When the Truth Hunts You Down
by Myria83

Summary

What if you find out the partner you trust with your life is the creature Humanity has been told to fear since the very beginning?

"When the Truth Hunts You Down" by Sam Tinnesz: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iKKIshyt CPC

Notes

I've published several short stories, novels and essays in my own country, but English is not my native language, and this is the very first fanfiction I write. If something doesn't sound right, you're welcome to point it out so that I can fix the mistake... Thank you in advance!
“They used to call the devil the father of lies. But for someone whose sin is meant to be pride, you'd think that lying would leave something of a sour taste. So my theory is that when the devil wants to get something out of you, he doesn't lie at all. He tells you the exact, literal truth. And he lets you find your own way to hell.”

― Mike Carey
moving on the debris; careful not to put myself in the line of fire and ready to face whatever shit was about to go down, I climbed a step and stuck my head inside the bedroom to take a peek. Barrow was very still, now, as if he felt something ominous looming right behind him, on the other side of the opaque glass wall standing between him and the adjacent living room. He met my gaze, then looked at the muzzle of my gun, but he didn’t have the chance to open his mouth before my dilated pupils went to a shadow slowly rising behind his back, and my gun instantly trained on it instead, without crossing the threshold of the nonexistent door.

A couple footsteps approaching on the shattered glass, slow and deliberate, the strange rustle of something big dragging through the debris, and a heavy breath, almost a thunderous growl, that I could feel reverberating in my bones. Then a sickening wet sound… The drip and the coppery scent I knew far too well, ‘cause I’d seen my fair share of gruesome crime scenes.

The vaguely human-shaped silhouette on the other side of the frosted glass wall chose that same moment to change into something different: it grew bigger, as if some sort of prop or backdrop was being lifted behind it... A moving, seemingly alive and apparently glowing sort of “prop”.

Whatever that thing was, it almost made me scream in terror when it suddenly rose and flailed the glass like murderous whip: a sudden strike cut right through it, with an ear-splitting noise I found myself literally recoiling from. Neatly sliced on a diagonal, half of it slid and crashed in slow motion to the floor, exploding in myriad fragments. I instinctively pulled back and hid behind the corner, almost stumbling over Ella who (kudos to her) hadn’t made a sound.

The one who choked up after letting out a startled shriek was the man no longer alone in that room. I saw what emerged from the other side of the destroyed glass wall, hovering just over the sharp edge in an elegant gesture before dropping to seize the hitman’s shoulder in a vicious grip. I got a glimpse of it before hiding, but I couldn’t make sense of the afterimage.

No human hand stopped the prisoner’s self-imposed stillness from morphing abruptly into a writhing fit. No living human’s. What emerged with snake-like swiftness from the sharp remnants of the glass wall moved faster than my eyes could follow, but it was the limb of a corpse: drenched in fresh blood oozing from a white double cuff fastened with otherwise impeccable links, it was straight out of a nightmare. Such a thing could only belong to a body burnt at the stake or skinned alive.

As a homicide cop I had seen my fair share of dead people and horribly abused victims, and what I knew for sure was that whoever that hand belonged to, he should have been screaming in agony, dropping unconscious on the floor or laying lifeless and cold on the steel table of a morgue. Moving with such an injury would be unthinkable for the most resilient, tough human being, let alone doing it with ease. It took being higher than a kite to bear that kind of pain, but that meant laying flat on a hospital bed.

Still, those long, sinewy, scarred fingers tightened their grip on their prey’s shoulder and froze the man on the spot, then the hand sat there unnaturally still, dark red, leathery and sickening wet, as if the skin had melted and peeled off to show the raw muscles twitching beneath. Those same muscles held the prisoner down like a junkyard’s hydraulic press a click away from resuming its movement and crushing him.

A smooth voice with a rich texture addressed Pierce’s henchman, and it did it with a sophisticated British accent I knew all too well: “You weren’t expecting the owner to come back home anytime soon, were you?” It breezed in from the pearly halo framed by the engraved stone walls, an incongruous, mesmerizing glow that had nothing to do with the natural light filtering from the balcony.
I was struck dumb. I let my gaze float in that faint, ethereal glow for the briefest eternity, then I stared stupidly at the wall, unable to process what it all meant or was supposed to mean. I was forcibly keeping Ella behind me, but my hand felt a word surging in her chest, and it went to cover her mouth in an instant, preventing her from uttering that name: “Lucif...” She was about to breathe out those three oh-so familiar syllables in a sight of relief, but I didn’t let her.

Something was wrong. Something was seriously wrong, in so many ways my brain couldn’t even process the hows and the whys.

"You hurt the Detective," added the voice, now darker, tinged by an unfathomable mix of sadness and pain that gripped my heart and gave it a painful squeeze in my chest.

Chloe...? Had something happened to Chloe?

But the undertones changed abruptly: "I wouldn’t tolerate that on my best day..." Hearing Mr. Tough Guy squirm on that creaky wooden chair, I couldn’t help leaning slightly forward to peek again. "And you know, these have been the worst 24 hours I went through since I was cast into a literal lake of Hellfire."

The hand sinking its claws into the man’s jacket wore a ring with a black stone on the middle finger. Lucifer’s. Our Lucifer.

The air in the room seemed to have suddenly become hotter, thicker and heavier. I fell back, shivering, but not before catching a glimpse of the truly horrific thing still lurking behind the shattered glass: something burnt raw, disfigured, dark red like rusty iron or tarnished copper. At first I thought it was a mask, but in the couple seconds I couldn’t help staring before catching myself, I saw the harsh lines of it tensing.

With a muffled cry and some rustling sounds, Barrow had suddenly gone frantic: with both his wrists still tied to the armrests of the chair, the Sinnerman’s second-in-command was desperately trying to wrestle himself free.

I didn’t dare peeking around the corner anymore, but following Ella’s eyes I caught a faint, scattered reflection on the chunk of stained glass that had survived the creature’s wrath, and I tried to decipher that. "Shush..." A palm had immediately shot to the man’s face, smearing it with blood and covering his mouth to shut him up. The creature bent over, but this time the man didn’t even squirm under the weight of the hand lying still on his shoulder: now that Hell was literally breathing down his neck, he suddenly seemed aware that those scarred, barely human fingers could apply a crushing weight to hold him down, if needed, or delight in doing something much worst. "We don’t wanna wake her, don’t we? She has had enough screams for today," added that voice in an apathetic, hushed tone, letting an even more unnerving hint of tiredness and sadness creep in before adding: "Since you’re already leaking on my favorite rug, I don’t even need to ask what’s your one and only desire..."

I was still holding my gun in a sweaty grip, but the muzzle was pointed downrange. All my instincts screamed “Danger! Danger! Danger!”, but the mind behind them hadn’t gone blank: it had started a crazy spin cycle, washing and rinsing the recent past and flushing away the remnants of an awful lot of delusions in a desperate, last-minute attempt to keep up with reality.

I wasn’t dying yet, but as I rewatched the last three years of my life projected on fast-forward on the flickering screen of my memory, I discovered that all I had done and said had no more significance, no more depth than my improv sessions.

Now that I had the freaking answer to the Ultimate Question of Life, the Universe, and Everything right in front of my eyes and it was not "42", I couldn’t playback all the time spent with the eccentric,
unpredictable but admittedly trustworthy “civilian consultant” Chloe had chosen as her partner without feeling as a fucking moronic, disposable side character who couldn’t see the truth even when it stared right into his eyes.

Satan in person had just handed me a bankrupting reality check. *Time to wake up and smell the coffee, Dan...*

I dreaded alerting the creature to our presence more than I trusted a couple 9mm bullets to seriously impair a freaking Archangel, and a very pissed-off one at that.

"I have no idea how you got out of there in one piece, but I’m sure our Boss isn’t finished with you," sputtered the hitman. Quite gutsy of him to say that, considering who he was talking to.

The blackened nails clutching his shoulder let go, but only to grab hold of the back of his collar and lift him together with the armchair he was tied to as if their combined weight amounted to... nothing.

"I’m not the only one the truth was hunting down..." Now the creature was whispering directly in his ear, discharging a fizzling bolt of disdain right down his bones, and that breath must be hot, 'cause literal *flames* were now coming to life and licking at its leathery neck and cheekbones. "It caught up with Cain, too." Those same flames ignited in its eyes, too, first a dancing, hypnotic spark that seemed to emerge from dark depths and belong there, then a raging inferno. The core of that ancient being was fueled by a fiery, blazing power that a human-like shell could hardly contain without cracking and being engulfed by it. And like a nuclear plant, it radiated death.

I was openly watching, now. I wasn’t even stealthy anymore. My eyes were wide open, literally and metaphorically.

If Barrow had seen himself as the boogeyman so far, now he knew how wrong he was. A bigger predator had set its eyes on him. The Predator. Neither him or us could escape anyway. That thing would have noticed the two humans hiding there, their fast, tight, shallow breaths, the smell of the cold sweat running down their backs... It probably already had.

Funny. Terrifying. Pathetic.

"I've already broken my Father’s little toy..." Powerful to an oppressive, breathtaking degree, that voice was now reverberating on different octaves at the same time, like an entire choir, or a huge, sinister church organ. "*That’s Divinity for you, Dan,*" I thought, evoking long-lost memories of my abuela and her never-ending sermons. "After thousands of years, Cain choose the wrong Adversary. Capital 'A','" said the Devil, breathing down Barrow’s neck and smiling with too many teeth, a far too-wide split in that horrific visage. "I made sure to send him where he belonged." The grin didn’t reach the creature’s eyes, and it sent goosebumps racing down my arms and legs. I felt Ella tugging at my sleeve. There I was, the man, the police man holding a loaded gun... as helpless and scared as she was. All I could do was grab her hand and squeeze it: “*Come what may, I would never let it go,*” I silently promised. Despite the shivering, she felt that oath traveling down my arm, reaching her core and settling there. She nodded in return, ready to hold on to that lifeline and use it to keep me afloat too, if I started sinking and drowning in the enormity of it all before she did.

First in line to take the brunt of that Revelation, Barrow had finally cracked. For good. He was whining and whimpering, on the verge of bursting into tears like a child. He begged under his breath.

I expected the King of Hell to end it, to sink his claws into that fragile human frame and give him the gruesome death he deserved before turning his attention to us, but he didn’t. He let go of his prey, putting back down on the floor both the man and the chair he was still tied to.
If Ella and me wanted out, that was the moment. I couldn’t for the life of me understand why, but the biblical monster itself seemed to be giving us the chance: somehow, his stance told me he knew we were there, listening, watching, even without a single side-glance giving away his intentions.

"Give me a reason not to send you down there before your time." He gave that ruthless killer a choice, too.

"The little girl," Barrow was quick to spit out. He was visibly trembling, but I had to gave it to him that his voice didn’t waver too much. "Beatrice Decker. She was our Boss’s collateral in case something went wrong…"

That sent my heart rate spiking so high I thought I was having a stroke. A cold shiver crawled up my spine. I tightened my grip on Ella’s hand and I instinctively raised my gun once more, even if I was still partially hiding behind the corner.

Pierce’s henchman found it in himself to smirk: "Nothing more useful than a human shield even the Devil cares about..." he commented. Then he visibly weighted his options, and his expression turned serious again: "They’re holding her hostage at Detective Decker’s place. They don’t know what’s coming for them, or they don’t care," he said. -"Is that enough to earn me a pentecostal coin... Your Majesty?"

I never thought that I might meet the Devil face to face, like I never thought that I might see him flinch. He straightened up, an unreadable expression on the grisly traits of his face, and the flames in his eyes flickered for a moment. "Killing humans is not my hobby, and I’m not planning on making a habit of it," he stated. Then that same unnatural stillness charged up from within: "You’ll pay the price for all of this in due time..." His whole body tensed up, as if it could barely contain an Earth-shattering surge of high-voltage wrath, the physical manifestation a primordial, abysmal power that made me recoil and draw further back along the massive stone wall. He had nothing to discharge it on, other then that luxurious penthouse and the three humans trapped in it.

That rumbling voice called me by name: "Daniel." It was a majestic choir, a holy hymn and a battle cry. No mortal being could ignore its incredible pull.

The faint glow that had filled the room since the creature had broken into it was now tinged with a reddish hue.

"You heard him," he said. “And now you heard me,” it echoed deep in my mind.

His words demanded immediate obedience: they had the echo of a key turning into a lock. No need to say anything more.

My daughter… my sweet baby was in danger. Trapped. Scared. I had to do something. We had to do something. Now.

With my heart thundering so loudly it seemed about to burst from my chest, I stepped around the corner to face Him.

When I met his gaze, the weight of it fell on me like a grand piano: it was so ancient it made me numb, dizzy… I felt an overwhelming need to cower under it.

*How did I dare think of this being as human, of all things?*

Like broken gears, my thoughts repeatedly failed to get a grip on each others, until they just stopped. I surrendered to him.
"I'll get to Chloe’s place as fast as I can, but I could use some help..." My brain didn’t process those words, at first: it wasn’t up to any task at the moment. It had gone completely offline. It took a while for it to register that after meeting mine, the almighty being asking for my help ("Help"... Really?) had tilted its head curiously, presumably waiting for an answer. Cocking his head to the side like a howl was another strange quirk of his: he did it whenever he couldn’t get the gist of some human behavioral pattern, as if he tried to adjust his visual perspective and get some more insight. We baffled him, an immortal being whose existence dated back to the beginning of time. I would have marveled at the idea, if I weren’t that disconnected.

I’d surrendered my sanity to the dark, unfathomable void I had seen in his eyes, an abyss stretching between ages and stars... I had never felt more mortal before, more insignificant. In front of a creature who must have watched continents collide then drift apart again, my heart beat fast like a hummingbird’s.

"Let Ms Lopez drive," I heard, far in the back of my mind. We baffled him, an immortal being whose existence dated back to the beginning of time. I would have marveled at the idea, if I weren’t that disconnected.

My left hand was still holding my colleague’s, and she almost crushed it when she inhaled a deep breath before stepping around the corner and showing herself. Her eyes were wide, her pupils dilated, and she desperately held onto her cross pendant, clutched in both her sweaty palms. Was she still clinging to her faith?

"As soon as those men get the news, the child is dead," Barrow cut in. He was right: we were stalling. I needed to get to the damn elevator and the damn car as fast as I could. Calling for reinforcements was out of question: the precinct swarmed with the Sinnerman’s spies, and I had sent the very few people I trusted to the Sinnerman’s lair, hoping to get Chloe out of there alive. Apart from her, the only people I trusted with such a delicate matter were Ella, Charlotte, whom I had lost to a bullet shot by that fucking bastard, and... well, the monster I apparently owed one for killing him.

Thinking of the man who had ended the life of the woman I loved, I felt the gun trembling in my palm, my index finger twitching on the trigger.

"Are you going to shoot me, Dan?" said the being who could incinerate the three of us and the entire building with a snap of his fingers. Dumbfounded, I refocused on it (him?). "I don’t think that I can take any more bullets… Would you mind waiting until I’ve saved your spawn?" he added, feigning indifference.

Without us noticing, the creature had already, oh-so slowly retreated, partially hiding itself behind what remained of the stained glass wall it had shattered before. To our utter astonishment, it stepped further back, raising its hands in a non-threatening posture and bringing that ethereal glow with it… with him, as if not to take the brunt of our reaction.

"You’re… hurt," Ella murmured under her breath, keeping a trembling hand pressed on her mouth. We both heard her. Barrow heard her too.

Now that I had the chance to take a proper look, the glass shards were not the only thing that didn’t belong, on the floor. There was fresh blood smeared on it. Like.. a lot. It had left a trail on the creamy tiles and the scattered debris, and the prisoner had some smeared on his face, where those horrific hands had touched him.

It couldn’t belong to Pierce’s goons: it was clearly still dripping from some ghastly open wounds I still had to see.
"I am," said the creature with the voice we knew so well and cherished so much. The voice of our teammate, our comrade… our friend. A friend that… stranger had stolen from us, because there was no way for the playful, dorky, unbearably honest nightclub owner and the freaking Prince of Darkness to be the same person… the same thing. Not even remotely. "I am, but I can still fight. And I will."

There were several bullet holes on the front his white button-up shirt, but no blood. Not there, at least.

There went our last chance at defending ourselves. I lowered the Glock and reholstered it. As scary and deadly as a kid’s toy…

The blood was drenching his double cuffs, after trickling down the sleeves, hidden by the black jacket of the once impeccable suit.

Keeping his hands in sight in that seemingly non-threatening gesture, he took one more step back. The fire burning in his eyes had faded, and now that it was gone, I found myself reading the ragged plains of that face and finding something familiar there, hidden in plain sight, laying under the scars and the exposed, sickeningly scathed tissue: the same bone structure, the same dark brown irises. The long, curved lashes fanning the eyes I knew were missing, but there was a softness to his expression I could finally begin to make sense of.

He seemed to be silently pleading with us to let him go. As absurd as it sounded, he didn’t seem too eager to play the bad guy… Not with us, at least.

Ella side-stepped me, and the instant she finally manage to have a proper look, daring to get closer than I had so far, I heard a high-pitched, muffled yelp coming from her. I caught her by the arm to steady her, and that’s how we both got a glimpse of what we probably weren’t supposed to see. What the Lord of Hell was still desperately hiding from us.

The glass shards crackled under the soles of Lucifer’s expensive dress shoes. He lost his footing, and to steady himself, he instinctively flared them on both sides.

Our jaws quite literally dropped to the floor.

They were huge, pearly white, emanating an enchanting, mesmerizing glow: looking at them, I felt engulfed in an overwhelming synesthesia of sensations, as if their blissful light were singing to my soul (and I knew I had one, now), fondling me, immersing my entire being in the sweet scent of exotic balms and murmuring ancient spells to it. I could feel the immense power behind that spell, but I was gently shielded from it: I floated in a moonlit night that kept the scorching sun hidden under a merciful horizon. For a moment, I experienced the purest bliss; I felt sheltered, cocooned, cared for in a way I had never even imagined, and it left me craving for more, to a frightening degree.

They brightest of God’s angels. The Lightbringer.

His wings were the most ravishing, pure, magnificent thing I had ever seen, but also the most heinously tainted. I don’t know how long I stared at them: milliseconds, millennia. All I know is that it took me a while to notice how much damage had been inflicted to all that beauty.

There was a faint tremor to them, and the tip of the right one was dragging on the floor, the longest primaries leaving a wake in the debris. Something was painfully wrong in the alignment of the bones close to the tip of what I thought to be the “wrist” (if evolution was still a thing) of that huge additional limb. I caught a glimpse of white that didn’t belong there, and a lot of bright-red blood was trailing down the layered feathers from what seemed to be a horribly exposed fragment of bone.
Their owner seemed far from unfazed by our gaze: he didn’t hold it, as if ashamed, and he kept backing off.

That’s when I saw her, right behind him.

Chloe was laying in a fetal position on the couch, bathing in the unfiltered sunlight coming from the missing glass panels of the balcony and still partially hidden by his tall frame and his even more conspicuous wingspan. I panicked for an instant, until I saw her breastbone raising in shallow but regular breaths.

The fallen angel turned to her, getting close to the light framing her body as if he didn’t belong with her anymore, as if he himself weren’t a source of soothing brightness. The beast looked down at the sleeping beauty, and we saw it changing, turning into something else, something far more familiar and reassuring... The Lucifer we knew began to reemerge: the gruesome mask faded, flickering in the background like a superimposed projection or a ghostly afterimage.

"I think she is in shock," he said, softly, reaching out towards a golden strand of her hair with the elegant, manicured fingers we had seen dancing on the keys of his grand pianos so many times. He pulled them back before touching her, as if he didn’t deem right to indulge in that simple gesture. "Keep her warm and make sure she doesn’t hyperventilate when she wakes up… please."

Please.

He was looking at her with deep fondness, like a precious, heartbreakingly fragile thing he didn’t dare touch, as if even the lightest, most loving stroke might make her fall apart. He visibly struggled with himself, knowing he had to leave her before she woke up.

When he did turn and step away, I lost some more precious instants before I found it in myself to rush to her side in his stead. I was still waiting to wake up from that vivid, feverish dream and find my way back to reality.

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"I’ll save her… I promise."

I knew that voice, that smooth, husky timbre, and I knew only one person whose word was an unyielding, unbreakable bond. Floating among distant, muffled sounds and a warm light filtering from afar, I clung to them for dear life, wanting, needing to resurface.

My mind had taken refuge in a long-lost memory, and it was a memory I actually didn’t wish to relive.

That tiny little thing twitching on the floor, those bleary eyes, the rustle of the broken limb smearing
its blood on the cold tiles of my mother’s backyard. I didn’t know why, but my brain wouldn’t let go of that image.

I willed that miniature version of myself to move, to do something, but she just kept staring, crouching on the floor and hovering over the little bird with her small hands stuffed in the folds of her skirt, morbidly fascinated. She stayed there until it stopped quivering altogether. She didn’t even know what that meant.

I had been held in an incredibly soft, snow-white cocoon of pure bliss, but that warmth was gone now, and I knew that nothing would cushion my fall, when I plunged back into the far less reassuring reality waiting for me. I would take the full brunt of it like the little bird I had found agonizing on the doorstep that day.

For an instant, I thought I was feeling the same warmth again, close, but that sensation crystallized and shattered too soon. There it was... There it went.

I struggled to open my eyes, to let the light in: I felt the shadow crack and scrabbled at it to find a crevice, a handhold to climb a steep slope I couldn’t even see. I wanted out, and I wanted it now, whatever was waiting on the other side.

I felt my hands again, and my hands felt something under their fingertips: a smooth, leathery surface. I blinked my eyes, trying to focus them on the creamy, vitelline color spreading under them. My head was spinning and the world was still a blur, but I heard another familiar voice, and this time it was very close: "Chloe… Can you hear me?" it called me, frantic and high-pitched. "Are you all right?"

Two palms held my temples, brushing the strands of hair away, then slid to my shoulders, and I was suddenly engulfed in the most welcome bear hug of my life.

"E... Ella..."

I felt sore but more or less whole, apart for the sharp pain coming from the bruise the bullet had left under the vest I was luckily wearing.

"Yes… I... I think I am," I manage to stammer out, wiping my eyes with the back of both hands while my colleague and friend steadied me.

Dan was there, too: he put a hand on my shoulder, and that was the only reason I didn’t start sobbing.

My cheeks were wet; I felt cold, a cold spreading from the marrow of my bones to my whole body. I was a shivering mess, feeling goosebumps all over my body… Even the hair on the nape of my neck were standing at attention.

That same moment, a rustling sound and a bright white stain at the edge of my vision suddenly reminded me why.

Fuck… Fuck… Fuck!

I wriggled free from Ella’s embrace and glanced over her shoulder. Her heart was beating rabbit-fast: she seemed to know what I was trying to look at, and dread it.

“Don’t, Chloe. Please, don’t…”, I felt her silent warning when she hugged me even tighter.

Because there he was.

A vision.
"I need to go." he said under his breath, facing the balcony. He didn’t turn to me, he didn’t meet my stare. If he did, I would have crumbled. I would have fallen to pieces, and he probably knew it.

I held my breath, blinded by the Truth he was forcing me to stare at, crushed under the capital “T” at the beginning of the word.

"Have you ever needed to prove what you are… Chloe?” he said without looking.

He wasn’t ashamed of what he was, and what that meant.

Chloe …
He never used my first name, nor my “impossibly boring middle name, Jane”. *Detective* was a term of endearment, on his lips. *I was his* Detective… and I felt it. He had made me feel the real weight of that title so many times, the respect it commanded, but also the softness behind it when he was the one purring it softly. So many times, it had sounded like a pledge of devotion that I desperately wanted to cling to.

"Is this… *us*… real?” he had asked me once, with such fondness I too wondered if I was dreaming.

Hearing him call me “Chloe” was unfamiliar yet intimate... unbearably so, now that he had turned into such an alien being, billions years and *light* years away from my tiny little existence and my tiny little planet.

*Sorry*.. That word was bound to echo in my mind and haunt me for a long time: I could read it in his posture, in the drooping line of his shoulders and the bent angle of his long, elegant neck, but he would probably never say it out loud.

I had rushed down those stairs with a deafening roar in my ears, stuck on the gut-wrenching thought of finding his corpse at the foot of the last flight… The relief I had felt spotting him *alive* at the epicenter of the disaster had been so overwhelming I had failed to see the gaping ravine waiting to swallow me whole. He was the one hovering over a lifeless body, not the other way around, but the world was meant to come crashing down anyway as soon as he turned to me.

“*You are safe… That’s all that matters*” he had said on the rooftop, holding me in a sheltering embrace. He had touched the bullet stuck in my vest, close to the heart, and I’d covered his hand with mine to reassure him, to keep both of us grounded. He was safe too, still alive after facing alone a platoon of armed thugs, but that wasn’t the only thing that mattered, not by a long shot.

A terrifying monster there and then, a mind-boggling chimera here and now.

Dragging the tip of a pair of long feathered limbs amid the glass shards scattered on the floor, fragments of the imploded windows he must have smashed into while carrying my limp body, he turned to me and finally looked me in the eyes. *This is it*, he silently acknowledged me, skipping the unsaid before I looked too deep into them. *Farewell*…

He was back to his human masquerade, 5 o’clock stubble, long lashes, dark curls, luscious lips and all, but the flames I had seen in his eyes before fainting were escaping the cracks, filtering through his skin, as if that shell couldn’t contain him anymore. Somehow, he had shielded me from the crash-landing and from everything else: I was alive and almost unscathed, and I knew I had to thank him and him only for it.

I had never needed to prove that I was a woman, a mother, a homicide detective of the LAPD, or a human. I had never needed to prove that I was mortal, cause I simply *was*. 
Lucifer had proved to me who he was many times... He just hadn’t felt the need to prove what he was. To be fair, he had made both things clear since I’d met him for the first time, sitting on the bench of his grand piano and voicing his righteous indignation over the murder of an innocent woman while sipping top-shelf whiskey from a tumbler.

“Lucifer Morningstar... Is that a stage name or something?”

“God-given, I’m afraid.”

He stepped out on the balcony, hitting a potted plant with one of his huge divine appendices and grunting an indignant “Bloody Hell...” under his breath when it crashed on the floor.

Before shutting down in the middle of those gangsters’ lair and letting me free-fall on the mosaic floor and the debris, my brain had barely registered the sight of all the bloodied, mangled feathers scattered everywhere: they were so out of place it had filtered them out of the overall picture, centered on the alien-looking creature talking with Lucifer’s voice and inflection. However, the whitest and fluffiest of them all had floated and settled right in front of my eyes, dripping red blood from its broken quill and leaving an afterimage under my lids when I had closed them. Now, many more were silently, softly landing on his balcony’s deck.

With a sigh, he decided to overlook the mess he was making and gaze instead at the horizon, grabbing the glass balustrade, cracking it under his fingers.

I made a step forward, holding my breath and lifting a hand as if I wanted to hold him back.

For a split second he seemed to hesitate, staring into the abyss and tentatively flapping his huge, feathered libs, maybe not so sure they could keep his weight in the air anymore, but then he took a deep breath and plunged into the void with my strangled scream following right after.

Ella bolted toward the railing to lean over it: my heart stopped when I saw her putting a hand to her mouth in horror as if watching a suicide fall to his death, but then her shoulders relaxed a little and her eyes widened in awe.

When I had the courage to join her at the edge of the balcony, something mind-numbingly impossible was gliding over the roofs of our city, the “city of angels”, with utter disregard of the laws of physics.

"I see the pun, Lucifer," I murmured between my trembling fingers, choking the unhinged laugh (painfully akin to a sob) that was about to escape my lips. "I see it quite clearly, now..."

Chapter End Notes

Let's celebrate the new season's Eve (pun intended...) together, dear Lucifans! ;-)
“Mommy...”

I was alive, Trixie was alive, but the coil tightly wound in my guts didn’t loosen up when I heard her quivering voice. I cleared mine, struggling not to put all my worst fears in the question I desperately needed my baby to answer: “Are you OK, monkey? Are you hurt?”

She mumbled something along the lines of “I’m fine”.

“Daddy is here with me… We are coming,” I tried to reassure her.

I heard a rustling noise as she probably adjusted her hold on the cordless. Her voice then became so tiny I could barely hear her: “Do angels... die, mom?”

My grip on the already battered cellphone tightened so much I thought I could crush it in my palm.

“The can’t… Can they?” My baby gave a little whimper, sniffling close to the receiver.

Dan was hitching to listen too: he grabbed my knee, and my gaze dropped to his white knuckles. I had to put the call on speaker and let him listen to it too, or he would have swerved the car and cut one or two lanes in his attempt to lean toward the faint, trembling voice of his daughter.

“I… I think he’s not breathing,” we heard her sob. “What should I do?”

I was the one who stopped breathing: had all the oxygen been sucked out of that damn car?

Dan ignored a stop sign and cut across an intersection without even slowing down, while I held on for dear life to the door’s handle. He grabbed my wrist to get the phone closer to his mouth before hissing: -Where is i… he, baby?-.

Our daughter didn’t answer at first, but we heard some more rustling noises as she put her ear to the phone again. “I can feel his heart beating,” she inhaled, forcibly stopping her sniveling, “but he won’t open his eyes...” I could picture her wiping the tears with the back of her hands, and I prayed that there wasn’t any blood on them.

“Trixie, baby,” her father cut her short. “I need you to get away from i… from him. Are you alone? Is there anybody else there?”

She spurned his demand as if the mere thought of leaving offended her: “The three bad men are...”
She stopped, probably checking her surroundings, "up there, still out cold." *Up there?* "What do I do if they wake up? He's hurt, and I can’t protect him..." Her pained, scared voice twisted the knife already sunk deep in my gut. “He told me to run away as soon I could, but...”

“Damn, Trix,- Dan cut in again. “You need to stay away from that thing!”

I didn’t get what he meant at first, neither did she. A little mutter reached my ears from the other side, almost washed away by the traffic noise: “‘Thing’?” she echoed, taken aback by her father’s words.

Uttered by her small voice, that word didn’t just *sting*; it carved a piece of my soul out. A surge of nausea and dizziness almost knocked me off my axis again.

I grabbed the phone from Dan’s grasp and mentally thanked my brave, righteous child for reminding me of what I really felt, what I really *was*. “Hang in there, *both* of you. We’re close,” I said to her, making her father freeze at the wheel and run another red light as if he hadn’t even seen it. That was *me*, Chloe Jane Decker, foolishly trusting her instincts once more, and it was a line I wasn’t going to back down from, whatever epiphanies were bound to break at my shore. I was knee-deep in the water when I didn’t even know an ocean was there: if it was going to sweep me away, I could only swim and try to stay afloat.

Everything narrowed down to a single purpose: *Get there fast. Save them both.* The mere idea of losing one of them was enough to set me ablaze like a sea of gasoline.

I didn’t know what to answer to Trixie’s question: I had no idea if an archangel could die, if the concept even *applied* to a few thousand, million, possibly *billion*-year-old being... What I knew for certain is that after all Hell had broken lose (pun intended, thank you so much) in those mobster’s hideout, he had shielded my mortal self from a literal storm of bullets: after taking the first one, I had heard panicked screams erupting from the chest I was being held against, then Marcus had shouted the order, “Finish it,” and those screams had become *pained*, dreadfully so.

Thinking again, maybe I *did* know the answer. He had given it to me himself.

Malcolm. All the blood spreading on that warehouse’s floor after Lucifer had turned the attention of the armed man on himself… “I thought he killed you,” I had whispered after he had somehow saved Trixie and me anyway. His shirt was still drenched with blood, the perfect excuse for not joining the group hug. “Oh, he *did*. Yes,” he had said with a troubled smile that didn’t reach his eyes. “I got better...”

It might have even happened *twice*. “Well, look who’s back...” he had smiled at me again in a hospital room, several months later. “You didn’t die after all... That makes one of us.” Another soft, tired smile. Again, he had somehow managed to get the antidote to the poison that had nearly killed me, retrieving the formula after the only man who knew it had slid his throat right in front of my eyes. He hadn’t even taken all the credit for that one: “a joined effort”, he had called it. As exhausted as I was then, I hadn’t forgotten a single line of that conversation. What had he done? How had he made that trip *downstairs*? How many times had he saved my life no matter the cost, without me knowing?

*There must be a limit to how dense a so-called LAPD “detective” can turn out to be,* I scoffed at myself.

I hadn’t let Dan get his hands on the phone again, and while I was sinking into my own thoughts, he had kept himself busy getting in touch with the precinct to test the water on that side. “No backup team is coming,” he said, cursing in Spanish right after ending the call. “Pierce made sure of it.”
“I really hope that *hijo de puta* is rotting in Hell,” I heard Ella grumbling from the back seat.

“He is.” We could be fairly certain of that, now.

“Perks of having the Devil on our team...” Ella choked on her own shrill laugh, as inappropriate as the circumstances demanded, raising a hand to clutch at her cross pendant before adding: “He’s still... I mean... “team Deckerstar” and *stuff*, right?”

Dan literally growled. He cursed again in his mother tongue, bumping a fist on the wheel and hitting the horn. The car swerved and a truck behind us honked back at the reckless maneuver.

That was it. At the next red traffic light I swiftly turned the key and killed the engine, then turned to face the forensic scientist, a fellow member of the Tribe: “You used to steal cars when you were in Detroit, didn’t you, Ella?”

She nodded, unashamed.

“Then you drive,” I unfastened Dan’s belt next to me. “So we have some chance of getting there alive”. Turning back, I frowned at the still cursing and still fidgeting ex-husband I couldn’t trust with the task.

She nodded again and jumped out of the car to switch seats. Before I even heard the click of the rear door closing again, the tires screeched on the asphalt and I immediately knew that we were out for one hell of a ride (*Couldn’t help it, thank you again*). Propelled like a cannonball straight into LA’s hectic traffic, Dan’s old sedan fired on all cylinders: Ella zigzagged and cut corners at high speed like a pro racer hell-bent (*What a cosmic inside joke we were in on now... Was I supposed to use the capital “H”?*) on winning the World Rally Championship.

“The Devil made me do it,” our nerdy forensic scientist sheepishly justified herself, after pulling off a handbrake turn that sent the vehicle into a spin with the rear wheels locked up, leaving a trail of smoke and skidmarks on the road. Squeezed breathless against the side windows by the centrifugal force, neither me nor Dan objected to that. At least the siren I had turned on screamed louder than the soon-to-be-spent tires of the unmarked car breaking an awful lot of traffic laws and leaving a mess in its wake.
Dan and me positioned on both sides of the front door, guns drawn and loaded. Swallowing hard and taking a deep breath, I pushed it inwards without making any noise, and it gave in. It wasn’t locked. How come I wasn’t surprised? Lucifer had always seemed to easily have his way with locks and bolts, including mine. Especially mine. Although in this case, maybe it was the mobsters’ doing.

We leveled our guns on both sides, a silent understanding synchronizing our movements in a dance we had perfected over the years, a dance our lives had depended on in many occasions.

After clearing the entrance, I gestured for him to cover me while I moved forwards and scanned the unnervingly-quiet living area.

That’s when I saw him: “up there”... quite literally.

There was a human projectile stuck in the wooden shelves suspended over my kitchen’s countertop. Two hundred and something pounds, give or take: kudos to the carpenter, ’cause I doubt the fancy piece of furniture hanging from the roof had been tested for that specific purpose. From the same spot, I could easily guess the fate of a second thug: his legs dangled limply from the skylight he had crashed through headfirst.

“Whoa,” was Dan’s concise, helpful comment. I followed his gaze when he looked down at one of the men’s submachine guns, abandoned on the floor: the barrel was bent at a 90 degree angle and the steel seemed to be partly melted.

The third man hadn’t been luckier than the others: he had gone right through the railing of the stairs, on the opposite side of the living room, and his body was still wedged in between the metal rods in a very unflattering position. Unconscious? Dead? Who knew. Who cared.

Where was my bab…?

“Mommy! Dad!”

We heard her voice coming from behind our backs and the couch, where the balcony door seemed to be ajar and the long curtains of the adjacent windows were slightly fluttering, pushed aside by the air coming through.

Dan lowered his gun and rushed towards Trixie’s voice, strangely muffled… then stopped dead in his tracks.

I saw the same scene, and it clicked.

My mouth agape and my breath quickly picking up, I got a fairly clear picture of how he had protected me by the fire of multiple SMGs and pistols, when Marcus had ordered his goons to finish
us. My daughter’s voice was muffled because she was engulfed in a gorgeous, faintly glowing cloud of fluff: a pair of gruesomely battered and shattered angel wings keeping the world at bay, her shell-shocked parents included.

I wasn’t wearing Lucifer’s pendant, but I could easily picture him commenting: “Fancy a matching pair of earrings, Detective?”

I swallowed, seeing up close how much saving me and my daughter had cost him. Again.

With nothing but a conflicting mix of worry and awe on her face, Beatrice twisted and squirmed a little bit to squeeze out of that tight embrace and pop her head out of all the fluff; when the barbs of a ruffled down feather made her sneeze, the whole, huge limb embracing her twitched.

Her guardian Devil was apparently unconscious: he lay slumped on the floor with his back resting against the wall and his legs bent to the side in an uncomfortable, almost kneeling position. We made no attempt to approach him, in that condition: it seemed wiser to let the sleeping monster lie.

When Trix freed her right arm, careful not to touch any of his open wounds, I watched in horror as a little flame crept along her wrist, then settled on her open palm, but to my utter disbelief, she didn’t even flinch: fascinated, she looked at it as it danced and flickered on her bare skin. “It’s warm, but it’s not hurting me,” she felt the urge to reassure us, after meeting our astonished stares, as if she considered the idea of Lucifer hurting her, willingly or not, to be somewhere between blatantly absurd and mildly offensive. “It tickles,” she giggled.

One wing was spread on the floor and bent at an awkward angle, with both of them weighting over it. When Trixie moved, it shivered: it wasn’t just a huge, incongruous appendix attached to a human figure it didn’t belong to, but a fully functioning part of a more complex organism, connected to it by sinews and a full set of powerful muscles, properly wired to the central nervous system. Had its owner been awake, the excruciating pain would have driven him crazy… That’s why my child needed to get away from him no matter what.

Dan must have thought the same thing, ’cause he leveled his handgun again and took the safety off. He had taken his personal P226, leaving to me the police-issued Glock 22.

Nobody thought that a barely audible “click” might be enough, but it was. And triggering the injured, traumatized being already struggling to shield us from the nuclear meltdown about to go down in its core proved to be an awful idea.

Lucifer’s entire body tensed up. The wing that was lying limp suddenly flared, the primaries aligning; impossibly sharp, the hardened barbs hit the armchair a few feet away from him and cut right through its metal frame.

Both me and Dan yelped, recoiling. My arms went up reflexively.

There was the furnace of a star confined within that fragile shell, and it was about to go supernova on us: a conscience, a will was needed to keep it under control, and that conscience was spent, overwhelmed.

Or so it seemed.

The other wing stayed where it was, bent around Beatrice to protect her: turned into a deadly weapon, but not leaving her exposed, whatever the threat was. Lucifer’s eyes were open, now, ablaze with fire but seemingly unfocused: there wasn’t a sentient mind behind that reaction, only his instincts. Bad news. Really bad news for us. The flames spread all over him and started licking at his face and his hair, breaking through his skin without burning it, as if his body were just a thin coating
layer, an outworn vessel about to crack: the raging inferno inside was tearing him at the seams, barely contained.

The only thing that prevented me from finding myself in the throes of a full-blown panic attack was the fact that my daughter seemed calm, almost unfazed. Maybe… worried, but not for herself. She wasn’t scared, nor in pain: that much was obvious.

Feeling Lucifer’s labored breath with her hands on his chest, she frowned at us, not him. “Stop it, dad! Put that gun down!” she admonished her father. “Don’t you see that you are scaring him?”

Dumbstruck, Dan slowly lowered the muzzle, holding the handle with both his trembling, white-knuckled hands. “I am scaring… him?”, he stammered, his eyes transfixed on the weaponized feathers at the wingtips. “I am the one who’s scared shitless, here!”

He stopped whining right away when he heard a low-pitched, cavernous grumble coming from the creature still laying in a crumpled heap on the floor, as if boosted by the subwoofers of a concert hall. It took a tremendous effort for Lucifer’s human-like side to come back online and override the feral, primordial urge to unleash his wrath and be done with it. That far more familiar and reassuring side of his spoke with human words in a croaky human voice: “…And I’m the one who’s hurting,” he slurred, winning an internal battle he might haven’t even bothered fighting.

Lifting a hand to massage his temples, the disconcerting chimera used the second of his six limbs (insects were the only flying hexapods I could think of) to support himself, since the wall he was propped against supported his back, but didn’t prevent him from slumping to the side.

His eyes blinked in an attempt to clear the fog blurring his vision, and to Dan’s utter dismay, he was the person those eyes chose to focus on, as soon as the blur was gone.

“Would you mind putting that gun away, Detective Douche? It’s unnerving,” he said in a hoarse, gravelly voice. “I doubt I could get away from here on my own limbs, if you put another hole in me.”

“Get”, not “walk“; “Limbs”, not “legs”. That explained the balcony’s door left ajar behind him.

Dan did lower the muzzle a little bit, but not before meeting the Devil’s earnest request with a mocking rebuff: “Indulge me, please”, he shrugged. “Consider it to be my coping strategy”.

Lucifer frowned, and even if his eyes were back to the dark brown we were used to, I felt a sudden pang of fear and a cold shiver crawling up my spine.

“And it’s not like it can actually hurt you… you freak” charged head-on my incredibly reckless ex-husband.

When the creature who had dared challenging God Himself shut his eyes and covered them with a hand pinching both his temples, I thought it was another praiseworthy attempt at keeping the world at bay and his anger in check. Instead, it turned out he was fighting a losing battle against the pain, now that he was back to his senses.

He collected himself.“My current mood swing has not reached the self-destructive bottom, yet,” he said, holding Dan’s gaze with a resigned, dejected expression. After weighting the possible outcomes, he made up his mind: “Now that I’m not needed anymore, I’ll relieve you of my unwelcome presence.” With a sigh, he loosened the tight knot still keeping the muscles of his right wing from letting go of its weight, like cutting the slings of a protective swathe, and gave Trixie the chance to escape his embrace. Apparently, all he wanted was to keep her away from the line of
fire… Daniel noticed that, too.

-Now, little human...”- His breathing was growing labored, and he was paler than I had ever seen him. -Go to your mother.- He gently, oh-so gently nudged her with his wingtip towards me. When she turned her widened, confused eyes in my direction, his irises lit again: he glared back at Dan without her noticing, daring him to put that damn itchy finger on the trigger before the child was at a safe distance from both of them.

“This is him”, I thought, struck dumb by a high-voltage bolt coming from nowhere like a random discharge. That was what Lucifer was, who he was, underneath it all, and I felt such a surge of fondness in my chest my breath stilled until the brain actually started to short-circuit. We had hurt him, in so many different ways, and a creature pained by rejection couldn’t be the embodiment of evil.

Finally, finally the whirling maelstrom of my thoughts flushed me down and expelled me from the world’s backdoor: it really felt like drowning, when it sucked me down, but I knew I could gulp as much air as I needed as soon as I resurfaced.

At a loss as he always was when it came to complex human feelings, the clueless dork looked at my puzzled expression, unable to read it, and when he did, he read it all wrong. He had been my partner for years, the roots of “our thing” (as I used to call it, whatever it was) reached deep, but his grasp on human emotions wasn’t firm at all, yet. Even less so, my understanding of a Celestial being’s reactions and how to handle them, now that I knew he had always been telling the truth about himself.

A being as ancient as the stars and the void stretching between them wasn’t supposed to seek leniency from a bunch of mere mortals, to strip bare in front of them: the fact that he looked so broken, so utterly defeated was as wrong as a tear in the Universe’s fabric.

He reached his own conclusions and he exhaled the remaining breath with the bleak finality of a last goodbye. That was it, for him. He’d had enough.

He glanced at the balcony’s door, but no: apparently, taking flight wasn’t an option anymore. That left him only the stairs.

He clenched his teeth, taking a deep breath and preparing for what was coming. With a muffled, strangled groan of pain he forced himself to get on one knee, first, then stand precariously. He couldn’t lean against the wall and trap his injured wings in between: that was too painful to even contemplate.

Maintaining some semblance of dignity was probably the only reason why he hadn’t let his wings droop: he kept them partly folded, half their span occupying most of my living room but leaving him some some spare space to maneuver around the furniture.

Oozing from a deep gash on his forearm, a rivulet of fresh blood had drenched a sleeve, dripping on the floor: darker than the black fabric, the stain was quite conspicuous. He had buttoned up the jacket not to show the bullet holes in his once-pristine shirt: no wounds could be spotted underneath, and his intermittent invulnerability baffled me.

I instinctively reached out when I saw him lose his balance, but I couldn't bring myself to rush to his side, and I didn't let go of the hand of my daughter, who was about to do just that. Unfortunately, he noticed, and he didn’t let me get away with it: “You had such a horrified expression, when you saw my other face…” he looked me in the eyes. He took a deep breath, then straightened his back, taking a few steps toward the entrance of the apartment, giving us a wide berth. He met my
daughter's moistened eyes, and I felt her small hand squeezing mine in a silent protest.

Stopping midway, he steadied himself against the wall, spreading his bloodied fingers and leaving dark-red stains on the pastel surface. Aware of the impending necessity to make his huge wings disappear before stepping out into the world, he tried folding them against his back, rolling his shoulders, but the splintered, partly exposed joint of the one that had suffered the worst damage didn't let him: the movement struck him with a bolt of blinding, unbearable pain. Letting out a strangled sound, he stumbled, blinking his eyes twice as if his vision had gone black for a moment and the room had started spinning around him. “If you wanted me to go back to Hell, all you needed to do was ask…” he panted, meeting my eyes for the last time. “I would have obliged.”

With that, the fearsome adversary of God collapsed to the floor in a heap of ruffled, bloody feathers. Some more came loose, floating in the air.
“I can see the gears of your brain spinning… Admit it: you’re already sciencing the heck out of this, Ella.”
No, I was not.
My voice dropped an octave: “I’m just trying to keep up with all these epiphanies,” I murmured. For an instant, I felt that deep, dark water rise up to engulf me and soak into my skin, my bones, my cells: I was tempted to ease myself into the unknown and let it dissolve me. Then I cleared my throat and looked back at Daniel: “If reality doesn't fit my beliefs, reality wins.”

"Confide in Me" by Kylie Minogue (The Abbey Road Sessions, 2012):
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v7gGPSOCGYE

I saw Chloe's eyes widening and her lips opening in a mute exclamation, mouthing the name of her partner, but I had already bolted forward when I realized she was impeded by the couch getting in the way and I was not.

I caught Lucifer’s head in both my open palms right before it hit the pavement. Nice catch, Ella. I didn’t want that pretty skull of his to crack open before he had given me the answer to a gazillion questions.

Panting for the adrenaline rush, I found myself kneeling on the floor, nesting a Celestial being and wondering how in the world my life had become like this. I’d dived without giving it a second thought... As simple as that. My bruised elbow could testify to that. Had “free will” something to do with it?

I mentally pleaded ‘not guilty’: “You see a friend crumpling in a dead faint and you don’t jump in to help him, Big Guy? Not cool...

Accountable or not for being the cool one once more, now I had the Devil in my lap, and he was trembling, curled in a ball, eyes tightly shut to keep the pain at bay. An injured wing was trapped under him, crushed by his weight, and a low, desperate moan slipped through his lips and clenched teeth: more than hearing it, I felt it in my bowels, resonating through our joined bodies and crawling up my spine.

From having a little crisis of faith and a few issues with the Almighty to babysitting a surprisingly nonthreatening incarnation of Satan... What a leap. What had I done to find myself at the epicenter of a seism of cosmic proportions?

“As the only believer in this room, I think that pointing a gun at an Archangel who also happens to rule Hell is unlikely to buy you a fast-lane ticket to a cozy afterlife, dude,” I informed Dan without
even taking a breath. Better to stomp on his lit fuse and put it out right away, before he made an even bigger mess of that already massive screw-up.

“I told you to stay outside,” he snarked. “You’re not even armed!”

Ignoring his retort and switching to a different strategy to distract him, I made a great show of looking at the ceiling in wonder: “What is this guy doing up there, anyway?” I feigned surprise, even if I had already peeked inside and scanned the Devil’s playground before venturing past the entrance. One of Pierce’s goons was literally hanging from the roof. Talk about a plan (quite literally) flown out of the window... “Did he throw him across the room or something?” Not to mention the other guy stuck in the kitchen’s shelves. I lowered my eyes on the sleeping beauty laying in my lap: he was quite adorably ruffled, now that his slick hairstyle had come undone and the unruly curls had sprung free from the slightly perfumed product he used to keep them in place. “Here’s the Big Bad Devil for you,” I almost smirked.

His additional limbs were hitching in pain all across their entire, considerable span. The bogeyman putting all boogeymen to shame since the beginning of time had given his all to protect a human and her daughter from harm, and he was paying the price for it: I had never seen anyone or anything so utterly spent.

“Someone tell me how to make sense of that, pretty please,” I silently begged the Heavens above.

I frowned at the aforementioned human, still holding Beatrice’s hand, and at the other (completely useless) individual she had mated and conceived her brave, lovely child with: “Are you going to help, or just stay there and stare?” I urged them both after meeting Trixie’s worried, almost panicked gaze.

I didn’t even realize I was stroking the Devil’s hair until he started purring in my lap like a big cat: the biggest WTF moment in my entire existence, even bigger than discovering that I had a ghost following me around, that my boss was a criminal mastermind or that my favorite civilian consultant was not a peculiarly dedicated method actor.

Chloe’s eyes went even wider: “What the he…” she cleared her throat, “…ck?” With her jaw quite literally dropped to the floor, she pointed a finger at the sound: “Is that…?”

“Felines do it when they are hurt or sick, seeking comfort…” I dropped the adventurous comparison like a hot potato: the implications opened their own can of worms.

Apparently, our friend was a mind-boggling chimera of different animal parts stitched together in a strangely coherent entity: he had probably inherited the quirks and behavioral traits of each one, and truth be told, that explained a lot of things. I couldn’t even rule out the possibility of him sprouting horns or a tail, if he wanted to: God probably didn’t subject his most complex creations to the constraints and limitations of a single natural species... provided that Nature itself was still a thing.

“I skipped the exam on angels’ anatomy at the University, but if a human bleeds so much, he is as good as dead,” I told the Detectives, just to keep them in the loop of my professional, absolutely reliable assessment of the perfect storm raging over our heads. “He has a heart, yes, and it's beating way too fast: I think he's going into a hypovolemic shock… If we don't help him, we won't have a dazzling fallen angel hanging out at the precinct anymore.”

The King of Hell growing attached to some random humans and sacrificing his eternal life to save them? That might tip the cosmic balance a little bit. Talk about the sky falling down...

Chloe flinched. God, angels, Heaven, Hell… Not only she had never believed in their existence, but
she probably didn't want them to be real.

“Can you hear me, Luce…?” I tried testing the waters, not knowing what to expect from the injured creature exhaling its last breaths on my thigh, a creature supposed to pour its wrath on human souls like molten ore for all Eternity.

“Be careful of the longest feathers,” hissed Dan. “They get crazy sharp if you startle him… They’re fucking weapons!”

When a low, even more animalistic growl instantly wiped away the soft purring sound, I glared back at my colleague with an urgent message: Shut the f*ck up or the wounded beast will gut me, thank you very much...

Luckily, the winged human feline calmed down as soon as I resumed petting it. “If he trashes, we won’t be able to hold him down… That’s for sure.” While I kept stroking him with my right hand, I checked his vitals with my left one, counting the heartbeats while checking my wristwatch.

“The asshole has always been too sculpted and well-built for being a lazy, sleep-deprived alcoholic who constantly indulges in junk food and stolen pudding... Not to mention the fact that he’s far too strong for his size.”

“Is that a pang of envy, Dan?” was my quick comeback. “Comparing body parts is never a good idea… especially with an Archangel.” An Archangel whose bodily functions I probably shouldn’t benchmark against the vital signs of a male human in his late-thirties or early-forties. “If what he told me holds truth, he might have needed a very fast metabolism to lit the stars…”

With that, a silence as heavy and thick as my abuelita’s heavy-duty woolen blanket fell on the three of us (four, actually, considering that Beatrice had been far too quiet all along).

“Wait… What?” murmured Dan. “Has he ever said something… along those lines?”

“Yes, he definitely did. ‘The ungrateful prick loves giving orders, then taking all the credit when he deems the result worthy of Him’, I managed a decent imitation of a posh British accent. ‘Let there be light, said the Almighty… But I was the one who had to figure out how’. Quoting the Devil word by word? Perks of having a very good memory.

That really sent our heads spinning.

Strangely, stroking Lucifer's soft, curly hair made me feel more grounded, even in front of that revelation.

“Holy… cow…”

“I had been singing Space Oddity and dancing around all day, when he said something about taking a selfie on the passenger seat of Musk’s Roadster… You know, the car that’s floating in space”. Such an awesome prank to make and a cool pic to post on his Instagram. “I laughed so much, pointing out that he needed to figure out how to make his cellphone work in space, after flying up there and finding the needle in the proverbial haystack, but he gave up only because he didn’t want to use,” air quotes, “the bloody wings Dad had forced back on him’. The same wings he had used to shield his favorite humans from harm. “Than we ended up discussing interplanetary travel, and he had his own theories on that too... As I mentioned before, you might wanna reconsider pointing a gun at him before you trigger a nuclear meltdown in the middle of Chloe’s living room,” I took the chance to warn Dan again.

His wing was straining under his weight, shaky and in pain, unable to free itself. “He has literally enlightened us, eons ago...” I didn’t dare touching it, even if I felt its long bones and its muscles brushing against my hip in that weak attempt to find relief. “But he has ended up being punished as a traitor. Like Prometheus...”

I listened to my own voice, and it sounded haunted. My thoughts were muffled, too, like shooting stars in a distant blur. I probably gave off different vibes, though, ‘cause Dan’s gaze locked on my apparently steady hands, one straightening the Devil’s locks and the other running again to feel his pulse, and he reached his own conclusion: “I can see the gears of your brain spinning... Admit it: you’re already sciencing the heck out of this, Ella.”

No, I was not.

My voice dropped an octave: “I’m just trying to keep up with all these epiphanies,” I murmured. For an instant, I felt that deep, dark water rise up to engulf me and soak into my skin, my bones, my cells: I was tempted to ease myself into the unknown and let it dissolve me. Then I cleared my throat and looked back at Daniel: “If reality doesn’t fit my beliefs, reality wins.”

That stare had to be the closest thing to a defiant scowl he had ever seen on my face: enough to make him realize something and finally put his weapon away. “Fine,” he sighed.

That’s when Chloe decided to step in. She had stayed away until now, closed off, literally unsteady on her feet, but after meeting her daughter’s gaze with a slow, meaningful nod, she came back to life and got closer. Her expression when she crouched down to take Lucifer’s limp hand into hers was so full of love and anguish I forgot to breath until I saw the first tear trailing down her cheek.

“Tell me what I can do to save him, Ella...” She wiped away that tear with the back of her hand and pierced me with watery but resolute eyes: “Please.”