Chloe stands beside the sofa in faded jeans.

"Ah, didn't know you were here, darling." But it warms him that she is. "Care for a drink?"

"I've got one," she replies, folding her hands before herself as he pours liquor. "I thought you'd be here when we got here. If you need us to go, that's okay. I just thought you might like some company. But I really should have called first."

"Stay," he says, and he's gifted with one of her bright, sweet smiles. "Who's the we, though? Unless you've taken to using some form of the royal we, in which case—"

Lucifer's sentence drops off, his eyes widening as Chloe's offspring jogs down the steps from his bedroom, seemingly coming from the direction of his bathroom. Never—not once—in the seven years he's lived in Los Angeles has a child crossed his penthouse threshold. He stares, confounded by the intrusion. She stops at the edge of the bar and stares back at him.

"Hi, Lucifer." She speaks softly.

"Hello, child," he returns, and drinks. This day simply won't end. "I hope you haven't been putting your sticky mittens on anything."

"She's not broken too much," Chloe teases.

"Your place is really cool," Trixie says.

"Cool," Lucifer echoes. Tainted now, more like.

Chloe clears her throat, and her offspring's lips quirk sheepishly.

"I'm sorry about yesterday," she sighs, eyes darting toward her mother. "I shouldn't have kicked you or said mean things."

Lucifer lets out a small, shuddering breath. "Well... No matter. Didn't even leave a bruise." He glances at Chloe, who now looks at him expectantly. Right. "And you have my apologies, as well, Beatrice. I meant to attend your tournament." He swallows. "I should have attended."
Trixie smiles a little before her mouth drops open. "Oh!" Lucifer startles at the sudden mood shift as she skips to the coffee table on scrawny legs. "I made you a picture!"

"Another?" he asks, baffled. "Why do I need so many?"

"Your fridge has room," Chloe laughs, nodding her head for him to join them.

He does so hesitantly. Trixie picks up a paper from the table and holds it out to him, wiggling with excitement. He stops some distance away and stretches out his arm to take it from her, as if being any closer might make him ill.

The drawing is more detailed than the one she drew for him the first time he baked her a chocolate cake; she's always improving as an artist. In it, he stands beside Chloe in the center, where they have smiling faces and large eyes, the pupils of which are pointed toward one another in a way that is rather true to life. The child stands in front of them, slender arms jutting like brackets beside her hips. What appears to be an astronaut's helmet adorns her head, and a purple cape falls behind her.

Beside Chloe, there is Daniel, accurately depicted as a cop. Beside Lucifer, Mazikeen with her blades and Isabel with her cards. Above them all, near a bright yellow sun, an alien speeds around in a flying saucer.

Most of all, he stares at himself, at the wings stretching behind the humans in his life. At the red horns atop his head. In all his many years, he's posed for countless artists, but he's never been part of a family portrait. He's never been seen like this.

"Do you like it?" Trixie whispers. She's edged closer without his realizing, and now tugs on his sleeve.

"I—" He looks down at her big eyes, a heavy, but not unwelcome, sense of responsibility hitting him. "I like it very much, Beatrice."

She grins toothily at him, and he looks at the drawing again. He might have it framed, he thinks, and hang it...somewhere.

Not the bedroom.

Chloe wraps an arm around his waist. "Who wants pizza?"

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The credits roll after Coco, which, as far as annoying children's films go, was tolerable in Lucifer's opinion. He looks around his living room and all the small bits of evidence that it's been taken over by Decker women. Many have passed through his penthouse as lovers and frenemies, but they've left no mark. Chloe and her daughter crash land and take up his space. They burrow so deep that they appear to stay with him wherever he goes.

Trixie lets out a small snore, and he rolls his eyes. Standing, he yanks a throw from a nearby chair and gently drapes it across her small form. Or not so small, really. She's much bigger than when he first met her in that dreadful school of hers. More interesting, too. Even if she Karate Kidded him.

He hears Chloe return from putting plates in the kitchen.

"She looked cold," he explains, stuffing his hands in his trouser pockets and taking a step back.
"Uh-huh." The corners of her eyes crinkle.

They drift onto the balcony and pull the glass partition closed behind them. It's a smoggy, cloudy night that smells of a coming autumnal rain. Lucifer flicks his lighter open and touches the flame to a cigarette.

"How did your session with Linda go?" Chloe asks. "Not that you have to talk to me about it. I just...wanna know you're okay."

"Can't even get to half-staff, if that's what you're asking."

"It's not."

He looks at her askance as he draws on his cigarette. What a pair they are. Kicked out of Heaven and the LAPD. Allergic to the horribleness of Hell. Fatherless. Smoke passes his teeth as he scoffs, "Linda thinks I'm grieving."

Chloe leans back on the glass railing. It always makes him a little nervous when she does. He shuffles closer, until their elbows touch.

"Do you think you're grieving?" she asks.

"Why should I feel sad about that bastard?" he asks, tapping ashes into the wind. "I mean, at least Mum had a few redeeming qualities."

"Because he was your father." She shrugs. "Because you loved each other once, I think? It's okay to be sad about losing him before and now."

Lucifer wants to deny it, but the words won't come. Instead, he looks down at the city lights as his throat tightens and his eyes burn. He drops the nub of his cigarette to the balcony and stamps it out.

"Linda said as much, but I'm still bloody pissed I didn't get the last word in."

Chloe snorts. Turning to face the city with him, she lets her temple fall to his shoulder. He takes one of her hands and threads their fingers.

"His soul is gone," he says. "I'm not sure if you could feel that, but we—my siblings and I—could."

"I don't know that it's gone. I think he gave parts of his soul to you."

"Like a genetic disorder," he jokes.

"Hey, I'm glad your parents made you," Chloe whispers, and the words inspire the most exquisite pain. "But I'm sorry you couldn't get what you needed from your dad."

What had he needed? His gut says revenge, but the fire behind the notion has been extinguished.

"I wanted him to accept my decision to be my own man," he says suddenly, his vision blurring as he stares unblinkingly at a building several blocks away.

Really, after all this time, after all the betrayal and torture, he supposes he desired a slightly different family portrait from the one he's gotten, as eternally grateful as he is for it. And that... He isn't sure what to do with that.

Chloe pulls him to her as he gasps unevenly and the levee breaks.
Chloe remembers what it was like in the weeks after her father's death. How different the world looked, knowing he wasn't in it. But then time stretched, and she thought of him a little less—and felt guilty for it. Then she forgot to feel guilty, too, unless something reminded her of him. Even now that she can be sure he is content, his absence will always be a small wound that reopens from time to time.

Grief is strange like that, and healing isn't linear, so it's no surprise Lucifer has good days and bad as he increases his sessions with Linda. Sleep often eludes him, but he finds ways to distract himself that don't include endless partying and hard drugs. Mostly, he drinks or bakes—or bakes while drinking. There's something fresh most mornings as a result, scones or croissants or muffins to go with full breakfasts. Cakes appear at random. Some go to neighbors when Lucifer isn't looking, if only to keep Trixie from becoming prediabetic.

"Check out these buns," Lucifer jokes, bent over as he draws a pan of steaming cinnamon rolls from the oven.

Chloe's laughter rings loud in her kitchen.

They're going to be okay. She's no fool to think their problems are solved, but maybe, just maybe, this is a turning point in their relationship and Lucifer's life. One where he knows he has people he can trust. Where pain doesn't have to be so isolating.

Nothing gives her more hope than when he has Trixie's drawing matted and framed. It replaces the old, and likely priceless, bronze relief that had hung above the light switch next to his elevator, so it's the last thing one sees before leaving the penthouse—and is impossible to miss beneath the newly installed gallery spotlight. The drawing is brightly colored and childishly whimsical, completely at odds with Lucifer's Old World antiques and otherwise modern sensibilities. But he's a complicated devil, and Chloe doesn't miss how frequently he glances at his new wall art.

Her dad was right. She's in real deep.

They continue to work on the Hudson case, diving into what is familiar when they're not picking up other pieces of their lives. They retrace Hannah Hudson's steps from decades prior, up to the parking lot where she was strangled and cruelly discarded beside her red Ford Fiesta. Everything about the case is a challenge. Hannah was murdered in '91, when there was less video surveillance, especially in the part of Los Angeles she was in on the night of her death.

In the end, it's a classic case of a bitter ex, a hothead who scared the lone witness into silence. They're in the middle of questioning yet another former model who worked with Hannah when the woman breaks down with a confession. Lucifer doesn't even have to bring out his mojo.

"I'm so sorry," Molly weeps, leaning on the front door to her home for support. "Ray swore he'd kill me if I said a word to anybody."

"Ray?" Chloe frowns and glances at Lucifer. "We didn't have a Ray on the suspect list." It's the first they've heard the name at all.

"Ray Briggs. Hannah dated him in high school." Molly shoves back a mop of auburn-dyed hair. "She mentioned him a few times, said he was kinda weird but meant well. He was in her past, you know? We were in our twenties by then. Once, he showed up after a runway we did together, but it
didn't seem like a big deal. I don't think it seemed like a big deal to Hannah, either. More like old friends catching up. But I guess Ray didn't see it that way... Hannah and I were both in the wrong place at the wrong time that night. This was months later. I've never known why he did it. I don't think I ever will." She looks between them, silently pleading for mercy. "If I told the cops, and they didn't believe me, or if he wasn't sent to prison—"

"And where is this murderous pillock now?" Lucifer asks tightly.

"Dead," she answers, eyes filling with tears again. "That's the only reason I'm telling you. He died a few months back. I-I've never been more relieved in my life."

Chloe nods sympathetically. "Why didn't you go to the authorities after his death, Molly?"

"I don't know. Sometimes it's better to just leave it, don't you think?"

Maybe, but Chloe doesn't reply. It's not for her to decide, really. The Hudsons are who matter here. "How did he die?"

"No idea. I just have the link to the online obituary. It doesn't say much."

She writes down what Molly remembers of that night, how she came across Hannah's body just in time to see Ray run for his car and speed away. Time has not been kind to the former model. A woman in her early fifties, she looks at least ten years older. No wonder, what with the secret she's held close.

In homicide cases, there are no happy endings, but some endings are more unsatisfying than others. The Hudsons will get the truth, but there will be no justice for Hannah, at least not on the earthly plane. And maybe not beyond it, either.

After they finish speaking with Molly and leave her front porch, Lucifer stops at the end of the driveway and glares at his phone. He's stuck on Ray Briggs' obituary, his jaw twitching with his frustration.

"You okay?" Chloe touches his elbow.

"He got away with everything," he says in a low growl. "She did nothing to deserve his hatred."

"No," she agrees, uncertain they're talking about Briggs at all.

He pockets his phone with a scowl. "I hope he's enjoying Hell."

Chloe hums. She doesn't particularly mind the thought of murderers suffering, either. At least for a while. But she can't help but wonder who has harbored more guilt. Who's to say Ray felt guilty enough about murdering Hannah—or guilty enough about something else entirely—to end up in Hell? And who's to say Molly will end up in Heaven, with all the guilt she feels? Did Hannah make it to Heaven?

In the car, Lucifer slams the passenger door shut with enough force that Chloe is shocked it doesn't warp the metal and plastic.

Nobody knows injustice like the Devil.

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With Trixie more confident that her world is not falling apart, Chloe and Dan return to their usual programming of joint custody. Tonight is the first night in weeks that Chloe has had anything other than parenting (hers and God's), Lucifer's grief, and casework on the brain. She's determined to have some damn fun. She's planned everything out.

While packing a duffel bag, Maze appears in her doorway and lets out a low whistle. "Out to charm a snake, huh, Decker?" she says around a mouthful of lemon. Rind on.

Chloe grimaces at the lemon and rolls her eyes.

"What?" Maze snorts, looking her up and down with a quirked brow. "Am I wrong?"

"Kind of," she answers, and doesn't bother to elaborate as she stuffs frilly panties into her bag.

She has clothes at the penthouse—just enough that Lucifer has begun to complain she's taking up too much room—but they're mostly practical clothes, not get a rise out of the Devil clothes. Now, she wears a new, dark red draped blouse and a black skirt she needs to be very careful about bending over in. So, Maze isn't entirely wrong, either.

"We're going out to dinner." Lucifer just doesn't know it yet. She pulls on a black trench coat and hefts her duffel bag.

Maze sucks on the edge of her toothmarked lemon. "I can guess what's for dessert."

"Okay," Chloe chuckles, gently shoving her aside at the doorway. "Glad you could get that out of your system."

She exits her apartment to the tune of demonic laughter.

In the car, she calls Lucifer, who answers on the third ring with a cheery hello.

"Hi," she says, smiling even as the jerk in front of her forgets to use his turn signal at the intersection. "So. Stop whatever you're doing. Dan's got Trixie, and I'm coming over, and we're going out to dinner."

"Ooh," Lucifer coos, immediately intrigued, "what's the occasion other than freedom from the thankless responsibilities of motherhood?"

"No occasion." She shrugs. "I just think we deserve it."

"Well, I'll not say no to a good time. And I know just the place. It's—"

"Nope," Chloe interrupts with a laugh. "No, I've already made reservations for eight—and, no, I'm not telling you where because it's a surprise. Oh! And this time I'm treating you." With the Hudson case settled and another client already lined up, she feels a little less indebted to the Devil now, even if he would never write her name in a ledger.

Lucifer pauses for a long moment. "I suppose there's only one question left to ask." A glass taps down to a hard surface in the background. "What are you wearing, darling?"

The way he says some things should not be allowed while she's driving. "Black and red. Fancy for me, not for you."

"Right, then. I'll have a shower and coordinate!"
He ends the call without saying goodbye.

When she enters the penthouse fifteen minutes later and passes Trixie's drawing, he's still in the shower. Lucifer takes forever to get ready, largely because he believes in long, water-wasting showers. Chloe smiles as his voice rings out in song.

"Spend your lives in sin and misery, in the House of the Rising Sun..."

In his room, she drops her duffel bag on the side of the bed that, at some point, became hers, as evidenced by discarded hair ties on the nightstand. There's something comforting about the way their personal effects keep spilling into each other's homes. With Hell having permanently wrecked her sense of time, it can sometimes feel like she's been in a relationship with Lucifer far longer than she was married to Dan. She's had to remind herself that not even Lucifer sees it that way. They are not married. They don't even, technically, live together. This is his first real relationship. In the face of everything else that's happened this Earth year.

Play it cool, Decker.

He's still learning to be open, still learning to accept acceptance, and she's still learning what it means to be with someone who has a history that goes back to... The Literal Beginning. Navigating it isn't always easy, and it's been awkward since the night he couldn't have sex. With the exception of a kiss here or there, they're almost back to how things used to be. Awkwardness in the bedroom is not something Chloe's come to expect from Lucifer, and she knows he's unhappy about it. So, time to give him a bit of a shake. Or try to. She's never been good at flirting.

Padding into his massive closet, she digs around for the pair of black, heeled boots she stopped wearing after she hurt her ankle over the summer. Lucifer doesn't know it, and she will never tell him, but she bought these with him in mind, though at the time she'd tried to convince herself otherwise. Tried very hard, in fact.

While bending to remove her sneakers and slip her feet into the leather boots, she catches sight of Lucifer's black, ceramic bowl with its delicately painted jasmine blossoms. Straightening, she reaches past polished shoes and picks up the dish, which holds his strange coin collection. She'd meant to ask him about it sooner, but forgot amid all the other things happening in their lives. Holding the bowl to herself now, she rakes her fingers through the metal discs, making them rattle and clink.

When she unearths twin coins embossed with a familiar pentagram and goat's head, she freezes. Holding her breath, she carefully lifts one of the Pentecostal coins with a trembling hand and stares at it. Hell is always with her, simmering beneath the surface with its monochrome horrors. Now, she smells the sulphur, feels the listlessness and heat, the grit of ash on her skin. She hears the rushed hiss of demons' feet in ankle-deep ash as they hunt her down the tangled corridors of Nox.

And the loops... The closet fades from her vision, until she's a captive once more, drifting in and out of countless locations and eras, hearing the screams of tortured souls. She sits with Cain atop a log house in a frozen tundra. Below, a man crunches through the frost-covered grass on his way to a thick forest at the edge of a village. In the pitch black belly of the woods, a cry cuts through the cold night. The loop resets, and the suffering continues anew.

They could go back, she thinks, thumb rubbing the raised edges of the pentagram as she remembers tormented souls. She knows they have to go back, just as Trixie predicted. Her head is filled with Lucifer's judgment books. Mens rea. Non liquet. Innocens. Innocens. Innocens.

"Well, well, what's under the trench coat, Detective?"
Chloe gasps and whirls around, the ceramic bowl slipping from her hand. Lucifer darts forward and catches it deftly before it reaches the floor. Coins slide across each another, spilling over one side and click-clacking against the tiled floor, where they bounce, spin, and fall on heads or tails.

"I'm sorry," she breathes out, looking up at Lucifer, who stands before her in shirt and boxers, his hair still wet. Guilt twists inside in her chest as his eyes flick between her face and the Pentecostal coin pinned between her thumb and index finger.

"No harm done," he says, though there's a coolness to his voice. "I see you've found my coin collection—and its latest additions."

"I didn't know you held on to these when we got back," she says shakily. "You, uh, shouldn't leave them lying around, should you?"

"It appears I shouldn't, no, but then you're the only one who knows what to do with one of these bad boys, aren't you?" His smile is thin as he sets the jasmine bowl aside and leans against the shelving. He tilts his head as he regards her. There's a tightness to his body, as if all his muscles have bunched. "What kind of snooping is this, dear heart?"

"Not really snooping," she says in a rush, and drops the coin into the dish. She clutches her hands in front of herself. "Just thinking."

"Having a think about what, pray tell?"

She looks at him sidelong. Sometimes she's reminded of how Lucifer is a competent interrogator in his own right. He plays on the job, but when he truly wants information, he knows what to do, even without his mojo. She swallows. She doesn't like being on the receiving end of these talents.

"Do you ever think about all the people in Hell who shouldn't suffer forever?" She licks her lips. "Or at all?"

"I've much better things to entertain me."

That makes her turn and look him in the eye. "You didn't answer the question."

His mouth twists with a bitter smirk. "What do you desire me to say, love?"

"The truth," she says, at the same time her phone buzzes. They look at the offending pocket of her trench coat like it's a third person in the room. "That's probably the restaurant sending me a reminder."

A reminder that she should let this go, that tonight is supposed to be fun. No Heaven or Hell, no God; no work or Trixie, even. Just the two of them.

"Right," Lucifer says, and clears his throat. "Ready in a jiffy." He turns toward his suits.

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An uncomfortable silence sits between them on the way to the restaurant. Silence is rarely a good thing with Lucifer, and Chloe feels his eyes on her as they start and stop through L.A.’s thick Saturday night traffic. But the tension eases soon after she parks and they walk the two blocks to Wild Umbra, the trendy cocktail bar and Greek fusion restaurant where she's reserved a table. The place is only a year old, serves teeny-tiny portions, and stays booked up. Chloe had to pull a few
strings of her own to get them a reservation.

"Ah, I know the manager of this place!" Lucifer exclaims as they come to stand beneath Wild Umbra's distressed wood sign. "She owes me a favor—two, actually, depending on how you look at it."

Chloe sighs in disappointment. She really thought she was surprising him with this one. "Don't tell me you bankrolled this restaurant, too."

"Nothing like that," he assures her with a smile. "I found Lisa a wife."

"Oh. That's nice." It will always amuse her that the Devil is a matchmaker, but maybe it makes sense, given his talents. "What was the other favor?"

"I found her a husband, as well."

She glances at him as they wedge into the tiny, dimly lit entryway and wait for someone to attend them. "Too bad the first relationship didn't work out," she remarks over the noise of dinner conversations.

"Actually, I believe they're all quite happy since they got the larger bed. Poor Aaron's back was killing him."

Narrowing her eyes, Chloe gives him a shrewd look. His mouth twitches. "You slept with all of them, didn't you?" she says, as a young woman dressed in a black uniform steps up to greet them.

Lucifer wraps an arm around Chloe's shoulders and grins at the waitress, bringing her into the conversation. "Who do you think recommended the new bed?"

The waitress' eyes shift between them, caught somewhere between the awkwardness of the conversation and the allure that is Lucifer Morningstar talking about beds. "Uh, do y'all have a reservation?"

The Pentecostal coin fades from Chloe's thoughts as they share small plates and drinks. During their relationship, they've not done much that could be considered actual dating, unless movie nights with Trixie or takeout and sex next to case files count. But going out with the Devil is fun. He charms the waitstaff and bartender, and requests to speak with the chef, who he compliments profusely and makes a deal with on the fly. Between all this, he jokes and teases, and Chloe laughs—and laughs harder still as the alcohol makes her bold.

Beneath the table, she drags the toe of one boot up the inside of his right leg. He watches her over the lip of his glass. Swallowing, he sets the glass aside and fingers a cufflink, his expression wary.

Chloe leans forward and rests her chin on a fist. The restaurant is wonderfully fuzzy around its edges as Lucifer leans in with her. "Do you know what I'm wearing under this?" she asks quietly. Or at least it was meant to be quiet. Maybe it's not, judging by the scandalized glare from a woman nearby.

Lucifer's eyes drop to Chloe's breasts, where they're barely hidden beneath her low-cut blouse. "Tell me," he says, attention returning to her face.

She smiles happily. "Nothing."

His mouth drops open, and she laughs, feeling she's finally beat him at his own game.
Their waiter stops by their table, beaming. "Are we ready to see the dessert menu?"

"I think we just want the check, thank you," Chloe says, pleased with herself.

"Yes," Lucifer agrees, glancing at her slyly, "something has come up, I'm afraid, and we really should get right on it."

Maze was right about dessert, as well.

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The elevator door slides open, and they stumble into the penthouse, leaving behind her trench coat and his suit jacket. Chloe yanks her top off, baring herself to eager hands. She unbuttons Lucifer's shirt as they kiss, and he guides her to the sofa by her hips. At the last moment, he turns them and pulls her down atop him. Her black skirt rides up, his hands find her bare ass, and she grinds into him, fingers tracing the muscles of his chest as his tongue slips between her teeth. They groan together at the friction of fabric, wanting more.

"I love you," Chloe pants onto the corner of his mouth, scruff tickling her lips.

She would love him, no matter what his body did or didn't do, but she can't deny that she's missed this side of him. This burning fire that calls to her like the sun. If he is the star, she is the black of space that craves his light.

Lucifer drags her back to his lips, into a bruising kiss she feels down to her boots. His fingers clamp at her jaw and dig into her hair. When he's rendered her breathless, he pulls away and pins her with a hard look that makes her brow furrow.

"You're not ever going back to Hell," he says, voice rough and low. "Do you understand?"

Caught off guard, Chloe stares at him for a long moment, aching with too many desires as he holds her head between his hands. The mood between them is suddenly heavy. "What if we need me to?"

"We don't."

"But—"

"We don't," he repeats, hands sliding from her face. His fingers trail down her ribs and stomach, to rest at the waist of her skirt. "And I'm destroying the coins tomorrow. They've brought us enough misery, this side of the Inferno."

"But what if—"

"No, that's the end of that discussion," he says crisply, and slides a hand between her legs.

She grabs his hand and pushes it aside. "End of the discussion?" Anger flares in her gut at his tone. "You don't get to decide when a conversation is over."

"I think you'll find I do on this subject," he says with that pompous celestial tone she despises. "I'm the Devil, darling. Hell is rather within my purview."

"That doesn't give you the right to cut off communication. Not with me. I've been to Hell, too, Lucifer."
"And hated every minute of it, as I recall. And returned with nightmares and a blinding insatiability—though I rather liked that bit. All understandable, really. You don't belong there."

"Lots of people don't belong there," she argues, crossing her arms over her breasts. "You didn't belong there."

Lucifer sighs loudly and looks down at where their laps meet. "Are we really going to waste the first good rager I've had in weeks on this?"

She glares at him. She'd been perfectly content to not think about Hell at all tonight. She'd planned on it. "You're the one who brought all this up."

"Yes, I felt I had to." Lucifer scowls. "Because you know what your problem is?" he says, pointing a finger.

"Right now?" she asks dryly. "Pretty sure it's resisting the urge to dislocate your finger."

"I feel those incessant wheels in your head," he says, twirling a finger, "turning, turning, turning. Dad made you care about right and wrong, and now all it takes is one of my coins to spin you right up about Hell."

"This isn't about your dad. Not really," Chloe sighs, ire melting out of her as she folds a hand over his finger and knuckles. "And I know you care, too." Or he wouldn't be so damn prickly.

"I don't."

She gives him a tired, pointed look. "The man I love knows it's wrong to let people suffer when we could do something about it. I know you're as bothered by the system as I am. Even more than I am."

"Not enough to come out of retirement," he sing-songs. "Face it, Detective, you're the selfless one, not me."

"So you're just the Devil, after all," she says. "That's it?"

"That's it."

Deep down, she knows this is grief and fear for her safety. And he doesn't lie. This is how he sees himself in the moment, just as he's seen himself in other ways before—just, she imagines, as he will see himself in other ways in the future. To love Lucifer is to love someone who is forever moving two steps forward and one step back.

"Okay." She crosses her arms and shrugs. "Show me again, if that's who you really are."

Hesitation flickers across his face a second before his jaw sets. He opens up his body, resting his elbows on the back of the sofa, leaving her an out, even now. But this is the only concession he provides. There is no gentle transition into his devil form. Between one blink and the next, he is a monster, hairless and scarred, coarse and scarlet red, his eyes alight with flame. He is everything Hell made him.

Chloe doesn't flinch. She would have, once, when she was afraid and confused by what his existence implied, back when Heaven and Hell were mere concepts. But she knows this skin now, has felt the chains of Heaven and Hell binding his bones. She knows his wings in the darkness, their heavy weight on her back in sleep. And beneath all of that, she believes she knows the real him. The boy who delighted in painting the sky.
He sucks in a breath when she kisses him, as surprised now by the press of her lips as the first time she kissed his burned flesh. But this is not like the gentle kisses she's given his nightmarish visage in the past. This kiss is as rough and needy as those she gave him minutes before.

Her fingers drag down his leathered chest, which heaves and twitches beneath her touch, as if he is a rabbit gone into shock. Hands balled into fists along the back of the sofa, he doesn't move beneath her, and she accepts this for a while, letting herself grow used to the heat and texture of his mouth and jaw beneath her lips and tongue. Underneath the comforting scent of his sylvan cologne, he smells of smoke, like a campfire on a summer night. She feels no fear, only a desire to rest near the flames, to walk his coals.

Pulling away, she draws his bottom lip between her teeth until it pops free. She stares into hellfire, feeling powerful as she reaches for his belt buckle.

"Chloe," Lucifer says in a rush, scarred hands covering hers.

She looks at his blackened nails and lets him hold her in place as she tilts her hips forward. Breath hisses out of him, and she smiles at how he is still hard and ready between her legs. "I'm not afraid of you," she reminds him, gently pushing past his loose grip and taking hold of his belt. "I'm not afraid of any of it."

Maybe that's just part of who she is, along with his inability to read her. Some righting of an old wrong God didn't even know he had committed.

Feeding leather through the buckle, she watches Lucifer's face, his parted, parched lips, so different and yet so familiar. "Your father made us," she says quietly, "but he didn't know what we'd end up becoming or who we'd be together." She shrugs a shoulder. "I think we're our own people." Believing anything else is impossible if they're to move forward. "You would never leave me in the darkness."

"No," Lucifer agrees, the crimson skin of his face occasionally shifting, revealing patchworks of white flesh that are soon consumed by fire.

"And I wouldn't leave you, either." She peels his zipper down and reaches between the open flaps of his trousers, to free him from his boxers and take him in hand. Excitement sparks low in her belly as she strokes uneven skin. His breaths are loud in the quiet room. "We've got each other's backs."

"You've got more than the Devil's back right now," Lucifer chokes out, hips jerking as his head falls back, exposing a neck corded with scars.

Laughing softly, Chloe kisses the gnarled flesh. "Do you remember when you first asked me what I desired?" she whispers, pressing her cheek to his while her hand moves.

"Yes," he says, a moan held in the back of his throat, "not that you cooperated."

"I told you I want to help people." She twists her fist. "That hasn't changed. Just...the details have." God should have known the Devil would always be in those. "I don't want to leave innocent people to the dark."

"You don't"—his breath hitches—"deserve any of this."

"It's okay," she says, easing back enough to look at him once more. Her eyes fill with tears at the truth of it. It is okay, this unexpected slant to her life, as long as she has a partner and can find some semblance of balance. What an adventure. What a chance to do good. "These are just more cases to
solve."

"How, she doesn't know yet, but for now it doesn't matter.

"I don't want to see you there," he confesses softly.

"I know, but we'll go together? We can try, Lucifer."

Chloe raises up on her knees, hovering above his hardness. Lucifer's hands rush to the bunched skirt at her hips, stilling her. He looks at her uncertainly, panic swirling in his hellfire, which shifts from red to rose gold. Gently, she drags his hands up and rests them on her breasts. She leans into the fevered ridges of his skin. She's wanted him like this since she first let herself imagine he could be exactly what he claimed to be.

They misunderstood Izzy's cards, she thinks. This form is not the darkness in him, no matter its dark origins. Instead, it is his rejection of himself and his complexity beneath these trappings that is the thing he must let go of. He doesn't see it, but she does. And maybe that's enough.

When she slides down on him, the sensation is old and new all at once, like finding a secret room in a home long lived in and deeply beloved. Their bodies meet, and she allows herself to adjust to the heat, the gentle, pleasurable tug of his knurled flesh encased within her own.

Boldness returns to him, and Lucifer pulls her close, running his nose up her neck and jaw until his lips brush hers. For all their anxiety and frustration before, they move together reverently now, ivory against crimson, their remaining clothes rustling.

"The Devil is still the Lightbringer," Chloe whispers. Holding her palm above his chest, she tugs on his light. The thread obeys her immediately, stretching out like a rope between them, lighting their faces and making them squint.

Heaving, Lucifer shudders and drives into her harder, one hand falling to the apex of her thighs. Distracted, she lets go of his light and hangs on to his scarred shoulders, working with him. Time loses meaning. What will time be to them at all in the years to come, in the centuries, in stretches she cannot fathom at all?

When she comes, curling toward him with a gasp, his burned flesh winks out before restoring itself. Her legs tremble with the force of her pleasure, and he leans with her, resting his head against her chest, his rough lips encircling a nipple. When release takes him, he lets out a frustrated sound at not having lasted longer, even as relief washes over him. Rocking gently, she holds his marred skull to her breast, giving herself to him.

They're quiet for a long time, though this silence is not filled with the tension it was earlier in the evening. Chloe feels when Lucifer's hair and stubble return, and she leans back to look at him with a soft smile. His brown eyes crinkle at their corners as he smiles with her.

"Is that..." He hesitates. "Is that something you would do with me again?"

Holding his face, Chloe's gaze doesn't waver. "Yes."

Maybe it's a trick of the light, but it almost looks like he blushes.

"Well, then... You've made your point, I suppose." A small laugh huffs out of him. "Or had mine, as it were." He lets his head fall back to the sofa as he sighs. "You truly want to go back, don't you? The wheels are going to keep turning until I agree to it, aren't they?"
No, she doesn't want to go back to Hell. "I want to do what's right," she replies. "And I don't give a
darn if it's what your dad wanted or not. If he made me this way. None of that matters."

Lucifer looks up again and nods gravely, finally accepting it.

"Very well." Lifting one of her hands in his, he brushes her knuckles with a kiss.
An Infernal Calling

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Why is doing the right thing so often the most painful or terrifying? Chloe asks herself this as Lucifer drives them through the Mojave Desert beneath the light of a full moon. She didn't want to associate their homes with Hell, and so they've decided to leave Earth from a remote location neither of them has strong feelings about. She almost regrets it now, as the nervous pit in her stomach grows colder, the longer they sit with their thoughts. But maybe they need this time to get in the right headspace.

Lucifer turns the SUV off road. The tires crunch over scrub and rocky sand as they bump along the uneven terrain and weave between moonlit Joshua trees with their stubby, alien arms. He takes them deep into the brush, until they sink into a valley that hides them from the main road. After parking and turning off the ignition, he climbs out of the driver's seat without comment, slamming the door shut behind him. He's anxious and still a little angry—sometimes with himself, sometimes with her, and most of all, with God.

The end of his cigarette burns bright red in the night as Chloe joins him at the front of the vehicle. He's dressed in black, and she feels herself in the presence of the Devil. It's not a discomforting presence, considering where they're headed. She watches him watch his stars.

"You're sure you want to do this, Detective?" He keeps asking.

"I'm sure," she keeps lying. "Anyway, we won't be gone for long, right? You said you could estimate how long an hour was on Earth."

"Long enough in Hell. It will feel like months." Swallowing, Chloe crosses her arms against the cool desert wind. "You've your sidearm?"

"Yeah, and the coin, and the demon blade." Which she doesn't even know how to use, but he insisted. "And I'll pray to you if we get separated or if anything goes wrong."

"And Amenadiel—"

"Is a last resort, I know." She rolls her eyes.

"Good." He nods as he blows out smoke. "Well, I suppose we'd better—"

"Hey, dumbasses! You looking for a threesome? Because I'm coming, regardless."

Chloe startles and turns to see Maze standing not twenty feet away from them, her black hair pulled back in a vicious, oiled braid that shines even in the dark. A large leather roll bag peeks up from her right shoulder, making her look like a soldier headed for war. Chloe has no idea how Maze followed them.

"Mazikeen!" Lucifer cheers, his mood brightening noticeably.

"Don't Mazikeen me," the demon snaps. "Either of you goes to Hell, I go to Hell. That's how it is."

"We're not staying there for long," Chloe argues. "That's why we didn't talk to you about it." And she had hoped to leave Maze with Trixie, just in case something went wrong. Which it won't.
"Yeah, well, you couldn't sneak off without Izzy figuring out you were up to something. I put together the rest."

Chloe looks at Lucifer, who shrugs, and just like that, the two hellions in her life settle the matter as they settle most things: without much discussion. She can't decide if that's the result of millions of years of bad habits or millions of years of knowing each other.

Taking several steps away from the SUV, Lucifer rolls his shoulders. His wings spread behind him, his feathers treasuring the moonlight as only they can. Opening his arms invitingly, he gives them a half-hearted leer.

The gates of Hell burst wide for the Devil. He flies across the threshold to the underworld, landing smoothly, not in a thick bed of ash, but in green grasses that whisper as they sway in a warm, slightly humid breeze. The air smells of musty earth.

Chloe stares.

"What the hell?" Maze shoves away from Lucifer with her roll bag. Her favored karambits appear in her hands, as if by magic.

"Well. This is unexpected," Lucifer says, gawking as Chloe slides away from him with equally wide eyes.

A grassland bathed in muted afternoon light stretches beyond Hell's gates. Small, gaunt trees dot the lonely hills and valleys, reaching spindly arms toward the sun, while distant mountains, once black and ominous, have been painted yellow-green by vegetation. Gone is Hell's oppressive gray. In its place is the surreal, desaturated emptiness of a Dalí painting. It's as alien a place, as ever, but in an entirely new way. In the last month on Earth of insisting Hell could change, Chloe never imagined how much it might already be changing without them.

She looks back at the gates when they swing closed with a resounding clang. They're the same threatening black, but the light makes them less disturbing, and the two rotund volcanoes that border them are now speckled emerald green with plant life.

Turning forward again, she slips her hand around Lucifer's and squeezes his fingers. "Is this... Maybe this is a good thing?"

He looks at her like she's crazy. "You know as well as I that Hell doesn't do good."

Maybe, she thinks. But maybe this is a start, too.

They return to the air, where changes to the landscape are even more apparent. Vibrant vegetation lies at the base of volcanoes, while drier, yellowed grasslands sweep beyond. Above, thick clouds drift through Hell's slate blue sky, casting dark shadows across land freckled by black, empty craters which once held lakes of fire. Some of these craters have even become real lakes, collecting what appears to be actual water, though the murkiness of it makes Chloe doubt it's safe to drink. Only in the distant, hazy edges of the plane, farthest from the afternoon sun, is Hell its old darker, grayer self. She doesn't like to imagine what might lurk in those shadows.

Maze and Lucifer give all of these transformations the same narrow-eyed suspicion they offer Hell's sun, but Chloe begins to feel a spark of hope. Even when they pass green-tinted mountains, where countless doors continue to rattle on their hinges, she hopes. If Hell can change this much
under the light of a sun, what else might be possible with a helping hand?

Ahead, the black tower and its minarets rise into view. Chloe feels Lucifer's shoulders relax at the familiar sight. Nox sprawls away from its focal point, the outer limits blackened by fires that have long since died out. But as they fly above the city, it's the central districts that draw the eye. Activity bustles as demons wander street markets and pop in and out of businesses. Muted colors abound on signs and the outsides of squat houses, as if the demons have concocted every dye they could from their new landscape. There's a strange liveliness to it that couldn't be more different from when Cain kidnapped her. The tension brought on by the wars is gone, replaced by community.

Had Cain really torn that much apart, even in Hell?

Maze smirks sharply while looking below.

Chloe follows her gaze to a rooftop, where a couple are having rough sex amid a dozen goblets she can imagine once held a terrible, ash-flavored liquor. One of the demons throws back his head, only to flail when he sees Lucifer flying low in the sky. The smaller male shoves the larger male off him and points up. Soon, both demons hop up and down, naked and waving.

"I think they're happy to see you," Chloe jokes, even as she works to ignore their aroused nakedness and the smaller demon's skeletal arm.

A slight smile breaks across Lucifer's face. "I was not unliked by the commoners." At his opposite shoulder, Maze rolls her eyes.

"Is that a good thing?" Chloe asks wryly.

"Nox isn't so bad, Detective. You simply saw it at its worst."

She doesn't reply. She doubts a city of demons is good, even at its best. Even Maze, who she trusts with her own flesh and blood, has hair-trigger moods, and that's after years of living on Earth. Nox's citizens may be going about their lives more peaceably now, but what happens when they get bored or angry again?

What does that mean for all the souls trapped in Hell?

As they come upon the black tower, it begins to look less, well, black. Red ivy crawls its walls, clinging so tightly that corners of the polished hellstone have begun to crack beneath the pressure. There's a stillness about it that suggests it hasn't been disturbed in a very long time.

Lucifer lands before the stairs that lead into the tower and sets Chloe and Maze to their feet. Concealing his wings, he rests his fists on his hips and stares up at his fortress, clearly uncertain about what he should think or where they should begin. There isn't actually a plan of action other than to do a tour of Hell loops together.

"I'm shocked no one's taken the throne. I always have at least one upstart to devein."

Please let that be a metaphor.

Turned sideways to keep a watchful eye on the city, Chloe is the first to see the small procession of demons gathering and making their way to the tower. If she overlooks their numerous deformities, they remind her of the human souls in Heaven, drifting toward God. She touches Lucifer's elbow and nods at the oncoming crowd.
His hands drop to his sides as he turns to look. "Oh, bollocks."

"You did say you were well-liked."

"Yes, but this is bloody inconvenient." To the crowd, he raises his palms up and shouts, "I just got back. Can it not wait?"

A demon protests in Hell's guttural tongue.

Lucifer rolls his eyes and sighs, exasperated. "At least use English for the detective, will you?"

And it starts from there.

The demons shove and punch to get to the front of the crowd, where they interrupt one another like impatient children. They want help on everything from interpersonal problems, to property disputes and advice on torture techniques.

"Hitler's acting up again," one demon gripes, and a murmur of agreement ripples through the crowd.

"Yes, that's what Nazis do." Lucifer shakes his head at Chloe as if to say, Get a load of these amateurs. "Did you try the thing with the cheese grater?" He makes a small whistle while twirling one finger upward.

Chloe decides never to ask about that.

Before she fully realizes what's happening, they've moved into the black tower's dramatically backlit throne room. It both is and isn't as she remembers from her time in Hell and her subsequent nightmares. Nox wasn't a busy place then, and Cain and some modicum of demonic respect for Lucifer had made the tower off limits. Now, the door is opened wide.

Lucifer sits on his throne, while she uncomfortably perches on its arm at his insistence. Maze stands guard at the bottom of the dais, one demon blade swinging idly on a finger as other demons are allowed entry, one individual or group at a time. They come to stand before the throne, their eyes darting toward Chloe with avid curiosity.

A stocky female stands before them in light armor that has been dyed Hell's new putrid green. "You got a live one?" she asks bluntly, and then licks her teeth.

Chloe narrows her eyes.

"Yes, someone you don't wish to cross, I assure you." Lucifer's grin is as sharp as a knife's edge. The demon swallows. "Now, what seems to be your problem, Prexa?"

He knows most of them by name.

This isn't how Chloe imagined their return, but Lucifer was—is—a king. She knows that. Sort of. She's listened to stories he's been willing to share. She's seen evidence of his influence in Hell, especially in Nox. But she's also watched him spin round in office chairs and sing into the head of a Reddi-Wip can while making pancakes. There's always something new to reconcile with her understanding of Lucifer Morningstar.

Demons are not what she thought they were, either, maybe. Especially not these who have survived what more than one of them calls "the felling," the strange sickness that swept through their
population at the appearance of Hell's sun. Most are the Lilim, Maze's siblings in some roundabout way involving Adam's first wife, God's first rejected creatures, and the fires of Hell. Things not exactly covered in history or sex ed.

With wars and sickness past, many of the demons who survived returned to Nox, though others have taken to nomadic life in the shadowed corners of the realm. She imagines the demons who once chased her through the city scurrying through the darkness, but maybe it's just as likely they're dead. She can't be sad over it.

Lucifer holds audience for what feels like hours, until he becomes snippy and Chloe's eyes begin to droop. Hell's atmosphere may have changed, and may still be changing, but it nonetheless presses lethargy into her flesh. It makes her want to beg Lucifer to leave. But there's work to be done, and so she doesn't complain.

When Lucifer finally refuses to see anyone else, Maze smirks up at him. "I told you it'd be bad if you left them alone for ages."

"Yes, well, I think we can both agree there have been extenuating circumstances, Mazikeen."

"Uh-huh."

"At least they're back doing what they do best, hey?"

"What?" Chloe laughs. "Screwing on rooftops and torturing people?"

"Exactly! Much healthier ways to handle boredom."

"Whatever," Maze snorts, and begins sauntering back to the tower's entrance. "Since shit's not hitting the fan, I'm gonna explore. Later."

The eeriness of the throne room increases considerably when it's just the two of them. Chloe looks up into shadows so black she can't see the vaulted ceiling she knows is there.

Lucifer huffs.

"What?" she asks, turning to him.

"Oh, just more of Dad's irony. Of course it would take a bloody star to change Hell, when I can no longer fly up to make them."

With the flaming fire pot behind the throne, Lucifer's face is bathed in shadow, but Chloe still finds his cheek in the darkness with her hand. "I couldn't have destroyed Cain without you." She runs her thumb along the scruffy edge of his jaw. "Anyway, we don't know what else will change. Not even your dad did."

They're quiet for a long moment, lost in their own thoughts.

"I don't imagine this will be the last I'll have to contend with demons while we're here," Lucifer sighs. Chloe feels him perk up. "I'll have a second seat installed for you."

Chloe frowns. "I...don't know how I feel about that."

"Surely it'd be more comfortable."

There's no denying that. Her ass fell asleep ages ago. "Yeah, but I'm not, like, a queen or anything." Memories of Cain's desire for her to become his make her shudder.
"Well, and I'm not a king, am I?" Lucifer defends. "I'm retired."

"Right."

"Mm, so it's settled then. You'll have a seat of your own." He stands suddenly, leaving her on the arm of the throne. Jogging down the dais, he stops in the hollow center of the room and spins around thoughtfully. "I think this room could do with a bit of redecorating, don't you?"

Exhaustion hits Chloe hard. It will likely pass, like last time, leaving behind the listlessness of Hell, but for now her body demands rest. Neither she nor Lucifer wishes to stay in the black tower, and so they venture into Nox's sunless, moonless "night," which looks no different from the old Hell, if you disregard the grass and the lack of falling ash.

Lucifer flies them to one of Hell's innumerable sierras, to a Hell loop that has a simple leather flap for a door. He tugs it aside and takes Chloe's hand, drawing her into another conjured world of the afterlife.

"This is one of my favorites," he explains, as they step into a circle of huts beneath a starlit sky.

Chloe wants to say he shouldn't have favorites since all loops contain misery, but that would be hypocritical. She has favorites, too. Hell is miserable, even with its new, dully-colored clothes; you take relief wherever you can find it. Maybe it won't always be this way. Or maybe it will. All they can do is try to change it.

Embers spark gently in a dying fire amid the thatched huts. Someone snores softly in their sleep, and distantly wolves howl at the moon. Chloe and Lucifer tiptoe through the dusty earth of the village until he stops before one of the domes and holds aside another leather flap.

"After you," he whispers, bowing dramatically.

She ducks inside. The space within is larger than she expects, and empty, save for a pallet of hides that is surprisingly well lit. Then she looks up and smiles. The roof of the dome is carved open for optimal stargazing—and what a light show. She can tell the loop is old by how bright the night sky is, how untainted by human progress.

Still smiling, she turns to Lucifer—and does a double take at his sudden nakedness. A loud laugh escapes her before she can clap her hands over her mouth. Oh, but it feels great to laugh here, like finding buried treasure. He grins, unabashed, and draws her down to the hide-covered floor.

She stops him from removing her shirt. "Lucifer, it's not the same in Hell."

"Tragically, no. But it just takes longer, darling. Much longer," he says, kissing her forehead. "Come on, what do you say?"

His dark eyes are soft and hopeful, and she thinks he wants to forget where they are, and doesn't she, as well? And so she lets him love her beneath the stars, and though it pales by comparison to what they have on Earth, it feels right to banish Cain's touch from her flesh in Hell.

They lie side by side after, staring at the false heavens, their noses filled with the scent of animal hides and their lovemaking. And it's like floating through a sea of time, where everything around them has come and gone, and all that remains is them. She knows in her bones that she will love him always.

Chloe senses Hell rippling at its edges. "Do you feel that?" she asks softly.
Lucifer turns on his side to look at her, his brows lifting in surprise. "I do indeed. Feels a bit like I've had one too many shrooms."

The loop resets, disappearing the hides from their bodies to return them to their original locations. Lucifer sighs and, with a careful roll of his shoulders, unfurls his wings, narrowly avoiding crashing into the thatched walls of the hut. Chloe shifts closer, sliding a leg between his as soft, warm feathers settle across her bare skin. She feels safe. She never felt safe in Hell before.

"What does the soul here feel guilty about?"

She's heard no crying, no pain. It is one of the most peaceful Hell loops she has ever been in.

Lucifer gives her a small, sad smile as he brushes fingers through her hair. "Well, Detective, two shanties over, a boy is breaking a girl's heart."

"That's no crime," she sighs, eyes fluttering closed as his nails drag across her scalp.

"No, and yet what a grievous mistake, not knowing what to say, or how or when to say it."

Chloe hums in agreement, thinking of their own missed chances. How different things might have been. Maybe better, maybe worse. Maybe they would still end up here, in this ancient hut, their limbs tangled.

Lips press to her forehead. She drifts off as Lucifer murmurs his love like a benediction.

When she rises some indeterminate time later, they dress and set to work, treating the loop as any other case that needs to be solved. Together, they put the soul and his memoried stars to sleep. When it's over, Lucifer stares into the loop's empty darkness, to the sleeping boy in the lone hut left alight.

Hell is changing.

With effort, Chloe finds Abeni again. She opens the door onto the dark void, and Lucifer flies them to the cave, the one spot of muted light left in the suspended loop.

"Did you meet her before?" Chloe whispers. The space feels holy on this unholy plane.

"I did, actually," Lucifer replies from where he crouches beside Abeni's sleeping form. "She had a very deep-seated guilt, as you are well aware. I...tried changing her loop, but she always brought it back. The ones with children often do." Chloe rests a hand on his shoulder, and he lets out a quavering breath. "She is a very old soul."

"How old?"

"Well, there weren't many souls here when she arrived. Humans had not traversed Earth very much yet."

No wonder she hadn't understood a lick of Abeni's language. "What do you think we should do with her? She's been held like this the longest."

"Let the dead rest, Detective."

"But what if we make places for them to live outside the loops?"

He snorts, glancing up at her. "What, our own little Heaven for the goodly damned?"
"It could be, I guess?" She shrugs, out of her depth. "I don't know."

A thoughtful frown pulls at Lucifer's mouth, as if he's really considering it, but then he shakes his head. "Not for a long time, I'd think. The demons would need to adopt quite a different attitude toward humans if Nox were to have souls wandering about all willy-nilly."

"They could learn," Chloe says, shuddering even as she suggests it. "Look at Maze."

"Yes, just look at Mazikeen, Detective," he says, tone wry. "Paid Mr. Marion Sims a visit the other day to let off some steam." His expression darkens. "Not that Mary doesn't deserve every ill which befalls him." He sighs. "Besides, the demons say Hell has a bit of a tornado sitch now, to go along with the earthquakes and acid rain. Not exactly the lap of luxury for our innocent souls to start a new afterlife."

"I have to believe Hell's still changing."

"Right, not its final form, is it?" Rolling his eyes, Lucifer stands. Her heart squeezes as he removes his suit jacket and lays it across Abeni. "You're becoming nearly as optimistic as Miss Lopez."

"Not really. It's only I'm not sure this"—she waves a hand between the small cave they stand in and the black void beyond it—"is just. Not when my dad is in Heaven, relaxing in his idea of paradise, only because he didn't feel guilty about something he had no control over."

And wasn't justice what God ordered? Or is the pain of injustice something he instilled in her breast that will never be satisfied?

"Hell will never be paradise, darling. That's asking too much."

Lucifer is probably right, but she hopes he's not, or that it's at least more complicated than that. Maybe one day they'll be able to give these souls a choice between oblivion and some kind of life beyond death. For now, they leave Abeni to rest.

In the black tower, the plane's harsh elements have blown through the hole Chloe blasted in Lucifer's hidden room. His old treasures are weathered and strewn about. Paper crumbles beneath their fingertips. Fabrics reek of mildew, and the faint echo of sulphur baked into them turns the stomach. But some things have survived, namely the stone tablets where Lucifer first carved his assessments of the newly damned.

He runs a hand over the etched face of an old stone. "I never understood they needed acceptance. I thought... Well, I suppose I was rather convinced it was a matter of me controlling it all. But it was always difficult to change Hell."

"It's strange how they never realize what's happening to them," Chloe says quietly.

And strange that he does not see he is his father's son, agonizing over creation.

"Yes, the souls gravitate toward their natural state of guilt, and Hell adjusts to work with them, as needed—usually with a bit of added flair. It takes the demons and I interfering regularly to change any of that." He grimaces. "No one's ever gotten free on their own—well, Man-Bat excluded, of course—but some of them get too close for comfort."

"You think most here are innocent?" It's been hard for her to tell.

He shrugs a shoulder. "No one is without sin, Detective. But many are innocent enough." He
smirks a little. "More innocent than yours truly, at any rate."

It becomes a game, almost, macabre as it is. They roam from loop to loop, picking apart guilt and passing uncomfortable judgment on the damned. Who is deserving of punishment, and for how long, and to what degree? Who can be helped, and how? There are no rules, and many opportunities to get it wrong. More than once, they argue loudly, turning loops on their heads as souls and Hell's generated figures startle around them.

"He murdered his wife, Detective."

"I didn't mean to," the soul cries.

"You, shut it," Lucifer snaps, eyes glowing red as hot coals as he points a finger at the man. "I could make your loop far worse."

"It's horrible what he did," Chloe agrees, touching Lucifer's waist, "but it was a hundred years ago—thousands or more here in Hell. We don't even know that he wasn't punished for this crime in his own life."

"This man is not innocent, Detective. He knows he's not."

"I didn't mean to," the soul says again, then winces away from Lucifer.

"Do you really think he deserves an eternity like this?" Chloe asks.

The words give Lucifer pause until the soul falls to his knees and begs. "Please, lord. Have mercy."

Lucifer glares down at the man and scoffs. "I will not help absolve this soul of his guilt. Not yet." As the man begins to wail, Lucifer turns away, his fingers at a cufflink. The front door to the generated house opens, and warm air pours in from Hell. "Do as you desire, Detective." The door clicks closed behind him.

Chloe remains until the loop resets, and the damned soul forgets he is dead. If she stays still enough, he never even notices she's there. He kills his wife again, his fat fingers at her slender throat. Chloe watches, feeling sad for the woman, for the soul, for herself and Lucifer. She turns away as the man begins to cry for the dozenth time.

"Oh, God, what have I done?"

Lucifer waits for her outside the Hell loop. It's evening, and the sky is gloomy gray, leaving the grasses to look even duller. It's a wonder the plants survive the climate at all.

He sits on a black boulder nearby, his long legs bent, his elbows resting on his knees. The orange flame of his lighter flicks to life in his hand and dies back, again and again. Chloe goes to stand before him, and he snaps the Zippo closed with finality.

"Lucifer—"

"I didn't care for Dad sending Mum to Hell," he blurts out. "Not that I gave her a chance while she was here. I refused to see her. That's on me."

Sighing, Chloe joins him on the rock. "It's wrong they let you get mixed up in their problems. It's wrong he hurt her. And you."

"I can't free souls like that, Chloe."
"Okay," she whispers, wrapping an arm around his waist. She rests her head on his shoulder. "I didn't free him, by the way. But one day we should. I should." A thought occurs to her. "What if we codified it, or tried to, at least? Sentencing years?"

The Devil huffs softly. "My dear, there are billions in Hell. We will never get to all of them, not so long as your sort keeps humping like bunnies. They will just have to wait for us."

It's a horrible thought.

"I just don't get what her guilt is about," Chloe complains, pulling open the door to the fifties diner. Jerry Lee Lewis' warbles about great balls of fire, and Lucifer cringes beside her. "I tried every angle I could think of. She always gets engaged to Ron."

They pause just inside the diner, stepping apart to let a Hell-generated waitress rush between them with a grease-soaked bag. Lucifer's eyes follow the young woman's knee-high stockinged legs as she passes. Chloe glares at him and gently smacks his chest.

"What?" he snickers. "I'm imagining you in those."

She rolls her eyes and grabs his arm, turning him toward Nancy. "Focus on her."

Ron drops to one knee and struggles to pull the ring box from his pocket. "So, what d'ya say, Nance? Will you marry little ole me?"

"Oh, how original," Lucifer gripes. "Shh."

Nancy looks as wide-eyed and uncertain as every time her loop repeats. She glances between their many onlookers. "I—" She swallows and gives Ron a bright, even-toothed smile. "Well, yes, of course I will, silly."

The ring slides onto her finger, and the restaurant patrons erupt into applause.

Lucifer huffs a laugh. "Well, well. There's your problem."

Chloe looks at him, curious. "What?"

"She's sapphic." He squints and tilts his head. "Maybe exclusively so."

Scandalized, Chloe's mouth drops open. "You can not tell that just from looking at her."

"Can't I?" He laughs loudly at her indignation. "Oh, it's not her fault she wants to eat at the Y, Detective. You know it's one of my favorite places to dine, too." Chloe makes a strangled sound at the back of her throat as he wraps an arm around her shoulders. "Now, see, this is all you have to do. Go sit with her, take her hand"—he takes her hand in his free one and leans close to her ear—"and say, 'Les-be friends.' Should knock her off course from her unimaginative beau from Hell. Who knows? Maybe she'll follow you right out of her little loop."

Chloe bats him away, annoyed. "I am not going to les-be friends her, Lucifer," she whisper-shouts. "She's half my age."

"Oh, she looks eighteen. Besides, she's dead and then some, Detective." His hands drop to either side of her waist. He walks her forward. "Go on, then. I want to see you flirt this poor, repressed soul to rest."
"This isn't my Hell loop," Chloe protests, reluctantly stumbling closer to Nancy.

"I should hope not because it might be my Heaven."

When they arrive at the booth, Nancy and Ron look up at them, confused.

"Time for you to beat it, Ronnie," Lucifer says, dragging Ron out of the booth by the collar of his letterman jacket.

"Hey!" Ron hollers, scrambling to stay on his feet as Lucifer shoves him several feet back. The generated patrons gasp, but make no move to interfere.

Lucifer pushes Chloe into the booth. "Nancy, dear," he says, leaning on the back of her seat.

"Uh..." Nancy cranes her neck around to look at him. "Do I know you, Mister...? I feel like I know you."

"Oh, I have quite the reputation in these parts, but it's not me you want to know, really, now, is it?" He holds a hand out to Ron's previously occupied seat. "Say hello to Miss Chloe Decker. She's had her eye on you."

"S-she has?" Nancy says, her voice pitched high. Her cheeks bloom red as she turns to look at Chloe.

No way. He's right about her? She hates that he's right about this.

Sighing, Chloe drags a finger through the condensation on the outside of Ron's milkshake glass. "Hi, Nancy. Do you..." Do you what? What do you say on the fly like this? To a dead girl in a Hell loop? "Do you, uh, come here often?"

Lucifer howls freely as he goes to deal with Ron.

Later, there's a skip in his step as they wander through the dry grass that lies between Hell's door-lined mountains. The sun shines above. "I'm so proud of you, darling."

"Please stop."

"It only took you, what, ten times to get it right?"

"Okay," she huffs, amused in spite of herself. "Laugh it up."

"Oh, I will," he assures her, tucking her into his side. They match their different strides awkwardly. "We really should have that threesome when we get back, shouldn't we?"

"Just shut up, Lucifer."

There are days when they need a break, even if it's only a break in Hell. They take refuge in less traumatizing loops or, increasingly, they return to Nox. Chloe doesn't draw attention to it, but she recognizes Lucifer's desire to clean up the city and reclaim it after all the damage Cain wrought. And the demons, she's coming to accept, can't be ignored, no matter how much they once terrified her. They are part of Hell, too. Of course they are. And human souls aren't the only ones who need healing or a decent home to live in. Maze is proof of that.

Chloe sits on the throne, watching in amusement as Lucifer directs demons around the black tower in much the same way he directs staff around Lux. He wears clothes the demons have provided
him with, even though privately she knows he hates them. She sympathizes, given they made something for her, as well. The soft leather pants have tiny, scratchy hairs, and the tunics feel like burlap. But here, in the midst of Nox, they wear the clothes with pride, and maybe they should. It takes hard work to draw anything of value out of Hell’s clenched fist.

All around them, there are demons on their hands and knees, scrubbing the floor; demons removing torture devices from the upper levels; demons reinforcing walls to support new windows. Two others work nearby, measuring the space where a second seat—Chloe refuses to call it a throne—will go. They cast suspicious glances her way when they think she isn't looking.

Most do the work almost cheerfully, while others snarl about changes to the status quo, but obey nonetheless. Even here, in the depths of Hell, Lucifer is liked. And feared. He is, she thinks, potentially a very good king, even if he says he's retired and the whole concept of royalty rankles her American sensibilities.

Maze breezes into the tower, climbs the dais, and plops down on the throne's left arm, half-draping herself along its back. It's the first Chloe's seen her in weeks, but she hasn't missed how the demons have become less suspicious of her, the longer Maze has been gone.

"Heeeyyy, Decker." She reeks of alcohol and sex.

"Uh, hey, Maze."

"You gotta try this." Maze shoves a black, metallic goblet into her hands. Then she burps so harshly that Chloe's hair shifts beneath her breath.

Leaning away, Chloe holds the goblet carefully to avoid spilling its contents. Tilting it toward herself, she scrunches her nose at the dark green liquid and gags when she catches a whiff of it. "Is this fermented grass?"

"Yeah. And pig's blood."

"That's disgusting."

Overhearing the conversation, Lucifer joins them with a grin. He plucks the goblet from Chloe's hands and kicks it back before she has a chance to stop him.

"Lucifer!" she gasps.

One eye blinking closed as his face screws up, he sticks out his tongue and smacks. "We've brewed worse here," he chokes out. He holds the goblet and its remaining contents toward her. "Go on, Detective. Just like a pickle juice chaser."

She fucking doubts that.

But then she notices what Lucifer has probably already noticed: how all work has paused around them. At least three dozen demons watch her. The demons talk about her in their language sometimes, and though she can't speak it, she can read the tone, and doesn't miss how Lucifer pulls some aside, only for her never to see them again. A human with the lord of Hell is scandalous and will remain so unless she proves herself beyond all the myths that have been spun about her. For now, she holds her light close, but there are other ways to prove herself.

This is not her first hazing.

Chloe grabs the goblet, takes a deep breath, and tips it back. The ripe, slightly viscous liquid slides
across her tongue and down her throat, tasting of copper, grass, and rot. Her body heaves against it, knowing this should not be the first thing she dares to consume after a month in Hell. But she forges on, drinking every last drop. When she's finished, she slams the empty goblet to the arm of the throne and lets out a yell.

"Well done, Detective!" Lucifer claps, his face lit up with his delight.

The room erupts into howls and cheers. Maze jumps to her feet, and before Chloe knows what's happening, she's being hauled over the demon's shoulder and jogged down the dais. She gasps as other demons rush to crowd around Maze.

"Lucifer!" she shouts, desperately holding on to her light as fear consumes her.

A large hand grabs hers from where she dangles over Maze's back. She sees familiar long legs in Hell leather and patent leather shoes and wonders if she's moments away from throwing up on them.

"You're being whisked away to a party, darling."

"I don't want to go to a party!" she yells, arching her body with effort to look at him. "What the fuck does a party in Hell even look like?"

Demons cackle at her swearing.

"Well, you're about to find out, aren't you?" Lucifer laughs, giving her bottom a smack where it lies atop Maze's shoulder. "Easy," he says to nearby demons. "Give the ladies some room."

And they obey, even as they draw her into Nox's belly, where horribly dissonant music and pungent smoke pour from gambling halls.

Time drifts on. Hell's days sometimes seem longer or shorter as they pass through the loops, witnessing crimes and tortures, big and small. More often than not, they unravel the loops, putting souls to rest, but sometimes they leave sinners to their misery. There are some things Chloe wishes she could forget, crimes she previously only knew from their aftermath.

Lucifer announces when it's almost time for them to leave Hell. As one of their final tasks, they decide to survey the plane, as best as they can survey something that is constantly expanding. It would be faster if Lucifer went alone—he can't tear through the skies with Chloe in arm—but they don't separate in Hell, even now that the demons almost like her. Doing so feels like bad luck.

Outside Nox, Hell is little more than a desolate grassland interspersed with mountains, pitiful lakes, and the occasional savanna. The farther they fly from Nox, the farther they fly away from where Hell's sun touches. At the edge of the shadowed land, the lakes and trees disappear, but the dry grass holds on stubbornly. It's here, where the light falters, that something catches Chloe's eye.

"Hey, what is that?" She points down to their right as they fly, to a squat, black house on a hillock.

"Haven't a clue," Lucifer admits. "Care to take a closer look?"

He lands them some fifty feet away from the structure. The small and square house, built from smoothed blocks of hellstone, looks empty, but there's always the chance it's not. They approach carefully, Lucifer announcing their presence. Wind blows across the hill, rustling Lucifer's feathers as it whistles and warbles brokenly through the house's numerous windows, shifting curtains made of threadbare rags.
"You don't usually see houses this far from Nox, do you?" Chloe asks.

Lucifer's expression darkens. "Oh, I assure you there are demons and other creatures who keep creepy little dungeons all over Hell."

With a shudder, Chloe walks the perimeter of the house, stopping cold when she arrives at the back, where two steel beams stick up in a cross formation. She scowls at the way the grass grows here, how this part of the hill is unnaturally smooth, as if once, long ago, it were cleared.

She hears Lucifer shove open the door to the house and enter. "Hellooo?" he calls obnoxiously. "Any fiends home?"

Chloe frowns as she reconsiders the beams. And then it comes to her. She imagines a scarecrow standing beneath Hell's old, raining ash. Imagines a horrible little field where nothing grows, even as a black-eyed man can't help but will it to.

"Oh my God," she mutters, stumbling back.

"How can you still say that?" Lucifer complains, suddenly behind her.

Chloe jumps, her hands going to her mouth as she turns to him. She looks at the Devil through tears hovering on her eyelids.

"Chloe?" He touches her face gently. "What is it?"

"Cain built this," she breathes. "For me."

Lucifer's eyes burn with hellfire. "Do you wish to destroy it?"

"I—" Agonized nausea sweeps through her. "I don't know."

She looks back at the black house, feeling ill and sad. After months of braving Hell loops, she can easily imagine unspeakable things happening to herself here. But as she looks on the remnants of Cain's garden bed, she also wonders what the world might have looked like if God had given Cain enough water for his crops. Would he have lived and died like any other human? Or was he always broken? She hates him still, but she is glad he is no longer tortured or torturing. There is justice in his ashes becoming something new that warms and encourages growth, rather than destroys.

Cain will always be with her.

A hand touches between her shoulder blades in comfort. "Come on, Detective. It's time to go home."

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to elleflies for the scene check!
Along the Cuyamaca mountain range there grows a giant white oak. Its trunk splits into two thick bodies that have dozens of limbs and many hundreds of oval-leafed fingers. In the cool October afternoon, Lucifer climbs the hill where the tree stands tall, cursing the scuff marks California's scrub is already dealing his freshly shined oxfords.

He stops before the white oak and stares at it dispassionately. Removing his flask, he unscrews the cap and tips the canteen sideways, spilling the best whisky money can buy over an especially gnarly root. The dry wood darkens beneath the liquid, and what drips to the ground is quickly soaked up.

"Well, brother," he says, "it's been another year." And a few days, but who's counting? "How are the worms biting?"

The white oak does not speak, although there's a part of Lucifer that wouldn't put it past it. Trees aren't supposed to grow from saplings to giants in a couple of years' time, but then he supposes no one ever used an angel's corpse for fertilizer, either.

He's not sure why he's here, other than Linda has insisted he revisit this literally bloody time of his life like some masochist. Part of a goodbye tour to his old life, which he's to attempt to accept, but also move forward from, and some other psychobabble gobbledygook. He would rather suffer trick-or-treating with the urchin and Isabel than pretend Uriel is anything other than a soul he shattered. Uriel, like Dad and even Mum, is simply gone. So, really, the tree is a moot point. The whole blasted visitation is.

But Lucifer is here, nonetheless, being a good devil.

With a sigh, he sits on the ground and leans against one of the trunks. He sips his whisky and stares across the ranges, to the green pines poking up in the distance and the scrubby hills stretching far and wide. Area's a bit prone to wildfire, but not a bad view, all told. Far enough from main trails. Peaceful. A respectable place to lay a brother to rest, at least by silly human standards.

Gentle wind blows through the white oak's leaves. If he's honest with himself, he never paid Uriel much mind. His brother could be such a know-it-all knobhead growing up. No one liked him for it. But Lucifer supposes they had their moments before Dad sent him packing to Hell and certainly before Uriel came sniffing about L.A. like a clairvoyant hobo.

"What did you know, brother?" Lucifer huffs softly, his head rolling against rough bark.

The even bigger question: What didn't Uriel know?

The question has been plaguing Lucifer rather unexpectedly since he and Chloe returned from Hell. Had Uriel died for a cause or miscalculated? Gone a bit mental? Did it matter? He had seemed so surprised when the blade sank to the hilt, but then Uriel had always been deceptive and sly when he wanted to be. He kept his secrets. And, well, he certainly kept them now.

*The piece is here.*

Or was it peace, after all? *Is* it peace they're building?
The questions circle in his brain, tiring him. It's not as if there are reliable answers. Eventually he exhausts himself, and his eyes close. He drifts to sleep, ankles crossed and fingers still wrapped around his flask.

Some time later, something crawls along the bridge of his nose, tickling him. With horrifying memories of being trapped with Chloe and a honeybee in a rental car, he snorts awake at once, smacking a hand to his face.

Amenadiel dances away like a big, black, demented elf and bends in half as rich, deep laughter pours from him.

Lucifer glares at his older brother while scratching his nose. "Oh, sod off."

"Nice to see you, too, Luci." He tucks away his wings, and it's this movement that makes Lucifer realize his brother isn't wearing his typical vestments. He's in jeans and a hoodie.

"Not here to take me back to Hell, are you?" Lucifer jokes. "Because I just got back last week, and bloody hell, are my wings tired."

To his surprise, Amenadiel frowns. "You went back again?"

"Chloe's desire," Lucifer sighs. "With plans to return for an hour each fortnight. We're putting the wrongly damned to rest."

"That's a big deal, Luci. It's good you're seeing to it, isn't it?"

"I suppose it's honest work." Assuming they're doing the right thing at all. "Would rather it be someone else's honest work, of course."

Amenadiel joins him, sitting at the base of the tree. "I hear you."

Lucifer glances at him out of the corner of his eye, a strange camaraderie seizing him. He knows burnout when he sees it—knows well the value of the occasional vacay. "In town for a while, brother?"

"I shouldn't even be here now. There's so much to do. Our siblings—"

"Real pains in the arse, aren't they?"

Amenadiel laughs. "I guess we all are sometimes."

"Big of you to admit that about yourself, brother." He grins slightly when his teasing is well received. "Good idea with the therapy, by the by, although I do hope you're finding adequate replacements in the Silver City. Linda should not have to crack the nut that is Gabby."

"Or Michael."

"You sent Michael to her, as well? I had no idea. The poor woman." It's clearly time to buy her a summer home.

"It's not ideal," Amenadiel agrees, "but she was the only one I could trust on short notice."

"Yes, Pavlov might be a bit out of date. And, well, you miss her, don't you?"

He's always enjoyed a bit of matchmaking. Who knows what Linda sees in his brother, but, well, stranger pairings have occurred. Including his with the detective, come to think of it.
"That's over, Luci."

"Oh, of course," he says, mouth tilting as he watches a hawk fly through the air. "My apologies."

Amenadiel drags a hand over his bald head and down his face. "How could it ever work? I have...so many responsibilities now."

"Mm, uneasy lies the head that wears a crown."

"There's a council."

"Ah, but who's the head of it? Face it, brother. They look up to you. And, well, it's not as if our siblings have ever been good at thinking for themselves. They need guidance." Not unlike the demons of Nox. Some are evil, but many are not. Some can even be reasoned with after a few punches. Worked with Mazikeen.

Not that he's a king to ponder such things.

"They're deeply afraid, Luci," Amenadiel says. "It comes out as anger or belligerence, but...they're afraid. I'm just trying to keep them busy. Earth needs them. The work Father put us in charge of is necessary."

"And what about you?" Lucifer asks, dreading the answer. "Are you afraid?"

"I just want to do a better job." Amenadiel nods to himself, as if this is the first time he's put the thoughts into words. "I see now that Dad..."

"Didn't know what the hell he was doing?"

"Something like that," he sighs. "There's a lot to fix. I see that now." He slaps a hand to the ground suddenly. "Oh! And Charlotte's leading desegregation efforts."

The thought makes Lucifer grin viciously. "I'm sure that's going over as well as any civil rights movement."

"You're not wrong." Amenadiel pauses, his mouth opening and closing. "Speaking of humans in Heaven... Lucifer, I came to tell you... Heaven's off limits, even though Dad's gone."

"And?" he laughs. "It's not as if I thought they'd roll out a red carpet for me now that the Old Man has unraveled himself." He raises a hand. "Nor do I want them to. You can keep your Heaven."

"No, Luci... This is about Chloe as much as you."

Lucifer straightens and turns. "What does Chloe have to do with anything in Heaven?"

"They blame her for Dad."

"That's preposterous! No one could make Dad do a damned thing! He went out on his own terms."

"I know that, but they don't see it that way."

Lucifer scoffs before pursing his lips. "Of course not." Of course they would judge her more harshly, just by being with him.

"I'm sorry. They just...don't have the context we do."
"And never will."

"Probably not, no. That means Chloe can't see her father again any time soon."

"She said her goodbyes to the officer." With immense fondness, he remembers John Decker, shaking his hand. "But, brother, don't assume she won't one day break the gates for the child. And I certainly won't stop her."

They stare at one another, an understanding passing between one not-king to another. With a sudden, easy smile, Lucifer holds out his flask as a peace offering. Amenadiel smiles, as well, and takes it, tipping it back.

"I prefer cosmos," he concludes, passing the flask back.

"Philistine," Lucifer snorts, wiping the mouth on his sleeve before drinking deeply.

Amenadiel looks around. "Lucifer, where are we? It's not like you to be out in nature." He rolls his eyes. "Alone, anyway."

"Oh, that. Yes." Lucifer pats the tree trunk. "Say hello to Uriel, brother."

"Huh?"

"Well, I had to rebury him after Mum let Azrael's blade slip, didn't I? I was shagging some hippie environmentalist at the time whose greatest desire was to be a tree when she died. Got a bit inspired, tossed in a sapling with Uriel, and here we are."

Twisting around, Amenadiel gawks at the white oak, finally realizing how out of place the tree is. "This is Uri?"

"Did I stutter? Yes, we're sitting on Uriel." A grin spreads across his face. "Just like old times, isn't it? Though he's a bit bigger now."

Amenadiel's laughter makes his eyes crinkle at their corners.

Something relaxes in Lucifer as he smiles with his big brother, feeling as though his past, present, and future aren't entirely at war with one another. He is loathed as the Devil, but the truth is complicated; perhaps enough people know that by now and are willing to sit with him beneath shade trees and laugh at the absurdity of it all. Perhaps he has Uriel to thank for that. No telling, really. But he supposes he can be satisfied about where he's landed. As Chloe keeps telling him, they can try with what they have. After all, he has more than he has ever had before.

All of it seems a profound revelation, but he will check with the Doctor to be sure.

Lux is filled with superheroes, slutty kittens, and vampires in capes. A coven of wannabe-witches occupies a booth with pirates and Obama, while a particularly round woman has dared to dress as a Jill-O'-Lantern. She is loved for it as she waddles through the crowd, which parts for her, lest they be knocked aside. He mostly ignores the sparkling red devil horns and swinging arrowhead tails. In the past, he would have had bouncers remove them for crimes against his person.

Music blasts on the sound system, and the crowd yells with it: "Ghostbusters!"

It's a typical Halloween night.

Removing his suit jacket and tossing it across the piano's lid, he slides onto the polished bench and
lets the crowd's energy wash over him. There's a sort of kinky happiness that Halloween inspires, which perks him up in more ways than one. He will enjoy it even more once Chloe is done with checking every piece of candy her offspring brings home for the night. She's been teasing him about her costume for weeks, but he still has no clue what to expect when she walks through his door. The possibilities are endlessly titillating.

As he flicks up the fallboard, Patrick swings by with a bottle of top shelf, a tumbler, and an ashtray. Lucifer goes about his night as patiently as he goes about anything, playing along to the music sometimes, and playing small melodies of his own at other times. It's discordant, but then what does he care? This is his kingdom, one of them, anyway, and he has always had one ear open to a different tune.

Long, bare legs appear at the mezzanine above the bar. He glances at them from the corner of his eye and follows them up to his favorite human. Chloe is dressed like a genderbent Inspector Gadget, and oh, it does it for him. Grinning and holding up an oversized magnifying glass, she winds down the spiral staircase as Michael Jackson sings about being spied upon. Lucifer's eyes dip down, to impossibly tall, black heels. She knows exactly what she's doing, and he loves her for it.

Her hips sway as she nears. Lucifer leans over the keys and rests his forearms on the piano, a sly grin tilting his lips. "You look familiar, Inspector. Have we met before?"

Chloe's face threatens to break into a smile as she leans on the piano with him. "We might have seen each other around. Lucifer Morningstar, isn't it?"

"That's right, yes." He smiles as he drinks and watches her over the lip of his glass. The bar is so noisy they can't even speak at normal levels, and yet it feels as though they are the only ones in the room. Certainly the only ones who matter. He sets the tumbler aside. "What's under the trench coat, Inspector?"

"Wouldn't you like to know?" she teases, lifting her comically large magnifying glass again. It tilts back her trilby hat, and soft hair spills downward.

"What does it take to get a peek, hmm? Need I prove myself? I've no secrets and am very open to cavity searches."

"Maybe if you—"

And then her phone rings. Chloe holds up a finger, willing his patience as she unearths her mobile from a deep coat pocket. Lucifer rolls his eyes whilst she answers it and presses a finger to her opposite ear. Heaven and Hell might change, but some things bloody well stay the same, don't they? He lets the fingers of his left hand dance idly over keys as he half listens to her side of the conversation. Something about the case they're working on, which reeks of more LAPD corruption.

Chloe ends the call a few minutes later, obviously excited. "That was Roger. He's willing to talk to us if we meet him now." Her excitement over this case, like most, is infectious and sets his heart to beating fast. But then she scowls down at herself. "I look..."

"Like a wet dream. Roger will tell you everything, and if he doesn't, he'll tell me the rest." Rising from the piano bench, Lucifer drops the fallboard and tugs his jacket over his waistcoat. "Well, what are we waiting around here for?" he chuckles. "Lead the way, Inspector."
Chapter End Notes

To everyone who has made it to the end—through basically three books' worth of content and a fucking pandemic we're still dealing with—thank you dearly. Writing this got me back into writing fiction, and I couldn't be happier about it.

In fact, there are a lot of thank yous I owe people:

**Obli** and **Yah**, thank you for helping me make some huge decisions about plot and characterization that I would have been too paralyzed to make if not for the hilarious discussions we had about them. And thank you to **Clammy/puerile** for helping me make sense of procedural norms so I would know just how much I wanted to throw them out.

To **Mita**, **Swankkat**, **thepoisonofgod**, and **Zee**, thank you for the amazing art you've created for AROL. It means more than I can express to see this story's ideas and themes come to life visually.

So many commenters! I cherish everyone who has taken (and will take) the time to comment. Thank you, thank you! Some of you especially wrote comments I will come back to for years when I'm feeling like I can't word good. There's something so satisfying about baring parts of yourself in writing and having people go, "Hey, I see you and know what you're doing."

Just...thanks.

**Other notes:**

(1) If you're into musical inspiration...well, I've got a playlist that exceeds 16 hours, and I'm not going to share that. 😎 But there are three songs that are kind of the epitome of this fic, and they are "Handmade Ego" by Tender, "Refractor" by Painted Palms, and "Opener" by Honors. Enjoy!

(2) If anyone wants to translate this monster or even write something related to it, have at it. I would be honored if you took the time.

(3) If you liked this, consider subscribing to my profile. I may write another longfic for *Lucifer*. We shall see! Regardless, I'll be doing short stories. :)

Please **drop by the archive and comment** to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!