Summary

Sam and Dean have moved to New Orleans, Louisiana after travelling around the country in search of any effective treatment for Dean's poison-gas-damaged eyes and lungs. Bobby, a family friend, rents out a home for them and sets Sam up with a job working as a piano player in a speakeasy called "the Roadhouse". Sam gets a recommendation to see a Vodou bokor by the name of Lucifer to help treat Dean's eyes, and, while things all appear to be going well for a while, there are a few more powerful forces at play than anyone could ever have anticipated.

Written by Mer and Sarah. Art by queerpanic on tumblr.

Notes

This is it. This is what we spent our summer/fall doing. Writing a Vodou AU.
In the night the city air was hot and black, and it tasted like the ocean. People were up at all hours here. There was always something better to be doing than just lying in bed and failing to sleep. The world was alive with music and neon and the sharp spice of the place where the bayou and the shoreline met. The moon hung fat and brilliant like a white flower. Sam twisted and kicked in his sweat-stiff sheets and gave up on sleep.

Dean was in the other room, either sleeping or faking it; both were possible. The door stood mutely open. It was late, too late, and the city was still whirling. For a bitter moment Sam wondered if anyone else in this whole goddamn city had a job to get to in the morning. The flash of irritation was tiring. He stared blindly at the ceiling, feeling the seconds slip past like syrup.

Stop it, he told himself. You have to sleep. Go the hell to sleep. Stop thinking. Stop worrying. It’s not doing you any good. You’re going to die of exhaustion at the age of twenty-five, and then what’ll happen to Dean? Shut your stupid mind off.

In the army it was so much easier. They said sleep and you slept. They said eat and you ate until they said you were done. If you didn’t you paid for it the next day.

His shoulder hurt with an old dry ache. He rubbed it and stared out the window, and watched New Orleans bubble and rage far away.

The second he pushed open the door of the Roadhouse, the blonde woman looked briskly up from the counter, said “Good, you’re here. Take this,” and dumped a tin bucket into his arms. The bucket was astonishingly heavy, like it was full of cement, and gave off a sticky rotten stench. He staggered for a moment, staring at her. “What?”

“You simple, boy? Take it outside.” The woman nodded at the door, still hanging on its crusted hinges. She was pretty but faded, with dull cornsilk hair and a face traced with lines. Her hands were thick and hard as a man’s. He had a brief confusing flash of his mother and pushed it aside with some difficulty. “Outside?”

“Yes. Outside. The place on the other side of the door. Throw it in the street, the dogs’ll take care of it.”

When he hesitated, she barked “Go,” and he fled.

The bucket proved to be half full of rank sour vomit. Sam tossed it across the street. A few people glared at him, but most walked on by. It occurred to him that they might be used to this kind of thing by now. That thought did not trouble him as much as it should have.
The blonde woman was polishing a row of crusted glasses when he walked inside. “Thanks,” she said. “Some idiot drank three more scotch and sodas than he could handle and didn’t make it to the john. Times like these make me think I should go legit.”

He didn’t know how to respond to that. “Um,” he tried, and then, rather weakly, “I’m Sam Winchester.”

A brief opaque flicker of eyes over the dirty glasses. “I’m aware. Bobby said you’d be coming in today. He didn’t say you’d be a bit slow, but I suppose that’s a side effect of his caring and generous nature. I’m Ellen.”

He groped vaguely for a memory of the name. “The owner’s wife.”

The eyes glanced up again, sharper this time. “Not since 1918. Got his head blown off by some Jerry bastard in the Marne. I’m the owner now.”

For a moment the impact of memory hit him like a blow—filth and gore and the hot gritty sting of gunpowder. “I was at the Marne,” he said, and wondered at himself for saying it.

Ellen watched him for a long moment, her face tight and unreadable. Finally she looked back at the glasses. “Is that so,” she said flatly. “Well. Welcome to the Roadhouse, Sam Winchester.”

The other employees of the bar arrived in irregular trickles, with little regard for timing. There was a slender girl with liquid blonde hair and soft eyes who introduced herself, somewhat unnecessarily, as Ellen’s daughter; she looked precisely like Ellen, minus twenty years of running a bar and the violent death of a spouse. Her name was Jo and she was exactly the kind of girl Dean liked. Had liked. Hell, probably still would like, if he got any contact with the female gender anymore. She gave Sam a crisp but friendly smile and a cursory explanation of where everything was, from the mops for scrubbing up stale beer (in a dusty corner) to the shotgun for dealing with unpleasant customers (behind the bar, where Ellen presided with implacable calm). Sam found himself liking her in an instinctual way.

Benny Laffitte slouched in about ten minutes after her. Of the other workers, Benny was the only one Sam had met before, and it was mostly due to him and Bobby that Sam had this job at all. A tall man with a lazy, predatory, grace and a wiry smile, he was one of Dean’s old drinking buddies from before the war. Sam didn’t know him very well, which was due largely to the fact that Dean was the sort of person who specifically classed some of his friends as ‘drinking buddies’ and Sam really wasn’t. Benny wore a drooping cloth cap and spoke with a fluid Cajun accent like honey and hot pepper. Sam didn’t like him, for reasons he could not define or articulate. He smiled at him and tried to stay out of his way.

Finally there was the blind woman. Her name was Pamela and Sam had never seen anything like her before. She was sleek and gorgeous, with a wild tumble of black hair and long silky legs, and she wore thick lenses of smoked glass which completely covered her eyes and a lot of the upper half of her face. When she walked in, she called out “Is everything the same as yesterday?”

“More or less,” Ellen replied.

“Thank you, sweetheart.” She walked across the room with a kind of rolling confidence. Sam, who had become something of an expert in the habits of the blind, watched her incredulously. Dean had lived in their mousetrap apartment for weeks without once leaving and still walked in fear of knocking things over. It didn’t seem possible that this woman, with her brassy self-assurance and her
bright dress, could really be blind. Surely there were eyes hidden behind those black glasses, watching him with the muted spark of laughter.

“One new addition,” Jo said, pushing out of the kitchen. “Go be friendly, Sam.”

Sam stood up, uncertainly. “Hi, I’m Sam, like she said. This is my first day. It’s great to meet you.”

“Yeah?” The dark holes of the glasses turned in his direction. “New to the gin mill, huh? It’s not so bad. Just stay away from Ellen’s coffin varnish. She makes that shit in the john.”

“You didn’t seem to mind it so much last night,” Ellen replied darkly, planting a half-dried glass on the shelf. “Or the night before that.”

“Needs must when the devil drives.” Pamela tugged a chair out from one of the rickety tables and dropped into it. “Sam, you drink?”

“A little. Sometimes.”

She leaned back, her glasses fixed on him like empty sockets, and he had the distinct feeling she was watching him again. “Don’t tell me you’re some god damn blue noser.”

“No, I drink. It’s just more my brother’s thing.”

“Really?” She smiled, wide and catlike. “I might like this brother of yours.”

Not many people were interested in violating the 18th Amendment at nine o’clock on a Wednesday. The Roadhouse was largely deserted apart from a scattering of pale, dusty, sunlight and the sour haze of last night’s liquor. In the corners were the truly devoted drunks, the ones with no jobs and no families, nothing but the chipped glasses of amber in front of them. They carried the dark stink of alcohol and hopelessness and there was little in their vacant, shapeless, faces to identify them as human. Every so often Jo would go over and top them up. Benny lingered by the door, keeping watch down the street with artistic casualness. The cops in this part of town had little interest in the thriving bootleg trade and had long since given up trying to control it, but once in a while the federals dropped by and it never hurt to be too careful.

“Bobby tells me you can play the piano,” Ellen said abruptly.

Sam looked up. “Sure. That was in the job description.”

Pamela shifted. “Really.” Her voice was oddly flat. It was impossible to tell what she was thinking.

“I took lessons. Not for very long, but…I mean, I like it. I’ve always liked music.”

“Play us something,” Benny said amiably, and gestured at the battered old upright piano in the corner.

“Yeah,” Jo said. “Show us what you got.”

Sam laughed, embarrassed in a slight and pleasant way. “Okay, if you insist. What do you want to hear?”

“Give us a surprise,” Ellen said. She was smiling faintly.

Sam shrugged and rose. “You asked for it.” The piano keys had that pearly yellow tarnish that came with years of use, and the stool let out a squeal as he sat. He ran his fingers over the chipped geography of black and white, feeling the strange, familiar, mixture of calm and excitement settle
over him. Experimentally, he pressed middle C, and a note of wheezing but genuine sweetness rang out.

He dove into the first five bars of “Tin Roof Blues”. It was a good piano, if a bit banged-up. The keys were slippery and the music roared out like it had been waiting for him. He pulled away, suddenly uneasy. It was, after all, not his piano.

“Very nice,” said Pamela. “You’ll make a fine replacement for me.”

Sam glanced back. “Sorry?”

“You heard me. I used to provide the musical accompaniment for this dump before all this.” She gestured vaguely at her face.

“Oh. That’s--a lot to live up to.”

“Damn right it is.” She sprawled backwards in her chair. “You better start taking better care of your hair.”

“His hair looks pretty good to me, Pam,” Jo said drily.

“So what brings you our way for a job?” Benny asked. He was leaning against the doorframe, picking idly at his nails.

Sam blinked. “I need a job to earn money so that I can buy the things I require for survival.”

Ellen let out a sharp laugh. “He has you there.”

“Not what I meant.” Benny tilted his head back. “You only end up in a job like this if you’re desperate, on the lam, addicted to something expensive, or all three. So what’s your story?”

A slight twist of discomfort moved in Sam’s stomach. “It’s long. And complicated.”

“None of us are doing anything.” Pamela leaned over the table, her hands tucked beneath her bony chin.

“Okay, okay. You want to hear my big story, here goes.” He twisted around at the stool and slid backwards against the face of the piano. “I was eighteen when the war started. Started for us, I mean.”

“Already I can see where this is going,” Benny muttered.

Jo shot him a sharp glance. “Benny, shut up.”

“Anyway, I was all set up for college. Scholarship and everything. Then the war came along and I figured, my father was a soldier, my grandfather was a soldier, and I should probably follow in the tradition. So I joined up. And Dean, my big brother, he joined up too. To look after me.”

He fell silent for a moment. This was the worst part, not the horrors that came after but this simple, inescapable fact; that Dean had joined up to take care of him, and everything else that happened after was because of that. There was no way through it or around it. That was the truth, and he couldn’t ignore it just because it might make things easier to live with.

“They shipped us out to France,” he continued finally. “We were there for nine months. The AEF, under Pershing. I met Pershing once. Dean and I were stationed together most of the time. We were together at the Marne, and at Argonne Forest, which was when--well, we were fighting, and we
were separated. There was some kind of chemical gas where he was, I never knew exactly what. Almost everyone else died. It knocked him unconscious and the bodies covered him, which I guess is how he survived--they must have shielded him somehow. So he was alive when they found him. Not by much.”

The bar was very quiet now. Sam did not look up. He didn’t want to see the faces of the people around him, because he knew what he would find there. It was the same look everyone got when he told this story, and it got old very quickly.

“He’s blind now, and he has trouble breathing,” he went on. “They sent him home after that. I had to stay more or less right up until the end, but when they let me go I came back and found him.”

“Where was he?” asked Jo softly.

“They sent him to our dad. In Kansas. He was having trouble living by himself.” Sam kept his voice level with an immense effort of will. This was the other difficult part--not remembering it, so much, but telling the story in a way that didn’t involve yelling and breaking things. “I took him and we left.”

“Why?” asked Benny curiously, which was always the question that came next, and always impossible to answer.

“He wasn’t taking care of him,” Sam managed, This was technically accurate, although it failed to capture the filth of the house, the alcoholic reek, the rats nesting in what was left of the bed. When Sam came Dean had been so weak he could barely move; he couldn’t remember the last time he had eaten, and it was like he didn’t care, like he was content to disintegrate of neglect and starvation in their father’s ruined house. It wasn’t a huge surprise, really. John had never been very good at taking care of anyone, even himself.

He realized that he had been quiet for too long. “We were on the move for a little while after that. Looking for treatments, mostly. We went everywhere and nothing worked. I did some odd jobs to pay for all the doctor bills which amounted to nothing. Then Bobby--he’s an old friend of our dad’s-- he got in touch with us and said that he had a room he could rent us, and maybe a job. So we came down here.” He looked up with a bright vacant smile. “And that is the extent of my story.”

Jo breathed out and shook her head. “That is quite a story, Sam Winchester.”

He shrugged with an edge of discomfort. “Now you know why I need the job. I figure I’ll take a look around here, see what local frauds and faith-healer crazies I can find to waste my money on this time. New Orleans can’t be any worse than the other places I’ve been.”

“That’s just tempting the powers that be,” Ellen said mildly.

Benny was looking at him from the doorway with an odd, intense, look, like a man on the verge of untangling a complex problem. He folded his arms, unfolded them, scratched irritably at the back of his neck, and folded them again. His gaze slid, uncomfortable and skittish, over to Pamela’s face.

“Pam,” he said, and there was the unfinished hint of a question in his voice.

Pamela’s head moved curiously in his direction, her black glass eyes calm. Then a spasm of shock and understanding crossed her face like a slap and she said “No,” very sharply.

“He could help,” Benny said, almost apologetically. “He could do something.”

She was shaking her head, stiff and insistent. “No. Benny, don’t. Please.”
Sam shot a glance of helpless confusion at Ellen, who was watching the exchange with interest and completely ignoring him.

“Come on, Pam,” said Benny. “He needs this.”

“No he doesn’t. No he goddamn well does not. Nobody needs this.”

“He does. Listen, I have to tell him. I’m sorry.”

Pamela stared at him for a long second, shaking her head, but in a weaker way. Then, very quietly, she said “Fuck this,” got up, and left. She walked out the door with the same swinging grace with which she had entered it, and it fell shut behind her.

Ellen sighed bleakly. “That girl is so temperamental. Always has been.”

Sam blinked and looked around. “I’m sorry, what just happened?”

Benny pushed away from the door, walked over, and dropped into Pamela’s chair. He leaned forward. “If you’re looking for healing,” he said quietly, “I know someone who might be able to help you.”

“Yeah?” Sam replied, hearing the voice of routine already start to drone. Here it was; my doctor, he did these amazing things, modern medicine and God’s mercy, and in the end it was nothing but bills piling up and Dean throwing up in the waiting room trash can.

“Hey. Listen up.” Benny snapped his fingers. “This is not your average bullshit. This guy is the real McCoy. He has references and whatever you’re thinking, he’s not that.”

“Okay, then what is he?”

An uncomfortable ripple moved over Benny’s mouth. “He’s got magic.”

Sam, who had been halfway prepared to tune out for the remainder of the conversation, felt his heart stutter. “I’m sorry, did you say magic?”

“Yeah, magic. Vodou.”

“Oh,” said Sam, and then was silent, unsure of what happened next. He was aware, of course, of the vodou culture in New Orleans. It was the sort of thing you heard about a place before making a commitment to live there for any long period of time. Somehow, though, it had always seemed distant, separated from him by the impenetrable reality of his life and the things he actually did. It existed, but in such a far removed way that it might as well have been a fairy tale.

Now here was Benny with his soft liar’s voice and his threadbare cap, saying “He’s the real thing. I’ve seen fake and he ain’t it. My cousin--she was having some real trouble with her husband, and he fixed it for her.”

“Fixed it?” Sam replied, slightly uneasily.

“Yeah. You know--” a lopsided shrug. “Fixed it.”

“Benny, stop feeding him shit,” said Jo briskly, filling a mug with acid gin.

“It’s not shit,” Benny insisted. “I swear on my life, it’s the truest thing I’ll ever tell you. That man is in contact with some powerful things.”
“Much as I hate to invest in any of this superstitious horsefeathers, or to agree with anything this layabout says, he happens to be right,” Ellen added. “There are people in this town who can do things you wouldn’t believe. If Benny says he’s the real thing, he probably is.”

Jo looked up with a quick sting of shock. “Mama, you can’t be serious.”

“Of course I’m serious. Just because you ain’t seen it don’t mean it ain’t real. Some of these vodou people have done things neither you nor I can explain, and until the day we can, I’m inclined to believe them.”

Despite himself, Sam’s curiosity had its ears pricked and was sniffing the air. He had tried dozens of faith remedies, but none of them were like this--something that was flatly and unequivocally witchcraft, strange and unchristian in the most basic way. And Ellen, who seemed almost mercilessly sensible, believed it. That had to be worth something. It made for a change, anyway.

But something about it still made him feel off-balance. “What about Pamela? Why was she so upset?”

Benny and Ellen exchanged tight glances, the kind of look you give someone with whom you share a prickly and disagreeable truth. Jo was not included, which meant she didn’t know. That was interesting.

“Pamela had a bad experience with that crowd,” Ellen said finally, her voice flat. “She got in deep and getting out wasn’t without its cost. Some of those people are nasty. Not all of them, but nowadays that’s all Pamela can see. She doesn’t trust any of them anymore.”

“That doesn’t exactly inspire me to trust them,” Sam pointed out.

“Not all of them. Is the important category,” Benny said. “A fair number of them are decent people. Damn strange, but decent. And they get results.”

Jo shook her head and looked away, murmuring “I don’t believe this.”

A part of Sam, the part that was hungry for order and logic and rules, shrieked its agreement. Most of him was too busy turning the situation over in his mind. He’d tried everything else, all the latest miracle cures and snake oils, things that had made him doubt his own sanity to hope for. And Benny said results and meant it.

And at home, Dean would be crawling out of bed now, going to the ice box for the first clammy sour beer of the day, his eyes clouded and dead.

“Okay,” he said, and then “Okay,” with more certainty. “Who is this person and where do I find him?”

“His name’s Lucifer,” Benny said, almost apologetically.

Sam coughed explosively around his next breath. “I’m sorry. Lucifer, as in the devil?”

“It’s what he calls himself. I can give you an address. He might not be there, he isn’t always. And he’s not cheap. But what you pay for you get in full.”

“That’s the important thing,” Sam said, hearing in his head the echo of another job, cut meals, electricity out in the hottest part of the year, but those things really didn’t matter. There were a lot of things that seemed like they mattered but didn’t. Dean was not one of those.
“Yes, I guess it is.” Benny sighed and looked away. “Look, this guy—he’s good, and he’s straight, most of the time. But watch your step.”

“For what?”

“I don’t know. You never know until it happens. What I’m saying is that he’s got a reputation and not all of it’s good.”

“I see,” said Sam, not at all sure that he did.

“Be careful is all. He’s slippery. They all are. Watch what you do and he’ll run you a fair bargain, but you have to be sure you’re not giving him more than you mean to.”

“Don’t trust a man named Lucifer is a pretty simple rule to go by,” Ellen added.

That sounded ominous in the extreme, but Sam tucked his misgivings in the back of his mind. “But he does things. He gets results.”

“Every time. Just don’t try to be friends with him.”

“I don’t know. This all sounds very sketchy.”

“It is,” Ellen said crisply. “It’s sketchy all over.”

“Hey, I’m just offering some simple advice. You want to make use of it or not, that’s your problem, not mine.” Benny shrugged with elastic disinterest.

Sam stared back at him, his mind running in circles. The whole thing was dubious; it sounded improbable and possibly illegal, and the idea of turning to something which was obviously and unapologetically unscientific did not sit well with him. But both Benny and Ellen, who was probably the sanest person in the room, seemed to put real stock into it. Maybe it was something about the city—vodou floated in the water, danced in the air. Magic here was as pervasive as breathing. Even if it worked nowhere else, it did here, because everyone believed it did.

He had tried so hard. Dragged Dean to an army of overeducated, disinterested doctors who peeled his eyes open and shone lights on him and shot him full of chemicals which did nothing except make him sick. Paid with blood and sweat for every minute of treatment he could get. Listened to the tent preachers, the herbalists, the spiritualists, and the liars. Now he was here and Dean was no less blind and his options were looking extremely thin.

He exhaled and glanced at the ceiling. “I’ll take that address, if it’s still on the table.”

Benny grinned his broad, sprawling, grin. “There. Seeing sense at last. Wait until I’m off shift, Ellen will find us some paper.”

There was a wiry old man with eyes like a sparrow’s at the side of the road, waving his arms over a rickety table piled with old books. “Only a quarter!” he called, his cracked voice riding over the chatter of the street. “Books for a quarter or less. Fine literature! Ma’am, perhaps some light reading for the long nights? No? Sir—yes, sir, you there. I can see you have the look of a reading man about you. Yes you do. Take a look at what I have. Something for all tastes, and the price is a trifle, a nothing.”

Despite his own better judgment, Sam drifted over to the table. It had been a hysterical few weeks
getting down here, scrounging up money for the apartment, and setting things in order for the job. He hadn’t had time to so much as look at a book for almost a month. His stash of ragged, water-stained, novels lurked under his bed, but he had read all of them at least twice. It was a new city, a new job, a new event in his life. He wanted words that were fresh and surprising.

On top of the stack was a slender volume in a tattered skin of wax paper. The pages were chewed. Dimly printed on the front were the words The Great God Pan, and the smudged image of a statue, a snarling man with horns.

He held it up. “How much is this one?”

The bookseller peered at it and laughed sharply. “That one? That one you can have. Take it, no charge.”

“Really? Uh--thank you. Why?”

“Listen, my friend, no one but you is going to want that book. It’s yours. Go on.”

And so Sam tucked the book under his jacket and wandered away from the table, feeling gratified but vaguely confused. The address Benny had given him on a crumpled scrap of paper was in the part of town where the roads got smaller and the buildings got older. Around him milling crowds of people rushed through their lives, yelling and laughing and sweating in the salty swamp heat. Most of them were black, in this neighbourhood. Sam felt disturbingly pale, like a drop of cream in a coffee cup. Every so often a flivver would rattle by, blowing thick clouds of greasy smoke. The air smelled like exhaust and human waste and wet concrete, with a faint aftertaste that was almost sweet, like wildflowers. A skinny androgynous child with skin the colour of ink gave him a broad luminous smile, and Sam smiled back.

Around him there were shops with a bright tasseled mosaic of herbs and charms in the window, peeling signs offering love and money, old hunchbacked buildings with strange designs sketched in charcoal and ashes on their doorposts. None of those were what he was looking for. He squinted at Benny’s looping scrawl and kept going.

And there it was. The building was less of a building and more of a shack. The paneling was composed of graying wood, but it looked sturdy all the same. The roof shingles had clearly been replaced recently, and were stained a dark, blue-gray color. There were two stories to the place and a quaint, shaded porch with colorful wind chimes and a small “Open” sign hanging from the roof.

A tall tree provided half of the house with shade, and it looked like small fruits of some sort were beginning to grow on its middle and lower branches. It wasn’t an extremely old tree, but it wasn’t young either—maybe twenty or so years old, at most? The grass beneath it grew in abundance as it relished in the partial shade it had.

The lawn was fairly well-maintained, overall. It had patches of dirt here and there from long exposure to the sun and its heat, but, then again, so did every lawn in the area. A dirt path divided the property, stretching from the main road to the few steps that led up to the porch. Just in front of the porch were metal sticks with a few branches sticking out of their sides at an upward angle. Each branch had a colored glass bottle topping it(some were dark blue, some were sea green, and some were more of a magenta color). The wind chimes hanging overhead made glassy clinking noises whenever breezes graced the street. It created a comfortable setting, really.

The front door creaked when Sam opened it, as well as the screen door beneath. Inside the shop was
dark and musty. He saw a long, dusty, counter running across the room, like a sort of front desk. Behind it was a jumble of tables, shelves, cabinets. The glitter of glass jars moved in the shelves, and he saw clutter; things as diverse as a record player to candlesticks to drying herbs which he couldn’t name. A Persian rug sat on the floor. At the back of the room, in the middle of the far wall, was a doorway covered by a thick curtain like a green shadow. No one seemed to be there. Sam moved forward, slipping around the front counter.

“Hello?” he called uncertainly. There was no sign of life in the dust and darkness of the room. He breathed in and tasted spices and ash. An awkward step forward and his leg smacked into the edge of a low table with a shuddering collection of crusted glass jars on it. One of them contained a gelatinous mound of small slippery things which looked unsettlingly like eyes of some kind. He bent to stare, feeling electric fingers play up his spine, and then pulled away. It wasn’t his business, and he was making this even stranger than it already was.

“Did Cas send you?”

The man was at the far end of the room, in the cramped curtained doorway that led to the back. Sam jerked, hearing his voice; it was soft but direct, low and slightly rasping. The man leaned against the door frame, arms folded, and watched him evenly.

Sam swallowed grittily, recovering from the shock. “Sorry?”

“I said, did Cas send you? He said that he had a customer.”

“Oh, no. Don’t know anyone named Cas. Sorry.”

The man shrugged and slid out of the doorframe. “It’s all the same.”

On closer inspection, he was tall—not as tall as Sam, who even as a child had been built like a gorilla, but definitely not short—and had a kind of wiry slenderness. His hair was a dull blonde and looked like it had been cut in the dark, and his face was lean, eloquent, catlike. He had strange glassy blue eyes like frost. He wore patched black trousers, suspenders, and a white shirt with the sleeves rolled up over his elbows.

He was also white, which was the most surprising thing. In this neighbourhood, and in a place of this type, the last thing Sam had expected was a young blonde-haired blue-eyed man behind the counter. Especially one as good-looking as this one. Which was an entirely inappropriate thought and which he ignored.

“So can I help you with something?” the man asked, lifting a tray of leather charms.

“Lucifer,” Sam guessed on instinct.

“That’s me.” Lucifer dusted his hands off and turned.

Curiosity nibbled at Sam and he said “Why do you call yourself that, anyway?” before he could think better of it.

Lucifer’s face was still. “Call myself what, exactly?”

“Lucifer. The devil. It can’t be good for business.”

Lucifer turned away, expressionless, to sort the charms. “I don’t call myself anything. Except my name.”
Sam paused, torn between laughter and indecision. “What--are you saying your mother named you Lucifer?”

“That’s exactly what I’m saying.” Deft corded hands moving over burnt leather. “And I happen to like it.”

“Oh,” said Sam, and got stuck there. He had no idea what to do. He had the distinct sense that he was being lied to, but wasn’t at all sure enough to say it out loud. There was no way to respond to a man who had told you that the name on his birth certificate was Lucifer and that he liked it.

“Something I can do for you?” Lucifer said, glancing up.

Right. Sam cleared his throat. “I heard you help people. With problems.”

“Some kinds of problems. Some kinds of people. You’ll have to be more specific.”

“Medical,” Sam said.

There was a slight pause. Then Lucifer sighed very delicately, shifted a stack of crumbling papers off a bowed wicker chair, and gestured to it. “Sit.”

For some reason the prospect of sitting made Sam distinctly uneasy. “I’ll stand, if it’s all right, thanks.”

Lucifer stared at him with those translucent eyes. “If you want.” He dropped the papers back onto the seat with a stale exhalation of dust. “Tell me about this medical problem.”

“My brother. He was in the war. Well, we both were. He was blinded.”

“How?”

“Poison gas. Battle of Argonne Forest.”

“Mmm.” Lucifer glanced down at the stack of papers. “And you want me to fix this.”

“Yeah. Believe me, I would not be coming here if I hadn’t exhausted every other option. I’ve been to all the doctors I can stand for one lifetime and they haven’t done shit. I’m not sure I believe all this--“ Sam gestured widely around the cluttered interior of the little shop “--stuff, but it’s all that’s left.”

“Where do you work?”

“What?”

“I asked where you worked.”

It was a strange question, but it was also a strange situation. “I got a job at the Roadhouse. It’s a sort of--a café. Not far from here.”

“I’m familiar with it. Nice place.” Lucifer finally looked up from the apparent entrancement of the stack of papers. “Listen, I mean no offence by this, but I seriously doubt that you are rich enough to afford the kind of treatment it would require to help your brother.”

“Don’t I kind of have to make that judgment for myself?” Sam tried for a lopsided grin. “How much does it cost, anyway?”

Lucifer regarded him evenly. “Fifty dollars a session.”
It was like a blow to the chest. Sam sucked inward sharply. “Fifty dollars a--that’s ridiculous.”

“It’s what it costs.”

“I can’t afford that. Nobody can afford that.”

“I know. That’s what I just told you.”

“Do you seriously expect people to pay those prices?”

“A surprising number do.”

“What, because this town has a high incidence of suckers?”

“No, because I do what I say I’m going to do. There are some things I provide which matter more than money. And I always provide them.”

Sam shook his head, frustration knotting in his chest. “How many sessions?”

“It’s different for everyone.”

“Take a guess.”

The pale eyebrows rose. “At a guess, maybe seven or eight.”

Seven or eight. That came to about four hundred dollars in total. At his current arrangement with Ellen, he was making thirty-seven dollars a week, and almost half of that went to rent. He realized, with a cold sense of inevitability, that he literally could not afford this. No matter how many things he sacrificed and how many odd jobs he took, it would cost him more than he could physically give to get together four hundred dollars for this man.

“I can’t afford that,” he said quietly. “I don’t have that kind of money.”

Lucifer was silent for a moment, watching him. A haze of dust from the papers had settled on his shirt, leaving it a faint grey. After a few seconds, his eyes flickered down to Sam’s hands.

“What’s that?” he asked.

A moment of confusion passed and Sam realized he was still carrying the book from earlier. “Oh--it’s a book. Obviously. I bought it from a guy on the street.”

“Skinny bastard? Black eyes, calls you “my friend”, sells smut out the back of his table?”

All of that sounded about right, except for the smut, which Sam had somehow failed to notice. He nodded. “Yeah.”

“That’s Cornelius. He’s a liar and a thief but he carries some good books sometimes.” Lucifer gestured at the book. “May I see?”


“It was free,” Sam said, feeling an irrational embarrassment.

“That’s nice.” Lucifer passed a finger over the cracked face of the stone man on the cover. “You read?”
“When I can afford it.”

“Have you read Paradise Lost?”

It was another odd thing to ask, but oddly pleasant also; someone else in this city knew about Paradise Lost, and had experienced some of the painful old truths it held in its pages. “Parts of it. In the library, when I was a kid.”


Sam grinned despite himself. “That’s ironic.”

“Painfully so.”

A sudden instinct took him and he said “My favourite’s A Tale of Two Cities,” without really knowing why he wanted Lucifer to know that.


“It’s his finest work.”

“He was better when he wasn’t being paid by the word.”

“That he was.”

They looked at each other for a long moment. Lucifer was smiling very slightly. Sam felt something unnamed shift in the room.

“Okay,” Lucifer said, and handed the book back. “Okay. I’m not going to lower the rate for you. I’m sorry but that’s not possible. I have bills to pay like everyone else.”

Bitter disappointment gathered in Sam’s throat. “Oh,” he said, and dug his fingers into the book’s fissured cover.

Lucifer ran his fingers through his uneven mess of cornsilk hair. “But you want to take care of your brother. I respect that. I really do. So I can change the means by which you pay, if you agree.”

The frustration dissolved into curiosity. “What do you mean?”

“How long are your hours at the Roadhouse?”

“Nine to three and then seven to ten. Every day but Sunday.”

“All right. If you want me to do this, you will come here when you’re not at the Roadhouse. Three to seven you belong to me, do you understand? Sundays too. You’ll work for me, here. Nothing serious. Odd jobs, manual things. I will not pay you. You give me your time until the treatments are completed. And in exchange, I will lower the price to twenty dollars per treatment.”

“Work?” said Sam, and then, with rising incredulity, “For you?”

“That’s the idea.”

Sam glanced around the cramped space, mind whirling. To work here--to work for a bokor, a sorcerer, someone he didn’t fully trust or understand. He had no idea what that would entail. The treatment sounded shady enough by itself.
“That’s a sixty percent discount. Mathematically, I’m being incredibly generous,” Lucifer said lightly.

“How often are the sessions?”

“Not more than once a week. In total it’ll take about eight weeks to complete.”

Eight weeks of working here. It was true that what he was offering was ridiculously generous, almost suspiciously so. Twenty dollars was doable. Twenty dollars meant maybe a few skipped meals and some wrangling with Bobby about the rent, but he could manage it and still keep his life in one piece. Twenty dollars plus eight weeks of four hours a day in this place. It was a fantastic offer, but it relied on his willingness to make a commitment to someone he knew nothing about, in a strange part of a strange town, based on something he wasn’t sure he believed in.

“I don’t know,” he said finally. “I have to think. Talk to some people about it.”

“Of course you do. The offer is open until tomorrow, Mr….”

With a slight sting of surprise, Sam realized that he had not told him his name. “Sam Winchester. Sorry.”

“It’s fine.” That smile again, thin as a sickle moon. “Go and think, Mr. Sam Winchester. Come back tomorrow.”

“Okay.” Sam gathered himself. “Thank you for seeing me.”

“Thank you for coming.” Lucifer was already half-turned away, picking through the charms, a ghost in the dark. Sam nodded awkwardly and turned to go. As he made his way out through the tangle of the shop, he had the crawling feeling of eyes moving over him; Lucifer’s bright pale ones, and others, quick savage eyes that lived in the oily darkness under tables and between shelves.

When he got home it was to the ripe smell of corn whisky and an apartment with most of the lights turned off. Dean was sprawled on the ratted couch that was also his bed, staring at the ceiling. One lamp was on, casting a rusty flickering light over the room. In one hand there was a crusted bottle of brown glass. As Sam watched, he took a long wet drag from it.

He was twenty-nine years old now. He hadn’t had a job in seven years. Sam had memories in his head of quick restless eyes the colour of sunlight through leaves, alive with sudden humour and rage. Those eyes were only memories, now. Some part of him had not yet given up on the possibility of seeing them again.

The man on the couch yawned and ran a hand over his mouth. He was already quite drunk and he would probably continue drinking for several hours more. The air had the heavy sticky feeling of a dedicated groove for oblivion in progress.

“Dean,” Sam said quietly.

Dean’s head rolled towards him on instinct, even though it did no good now. There were his new eyes—a hazy scarred white, the green erased by cataracts and pearly occlusions. He smiled his big flat smile.

“Sammy,” he said, his voice slightly slurred. He was in a good mood, which meant that he hadn’t really gotten underway yet. His pattern of drunkenness was very similar to their father’s; first there
was the relaxation and the stupid amiable happiness, and then came the anger and the desperation and the incoherent, irrational, brutality. After that he either cried or passed out. Mostly it was passing out, these days. Dean had never had much use for tears, now less than ever.

The bottle hung limp in his hand. It was unmarked and smelled homemade. Sam had never been able to figure out where Dean got his endless supply of cheap gritty liquor, although he suspected that Bobby might have something to do with it.

“You’re late,” Dean said cheerfully as Sam sat down next to him. “Long first day with the drunks of New Orleans?”

“You’re one to talk,” Sam said grimly.

“I certainly am.” Dean poured more whisky down his throat and breathed out in satisfaction. “So how was it? You like the people?”

“Yeah, they’re good. There’s a girl there. Jo. You’d like her.”

“Is that a fact? You’ll have to get me out there sometime.”

“Sure, but be careful. Her mother’s the owner, she keeps a shotgun behind the counter, and I’m pretty sure she’s killed someone before.”

They both laughed at that, and Sam realized, with a pulse of sadness. That it was a different kind of laughter than it would have been before the war. Eight years ago it would have been funny because they had never killed anyone, never seen a dead body, knew nothing about death. It would have been funny because it was impossible. Now there were men rotting into the black French earth because of them and they laughed because they both knew that.

Sam folded his hands between his knees and stared at the floor.

“Listen,” he said. “I met someone.”

“Your first day? You son of a bitch.” Dean elbowed him over the shoulder with surprising accuracy. “This Jo girl, or someone else?”


Dean’s face went tight and cold and he dropped back into the couch. “Jesus, Sammy. Not this again.”

“I know we don’t exactly have a good track record, but we can’t just stop trying. And this guy, he’s-”

“I don’t want to hear about what he is. Seven years of fucking doctors poking me and sucking our blood is enough. I’m done, Sam. I’m just done.” He passed a hand wearily over his glazed eyes. “I’m not doing it anymore.”

“Yeah, well I am. I still am.” Sam kept his voice fairly level with an effort of will. After their first shouting match the ancient Polish man upstairs had nearly gotten them evicted. “Look, I get that it’s frustrating. We’ve been trying for years and gotten jack shit. I get that.”

“It’s not just frustrating, it’s hopeless,” Dean muttered.
Sam chose to ignore this. “But this guy, he’s different. He’s got something different.”

“Yeah. They’re all different, until they’re not.”

“Dean.” Sam blew out harshly. “He’s a bokor.”

“The hell’s that?”

“A sorcerer. Vodou.”

There was a long moment of silence. Then Dean said quietly, “Well, that is different.”

Sam felt abruptly, intensely, exhausted, in a way that pulled at his bones. He rose stiffly. “I have to be back at the Roadhouse in a couple hours. I’m going to get some more sleep. Put something on the stove, okay?”

“Beans and sausages sound okay?”

“Fine. And think about it, okay? It really is different this time.”

A dry laugh. “Can’t hurt to think. You’ll just do whatever the hell you want to whether I like it or not.”

Sam laughed too, partly against his will. “That’s true. Take care of yourself.”

“I’m going to be ten feet away from you, Sam. Don’t kill yourself over me. Go sleep.”

As Sam turned to close the door into his shuttered closet of a bedroom, he saw Dean rise and shuffle over to the stove. His back was to Sam as he groped for matches, a stained pot, a dented can of brown beans. He was already used to the way things were in this kitchen, running on an easy instinct that didn’t need eyes. The bottle sat on the end of the couch, glittering in the dim light. To an unfamiliar eye it would seem forgotten, but Sam knew that when Dean wanted it again he would know exactly where it was, exactly how to pick it up so it wouldn’t spill, exactly how much he had left. The beans splattered onto the burnt floor of the pot.

He was humming now, softly, with an indistinct rasp in his voice. The gas had done something to his lungs, the doctors had said. One of them had made a joke that he would never sing opera again.

He had hummed like that, back in France, and before that, too. When he came to pick Sam up from school, or when he went out to get a job he wasn’t legally old enough for so that they had enough food in the house. There had been a lot of times like that, when it had been like Dean was the only other person in the world because he was the only one who cared. A bony big-eyed child in his father’s ill-fitting clothes, hands stained with dirt, smiling even as he didn’t know what they’d eat that night. Don’t worry, Sammy. We’ll figure something out. We’ll be fine.

And as Sam closed the door and moved into the darkness of his room, he knew what his answer was going to be.

Chapter End Notes

Tin Roof Blues: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=43S1Yk5PMoU
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

this chapter written by: Mer

Warnings: general prejudice against Vodou practices, implied/past character death, not-so-chill Southern Baptists

A sweet, crackling noise echoed around the small room. Everything had a sort of dark, flat feeling to it, but it was completely comfortable that way. Lucifer knew where he was. The lack of a real, grounding sensation wasn’t unusual or awkward. A voice began humming along with the clarinet’s crooning, reedy melody and Lucifer felt a smile creep up his face.

“Hello, there.”

“Hiya, Luci.”

Lucifer frowned at the nickname as he always did. A small, playful laugh came from no particular direction. Maybe it was coming out of the record player. That would be obnoxious.

“What are you up to?” Lucifer asked. “What do you need?”

“I want to talk to somebody. Is that a crime, now?” the voice replied.

“You’re not manifesting yourself,” Lucifer sighed. “If you need something, do tell me now. I ought to be opening up the shop sometime soon.”

“Jeez,” the voice replied, “so easily irritated. I thought you’d have a little time for me.”

“Of course I do, I simply must open my shop.”

The form of a man appeared before Lucifer. It was just at about average height with somewhat long, styled blonde-brown hair, lightly tanned skin, and a smug smile that Lucifer simply wanted to wipe off of its face. It was a welcoming image, despite all of this, however. Lucifer smiled warmly at the man.

“Hello, Gabriel.”

“Now, that’s more like it,” the figure declared. “I was getting the feeling you were getting tired of me.”

“I didn’t say that I wasn’t.”

“Oh, hush,” Gabriel cajoled, “you love me and you know it.”


“Just to check in on you. I haven’t seen you in ages.”

“I am doing just fine.”
“You sure about that?” Gabriel asked. He raised a single eyebrow almost comically. Lucifer rolled his eyes and stared back at him as if challenging him to go on. Gabriel threw up his hands in surrender and shrugged his shoulders.

“Okay, fine. Just asking. Last time I saw you was when Maman Brigitte was riding your meat suit around for a few days. Wore you out pretty quickly, if I remember correctly…”

“I’m perfectly adjusted to channeling her by now, Gabriel.” Lucifer leaned back in his seat, rubbed at his eyes, and tried not to groan.

“I am merely looking out for you, Luci,” Gabriel stated. The man strolled over to the record player and watched the disc spin as it neared the end of the song.

“Well,” Lucifer sighed after a moment had passed, “thank you for your efforts.”

Gabriel sighed and tapped the table that the record player sat on. Lucifer looked up and down his companion’s frame and took in the exhausted nature of his stance. Gabriel slouched his shoulders ever so slightly and leaned to the side, resting his weight more on one hip than on the other. His left thumb rested at his waistband and his fingers tapped against his leg in the same rhythm as the ones on the table did. Something was bothering him. Lucifer frowned.

“I do hope that you would tell me if something were actually amiss,” Lucifer said to break the silence.

“I would,” Gabriel laughed, “Of course I would, Lucifer, what do you take me for?”

“A liar.”

Gabriel sighed and shook his head.

“It’s nothing, Luci. Just a weird feeling, alright?” He turned around and waved his hand at Lucifer with a sly smile. “Now get up, alright buddy? You’ve got a shop to open, remember?”

Lucifer felt his head and eyelids grow heavy, and the room around him darkened and faded out as he attempted to catch himself on the edge of the table next to him before he hit the ground. He shut his eyes tight, doing his best to block out the odd dizzy rush that had suddenly overcome him. When he opened his eyes again, something soft was pressed up against one side of his face and the world was tipping sideways.

He was in bed, nearly fully clothed from the previous day with a blanket bunched up in place of a pillow under his head. Lucifer blinked and ran a hand through his—surely unruly—hair and yawned as he sat upright. It took a quick calculation of his surroundings to get him to launch himself out of bed and into a standing position (and successfully not tip over immediately after doing so). He flipped open the chest at the far corner of the room and frowned at his limited assortment of clean clothing. That would have to be taken care of soon.

A button-up, off-white shirt, a pair of long trousers, fresh suspenders, and one pair of ratty old shoes later, Lucifer could pretend that he was fully awake and prepared for the day ahead. He walked past the curtain between the two main rooms of the modest home he lived in, kicking various items out of the walkway and into corners as he strode across the creaky floor to the front door. Another bokor had recommended to him a service that would come to his house and fit his old, squeaking door with fancy, new brass hinges, a simple knocker, and a peephole with a lens that would let him see his visitors before inviting them in. He thought that paying for someone to come in and do it for him was ludicrous. Why would he request a so-called expert to fix up a door that he could deal with himself if
he so wished?

Lucifer could be a bit of a procrastinator, of course. He had intended to fix the door with new hinges around two months ago—he had bought the hinges, knocker, and lens for the peephole already, but hadn’t quite found the proper motivation to install them just yet. The same went for the latest publications of a few books and several labels for his extensive collection of herb jars and spirit bottles (each respectively reading anything from Thyme and 8 ounces to Dragon’s Blood Ink and Do Not Disturb); they had all been set out and prepared for action, but none of them had been even touched since they had been brought home.

The door required a well-placed jiggle at the handle in order to unlock it properly before Lucifer could open it. He hung the small Open sign on a hook where an old set of wind chimes usually were (said chimes were also in need of repair, but were in the same place in the bokor’s priorities as the door hinges and the jar labels). He stood, leaning against one of the front porch’s posts and stared out into the street.

Missouri Moseley, an old associate of Lucifer’s, smiled and waved at him from across the street before disappearing into one of the shops. The news boy stood at the corner of one of the blocks down at the nearest crossroads, shouting something about the day’s headline. Some well-dressed women strutted down the street in the direction of downtown, chattering noisily, enjoying the less-humid-than-usual morning air and the clear, blue sky above. A light breeze was drifting in from the waterfront and brought with it the smell of fishing boats and the light tang of salt water.

It was a beautiful day, Lucifer concluded. Satisfactory, at least. He shut the screened door and left the main door wide open to encourage sunlight and airflow to fill the front room of his shack. The canvas covers over the windows were soon lifted as well.

Lucifer settled behind the countertop and leaned against his bookshelf so that he could better take in his surroundings. Yes, today was a nice-looking day. Maybe he’d even get something done, instead of putting any of his tasks off for even longer.

It only took half an hour for Lucifer to become bored. He had at least a dozen things to do, but he didn’t honestly care to take the effort to do any of them. He felt like calling on Gabriel for company or to inspire motivation to work, but he didn’t particularly care to do anything that could possibly make the man worry even in the slightest. Gabriel had been stressed, and the last thing Lucifer wanted to do was provoke any more exhaustion by requesting yet another communication session.

There was a shift in the air, then. Lucifer tensed as he sensed a new presence in the room. He looked up from where he had been inspecting his nails for dirt to see a figure standing in the doorway to his shop. It was man, young, somewhat tall, and donning a tan trench coat—which seemed a tad excessive for the summer weather, but the bokor didn’t mention it. Instead, he merely nodded to the man in a silent greeting. The man entered the shop, looking around with curiosity in his eyes as though it was his first time stepping foot inside of it.

“Good morning, Castiel,” Lucifer stated, standing up so that he could approach the younger man. The man looked at Lucifer and responded with a quick and quiet, “Good morning.”

“Is there something that I can help you with?” Lucifer asked him. Castiel glanced around at the shop for a moment longer before responding.

“I suppose that I am lacking any tasks today. Do you require any assistance?”

Lucifer nodded and patted the man’s shoulder amiably.
“I’m sure that I can come up with something for you to do. I’ve always got plenty of jobs lying around waiting to be done…” The bokor looked around his shop, searching for the right task to hand Castiel. The young man was kind, quiet, and good at taking orders, which was exactly what Lucifer needed on some days. He hadn’t had a proper apprentice for years, and although Castiel hardly counted as even an assistant, he was always very helpful to have around.

“Would you be able to possibly sweep off the front porch for me?” Lucifer asked after a moment of consideration. “That would be very helpful, right now.”

“Certainly,” Castiel replied. He quickly located the broom and hung his coat over the back of one of the chairs at the table before heading outside once again. Lucifer watched the man carefully shut the screened door behind him and begin sweeping.

Castiel always seemed to try his best to look put-together, but his hair insisted on defying any method the man used to tame it, and his clothing always seemed to be just on the unintentional side of odd. For instance, on this day, he wore a white button-up shirt with the sleeves rolled up to his elbows, but an odd crease left his collar crooked, and his tie had been put on backwards. He also had a small amount of scruff that was always present, even when he had clearly shaved his face recently. Lucifer seemed to be one of the only people who he interacted with in town, joined only by a few of the bokors and leaders of the vodou community. He was a good man, as far as Lucifer knew. (They had only truly known each other for a few years, but Lucifer believed that that was long enough to be allowed to make such judgments.)

Lucifer’s mind wandered to the man he had seen the day before, suddenly. He wasn’t sure quite what made him think of the tall, desperate man…Sam, was it? He couldn’t quite remember. The man had been unusual—definitely new to the area—and was polite and patient, which was already more than he could say about most of the people he had the displeasure of being asked after by, most of whom assumed that he dabbled in the dark magick side of vodou. Sam (yes, that had definitely been his name) had spoken with steady, well-pronounced speech as if he hailed from the Great Lakes region rather than the Gulf coast. He had a soldier-like rigidity to his stance, not unlike Castiel’s, but there was a casual farm-boy air about him that made him less intimidating than he would have been otherwise.

It would be a lie if Lucifer said the man hadn’t been well-put-together and, dare he say, handsome even, but there was something about him that made him look less like someone who has wooed many a woman before, and more like a puppy dog. Sam had these hazel eyes that simply made Lucifer unable to turn down a request to help the man’s ailing brother. Of course, that didn’t mean that he would pass up on normal payment just because he couldn’t say no to a potential client like Sam; it simply meant that he was more likely to make strange exceptions and offers that he hadn’t even realized he was willing to suggest until he had already stated them.

Lucifer found himself hoping that Sam would come back and accept his offer. It was a fairly reasonable one, he thought, and it was more generous than ones he normally gave other people when they were in a tight spot, monetarily. There was just something different about this man. There was something to him.

Whatever that something was, Lucifer couldn’t put a name on it for the life of him, and was definitely not about to begin to try to.

A new voice came drifting in on the breeze from the porch. Lucifer looked up to see a man talking to Castiel. He was dressed in a tan colored shirt, a fitted brown vest, and a pair of slacks and shoes that were clearly nicer than maybe two-thirds of Lucifer’s own wardrobe. As he walked into the shop, Castiel followed him with wary eyes before returning to his task at hand. As the man approached, he
seemed to step with extreme care over the floor boards, almost as if he thought something was going to reach up between the cracks and grab his ankles. He was clean…very clean, in fact. There was no dust or dirt anywhere on his clothing from his ankles up.

Lucifer narrowed his eyes and nodded to the newcomer.

“How do you do, sir?”

The man looked up to meet the bokor’s eyes and quickly attempted to compose himself. He stepped up to the countertop that served as Lucifer’s front desk of sorts and he smiled cheesily. Oh boy.

“I’m doing quite fine, today, thank you,” the man replied with a flawless drawl. It was at around this point that Lucifer noticed the book and papers in the man’s hand.

“Is there something that I can help you with?” Lucifer asked, trying to keep a business-like air about him.

“I’m from the church down the way, and I’m handing out papers to folks down this way—”

“You’re recruiting for services, I take it.” Lucifer stated with a polite smile. He could practically hear the man gulp out of nervousness.

“Yes, I am,” he replied.

“I do drop by a few of the local churches now and then, just to keep connected to the folks there,” Lucifer explained, “I can’t exactly attend every mass, of course, but when I can I most certainly do stop by.”

The man nodded, a confused expression on his face. There was a moment’s pause before Lucifer smiled and said, “You look as though you have something on your mind, sir.”

“I do not mean any offense by this, mister,” the man began with a stutter, “but if you put time aside for the Lord, how are you in…this business?”

Lucifer raised an eyebrow.

“I did say that I was keeping in contact with folks by occasionally attending services. I do not currently put time aside to pray to your deity, however much I respect your beliefs.”

“That is only the first step on the path to God, mister…?”

The bokor held out his hand for a shake.

“The name’s Lucifer.”

He held back the urge to laugh at the look on the man’s face as he contemplated whether or not shaking hands with a man named after the Devil, the Adversary, the serpent in Eden, the pride-driven tempter, Lucifer, was a good idea. The man took hold of the bokor’s hand and shook it loosely and quickly before dropping it again.

“It’s a pl-pleasure, Mr. Lucifer,” he stammered.

“Oh, the pleasure is all mine.” Lucifer smiled stiffly back. “And if I do come around to your church at some point, I’m sure that you will be the first to know.”

It wasn’t supposed to sound like a threat. It really wasn’t. It came out that way, though, and the
man’s eyes looked as though they would bug out of his head for a moment.

“Whose church do you hail from, may I ask?” Lucifer asked casually. The man held out one of his papers for the bokor to take. Lucifer gingerly plucked it from his shaky hand and glanced down at the page.

The New Orleans Southern Baptist Church welcomes all to attend!

23rd of June at twelve o’ clock noon

25 Brick Avenue

“I don’t believe that I have visited this one, actually,” Lucifer commented. Not that he particularly wanted to, of course. Southern Baptists coming to his shop, however…that took serious desperation and gall.

“Correct me if I’m wrong,” Lucifer said, “but doesn’t your community view mine as an infestation of Devil worshipers?”

“I-I am familiar with common belief, yes.”

“You’re fairly hard boiled to come into my shop to even chat with me, aren’t you?”

The man laughed nervously.

“I suppose so, yes.”

“Do you believe in that, though?” Lucifer asked, attempting not to betray his amusement.

“I...My faith states that those who practice with their minds and souls and with all of their hearts devoted to Christ will be seen as good and righteous in the mind of the Lord.”

“That didn’t entirely answer my question,” the bokor stated. “You believe that I am of the Adversary, do you not?”

“I…”

Lucifer met the man’s gaze with a questioning look.

“Good man,” Lucifer said, “I believe that you’re taking wooden dimes from me, here. I’ve gotten an earful from you folks on a regular basis. I may be named for your Devil, but I am most certainly a mortal man at heart who simply has no preference, religiously. I don’t not believe in your God, but I don’t believe that your version of him is as accurate as others.”

“Voodooist faith is of the Devil,” the man spurted out, unable to hold his tongue any longer. “I’ve no doubt that every man can be a good man, but your soul is in grave danger, mister. I don’t think you quite—”

“I do grasp your beliefs,” Lucifer interrupted, “and I disagree.”

“God dictates that man is to not open himself up to demons and spirits! It is explicitly stated that humans who practice divination, inquire of the dead, and attempt to interpret omens are seen as unfit
and unholy by the Lord. I don’t wish to be unkind, mister, I really don’t, but you can change your ways!”

Lucifer sighed. This was going to be a tricky one. The people who actually thought they were spreading good words and will were easier to respect, but a bit harder to deter. There were very few Southern Baptists who would so much as walk within close proximity to his house, these days, much less walk right in the front door and take a gander at saving his soul.

“And if I do not wish to change my ways?”

“Then…then I suppose that the Lord will not be capable of forgiving your sins—”

“I would not wish to believe in a divine being who lays down such strict and unnecessary rules,” Lucifer stated, cutting him off. “I am connected to the divine as it is, and I am familiar with the methods by which I may protect myself against negative energies and forces. If a person so wishes to interpret a sign, then that person may do so freely, because it is simple human nature to want to define things. If a client wishes to gaze into the nature of future events, then I will gladly help them do so, though I do not wish to do this myself. I am more than happy to recommend ways of uncrossing and treatments for ailments, and I will do so as long as I know that my methods work for most people. My practices are important to my community, and I will not discontinue doing them because some church congregation disagrees with my arguments. Do not take me for a fool.”

“I only wish to be helpful mister, please,” the man said. “I sincerely wish for the best judgment to be placed on all people who do good by the Lord.”

“I own a bible,” Lucifer explained. “I own a copy of most holy books, actually. I have published copies of the Torah, the New Testament, the Quran, and anthologies of myths and legends from various Mediterranean and Nordic cultures. I enjoy religion, but I simply do not take part in most of it. I know your scripture—likely as well as the head of your church does—and I know what you would quote if you got the chance to do so. Your faith’s words interest me, but I simply believe in other things.”

“Why do you take the name of the Devil, though?” the man asked.

“It is my given name,” Lucifer replied.

“Why would a mother name her child after the first fallen angel?”

“Because it means light-bringer, it was the name of an archangel, and, truthfully, my mother was rather bitter about my existence. What do you wish to conclude from that, pray tell?”

“You are not of the Adversary, Satan, unless you allow yourself to be! You don’t gotta carry a burdensome name around all of your life like that. You can be a holy man, as you were when you were young and impressionable.”

“I bet you think you’re a funny ol’ bird, don’t you?” Lucifer scoffed.

“I beg your pardon?”

“Walking in here like you did and talking up a storm and shining your Lord Jesus Christ razzle-dazzle in my eyes. You have to think that you’re really something. Am I wrong?”

“I haven’t intended to—”

A knock on the door interrupted them. Lucifer sent a silent prayer to whoever was listening in thanks.
for the perfect timing. The next words out of his mouth might have been venomous enough to get him into serious trouble. He looked over the Baptist’s shoulder and almost smiled as he saw a familiar, tall frame of a man standing in the doorway.

“Hello, Sam,” he said cheerily. “How are you, today?”

“I’m fine, thank you for asking,” Sam replied, taking a few steps into the shop. “Are you busy right now?”

“Not too much so, no,” Lucifer said, “just talking to a representative from the Southern Baptist Church about how my soul needs to be saved and all that jazz.”

“I was merely—I only wanted to——” The man was suddenly flustered, looking back and forth between the tall man to his right and the bokor in front of him.

“From what I’ve heard,” Sam stated, resting a firm hand on the Baptist’s shoulder, “you have made your point very clear. How about you go find more willing folks to take those papers off of your hands, though? I’m sure this one here’s a bit too much of a lost cause for you to take on today.”

The man nodded nervously and allowed Sam to usher him out the front door.

“I’ll hang on to the paper, how about that?” Lucifer called after him.

“Good!” the man called back, then addressed to Sam and Castiel, as he exited the porch, “God bless.”

“Have a nice day,” Sam replied as the man took off quickly down the street. He sighed heavily and re-entered the shop.

“Thank you for that, Sam,” Lucifer said.

“It’s not a problem.”

Lucifer looked at the man, still dressed in what looked like his work clothing. His shoulders were squared, but his hands were held in front of him, wringing themselves and fidgeting uneasily. He met Sam’s gaze and held it for a moment.

“Have you made a decision about my offer?” Lucifer asked.

“Yes, I have.”

Sam sighed and broke eye contact for a moment, clearly trying to not second-guess himself.

“What do you wish to do?”

“I…” He cleared his throat and re-established eye contact. “I’m saying yes.”

“Yes…?”

Sam frowned and hesitated before stating, “I will take you up on your offer.”

Lucifer felt a small smile tug at his mouth. Good. Good. An assistant. That was good.

“Are you certain?” he asked, just for safe measure.

“Yes, I am.”
“Wonderful.” Lucifer straightened up his posture and held out a hand for Sam to shake. The taller man obliged (with a strong yet gentle grip from a large and calloused hand, Lucifer noted).

“When do we begin?”
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

this chapter written by: Mer

Warnings: vodou (duh), self-denial, past romantic break-up, one large snake, disruptive bucket fauna

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The Roadhouse was lively in the morning. Sam hurried in the back door, toting, in one hand, a bag stocked with strange supplies that Lucifer had requested that he retrieve, and, in the other hand, a large bucket with a makeshift lid on top of it...and a live, black rooster inside. It was only day one of his task, and he was already dealing with what he considered the odd parts of Vodou. He dumped his load in the main supply closet and, after making sure that the rooster wouldn’t escape, slowly backed out of the small room and shut the door tight.

“And what do you think you’re up to?” a voice said behind him. Sam whipped around to see Jo Harvelle standing behind him, arms crossed. If she could look down her nose at Sam from her height, she would have been at that exact moment.

“I’m just putting my…uhm…some of my things in here for now,” he stuttered out. “Is that okay?”

Jo stared at him critically for a moment, taking her time and letting Sam steep in his thoughts. Damnit. If I can’t…I just started here…I’m the new kid, so I can’t…she’ll tell Ellen and then—

She began laughing at him. Sam, unsure of what to say, gaped at the woman. Jo boxed him playfully in the shoulder. He laughed nervously along with her.

“Don’t be so uptight, Sam,” Jo said with a friendly smile. “I’m curious about the clucking coming from that bucket, though.”

“I…”

“You took the job with Lucifer, then?” Sam looked up to see Benny step out of the kitchen door with Bobby trailing close behind, an unlabeled bottle in his hand.

“Yeah, I did,” Sam replied. “He seems like a decent guy, and he offered me a great deal.”

“Oh yeah?” Bobby asked. It was hard to tell if he disapproved of Sam’s actions or if he was just being his normal grumbling self. He leaned against the wall next to Sam and raised a questioning eyebrow at him before asking, “And what kind of deal was that?”

“I pay half of the fee for the treatment in installments,” Sam explained, “and instead of paying the other half, I assist him in his shop by picking up supplies and mixing ingredients and so on.”

“You sure that’s wise?” Bobby asked. “It is all up to you, and I’m glad you’ve finally found someone who’s willing to help you boys out, but do you know what you’re getting into?”
“Oh, stop trying to scare the man, Bobby,” Jo said.

“It’s a reasonable question, though,” Bobby stated. “I just don’t want you gettin’ in over yer head with this fella.”

“What do you know about him?” Sam asked. “I mean, I only know what Benny’s told me.”

The three all turned to look at Benny at that moment. The man chuckled and raised his hands in a defensive motion.

“Don’t ask me for information on him, brother. I’ve told you all I know.”

“He’s not well-liked around here,” Bobby stated. “Did you know that?”

“I assumed that came with the territory,” Benny said. “You know, the whole Vodou bokor business. I thought folks were just generally disliked in the practitioners and community as a whole.”

“Lucifer’s a bit more disliked than most, though,” Bobby explained, glancing at Sam. “He’s not your average bokor. Got a sad family background that most folks don’t like. The boy’s connected to the spirits and loas like nobody I’ve ever seen. Plus, he’s one of the only practitioners in this part of town who’s pale as a sheet. The Vodou community doesn’t mind his racial background, but…he’s just different. He’s real abrasive a lot of the time, and he’s got too many odd connections.”

“Odd connections?” Sam asked. “Isn’t that a good thing, usually? I mean, Bobby, you’ve got a hell of a lot of odd connections, yourself.”

“Yeah, well, how many Vodouists get along with the town’s non-Catholic churches?”

“Well, if you’re not colored, it’s probably pretty easy,” Sam said in a matter-of-fact tone. Bobby shrugged and conceded to his point.

“All’s I’m saying is you oughtta look out for yourself, boy. Vodou is strange and risky business. Folks won’t like you if you’re associated with Lucifer.”

“He’s promised not to lie to me or omit any details about what he’s having me do,” Sam explained. “The moment that he breaks that promise, I’ll leave. I know how to handle myself when making deals, Bobby.”

The older man nodded.

“It’s your choice, like I said. I’m mostly just glad you’re workin’ so hard to look after your brother.” Bobby patted Sam’s shoulder and left for the kitchen once again without another word.

“How ‘bout you head to that ol’ piano, then?” Benny said as he walked past Jo and Sam to reach the back door. “I’d like to hear a bit of music in here. It’s too quiet in the morning before the normal crowd arrives.”

“Sure,” Sam said, looking at Jo. “Is your mother going to be okay with the…you know…in the storage closet?”

“If she looks like she has a problem with it later on, just explain it to her and she’ll listen. She’ll be fine with it, I’m sure.” Jo smiled and grabbed Sam’s arm and, with unexpected strength, pulled him into the main part of the establishment. The tables were cleaned and the chairs were all pushed in, waiting patiently for the day’s customers to begin trickling through the front door. The piano had been dusted off since the day before; the keys were already uncovered, and it felt like they were
beckoning Sam over to them, tempting him to play something—anything—to fill the near-silence of the room.

Jo let go of Sam’s arm and ran over to the instrument excitedly. She pulled the bench out and gestured grandly towards it. Sam bowed jokingly in return and sat down. He pushed his sleeves up, making sure that they were past his elbows, and ran through a few jazz scales. There were definitely some out of tune keys, but they were all thankfully ignorable. His fingers performed an improvised dance on the black and white teeth of the piano until a melody came floating up and out it. Jo leaned against the side of the instrument and watched him play, tapping her fingers on her arm and nodding her head every now and then. She smiled as he finished with a flourish and stinger on the end.

“Now that’s more like it, brother!” They laughed at Benny’s muffled shout from the kitchen.

“Yeah,” Jo said, “definitely more like it. Way to liven a place up, Sam.”

“Thanks.” Sam was surprised by the sudden approval. Spending time with soldiers in bars back when he and Dean were in training taught him a thing or two about how to play to certain audiences. For instance, Jo instantly seemed like a Gershwin kind of gal, and Benny came across as a purely New Orleans lively jazz kind of man. Bobby, he knew from experience, would listen to just about anything as long as the tune wasn’t a mood-killer. It was easy to read an audience if one looked hard enough and wasn’t afraid to try a few things out first.

“Play some blues when my mother comes in,” Jo suggested. “That’ll help you win her over.”

“I, personally, love King Oliver and that Fletcher Henderson guy,” a voice said from the front door. Jo looked up and grinned.

“Hey there, Pam. What’s got you in so early?”

“I was walking down the street and got some good vibes off that piano noise there,” Pam said as she strolled in, brushing her fingers along the backs of chairs as she did so. “Nothing wrong with being seduced by a bit of the Devil’s music, is there?”

She came to a halt by the piano and somehow managed to reach up and ruffle Sam’s hair without being able to see the top of his head. The woman smiled in the general direction of her companions, placed her hand on her hip, and leaned on the piano.

“Speaking of the Devil,” Pam said, “what did you do about that Vodou bokor?”

“I agreed to work for him.”

Pam screwed up her mouth, not in a disapproving way, but not in an altogether pleased way, either. She drummed her black-painted fingernails on the wooden lid of the piano and hummed to herself for a moment. After a moment, she turned her head to face Sam, and he could swear that she would have been looking him in the eyes if her own had been intact.

“I wonder if he’s as pretty as I remember him being.”

Jo laughed at Pam’s comment.

“Is he pretty, do you think?” Pam asked Sam.

“Uhm.” Sam cleared his throat awkwardly and said, “I suppose it depends on what your idea of pretty is, really.”
“He’s got a nice voice, and a pretty way of moving, you know? Like he just floats or something. And his hair was soft, I think.”

“I can’t say that I touched his hair,” Sam explained, “but...uh, I guess he was rather graceful”—like a musical conductor, waving his hands at a brass choir instead of at an assistant who’s going to fetch him a bottle of well water—“and his voice is kind of smooth and quiet, I suppose”—like a sweet, B-flat clarinet—“if that helps you at all. I suppose he was pretty by your definition, if that’s the case.”

Sam chastised his mind for comparing the man to those beautiful things. It wasn’t as though he found Lucifer to be average or unappealing or anything; aesthetically, the man was well-off. Sam didn’t look at men like that, though. Not normally. The man was named after heaven’s most beautiful angel, after all. Sam mentally slapped himself for even thinking that last part.

“Well, then,” Pam said, quirking one side of her mouth up into a slight smirk. “It sounds like he hasn’t changed at all. Still pretty, then. You know, Sam, I don’t think he’s all that averse to men, either, if I remember correctly.”

Jo snickered. Sam glared at her.

“Not my tune, Pam, but thanks anyway,” Sam replied.

“Just laying it out there in case it was.” Pam threw her hands up in mock surrender. Sam shook his head and ran his fingers over the piano keys again in an effort to distract himself from the moment. Pam grinned at the sound and patted his shoulder affectionately as she turned to walk away.

“Keep up that lovely playing, Sam. Heaven knows it brightens up the room.”

“Thanks, Pam,” Sam replied. Jo looped an arm around Pam’s and led her back to the kitchen, leaving Sam all alone in the main room of the café. He could hear Benny whistling along to his playing from the other room, and it helped him settle into the rhythm of the jangling of the saloon-style keyboard. Maybe he’d be lucky and only have to play the exciting stuff when business picked up. It would be easier to stick to the simple tunes while nobody other than the kitchen staff was stomping their feet and asking for more. He’d have to take less breaks, and less breaks meant less time to think about his deal with Lucifer.

“Honey, this is exactly what I hired you for,” a voice said from over his right shoulder. He covered up his surprised jump by playing a few dissonant steps down from where he’d been before going on with the main melody.

“Bobby told me you were good,” Ellen’s voice stated when he didn’t answer. The sound of a chair scraping across the floor fell under the music. Ellen sat down in a chair just inside of his peripheral vision. She was smiling a warm smile as she watched Sam’s hands fly across the keys. She looked at him like Jo had, but with a distant expression filling her gaze as opposed to an enraptured one. There was something she wanted to say, but she was a patient woman, as Bobby had mentioned a while back, and Sam was almost done with the song he was playing. She waited until the last notes were played—accompanied by a whoop from Benny and Pam in the kitchen.

“What’s going on?” Sam asked. He turned to face the establishment’s owner.

“Who says something’s going on?” Ellen challenged.

“Bobby gets that same look when he has something to say,” Sam explained.

Ellen sighed.
“Well, that’d make sense, wouldn’t it?” She straightened up in her chair and brushed her hair out of her face before she continued, “It’s the Roadhouse’s finances. I haven’t told anyone other than Bobby and Pam about it yet.”

“Running low?” Sam asked.

“Yeah. The townsfolk love this place, ‘course. Times just aren’t as easy as people make it out to be, you know? Everyone’s pockets are overflowing except for us underground folks.” She rubbed her eyes and frowned.

“If there’s anything I can do,” Sam said, “I’ll try my best to—”

“You’re the new kid, Sam,” Ellen interrupted him. “I wouldn’t ask anything of you other than to carry things with those soldier’s arms of yours and play piano with those musically gifted hands. Just keep up what you’re doing already, alright?”

Sam nodded. Ellen patted his shoulder and rose from her chair.

“Oh, and Sam?” she said over her shoulder as she set the char back at its table.

“Yes?”

“I stuck that rooster back in its bucket for you. Hope you don’t mind.”

He swallowed thickly and avoided her eyes.

“I-I don’t…ah, thank you.”

“Next time you bring something live in here, tell Bobby or me and we’ll stick it somewhere it won’t get out and go around running into things, alright?”

“Ab-Absolutely, Ellen. Sorry.”

She ruffled his hair and said, “Play me some Bessie Smith, if you can. Just to ease my nerves a bit.”

“I most certainly can.”

She smiled at him, but it didn’t quite reach her eyes until he settled down into a comfortable pace, playing his best vocals-less version of “Moonshine Blues”. She too strolled over to the kitchen and snapped at Jo and Benny to get to work before setting up at the bar. Sam worked away at the piano, then, and continued to do so until Bobby came in to tell him his lunch was waiting in the kitchen for him.

Folks began flowing in steadily at around 11:00 am, and their appreciation for the new musical addition to the Roadhouse crew was immediately evident. At around 1:00, Ellen gave him a few physical tasks to carry out. Pam had left and Bobby had taken over Benny’s job as the shifts changed out for the afternoon.

At 5:00, Sam grabbed his things from the storage room (sweeping up a bit of graveyard dirt that the rooster had knocked over in its escape attempt earlier in the day) and headed out into the streets once again. The roads were dusty and well-populated all along his way from the Roadhouse to Lucifer’s shop. All sorts of people lined the streets—merchants, peddlers, high-class ladies, noisy and playful children, tired-looking folks searching for shade—and most of them seemed relaxed and un-bothered. It was a lazy Louisiana afternoon for these folks, and Sam felt only somewhat envious of them. He was glad to be put to work. When he had nothing to do, his mind could wander back to...
other times and places, quickly turning a lazy afternoon into a dreadful one.

Someone brushed Sam’s shoulder in the crowded street. He turned, suddenly snapped out of his daze, to see a woman in a white dress with wavy blonde hair flowing down just past her shoulders turn to face him and apologize quickly before continuing on her way. Sam blinked and replied with an apology of his own just a bit too late for her to hear him.

She looked familiar…like someone he knew…another woman with golden hair, a fast tempo in her step, a pair of life-filled eyes, and—

No, he could not think back to her. Not now that he’d settled down properly, moved on properly. Not now that he was in a new city with a new life.

Jess. That was her name. She was sweet. She was tough. She was just as head-over-heels in love with Sam as he was for her. They had been happy and comfortable as could be. What had happened…?

The war. Right. Sam had left, and while in France had mailed her a postcard, telling her that she didn’t have to wait up for him. She had responded with a thank you to him, but said that she would keep in contact while he was away. Jess had settled down with a professor at a nearby college half a year later, but kept her word about keeping in contact. The professor was a good friend of theirs from their own school years. It hurt, but Sam knew that it would. He was glad to see that she was with someone who would be good to her instead of with a soldier who might never come home.

He had come home, however. Bobby had convinced Dean and him to move down south to avoid any old ties back in Kansas. The man had been looking out for his friend’s kids, and knew everything that had happened from the telegrams that Dean had sent him. Jess had been Sam’s everything before the war, and Dean knew it. Sam thought he had moved on, really, but every time he saw a woman who looked even slightly like her, he would freeze for a few seconds before shaking himself out of the sudden trances he sent himself into.

It hurt, yes, but he had no bitter feelings about any of it. He still wrote Jess occasionally. They wrote like old friends were supposed to. They were on good terms. She and her husband were happy, really. So was Sam.

He sighed heavily, pulling himself out of his daydream, and continued on his way.

The old shack stood with its main door open as it had the day before. Bits and pieces of conversation floated out through the screened door. Sam stepped up onto the porch and peeked inside, only opening the door a crack, to check that the coast was clear before he entered.

A woman of average height with dark brown hair and very lightly tanned skin, like she’d just barely escaped receiving a sunburn, stood across from Lucifer at the stretch of countertop at the front of his shop. In one hand, she held a covered picnic basket. She leaned her chin on the other as she spoke to the bokor.

“She’s been well-fed and taken care of. I’m not that bad at keeping track of things, Luci.”

Sam knocked on the doorframe to get Lucifer’s attention. The blond glanced over at him and beckoned inside. Sam entered and shut the screened door carefully behind him. The woman watched him with critical eyes as he set the bag of ingredients down on the counter and the bucket (clucking rooster still inside) on the ground. He tried not to squirm nervously under her gaze.

“Thank you, Sam,” Lucifer said, taking a quick look inside the bag. “This is excellent.”
“You’re right,” the woman commented. “He is tall.”

“Sam, this is Meg. She is an associate of mine, so I’m sure you two will be seeing quite a bit of each other.” Lucifer gestured to the woman. There was a certain fondness in his eyes, like he was a teacher looking at a favorite former pupil. She smiled crookedly at Sam and held out her free hand to shake. He obliged and said, “Nice to meet you.”

“Well, aren’t you friendly?” she said with a hint of amusement. “Good to meet you, too.”

“I can take care of Lilith for a short while,” Lucifer said to Meg. “It’s been a while since she last saw me, so I ought to re-familiarize myself with her.”

“Sounds like a good idea,” Meg said and lifted the basket in her hand and set it down on the counter next to Sam’s bag. She peeked underneath one of the flaps on top of the basket and said, “Now you be a good girl for Luci, you hear?” She smiled at whatever it was—Lilith, apparently—and glanced up at Sam, mischief in her eyes.

“Wanna meet Sam? He’s Luci’s new friend.” She reached her hand in and pulled gently lifted out something long and scaly. Lucifer reached out and took it from her. Sam just stood and stared as the man grinned at the large, white serpent like a child might at an old pet dog.

“Hey, sweetie,” he said to it, then carefully draped it over his shoulders. Meg smiled at the man and the snake for a moment before looking up at Sam’s surprised expression.

“Her name’s Lilith,” she explained. “She used to be Lucifer’s, but now she’s mine. She’s a total sweetheart. You’ll never meet a python more adjusted to humans and noisy stimuli.”

“I see…” Sam said quietly. Meg gave him the creeps. It was just the way that she smiled like she could see right down into his deepest, darkest secrets, and could spill everything at any given moment. It was terrifying, but since Lucifer acted like he trusted her so much, he chose to ignore the sensation that her gaze gave him. He took note of her physical appearance: well-put-together, not extremely well-off, but not particularly lacking in funds (as could be seen by her comfortable-looking, clean, maroon skirt, cream-colored blouse, and blood-red shawl), pretty, but in a mysterious sort of way, and curvy from some subtle muscles. She looked like the kind of woman who could sell anything she wanted to a customer, but could also easily hold her own in a fight. She reminded him of Jo in that way, but there was something a bit more dangerous the energy that Meg put off.

He decided quickly that she wasn’t a person to be meddled with.

“I will go ahead and put Lilith in her cage,” Lucifer announced. “Meg? Could you show Sam where to put the rooster?”

“Certainly.”

Sam followed the female bokor out the front door and around to the back of the wooden shack. Right next to the back door was a wire pen, large enough for a few animals to be comfortable while residing inside. The black rooster took quickly to its new environment and clucked noisily for a moment before it began pecking at the straw beneath its feet.

“You’re off to a good start, Sam,” Meg stated as they walked back around to the shop’s front door. “He asked a lot of you, and you delivered.”

“It’s my job,” Sam tried saying to pass off the compliment.

“Nah, I couldn’t get everything on the first try when I worked with him,” Meg insisted. “You seem
like a good fellow, too. So don’t let me see you doing anything you’re not supposed to, you hear?”

Sam nodded.

“Good. I like you already. I think this is gonna be a good business partnership for both you and Luci.”

“I hope so,” Sam replied. Meg smiled at him as he held the door open for her.

“And you’re a gentleman, too. Thank you.”

Sam smiled and walked in behind her. Lucifer sat in a chair by the table, tipped back on its back legs dangerously; the snake was nowhere to be seen. Meg rapped her knuckles on the front counter.

Lucifer snapped his head to the side to see his companions and let the other two legs of the chair land back on the floor.

“Rooster’s all nice and snug in its pen,” Meg reported.

“Lilith’s settling in, too,” Lucifer stated. “Thank you for taking care of that.”

“Not a problem.” Meg plucked the now empty picnic basket up off of the counter and hung it on her forearm.

“I will be seeing you in a few days, then?” Lucifer asked.

“If not sooner,” she replied. “Tell Gabriel I say hello, too.”

Lucifer’s expression dropped to a deadpan, suddenly, as he stated coolly, “Of course.”

“See ya ‘round.” Meg smiled and winked at Sam as she walked out of the shop. The screened door swung back and bounced off of the frame with a muffled smack before shutting on its own.

“Who’s Gabriel?” Sam asked, unable to hold the question back.

“Just someone.” Lucifer avoided answering him, and Sam withheld any further prying, understanding that the area must be sensitive for the bokor to shut him down like that.

“What do you need me to do today?” Sam asked, changing the subject quickly. Lucifer stood up and gestured to the seat.

“I will get some supplies for a few things that need assembling. You may wait in here for a moment.”

Sam sat in the wooden chair, and Lucifer left the room through the curtain that shielded the back room from sight. The bokor returned a moment later with a small canvas bag full of supplies in one hand and a music record in the other. He placed the bag down in front of Sam on the table and moved a stack of books and papers off of what Sam had initially assumed was yet another cabinet in the furniture-crowded room. Lucifer propped the lid open and revealed the dust-free interior—a recent model of phonograph, well-used and loved. He gave the crank a few good turns, set the record and the needle in place, and clicked it into playing position.

“Hope you don’t mind Jean Goldkette,” Lucifer said as he pulled up a chair to sit across from Sam at the table. The music came through the crackling surface noise, filling the room with “Honest and Truly”. Sam smiled and shook his head.

“I don’t mind it. I like his orchestra.”

Lucifer nodded. He pulled several items out of his bag and laid them out on the table in front of
them. Sam sat up in his seat, ready to be put to work.

“I’ll have you make a few simple gris gris bags today,” Lucifer stated. “Take a piece of cloth from this stack. It’s already been anointed with some oils, so all you need to do is place one of each of these things in it. Let me know when you have three of those finished, then I will show you how to tie them up into bags.”

Sam nodded and set to work. One golden colored stone, a pinch of black sand (magnetic?), an orange peel, a small flower blossom, and a dab of something lemony-smelling and waxy…moved to the side…then the next one. Lucifer stitched two pieces of pre-cut cloth on the other side of the table as he waited for Sam to finish, nodding his head to the music every now and then.

They turned the gris gris ingredients into three pouches with leather cords that were long enough to let a person wear them as necklaces. When each record ran out, Lucifer put a new one in the last one’s place. The man had good taste in music, Sam noted as he tried not to stab himself with the needle he was using to poke through the cloth.

“What are these for, anyway?” Sam asked before he could stop himself.

“These ones are charms to banish anxiety and fears,” Lucifer explained. “I’ll also have you put together a couple of different protection charms, once these are finished.”

“Huh.”

Lucifer shot him a quizzical look.

“What, did you expect to be putting together hex bags to jinx people, instead?”

“Uhm…” Sam cleared his throat nervously and avoided his companion’s eyes as he said, “Maybe?”

Lucifer shrugged. Sam looked up from the anti-anxiety pouch in his hands to see the bokor’s sewing project turning into a doll-like shape. The man didn’t seem bothered in the least by Sam’s assumptions. He’d expected him to be at least somewhat offended.

“I’m not too surprised,” the bokor stated. “Not everyone knows the reality of Vodou. It’s not nearly as dark as people believe it to be. There are dark magicks out there, but I don’t practice the majority of them. Cruel curses and death tricks are bad news, so I avoid them. It’s as simple as that, for me. Vodou is a healing-oriented practice for those of us not too closely connected to the religious aspects of it. I, for example, sell ingredients for various charms and oils and washes, but don’t always care to partake in ceremonies. I believe in loas, ancestral spirits, and ghosts, and I take most of the superstitious precautions that fellow practitioners take as well, just for safety’s sake. I don’t worship the spirits, but I respect them and pay homage to them regularly. That’s what Vodouism is to most people in my circles.”

“Loas?” Sam asked. “Those are…powerful spirits or something?”

“In the Vodou that I practice,” Lucifer explained, “they are comparable to saints and angels in, say, Catholicism. They are mediators between us on the mortal plane of existence and forces in the unknown realms beyond. They manipulate certain parts of life and have the power to sense things that we cannot. The main difference between loas and saints and angels is that the spirits are both served and petitioned to via private prayer. Service is given through the drawing and painting of ritualistic symbols, song and dance, and a few more individual and distinct actions that depend on the loa being served.

“People like myself serve patron loas and pray to ancestors and loved ones who have died. It’s a
much more ritualistic and respectful practice than some of the local churches might have you believing.” Lucifer sighed and held the doll form up for inspection.

“So, no devil-worship, then?” Sam laughed.

“No,” Lucifer said with a shake of his head. “No devil-worship.”

“What about dolls?” Sam asked. “Aren’t those supposed to be cursing objects?”

“Not normally,” the bokor explained as he set the doll down on the table and began stuffing it with cotton from the canvas bag. “They are used to bless and protect people more often than they are used to curse people. They are another form of gris gris. I sell the forms and a few ingredients used in the kind of magick that surrounds them. If someone wants to know how to make and effective doll, I can explain how to make ones for healing, finding love, and seeking spiritual guidance. Although I can tell a person how to curse another with gris gris, I will more often than not stay away from doing so. Dolls didn’t even become popular until the reign of Marie Laveau, but they already are the focus of most misunderstandings regarding the Vodou community.”

Sam nodded and hummed. He felt Lucifer’s eyes on him as he finished tying off the leather cord attached to the pouch. It wasn’t uncomfortable, like it had been when Meg had stared him down earlier. There was a well-hidden curiosity in the bokor’s gaze.

“Finished the last one,” Sam announced. He looked up and met Lucifer’s eyes for a moment before the bokor looked back into his bag.

Blue. Pure, icy blue. That’s what they were. Like a stained glass window. They were closed-off, but not abrasive. He looked at Sam like he was a strange trinket in a shop; he was curious, but guarded. There were light shadows under his eyes, likely put there by steady alcohol consumption, late nights, or both.

Pam was wrong. There was one more thing that could make someone “pretty”. Their eyes.

Sam ignored his conclusion for the time being, though. It wouldn’t do to be going around thinking about strangers as pretty or alluring or… He cursed his mind for leading him down that train of thought in the first place. All he did was see the man’s eyes in nice lighting, and suddenly he felt poetic about all of it.

Maybe he was going into shock and was just now becoming self-aware again. Yes. That was it. That was a logical conclusion.

“Do the same with these things instead,” Lucifer stated, gesturing to new piles of seemingly random ingredients. Sam nodded and went to work, trying to focus on the task at hand and not on his temporary taste of insanity.

Shed snake skin, small bones of some sort…eyes like a clear, spring sky…tobacco ashes, horsehairs, a glass bead that resembled an eye…tired, but not like he had been physically exerting himself, more like he had seen too much…tie everything up with a leather cord, and start again. Flannel cloth, snake skin, bones…they still had a spark behind them, though, like a childish trickster who hadn’t played a joke in a while…tobacco ashes, hairs, bead…damnit.

A knock at the door was what finally snapped Sam out of his thoughts. He looked up to see a somewhat tall man standing in the doorway, peeking in cautiously. Sam quickly realized that it was the same person who had been sweeping the porch off just the day before.

“Castiel,” Lucifer said, standing up and moving to greet the man. “How are you, today?”
“I am fine,” Castiel replied with a voice like a muted bass trombone—surprisingly low and rough. “And you?”

“Good, good,” Lucifer said.

“I am looking for white candles. Would you happen to have any for purchase at this time?”

“Ab-so-lute-ly.” Lucifer opened a cupboard and handed three to Castiel.

“How much—?”

“For you, they’re two cents each.”

Castiel reached into the pocket of his beige trench coat and withdrew exactly six pennies. He handed them over to Lucifer and placed the candles into his pocket in place of the coins. Sam couldn’t help but marvel at the fact that the man wasn’t overheated from all of the layers he wore. There was no way that Sam would be able to stand wearing more than one while under the New Orleans summer sun.

“Have you met Sam?” Lucifer asked the strange man. Castiel turned his head to look at Sam, who he had previously ignored. His gaze pierced through Sam like a knife. He felt like he was staring into the eyes of something strong and inhuman, the way the intensity of it pushed at him like water behind a levee. Sam suppressed a shudder as the man tipped his head to the side. It reminded Sam of the way a cat stared at a mouse as it considered whether or not the creature was worth its time.

“I saw him yesterday,” Castiel said, pacing his words out slowly, annunciating each one with extra care. “I do not believe that we have properly met, however.”

He approached Sam and stopped stiffly a few feet from him like the motion was frequently practiced, but not exhibited. Castiel held out his hand, and Sam shook it. The man’s grip was loose, even though his stance was rigid like a soldier’s would be.

“It’s nice to meet you, Castiel,” Sam said in what he hoped was an amiable tone.

“And it is a pleasure to meet you, Sam,” the man replied in a quiet, clipped voice.

“You’ll see quite a bit of him as well,” Lucifer stated from his place at the front of the store. Castiel nodded to Sam and walked to the door. His coat flowed out slightly behind him as he moved. He came to a halt by Lucifer and muttered something to him. Lucifer replied softly, and patted Castiel’s shoulder. Sam heard “today” and “fine” and “Gabriel” (there was that name again), but couldn’t catch the rest. The mysterious Castiel walked out the door with a stiff nod to both Lucifer and Sam.

Lucifer stood by the door and watched him walk down the street for a few seconds before he returned to his place at the table.

“Is he a regular?” Sam asked.

“He helps out around the shop every now and then,” Lucifer said. “He does odd jobs for a small pay, and buys a few ingredients for an ancestral altar now and then. Castiel’s a good fellow.”

“Old friend, then?”

“Family.”

“Ah.” Sam nodded his head and returned his focus to the protection charms on the table.
“Castiel is a bit strange,” Lucifer stated, “but when he warms up to you, I’m sure you will get along just fine. He isn’t always so tightly coiled like that.”

“Oh, good,” Sam sighed. “I was worried he just didn’t like strangers or something.”

“How did he shake your hand?” Lucifer asked. Sam looked up from the pouch he was tying off and frowned.

“I’m not sure what you mean.”

“Did he grip your hand tight like he was making a business deal with you, or did he relax his hand like an acquaintance or a neighbor might?”

“The latter.”

Lucifer held out his hand for the completed gris gris charm in Sam’s hands. Sam handed it over quickly, and, as the blond inspected it, he said, “That means that he likes you. It’s a good thing. If, say, Meg didn’t like you, you could still easily keep a good business deal with me. On the other hand, if Castiel didn’t like you, it would be hard to get things done in a timely manner.”

He looked up from the charm in his hands and stated, “I trust Castiel’s judgment. He always has the best intentions at heart, and if he feels threatened by someone in a business interaction, I find no reason to trust said person either.”

“It’s a good thing he likes me, then,” Sam said. “I would hate to cause trouble for you like that.”

“You’re no trouble, Sam.” Lucifer lifted the gris gris charm up and said, “Great job with this one. We’ll use it for someone special.”

“Special?”

“Your brother, maybe.”

Sam swallowed thickly and nodded.

“Sure.”

“Now, can you make four more?”

Sam nodded. He dove back into his work to keep from asking anymore questions. He didn’t want to come across as too curious, did he? He didn’t practice Vodou; he just put a few trinkets together for folks who did. That’s all. He didn’t want to know anything about the people walking into Lucifer’s shop. He didn’t need to think about whether or not the bokor was as pretty as Pam remembered him being. He didn’t have to think about how he and the man across the table from him had the same music tastes. None of that had to happen.

It did, though, even if it was all in Sam’s mind.

He tuned out to the sound of Lucifer singing along quietly to the music crackling through the phonograph.

“I’ve got the blues, and up above it’s so fair. Shoes, go on and carry me there. I’ll build a stairway to paradise, with a new step everyday…”
Dean’s first treatment was scheduled for that day. Sam led the bokor to the front door of the house. He knocked in a strange rhythm he’d come up with a while back so that his brother would know that it was him approaching. There were a few muffled noises behind the door for a moment before it was opened halfway by a tired-looking Dean.

“Sammy, you’re a few minutes early.”

“I’ve brought that bokor with me,” Sam said. Dean stepped out of the way and gestured to the room behind him in an invitation to the two men at the door.

“Yeah, I thought I heard someone else there. Come on in.”

Lucifer stepped inside right behind Sam. He looked at the room as if he was trying to assess every wood panel that made up the structure; his gaze eventually landed on Dean who shut the door and locked it behind the bokor with practiced ease. Lucifer stared for a moment. Sam wondered momentarily if the blond could read his brother’s soul just by watching his movements. He quickly tossed the idea aside as Dean turned around again.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Dean,” Lucifer said smoothly. Dean nodded his head and held out his hand.

“Sammy won’t shut up about you and all this Vodou mojo,” Dean stated. Lucifer shook hands with him and watched the man walk past him and to the stairs.

“I’ll be back down in just a moment.” Dean ruffled Sam’s hair as he passed him. (Apparently people were suddenly getting urges to do that—first Pam, now Dean.) Sam shook his head and led Lucifer into the sitting room.

“What do you have planned for today?” Sam asked. The bokor set his bag of supplies down on the sofa and looked around the room.

“I think that I will start by smudging the house with sage, if that is alright by you.”

“Sure,” Sam said. He hesitated before asking, “What do you mean by smudging, exactly?”

“He means he’s burning a bit of sage and fanning the smoke around the place,” Dean’s voice explained from the doorway. Sam hadn’t heard him approaching and jumped at the sound.

“Yes, that is generally what it entails,” Lucifer confirmed.

“Okay, then,” Sam said with a sigh, “would you like us to get out of your way?”

“It’s not necessary,” the bokor explained. “I would like to know which rooms are most used by the two of you so that I may do this all at once.”

“Certainly.” Sam looked to Dean and asked, “Do you want to show him around, or do you want me to?”

Dean shrugged.

“I don’t really care.”
“I’ll… go ahead and show you around, then,” Sam said to Lucifer. They toured the small house quickly, Sam pointing to each room and explaining what it was used for and whether or not it was used with any regularity. Lucifer remained quiet, only making noise when he felt the need to acknowledge that he had heard what Sam had said.

The scrubbing took around thirty minutes. Sam sat and watched as Lucifer walked around the house with a bundle of dried sage and a large feather. The bokor mumbled under his breath every now and then, and then moved on to the next room. Dean reclined on the sofa in the sitting room, staring into the space where he should have been able to see the ceiling.

When Lucifer moved upstairs, Dean turned to face the area that Sam stood in and asked in a hushed voice, “So you think this’ll work?”

“I’m willing to try,” Sam sighed. “You said you were, too, remember?”

“I mean, I don’t really believe in this stuff. You’ve gotta understand that.”

“I don’t think you have to believe in it all the way for it to work properly,” Sam explained. “That’s what Lucifer keeps implying, in any case. I think that you just have to be willing to give it some room for reasonable doubt.”

Dean shook his head.

“I can try, Sammy, but you know me. I ain’t a faith-filled kinda guy.”

“I don’t expect you to be.”

“Good.” Dean stretched his arms and sat up.

“What’s he like, then?” he asked. Sam frowned.

“He seems nice. He likes dealing in the healing area of Vodou, I think. He’s quiet, usually, but he can carry on a good conversation, from what I’ve seen.”

“Well, if you think he’s okay…” Dean muttered. “I guess I can trust him walking around, smudging our house.”

“Oh, yeah, and how’d you know what smudging was?” Sam asked, taking a seat next to Lucifer’s supply bag, across from his brother.

“Mom and Dad had a friend from around these parts,” Dean explained. “She came and smudged the house once or twice when we were little. She absolutely doted over you. Somethin’ about folks seeing a new baby in the house, I dunno. She loved to tease me, so I didn’t care for her all that much.”

“Wait, so Mom and Dad had a friend who did this kind of stuff?”

“Yeah. Don’t remember her name, but she knew her stuff. She was a psychic or something.”

“Why did she get asked over to the house to sage the place, though?” Sam asked. He’d never heard this mentioned before—not by Dean or Dad or anyone.

“I think it was Mom who asked her over,” Dean said. “No clue why. Maybe she got a bad feeling from the place. That’d be weird, since it’d been in the family for a while and no one else had felt anything. She believed in that sort of stuff; you know, ghosts and angels and demons and all that. It’d
make more sense for it to have been her.”

“Wow.” Sam wasn’t sure what to say. It was…strange. Why wouldn’t anyone have mentioned a psychic friend before? Maybe he should have started by looking for her. Lucifer seemed like he wanted to do good by the two of them, though, and since he focused on healing magick, maybe it was just fine that they had resorted to utilizing him instead. Sam shook his head in an effort to clear his head.

Lucifer descended the stairs and re-entered the sitting room.

“I’ll need some help with the next part,” Lucifer stated. He placed the no-longer-smoking sage bundle and the feather back into his bag, and pulled out several lemons and a few garlic cloves.

“Sam, go ahead,” Dean said. Sam helped Lucifer carry the foods into the kitchen and deposited them on the table.

“We will cut these in half,” Lucifer explained, pointing at the lemons, “and put a garlic clove into the center of each of the halves. They are to be placed face-down in the corners of the rooms I smudged and left overnight. If any of them are physically altered in the morning, those areas need to have their lemons replaced. Repeat that until physical changes no longer occur.”

“And this is for…?”

“These will detect and remove negative energies,” the bokor said. “Their effects are similar in nature to those of smudging. Just alert your brother to their presence soon after you lay them out.”

Sam nodded and began following his instructions. Every room in the house smelled lightly of smoke, but it wasn’t overwhelming. He was more worried about bugs being attracted to the citrus and garlic combination he was placing in nearly every room. Wouldn’t fruit be physically altered if it was left cut open and on the floor overnight, anyway? Sam decided to trust Lucifer in this case, since he had never done this before, but he was curious as to how these things were supposed to expel negativity. He returned to the kitchen, smelling sharply of citrus, and began wiping off the knife he had used to cut everything. Lucifer joined him around a minute later.

“That is all I am going to do today,” he said. “Next time I will bring in a charm for Dean to wear and maybe some other things as well, if you find that this initial cleansing works well.”

“Sounds good to me,” Sam replied. “Thank you, again, for offering to help us out.”

“It is my pleasure, Sam.” Lucifer took his bag from the sitting room and stopped by the sofa where Dean lay.

“It has been good to finally meet you, Dean.”

Sam watched his brother turn his head and squint at the bokor, then focus on the ceiling again.

“Likewise.”

Lucifer watched the man in front of him for a moment, his head cocked to the side like Castiel’s had earlier. He turned around and walked to the front door. Sam held it open for him and smiled reassuringly.

“He can be a bit…”

“It’s alright,” Lucifer said. “I understand. I am a stranger in his home and he can’t see me well
enough to judge too much about my trustworthiness. His behavior and tone are perfectly reasonable.”

“Good,” Sam stuttered out. “Sorry. And thanks again.”

“You don’t need to do anything else for me, today,” the bokor said. “I have nothing else for you to do for me at the moment. I will see you the day after tomorrow?”

“Yes.”

“Goodbye, then.” Lucifer turned away and walked back down the street. Sam watched the man disappear into the crowded walkways. The door was closed and locked it once again. Sam rested his forehead against it and let out a heavy sigh.

One treatment down...

Chapter End Notes

Moonshine Blues: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sSelemqcdhE
The preacher cleared his throat and took a gulp from the glass of water that sat next to him on the pulpit. The glass was patched with sticky fingerprints. It was summer in New Orleans, and fans and all, the air was still like steam. The church was full of the heavy, wet, smell of people, ranked in their pious rows, shifting and coughing into handkerchiefs, sweating silently through the boiling torture of the morning to the glory of God. Sunlight poured in through the windows like scorching crystal.

“It seems to me,” the preacher said, “that we are far too often ignorant of the dangers that lie around us.”

Lucifer, who was seated two rows from the back in a shapeless straw hat, scratched his nose and looked down. The man had a good voice, warm and strong as Canadian scotch. It might have been pleasant to listen to if Lucifer hadn’t had a fairly good idea what he was about to say.

“We live in this city which is beautiful in many ways,” the preacher continued. “We eat its food, walk its streets, and dwell within its walls. And so we fail to see beyond our own lives, and how close the works of the Enemy are to us and those we love.”

A murmur of recognition moved across the church. They knew where he was going now. There was always a moment of uncertainty at the beginning of each sermon; was it going to be about Compassion, or the Church Militant, or Repentance, or any of the other members of the church’s roster of topics? This one was about Sin. Maybe even about Evil, if the preacher could manage that in this heat. A few rows ahead of Lucifer, an elderly woman in an extravagant hat leaned forward, feathers bobbing.

The preacher nodded, satisfied with the reaction. “You all know what I’m talking about. You see them on every street corner, with their signs promising you wealth and luck, and their devil’s marks on the doorways. Maybe some of you live next to them. Maybe some of you have even been in their shops before. The truth is this--it is the year of our Lord nineteen-twenty-five and we live in a city where witchcraft runs rampant. I say witchcraft! I say it because that’s what it is. They try to disguise it with crosses and candles and portraits of the Virgin, but that’s Catholic bastardization of the faith. Those are lies. And the horrors, the offenses, that go on behind those lies, I cannot begin to describe.”

It was clear that, despite this, describing them was exactly what he was about to do. A rustle of interest washed over the congregation. This was it, the good part, the meat and bones. Lucifer stared at the back of the pew in front of him.

“The owners of these so-called vodou establishments practice every perversion and atrocity known to man,” the preacher said. His voice was tight and feverish. “I’ve heard firsthand accounts, and my friends, it mortified my soul. In their rituals, these sorcerers take part in cannibalism. Torture. The
murder of children. Sexual inversion. They summon the devil directly and ask for his aid in bringing curses down on decent people.”

This part was always entertaining. The things that these righteous, god-fearing, people claimed went on were always more sick and complicated than anything Lucifer could practically imagine, let alone actually do. He had no idea how he would find a child to sacrifice, let alone getting people to eat the body. And managing to keep it hidden from the police would be massively inconvenient.

Sexual inversion was another matter. But that had nothing to do with the devil.

“ Their existence is an affront to God,” the preacher bellowed. Despite the heat, he had gotten into the fire and brimstone section of the program with admirable enthusiasm. His eyes were wet and brilliant, and he was sweating heavily. “The city cries out to be cleansed, to be rescued from its infirmity. God will not allow evils like these to stand. Are we soldiers of the church or are we bystanders? Will we do nothing as this corruption touches the lives of good men and women? It has been far too long that these sorcerers have been allowed, even encouraged, to practice their works. Will we let it continue? Or will we take up the cross and the sword and do the work that God has laid before us?”

The woman in the hat howled “Amen!” and further up, someone gripped in an ecstasy of hate shrieked “Yes, yes!”

Lucifer rose, pulled his hat over his face, and left the church.

When he was very young, Lucifer’s mother had taken him to a hounfor. There were a few in New Orleans, but they were not strictly welcome in those anymore; the one they went to was on an island. It took them several hours to get there by boat. Inside there was the rich salty scent of ceremonial foods, the houngan hurrying around in their bright fluttering clothes. Candles burned everywhere, a warm tide of light washing across the room. In one corner were the drums which would be brought out later for the salute to Hounto and the litany. No one knew them there, but everyone had a smile for him—the strange white boy with his skinny, tight-faced, mother who kept her hand on his shoulder at all times.

“It’s just like a church,” he had said, astonished. His mother had shot him an opaque look, and he had sensed that he had failed some kind of test, given the wrong answer to an unspoken question.

“It is a church,” she had said. “This is a church. A holy place. Treat it with respect.”

Now he walked towards home, hands in his pockets, away from the swirling mass of hatred and energy behind him. He could still feel it in the back of his head, like the beginnings of a headache. Whenever a new religious presence made itself apparent in his area, he swung by, to give it a quick once-over and see how likely it was to be bad for business. This one was not looking promising; this new preacher would be trouble. He sighed and started mentally sketching out the protective charms he would need to replace, the sacrifices to be made, the people to be warned and deities to be appeased. He was not the only one this would affect.

Would it matter to these people if they knew that the “sorcery” they hated was a religion just like theirs? Probably not. From what Lucifer had seen, they didn’t respect other religions very much either. Sometimes it seemed like churches of this kind were just places for people to gather and loudly hate the same things together, so that they themselves would feel safe.

He wondered abruptly if Sam was religious. He’d never spoken of it, but then he didn’t seem like the
type who would. For some reason Lucifer felt that he probably was; there was something in Sam that reached out for God even under the stupidest and most unlikely of circumstances. Anyone who could chase so desperately after lost causes had to have some kind of God inside them. That was the basic drive of Sam’s personality; believing. Having faith.

He was going to see Sam later today; another session with the grumpy but generally tolerable brother. Maybe he’d let Sam do more this time. If he wasn’t vastly mistaken, he thought the other man was starting to like it.

It took him a moment to realize that the dark blur which had been keeping pace with him was a person, and another moment to realize it was a person he knew. He felt an unpleasant twist of tension. It was never good news when he saw his family. Especially not when they were the ones who chose to seek him out.

Jesus. Like the preacher hadn’t been enough to worry about. He rubbed a damp haze of sweat off his forehead and turned to the man next to him.

“Raphael,” he said, voice scrupulously pleasant.

Raphael shot him a chilly glance of immense dislike. He was a man struggling towards middle age, with skin the colour of black coffee and inky eyes. Lucifer had not seen him in something like ten years and he was not wearing the age well. He tugged his coat, which was too long and too heavy for the weather, around him, and grunted a reply.

They walked for a moment down the fissured sidewalk, not looking at each other. A chattering cloud of schoolgirls passed, leaving behind a faint haze of cheap perfume and laughter. The sun glared down.

After a time, Raphael said “You don’t look anything like her.”

Lucifer swallowed the hot spasm of anger and said “I know,” voice flat. His mother, with her confusion of racial heritage—black, French, Spanish, Indian—had been able to pass for white at times, but bore the mark of their African ancestors in her face and skin. Lucifer did not look like her and never had. His blonde hair and blue eyes were the most obvious signs of his father’s contribution, and the fact that everyone knew; that he wasn’t really part of the family; that he was a mistake. He was an expert in the many ways in which he was not like his mother, and Raphael’s reminder was a little cruelty that he could really have done without.

“What were you doing in that church?” Raphael asked.

“Checking out the competition.” Lucifer tilted the brim of his hat up and squinted at the sky. “Do you want something? I thought I was dead to you people. You don’t call, you don’t write, et cetera.”

“Don’t be an idiot, you little piece of shit,” Raphael hissed. “You should be grateful. I have something you’ll want to hear.”

“If it’s more information about how I’m hellspawn and don’t deserve to be alive, you can rest in the knowledge that I’ve heard it before.”

An unpleasant snort. “Would it surprise you to know that we’re trying to help you?”

“Immensely. Also, I don’t believe that you are.”

Lucifer blew out a sigh, suddenly and fiercely exhausted. He did not have the patience to deal with his family’s insanity. He wanted to go home and fix Sam’s brother and talk to people who didn’t think he was actually Satan, or at least were much more subtle about it if they did. “What do you want, Raphael? Make it quick. For both our sakes.”

“A word of warning.” Raphael huffed out a strained breath. “Slow down.”

Against his own instinct, Lucifer let his pace ease. Some part of him was always trying to get away from Raphael, no matter what the rest of him intended.

Raphael gave him a dark look, and then sighed and looked away.

“There’s someone new in town,” he said.

Under other circumstances this might have been innocuous, unimportant, but when a member of the family came to tell him that there was someone new in town, it only meant one thing. Lucifer felt a thrill of nerves down his spine. “Someone we know?”

Raphael shook his head. “He’s from out east. Georgia, Florida. Anna is talking to our friends there. The most we know is that he’s significant, and he has a reputation.”

“Not the good kind, I’m assuming.”

A barking laugh. “Curses, violence, some killings. No, it’s not good.”

“So he’s a bokor,” Lucifer murmured. “No church ties. Why is he coming here?”

“There are plenty of theories. He ran into trouble with the police. He got bored. Make up your own, if you like. He seems to be operating on his own.”

“That’s convenient. Where’s he staying?”

“Not around here. Nice house, down by the water. He has money. And he’s been seen wearing red, and with a tree leaf charm on his person.”

“Met Kailfu,” Lucifer muttered, and sighed internally. He had had dealings with the crossroads loa before, very few of them civil. If this new bokor had been chosen by Kailfu, he was going to be a problem.

“Yes,” agreed Raphael grimly.

They walked in silence for a short while. A cluster of children playing on the sidewalk scattered around them. One of them, a ragged boy who couldn’t have been older than five, gave Lucifer a savage glare and spat thickly onto the concrete in front of him.

Raphael laughed. “They know you here.”

“So they do,” Lucifer said mildly. Then, after a long moment, “Has he made threats?”

“Who?”

“This new one.”

“Oh, yes. No, he hasn’t done anything yet. Seems quite content to sit in his nice house for now. But he will, and when he does, it’ll be worth your while to be prepared.”
Lucifer turned this over in his mind, and then said, abruptly and uncomfortably, “Why are you telling me this?”

Raphael gave him an impenetrable look. “What?”

“You’ve made it abundantly clear how you feel about me. Why warn me now? Seems like it would suit you better if this new idiot and I destroyed each other for you. Got rid of two problems at once, as it were. So why tell me? It’s not your style to be helpful.”

A low, grinding, snort. “Don’t be a complete fool.”

“That’s not an answer.

There was a long taut pause. They turned a corner and the dim shadow of the buildings fell across them like dust.

“You are the devil’s child,” said Raphael, finally, unhappily. “You are the worst kind of accident and a disgrace to your mother’s memory and to our work.”

“Yes, I’m aware,” Lucifer replied coolly.

“But,” Raphael continued, glaring at him, “you are still of the family. Half of you, anyway. This newcomer is, is nothing. He will upset the balance. As bad as you are—”

“He’s worse, because he’s not part of the family. He’s an invader. Yes?”

“That’s it,” Raphael conceded.

“Yes. I should have known.” Lucifer stared at the ground and counted his footsteps. There were a great deal of things he wanted to say here--a ball of poison in his stomach that leapt to get out. He said none of them. In the strangely tilted moral landscape which he had been born into, this was what counted as kindness. Nothing he could say would make a difference to Raphael. It never had before.

“Okay,” he said, and swallowed the rest of the anger. “My house is near here, and you should probably go. Wouldn’t want to be seen with me, would you.”

Raphael stared at him, face twisted, and then shook his head. “You ungrateful scum. I suppose I shouldn’t have expected anything better.”

“No, you really shouldn’t have,” Lucifer agreed amiably, and waved a hand at him. “Go on. You’ve told me what you wanted to tell me. Hopefully I won’t see you again for a long time.”

He did not look up to see Raphael go. It was only when the long coat was flapping away down the street that his tongue got the better of him and he called out, without really meaning to, “I can’t help who he was, or what he did. I didn’t ask to be born. I didn’t ask to be like this.”

Raphael did not look back. He turned the corner and was gone. Which, Lucifer reflected, was all the acknowledgement that attempt really deserved. He had never asked for Raphael’s respect, or even his tolerance. And “I didn’t ask to be born” was a weak excuse at best.

Anyway, it didn’t matter now. He turned towards the shop door and felt for his keys. This had been a very interesting day, and it wasn’t over yet.

“When I was pregnant with you,” his mother had told him, “the family wanted you dead. Erased,
gone. Never born. They offered me money and pleaded, and when that didn’t work, they screamed and threatened. No one would want me, they said. A fifteen-year-old with a child and no husband. I would be a disgrace. But I didn’t care. I wanted you. I wanted something good in the middle of all my sorrow. And I kept you.” She ran her fingers over his hair, smiling her lovely wounded smile. “My little devil child. My beautiful little monster.”

Lucifer had listened to this, a child, wide-eyed and voiceless. She had told him things like this, things he didn’t want to know and probably shouldn’t have heard, his entire life. Her honesty was blind and complete and awful. At times she would laugh at herself and say “I shouldn’t be telling you this, this is bad for you to know,” but that never lasted. It was as if she felt she owed him less kindness, since he existed as a result of cruelty.

She was a beautiful woman, his mother. He loved her very much, and he was also very afraid of her.

This was how it happened. She was fourteen, a pretty child, training to be a mambo under her mother and aunts and grandmothers. She was walking home from a servis when he took her. He kept her in his basement for two days and then let her go. She never knew his name, or remembered where he had lived. They searched the city for months afterwards but he was nowhere to be found. Some of her relatives said he was a demon sent to defile her purity, and he had left when his task was done.

“They always had trouble with that,” she said, stretching. “That he was human. I told them —‘Brothers, sisters, no—he’s just a man. He breathes and eats and shits just like you or me. A terrible man, but just a man. No more, no less.’ They never believed me.” A thin sigh. “I think they objected to him being human because how could a man do all that to me and then get away with it? They didn’t like that. They didn’t understand that sometimes people do awful things, worse than demons, and never suffer for it, and that’s just how it is and we have to live with it.”

He broke both her legs and once, when she struggled, slammed her head into the wall. There were other injuries but these never fully healed. She walked with a cane and was partially deaf for the rest of her life. A few weeks later, she discovered she was also pregnant.

“That was you. And oh, they were so upset. Wailing and gnashing of teeth. But I said no—no, I’m keeping it. I don’t care who its father was. It’s mine. And a little while later, you came along.” She smiled, distantly, stroking his head. “And we were so happy.”

They had been very lucky. For a while it was hard and they were alone, but then there was Chuck. He was white, but he didn’t mind marrying a mixed woman who already had a four-year-old son and a background in the shadier aspects of the city’s religious community. He was a good man. Within the year Gabriel was born. He was always a little confused by his wife’s choice to name her first son after the devil, but he learned not to ask. And Gabriel was funny and gentle and good, even after he got sick.

She never taught Gabriel the ways of vodou. Only Lucifer. It was never a subject of discussion in their house, but Lucifer was always the one who was going to learn the family trade, and Gabriel was always the one who was going to have something else, something better. No explanations offered or expected. Lucifer decided, over time, that it was probably because he and his mother were alike in some fundamental way that they did not share with the rest of the family. In both of them there was a profound darkness which had been put there by his father, in different ways and with different outcomes. There was no point in trying to protect him from the dangers of the work, because that stain was already inside them both. It wasn’t exactly the sort of bond he wanted to share with his mother, but it was better than nothing.
“So,” Gabe said. “Sam Winchester.”

They were in the shop. Dusty sunlight spilled through the windows. Lucifer pulled off his hat and tossed it onto the table. “What about him?”

“Oh, just noticing him. You know. Taking stock of his existence.”

Gabriel’s voice was that particular flavour of too calm that meant he was up to something. Lucifer shot him a flat look. “Is that so.”

“Mmm. Reminding you he exists. Thought you might need it.”

“Well, thank you.” Lucifer dropped back into a chair. “I’m not sure I need a reminder, but thank you anyway.”

“Anytime, good sir.” Gabriel padded over, noiseless. It was constantly astonishing to Lucifer how real he seemed, how close to human. It made it very confusing to talk to him, since Lucifer had to constantly make small corrections to deal with the true situation and how little it resembled what appeared to be going on.

“So,” Gabriel said idly. “Good-looking kid.”

A prickle of irritation. “Gabe--”

“Just saying! Just saying.” Gabriel was grinning like his face was about to split. “I mean, he’s not my type, but if you go for the tall, strong, soulful-eyed, gorgeously chiseled ones, then I guess he’s all right.”

“You don’t have a type. You’re not allowed to have a type. You’re dead.”

Gabriel shrugged elaborately. “Never said I wasn’t. Am I lying?”

“No,” Lucifer admitted tightly, “you are not lying.”

“There you go. He’s an extremely attractive boy who is compelled to spend time with you every day. I have no idea why you’re still sitting here.”

Lucifer sighed, feeling a rueful twitch of amusement despite himself. “I’ve known him a week. And he’s working for me.”

“Your point being?”

“My point being that I have bigger things to worry about.” Lucifer leaned back in his chair, folding his arms behind his head. “Raphael came to talk to me.”

Gabriel’s face stilled. “Did he now.”

“He did indeed. Apparently there’s someone new in town. No one we know but he seems to be bad news. One of Met Kailfu’s people.”

“Kailfu? Christ.” Gabriel blew out in sharp surprise. “Have you ever heard of someone with Kailfu as their head?”

“No, I haven’t. Which is what bothers me.” Lucifer frowned and stared at the sagging ceiling. “I don’t know this guy’s name or what he wants. The only thing I know is that Raphael thinks he’s dangerous and he has suicidally stupid taste in patrons. It’s worrying. I have no idea what he’s likely
to do. I don’t like it.”

“There was a long, silent, pause. Then Gabriel said briskly, “You’ll kick his ass. You always do.”

Lucifer shot him a wry smile. “Thank you, Gabe, for those words of comfort.”

“It’s my job.” Gabriel returned his grin. “And, speaking of asses, Sam Winchester.”

Lucifer laughed in an aggravated cough. “That is really not the kind of—”

The doorbell let out a rusty jingle like an abruptly woken bird. Lucifer’s voice halted and he sat up. A moan of hinges, and then a voice called “Hello? Is this—can I come in?”

“Yes, come on in,” Lucifer called curiously. Gabe raised his eyebrows with the kind of dramatic flourish that made Lucifer very glad that other people usually couldn’t see him.

There was a rattling shuffle of steps from the front of the shop, and then the man drifted into view. He was thin and tall, and everything about him was the color of soot, from his eyes to his fingernails. His skin was the colour of soot and it was impossible to tell what race he might actually be. He stared at Lucifer with soft soot-colored eyes and said, in a voice that somehow managed to be soot-colored as well, “Is this—ah, are you—”

“Yes, I’m Lucifer,” Lucifer said impatiently. People always asked that, and always in that tone of voice, like they were hoping that the name ‘Lucifer’ was a marketing ploy, or that he would say oh no, I’m Lucifer’s secretary Bob, you don’t even have to talk to that lunatic. We keep him locked up for his own protection. Coffee?

The man looked a bit taken aback, so Lucifer quickly moved on. “Let’s not prevaricate, shall we? You need something, probably something too difficult or expensive to get through more conventional channels, so you’re here. I can help you. Tell me what it is and we can talk times and prices.”

The man, looking a bit like he had been slapped, swallowed and took a step back. Gabriel threw Lucifer a narrow look and said “You know, what I admire most about you is your subtle and understanding way with people.”

Lucifer ignored him. It occurred to him that perhaps the combination of church, Raphael, and bad news had rubbed his nerves a little thin.

Despite his vacant look, the soot-colored man stood his ground. “You’re right,” he said. “I do need something. And there’s no other way I can get it.”

“Yes. We’ve covered that.” Lucifer turned away and moved over to his accounts book. “Now I need information, please.”

“There’s someone,” the man said, and then was silent for a long, hesitant, moment. Lucifer was on the verge of speaking again when the man continued, “I need him dead.”

Something steely and unpleasant curled in Lucifer’s gut. Gabriel’s eyebrows flew up to his hair. Lucifer smiled rigidly. “No.”

The man stuttered. “Wait, please—you don’t understand.”

“I don’t do murder.” Lucifer turned back to face him. “Not for any reason, not under any circumstances. I’m sorry.”
“But this man, I—I owe him money. Please, he threatened my family—I can’t—”

“Then go to the police,” Lucifer replied, ignoring his quick reflexive sympathy.

“The police will only make things worse. I’ve tried, believe me. Please. He’s not—he’s a bad man.”
A stiff swallow. “The world would be better without him.”

“That’s not up to you or me to decide.”

The man stared at him unhappily for a moment and then said “Whatever you want, I will pay.”

“It’s not a matter of the money. I don’t kill people. Consult the police or try someone else.” Lucifer considered the man for a moment. “I’m sorry.”

Everything about the man sagged, like his integral framework had been broken. “I understand. Sorry for bothering you.”

He walked slowly, painfully, out of the shop, disturbing the pale fall of sunlight through the crusted windows. He left a dim rattle of the bell behind him.

“You know,” Gabriel said, watching him go, “he’s just going to find someone else to do it.”

Lucifer rubbed his eyes. “Yeah, I know.”

“And that person is going to charge him money that we could be using, for charitable purposes.”

“I don’t kill people, Gabe. You know that.”

“So I’ve heard.” Gabriel clicked his tongue, his face impassive. “Man was threatening his family.”

“I’m aware. Listen. I don’t have time for this.” Lucifer groped for his leather satchel, heavy with the things he would need this afternoon. “I got an appointment.”

“Yeah? Who with?”

“Sam Winchester, actually. The blind brother.” The satchel found, he slung it over his shoulder. He always felt better with the bag. It was like a badge of office—an assurance that no matter what anyone else thought, he had a right to be here, because if nothing else he was good at his job. “Keep an eye on the shop.”

“As always. Give Sam a kiss from me.”

Lucifer made a wrinkled face. “Sure. Just that easy.”

“Why not?”

Lucifer was at the door when he turned. “I don’t get to decide who lives or dies, Gabe. That’s God’s job. Not mine. You start thinking that you can judge people, who deserves to live and who doesn’t, you’re opening the door to a lot of very dangerous things.”

Gabe was still leaning on the desk. He smiled, but it was thin and somehow insubstantial. “I know,” he said. “Because that would be too easy, too, wouldn’t it?”

“Yeah. Basically.”

A dry laugh. “You’re a fucking nightmare, Luce.” He gestured airily at the door. “Go on. Go see
your brown-eyed boy toy. I’ll take care of everything over here.”
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

this chapter written by: Sarah

Warnings: alcoholism, depression, prejudice (vodou/voodoo based)

The gears slid together with slow, shuddering, certainty, like a microscopic constellation slipping into order. The smallest one went in the back and was smaller than a grain of corn. After the slick fragrant coating of oil had been brushed on, the most important thing was making sure that none of the cogs slipped. Trapped between two fragile needles of brass, the tiny gear snapped into place, almost silently. The black filament of the second hand jerked, then settled.

Dean closed his eyes when he fixed clocks. It didn’t make much of a difference in terms of actual vision, but he said it helped his fingers focus better. It was the same kind of physical sensitivity that had made him the best mechanic in his garage back before the war. With the tips of his fingers he could read the delicate scaled teeth of the wheels and the infinitesimal shifts in pressure in a way that did not require or benefit from sight. Everything by touch. He was like a man poring over a map, learning a new country through his skin.

“Looks good,” Sam said, wandering in the apartment. The door banged shut behind him.

“Thanks.” Dean reached for his tweezers, which were scrubbed so brightly they shone. “Bobby says he wants to pay me for it.”

Sam snorted, moving into the kitchen. “Of course he does.”

“I swear Bobby would pay me for breathing if he thought I would let him get away with it.” The tweezers clattered down beside the half-full bottle on the table.

Sam peered inside the pantry. “Why don’t you let him?”

“Pay me for breathing?”

“No, that sounds kind of extreme. For the clock. There are people who fix clocks for a living, it makes sense to let him pay you.”

“What? No.” Dean laughed sharply, with a touch of discomfort. “I like doing it and I’m bored. I’m not going to let him pay me for a favour he’s doing for me. That’s manipulative.”

There was another current running beneath this. Dean didn’t want Bobby to pay him because somehow that would be pity money, a charity gift for the poor little blind cripple who couldn’t do any real work and had to get by on shit like fixing clocks instead. Behind every kindness Dean now saw condescension, whether it was there or not. It was impossible that Bobby would want to pay him for a well-mended clock. That money would be an act of pity, the kind of pity that walked hand in hand with disgust, and that to Dean was worse than death.

Sam understood all this, sighed internally, and said “Okay,” in a carefully even voice. This was also a form of pity, but it was a harder one to object to. Dean shot his general direction a dark look and
was silent.

Then, after a moment, he said “What are you doing here, anyway? Shouldn’t you be out working for your new best friend?”

“I’m going there soon. Got off early at the Roadhouse, wanted to grab some food.” Sam felt around aimlessly in the pantry.

“Oh, hey--” Dean raised his hand from the tangle of gears. “If you find some of that ham from the market just--”

There was a hollow impact and then the horrible rolling crash of something heavy falling. Sam spun. Dean’s hand had struck the bottle and knocked it onto the floor. He stammered. “—put it on the— uh. Jesus fuck. Shit!”

A dark wet stain of beer was beginning to spread across the floorboards. Dean and Sam stood in paralyzed uncertainty for a moment. The neck of the bottle was cracked, with a spray of brown glass like sugar crystals floating in the liquid. Dean looked up, a brass wheel still between his fingers.

“Forgot that was there,” he muttered.

There was a dish towel thrown over the edge of the counter. Sam grabbed for it, feeling a familiar heavy dread gather in his throat. This was just fantastic. Things had been going so well and now this, and Dean would be here all afternoon cleaning it up and thinking about how he was stupid and useless, and the room would probably smell like beer for the foreseeable future too.

“Dean,” he said cautiously. “You know it’s not--”

“Whatever you’re about to say, yeah, I know already,” Dean replied flatly. He was on his hands and knees, feeling around him. His fingers brushed over the scatter of broken glass.

“You don’t have to do that,” Sam said quickly. “Let me take care of it.”

“You have to get to your job. I can do this. Give me the towel.”

It wasn’t worth wondering how Dean knew where the towel was. Dean knew where everything was, except on the rare and disastrous occasions when he didn’t. “I can be late. Listen, there’s broken glass. At least--”

“Sam, for God’s sake.” Dean laughed, a sound utterly without humour. “I can tell where the floor is wet, and you need to get to your damn job. Go. I don’t need your help here.”

Sam dithered helplessly by the kitchen, twisting the towel in his hands, and then gave up and handed it to Dean. Whether or not his help was needed, it would clearly not be accepted. He didn’t feel hungry anymore. Wordless, he left his brother kneeling on the floor, turned, and walked out.

On his way to Lucifer’s shop, a child threw a rock at him. At first it was nothing more than a buzz of motion to one side of his head. War reflexes took over and he ducked; the rock sailed harmlessly past him. The child, arm still raised, made a face like a snarl and disappeared. Sam could have sworn it was the same skinny kid who had smiled at him his first day in this neighbourhood. Things had changed. Clearly he was gaining a certain amount of notoriety simply by being attached to Lucifer. The people here might make use of the bokor, but they did not like him. He was a messenger of chaos and uncertainty. Even being his assistant merited distrust.
It didn’t matter, Sam decided. Lucifer was helping Dean and that was the only important thing. He could take an army of children with rocks if the treatments continued the way they had been. He wasn’t here to get people to like him.

Castiel was in the door when he arrived at the shop, staring out at the street in a slightly aimless manner.

“Hey, Cas,” Sam said, and gave him a smile. Cas smiled back in his strange uncertain way. Everything about Cas was a little uncertain, as if he was unused to human interaction and was still figuring out how it worked.

“Sam!” Lucifer roared from inside. “Get in here.”

The shop was, as usual, underlit and dirty. Lucifer was stacking books with ruthlessly crisp efficiency. “You’re late,” he said.

Sam shot a tired look at the clock. “By a minute.”

“That’s still a minute late.” A book slammed down onto the shelf. “Grab a glass. You’re making a cure-all today. Little old lady a few blocks down, thinks she’s dying. We’re giving her something to calm her nerves.”

“Shouldn’t you send her to a doctor?” Sam asked tentatively.

Lucifer gave him an impassive look. “I am her doctor.”

There was little to be said to that, so Sam reached for a slender bottle of green glass among Lucifer’s collection and listened to the trail of ingredients. “Jimson weed, honey, sulfur. Jimson and honey are over in the herb cabinet, sulfur’s in one of those little jars under the dropcloth. That’s where I keep the volatile chemicals, so be careful. No, don’t use the green bottle, we need to be able to see it when it’s mixed. Use the clear one.” The green bottle was whisked out of his hands and replaced with a smaller one of thick silvery mercury glass. “And don’t try to eat the jimson weed or anything stupid like that. It should be fine to touch, just keep it out of your mouth. It’s dangerous stuff.”

“Okay.” Sam could feel himself getting into the rhythm of the shop again. He liked this, the pounding ritual quality of the work, the constant stream of knowledge and lore. “How much should I use?”

“Fill the bottle. And be gentle with the mixing.” Lucifer slid a thin glass wand to him across the table. “Get moving.”

The jimson weed was ashy and crumbling, and the honey was rich, thick, and shining, with desiccated bits of comb floating in it. Sam squeezed a few fat drops into the bottle. “So this is what’s in a cure-all?”

“That it is.”

“Why can’t we just use one of these for Dean?”

“What, you think ‘cure-all’ is literal?” Another book landing heavily on the shelf. “Doesn’t work like that. It has its uses, but it’s not like God sees you walking around with a little bottle of chemicals and decides, okay, you are now automatically exempt from the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to. It’s valuable mostly because it makes people feel safe.”

Sam nodded. “It’s a placebo.”
“A what?”

“A placebo. Like the placebo effect. T.C. Graves wrote about it in The Lancet a few years ago.”

“You read The Lancet?”

“I spend a lot of time talking to doctors.”

Lucifer let out a quiet laugh. “Doctors. Right. The cure-all does have some practical effect, you know. It’s just primarily useful in a psychological way.”

“A placebo is only useful psychologically.”

“I thought as much.” Lucifer returned to the books. “After you get that mixed up we need to rub it on the fur of a black cat. Meg should be bringing one over soon.”

“Do you just keep a black cat on hand for moments like this?”

“Full of questions today, aren’t we,” Lucifer replied mildly. “I have no idea where Meg gets the cats from. Ask her if you’re that curious.”

As he reached up to slide a book in on a shelf above his head, his shirt twisted and there was a sudden warm flash of bare skin on his shoulder. Sam felt his face grow hot and was about to look down when something caught his eye. Draped across the flex and dip of Lucifer’s shoulder muscle, there was a fluid line of black ink, a lacework of elaborate markings dyed into the skin. It was difficult to see what it was supposed to be; it seemed to wrap his shoulder and disappear down his arm, and loop behind his neck on the other side. He had a tattoo. That should not have been so surprising, given his general attitude towards convention, but it was. Sam had known a number of sailors with tattoos, but he had never met anyone who worked primarily on dry land who had one, and for some reason he felt an interested stirring in his stomach.

“What’s your tattoo?” he asked, feeling a leap of excitement to hear out loud the question he had only half-intended to ask.

“What?” Lucifer looked around and noticed the failure of his shirt. “Oh. Yeah, I was wondering when you’d see that.”

“I know some people in the army who had tattoos. No civilians. Must be something pretty special.”

A quick unreadable look. “You don’t have any?”

“No, I don’t.”

Lucifer turned away from the books fully, his attention now diverted. He leaned back a little and smiled in a bitten, preoccupied, way.

Then he said, “Would you like to see it?”

Sam sat very still. He could hear the faint electric sound of his own heartbeat. “What?”

“Would you like to see the tattoo?”

Part of Sam’s brain informed him in a conversational tone that this was very odd and he should probably say no for his own good. The rest of him was too busy listening to the sudden quickening of his heartbeat.
“Yes,” he said quietly, and then “Please,” because it seemed polite. Why shouldn’t he say yes? The man had offered. And he just wanted to see what the tattoo looked like.

Lucifer regarded him with those beautiful cold eyes and then reached up and started to unbutton his shirt. Beneath the cloth Sam could see the dark hints and shiftings of the tattoo. The shirt fell from his shoulders and slid down to his hands. He stood naked to the waist, looking at Sam, expressionless.

The tattoo was a snake. Its tail lay in the fold of his elbow, and then curled up his arm to hang over his shoulder and brush his collarbone. It looped behind his neck, then trailed over the other shoulder and down the inside of his other arm. Its head lay in his pale forearm, sharp obsidian eyes and a faint veined flicker of tongue. It was done in thick deliberate lines of charred black ink, more the idea of a snake than an actual snake, its scales a liquid honeycomb against his skin. It was odd, mesmerizing. Despite the stylization, it seemed somehow alive and aware, like at any moment it might peel away from his arms and open its languid, savage, mouth to show its luminous fangs.

It was also beautiful, and that was what Sam said. “It’s beautiful.”

“Thank you,” Lucifer replied. He tugged his shirt back on and began to do up the buttons. “A friend of mine did it for me. Took almost a year to complete.”

“It’s very,” said Sam, and stopped, not sure how to finish that thought.

Thankfully Lucifer did not seem to care. “Snakes are very important,” he said, his fingers on the buttons. “Damballah, the creator of life, is a serpent, as is his wife Ayida Weddo. He presides over the sky and the intellect and is the protector of the crippled, which is obviously a useful trait in this line of work. It was Damballah, as a snake, who created the earth, and he and Ayida Weddo live in all human beings. Their nectar is semen and breast milk. Snakes are creatures of healing and prophecy. They have venom, but they also know the secrets of earth and heaven.” He left the top two buttons open. “Are you finished?”

“Oh. No, not yet.” Sam jabbed half-heartedly at the cure-all. His mind was wild with snakes, snakes restless among the stars, snakes underwater and in the black embrace of the earth. That was the best part of this job, these new things that Lucifer told him every day. He had traveled the entire country and been to France besides, but the world was expanding in new directions that he had never known existed.

The sulfur was a fine soft powder, the bright yellow of pollen. He tilted a fine stream of it into the bottle and then, very carefully, brushed it off his fingers.

“You know,” said Lucifer abruptly, “there’s a theatre near here that’s showing the new Charlie Chaplin picture tomorrow afternoon. Called the Gold Rush, I think. The picture, not the theatre.”

“Is it?” Sam replied, stirring the sulfur in cautiously and wondering why Lucifer was telling him this. He would be working all tomorrow afternoon, most of it here, so there wasn’t much point in letting him know about something he was inevitably going to miss.

“And I was planning to go,” Lucifer added.

That was new. If Lucifer was going there wouldn’t be anyone at the shop. “Does that mean I get a day off?”

“If you want. Actually, Meg and Castiel are coming alone, and you’re welcome to join us.”

On the counter at home, there was a small jar with a scattering of coins inside. These were the remnants of Sam’s paycheck, after rent and food and treatment, which could conceivably be used for
non-essential things. At this moment he was doing some quick mental calculations about whether or not he had enough money to buy a movie ticket and also whether or not he valued the opportunity of going to the pictures with his boss enough for that.

Then Lucifer added “That brother of yours can come too, if he wants.”

That thought changed things somewhat. Dean hadn’t been out of the apartment for weeks, orbiting in his own world of petty work and alcohol and depression. A movie would be good for him. Other people. Sound. Fresh air. The movie itself would be largely wasted on him, but the company would do him good.

Two movie tickets would basically clean out their disposable income, but fuck it. It was just sitting there gathering dust. Like Dean, honestly.

“Okay,” he said. “That sounds nice.”

A smile broke across Lucifer’s face. “Great. Come over tomorrow at the regular time and we’ll all go there together.”

“You could just give me directions to the theatre,” Sam suggested.

“Faster this way. Besides, it’ll make a nice walk.” Lucifer’s thin smile was touched with warmth, and Sam had the feeling that he understood the real reason Sam had agreed to come, and was choosing not to say so. That should have made Sam uncomfortable. It didn’t.

That was when Meg arrived with an angry bundle of black fur and claws in a basket, took a look around the room, and said, with a wry smile, “Am I interrupting anything?”

Cornelius was at his stand when Sam emerged from the shop, and when he saw him he waved. “Hey! Mister! I got something for you.”

Sam hesitated, but the man was looking straight at him, so he headed over. He was fairly sure that the smut was about to come out from behind the table, but Cornelius just gave him a clever curling smile and produced a thin book wrapped in a rag.

“The water damage was bad. No one else is going to want it,” he said, as Sam unwrapped the rag cautiously. “And I thought it might be interesting to you.”

The book had clearly been soaked and then badly dried. The pages were rippled into set, dramatic, waves, and the cover was grey with rot. Dim print read THE MYSTERIOUS STRANGER, and, beneath it, MARK TWAIN.

“Twain,” said Sam, startled.


“Again? Cornelius, I can’t—”

“No—no, I will hear no arguments. No one else will take it.” Cornelius pressed the book into his hands with a creased smile. “You’ll be doing me a favour getting it off my table.”

Sam hesitated and then took it. “Thank you. Thank you so much. I swear I will actually buy something from you at some point.”
Cornelius shrugged. “I have a lot of overstock. Would be a shame for it to go to waste.”

After a few more thanks, Sam left the table, turning the book over in his hands. It was very light. Due to the hours of downtime in the morning at the Roadhouse, the least successful speakeasy in New Orleans, he was almost done with The Great God Pan, which was proving to be a good but extremely strange book. He would have needed something else soon anyway. He flicked idly through the pages. The print was blurred, especially near the back, but it was still largely intelligible.

“It’s a good book, that,” said the man in the doorway.

Sam glanced over, startled. The man was short, ranging into middle age, with a round face and a stubbly crop of beard. His hair was dark and clipped short and high. He wore a long coat of black oilskin. His eyes were quick, deft, shining—bird’s eyes, aware of everything and revealing nothing. He stepped lazily out of the doorway, tossing his coat back.

“Have you read it?” Sam asked cautiously.

“Oh, yeah. Quite a few times.” The man’s voice was low, with a slight, rasping, accent that sounded British. “Good book. If you like them a bit existentially terrifying.”

“Sounds good to me.” Sam turned the corner. The man walked along beside him, hands in his pockets, staring amiably at nothing.

After a moment, the man said “You know, there’s a school of thought that suggests the vodou loa are fallen angels.”

All the nerves in Sam’s body stood upright like hairs. Be reasonable, he told himself. This city is full of practitioners. It doesn’t mean anything. “I didn’t know that.”

“Mmm. Most common among the rabid Protestants, of course. The true servites don’t need those kinds of excuses. The loa are loa. No equivocating.” He made an unusual chuffing noise, somewhere between a laugh and a cough.

In Sam’s head, the child from earlier bared its teeth, clutching a rock.

“Did you say what your name was?” he asked, as evenly as he could.

“No,” the man replied calmly. “There’s a bokor lives somewhere around here, isn’t there? Very unusual name.”

Sam turned and stopped, holding the book tighter than he knew he should have. “What do you want?”

“Ah.” The man clapped his hands together with a brisk impenetrable smile. “Direct. I like that. Very well, let’s be direct. What does your master know about me?”

“He’s not my master,” Sam snapped. “And I don’t know what he knows about you and I wouldn’t tell you if I did. Which I don’t. Who are you?”

“A friend. No one.”

“Give me a name.”

The man sighed. “So predictable. I have a number of names and no intention of telling you any of them. You can just call me ‘Big Git In The Coat’ for now, if you like.”
“Look,” Sam said, pinning his heartbeat down with a great effort of will. “If you won’t tell me who you are there’s nothing I can do for you. I don’t know anything useful and I’m not going to tell you what I do know. Ask Lucifer if you want. I’m just going home. Okay?”

“Compelling,” the man said lightly. “Go home if you want. I don’t think I’m doing anything to stop you.”

Sam turned and walked away down the narrow ribbon of sidewalk, feeling his fingernails chew into the damp cover of the book. From behind him, the man called “It is a good book, you know. I wasn’t lying about that.”

Sam didn’t turn around. He could feel a toxic swirl of fear and aggression boiling inside him. This was the first day he had been personally affected because he worked for Lucifer. It shouldn’t have been a surprise—he should really have expected it sooner, with what he was getting involved in—but it was. A sudden shock, like a slap in the face. He wondered who the man was, what he really wanted. It probably wasn’t anything good.

He only looked back once, at the end of the street. The man was gone and the street was deserted. The tall cold walls of the houses reached up to the sky. He tucked the book under his arm and went home.
“He’s not here,” Meg said irritably, staring at the clock.

Lucifer sighed. “I kind of noticed that myself, Megan.”

She shot him a tight glare. “Don’t. You said he would be here ten minutes ago.”

“You did,” Castiel added. “I remember that very clearly.”

Lucifer looked darkly at his shoes. “Thank you for that. I happen to remember it as well.”

“So he’s not coming,” Meg said.

“No, he’s coming. I’m pretty sure of that.” He had seemed to wake up a bit more when it was suggested that he bring his brother. He wanted to come, Lucifer had no doubt. Why he wasn’t here was a more complicated question.

There was a moment where they were all quiet, staring at the clock, as it ticked numbly along in the silence.

Meg said, “Don’t you know where this guy lives?”

Sam’s apartment did not have a doorbell. Lucifer rapped sharply on the door, feeling it shudder in its frame. There was no response. He knocked again.

From within, a bleary voice yelled “Yeah! Yeah, I’m coming. Hold on.”

It was not Sam’s voice. Meg’s mouth twisted meaningfully. A flutter of footsteps and the door jerked open. Milky, clouded, eyes stared blankly out.

“Yeah,” Dean said again. “Who is it?”
“Dean, it’s me. Lucifer. Sam was going to be at the shop today.”

“Oh, shit, yeah. Sorry. Just a second.” He threw his head back over his shoulder. “Sam! Sam the man! You got company!”

There was an incoherent moan from the back of the apartment. Dean turned back to them. “He’ll be out in a minute. Late night at the Roadhouse turned into an early morning at the roadhouse. Apparently he can still play the piano while drunk. You know how it is.”

“And how,” Meg said.

Dean’s sightless eyes slid over to her. “Hello. You didn’t say you brought a friend.”

Lucifer bit back a sigh, forseeing immense stress in his future if these two spent any time together. “Dean, this is Meg Masters, my assistant. Meg, this is Dean Winchester, whose brother you have met.”

“Assistant? Sweetie, don’t make me laugh.” Meg reached out, and, with an unusual degree of tact, took Dean’s hand so that he wouldn’t have to reach for hers. “Hi. I’m Meg. Pleasure.”

“Pleasure is all mine.” Dean smiled at her, a smile that was oddly sweet and boyish despite his glazed eyes. “See, now’s the time when I’d normally ask to feel your face, but I can tell just from hearing your voice that you’re beautiful, so you get out of it this time.”

Lucifer rolled his eyes and stared at the wall. Meg was smiling, clearly amused and aware of what was happening, but a little flattered nonetheless. “Well, I hate to blow my own horn, but you have a remarkably accurate grasp on voices.”

“I like to think so.” Dean was still holding her hand. “So you work with Lucifer? Are you a vodou priestess? I’ve been hoping I would meet one.”

“She’s not a priestess,” said Castiel. “None of us are connected with the church. Lucifer is a bokor. The houngans despise him, and us for associating with him.”

Lucifer suppressed a flinch. There it was; Cas’s flat, merciless, honesty. It wasn’t the most appealing introduction.

Dean’s face went wide with surprise and he let go of Meg’s hand. “Hey, hey, wait. There’s someone else here?”

“Dean, this is Castiel Novak, one of the few worthwhile members of my family. Cas, Dean. Etcetera, etcetera.” Lucifer propped himself against the wall, wondering how long it was going to take Sam to get out here and how many things could go wrong in that time.

“Jesus, man.” Dean laughed roughly. “You don’t have a lot to say, do you? I didn’t even know you were there.”

“The conversation did not seem to require my input,” Castiel replied.

Dean laughed again, but with an edge of curiosity. “What did you say your name was?”

“Castiel Novak. Sometimes abbreviated to Cas.”

“Castiel. That’s unusual.”

“It’s the name of an angel,” Lucifer provided. “Sort of a family tradition.”
“It’s not really an angel’s name. I haven’t found any record of any angel named Castiel anywhere,” Cas said. “I suspect it was a mistake.”

“So you’re a fake angel,” Dean said, and he smiled a little, a more open smile than the one he used on Meg, as if he was genuinely pleased with this thought.

A brush of confusion passed over Castiel’s face. “I suppose so.”

“Dean?” Sam emerged from the recesses of the apartment, wiping his hands on his shirt. His eyes were stained with exhaustion and his hair stood out in a brown wilderness around his head. “What —“

His eyes focused on Lucifer’s face and understanding crept in. “Damn it.”

“Sam,” said Meg cheerfully. “You’re late. Significantly.”

“I’m sorry. I’m really sorry.” Sam swallowed thickly. “It was just—“

“Late night. We know. Dean was very helpful.” Lucifer made a brief gesture at a smile. “All is forgiven. We still have time, if you’re ready.”

“Ready for what?” Dean said suspiciously. “I thought you were going to work.”

“Right.” A faint twist of trepidation in Sam’s expression. “Actually, I’m going to the pictures with Lucifer. The new Chaplin.”

“Are you,” said Dean, not looking any less suspicious.

“It’s called the Gold Rush,” Cas supplied helpfully.

“Is it.”

“Yeah, it is,” Sam said. “And by ‘I’, I mean ‘us’. You and me. Get your coat.”

Dean stared fixedly in Sam’s direction and Sam stared back with eyes like bullets. The silence was suffocating. For a moment Lucifer worried that they were about to be made witnesses to the strangest double murder the world had ever seen. Then there was a quick and skillful bit of sibling telepathy, and Dean turned back to them with a big glassy grin. “Okay. Let’s go to the movies.”

“Very good,” Cas said uncertainly. Lucifer shot a glance at Sam. He was smiling quietly, and he caught Lucifer’s gaze. His eyes were the color of dark chocolate. Lucifer looked away.

The movie theatre was cramped and confused, a little two-cent place mostly frequented by kids looking for a place to neck and the extremely old. The grimy marquee advertised THE GOLD RUSH in tarnished letters. Near was a picture of the Little Tramp—bruised eyes, ragged moustache, that pinched sooty face that somehow seemed to hold all the miseries and trials of the human race. Everyone loved Chaplin because he was sad. It was wonderful to have a star who was sad as well as funny, and made being sad okay. The bored ticket agent took their money and shuffled them into the theatre. The seats were ratted crimson velvet. Lucifer found himself on one end, beside Dean, who was mostly interested in talking to Meg. Sam was at the other end, speaking quietly with Cas. Maximum separation, Lucifer thought wryly. The theatre was largely empty. There was a teenage couple getting lively in the back and a man in the front row, and that was about the extent of it. The lights flickered and flared. The screen filled with grainy, unfocused, light. The movie began.
It was a good movie. Funny, compassionate, engaging. Chaplin was at his best and the other actors formed a solid complement. Lucifer knew this because he was watching it for a little while before he became aware that he was not in fact the last person on the row. There was someone sitting in the seat next to him, and he had a fairly good idea who it was even before he looked.

The faded lights of the screen played across Gabriel’s face like the dappling of rain on a window. He gave Lucifer a quick smile, and then turned his gaze back to the screen, apparently totally engrossed in the movie.

“Isn’t this amazing?” he said after a minute. “We can watch other people on camera from miles and years away. It’s like magic.”

Lucifer had to wait to reply until a roar of laughter rose from the audience. “Gabe, I’m out. There are other people here,” he whispered. “You know I can’t talk right now.”

Gabriel gave him a faintly dismissive look. “Are you?” he said. “And how long do you think that’s going to last?”

Lucifer stared at him. “What?”

“How is he enjoying this?” Gabriel nodded over at Dean. “Seems like it would be wasted on him.”

“I don’t know. He’s mostly doing it as a favour to his brother.”

“That’s nice of him.”

Lucifer watched him for a moment, and then said “You’re acting very strangely.”

Gabriel smiled at him, a distant, pale, smile he didn’t know. “You’re talking to a dead man,” he said. “Don’t you think that’s strange?”

Then he was gone. Dean, whose hearing was also going to waste on this activity, elbowed Lucifer and asked if he was all right. Lucifer said yes, absently. It wasn’t like Gabe to disappear like that. It especially wasn’t like Gabe to show up, be obnoxiously cryptic, and then disappear like that. They would have to talk when he got back to the shop.

The movie reeled on. Lucifer could not pay attention. He squinted at the matted velvet arm of his chair. Waves of laughter came and went as the plot unrolled on the screen in a jerky wash of black and white. It would no doubt have been very entertaining if he had been paying attention. He felt odd. So many things were happening at once, around him and inside him. All the elements were coming together for something to happen, but he didn’t know what it was, or how to prepare for it. He hated it, that kind of vulnerability. It made him feel like there were things moving under his skin.

With a canned brass fanfare, the movie drew to a close. There was a lazy scatter of applause from around the theatre. The man in the front row was more enthusiastic, clapping intently as the screen faded out. The lights went dim as the credits started to roll. Pops and flecks of interference crossed the words like punctuation. Lucifer stretched and flexed his hands behind his head.

“Well, I assume that was good,” Dean said dryly, and Meg laughed.

“That guy in the front row tried to talk to me yesterday,” Sam said. He had materialized behind Lucifer’s chair. His voice was low and tense. Lucifer glanced up; he had not seen Sam’s approach. “What?”

“That guy, down in the front. I saw him in the street yesterday.” There was the shadow of trouble
across his eyes. “He tried to ask me about you.”

Lucifer’s breath stopped. “What did he ask?”

“He wanted to know if you knew about him. He wouldn’t tell me his name.”

“Ah,” Lucifer replied. He realized with a surprising lack of nerves that he was now probably less than thirty feet away from the other bokor of New Orleans. He was extremely angry, angry in a way that crystallized in his veins like snow. Attacking him was one thing. Attempting to reach him through Sam—through any of his people—was very different. That was not fair play. That demanded a response. It occurred to him that this might be why the other man had done it that way.

He stood, feeling the cold perfect rage move through his body, almost like pleasure. “Get everyone else outside, will you?” he said to Sam. “I want to have a word with this gentleman. Go get ice cream or something.”

A crease of worry found its way onto Sam’s mouth. “Lucifer—“

“It’s just a talk. I’ll be fine.” Lucifer stepped out of the row into the aisle. “And I’m sure he will too.”

The man was watching the dull roll of the credits as Lucifer walked down the aisle. Behind him he heard the muted sounds of the others making their way out of the theatre. They would be alone. That was really for the best. He didn’t know yet what he was going to do. He reached the man’s seat and they stood together for a moment in the ghostly glow of the screen.

“I thought that was rather good,” the man said, finally, looking up. “Didn’t you think that was good?”

“I wasn’t paying attention,” Lucifer replied tonelessly.

“Mm? Shame. It was worth seeing.” The man’s smile was rich and curling. “Well, you can always go see it again.”

“That boy is working for me to pay off his debt,” Lucifer said. “He asked me to heal his brother, which I am doing, and in exchange he moves boxes and mixes things. He doesn’t know anything.”

“I established that yesterday,” the man said calmly. “Sit down, will you? You standing, it’s very stressful. The height difference and all.”

Lucifer sat. The chair sagged underneath him. The man watched him for a moment, the pallid screen light reflecting blindly across his eyes.

“My name is Crowley,” he said finally.

“You know who I am,” Lucifer replied.

“Yes, I do.” Crowley glanced down at his hands, picking idly at his broad fingernails. “And I assume you also know who I am, or at least what I do. Seems we have a lot in common.”

“I’m not interested in what we have in common,” Lucifer said. He could feel the anger, precise and terrible as a needle. “You attempted to intimidate one of my people. I don’t appreciate that. If you have questions, address them to me. I am happy to speak with you. I am happy to help you in whatever way you require.”

“Thank you.” Crowley was smiling faintly down at his fingernails. “That’s quite generous. I feel
overwhelmed."

“Listen to me,” Lucifer said quietly. “I have no interest in being your enemy. Honestly, I have no interest in having anything to do with you. You and I can exist very peacefully and never see each other again. I have a dedicated clientele base and I’m sure you’ll have one of your own soon. Do you understand? I don’t want to hurt you.”

“And yet here come to the threats,” Crowley said idly.

Lucifer smiled, feeling the rage curl inside his gut like hunger. “Exactly. I don’t want to fight you, but if you decide you want to fight me, you will lose, and badly. This is my city. If you make it necessary for me to hurt you, I will. I am a servant of the Mysteries, of Damballah, of Marinette and the Barons and the Mother of Graveyards. You are not afraid of me now. You should be. You will be.”

Crowley lifted his head and gazed vacantly at the screen, still smiling. After a moment, he said “This is all beginning to sound remarkably familiar. Do you really think this is the first time some jumped-up child has tried to threaten me? I’ve been to a lot of cities, with a lot of different flavours of competition, and I have come out of all of them to sit with you here. Now, I don’t know about you, but what that tells me is that listening to your posturing is sort of pointless.”

“Oh, I don’t expect you to listen.” Lucifer pulled his lips back, his smile spreading wide and hungry. “This is really more for my sake than yours.”

“Is it? Do tell.”

“This way.” Lucifer said, “if you try to attack me, I can say that I did warn you beforehand. It’s not my fault that you didn’t listen.”

Crowley’s smile took on a slightly flat quality. “Very clever.”

“I hope so.” Lucifer leaned back in his seat. “Honestly, Crowley, I don’t want to fight you. The best way this can go for both of us is happy estrangement. We carry out our trades on opposite sides of town. If I see you in the street, I’ll nod and you’ll smile, and that’ll be the end of it. Don’t try to intimidate my people and I’ll do you the same courtesy. How does that sound?”

Crowley was still smiling, but it was a bit fixed, like a picture of a smile. He sighed and shook his head, slowly, as if lamenting the foolishness of youth. Then he reached into the depths of his coat. “Here.”

Lucifer’s hands clenched. “What’s that?”

“Calm down, darling. It’s a gift.” The hand emerged, with something fragile tucked within it. “A token of friendship, as it were.”

The thing in his fingers was delicate, bony, as if it were made of black wire. Thin bristles, a cluster of jointed legs, glittering beaded eyes. It was a spider, Lucifer realized. A dried spider hung on a piece of scarlet string, perfectly preserved. Its cluster of wet black eyes gazed mindlessly at him.

He had seen many things like this—fetishes, charms. But for some reason this one sent something unpleasant squirming down his spine.

“Thank you,” he said stiffly, and lifted it out of Crowley’s palm by the slender tail of the thread. The spider hung and twisted weightlessly.
“Oh, it’s a gift,” Crowley said airily. “Think nothing of it. Peace, then?”

“Peace,” said Lucifer. It was more of a question than an agreement.

Outside the theatre, Meg said “So what was that?”

“Confusing, mostly,” Lucifer admitted. He looked down at the brittle shadow of the spider fetish and turned it carefully over and over in his hands.
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

this chapter written by: Mer

Warnings: spirit possession, communing with the dead, implied past character death, painful flirtation, alcohol use

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

As Sam stepped up onto the front porch and lifted his hand to knock on the door, he heard a quiet, one-sided conversation going on inside the small shack. He hesitated with his hand over the polished, iron knocker. The last time he’d walked in on Lucifer talking to himself, the bokor had been deep in conversation with a spirit, and…well, it had been an awkward encounter, and Sam honestly didn’t care to have to experience it again. Not that it was a bad thing to walk in on your business partner seemingly carrying on a conversation with thin air; it was simply that Sam would rather avoid interrupting anything personal or important regarding Lucifer’s life or his relationship with the spirit that he was supposedly chatting with.

There was little point in sitting outside in the humid, New Orleans air, though, and the idea of lounging on a voodoo bokor’s front porch for any period of time seemed a bit…unappealing. The longer Sam contemplated this, however, the more it felt like he was inhaling water vapor instead of air, and the idea of going inside and potentially interrupting some sort of séance felt increasingly comfortable. He reached tapped the knocker’s handle against the old, wooden door. The talking inside stopped, and Lucifer’s voice rose in a muffled invitation from inside.

When Sam stepped through the doorway, however, he was greeted with an empty front room. The furniture had been moved again; the table had been rotated 90 degrees and shoved up against the wall and in front of the doorway that led to the stairwell. The floor had chalk-drawn symbols all over it, and the bookshelf had been rearranged so that the books were all organized in order of their covers’ colors. The room smelled like burnt sage and red wine.

“Lucifer?” Sam called out into the shack.

“Don’t worry about the mess, Sam,” the bokor’s voice replied from the direction of the back room. “Just try not to erase any of the chalk!”

“Sure thing,” Sam said. His eyes scanned over the floor as he mapped out his path around the chalk sigils. He resisted expressing his curiosity about them aloud. Everything made him wary, these days, and though Lucifer was patient and kind, he still was deeply embedded in the local voodoo culture and community. Sam simply couldn’t give the bokor any more reasons to believe that he was interested in it any more than he’d already let on. He wasn’t sure exactly why he needed to assert this; it just felt like the right thing to do.

Inching around the room cautiously was really not nearly as easy as Sam had anticipated, and he had to dodge the chalk lines now and then when he would stumble or trip over his own clumsy feet. Lucifer’s voice drifted in and out of earshot as Sam tiptoed over to the curtain between the two main
rooms. A bitter and humorous thought crossed Sam’s mind as he imagined walking in on the bokor: would there be a client with him, or would no one else be with him again?

Sam stepped into the room and had to hold back a smile as he saw a familiar scene: Lucifer sat at the small, round table, his eyes closed, his brow furrowed, his hair sticking up and in every which way, and a thin sheen of sweat on his forehead and neck…and he was alone. The blanket on the bed at the far side of the room was rumpled like someone had been tossing and turning on top of it. The window on the door was covered, as per usual, and some of Lucifer’s clothing had been tossed around in piles all over the floor. It honestly looked like a twister had hit the place.

“No,” Lucifer said sternly, his eyes still firmly closed. “I said, ‘no,’ and that’s final. I don’t care what interpretation you’re taking.”

Sam smiled at the bokor’s casual manner. The only time that he had ever really seen Lucifer truly relaxed before this point was the last time he had talked to the spirit he called “Gabriel”. Sam wasn’t exactly convinced of Gabriel’s existence, but he enjoyed seeing the way Lucifer reacted to the spirit’s supposed presence. The blonde became carefree and casual with how he conducted his movements, how his tone of voice fluctuated and diverged from his usual calm and steady range, and how he allowed facial expressions to slip through the cracks in his normally postured presence. It was…kind of a relief, actually, to see Lucifer like this. Sam sometimes forgot the man was human when they were alone together. Gabriel reminded him that the bokor was just another fellow, after all. Well, just another fellow who was talented in the ways of voodoo practices, to be precise.

“You can be a real pain sometimes, you know that?” Lucifer grumbled to the air after a long moment of silence.

“Hi, Gabriel,” Sam said to the room as he strolled across the floor, attempting to pick up some of the mess along the way.

Lucifer glanced at Sam and raised a curious eyebrow before grimacing and slurring that, “Gabriel says hello.” He then winced as if someone had made a sudden, loud noise. Sam failed to hold back an amused grin.

“No, I am not saying that,” Lucifer exclaimed. “Stop it. You’re not nearly as clever as you think you are.”

He opened and closed his mouth like he had been cut off from something he was about to say. Silence fell over the room for a moment. Lucifer let out a heavy sigh.

“Yeah, well, that was one thing, okay? You could guess one thing. That doesn’t exactly make you Copernicus, does it, now? You shouldn’t be in my business, in any case… I swear. Little brothers…”

“What about little brothers?” Sam mused.

“I meant—I mean—I…you know what I mean.” The bokor waved his hand in Sam’s general direction.

“Plus,” Lucifer continued, “you are hardly the little brother of your family.”

“Size-wise, I suppose that that is true,” Sam conceded.

“Some little brothers like to stick around longer than their normally allowed time just to try to tell their elders what to do,” Lucifer stated pointedly.
“Wait,” Sam said, dumping the wadded-up clothing that he had collected off of the floor into a pile on the bed, “so Gabriel’s your brother?”

“Yes,” Lucifer replied. He looked up at Sam again and frowned. “Didn’t I tell you that?”

“Not that I remember.”

“Oh,” the bokor said with a frown, “I see. My apologies.”

His head suddenly whipped to the side as if he were staring at someone else sitting next to him and said, “No, I’m not sure that that’s—I mean, yes, eventually, but not now…You are very good at that, actually, so I wouldn’t put it past you. Remember last October?…Yes, I do still remember that.”

Sam sat on the edge of the unmade bed and watched the one-sided conversation. He smiled at the bokor’s expression and the way he sat, how his body was at attention and at ease at the same time while a comically sarcastic-looking frown contorted his face. It was almost as if he didn’t care that Sam saw him like this, relaxed and uncaring.

“Gabriel, don’t, alright? I know you don’t care what I have to say on the matter, but I—come on. That just isn’t okay.”

“What are you arguing about?” Sam asked. Lucifer looked at him again, a residual glare of irritation still on display, but not directed at Sam’s confusion.

“Gabriel wishes to meet you, and I wish for him to drop the subject.”

Sam hummed in response, unsure as to what meeting Gabriel would entail, exactly. If a voodoo bokor was worried about something regarding any spirit, however, Sam wasn’t about to question that judgement.

“I don’t care!” Lucifer said to the space where Gabriel must have been. Sam shook his head and flopped over onto the bed with a relaxed sigh. He’d wait until Lucifer wasn’t occupied to try and get to work. The man tended to become irritable when interrupted, and Sam didn’t want to be on the receiving end of that. He tuned out the sound of the conversation and tried to relax his muscles as best as he could. Knots had worked their way into his shoulders and neck over the course of the past few weeks, all because of the stress and frustration over Dean’s discouraged attitude and his more frequent trips out to the marketplace to retrieve ingredients for Lucifer’s various projects. Bending over in a garden while under the hot sun, picking herbs, planting new ones, and weeding took a greater toll on his body than he had expected it to. When there was a low supply of candles—a much more common problem than Sam had initially expected it to be—he would have to make new ones, cutting the wicks to just the right lengths, mixing the wax and color solutions together, and filling the molds one after the other for entire afternoons. Being an assistant for an infamous bokor was demanding work.

Of course, just as he managed to relax, Sam began to hear Lucifer’s half-conversation drift back into focus once more.

“Gabriel, you’re really not helping me make any decisions with all of this—this talk, alright?”

There was a moment of silence as Lucifer allowed his brother to speak.

“I will,” he replied eventually. “Yes, Gabriel. I’ll be alright. Don’t worry so much. That’s my job, you hear?...Yeah, yeah. I will. See you later.”

The room went quiet. Sam opened his eyes and peeked at Lucifer, who had leaned over the table and
rested there with his elbows planted on the surface just in front of him and his head sitting heavily in his hands. Was it truly that exhausting to connect with the spirits? Sam thought over this as he watched the bokor take slow, deep breaths. Maybe it was just exhausting to talk to his brother. He had said that it was his job to worry...but over what, exactly? Was there a reason for him to worry for Gabriel’s sake, or had he said that just because that’s what older brothers think that they are supposed to say?

“I’m sorry that I couldn’t wrap that up earlier,” Lucifer said, breaking up Sam’s internal monologue.

“It’s okay. I don’t really mind.” Sam sat up and looked over at the blonde. He was clearly still buzzed from the wine that he had consumed before Sam arrived. Lucifer sat up again in his chair and swayed ever so slightly from side to side as he secured his position; he ran a hand lazily through his hair, making it stick up in haphazard spikes, and he flashed a bitter smile Sam’s way.

“I’m sorry for Gabriel, then.”

“I can’t exactly hear him,” Sam pointed out, “so any embarrassing brotherly issues probably went over my head. No worries.”

“Of course,” Lucifer laughed lightly. “I forget that sometimes.”

“Gabriel wanted to meet me, though?”

Lucifer frowned and nodded, but didn’t say anything.

“What would be wrong with a meeting?” Sam asked. “Is it the whole obnoxious little brother thing, or…?”

“Yes. Precisely.” Lucifer sighed. “He has practically no verbal filter, so there’s no telling what he will say or do.”

“Oh.”

Lucifer met Sam’s gaze and smiled apologetically.

“He seems to like you, though, if that’s any consolation.”

“That’s good, I suppose.”

“If he didn’t like you,” Lucifer explained, “we would have a problem.”

“How so?” Sam asked.

“He was always the trickster of the family,” the bokor said with a wry smile. “I don’t think I need to say more than that.”

Sam recalled the sort of activity that supposedly surrounded poltergeists and unsettled spirits and nodded in agreement with Lucifer’s conclusion—a happy ghost was always better than an irritated one. He didn’t necessarily believe that ghosts existed, of course, but he was willing to suspend his disbelief for long enough to have listened to his father’s drunken rants about vengeful spirits and the likes back when he was younger. It wasn’t that Sam was superstitious at heart; it was just that he didn’t know what to believe and what not to. If Gabriel had been a trickster in life, though, imagining him in death…Sam tried not to think about it too much.

“Woah.” Lucifer mumbled quietly and swayed forward. He caught himself before he could fall and
braced himself by resting his hands on his knees.

“You okay?” Sam asked. Is this normal?

“I’m…I’m a bit light-headed. I should be—oh no no no, come on.” Lucifer leaned back in his seat again and closed his eyes tightly.

“What is it?” Sam’s tone became a concerned one at this. This is definitely not normal, then.

“Just a warning,” Lucifer blurted out, “I’m about to act very strangely, and I don’t want you to do anything about it. Just let me go through the motions, and then I—”

He stopped speaking—stopped moving—abruptly, as if his whole body was frozen. His eyes went wide, and he took in one deep, shuddering breath before suddenly relaxing his entire body. The bokor’s head tipped back so that his neck was bent over the chair’s backrest. His breath slowly and smoothly leaked out of him and it trickled away to nothing as the air in his lungs left completely.
Sam sat still and watched with confusion as Lucifer’s icy blue eyes rolled back in his head before being hidden once again by his pale eyelids. For a long moment, neither one of the men in the room
moved. The only sounds came from the birds in the trees outside of the rickety, old shack. Sam got up after around half a minute to cautiously observe the blonde in an attempt to find signs of life. He had been instructed to not do anything about it, but if he was in trouble…

His eyes snapped open. Sam jumped in reaction to the sudden movement and stepped back, relieved that the bokor was alive (despite the fact that the man hadn’t taken a breath since he let out that long, eerie sigh, earlier).

“Jesus!” Sam exclaimed. “Don’t scare me like that, Lucifer.”

The bokor didn’t reply, though. He sat upright again and lifted his hands to examine them, and stared at them as if they were foreign appendages attached to the wrong body. Sam watched as Lucifer flexed his fingers slowly, then bent them again like he was testing them out. He took a deep breath in and released it normally. Lucifer’s face remained emotionless as his eyes scanned over the room.

Sam cleared his throat to get the bokor’s attention. Lucifer turned his head quickly to the side as if he’d only just realized that Sam was still there with him. As he looked up and down Sam’s form, a look of curiosity slowly decorated his face.

“…Lucifer?” Sam asked. “Are you feeling—?”

“Sam!” the bokor exclaimed with almost childish glee. His head shot up so he could look at Sam in the eyes.

“Yes,” Sam replied slowly, “that’s me.”

“Golly,” the blonde sighed, acting strangely expressive. He held his hands out as if presenting Sam to the rest of the room, and he beamed.

“I’m sorry?” Sam asked, unsure of how he should respond to that particular reaction.

“He wasn’t lying when he said you were a big one!”

Sam frowned.

“Oh, sorry!” Lucifer said with a cringe. “You haven’t met me yet. Of course. Your buddy here’s acting all weird and all I’m doing is causing you more confusion.” He jutted his hand out and straightened up his posture. Sam took the hand into his own and shook it hesitantly.

“The name’s Gabriel. Gabriel Shurley.” The bokor said this with a smile that crinkled the skin by his eyes and pulled his muscles back tight with enthusiasm.

“Gabriel?” Sam asked, unsure that he had heard him correctly.

“Wearing my brother’s meat suit, yes.”

Sam released his hand.

“Sorry, what?”

“You’re new, right?”

Sam nodded.

“So,” Lucifer replied, “you probably haven’t seen too many possessions before, have you?”
Sam shook his head. Possession…that certainly made more sense than, say, multiple personalities or some of the other ridiculous theories his mind was trying to come up with. He put aside his doubt, again, and decided to play along. Lucifer could be messing with him, for all he knew, just to see how far he could suspend his disbelief (or to see how gullible he really was). Sam had to admit to himself, however, that he had never seen the man act like this before, even when in a strange mood or deeply under the influence of alcohol. This…this was new.

“Well,” Gabriel continued, “Luci’s locked away in a bit of a sleep-like state right now. He won’t be too happy with me when I leave, but I wanted to meet this assistant he’s talked so much about.”

“It’s—um—a pleasure to meet you, then, Gabriel,” Sam said.

“Sit down, Samsquatch,” Gabriel offered and gestured towards the edge of the bed where Sam had previously been sitting. “Tell me about yourself.”

“Alright,” Sam replied, “what do you want to know, exactly?”

“Luci’s told me very little about anything other than your looks, the way you act around him, and your general feelings towards his practices, so how about…how about you tell me why you’re working with my brother in the first place?”

“He hasn’t mentioned that?”

Gabriel shook his head—Lucifer’s head, technically—and shrugged.

“Huh. Weird.” Sam cleared his throat nervously and explained, “My brother and I were in the war in Europe, fighting in France, mostly. Dean’s eyes were damaged by some of the gases that the enemy deployed on us, and he was sent home before the war’s end. I looked for affordable care everywhere here in the states, but no one seems to be able to help us for what we can pay. A coworker of mine, Benny Lafitte, recommended Lucifer’s services to me, and, even though I don’t really believe in all of this stuff, I looked into it. I…I guess I couldn’t really deny the results that he’s had in the past, so I asked Dean about it. He doesn’t really seem to care what kind of treatment I’m bringing home for him, anymore, though. Maybe he’s just entertaining my hope by agreeing; I don’t know. Lucifer agreed to treat him, though.”

The spirit hummed and tapped his finger against his lower lip as he thought.

“So, wait,” Gabriel said, “do you buy into all of this magick and mojo stuff now, or do you not?”

“I—” Sam was about to answer, but stopped himself as he remembered who he was quite possibly talking to. Would a spirit be offended by Sam expressing his doubts regarding the religion that it practiced when it was human? He hesitated and watched out of the corner of his eye as Gabriel stared at him. An amused look covered Lucifer’s normally stoic face.

“You can say ‘no’ to that, by the way,” the spirit added.

“Well, then, no,” Sam laughed nervously, “I don’t buy into all of it, but some of it seems to be effective and credible, so I’m not dismissing it all just yet.”

“Good. An open mind. I like that.” Gabriel nodded and thought to himself for a moment before asking, “So what’s my brother got going for Dean-o?”

“He’s sage-scrubbed the house,” Sam explained, “and lit some candles and said some prayers…or something like that. Dean’s wearing a mojo bag on a string around his neck, and…and I think that’s it, for now.”
“Good, all very good,” the spirit said with a smile. “It’s honestly funny how he always talks about you all, but he rarely ever truly talks about you. Does that make sense?”

Sam nodded. He was familiar with how Lucifer did that in regards to himself, too—constant talk and chatter revealing nothing personal in the end about the bokor besides his personality and his simple habits. Sam had never once even been told that Lucifer had any family whatsoever outside of his mother. Now he was (maybe?) talking to the bokor’s deceased younger brother. It wasn’t that he wanted to know too many things about the man’s life, of course; it was just that he tended to deflect any and all of Sam’s inquiries into it.

“So you’re paying off a debt to him by working with him?” Gabriel confirmed, snapping Sam out of his thoughts.

“I’m paying half of the normal cost in money, but, yes, the other half is being worked off.” Sam laughed humorlessly and stated, “Dean and I just aren’t that well-off, financially.”

“Let me see if I have all of this information correct, now,” the spirit articulated carefully. “You need to help your brother. You get help from a fella who practices crazy business with even crazier folks, and you agree to pay off half of your debt by plunging head-first into the insane underworld of the New Orleans Voodoo-Hoodoo community with no damn clue about how any of it works?”

Sam blinked.

“Uhm, well, when you put it like that—”

“When I call it as I see it, you mean?”

Sam closed his mouth and frowned. Damn it, he sounded crazy when Gabriel described his situation like that. Was that all…was that really how it looked to everyone else?

“Well, okay,” the spirit suddenly stated in a lighthearted tone.

“O-Okay? Okay, what?” Sam asked confusedly.

“Okay. Yeah. Sure. So that’s your story.” Gabriel leaned back and crossed his (Lucifer’s) legs casually.

“So…?”

“At least it was Benny who recommended Lucifer to you, and at least it was my brother who was recommended to you, not somebody else. You coulda been stuck with Meg Masters or something instead. Not everyone’s got the clean, professional record that Luci has. You coulda been making love potions and fetching ingredients for curses instead of what my brother’s got you doing. You have it good, kid. I’m glad.”

“Thanks, I guess?” Sam replied hesitantly, unsure of what the appropriate response was to all of what the spirit had said.

“And, frankly,” Gabriel added, “I think it’s a good thing you found him, too, ’cause I think you two are good for each other.” This only served to confuse Sam more.

“How?”

“I can sense things that humans can’t. It comes with the whole being a spirit business. For instance, I can tell that you get a rush walking in the door every day that you’re here. I can sense the way you’re
curious about the vodou lore and all of the odd legends that Luci rambles about nonstop. I can also
tell that he talks to you almost as much as he talks to me.”

He paused to let that sink in, then said, “That’s a lot, Sam. My brother doesn’t talk to anyone more
than the absolute minimum that he’s expected to.”

“He talks to Meg and Castiel,” Sam pointed out.

“Meg’s like a favorite graduated student to him, though,” Gabriel explained. “Plus, Castiel is family,
and he doesn’t talk much, either. My point is that you’re something special to him. You’re probably
one of the closest things to a friend the man’s got.”

“Oh,” Sam said, unable to think of anything else. Something had snapped into gear, however. It was
actually somewhat endearing to hear all of this. It didn’t take a genius to understand that Lucifer
didn’t have many friends, and if Sam meant more to him than just any old assistant might have, then
he was pleased. Gabriel was right. It was a good thing.

“If I’d known that all it would take to get him to open up a bit was finding a tall, handsome man to
be nice to him and help out a bit, I might have tried harder to find one before now.”

Sam felt heat spread over his neck and cheeks when Gabriel called him handsome, but laughed it off
easily. The spirit looked Sam up and down as though he was trying to read into the reaction, but met
Sam’s gaze again and quickly seemed to give up. He threw Sam a tight-lipped grin again.

“Well, I think I’ve stuck around long enough,” Gabriel said with a sigh. “I’ll turn this back over to
Luci. It’s been good meeting you, Sam.”

“Likewise, Gabriel.”

The spirit winked at him before closing its eyes and drooping forward in the chair. Around ten
seconds of silence and stillness passed before a small, whining grunt came from the bokor’s mouth.
He slowly lifted his head, and Sam could tell immediately that Lucifer was back. The man squinted
at his surroundings as if his eyes weren’t quite adjusted to the light in the room and frowned slightly
in discomfort.

“Hey, there,” Sam said, failing miserably at holding back an amused smile. Lucifer’s eyes focused on
him, and, after a second’s pause, they were opened wider in a suddenly very worried expression.

“Oh, hell,” the bokor croaked, “Gabriel was here, wasn’t he?”

“He most certainly was,” Sam confirmed. Lucifer grumbled something.

“Sorry, I didn’t quite catch that,” Sam laughed.

“I said he was a sneaky bastard,” Lucifer explained. “What did he tell you?”

“Mostly that he wanted to know a bit about me, and that he, apparently, approves of my presence
here.”

“And?”

“That’s all. You’ve only missed around ten to twenty minutes of time.”

An expression of relief washed over Lucifer’s tired visage. Sam couldn’t help but notice all of the
differences between the bokor and his younger brother. It was fascinating, really, to see such obvious
differences in personality coming from the same body. Gabriel had been absolutely oozing with energy and made faces that Sam previously would have only associated with actors in movies and vaudeville performances. He spoke with his whole body, too. Lucifer seemed almost mellow in comparison. His vocal inflections were much more subtle, and his tone leaned almost towards monotony when he was addressing a stranger. While Gabriel’s movements were those of a prankster, Lucifer’s were the strange, fluid ones of a storyteller.

They smiled differently, too. Gabriel, if he had his own body, would undoubtedly have deep smile lines engraved into his cheeks from repeated grins, smirks, and laughter. Both Gabriel and Lucifer had this charming way of crinkling the skin around their eyes, consequentially forming premature but shallow crows’ feet wrinkles there. While Gabriel smiled with his whole face, though, Lucifer frequently smiled with only his eyes and a small, crooked quirk at the mouth. The bokor did, however, have a tendency to smirk in an utterly amused and patronizing way that irked Sam like nothing else, and Gabriel hadn’t done that once while he had been chatting.

Lucifer was actually sending him one of those smirks at that moment.

“What?” Sam asked, surprised by the bokor’s sudden change in attitude.

“So have you been convinced yet?”

“Convinced of what, exactly?”

“The existence of spirits.”

Sam thought for a moment before answering.

“Maybe.”

He could have said “yes”, but if he had, that smug grin on Lucifer’s face would never have come off. Instead, the man shrugged in response and said:

“That’s good enough for me.”

Chapter End Notes

And SO MUCH THANKS to our lovely artist, Nadia at http://queerpanic.tumblr.com for the lovely picture.
(I’m still making excited noises.)
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

this chapter written by: Mer

Warnings: painful flirtation, what the fuck even is Enochian transliteration, not-as-negative portrayal of Southern Baptist church, suggestions of blasphemy

The treatments were becoming a routine, now. Dean seemed to be getting used to them, as well, and that made everything easier for Lucifer and Sam; the man didn’t complain about it nearly as much. Sam had led Lucifer to believe he would, either. Dean wasn’t a man of faith, and the only home cure-all that he believed in was his mother’s recipe for chicken and rice soup. Getting him to go along with their antics was relatively easy—the older Winchester would just follow instruction without any enthusiasm or conviction. It was unfortunate that his reason for playing nice wasn’t that he thought Lucifer could truly do something for him. Sam was apparently oblivious to the fact that Dean was merely appeasing his younger brother. He wanted Sam to be happy, and if allowing that spark of hope to grow even in what they thought were the most unlikely of places was what it took, he would let it happen.

On this particular day, however, Dean seemed to almost enjoy having company over. Lucifer had brought Castiel along for this visit so that he could observe parts of a difficult healing process. Dean had, once again, not noticed Castiel’s presence until the younger man spoke up. When Dean realized that Lucifer’s cousin was there, a small smile lit up his face, and he stood aside to let everyone in.

“How’d you all like the movie, then?” Dean started by saying. “Sam said it was fantastic, but I’m not taking his word as gold until I hear your thoughts, too. You didn’t say much after the show was over.”

“It was good,” Castiel said. Lucifer looked at him with a surprised expression on his face, but said nothing about Castiel’s unusual decision to voluntarily talk to a virtual stranger.

“I thought it was, too,” Lucifer concurred as he set down his bag of supplies. “Very interesting. The orchestral arrangement that went with it was absolutely beautiful, as well.”

“Guess I can trust Sammy’s taste in movies, then. Good to know.” Dean patted his brother’s arm and leaned against the stair railing.

“What’s on the agenda for today, then?” Dean asked. “More lemon and garlic decorations or something new?”

“Something new, this time,” Lucifer explained. “Is there anywhere that I can use as an altar?”

“Altar?” Dean asked skeptically. “What for?”

“A clarity and healing charm.”

Dean shrugged and waved Lucifer into the kitchen. He cleared a stack of clean plates out of the way by moving them into the cabinet and pointed to the now empty counter space. Lucifer set his bag down on the table and said a quick “thank you”. Dean nodded and leaned back on the cabinets by
“So is Cas part of your little posse here?” Dean asked.

“Posse?” Lucifer asked. Castiel entered the room at the sound of his name, Sam trailing along behind him.

“Yeah, you and your Vodou crew or whatever you like,” Dean said with a wave of his hand.

“There’re a whole bunch of you, now. That doll who came with you, too.”

“I suppose I should leave that to Castiel to decide.” Lucifer shrugged and made eye contact with the black-haired man who stood in the corner of the room closest to the door. Castiel’s eyes widened at Lucifer pushing the conversation off onto him. (That confidence that he displayed earlier was apparently gone, now.)

“I…well, yes, I…I suppose that I am, aren’t I?” Castiel managed to say. Dean smirked.

“You’re a quiet fella, ain’tcha?”

“I tend towards quiet, yes,” Castiel said, ducking his head. Lucifer smiled at his cousin and shook his head. Poor sap.

“Sam, I think you should help me out with this one,” he stated and beckoned Sam over to him with a wave of his hand.

“Sure. What do you need?”

“Would you take these”—Lucifer handed him a half-black, half-white candle and a small bottle of oil—“and show your brother how to fix the candle?”

“Yeah, Dean?”

Sam walked his brother through anointing the small candle over the sink. Dean made a few snide remarks, but followed each of the instructions as they were given to him. Lucifer spread a piece of muslin out on the table and motioned for Castiel to come closer and watch him.

“All that I’m doing is sprinkling some powdered abre camino herbs out on the fabric,” Lucifer explained, “and we will roll the candle in those until it’s coated to our satisfaction.”

Castiel nodded his head, but said nothing. The bokor took the candle from the brothers and rolled the candle while quickly muttering something under his breath. Castiel tipped his head to the side and squinted at his cousin, listening intently to the quiet words being recited.

“Is that…?”

Lucifer nodded and continued with his work, whispering quietly enough for the brothers not to hear more than a few words, but loud enough that Castiel could hear everything that he said clearly. Cas closed his eyes and frowned as he listened to Lucifer at work, never once tripping up on his wording.

“OECRIMI OIAD AMAYO, LONCHO OL NOQOL OL OIAD GE-IAD DS NOQODI GAHA DOSIG OE OIAD SALMAN OL OIAD AMAYO. OL OFECVFA MAD OZIEN OE OIAD SIAION OD OECRIMI OIAD AMAYO. MIAN NOALN OIAD GE-IAD LONSH OL LOAGAETH ZION, OIAD DS OI OIAD OL OADRIAX OD COASG.”

Lucifer repeated the last phrase over several times before he finished, satisfied. He pulled a ceramic
saucer out of his bag and placed it on the counter with the candle standing upright in the middle of it. He struck a match and lit it on the first try. As soon as the candle was lit, he quickly and quietly recited psalm 6 in the third person. He focused on the energies of the room—his, Castiel’s, Sam’s, the passing spirits’, and, most importantly, Dean’s. He pictured…felt their souls pull at his. The tendrils of spirits’ being, past and present, flowed around him like a cool, steadily flowing stream of water. Some acknowledged him, but most kept on moving, their only focus being on their own destinations. Lucifer’s words drifted out over, between, and through them to add to the stream and follow the current out of the Winchester household. A feeling of regret tugged at him as he pulled out of this transient state and opened his eyes again, the end of the psalm rolling off of his tongue with ease.

“All his enemies shall be ashamed and greatly troubled; they shall turn back and be put to shame in a moment.”

The quiet of the room was tangible. Lucifer sighed heavily and turned away from the candle to put his things back in his bag. Castiel tapped his shoulder after a moment of awkward calm.

“That was Enochian,” he commented.

“Yes,” Lucifer said, unsurprised by Castiel’s knowledge of the language. “It is a language frequently used in magick, as you know.”

Castiel stepped back from Lucifer and approached the Winchesters.

“You seem uneasy, Dean,” he commented.

“Yeah, nah, I’m fine,” Dean mumbled. “Just felt a bit of a chill for a moment there. ‘S probably just a breeze passing through or something.”

“Quite possibly.”

“You don’t sound like you believe what you’re sayin’, Cas.”

“I believe in most of the things that Lucifer believes in,” Castiel explained. “I am more connected to the Voodoo that is native to New Orleans than to the Vodou that he practices, but I do believe that charms and such hold power.”

“Ah, is that so?” Dean asked.

Lucifer watched the two interact. Castiel was acting curiously. It was obvious that certain people could make him come out of his shell more than others…maybe a blind man seemed less threatening to him than someone like Sam. Dean was still built like a soldier and had clearly never slacked on physical exercise, even though he rarely left the house anymore, and he was clearly taller than Castiel and Lucifer. There was something else, though. Dean was acting more approachable as well. He was the most cooperative and talkative that Lucifer had seen him thus far.

Maybe he would have to bring Castiel back again for a later treatment.

“Hey, Lucifer?”

Sam had apparently been trying to get his attention for a few seconds. Blinking back into reality, Lucifer turned to face his assistant. Dean and Castiel continued to idly chat at the other end of the room.

“Hm?”
“You alright there?”

“Of course I am,” Lucifer said dismissively. He rolled up the muslin and placed it back into his bag and brushed the table off with his hand, just in case some of the herbal powders had been scattered.

Sam was shifting anxiously from side to side as he stood next to Lucifer. The bokor sighed and placed his bag in the center of the table. When he looked at his assistant again, a slight frown had settled onto the tall man’s face. Lucifer resisted the urge to smile at him; Sam looked like he was waging war with himself behind those squinting hazel eyes. It was much more amusing than it should have been. His long hair had been tucked neatly behind his ears, and his hands were clasped behind his back (at ease, Lucifer thought to himself) as if he was just barely keeping from fidgeting with them.

Okay, so maybe Lucifer didn’t entirely resist holding back an amused smile, but at least he could tell himself he’d tried.

“What’s on your mind, Sam?”

“Nothing, really.”

Sam, you liar…

“Really?”

Sam bit at his lip as if it would keep him from speaking. He shrugged. Lucifer rolled his eyes.

“Sam, you’re like an open book. What’s got you worked up?”

“Gabriel,” Sam admitted. Lucifer blinked at him, then nodded. Right. He knew that this would come up at some point.

“What is it that you want to know?”

“I’m just…just curious ‘s all,” Sam explained. “You never talk about yourself or your family, so I sort of can’t help but find Gabriel to be…”

“Interesting,” Lucifer supplied.

“Yeah.”

“How about I answer any questions you have on our walk to the Roadhouse?”

Sam looked confused.

“The Roadhouse?”

“It’s where you work, is it not?” Lucifer asked. When Sam nodded his head in response, the bokor continued.

“I need to make a stop somewhere in that area and, unless you wish for me to do otherwise, I wouldn’t mind walking with you.”

Sam hesitated before a small smile tugged at the sides of his mouth and he nodded.

“Sure, why not?”
“Good, good.” Lucifer turned towards Castiel and Dean, who were still making steady conversation, and told his cousin that he and Sam would be leaving shortly. The man thought for a moment, looking between Dean and Lucifer a couple of times, and eventually stated that he would stay and chat with the elder Winchester if he was allowed to. Dean smiled and waved at Lucifer and Sam dismissively, saying he’d see them around sometime soon, and invited Castiel to sit down.

Lucifer felt a smile creep over his own face momentarily as he and Sam walked out the front door. He could practically hear Gabriel saying, Aww look, little Cassie’s making friends!

Gabriel. Right, then. Lucifer hung his bag over his shoulder and walked along Sam.

“So what do you wish to know?”

“Gabriel’s your brother?”

“Yes,” Lucifer said. “Was, is, however you wish to look at it. He is, technically speaking, my half-brother. My mother married a man named Chuck, Gabriel’s father. Gabriel was born after that, and just a few years after me.”

“So Chuck wasn’t your father, but you and Gabriel did have the same mother?”

“Precisely.”

“How long ago did Gabriel…”

“Die?”

Sam nodded. Lucifer sighed and shifted the bag on his shoulder slightly. He could feel Sam’s eyes on him, but he chose to ignore them for the moment.

“It was a few years ago,” Lucifer explained. “He was very ill and refused to let me treat him with anything other than healing spells. I was to summon nobody, I was to try nothing he deemed ridiculous or unnecessary, and I was to make no deals with anyone or anything. I wanted to save him. I truly did. He was ready to pass on, though, and I… I had to respect that. He stuck around for a year, as familial spirits do before Baron Samedi guides them to the other side. For some odd reason, he stayed longer than he was supposed to. Even he claims to have no idea why or how.”

Lucifer laughed and said, “He likes to claim that he has unfinished business.”

“Do you think he does?” Sam asked.

“It’s possible,” the bokor said with an indecisive shrug, “but if he does, I don’t know what his business could possibly be.”

“Does he visit any of your other family members?”

Lucifer frowned slightly at that.

“Mother’s passed on, herself, and Chuck doesn’t sense the spirits like my mother or I did. He’s not in contact with me much anymore, either. He writes me maybe twice a year. Once for the winter holiday season, and once in the summertime. Usually. Sometimes he writes more often. Gabriel was our main connection after my mother died, so it’s not always easy to talk about anything without bringing them up. He’s still sore from it, even though I’ve moved past it by now.”

Sam hummed, taking in the information.
“You can see why I don’t always volunteer this information,” Lucifer said. His assistant nodded and smiled sympathetically down at him.

“I get that family can be a touchy subject,” Sam stated, but he said nothing more on the matter. Lucifer watched as Sam’s lips tightened and his brow furrowed in an almost-frown for a moment. Family was a sensitive spot, then. Lucifer made note of this quickly before he shut down any questions that bubbled up with the thought. He focused instead on the strand of hair that had fallen out from behind Sam’s ear and was brushing against the man’s face every now and then. Lucifer wanted to quickly tuck the chocolate brown strand back into place so that his view of Sam’s face would be once again unobstructed. It would only take a small flick of a movement to do so…

Lucifer turned his eyes downward to watch his feet. What was he thinking? He had known Sam for only a short while, and yes he was handsome and all, but where had that urge come from? That long hair was just so tempting, some days…Lucifer had to keep a hold on himself to make sure that he wouldn’t act on any of these sudden, extroverted impulses that he kept receiving.

Sam clearly didn’t mind his staring. Normal folks—customers of his, for example—were always bothered by his intense stare and the way he knew he tended to let his eyes linger too long. Lucifer was a notorious people-watcher. It only helped his reputation outside the Vodou community for being eerie and discomforting grow. People don’t like to be stared at, as a general rule. Lucifer couldn’t help but admire things that were nice to look at or interesting to watch. Really, it was much more of a compliment than anything, but people didn’t seem to understand that.

Castiel did it too. The only differences between their habits being that Castiel also had a problem with personal space (incurable, as Lucifer had concluded) and was much more respected by the local church-goers. People thought of him as a strange but sweet man. Lucifer was seen as a strange, dangerous man. He didn’t mind it much, though—he actually found it rather amusing. As long as people weren’t destroying his reputation within the Vodou community, he didn’t care what they said about him. He was just glad that Castiel didn’t have to experience the same things he did.

As if he could read Lucifer’s mind, Sam suddenly asked, “What is Castiel’s relationship with you? I know you said that he’s family, but what does he do for you, exactly?”

“He doesn’t really have anyone there for him,” Lucifer explained. “The poor fellow only has me and Chuck. He’s not of a close relation to me, blood-wise, but he has a lot of heart, so I let him help out around the shop for a small amount of pay when he needs it.”

“Does he practice Vodou, though?” Sam asked. “I mean, he said he was more into a different form of it than you were, when he was talking back at the house.”

“That was strange, actually,” Lucifer commented. “He’s never volunteered that much information to a virtual stranger before. Not when I’ve been around, at least.”

“Maybe he just likes Dean?”

“Maybe.” Lucifer moved his bag to his other shoulder and continued.

“He believes in the power of charms and spells, and he believes in spirits, ghosts, and loas, like I do. The difference is that he takes it and applies it to his own Christian upbringing. In New Orleans Voodoo, the beliefs are less of a religion and more of a general guide to everyday life. Castiel sets up altars and petitions to the loas, but believes in the singular God of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam instead of Damballah Wedo, the great serpent and creator.”

“Huh,” Sam said; that subtle, thoughtful look was back on his face. “What do you believe in, then?
“The great serpent?”

“I don’t have any attachments to any particular religious views,” Lucifer stated with a sigh. “I do get some criticism for that from some of my fellow practitioners, but I prefer to remain indecisive. I don’t want to settle down on one faith in one individual deity. It’s a bit uncomfortable to put that much faith into such a mysterious entity.”

“Isn’t that what you’re doing with the loas, though?”

“No, I have evidence of them.”

Sam turned his head to look at Lucifer, surprise painting his face. Lucifer met his gaze and shook his head. He turned his head to face the street ahead of them.

“I have come into contact with the loas. I’ve even become a vessel for them during ceremonies at times. I know that they exist because I’ve serviced them, and I’ve seen others servicing them, too.”

“You mean that loas possess Vodouists?” Sam balked at him.

“Yes, precisely. Possession is always a strange experience. It’s much different from a simple spirit possession, too. Depending on the loa, the possession can range anywhere from a soft, smooth, dreamy transition to a sudden shift that appears to be almost violent to a bystander.”

“Wow,” Sam muttered. “That’s got to be an interesting experience.”

“It is,” Lucifer admitted, “but the person carrying the loa doesn’t remember anything that the loa does. The chwal, our name for the horse or vessel of a loa, blacks out for the duration of the possession. A loa might act slightly different when in different people; it all depends on what its vessel thinks and feels in his or her subconscious mind. A loa might act upon an urge that seems like something the chwal would do, but the chwal him or herself will be unaware of it when he or she comes back into consciousness.”

“That sounds disturbing.”

Lucifer shrugged.

“Not really,” he stated. “It’s exhausting, but it’s not terrible. The loas are normally rather respectful of their chwals.”

Sam nodded. That hair was still out of place. It honestly shouldn’t have distracted Lucifer as much as it did. He blinked and looked up at the Roadhouse as they approached it. Sam came to a halt in front of the café and smiled amiably at Lucifer.

“I’ll see you around, then.”

“You most certainly will,” Lucifer replied. He faltered momentarily and thought to himself, Oh, what the hell is stopping you?

“Do you mind holding still for just a moment?”

“Uhm, no?”

Lucifer leaned up onto the balls of his feet so that he could be level with Sam as he tucked that obnoxious bit of hair behind the man’s ear. He rolled back down to a normal standing position and sighed, finally satisfied. Sam blinked, clearly lost in his head for a second or two (as Lucifer had
probably just invaded his personal space a bit more than Sam was used to people doing around him).

“There. Much better.”

“Thanks,” Sam laughed at him, coming back out of his headspace.

“It was bothering me,” Lucifer said as an excuse, even though Sam hadn’t asked for one. “I’ll be on
my way, now. Go play your piano, Sam.”

Sam shook his head and said, “Sure thing. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Lucifer waved over his shoulder (the one not supporting his canvas bag at the time) and walked
down the street towards his next destination: the new Southern Baptist church. Mass was currently
happening, and he knew it. Maybe if he stopped in for a short while, they would take to him a bit
more, like the Protestants down the road had. If not…well, it would be worth seeing what they
thought of him dropping by for a short while.

The church was in a brand new building. It was tall and made from dark brown wood and red brick.
It had some decorative windows that probably looked nicer from the inside, and a small sign
announcing their worship times for the day out front. Lucifer walked up the small steps in front of the
building’s main entrance and peeked inside the double doors. The entryway was small, but it was
pretty. There was scripture painted in intricate script writing above the sanctuary room’s door, and a
long, short book shelf with several copies of the bible and the church’s preferred psalm book stacked
neatly and snugly inside of it. Lucifer stood still and listened as the congregation inside stood and
began reading a call-and-response passage aloud. He grinned and took a seat on a wooden stool in
the corner of the front room and allowed his head to lean back against the wall. He listened to the
voices carry out through the crack below the door and through the thin, stained-glass windows
looking into the sanctuary room. A smile stretched involuntarily across his face as he closed his eyes
and relaxed against the wall behind him. He set his bag down quietly on the floor next to him and
waited for the service to come to a close.

When it did, chatter started up amongst the congregants and the doors opened as children burst out,
giggling and ready to run amok in the streets after bottling up their energy for so long. Some of the
church ladies (all dolled up for God, he noted) nodded to Lucifer and smiled at him, likely taking him
for anything other than what he actually was. There was a steady stream of men, women, and
children who all rushed out of the building like a school of talkative fish. Lucifer waited for the
stream to thin out before he entered the sanctuary room.

Pews sat in three rows, allowing for four aisles to form around them. At the far end of the room, the
floor was raised to create something of a small stage, and a modest-sized podium sat in the middle
and at the front of it. At the front of the aisle that Lucifer had entered through, two men spoke in
hushed voices. The bokor took a seat halfway down the nearest row of pews and pulled a psalm
book out of the pocket on the back of the pew in front of him to glance at while he waited.

A few minutes later, the conversation ceased and one of the men’s footsteps approached Lucifer.

“Hello.” Lucifer looked up to see who was talking to him. The man was of an average height and
had a crinkled face—one of a man who smiled entirely too much. He was dressed as Lucifer
imagined that a church pastor would be. Lucifer returned his smile to be polite.

“What brings you into our church?” the man asked with a smooth, New Orleans drawl. “I haven’t
seen you before, I don’t think.”

“I haven’t been here before,” Lucifer replied. “I thought that I ought to visit the place. Beautiful
building you have here.”

“Thank you,” the man said. He leaned against the end of the pew and gazed down at the stranger in front of him. It wasn’t a patronizing stance, but Lucifer knew better than to assume that he wasn’t in any position to be looked down upon in a not-so-literal sense.

“What denomination do you come from?” the man asked.

“No distinct denomination,” Lucifer replied. “I wasn’t raised Christian.”

“You came to admire the church, then?” the man asked with a cheesy grin.

“Mostly, yes.”

“You are more than welcome to attend a service, if you wish to.”

“Oh, yes, I know. One of your soliciting papers made its way into my hands recently.”

“Did it, now?”

“Yes, rather forcefully, too, if I may add,” Lucifer mused. “I was curious, nonetheless, so I came anyway.”

“I’m sorry if we caused you any inconvenience,” the man said with what felt like exaggerated sympathy.

“It was nothing I haven’t experienced before, don’t you worry.”

“Are you interested in joining our congregation?” the man asked. “Or was the building the main attraction for your visit?”

“I’m not too interested in joining, but I may drop by from time to time.”

“Well, I’m Pastor Kubrick,” the man said, holding out a hand. “And I hope that we may meet again in this lovely building.”

“It most certainly is lovely,” the bokor replied, shaking the man’s hand. “My name is Lucifer. Lucifer Shurley.”

The pastor froze in place, but relaxed again just as quickly. Lucifer broke the handshake and smiled at the man in front of him. Pastor Kubrick tilted his chin downwards and peered curiously down at Lucifer.

“Lucifer?” he asked. “Is that a title or a given name?”

“Both.”

“I see.” Pastor Kubrick frowned at him—not an upset frown, just a somewhat confused one. He crossed his hands over his chest and stepped back so that he could take in the appearance of the man before him. Lucifer had seen this routine all too many times with other pastors, priests, preachers, deacons, and elders. He remained still and relaxed and allowed the man to size him up.

“Say,” the pastor said, squinting at Lucifer, “you wouldn’t happen to be the Vodouist from a few streets over, would you?”

Lucifer smiled.
“That would be me, yes.”

“Interesting that you would drop into a church just to look at the building, then.”

“I don’t do things with hidden intent, pastor,” Lucifer explained. “I honestly did want to see what your church looked like. Your congregation members are also rather polite to strangers sitting in their church’s entryway, as I’ve noticed. Well, until they catch wind of said strangers being involved with the likes of Vodou, but I’ll ignore that part for now.”

“I have to ask,” the pastor said as he sat down in the pew in front of Lucifer, “do your fellow practitioners have any beef with the church?”

“No,” Lucifer laughed, “it’s your lot that has beef with us, if anything.”

“I see.” Kubrick stared at Lucifer. Lucifer stared back and waited patiently for the man’s next move. They sat in near-silence, the only sounds breaking the tension being those of the other man, who was still organizing the books that sat on the pews furthest from the bokor and pastor.

“I may have a favor to ask of you, if you would be willing to help me,” Pastor Kubrick said in a quiet voice. Lucifer leaned in closer to the man and offered him a small, patient smile.

“I am willing to listen first.”

The pastor made his request in a small, hushed tone so as not to attract the attention of the third man in the room; he leaned close and Lucifer turned his head and directed his ear towards the man so that he would not miss a single word. As the pastor detailed his petition to Lucifer, the bokor felt a smile spread across his face. This was good. Oh, this was most certainly going to be interesting.

“Would it work for a man of faith such as myself?” the pastor asked nervously. Lucifer turned his head to face the man once again. He was unable to hide a smirk as he replied.

“If you mean these words which you speak and you believe with your heart that it is worth the effort, then it just might.”

“For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved,” the pastor stated with a relieved look in his eyes.

“Romans 10:9-10, wasn’t that?” Lucifer asked as he picked up his bag and rose from his seat. The pastor mirrored his actions and smiled. They shook hands once again.

“It is, indeed,” Pastor Kubrick said with a satisfied grin. “You’re a learned man, but not of Christian faith. I see.”

“Good day, pastor.”

“Good day to you too, Mister Shurley.”

“Please, call me Lucifer.”

He exited the church, his mind racing. That was not how he had expected that meeting to go. That was not how that meeting should have gone. The pastor couldn’t possibly put him at ease if he wanted to. He was like a ferret or a weasel, and spoke with a tone as smooth and sickly sweet as honey. Lucifer didn’t like it one bit.

Oh, but how could he possibly resist an opportunity such as the one that had just been laid out before
him? He couldn’t—that’s how. There was no way in hell that he’d turn down an offer…a request like this one. He’d likely never get to do something like this again.

Maybe he could learn to put up with this new church, after all.
When Sam arrived at Lucifer’s shop the next day, he noticed the bokor and a short, dark-skinned woman, dressed in brick red and tan clothing. Her hair was all tied up and away from her face and her hands were fast at work with a sewing needle, thread, and a couple of small pieces of cloth. The woman sat in a chair (likely brought out from the shop), and, next to her, sat the Lucifer. He was leaning forward, his elbows propped on his knees, and he listened intently as the woman spoke.

“…heard a bit about him, here and there, but I don’t know if I can believe everything I’ve heard, honey. I’d have to meet him myself, first.”

“That’s alright,” Lucifer said with a concerned sigh. “I got a bad vibe off of him, but it felt like he was putting a show on, so I couldn’t…oh, hello, Sam.”

Sam stood awkwardly by the porch steps and waved politely at the bokor and his companion. The woman, without looking up, smiled and made a strange cooing noise. Lucifer glared at her and she smiled mischievously. It was like they were sharing some sort of inside joke with each other.

“We might as well be, sugar,” the woman said, interrupting Sam’s thoughts. He frowned.

“Sorry, but—”

“Psychic,” the woman stated. She reached out a hand and smiled warmly at Sam.

“Sam, this is Missouri Moseley,” Lucifer said as he sat up straight to get out of the way of the handshake. “Missouri—”

“Sam Winchester,” the woman said in a delighted tone. “Boy, it’s been a while, hasn’t it? You’ve grown mighty big an’ tall, haven’t you?”

Sam laughed.

“If I had a penny for every time I heard that one…”

“I was friends with the Campbells,” Missouri explained. “Your mama and daddy knew me when you and Dean were little, bitty things.”

“Dean had mentioned that our family had connections with a psychic down here. Neither of us could recall a name, though. If I had, I would have contacted you before now.”

“Oh, honey,” Missouri said, “you don’t have to worry your pretty little head about that. I didn’t expect either of you to remember me after so long.”

“You and Lucifer know each other, then?” Sam asked. He leaned against the railing at the edge of
the porch and watched the bokor and the psychic look up and smile at him in synchronization.

“Why, yes, his mama and I went way back, just as I did with Mary.”

“She’s the honorary matriarch of the lot of us,” Lucifer added in. Missouri laughed at him.

“You’re just sayin’ that to flatter me, boy.”

“No, I’m not.”

“Don’t argue with a psychic.”

Lucifer rolled his eyes and Sam tried desperately to resist laughing at them. Missouri smiled up at him and set her sewing project down in her lap. She squinted at him and frowned.

“You and Dean were in the war?”

Sam flinched.

“Yes, we were.”

Her expression looked hurt, suddenly.

“Oh, and poor Dean…”

Sam stared at his feet. Missouri sighed and shook her head. Looking over at Lucifer, she stated, “You wouldn’t believe how sweet those boys were when they were little. They would make even you and Gabriel seem nasty in comparison.”

“I’m sure that that would be fairly easy to accomplish, really,” Lucifer mumbled. Missouri laughed quietly and picked her sewing back up. Sam looked up to see what exactly she was working on, but he felt Lucifer’s eyes on him—cool and calculating.

“Didn’t your mama tell you it’s impolite to stare?”

Missouri boxed at Lucifer’s ears and, if Sam wasn’t mistaken, the bokor giggled somewhat under his breath. It was like the introverted man had been reduced to a child for just a few seconds before fading back to his normal level of composure. Missouri sighed heavily and looked between the two of them.

“I know he’s handsome,” she said, “but you’ve gotta hold yourself back like the rest of the ladies and gents do.”

Sam might have been mistaken, but he could have sworn that he saw Lucifer’s ears and cheeks turn a light shade of pink at her comment. He ignored the thought in favor of peeking at Missouri’s sewing. It was a Vodou doll with buttons and trinkets stitched into it and its back attached only halfway. Sam had never seen one this ornate before. Its stitches were small and evenly placed like those on a child’s stuffed toy. Missouri had to have been practicing making those things for years to be that good at it by this point.

“Lucifer, honey?” the woman asked after accidentally pricking herself with her needle.

“Yes, Missouri?”

“You wouldn’t happen to have a thimble inside that shack of yours, would you?”
“I know exactly where one is.”

The two rose from their places and headed for the front door. Sam followed along behind them, unsure as to what he ought to be doing while Lucifer visited with the psychic. He nearly ran into said psychic as she stopped in her tacks just inside of Lucifer’s doorway.

“Goll-y. Lucifer, have you scrubbed this place in the last month?”

“Yes,” Lucifer said. He turned around and, with a confused look on his face, asked, “Why?”

“I just got hit by a wall of negative energy in here, hon.”

A small frown tugged at Lucifer’s mouth as he stood still for a moment, glancing around the room as if he expected to find the source of the negative energy standing right in front of them. Sam tried to see if he could feel anything amiss with the room, but couldn’t even feel what Missouri said she had sensed, and she was only about two feet in front of him. The psychic frowned and stepped cautiously into the room, allowing Sam to file in behind her and move around the room towards where Lucifer stood.

“I think I’m feeling a bit of what you’re talking about,” Lucifer muttered. “I’ll get that thimble for you, then I’ll get my sage and matches out for a quick once-over.”

“Good idea,” Missouri said with a shudder.

As Lucifer walked past the several rows of shelves in the shop area and strolled into the back room to retrieve his sewing kit, a few of the ceramic pots clattered slightly. Sam frowned.

That’s not right…

He walked past the cabinets, following the bokor’s steps.

“Hey, Lucifer?”

“Hm?”

“What does it mean when the lids on these pots rattle?”

Lucifer’s head poked out from behind the curtain that led to the back room.

“Why do you ask?”

“Just…what does it mean?”

“It means that the spirits inside of them are excited,” Lucifer explained. “Did they just rattle or something?”

“When you walked past them, yes,” Sam replied, “but not when I did.”

Lucifer paused to think and bit at his lower lip. He squinted at the shelf of ceramic jars (in a way that reminded Sam of Castiel’s default confused expression) and ducked back behind the curtain once more. He reappeared with a thimble, matches, and his canvas bag that he usually brought along to Sam’s home. Missouri took the thimble off of the bokor’s hands and sat down at the table to continue sewing, despite the negative energy she had felt earlier. A deep frown had set in on her face, but, other than that, she seemed to be doing her best to ignore the bad feelings she was receiving from the room.

Lucifer strolled past the cabinets again. The pots clattered again. This time, he noticed.

“I don’t have any loose floorboards here, do I?” Lucifer asked nobody in particular.
“When I walked in that area just a minute ago nothing happened,” Sam volunteered. Lucifer hummed and shook his head.

“Missouri, I may need you to scrub me, just in case something’s followed me home.”

“Sure thing, child,” the psychic answered. “Just let me know when you’re ready for me.”

Lucifer placed his bag on the table and began rummaging through it. He pulled out a bundle of dried sage—one that Sam had assembled for him just the day before—and lit the end, blowing the small, flickering flame out quickly afterwards; smoke came floating out of the end of the bundle, and Lucifer began moving around the room. He fanned the smoke with the back of his hand, starting at the bottom of the front door, moving up towards the ceiling, then onto the corners, windows, and the doorways to the back room, basement, and stair well. Sam heard him muttering, but only caught every few words. It was something in Latin, Sam concluded—he heard “lux”, “amor”, “vis”, and “praesentia”—and was likely a prayer of some sort.

The bokor moved around the room in a clockwise motion and stopped once he had reached the door again.

“Missouri?”

“Coming, honey.”

Missouri took the sage bundle from Lucifer and fanned the smoke at him, moving from his feet up to his head; she had him turn around, after she had completed scrubbing the front half of his body, so that she could do the same on the other side. Sam watched, unable to hide his simple curiosity. Why just Lucifer? Did the rattling jars really mean something that important? He kept quiet, assuming that Lucifer would answer any of his questions at a later time if he was still interested by then.

Missouri sighed and handed the sage bundle back to Lucifer.

“There you go.”

“Thank you for that.”

“I’m already feelin’ the air get lighter in here,” the psychic stated. “Must’ve been somethin’ following you back from the graveyard.”

“Possibly,” Lucifer replied. He extinguished the incense in a small bowl full of water that rested on top of the bookshelf and tucked it back into his canvas bag. Missouri sat back down at the table and pulled the needle out of the thread, set the thimble aside, and tied one of the quickest, smallest knots Sam thought he had ever seen anyone tie. The psychic released a satisfied sigh and glanced up at Sam for a moment, shooting him a reassuring smile.

“It gets better with practice,” she stated. Sam nodded and watched her rise from the chair, leaving the needle and thimble at the table.

“I would assume so,” he replied.

“It’s been a pleasure getting to meet you again, Sam.”

“Likewise.”

Missouri patted his shoulder and kissed his cheek before approaching Lucifer and doing the same to him. The bokor let a small smile slip through his tight expression and returned the gesture.
stopped at the house’s threshold and turned back to face the two of them on her way out.

“You boys be careful,” she said. “Something’s weird in the air, and I can’t quite place it.”

“I assure you that we will be cautious,” Lucifer replied.

Without another word, she left the shop, incomplete doll in hand, and left the bokor and his assistant in silence. Lucifer stood by the doorway and stared after her. Sam stood by the table and stared at Lucifer.

There was something off about him. He was uneasy…or maybe worried was a better word for it. Whatever it was had disappeared within an instant as he turned to face Sam again. His normal, calm deadpan had erased the squinting and light frown lines that had been there not even a second earlier. Lucifer strolled back over to where Sam stood, attentively awaiting his first instructions of the day.

“At ease, soldier,” Lucifer mumbled, an undertone of humor barely detectable in his voice. Sam relaxed; he hadn’t noticed that he was standing so rigidly until the bokor had mentioned it. Old habits die hard, apparently.

“I would like for you to make a few candles for me,” Lucifer stated. He reached around Sam to grab two colored wax blocks and a few pre-cut wicks from the shelves by the ceramic pots.

“You can melt the wax out back and bring it in here to pour into the candle molds.”

Sam took the blocks from Lucifer and picked the matchbox up off of the table. The bokor handed him a small pot with a long handle to melt the wax in and gestured towards the back of the shop. Sam nodded and juggled the items as best as he could as he walked through the curtain between the two rooms. Lucifer held the curtain out of the way for him and followed close behind.

“I’ll bring you a knife to cut the wax,” the bokor said. “I will need five red candles and five black.”

“Alright.”

Sam let Lucifer unlock and open the back door for him, throwing a quick, “Thanks,” over his shoulder as he stepped outside. He gathered a small pile of dry wood and set a small fire in what looked like a well-used fire pit halfway between the shack and the outhouse.

Candle making, he realized quickly, was a long and tedious process. Wax didn’t melt anywhere near fast enough for his attention span to hold up. Sam carried the black wax in first, filled the molds as best as he could, and placed the wicks in as Lucifer instructed him to. Then, back out to watch more wax melt over the fire. It was nice to look at, at least. Maybe if he could just sit there and admire the small, dancing flames for a bit, he could imagine that he was in front of a campfire with Dean and their father, like he so often was when he was little. It only made the process mindless, though. Daydreaming didn’t always help tiring tasks become any more entertaining.

When he brought the second batch of hot wax in, Lucifer was nowhere to be seen. Sam went ahead with the next couple of steps on his own, under the assumption that the bokor was retrieving something from either the basement or loft. Sam sat down on the floor in front of the molds and tried smoothing out the knots he had forming in his shoulders and neck. That’s what he got for having two jobs where he sat around for most of the day. Not enough movement, not enough stretching, and not enough attention paid to his muscles all came back to bite him rather quickly, he thought. It wasn’t like it was anything that would cause him problems, but it certainly was obnoxious.

As he sat there, he heard voices out on the porch.
…and it’s in a drawer, since I wasn’t sure what to do with it.” The first voice was Lucifer without a doubt.

“Did you say Crowley?” That was Meg. Sam sat up straight involuntarily. What was she doing here? He forced himself to relax. Meg was a friend, no matter how intimidating she could be. Sam kept still and listened closely.

“Yes, do you know him?”

“…might. You know what he’s in town for?”

“Business, I would assume.”

Meg said something that Sam couldn’t quite hear because something had started making noise inside of the shop. He glanced around, unsure of where the sound was coming from. It sounded like someone was shaking the knobs on one of the drawers by the table. Sam rose to his feet and followed the noise to a small drawer by the front counter. Maybe there was a mouse or something in there. He’d have to get a bucket or a box to put it in so that he could move it outside…

Sam picked up a large, empty glass jar labelled “rosemary” from the cluttered countertop and slowly opened the drawer. As soon as he did so, however, the noises stopped. Sam frowned. Where did it go?

“Whatcha doing, moose?”

Sam looked up quickly to see Meg standing in the doorway. Lucifer was still on the porch, behind her, and was looking out at the road even though he was holding the screened door open for the other bokor. Sam looked down at the drawer and set the jar down. The only thing in it was a handmade spider-shaped pendant.

“I thought there was something in the drawer,” Sam replied smartly.

“And was there?” Meg asked. She talked to him like he was four years old. Sam grimaced at the thought.

“Just a fetish, I guess. I thought there would be a mouse or something with all of the racket it was making.”

Lucifer’s attention was clearly piqued at this. He walked past Meg and into the shop, letting the door swing shut behind him. He came to a halt behind Sam and peered over his shoulder to look at the drawer for himself.

“That’s strange…” Lucifer mumbled. He lifted the spider fetish up out of the drawer by the string it hung on.

“That’s the thing you were talking about, then?” Meg asked. There was a dark tone to her words.

“Yes…it is.” Lucifer stared at the pendant. His brow wrinkled in a confused frown and he bit at the inside of his cheek. The bokor’s blue eyes were wider than they usually were as he studied the pendant for a moment. Suddenly, Lucifer snatched up Sam’s wrist, and, despite his feather-light touch, caused the assistant to jump out of surprise.

“Sam. Would you go to the bookshelf and retrieve my key ring for me?”

“Where on the bookshelf?”
“On top of the 19th century play anthology. It’s the large, dark green book.”

“Certainly.”

Lucifer released his hold on Sam and moved out of the way, not taking his eyes off of the pendant for even a second. Sam rubbed at his wrist and stepped over to the bookshelves. Lucifer’s hands were cool, despite the heat outside; Sam wanted to admit to himself that his touch felt refreshing… like a glass of cola from the general store with chipped ice in it—not harsh or cold, just chilled and refreshing.

Sam brushed his thoughts aside (he noticed that he seemed to be doing that quite a bit lately). If he wasn’t careful, he’d be waxing poetic soon with all of these fascinating descriptions he kept making in his mind of his business partner. It wasn’t exactly what one might call professional.

The keys were, in fact, precariously placed on top of a collection of 19th century plays that looked like every other book on the shelf, meaning that there wasn’t even a thin layer of dust on it. When did Lucifer read all of these books? It certainly wasn’t when Sam was around. He also noticed that the books were rearranged again, all organized alphabetically by title. Sam made a mental note to ask about that later.

Sam handed the keys to Lucifer.

“Thank you.”

Lucifer set the spider fetish down slowly and gently in the drawer. He shut it carefully, then quickly rooted through his keys, one hand still on the drawer handle, until he found the smallest one, and locked the pendant in the drawer.

“Good riddance,” the bokor exhaled.

“Why did you need to lock a pendant in a drawer?” Sam asked. Meg looked up at him and gave him the most patronizing look she could muster. He shrugged and looked down at his feet.

“Moose,” Meg said sharply, “when something’s rattling a drawer, and you open the drawer and see something in it, what is your first conclusion?”

Sam frowned, not quite understanding what she meant.

“Okay, say there was a mouse in the drawer,” Meg tried instead with a roll of her eyes. “You open the drawer, you catch the mouse, you set it free. What was rattling around in the drawer if there wasn’t anything else in there with the little critter?”

“…the mouse?” Sam asked tentatively.

“Precisely. Now, take out the idea of a mouse and replace it with a spider-shaped fetish. You hearing what I’m saying yet?”

Oh.

Oh.

“The pendant was rattling the drawer?”

“Lucifer, he is a smart one!” Meg exclaimed with false enthusiasm. “He’s a bit slow, but he figured it out, didn’t he?”
“Wasn’t exactly the riddle of the sphinx,” Lucifer muttered, his eyes fixed on the drawer still.

“How does an inanimate object rattle a drawer?” Sam asked, feeling like he was being left out of something important.

“It doesn’t,” Lucifer said simply. Somehow, that didn’t feel like a satisfactory answer to Sam, but he took it for the moment.

“What’s eatin’ you, other than the fact that it moved on its own?” Meg asked. Lucifer finally tore his gaze from the drawer and looked up at her. Even from behind him, Sam could tell that his expression was foreboding.

Of course, then there was also what he said next, in a quiet, smooth, yet extremely unnerving voice.

“I could have sworn that it was smaller before.”

Both Meg and Sam stared at him in silence for a few seconds as they tried to grasp at the situation.

“Well,” Meg replied slowly, “let’s hope that you’re just imagining things.”

“Best case scenario,” Lucifer stated. Sam stared at them with wide eyes.

“Where did you get it?” Meg asked.

“Crowley.”

“When did you get it?” Sam asked before he could stop himself. Lucifer turned to look him in the eyes.

“Just recently.”

“Within the past month?”

Lucifer hesitated, but, after a moment, he seemed to realize what Sam was implying.

“Sam, I think Meg’s right. You are pretty smart.”

Sam normally would have smiled at a compliment coming from Lucifer, but he was still trying to wrap his mind around the idea of an animated piece of jewelry. The fact that Meg and Lucifer both looked so grim didn’t reassure him much, either. Usually Lucifer kept his cool around things that Sam found weird. It was unnerving to see both him and Meg in such a state of discomfort at the same time.

“I’m gonna head out, once I get those candles from you,” Meg sighed. She strode over to the cluttered table and dragged a chair out for herself.

“They should be cooling as we speak,” Lucifer stated. “Sam, would you go put out the fire? You’ve made all the candles I need for now.”

Sam did as he was told and left Meg and Lucifer to their own devices. As soon as he stepped out the backdoor, he let out a relaxed sigh. The tension in his neck and shoulders dissipated, and the air suddenly felt lighter. He hadn’t realized that he was so high-strung. It must have been the fresh air. Maybe he should offer to open a few windows to get a slight breeze going through the shack; the stagnant air could have had something to do with the negative energies that Missouri and Lucifer were discussing earlier.
The fire was extinguished easily. Sam gathered the candle-making supplies and walked back towards the back door. He hesitated just inside the back room, though. There was a heaviness that settled over him. That wasn’t just fresh air making him feel like that; that was brought on by some sort of sensory trigger like the feeling one gets when expecting a storm to be coming in off of the gulf coast at any moment…the clouds are there, they just aren’t overhead yet. Sam shuddered. Maybe he was picking up these sensations, too. Maybe he had stuck around too long and Lucifer was starting to rub off on him.

He found that he didn’t mind the idea all that much, though. It was a good thing to be able to sense things like this, right? It wasn’t bad to feel uneasy when something strange is happening. That’s how it was in all of Sam’s years of experience, at least. It was like hearing the crack of a gun in the distance and knowing to duck back into the trench to warn the others. It was like not hearing any birds singing or bugs flying around and knowing to bail before something happened. It was like being the canary in the coal mine (though that comparison was admittedly less desirable than the others). All in all, it was useful more than harmful.

Right?

Sam focused again on the voices in the next room over. Meg had become cagey and irritated at the slight mention of Crowley’s name. Of course, she normally sounded perturbed about most things around her, but she didn’t come across as anxious before the new bokor was mentioned. Sam shut and locked the back door and carried the matchbox, knife, and leftover wax into the main room. He was still lost in his head as he set the materials in his hands down on the table by Lucifer. The front room felt clearer than the back room had, but Sam still felt slightly on edge. He blinked hard to try and clear his thoughts.

Lucifer had said something to him.

“Sorry, what did you say?”

“I was asking if you were alright.”

Sam nodded, but didn’t make eye contact as he said, “Yeah, yeah, I’m fine.”

The look on Lucifer’s face clearly meant that he wasn’t being nearly convincing enough, but the blond man didn’t push the subject. Something that looked like concern slipped through his calm visage, but it was quickly covered up when Meg cleared her throat loudly. Both men turned their heads to look at her.

“As sappy and adorable as you two are, I need to see a man about a loa, so if those candles are anywhere near ready—”

“You may check on them,” Lucifer interrupted her. “The basement doesn’t have a light, though, so I will fetch you a lantern.”

“Oh, come on,” Meg said teasingly. “I’m not just some dame from off the street. I can walk around down there just fine as long as you leave the door open at the top of the stairs.”

“As you wish,” Lucifer stated, holding his hands up in mocked surrender. “They might not be cool by now, though.”

“They oughtta be.” Meg made quick work of hopping up out of her chair, opening the door to the basement, and flying down the stairs to retrieve the candle molds.

Sam registered at about that time that neither he nor Lucifer had made any comment about being
described as “sappy and adorable”. The tips of Lucifer’s ears had turned pink in what Sam could only assume was some sort of blush, but no comment was made. Meg’s “see a man about a loa” comment had made the bokor smirk and covered up any reaction that he might have had to what she had said just before it.

Sam honestly didn’t know what to make of any of it, so he remained silent. Maybe that’s what Lucifer was doing, too. That would surely be the easiest conclusion to come to—less thinking would be involved.

“Alright,” Meg stated as she reached the top of the stairs. She shut the door by bumping it with her hip and smirked victoriously at the bokor and his assistant. The molds were handed off to Lucifer and the candles were all held by their wicks in her left hand. She ruffled Lucifer’s hair affectionately and headed for the door.

“I’ll see you two soon.”

“That you will, Meg.”

“Moose—try and keep him outta trouble ‘til then, yeah?” Meg winked at Sam and headed out the front door. Lucifer and Sam were left alone, once again.

“What was bothering you when you came inside earlier?” Lucifer asked, still staring at the door. Sam sighed and sat down. What was he supposed to say to that? He was listing similes in his head to compare to this odd sixth sense he seemed to have picked up? No, that was...just no. He wouldn’t say that.

“I think I know what you and Missouri meant earlier,” Sam stated. “The whole negative energy thing, I mean. I stepped inside and it was just like...like the air was heavy around me and everything was too still, too quiet. I don’t know. Maybe I’m just imagining things.”

“You aren’t.” Lucifer was looking at him again with those damned soul-gazing, cerulean eyes. Sam was doomed. Waxing poetic was the least of his worries. He was turning into a romantic. That was infinitely worse. What was his problem with Lucifer, anyway? (Well, maybe “problem” wasn’t the best word to use—it was more of a lack thereof.) He allowed himself to appreciate other men’s looks now and then because it was only natural to compare people aesthetically. He wasn’t even comparing Lucifer to anyone, though. Lucifer made up the personification of other things instead. His eyes weren’t like precious stones; they were like the bright blue sky being reflected off of the surface of a lake—simple and common, but intricate and different at every angle. His voice wasn’t like a that of a Broadway actor’s; it was like the sweeping clarinet solo in Rachmaninoff’s piano concerto no. 2 in C minor—something only big band directors and music history students could recall with clarity. His hair wasn’t like Joan Blondell’s or Rudolf Valentino’s; it was like the soft, short fur on a golden retriever dog and it was the color of dried tall grasses and straw in the sunlight.

He needed to stop. This was extremely odd. Ludicrous. Nonsensical. Sam was thinking of Lucifer like a schoolboy thinks about the pretty girl who sits in front of him in class. He did not think about Lucifer in that way.

...right?

“Sam, you look distraught.”

Sam groaned and rubbed at his eyes. When he opened his eyes, Lucifer was still there, staring at him with those wide, blue—just blue, not anything else—eyes. If he had been trying to conceal his
concern earlier, he certainly wasn’t anymore. Sam shook his head and pulled a chair out from the
table. He slouched in it with his back to the wall.

“Sam—?”

“I’m alright, I’m alright,” Sam said at last “Just a bit tired ’s all.”

“Are you able to listen to what I have to say?”

Sam nodded.

There was silence. He opened his eyes to see Lucifer staring expectantly back at him.

“I need a yes or no.”

“Yes, I can listen. I’m sorry.”

“It’s not a problem.” Lucifer rested his elbows on the table and leaned towards Sam.

“I want you to know what will be happening in the near future,” the bokor explained. “I will be
hosting a summoning ritual in a cemetery for a client. I might need an extra set of hands, and I will be
more than pleased if you are willing to take part in carrying things to and from the site. If you are
uncomfortable with this, however, you are more than welcome to simply add another meeting to the
end of our scheduled appointments. I can have you do something else instead.”

“What does a summoning ritual entail, exactly?” Sam asked. His focus was entirely on the
conversation, all of the sudden. This was a…strange request, to say the least. Why did Lucifer feel
the need to ask him to carry materials to and from a ritual site? It was possible that he was just trying
to be polite about it—he likely figured that Sam was uncomfortable with Vodou’s spiritual aspect still
even after meeting Gabriel).

“You would not have to stay for the ritual,” Lucifer explained, “but it would be easier if you did. I
frankly just need someone to carry materials to the location with me, but I will likely be able to
recruit volunteers afterwards, if need be.”

“And say I stayed for the ritual. What then?”

“Summoning a loa like the one we are trying to contact would be unlike anything I have exposed
you to thus far. It involves possession, and, if all goes according to plan, the loa will possess me.”

“Would it be like the time that you channeled Gabriel?” Sam asked. If it would be, he was more than
capable of staying for the ritual, even if it got a bit weird. Lucifer pursed his lips, however, and
hesitated as he thought on his answer.

“In a way, yes, and in a way, no,” he said at last. “I will be acting like the loa, but I will display a
few of my own personal traits at times, as I have explained to you before. Do not assume just
because I am acting a little bit like myself that I am myself. You need to get direct confirmation from
me, first. In that sense, it will be much the same.

“The differences come with the ritual itself. It is very physically involved and rather dramatic. I might
do a few odd things, but I assure you that I will most likely not remember any of it when I return to
full consciousness. The particular loa who I will have riding my body as a vessel of sorts is
considered to be rather violent in its possessions. My only real concern is that you would find it
difficult to watch.”
Sam had been a witness to many terrible scenes in which he had been helpless until the worst was over. He had seen the horrors that war brought upon people. He had watched loved ones leave him left and right, be it from injury, exhaustion, or death. He had listened to his fellow soldiers being overtaken just a few miles away…just a few hundred feet away…just an inch away from him. Sam was familiar with terror and helplessness—he knew that much.

The problem was that when he went into war, he knew that he had to expect those things. It was the family business—fighting for freedom and saving those who needed saving. He knew early on what he was supposedly getting himself into. Now…now, he was unfamiliar with even the concept of a loa possession ritual. He had no idea what to expect. Lucifer could probably prepare him all he wanted, and it would still be impossible for Sam to know what was waiting for them in the cemetery. Still, though, he was curious.

*Curiosity killed the cat*, he reminded himself mentally. Nothing worthwhile is gained without at least some risk, though. Sam was interested—there was no way around it. He couldn’t hold back this time. He might never get the chance to see this sort of event take place again.

“I think…I think I might come along,” Sam decided. “I will at least carry your materials out there for you. I’ll try to stick around for the whole thing, but…”

“If you bail, I won’t blame you, though I will add another day onto our schedule,” Lucifer sighed. There was a note of relief in his voice that Sam just barely caught. He wanted Sam there. He wanted Sam to be interested.

And that was absolutely unnerving and reassuring all at the same time.

“Good,” Sam said with a smile.

“It’s a deal, then?” Lucifer asked. He held out a hand.

“Deal,” Sam answered. They shook to seal it.

*What the hell have I gotten myself into?*

Sam sat back in his chair; Lucifer rose from his and ducked into the back room. Sam stared after the man, unwilling to answer his own internal question at first. He was most certainly going insane. He had made a deal with a bokor. He had been having terribly sappy internal monologues about a man for Christ’s sake (and said man happened to be the bokor). He had just now made a second and even more risky deal with this same bokor. It was starting to feel like his life was revolving around the inhabitant of this old, honestly creepy-looking shack. *What the hell have I gotten myself into?*

Sam thought for a moment before some part of his mind answered the question easily.

*Nothing I can’t get myself out of—that’s what.*

So why did he feel like he only wanted to dig deeper, learn more, go farther? Why didn’t he want to get himself out?

He couldn’t answer that question no matter how much he tried to, and that terrified him more than anything.
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

this chapter written by: Sarah

Warnings: implied past character death, dream sequence, nightmares, disturbing description, bugs, borderline gore

The butterfly’s wings were blue and green, with faint edges of gold sunlight. Lucifer opened his eyes and lay very still, looking at it. It fluttered on his chest, its spindle legs weighing nothing. It felt like a kiss. He gazed at it, the brilliant billow of its wings, the place where they joined the segmented nightmare of its body. Its face was a chittering mechanical mess of eyes and feelers. He liked that, that there was this blinding watercolour beauty which was part of an animal which ate sweat and excrement and looked basically like a chitinous ant with wings. He liked the fact that they were the same thing, that one could not exist without the other.

Once, when he was nine, he had caught a butterfly and tried to pull off its wings. They were beautiful and the butterfly was not. He wanted to be able to have them, look at them whenever he felt like it, without that ugly little body in the way. He had been slowly peeling the silky base of one wing off the body wall when Gabriel found him and immediately burst into tears. Stop it, God, that’s awful, you’re hurting it. He had stopped because it was upsetting Gabriel. It took him a while to understand on his own why it was a bad thing to do. When his mother heard, she had laughed. After a time the butterfly flew away. He sat up. He was lying in a great golden field, under a sky the illuminated blue of stained glass. Around him wildflowers bobbed and swayed in a bright ripple of scarlet and yellow. The air smelled like earth and pollen and something else, something green, which was somehow integrally connected to summer. The sun was a burning penny high above. There was someone else in the field. He stood and walked over. It was so quiet. He was a city boy born and raised; he had only been out in the country, really out in the country, not the swamps, maybe twice in his life; and never in a place this quiet. It felt very strange, like the world was more real without all that sound getting in the way.

The other person was a woman in a white nightdress. She was blonde and very pretty. Her hair poured over her shoulders like liquid sunlight. There was something very familiar in her face. Lucifer had the feeling he had seen her before, although he did not know where. She smiled at him. She had a good smile.

“You know that old rhyme,” she said, “the one about what boys and girls are made of?”

Lucifer sat down on the grass next to her. She put her hand next to his. “How does it go? Snips and snails and puppydog tails, that’s what little boys are made of. Sugar and spice and everything nice, that’s what little girls are made of. Isn’t that right? I think that’s right.”

She was bleeding. There was a wet red mark creeping across the stomach of her nightdress. She did not seem to know or care. Lucifer thought about saying you’re bleeding, look, you’re bleeding, and said nothing.

Her smile was immovable, beautiful, radiant. “But everyone’s really made of the same thing on the
There was a lot of blood. The stomach of her dress was soaked black. It dripped down over her thighs, like an abstract scarlet profile of violence.

“Do you know what that is, Lucifer?” she said. She took his hand in hers. Her touch was warm and strong, like an embrace.

She leaned in and whispered “It’s something really scary.”

Then she opened her mouth and a hundred thousand black beetles crawled out and covered the sun.

He woke in his bed too afraid to move. Some nightmares demanded that he leap out of bed, throw on all the lights, plunge feverishly into work so as to forget everything as enthusiastically as possible. This was not one of those. He lay there in the sour heat of his sweat, very still, not wanting to breathe or think or be alive.

Very slowly, he reached out for the lamp beside his bed. The light guttered to life, washing the room in a gas-coloured glow. Gabriel was seated at the desk. For some reason this was not shocking or frightening. Lucifer had almost expected him to be there, watching.

“Bad dream?” Gabriel said.

“Yeah,” Lucifer managed, and pulled himself upright in bed. “Bad dream.”

“To be expected. Considering tomorrow.”

“I guess.” Tomorrow, Christ. He had forgotten about that, in the preceding moments of paralytic terror. Hell of a time to have a nightmare, the night before a ceremony.

“You don’t have to go through with it, if you don’t want to.”

Lucifer shot Gabriel a tight look. “Yes, I do. It’s never been about what I want. And I thought you were okay with this.”

“I am. I’m just making sure you are too.”

“I’m fine. We’re doing it.”

“All right,” Gabriel said equanimously.

There was a moment when neither of them said anything. The darkness lay heavy around them. Lucifer wrapped his arms around his knees and stared at the wall. He could still feel the woman inside his mind, her soft smile, her body full of corruption.

“I don’t dream,” Gabriel said. “Not anymore. It stops when you die.”

“You show up in my dreams often enough.”

“It’s different. I’m awake when I do that. Always, always, awake.”

Lucifer glanced at him. His face was remote and still, like a mask.

“I’m sorry,” he said finally, not knowing what else to say.

“Yes. It’s a terrible thing, being always awake. I don’t even miss sleeping that much. Just dreaming.”
Another pause. The light flickered, throwing a wild dance of shadows on the wall.

“I used to think,” Gabriel continued, almost absentely, “when I was little, that when I died I would turn into a star. I thought that would be a good thing to be. You could see everything.”

Lucifer waited, listening. He had the creeping sense of unreality moving around him. This wasn’t normal. With a slow ripple of horror, he wondered if he was still dreaming.

“Instead I’m this,” Gabriel said. “I don’t know why. I was a good person. I didn’t deserve to die. Did I deserve to die?”

“No,” Lucifer said. “You were a kind person. You didn’t deserve to die.”

“That’s right. That’s right.” Gabriel smiled, cold and strange. His eyes were as empty as camera lenses.

“If one of us had to die,” he said, “it should have been you.”

“I know,” Lucifer said.

“Yes. You do. That’s good.” Gabriel sighed, shifted. “I understand so many things now. All the things I didn’t have names for when I was alive, I do now. It’s terrible. I never wanted to understand so much. No one should have to understand these things.”

Lucifer said nothing, feeling his heartbeat like the soundless fall of snow. Each moment seemed to hold a lifetime.

“I know that the world is beautiful and I know that the world eats its young,” said Gabriel. “And I know that there is love, true love, love more powerful than any human achievement, but I also know that love relies on neither of the participants really knowing anything about the other.”

Gabriel said “Everyone has these things inside them. The rot and the filth. The wounds that go septic. Everyone has the madness just below the skin. If we all truly knew each other, what we really are, the human race would go extinct because none of us would want to touch each other.”

Gabriel said “You are going to kill the things you love. People will want to be near you because you’re beautiful and talented and brave, and you are going to destroy them. I don’t think you even mean to. God put you on earth as a tool to punish the people you love. You’re a disease. You’re a shared insanity. You ruin people by being close to them. You make people love you and then you eat them alive.”

The lamp leapt and shuddered in the shadows on the walls. The woman in the white dress looked like Sam, Lucifer realized. She had his eyes, warm and endless. Eyes that wanted to be hurt. He could feel the terrible stillness of time inside him. Gabriel was still speaking. He didn’t want to listen but he couldn’t stop.

“God is in our lungs,” Gabriel whispered. “God is in our bowels and our brains. God is in the spread of infection, God is in war and atrocity. God is in the mothers and fathers who beat us or abandoned us or made us monsters. God is in rape, mutilation, humiliation. God is in all things that are evil and disgusting, all things that kill, all things that sin, all things obscene or savage or unspeakable. So what does that say about God?”

“I don’t care,” Lucifer said. “I’m not Christian.”

Gabriel laughed. “That’s true. It’s very comforting, isn’t it, to have a cosmology that doesn’t rely on
a great big daddy in the sky who loves everyone and makes sure everything works out for the best? If you’re a Christian, especially if you’re a Protestant, you’re obligated to stay cheerful and optimistic no matter what, because your wise and loving God is in charge and whatever kind of merciless bullshit befalls you is surely in the interest of the greater good. Not like that for us. We know that the almighty powers don’t really like us and probably aren’t looking out for us. When the bad things happen we can take comfort in the fact that they’re unfair or useless or just plain shitty. We’re allowed to be angry. It’s not part of a bigger plan, it’s not really confusing evidence of God’s love. The universe just doesn’t care. And that is a reassuring thought.”

“It is?” Lucifer asked doubtfully.

“It is if you feel like the bigger plan probably doesn’t include you.”

“I don’t understand,” Lucifer said. “What’s happening? I feel like you’re slipping away. I feel like everything’s slipping away.”

“Maybe everything is slipping away,” Gabriel said.

There was quiet for a moment. Someone yelled something on the street outside, and then footsteps rushed by on the pavement. Abruptly there were other people in the world again.

“Is this about the preacher?” Lucifer asked. “That Kubrick fellow?”

Gabriel shifted and glanced away. “Why would it be about him?”

“It’s not a religious thing. His son’s dying. That kind of overrides everything else.”

Gabriel’s mouth twisted. “How much do you want to bet that the second Legba’s intervened for his kid, he’ll go right back to calling you a Satan-worshipping abomination unto the Lord?”

“There’s no doubt about that.” Lucifer slid back down onto his pillows. “But that’s not what matters. The kid’s what matters. I’m not doing it for him.”

“It’s a gift, you know,” Gabriel said absently. “Being a horse. That’s what it’s really about.”

“Right. Well, if I’m going to be a good little gift tomorrow, I need to sleep tonight. Nightmares or no nightmares.” Lucifer rolled over. “I suggest you go somewhere private and work out whatever’s going on with you. It’s worrying me. We can talk about it tomorrow if you like.”

“You’ll be busy tomorrow.” Gabe’s voice sounded distant.

Lucifer closed his eyes. “Not that busy.”

There was no answer. Lucifer wondered if he cared enough to look back around and decided he didn’t. Gabe would probably just be gone anyway.

He shut his eyes very tightly and dug his face into the pillow, reaching for the sleep which could not be found.
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

this chapter written by: Sarah

Warnings: loa possession, gore, body horror, graphic description, alcohol use

The day of the ceremony came bright and hot. Sam woke early and lay in bed for half an hour staring at the waking city. He felt like a stranger who had wandered into his body and did not know how to get out.

This is the day of my first vodou ceremony, he said to himself. Tonight I am going to go to graveyard and take part in a ritual which I do not believe in or support morally. How did this happen? When did I start being this person? Why doesn’t this bother me more?

That was the real problem, of course; that he was supposed to be a good white Christian boy from the Midwest and all he could think of was how exciting this was. It should have sickened him. He should have been terrified. Instead all he felt was the adrenaline, like a shower of sparks falling through his body. He felt like some part of him he had not known existed was waking up.

He got up and made himself a ramshackle breakfast. Dean was still asleep when he left.

The day passed in a kind of gentle haze. He did his part at the Roadhouse, banging out a dull assortment of tunes to entertain the morning drunks who didn’t really care. The sun slid across the sky like a clock counting down. Jo asked him if he was alright, and he told her he was, which was true in a limited sort of way. She looked at him with a quiet worry. He realized that he had managed to make the people here really like him, which was both nice and kind of a problem given the direction his life seemed to be going.

At the end of his shift, he went to Ellen and told her he wouldn’t be able to make it that night.

“It’s very urgent business,” he said. “I’m sorry I didn’t tell you sooner.”

She watched him through her hard eyes, eyes so like Jo’s and yet so different. “This have something to do with that bokor?”

“Yes,” he replied. Lying would just waste time.

“Yes.” She nodded thoughtfully and stared over his shoulder for a moment. ”What this means is that you’re putting one job over the other. I understand why you’re doing it, but that don’t mean I have to like it. Go ahead and go tonight. Don’t do this again. Understood?”

“Completely,” Sam promised.

At Lucifer’s everything was quiet. They worked through the afternoon at meaningless things, wasting time until they could leave. When the sky grew cloudy and the colour of dark wine, Lucifer gave Sam a piece of bread and the sticky, pungent, cheese made in the swamps.

“Try to eat,” he said. “You’ll need it later.”
Obligingly, Sam ate. The food went down like dust. Lucifer sat and watched him, detached.

“Aren’t you going to eat?” Sam asked, his mouth thick with food.

“No. I’m fasting. Keeps me focused.” Lucifer’s eyes were sunken and dull, and Sam suspected he had not slept well the night before.

“Listen,” Lucifer said, and then was quiet. Sam watched him, eating steadily.

“A possession of this type is a very intense experience,” he continued finally. “I know I’ve talked to you about this before but you have to understand that you—you are going to see some strange things tonight and there will be times when you will be afraid. I want you to know that you don’t need to be. I’ve done this a lot of times. No matter what it seems like, I will be fine, and so will you. Okay?”

“Okay,” Sam said, vaguely confused. He thought this was probably supposed to be comforting but it actually gave him no idea of what to expect. The heat and stink of the war were still very alive in his mind. He decided that he could probably handle whatever was going to happen tonight.

The ceremony was to take place in a graveyard. Technically it was illegal to be there after eight o’clock, but the night watchman knew Lucifer and had left a side door open. Before they left the shop, Lucifer went rummaging around in the shelves and emerged with a box of thick tallow candles, a small drum smeared with bright paints, and a bundle of cloth wrapped in rags.

“Meg’s bringing the rest,” he said. “Let’s go.”

The walk through the streets was hurried and silent. The sun had melted down to the edge of the horizon and now nothing was left in the sky but the grey memory of light. The night air was hot as wet velvet. Around corners and down crooked alleys, lights flared and glittered, voices floated out loud. Some parts of the city were still awake. In the darkness everything was uncertain and touched with mystery. Above the smudge of clouds, the moon stared down, remote and haunted.

Meg was waiting inside the cemetery gate. At first Sam did not see her. Then there was the white flash of her hand wrapped around the bars, and her dark mass of hair. “You got everything?” she hissed.

“All here. You?”

“Yeah. Cas is further in, entertaining your guest. I’d step if I were you. Looks like he’s getting jitters.”

They moved into the stillness of the graveyard. Meg shut the gate behind them. This far south, it was hard to prevent nature from taking over whatever it felt like, so the cemetery was as much crawling vines and moss as it was actual cemetery. The stones lay jagged and smothered under a drapery of soft green. No one was there. The walls were thick and dark around them. To one side an angel stood with outstretched wings of pearly stone and a beautiful unfeeling face. The path was pebbles, unevenly laid and poxed with rebellious tufts of grass, twisting through the gap-toothed lines of headstones. On some of the stones, people had left gifts—coins or oyster shells or broken glass. Someone had left spider lilies in a rusted tin can next to a squat old stone carved with the name CASSANDRA GREEN. The dates beneath the name were not very far apart.

Swallowing a shiver, Sam turned to Lucifer. “Who’s the friend Meg was talking about?”

“Our client. He wanted to be present.” A pinch of distaste crossed Lucifer’s face. “Just ignore him. Dealing with him is Cas’s job.”
“You sent Cas to deal with another human being?”

He got a thin smile for that. Then, “We’re here,” and Lucifer turned away.

It was the center of the ragged paths that divided the cemetery. There was a slightly larger cleared area, edged with stones like uneven mossy teeth. The grass grew tattered and thick between the pavements. Everything was caught in a dreamlike silver state by the moonlight. Cas was there, his torn raincoat wrapped around him. Next to him was another man dressed in black. He looked up and Sam’s heart jumped in surprise. It was the pastor from that new hardline Baptist church that had been giving Lucifer so much trouble. Sam had never been there, but he recognized the man from the street. He was staring around him with a look that was a blazing mixture of hatred, shame, and gnawing fear.

“Sam.” Meg nudged him. She was holding a short stool of knotted wood. “Put this over there. And put some of the candles on it.”

Sam obeyed. Lucifer had taken a bag from Cas and was drawing on the ground with the stuff inside of it, which appeared to be a fine dust. Sam detected a faint gritty smell of ashes, and also of corn meal.

“Who’s he calling on?” he whispered to Meg.

“Legba,” she replied. “Our priestly friend has a sick kid. Wants some instant healing. Apparently he’s paying an arm and a leg.”

“He couldn’t just come in for a charm like everyone else?”

“Nope. He’s desperate, I guess. Get those candles set up.”

The candles were green. He hadn’t noticed that before. He put them on the stool and stood back, unsure of what to do.

The design Lucifer was drawing was increasingly complex and strange. It looked a little bit like a large cross, with a latticework at its center and things drawn at the tips of the bars. Meg hurried over to the stool, opened her bag, and started putting a very strange collection of objects out. Long rags of white and red cloth, three copper pennies, a bottle of rum. Carefully she put down a sealed clay bowl and took the covering off. The thick sweet smell of yams billowed out. Lastly, she laid down two small, cracked, mirrors, and between them a clay figurine of a man with a cane. The man’s body seemed somehow twisted or warped, but his smile was broad and warm.

From out of the bundle of cloth he had brought, Lucifer lifted a small glass bowl. He laid it carefully down before the makeshift altar, and put the bone-handled knife beside it. His movements were very tight and fluid. There were ghost lights burning deep in his eyes.

“Does it hurt?” Sam asked Meg quietly. “I mean, is it painful for him?”


Lucifer got slowly up from the paving stones, dusting off his knees. He turned. “Castiel,” he said.

Cas nodded and crossed to Lucinda Moran, Beloved Wife and Mother. From behind the stone he yanked out what at first appeared to be a confused cluster of straw and feathers but which resolved itself into a wicker cage with a black rooster in it. Sam started guiltily. The rooster was very still and had obviously been drugged. Castiel handed the cage to Lucifer and sat down, tucking the round
Lucifer put the cage on the ground next to the bowl. The rooster shifted but did not wake, the scarlet flesh of its neck trembling. With a great sigh, Lucifer dropped to his knees. The design in ash and flour spread out before him like a great web.

“Now,” he said, and Castiel began to beat the drum in a quick desperate rhythm, like the patter of bullets. Sam felt his heart leap in time. Lucifer’s hands clenched by his sides. He put his head back, his pale hair falling over his back, and began to sing.

It was not a normal kind of singing, not like any other kind of singing Sam had ever heard, but that was really the only thing to call it. Lucifer’s voice slid up into a high quivering wail, a sing-song drone that moaned and echoed across the graveyard. There were words, but Sam could not clearly make them out. They seemed to be largely unintelligible. Cas hit the drum to a feverish beat. The priest watched, his face caught in a rictus of emotions Sam did not understand.

It became apparent that Lucifer was singing in at least three languages. He kept skipping back and forth between English and the broad French of Haiti, with frequent interjections in some passionate streaming tongue Sam didn’t know. The name Houn’to was mentioned a number of times, and then there was what seemed to be a list of names, a few of which Lucifer had mentioned before. Papa Ghede. Ougoun. Loko. Then Lucifer rattled off the Lord’s Prayer in a rapid mix of French and English, so quickly that Sam barely realized what was happening before it was done.

The air was sticky and full of the syrupy smell of plant rot. The moss grew thick in the rich boneyard soil. It was almost midnight, and the moon looked down in a haze of clear strange light like broken glass.

Lucifer took the bone-handled knife in one hand, and undid the wicker cage with the other. The rooster rustled but made no attempt to move. Sam felt a heavy nausea fall into his stomach.

“Papa Legba, hear me,” Lucifer said. His voice was very even. He slit the rooster’s throat with a quick twist and held it over the glass bowl. Black blood vomited out, spilling into a thick puddle at the base of the bowl and running down the sides. The rooster’s corpse looked different, limp, as if it had been wrung out. The bowl filled with a dark wet mass, feathers floating on the surface.

Carefully, Lucifer wiped the blade of the knife on the rooster’s side and laid the body before the altar, next to the streaked cup, which was mostly full.

Sam felt his nerves trying to crawl out of his skin. He had not been expecting that, although looking back it was hard to tell how he hadn’t seen it coming. He shot a surreptitious glance at Meg, who looked perfectly calm and almost bored. The preacher was staring, his face disfigured with outrage. He made several choked gasping sounds, which everyone ignored.

There were faint scarlet smears on Lucifer’s fingertips. He looked up at the altar, his face smooth and empty as the marble angel which stood guard over the path.

“I am troubled,” he said. “I ask your presence, Father of the Crossroads, opener of doors, attend to me. I am here to serve you. Legba, great traveler, mystere de la porte, Saint Pierre, Saint Lazarus. It is I, Lucifer, your servant, shadow-worker. I call you. I implore you. I offer you food and drink. Legba of the crossroads, come to me.”

For a moment, there was nothing. The dim chanting of the insects was the only sound. It stretched on and Sam thought, with a brief flash of relief, that perhaps the summoning had failed, and they would be done for the night.
Then Lucifer’s mouth dropped open, slowly, almost lazily. His eyes went very wide and empty.

“Ah,” he said. “Ah.”

He began to shudder convulsively, violently. His body shook and spasmed like a doll being thrown. His head snapped back against his shoulder. He collapsed to the ground, boneless and jerking. His hands opened and closed and twisted into white distended claws.

Sam breathed in sharply. Meg put her hand on his arm.

“He’s fine,” she said. “Wait.”

As they watched, Lucifer began to beat his head against the ground. He did it blindly, mindlessly, and the ugly sound of breaking skin rose. A muddy stain began to collect on the stones. He did not seem to be in pain; his face was serene, vacant. There was a spark of white bone on the ground. He raised his head. His forehead was a mangled smear of gore.

“He’s hurting himself,” Sam blurted, unable to stop. “He’s hurting himself.”

“Shut the hell up,” Meg hissed. She was watching intently, almost hungrily.

Across from them, Cas stared at the grimy mess of Lucifer’s blood on the stone.

Lucifer reached across the symbol drawn on the ground to the bowl of blood by the altar. For an awful moment Sam was sure he was going to drink it. Instead he turned it, carefully, almost curiously, in his hands. Then he smashed it on the ground. The bowl exploded in a burst of shattered glass and bullets of blood. Sam flinched involuntarily, feeling horror move over him.

Where the bowl had been there was a murky black pool, and a halo of brilliant glass teeth. Lucifer looked around at the circle of people and, almost theatrically, scooped up a handful of broken glass. Then he clapped his hand to his mouth and swallowed.

Sam stopped breathing. Lucifer’s hand fell and there was the sharp fatal glitter behind his teeth. He swallowed again, wetly. A bright trickle of blood ran down over his chin. He opened his mouth in a gaping, grotesque, smile, and red gore dripped out.

“No,” Sam whispered. “No.” He didn’t know why he was saying it, but he couldn’t stop. It was a denial that he was seeing this, that it was really happening, that his boss had actually just gone insane and killed himself by shoving broken glass down his throat.

“Ah, God,” Lucifer said. He was still smiling, wide and wet and awful. He lifted one hand and turned it over, looking at it almost idly. The smallest finger jerked backwards and broke with a sucking pop, like someone had crushed it. His knuckles distended and snapped one by one, leaving a line of mutilated gristly lumps behind. He did not seem displeased; if anything, he looked vaguely fascinated. His hand spasmed and cracked into a useless disfigured bag of flesh at the end of his arm. Then his elbow snapped, almost crisply. A white fingertip of bone stabbed out of his arm.

As they watched, a wave of violent convulsions crawled over his body. His ribs burst one after another, like piano keys being smashed. His neck broke and his head rolled to one side even as his skull started to turn concave, cheekbones snapping, forehead crumpling back against his brain. He was mutating into some horrific broken thing, a tangle of bones and torn skin. One of his eyes disappeared mutely inside his eyes, leaving a damp and shapeless socket behind. It was like watching him decompose over a period of minutes.

Finally, he raised his head. His face was a shattered horror of angles and scars. His remaining eye
stared out with manic, terrifying, good humour.

“Well,” he said. “Here I am.”

The voice was Lucifer’s and the mouth was his also, but the thing that was using that voice and that mouth was not him. It was something else entirely.

That was when Sam broke and ran. His heart howled desperately as he fled across the graveyard. He could hear Meg calling after him but he didn’t care. The gate was open. Somewhere out there was a place where this wasn’t happening, and that was the only thing that mattered.

Lucifer found him a few hours later. He had gone to the Roadhouse, because it was the only place he knew he could drink safely. Benny was on bar duty, and had taken one look at him and given him a glass of dark brown acid that could probably be used to strip paint. Sam sat, bent over it, taking short pinched sips and waiting for the alcohol to burn away his mind. He stared at nothing. He could still hear things in his head, like an echo; the tearing sound of the rooster’s neck being slit, the breaking glass, the sharp crack of snapping bone.

Ellen came by after a time. “Thought you weren’t reporting for duty tonight,” she said impassively.

“I’m not,” Sam said. His voice sounded empty, even to him. “Just looking for a little peace and quiet.”

Ellen nodded. “The adventure with your friends didn’t go so well.”

“No,” Sam replied. He didn’t offer any more information, and after a moment she left. She must have warned the others he wanted to be left alone, because he didn’t get any more company.

Until Lucifer slid into the chair next to him, sniffed at his drink, and coughed. “Christ, what is that, gasoline? I thought this was a respectable joint.”

Sam stared at him in vacant shock. It was Lucifer, quite whole, as straight and slender as he had ever been, bearing no sign that a few hours ago he had been a shapeless broken corpse. Two bright blue eyes, two intact hands, the face that Sam had seen every day for weeks now. His clothes were clean, although different. The old ones were probably lying in a blood-stained heap somewhere. He gave Sam a tentative smile.

“What,” Sam said, and then stopped, suddenly having a great deal of trouble speaking. “What—“

“You ran out on us pretty fast, I’m told,” Lucifer said, leaning back.

“I thought you were dead,” Sam snapped on a sudden flash of anger.

“Yeah, but I’m not, clearly.”

“Which brings up an entirely new set of questions.”

Lucifer shrugged. “This is what the loa do. They get in you and they fuck you up all sorts of ways, but they usually put everything back where it was before they leave. They like to show off. Swallowing razor blades and breaking rocks. I’ve done this a lot, I’m always fine.”
“You ate broken glass,” Sam countered flatly. “You broke every bone in your body.”

“I’ve had worse. Legba is usually pretty forbearing. It’s the ones like Marinette and the Ougouns you have to watch out for.” A shadow of a frown crossed Lucifer’s face. “It was bad tonight. I don’t know why.”

“You’re saying this is normal.”

“For a Chwal, yeah.”

“Is it this bad for other people?”

“Not for the real houngans. I never had real training. I’m not initiated. That makes some things more difficult, and this is one of them.”

Sam blew out a sharp sigh and shook his head. “This is too strange. This is fucking—I don’t even know. I don’t know how I’m supposed to handle this.”

“I’m sorry,” Lucifer said quietly.

Sam took a long painful gulp of his drink and made himself say it. “It’s real, isn’t it? All of this. It’s real. It actually happened.”

“I’m afraid it is.”

“Okay,” Sam said, and leaned forward and closed his eyes. “Damn it. God damn it.”

“You didn’t really believe it was before.” Lucifer was watching him carefully. “You thought it was just illusion and trickery.”

“I believed some of it. Not enough.” The air smelled like liquor and humidity. Good smells, real smells. It was hard to connect them to that graveyard and the thing that had taken Luce’s body, to say that that was just as real as this. That the two existed and did not contradict each other.

“You’re doing very well,” Lucifer offered. “Most people are screaming and crying at this point.”

Sam laughed a little desperately and raised his head. “Most people? Do you do this a lot?:

“More than you’d think.” Lucifer’s smile was thin. “You’re okay.”

“Oh, yeah, I’m aces. Just copacetic.” Sam rubbed his eyes angrily, feeling like he was unable to fully wake up. The alcohol settled in his blood.

“I can’t do that again,” he said finally “I’m sorry, but I can’t.”

“All right,” Lucifer agreed easily.

Sam shot him a glance. “So I guess I’m fired.”

“No, you’re not. You remember the deal? I’m not going to make you do anything you don’t want to, but every time you choose to opt out, I add a day onto your total time. The job’s still yours, if you want it.”

“Thanks.” Sam breathed out. “Thanks a whole bunch.”

“It’s fine. You’re a good worker. And I like having you around.” Lucifer stole Sam’s glass and took
a sip. “Just make clear what you can or can’t do beforehand, in future.”

“Don’t worry. I think I’ve learned my lesson in that department.”

They sat in silence. The bar was slowly emptying. It was very late, and most of the patrons were going home. Benny, at the end of the bar, shot them an opaque look.

“You know what the crazy thing is?” Sam said finally.

“Is there anything about this that isn’t crazy?”

Sam raised his glass. “Fair point. Okay, you know what one of the crazier things about this is?”

“Tell me.”

“I was actually getting to like this. I mean, what we do at the shop. I like the symbols, the mythologies. I like how much of it there is. And I like that it’s real. I like that it works.”

“But now this,” Lucifer finished for him, and Sam nodded grimly, taking a sip.

“There’s a lot more to vodou than what you saw tonight,” Lucifer said softly. “And even being ridden—it’s not bad. It’s not wrong. It’s just hard to understand.”

“Too hard for me, maybe.”

There was another pause. Lucifer passed his hand over his face and sighed inaudibly. His eyes were ashy, and there was a faint tremble in his hand as he put it back on the bar.

“You look terrible,” Sam noted.

Lucifer laughed sharply. “Yeah? I feel terrible. It’s not easy, being a chwal.”

“Why didn’t you go home? Get some sleep?”

Lucifer looked at him with a strange clear honesty. “I wanted to make sure you were okay,” he said, and Sam knew he was telling the truth.

Everything seemed very simple then, for a moment. The liquor was strong and the night was warm. Around them was the still, enchanted, world, waiting for them to move. Lucifer had said that he wanted to make sure Sam was okay, and he had meant it, and that was so good in such an uncomplicated way. It was like sunlight. He smiled at Lucifer, and the smile Lucifer gave him in return was sweeter than any of the kisses he had ever known.

Then Benny yelled “Last call, seriously, you two,” and the perfect moment broke. Sam coughed around his swallow of whiskey. Lucifer laughed at nothing, and looked down.

“Well,” he said presently. “Let’s get you home. Your brother will be worried.”

“Dean knows I can take care of myself,” Sam replied, sliding off his stool. “Besides, what about you? You’re the one who just got ridden by some ancient cosmic power.”

“You make it sound like a horror movie.” Lucifer grinned. “I’ve made it this far. I can handle a few more minutes.”

The lights of the bar passed behind them. They walked out into the warm arms of the night.
Castiel absolutely made sessions with Dean easier, Lucifer concluded quickly. Dean opened the door for them, an unreadable expression plastered onto his face. When Castiel spoke up (sooner rather than later, this time, so as to alert Dean to his presence before he surprised them man again), it was as if a light was turned on behind Dean’s eyes and a grin quickly spread across his face. He stepped aside to let them all in.

“What’s on the agenda today, then?” Dean’s question was clearly directed at Lucifer even if he wasn’t looking at anyone in particular when he asked it.

“I have a rather simple task to complete, today,” Lucifer stated. “I’ll likely have Sam do most of the work on this one as I put together something else for later.”

“Something else for later?” Dean asked.

“A remedy to be consumed, preferably before you go to sleep for the night.”

Dean nodded and leaned against the post at the bottom of the stairs. Castiel shuffled anxiously by the doorway, eyes transfixed on the almost-blind man. Lucifer shook his head, deciding not to think on it until after he had instructed Sam on what to do. The bokor beckoned Sam towards the kitchen.

“Come, Sam.”

Sam followed him into the other room and waited patiently for directions. Lucifer still found it amusing that the man stood at attention or at ease, depending on how focused he was on a task that Lucifer assigned him; if it was something regarding Dean, Sam’s posture would be impeccable, his chin would be tipped up ever so slightly, and his feet would be rooted together like a solid tree trunk holding him up. If the task was something like fetching materials or putting a charm together, he would stand with his hands clasped behind his back, his feet apart with around a foot and a half of space between them, and eyes trained on Lucifer until everything had been explained thoroughly. It was a habit that, no matter how many times it was brought to his attention, Sam clearly couldn’t stop acting upon.

“You will put a thin coating of olive oil from this bottle”—Lucifer pulled the bottle in question out of his bag and handed it to Sam—“on or around Dean’s eyelids, depending on what he is more comfortable with, and you will recite the prayer I have written out on a card.”

Lucifer held up a finger as he rummaged around in his bag for the correct piece of paper to hand over. Sam stood still and silent as he waited. In the entryway, they could hear Castiel and Dean talking to each other quietly.

“You can take off your jacket, if you’d like,” Dean said. “There should be a rack by the door for that.”
“Thank you,” Castiel replied, “I had forgotten I was wearing it.”

“How’d you forget you were wearing a trench coat?” Dean asked with a small laugh. “It’s like Florida outside, it’s so hot and muggy.”

“I have never been to Florida,” Castiel stated. There was a clattering noise as he hung up his jacket and soft, light footsteps made their way back to where Dean must have been standing.

“I don’t care for it all that much, personally,” Dean said. “It’s a lotta swamp land and beaches, from what I’ve seen. A helluva lot of gators’re down there, too.”

Their conversation turned back into background noise as Lucifer found the paper that he was looking for. He handed it to Sam and began pulling everything else that he needed out of the bag. Sam read over the small prayer and whispered the words under his breath.

“He shouldn’t have to wipe the oil off too soon,” Lucifer added, “so don’t use too much. Just a thin coating will do for our purposes. If it is bothering him after an hour or so and it still isn’t dry, he may dab at it lightly with a towel to remove any excess oil.”

“Okay,” Sam said, “I think I can do that. What will you be making?”

“A drink,” Lucifer stated, “and I will be mixing an oil for him to add to the next bath he takes. All it is is Rosemary and Eucalyptus, so it shouldn’t be too obnoxious of an odor for him to deal with. It won’t be a very high concentration, either.”

“Alright, is there anything else I need to do?”

“Nothing for now, no.”

Sam nodded and left the room to take care of Dean. The voices moved into another room and became even more muted. Lucifer sighed exhaustedly and pulled out a chair to sit in. He was still exhausted from the session with Papa Legba and Pastor Kubrick. There was a slight sense of vertigo that he received every time he stood up after staying horizontal for too long and he felt as though, while at home, he was guzzling water just to keep himself properly hydrated and alert. He was damn tired. Nothing was ever very comfortable after a violent loa possession, but the fact that Sam wasn’t talking as much as he normally did wasn’t helping anything. Knowing Sam, he would likely get adjusted to the idea sooner rather than later, but that guaranteed nothing. Outside of Sam, Lucifer had Meg to talk to. (Castiel talked so little in the first place that he didn’t entirely count as being in either category, in this situation.) It wasn’t as though Meg was hard to talk to, of course. Lucifer had simply gotten used to hearing Sam’s refreshing and different perspective on everything.

He cleared his mind and focused on the materials at hand. He mixed everything together in a jar, capped it, and set it aside for the brothers to take care of later. The rosemary and eucalyptus were mixed with olive oil and an individual piece of rock salt. The oil was set aside in a smaller bottle for Dean, next to the drink, and Lucifer was left with nothing else to do. There was honestly so little that he knew about treating the eyes. It made him uneasy sometimes to allow Sam to believe in his abilities so faithfully. Lucifer was determined to do right by these men, though; they needed someone to help them, and he was more than willing to do everything in his power to be that someone. He knew enough about the healing process for other ailments that he could act as both medicine man and spiritual healer for Dean with some ease, but there was always that risk that he wouldn’t be able to do enough.

Lucifer had doubts. Of course he did. He never let on, though. Not to Sam, not to Dean, and certainly not to the spirits he petitioned to. He couldn’t afford to have doubts predominate his
thoughts. His optimism had to outweigh everything else in order for this to work.

The bokor collected his materials and joined the others in the sitting room. Dean was relaxed, draped over the couch and, more importantly, over Castiel. Lucifer had a hard time trying not to smile at the image, because it was absolutely priceless; Dean’s eyes closed, lids shining from the thin sheen of olive oil on them, and his legs—clearly intentionally—crossed over Castiel’s lap, effectively trapping the man. Dean was laughing about some story he had been telling just before Lucifer had entered the room. Sam looked like he was barely holding back laughter, himself. Castiel’s mouth hadn’t moved by much, but Lucifer could see the faint smile in his eyes. The bokor was surprised that Castiel wasn’t uncomfortable with Dean’s unreservedly flirtatious behavior. He decided not to make any comments on the subject.

“So what’s up?” Dean asked suddenly, a smile still on his face.

“I have a drink and a bottle of bath oil for you, back in the kitchen,” Lucifer reported.

“Sounds great. I’ll take care of those in a little bit. Short visit today, then.”

“Yes, it has been,” Lucifer said. Dean raised an eyebrow (which was almost a comical picture, seeing as how his eyes were still closed) and let a frown flash across his mouth quickly before replacing it with a casual expression once again.

“You sound tired,” Dean said plainly.

“I…I am rather tired,” Lucifer admitted. He watched as Sam’s shoulders tensed, then were forced to relax back into the chair’s backrest. Lucifer grimaced.

“If you don’t have anything else to do, I’m not gonna keep you from taking a nap or resting up or anything,” Dean offered. “Just tell me if I’ve gotta do anything special with those things in the kitchen before you do.”

“The drink shouldn’t be consumed all at once,” Lucifer explained; he tried to keep his words from becoming muddled together, but was only halfway successful. “It’s to be taken before you retire for the evening, and you shouldn’t drink anything until around two hours afterwards. And there isn’t anything special about the way you need to handle the oil. Just treat it like you would any normal bath oil.”

Dean saluted in the general direction of the doorway where Lucifer stood.

“I think I can manage that,” the man said confidently.

“Is everyone here staying around for a while, or should I wait a few minutes before leaving?” Lucifer asked on a tired exhale.

“I think Sammy’s going to the Roadhouse in an hour, and Cas looks like he’ll be sticking around for a little bit longer,” Dean explained. “If you don’t wanna walk home while you’re so exhausted, I wouldn’t care if you wanted to lie down for a while in the spare bedroom upstairs.”

“I wouldn’t want to impose—”

“If you’re tired, it completely fine,” Sam interjected. “But the spare room’s a bit dusty. My room’s perfectly fine, though.” Lucifer opened his mouth to object, but the look Sam gave him was firm enough to deter him. He nodded and rubbed at his eyes with his palms and let his hands slide down either side of his face because of how heavy his limbs felt. Sam shot him a kind smile, but Lucifer could still see the small sense victory behind the expression.
“Where is your room, again?”

“Upstairs. First door on the right.”

“Thank you very much,” Lucifer slurred and walked with small steps towards the stairs.

“What’s up with him?” he heard Dean ask.

“A ceremony he did recently took a lot out of him, I guess,” Sam replied.

“Yes, that would make sense,” Castiel’s voice chimed in quietly.

“Letting someone sleep in your bed then, eh, Sammy?” Dean teased.

“Shut up,” Sam mumbled.

Lucifer tuned out whatever was said next by the time he reached the bend in the stairway. As soon as he stepped up onto the second half of the stairs, however, a loud thump sounded from downstairs along with several startled noises coming from the sitting room. Lucifer turned around and looked down at the entryway.

“Is everything alright down there?”

“A bird flew into the window,” Castiel reported back. “Small, black bird. Likely dead, travelling at that speed.”

Lucifer blinked hard and forced the haze to clear out of his head temporarily. A black bird flew into the window and killed itself. That was ominous…and a bit cliché, by Lucifer’s standards. Was it that negative energy following him again? That was a frightening yet extremely likely possibility.

He should leave. If he was attracting bad energy, this house was the last place he wanted to be if or when anything more drastic occurred. Lucifer descended the stairs once again, but was stopped in his tracks halfway down them as Sam stepped into the entryway.

“I’ll take care of it,” Sam said gently, making eye contact with the bokor. “Go upstairs and get some rest. I don’t want to hear what you have to say about this one, ‘cause I can see what you’re thinking as plain as day.”

“What am I thinking, then?” Lucifer mumbled back, surprised by how direct Sam was being with him. Normally, he spoke in a carefully worded, respectful tone to Lucifer. In that moment, though, Lucifer felt like a child being dismissed from the grown-ups’ conversation. It was almost like Sam was channeling his older brother with such an authoritative tone. Lucifer shut his mouth tight and listened to his assistant.

“Black birds are bad omens. It doesn’t take a genius to know that much. Death is kind of an obviously bad sign, too. The truth is that I don’t care what you have to say about it at this very moment because I want you to not look like you’re going to collapse at any second when you leave this house. I’ll wake you in an hour; does that sound good?”

Lucifer held his tongue. So commanding, Sam Winchester.

“Yeah, yeah it does. Thank you, Sam,” Lucifer croaked after a moment’s pause. Sam stared at him for a couple of seconds longer before he walked out the front door, probably to retrieve the deceased black bird. Lucifer was left standing on the stairs, staring after the brunet. That was…interesting. He blinked hard and braced himself on the hand rail. This was no time to analyze Sam’s behavior. That
could wait for later. Lucifer, instead, followed Sam’s instructions and finished climbing the stairs. He sat down on the bed in the first room on the right side of the hallway and barely managed to kick off his shoes before he collapsed onto the twin-sized bed. The room was comfortable. It was just slightly smaller than Lucifer’s back room at his shack, but it was much better organized than his own living quarters. The lone, rectangular window would have looked out over the roofs of the smaller buildings across the alleyway if it weren’t covered by a thick, dark curtain. Lucifer shut his eyes and rolled onto his side, facing away from the door. He fell asleep almost immediately thereafter.

It was the most restful sleep he had had in weeks.
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

this chapter written by: Mer

Warnings: alcohol use, smoking, ironic choice in drink

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Friday nights always provided a lively atmosphere in the streets of New Orleans. People milled about, chatting with friends, drinking from unlabeled bottles, playing music from glowing front porches. Sam found that he could feel the pure energy coursing through his veins when he was surrounded by the late evening crowd of the city.

Sam passed by shops, open-air markets, [poorly concealed] speakeasies, and hotels, searching for some place to spend some time away from home. The Roadhouse was doing just fine without him for one night, and Dean had shooed him out the front door with a command to “have some fun”. Sam had thought that maybe Lucifer could use some help, but quickly realized that he didn’t want it to look like he was volunteering to dabble in Vodou in his free time. Plus, the bokor’s lights were out when he had passed by the shack. Apparently, even Lucifer got out of the house for a night on the town.

Actually, Sam didn’t think that he had ever seen the bokor outside of their designated work hours. He didn’t know where Lucifer went or what he did when their sessions weren’t occurring. Maybe Lucifer did other home visits like the ones he did for Dean. Maybe he had a secretive lover somewhere or some favorite establishment he visited for a drink in the late night hours. It was hard to imagine Lucifer outside of the Vodou practices he was known for.

Thinking about the bokor so much must have been making Sam crazy, because he could have sworn in that moment that he had seen a familiar blond-haired figure slip around the corner of a building at the end of the block. Sam blinked hard. No…no, he hadn’t imagined that. Curious, Sam picked up his pace to follow the bokor. As he rounded the corner, he caught a glimpse of Lucifer stepping into an old, multi-story, brick building with warm, yellow light spilling out of it. He was dressed in a button-down, white shirt, a black vest, black trousers, and simple, black shoes, and he carried a medium-sized bag in one of his hands.

Sam didn’t know what made him want to follow the bokor, but he wasn’t resisting the urge anytime soon. The place practically screamed, Good location for a juice joint, as Sam looked over the outside. He stopped at the front entrance and hesitated a moment before stepping inside.

He was immediately overcome with surprise as he was greeted by a setting that reminded him of the Roadhouse. The restaurant was populated by people of all ages, and the main room extended far back into the building. At the back of the room was a wrought iron, spiral staircase that stretched upwards through the ceiling and down through the floor. There was the faintest sound of music accompanied by a thin haze of tobacco smoke that floated up from the lower floor. No one seemed to pay any attention to Sam as he descended the dizzying stairs and entered the belly of the beast.
Tables and chairs surrounded by all sorts of people filled the space by the stairwell, which touched
down almost dreamily in the middle of the lower room. A section of the wooden floor, back in the
direction of the wall facing the street, was unoccupied by furniture, but hosted several enthusiastic
dancers. A bar stretched along one of the walls, and around half of its stools were occupied by men
and women alike who each were caught up in some combination of laughing, talking, smoking, and
nursing their drink glasses. Just beyond the stage, a section of the room was raised like a short
staging area and was blocked from view by a cream colored, opaque screen. Lights shone from
behind the screen, and dark silhouettes of the band were cast onto the screen.

Sam glanced around quickly at the crowd before he stepped onto the floor, and found that he
couldn’t locate Lucifer anywhere. The establishment was nice enough, however, and the music was
wonderful, so Sam decided that it was worth sticking around for a while. He made his way over to
the bar and sat on one of the open stools.

“And what can I get you?” the man at the bar asked. He was a skinny guy with short brown hair, a
goofy accent, and a broad smile.

“Whiskey?”

“We just got some good stuff in the other morning,” the bartender commented as he pulled out a
glass bottle of amber-colored liquor and quickly poured a glass. “It’s a good choice, my friend.”

“Thanks.”

“I don’t believe I’ve seen you around here before. You new to the area?”

“Sort of, yeah.” Sam replied. He put a hand around his glass and held it in his line of sight, but didn’t
feel like taking a drink yet. The bartender leaned against the wooden counter and looked up and
down the bar (probably checking to see if anyone would need a refill anytime soon, Sam assumed).

“Well, I’m Garth,” the man said with a cheery smile.

“I’m Sam.”

“Pleasure to have you here, Sam. I’ll be working the first half of tonight, so let me know if you need
anything.”

Sam nodded and Garth left him for a new customer at the other end of the bar. After looking around
the room a few more times, Sam still couldn’t locate Lucifer. Maybe he had been imagining things.
The joint was a good one, though, so it hardly mattered if the bokor was in the crowd or not. It
wasn’t as if Sam really needed to be around him anyway. He merely followed because he was
curious. He had already decided that he didn’t want to spend time outside of their scheduled
meetings…so why would he follow the man in the first place? Curiosity was the reason Sam wanted
to settle on, but he also couldn’t help but think of the bokor as something of a friend. Maybe it was
more like an amiable-business-partner relationship than an actual friendship, but it was a good
connection nonetheless.

Yes, Sam was going to need that good whiskey Garth promised him if he was going to be practically
alone with his thoughts for the evening.

Sam directed his attention to the main stage as the current song ended. The crowd applauded and
cheered and whistled as the band transitioned. Another couple of silhouettes joined the few that were
already on stage—a trombonist, a clarinetist, and a vocalist carrying what looked like a fiddle in its
case.
The band picked up a new tune. The vocalist rested his hand on the microphone on its stand towards the front of the stage and nodded his head, pacing back and forth as he listened to the trumpet and saxophone play through the root melody. Sam could see the smile appear on the vocalist’s face as he leaned in towards the mic to sing, even though he was only looking at a silhouette.

“I’m just a little bit bad, a little bit bad,
I don’t mean anything wrong.
A little loving now and then,
Though I shouldn’t, still, who wouldn’t?
A wee little kiss,
Means oceans of bliss,
When you’ve been good for so long.
Oh, isn’t it a shame and a crime?
I feel like making up all the time.
I’m like a bird in the cage
That’s been there for an age,
Trying to break out.
I don’t know which way to turn,
But I am willing to learn
What it’s all about.
I try so hard to be good,
But misunderstood
I’m almost insatiable
I’m gonna write out an ad:
I’m just a little bit bad,
That’s all!”

Sam could honestly say that he hadn’t heard the vocalist’s style of singing before, but it complemented the instrumentals perfectly. The song’s range called only for a contralto range, but the energetic mood of the singer made it much more interesting than it could have been, were anyone else to sing it instead. The trumpet took a solo, then, which seemed to contradict the expected flow of the song, but Sam found that it worked beautifully. None of the musicians on stage seemed to feel any reservations about moving to their collective rhythm, which was nice to see, from Sam’s perspective. He watched the stage and bounced his foot against the stool’s footrest, absolutely entranced.
The root melody came back to the foreground of the piece, and the trumpet player sat down. He received the audience’s applause with a wave of his hand and lifted the instrument to his face again. The vocalist stepped up to the microphone again and sang the last couple of lines again before the band led them out.

“I try so hard to be good,
But misunderstood,
I’m almost insatiable
I’m gonna write out an ad:
I’m just a little bit bad,
That’s all!”

The crowd applauded and the vocalist and trumpet soloist took their respective bows.

“Thank you all very much,” the vocalist said into the microphone. A bit of laughter hung around the edges of each word he spoke. It was almost as if he was letting loose for the first time all day; all of that pent-up tension slipped out between his words and quiet, somewhat high-pitched laughter. Sam found himself smiling at the sound, and he honestly didn’t care enough to conceal it from anyone around him.

The next tune was a rag that Sam barely recognized. He had heard it somewhere before…maybe Lucifer had been humming it the other day. That must have been it. It was catchy, though. He took a sip of whiskey, leaned his elbow on the bar, and allowed himself to relax and just enjoy the music. The vocalist pulled out his fiddle, and, after rosin up his bow, joined in with the rest of the band. His fingers danced across the fingerboard, and his bow arm moved with ease. He rocked and stepped in time with the music like his body was the instrument instead of the player. They were all mesmerizing to watch, but the front man was something else altogether.

“Good, aren’t they?”

Sam hadn’t noticed Garth walk up to him again, but he couldn’t even care that he should have been surprised by the bartender’s sudden comment. He simply nodded, still in his trance. Garth laughed at him a bit.

“Does the screen have a purpose besides creating an interesting effect?” Sam asked after the song had come to a close.

“It’s pretty much just because the owners of this place artsy types. Plus, it’s something that the original band did that the rest of the musicians, who’ve come and gone since then, haven’t wanted to drop. It’s kind of a tradition at this point.”

Sam hummed and nodded his head.

“Care for more whiskey?”

“Sure,” Sam said. “You were right. That’s good stuff.”

“I frequently am about these things,” Garth said with a chuckle. He tipped more whiskey into Sam’s glass.
“Well, Sam, are you out on a personal night or are you meeting someone?”

“I…”

Oh, what the hell.

“…was thinking about meeting a friend here. He’s not exactly aware that I’m here. I just figured I’d say hello and see what this place was like. I haven’t had too many nights on the town yet—new to the area and all. I just don’t know where he’d be.”

“What’s he look like?”

“He’s kind of tall, and he’s got blond hair and blue eyes. Uhm, his skin is kind of pale…he’s got a really level voice when he talks, no matter how loud the room is…he doesn’t smile all that much—”

“I think I know who you’re talking about,” Garth said. It looked like a light bulb had turned on in his brain. He snapped his fingers and pointed at Sam.

“He usually comes over here at around 10:00,” the bartender explained, a knowing smile growing on his face. Sam wasn’t sure whether or not that was a good thing—there were too many psychics in New Orleans for him to feel comfortable with those sorts of facial expressions anymore.

“Great,” Sam replied quickly. “Thanks for the help.”

“You are ab-so-lutely welcome,” Garth said in a chipper tone as he moved back down towards his other customers.

Sam’s army-issue wristwatch read 9:30pm. He figured he could pass a half hour listening to the band play. So he did just that; time flew by and the crowd carried on chatting, smoking, and dancing and swaying to the music. It was all so enchanting. The dimmed lighting of the room only added to the atmosphere, too. Sam felt like he didn’t have to hide a thing, which he couldn’t say for every experience he’d had in other speakeasies.

After around twenty minutes had passed, the vocalist had put away his fiddle and stepped up to the microphone once again. The trumpet and trombone lead the band into their next song with an upbeat tune that was very familiar to Sam. This was one of Lucifer’s favorite songs. Some part of Sam’s mind wondered why he’d made a note of the bokor’s favorite musical selections, but he put the thought on hold as soon as the vocalist leaned into the microphone to sing the first lines of the song.

“All you preachers

Who delight in panning the dancing teachers,

Let me tell you there are a lot of features

Of the dance that carry you through

The gates of Heaven.

“It's madness

To be always sitting around in sadness,

When you could be learning the steps of gladness.

You'll be happy when you can do
Just six or seven;

“Begin to-day!

You'll find it nice,

The quickest way to paradise.

When you practice,

Here's the thing to know,

Simply say as you go...

“I'll build a stairway to Paradise

With a new step ev'ry day!

I'm gonna get there at any price;

Stand aside, I'm on my way!

I've got the blues

And up above it's so fair.

Shoes, go on and carry me there.

I'll build a stairway to Paradise

With a new step ev'ry day.”

The vocalist…Sam must have been taking his drink too fast because he could swear that the vocalist sounded like Lucifer. That was ridiculous, though. Lucifer only ever sang quietly and hummed little bits and pieces of tunes, frequently messing up the words or pitches here and there just to mess with Sam. He'd thought that the bokor was doing it because he knew that Sam was a musician, but maybe…just maybe it was possible. Sam shook his head as the singer carried on with his solo.

“Ev'ry new step helps a bit;

but any old kind of two-step does as well.

It don't matter what step you step.

If you work it into your soul

You'll get to Heaven.

“Get busy;

Dance with Maud the countess, or just plain Lizzy:

Dance until you're blue in the face and dizzy.

When you've learned to dance in your sleep

You're sure to win out.
“In time you'll get Saint Vitus dance,
Which beats the latest thing from France.
Take no chances on this Paradise;
Let me give you advice.

“I'll build a stairway to Paradise
With a new step ev'ry day!
I'm gonna get there at any price;
Stand aside, I'm on my way!

I've got the blues
And up above it's so fair.

Shoes, go on and carry me there.

I'll build a stairway to Paradise
With a new step ev'ry day.”

The vocalist stepped back and bounced and swayed to the music, then. Stage-right of him, the clarinetist stood up and took a solo, and the band quieted down a bit with the root notes and chords so that the quieter reedy noise could be heard over the dynamic show tune. The vocalist tipped his head back and nodded slightly from side to side until the clarinetist finished saying his part. Applause sounded respectively from the crowd as the clarinetist sat back down in his seat. The music swelled once again, and the vocalist stepped up to the microphone again.

“The vocalist stepped back and bounced and swayed to the music, then. Stage-right of him, the clarinetist stood up and took a solo, and the band quieted down a bit with the root notes and chords so that the quieter reedy noise could be heard over the dynamic show tune. The vocalist tipped his head back and nodded slightly from side to side until the clarinetist finished saying his part. Applause sounded respectively from the crowd as the clarinetist sat back down in his seat. The music swelled once again, and the vocalist stepped up to the microphone again.

“I'll build a stairway to Paradise
With a new step ev'ry day!
I'm gonna get there at any price;
Stand aside, I'm on my way!

I've got the blues
And up above it's so fair.

Shoes, go on and carry me there.

I'll build a stairway to Paradise
With a new step ev'ry day.”

The song ended, and the vocalist and clarinetist took their bows. The vocalist put his fiddle all of the way back into his case and shoved it in front of the microphone before he exited the stage. Sam checked his watch.

10:00
It was looking more and more like his suspicions were right. Sam watched the sides of the stage for anyone exiting, but caught no one for several minutes. He checked his watch again.

10:08

“Excuse me. I hope you don’t mind if I take this seat.” Sam jumped and turned around to come face-to-face with Lucifer, who was dressed (still so strangely, according to Sam) in civvies; the white shirt’s sleeves were rolled up to his elbows and his top couple of buttons by his collar undone; the black vest was still in place and (unbearably) form-fitting; his dark slacks and shoes had streaks of dust on them like he had brushed against a neglected piece of furniture between when Sam had seen him outside and this moment.

“I d-don’t mind one bit,” Sam stuttered out. The bokor threw him a satisfied look and sat down next to his assistant.

“Hey there,” Garth said with a big grin as he approached the two of them. He gestured to Lucifer and asked, “The usual?”

“Absolutely, Garth,” Lucifer replied. Garth quickly pulled out a shaker, strainer, and a few miscellaneous bottles from under the bar. Either Sam was losing his tolerance for liquor and was too buzzed to keep track of the bartender’s motions or Garth was just a wicked-fast drink mixer. He produced Lucifer’s drink in record time and grinned as he slid it over to the blond. Lucifer gave him a small smile as he wrapped his hand delicately around the glass.

“Go ahead and put Sam’s drinks on my running tab, Garth.”

“Sure thing.” Garth glanced between the two of them and grinned before he strolled away once again.

“You don’t need to do that,” Sam found he couldn’t say quickly enough. Lucifer held up a hand and shook his head.

“I don’t want to hear it, Sam. I know how you and Dean are pressed for money, even during these times.”

Sam sighed and let out an almost embarrassed, “Thanks.”

“It isn’t a problem at all.” Lucifer took a sip of his drink. It was a light, translucent color that Sam couldn’t quite place in the dim lighting of the room.

“What’s the usual?” Sam asked.

Lucifer smirked in a way that reminded Sam of the time that Gabriel had possessed the man in front of him.

“It’s called a Fallen Angel.”

Sam laughed.

“You really do appreciate irony, don’t you?”

“I most certainly do,” Lucifer said, his voice just slightly gravelly from speaking with his lower register. Sam could tell that the man was feeling quite a shock from his first sip of alcohol for the night. He tried not to find it amusing how Lucifer’s nose wrinkled up and his eyes widened momentarily, but he failed miserably.
“What brings you here?” Lucifer asked, raising a curious eyebrow at Sam’s expression.


“I hope it didn’t disappoint,” Lucifer said, breaking eye contact to take another sip of his drink.

“It’s fantastic,” Sam said. “I love the band, too.”

“I thought you might,” Lucifer said with a smirk.

Sam hesitated first, but, after a few seconds, asked, “Weird question, here, but was that you—?”

“That was me singing and playing fiddle, yes.”

Sam nodded and finished off the whiskey at the bottom of his glass. Lucifer was strangely stoic for someone who had just been moving so much up on stage. Sam wore himself out from an hour of playing at the piano at the Roadhouse. He couldn’t imagine what it must feel like to be standing for an entire performance.

“You did a fantastic job,” Sam commented. Lucifer glanced at him, but quickly looked away again.

“I mean it.”

Maybe Sam imagined the smile he saw on Lucifer’s face right then. Maybe he hadn’t. None of that mattered, however, as a new song started and Lucifer downed the last part of his drink (with another one of those nose-wrinkles) and grabbed Sam’s wrist, leaping off of his stool. Sam’s eyes widened with shock as he realized where Lucifer was beckoning him.

“Lucif—”

“Don’t tell me you don’t like to dance, Sam,” Lucifer interrupted him. “I might have to reevaluate this friendship of ours, if that’s the case.”

Friendship? Not solely a business partnership anymore, then?

“No, no, it’s nothing like that,” Sam said. They stopped in their tracks just a few steps away from the bar. Lucifer gave him a confused look. Sam explained, “I just can’t dance. I’m…I’m no good at it. It’s been a really long time and—”

“I refuse to believe that you can’t dance,” Lucifer stated.

“The last person I danced with…” Sam let out a shaky sigh. “The last person I danced with was Jess. Before the war. It’s been a long time, Lucifer.”

Lucifer relaxed his hold on Sam’s arm and stepped closer. If there hadn’t been any booze in his system, Sam might have been bothered by the less-than-reasonable amount of space that was between them, but he honestly couldn’t care less at that point. The bokor made eye contact and tipped his head to the side in a questioning manner.

“Jess?” Lucifer asked.

Apparently all it took for Sam to spill his guts over Jess and his story was a few doses of whiskey and those sympathetic, blue eyes staring into his own. Lucifer listened to his abbreviated story
patiently. He let them stand in silence for a moment as the song changed. When the music started back up again, Lucifer took Sam’s hand in his own and gently dragged him out onto the dance floor.

“Lucifer, I can’t—”

“I reject that opinion,” Lucifer asserted in a smooth, calming voice. “Can you do the same?”

Sam was confused. What was so important about him dancing with the bokor? They both liked music, that much was true, but he had never seen Lucifer speak to him in such an insistent tone before. So maybe it was the alcohol, and maybe it was the music, and maybe it was Lucifer right there in front of him, begging him to come along—something made Sam throw away his inhibitions and join the bokor out on the floor to dance among dozens of other carefree bodies.

They danced through the night and into the early morning hours when Lucifer insisted that Sam either go get another drink or go home to get some rest. Sam went with the latter option and left the bokor behind in the smoky, heated underground. As he stepped out into the cool, night air, he let out a sigh of elation. He didn’t bother questioning it. It was what it was. It was real and it made him feel wonderful.

A dumb smile had spread across his face, and he knew it. He could hear it in his voice as he announced, slurring through his words, that he was going to bed. He knew Dean could hear it, too. He just didn’t care. Sleep overcame him as soon as his head hit his pillow.

He somehow slept peacefully through the rest of the night.

Chapter End Notes

EDIT: So I accidentally posted chapter 12 twice instead of chapter 12 then 13. Here. It's fixed now. Sorry!

Just A Little Bit Bad: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_9KnuVlaGho

I'll Build A Stairway To Paradise: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U2RVZqRpnw8&list=PL9Evx_PCcctNgIG_5VPfWq_1oUGVfV-2I&index=3

And Lucifer's cocktail, the "fallen angel," is an actual thing: http://www.imbibemagazine.com/Fallen-Angel-Recipe
Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

this chapter written by: Sarah

Warnings: alcohol abuse, implied past character death, spider, background character death

Of all the unpleasant experiences of this life, waking up hungover after going to bed drunk had to be one of the worst. Lucifer rolled over and immediately let out a miserable moan as his head contracted in a pulsing ache of pressure. His mouth tasted like sawdust and rot. He could not remember how much he had drunk last night, but it was safe to assume it had been too much. Slowly, he eased upright in his bed, feeling the boiling rush of blood move in his skull. He opened his eyes. Apparently his drunk counterpart had retained the presence to get rid of his shirt and tie before going to sleep, but not his suspenders. His bed was a twisted mess. The light was dusty but somehow still too bright. He opened his eyes a little wider and grunted at the sudden dizzy pain.

“So, have a fun time last night?” Gabe said. He was perched on the end of the bed, grinning brilliantly.

“You’re a demon,” Lucifer responded, resting his throbbing head in his hands. “You’re a demon sent from hell to torment me for my sins.”

“It’s a little ironic for you to say that, don’t you think?” Gabe drew his legs up onto the bed. “And you’re mostly tormenting yourself for your sins. That hangover is not my fault.”

Lucifer raised his head. “How much did I even drink last night?”

“Don’t ask me. You came back from the regular gig about two hours too late and mumbling something about Sam Winchester. I figured it would be cruel not to let you sleep.”

“Oh,” said Lucifer, and with a faint pain in the back of his head, the memories came flooding back. The blazing ceiling of Garth’s joint, the roar of the crowd, the liquor going down like silk. Fallen Angels. Sam had thought that was funny.

Sam. Sam’s face alight with heat and joy, hair flying back and forth as he moved. Sam had danced with him. Sam had danced with him. Sam had let him drag him out onto that dance floor and whirl him around until all of his awkwardness and uncertainty melted away like scar tissue which had served its purpose and the only thing left was him, restless and glowing and beautiful. They had both been very drunk. Later, when they were stumbling home, Sam had said “God, I haven’t danced like that since high school. Actually not even then. Not ever. I haven’t danced like that ever.”

“You’re smiling,” Gabe said with satisfaction.

Lucifer, jolted out of recollection, frowned automatically. “No, I’m not.”

“You were. And you’re a liar, too.” Gabe sat back with an expression of immense satisfaction. “I knew it. Did you fuck him?”
“No, I didn’t, you sick scumbag.” Lucifer swung his legs out of bed and stood, slowly, ignoring the whirl of dizziness that came with. “We danced a little. That was it.”

“That’s not nothing.”

“He’s straight, Gabe. I’m pretty sure he was just surprised that I asked him.”

“You are entirely too pessimistic.”

“And you’re trying to live vicariously through me, which is stupid, because you’re dead.” Lucifer wandered blearily into the kitchen.

“What’re you making?” Gabe asked, watching with interest.

“Bread. Don’t think I can handle anything more than that right now.”

“Aw, come on. No bacon? No fruit?”

“Nope. You can hitch a ride if you want, but it’ll be pretty boring.”

Gabe scowled. “What’s the point?”

Occasionally Lucifer would let Gabe take a brief turn in his taste buds, when he was eating something Gabe had particularly liked, but given Gabe’s extremely limited eating habits it didn’t happen very often. Lucifer suppressed a smile. “I see you’ve gotten it out of your system.”

“Gotten what out?”

“What was eating you last time we talked.”

“What, the desire to talk to your new boyfriend?”

Lucifer shot him a look. “No. You know what I’m talking about.”

“Except I actually don’t.” Gabriel raised one pale eyebrow. “Explain, please.”

“The night before the possession. You showed up in here, you were acting very weird. Remember that?”

Gabriel stared at him for a long moment in silence. Then he said, flatly, “Are you making this up?”

“No. Of course not.” Lucifer turned to him, irritation poking at him. “You were there, Gabe. You have to remember this. You said a lot of bizarre shit about how you understood so many things now you were dead, and you said some things about me. You have to remember this.”

“That didn’t happen. I don’t remember that at all. Seriously, are you making this up?”

“No, I’m not!” Lucifer swallowed frustration. “What the hell are you—you were there. That was you.”

Gabe shook his head, dumbly, insistently. “Are you sure you weren’t dreaming?”

“Would it matter if I was? You never had much intention of staying out of my dreams before.”

“I wasn’t in your dreams the night before the possession. I wasn’t here at all.” Gabriel’s mouth was tight. “I don’t know what you think happened, but it wasn’t me.”
“Gabe,” Lucifer said, feeling a sudden, desperate, shock of panic. “This isn’t funny.”

“No,” Gabriel replied softly. “It isn’t.”

They stared at each other for a long moment of uncertainty. The room was very quiet, with the strange taste of tension in the air. Lucifer wondered why he wasn’t more afraid, and decided that it was probably because he genuinely did not know what was happening, and so had no idea if fear was the appropriate response or not.

From elsewhere in the shop, there was a loud rattle and then a thud, like someone shaking a door handle. After a pause, it repeated; the rustling, the sound of impact.

Lucifer turned sharply. “Did you hear that?”

“Luce, I think we need to talk about this. Just—“

“Yeah, yeah, but you heard that, right?” Lucifer raised his hand. “Hold on. Just a second.”

The noise came again, more jagged and insistent this time. Lucifer had a fairly good idea of where it was coming from. He wandered out into the main area of the shop. The keys were in their regular place on the book of plays. Lucifer felt around for a bit before snagging them. He glanced over at the table. The knob on the drawer shuddered, and the drawer itself shook in its frame.

“Luce,” Gabe said, his voice trailing off into uncertainty. He had followed his brother into the shop and drifted behind him, looking lost.

Very cautiously, Lucifer bent over the desk. The key slid into the rusty hold of the lock. The drawer slid open with a soft moan of rising dust. Inside there was nothing but the spider pendant, lying still and fragile as ever. It wasn’t moving. Its glistening cluster of eyes stared up blankly.

Lucifer lifted it by the red string and held it out in front of him. It had very definitely grown in size since the last time he’d seen it. It had been only about an inch in diameter. Now it was about the same size as his palm. He examined it, watching it twist and spin weightlessly, and smiled.

“Very sneaky,” he murmured.

From behind him, Gabriel asked hesitantly. “Is that—“

“Yes, it is, and I think it’s time I did something about it.” Lucifer laid the pendant carefully down on the scabbed surface of the desk and moved away. There was a shelf of empty Mason jars within reach. He grabbed one and tapped the faint haze of dust off of its sides. A piece of brown flannel was left over from the last batch of conjure bags, and he tucked it around the motionless claw of the spider’s body, making sure to keep its pincer legs inside. He walked to the door. On his way out of the house, he lifted a box of matches off the front desk.

The morning air was already hot, but in a clean, new, way. The insect chorus buzzed and sang around the porch. He unscrewed the jar. The spider in its flannel shroud fit inside with a bit of poking. He lit a match, dropped it inside, and set the lid back on. The flame caught in a scorching lick of gold and crawled over the flannel. The spider was eaten away in hard waxy bits, chewed to a fine dust glowing with freckles of flame. He sat back and watched it burn silently. In time, there was nothing but a layer of powdery black ash that filled about half the jar and caked on the walls.

“Well,” he said. “That’s done.”

Gabriel, who was still standing in the quiet behind him, said “What’s happening to us?”
“I don’t know,” said Lucifer. “I have no idea. This is something new.”

There was a pause. Then Gabe said, “He looks upset.”

Lucifer glanced up. “Who?”

“He.” Gabriel gestured over Lucifer’s head. “The man on the road.”

There was indeed a man walking down the road towards the shack. He was moving very strangely, with a heavy, wandering, gait like a drunk or a sleepwalker. His shoulders were pulled high and uneven, almost broken. His head was bowed as if in prayer.

“He’s got blood on his hands,” Gabriel noted. Scarlet stains climbed the man’s arms, clinging and sticky, drying quickly to a black crust in the heat.

“It might not be blood,” Lucifer said, with slightly fatal hope. Gabriel snorted, which spoke eloquently for itself.

Lucifer set the jar of ashes aside. “Remind me to take that inside later,” he told Gabriel.

The man raised his head, slowly. It was Pastor Kubrick. His lined face was blasted and terrible and corpseslike. There was something in his eyes that was utterly empty, like the bottom of a well. When he saw Lucifer on the front porch, a convulsion of raw agony moved across his face. His lips curled back from his teeth like a rabid animal.

“He knows you,” Gabriel observed.

“Yeah.” Lucifer rubbed his hand across his mouth. “I know him.”

The pastor walked up to the porch, saying nothing. His eyes were bullets or black holes. He came up on to the porch and stared at Lucifer His blood-stained hands hung at his sides.


Kubrick’s mouth opened, slack and vacant. “You,” he said, and a sudden clarity moved in his eyes like a pair of scissors cutting skin. “It was you.”

“I’m sorry?”

“It was you,” he repeated. “You’re the one. You evil sick son of a bitch. You did it. You killed my son.”

And he threw himself at Lucifer, his hands disfigured claws, his mouth open wide in a howl.
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

this chapter written by: Sarah

Warnings: debt/monetary problems, mention of background character death, physical assault, false conviction, jail

“No, he didn’t make me dance,” said Sam, exasperated. “He just suggested it, and I didn’t want to, and then he convinced me. That’s all.”

“So your mysterious ghost-conjuring vodou sorcerer employer is secretly a violin-playing singer at a gin mill across town. That’s what you’re saying.” Jo was grinning like her face was about to split in half.

“And he made you dance,” Pamela added.

“He didn’t make me—” Sam exhaled sharply and buried his face in his hands. “You know, I don’t even care. Yes, apparently he plays the violin in his spare time. He’s good, too. And yes, he made me dance, Pam.”

Pamela cackled explosively. “You lucky bastard. Well?”

“Well what?”

“Did you like it? Was he a good dancer?”

“What does that matter? I—yes, he was a good dancer, I guess.” Sam shook his head, trying to find last night in the alcoholic cloud. “He was—gentle. Like he knew what you were going to do before you did it.”

“Oooh. I know that type.” Pamela drew back, smirking. “They’re the worst.”

“It’s not like I’m going to make a habit of dancing with him,” Sam replied, a bit irritably. “I’m still working for him.”

“Is that what they’re calling it nowadays?” Benny murmured from over by the door.

Jo dissolved into laughter, and Pamela snickered appreciatively. Sam gave the entire group a scalding glare. “I shouldn’t have told you any of this.”

“You really shouldn’t have,” Jo agreed, still laughing in short exhausted gusts.

“I don’t see what’s so funny about it, anyway. Lots of people have second jobs. And I was drunk, is it my fault if I wanted to dance?”

“Sam, honey, the only reason you can’t see why it’s funny is because you’re the one who’s being funny.” Pamela lounged easily in her chair, her glass lenses fixed more or less in his general direction.
“What does that even mean?”

“It means that you all need to stop being lazy and do what I am so generously paying you to do.” Ellen rushed out of the kitchen, smacking Sam on the back of the head as she passed. “Up. Sam, start tickling those ivories. Jo, I need your help in the kitchen.”

“Mama, it’s barely eleven,” Jo pointed out. “We won’t have anything to do for hours.”

“There’s always something to do,” Ellen responded dourly.

Sam rubbed his hand over the back of his head. He had been waiting for Ellen; the words were gathering in his throat. “Ellen, can I talk to you?”

She glanced back at him. “Sure, give me a second. I just need—”

“Sam?”

Cas was in the door, wearing his ridiculously heavy trench coat as usual. Benny was staring at him with a faint smile of curiosity.

“Cas.” Sam rose from the piano stool. “What’re you doing over here?”

“Nothing.” Cas stepped into the Roadhouse, looking distinctly uncomfortably. “I don’t have to go to the shop for a couple of hours. I thought I’d come visit you.”

Across the room, Pamela arched her head up. “Who is that?” she said. Her glossy black sockets moved over to the door.

Cas turned, saw her, and froze. He seemed for a moment to be about to speak, but then made a slight noise in the back of his throat and said nothing. His eyes were very wide and still in perfect blue. For the first time, Sam noticed how like Lucifer’s they were.

“Sam, if you want to talk to me, now would be the time,” Ellen said from behind the bar.

Sam looked uncertainly between her and Cas, waiting to see where the balance of the moment was going to slip. “Cas—”

“I’ll wait outside,” Cas said numbly, turned, and walked out. He moved with a stilted, mechanical, urgency, not looking at anyone. Pamela, seeming to have noticed nothing, directed her attention back to her glass. Sam looked between them, his mind whirling with questions.

“I don’t have all day,” Ellen commented sharply.

Blinking away his confusion, Sam crossed to the bar. Ellen leaned over it. “Talk.”

“Ellen—“ Sam swallowed. This would be hard enough to do with someone he didn’t like. “I don’t know how to put this.”

“Then be honest.” She surveyed him, unblinking.

“I need a raise,” he choked, and then blew out air. It had been harder to say that than he had imagined. He had never really thought of himself as having Dean’s ramrod preoccupation with self-sufficiency, but openly asking for money was painful.

Ellen’s mouth twitched in a very unamused way. “You need a raise.”
“I really do. It was hard enough before, but with the treatments every week—I don’t have any spare time and there’s barely enough money to cover the rent, let alone food and water and the things we need. I’m running on nothing and I don’t know how long it’s going to be before we really can’t afford basic needs. I just—there’s not enough. Dean can’t work. I don’t know what we’re going to do if we don’t start getting money from somewhere.” Sam paused and took a deep breath. He’d had that gnawing at him for far too long. In addition to all of the much stranger problems that had invaded his life, the jar on the counter was completely empty. There was just nothing. Dust and worry and nothing else.

Ellen nodded, and looked down at the counter. After a moment, she said “The Roadhouse’s in debt.”

Sam looked up. “What?”

“We’re in debt, Sam. Pretty bad, too.” Her eyes met his. “We owe money to three other establishments around town and even with that we’re barely keeping body and soul together.”

“I didn’t know that,” Sam said stupidly.

“I know you didn’t.” She pulled back from the countertop. “I wish I could help you. Hell, I wish I could pay all you kids the way you deserve. But there’s no money for us, let alone you. The cupboard is bare. I’m sorry.”

“Oh.” Sam stared at the streaked face of the bar, biting back disappointment. “Yeah, I get it.”

“Times are tough all over,” Ellen said. There was a touch of kindness in her voice which Sam had not heard before.

“They sure are.” He looked up with a tight, difficult, smile. “Thanks anyway, Ellen. Sorry I asked.”

“It’s fine, kid. I wish there was something I could do.” Her own smile was creased with worry.

“You’re already doing a lot.” He pulled away from the bar. “I’m going to talk to Cas.”

She reached for a rag, her face closed again. “Make it quick.”

Sam walked across the bar, bitterly cursing in silence. Ellen had been his last real hope. He didn’t know anyone else he could ask for money; all the other employees of the Roadhouse were suffering just as much as he was. And the thought of asking Lucifer for money made something in him flinch painfully.

What kind of fucking world is it, he thought furiously, where a man can work two jobs and still not have enough to live? What kind of goddamn justice is that?

Castiel was lingering outside the door in a cloud of badly-hidden anxiety. Sam looked at him for a long moment and then decided that now was not the time for delicacy. He was tired in a way that was more than just physical and the capacity for gentleness had left him.

“How do you know Pamela?” he asked bluntly.

Cas looked at him with a sudden flash of animal panic. “What do you mean?”

“Oh, come on, Cas. I saw how you got when you saw her. You know her and she probably knows you, even though right now she doesn’t seem to be aware that you’re here.” Sam leaned against the wall, folding his arms. “I’ve had enough of mysteries. How do you know her?”
Castiel gazed at him for a long moment, and seemed to judge that Sam was not in the kind of mood to be forgiving or forbearing. He nodded and looked at the ground.

“She came to us,” he said quietly. “Lucifer and me. She needed something. I had been studying. I thought I was ready. I said I would do it for her.”

He hesitated. Sam felt an unpleasant shudder of realization and wondered if he really wanted to hear the rest of this story.

“I thought I was ready,” Castiel said. “I wasn’t.”

The hot lazy wind whispered by. Across the street a woman opened a window and yelled out of it in Spanish. The air was glittering with dust.

“I made a mistake,” Castiel continued. “A big one. Everything went wrong. I called on the wrong person and she lost her eyes. I didn’t mean to but it happened anyway. I blinded her. That’s how I know her.”

He spoke in a very flat, precise way, and did not look at Sam. His hands were knotted in the unraveling cuffs of his trench coat. Sam swallowed, feeling the anger of before ebb away in the uncomfortable way that it always does when you come face to face with suffering worse than your own.

“I’m sorry,” he said finally, for lack of any better options.

“No.” Cas raised his head. “Not for me. Be sorry for her. I still can see. I’m still whole. You don’t need to be sorry for me.”

Sam shook his head and stared down the street, wanting to say a lot of things that didn’t involve words.

“I heard you talking to the woman in there,” Cas said abruptly.

Sam gave him a sharp look, surprised by the sudden hairpin turn into a different subject. “From all the way out here?”

“You have a very carrying voice.”

“Christ.” Sam rubbed his forehead with a sigh. “So everyone else heard it too.”

“That seems unlikely. I was paying attention. They were not.”

Sam grinned wearily. “Eavesdropping, Cas?”

“Yes,” Castiel said remorselessly. “I am aware of your problem.”

“Yeah. That.” Sam rubbed his forehead again, feeling the gnawing beginnings of a headache. “It’s not a big deal. We’ll be fine, okay? Things’ll work out jake. They always do.”

“I don’t think so. You sounded somewhat desperate.” Cas turned away, rummaging inside his coat. “I can help you.”

Sam blinked. “What?”

“I can help.” From within the depths of the coat, Cas’s hand emerged with a crumpled ball of money. It was an astonishing size and he held it out to Sam with the effortless honesty of a child. “Take it. I
“Cas—“ Helplessly, Sam took the wrinkled flower of bills and flicked through it in disbelief.”Cas, this is like two hundred dollars.”

“It should be, yes.” Cas wrapped his coat around him again and gazed vacantly at the still-open window across the street.

Sam turned the money over in his hands, his mind slow with shock. “Where the hell did you get this?”

“That’s not important. It’s yours now.”

“No. No, I—I can’t.” Sam swallowed almost desperately. Two hundred dollars was more than he would make for the next three months. Two hundred dollars was a shining future with enough food to eat and rent paid every week and maybe another movie and Lucifer not having to say it’s okay, you’ll pay next week, I trust you maybe ever again. Two hundred dollars was a lot of money.

“Why not?” Cas asked blankly.

“It’s charity money.” Pity money, Dean would call it.

“Yes, it is. You need it, I don’t. I’m giving it to you.” Cas looked at him with that implacable matter-of-fact logic. “What’s so terrible about that?”

Which was actually a very good point. The money shone in Sam’s hand, and his pride could only go so far. He closed his fingers around the wad of paper and felt an almost overwhelming clutch of relief. “Thank you. Thank you so much Cas. You’re—God, I don’t know how to say this.”

“Just ‘thank you’ is usually sufficient.” Cas gave a very small, tentative, smile, and Sam realized with a burst of affection that this was his own quiet version of a joke. He laughed, and Cas looked very pleased.

After a moment, he said, “It distresses me to see you and your brother suffer needlessly. You’re good people. You deserve better than what circumstances have given you.”

Sam stared at him, in frozen astonishment and gratitude. Rarely if ever had someone told him something so kind in such an open and honest way. It was a very new feeling, and of all the people in the world, he had not expected it to come from Castiel.

“I hate to destroy this touching moment, but we have a bit of an emergency on our hands right now,” Meg’s voice gasped.

Sam whirled around. She was sagging against the corner of the Roadhouse, right beyond Castiel, and her face was flushed and damp. She gripped the wall with one white hand and made a weak gesture of greeting with the other.

“Meg,” Cas said, with remarkable composure. “You look awful.”

“Ran here. All the way.” She heaved herself upright with a hissing breath. “Bad news. Lucifer’s been arrested.”

Sam’s heart stuttered with such force that he thought it might knock him over. “What? Why?”

An ugly look crossed Meg’s face. “That preacher. His son’s dead and he seems to think Luce did it.”
“That’s ridiculous,” Cas objected.

“Ridiculous or not, he’s down at the precinct right now and Lucifer is locked up. Which is why we are going to bail him out.” Before Sam could react, Meg’s hand locked around his wrist and she was dragging him away at a stumbling half-run. “Meg! Meg, wait. I have to tell Ellen——”

Meg stopped and spun to face him with a hard look. “Sam. Listen to me. Lucifer has been arrested. He is literally in prison as we speak. Do we agree that your day job can wait?”

“My day job can wait,” Sam conceded faintly.

As they left the street, Castiel asked “Does the sheriff know about this?”

“Wait,” said Sam in utter confusion, “there’s a sheriff?”

The sheriff was a small woman with messy brown hair and intense dark eyes who sat at a desk behind her husband, police Detective Sergeant Mills. She said nothing and her gaze followed every detail of the scene in front of her. Her name was Jodie, Meg said. When Sam caught her gaze, she smiled.

“She’s the one you really have to watch out for,” Meg had warned as they walked up to the station. “Her husband has the badge but she does the work. They don’t call her Sheriff for any reason other than the obvious.”

Her smile was warm and deceptively calm. Uncomfortable, Sam looked away.

Besides her, her husband, and Sam, there were a number of others in the grimy badly-lit station. A mad bustle of officers and clerks raged around them, caught up in the day-to-day hysteria of filing and recording and getting things done. In the cells, prisoners talked or snored or paced. The officer who had arrested Lucifer stood by Sheriff Mills’ desk, hands hooked into his belt, scowling. Over to Sam’s left was the preacher, slumped in a chair. He looked very old and somehow broken, but there was a fury in his eyes that had nothing to do with age.

Lucifer was sitting very straight and very still in a chair to the right. His wrists were locked in steel cuffs, but they had let him out of his cell. His hair was a tangled mess and he had a raw bruise over one eye. There had apparently been a small but intense altercation before the police had arrived. Lucifer’s face was empty and cold as a mirror; he had not looked at Sam once since he came in.

The preacher’s son had been found dead on the floor of his father’s house. No signs of violence or forced entry, his eyes were open and his skin was cold. The only suspicious aspect was the pool of dried black blood on the floor beside his open mouth.

The boy’s name was Martin. He was fourteen, and had been sick most of his life. The logical conclusion was that his disease had finally caught up with him, but Pastor Kubrick seemed to think otherwise, and the blood pointed to possibilities that no one seemed to understand.

“Of course there’ll be an investigation,” Detective Mills said pleasantly. He was a tall middle-aged man with a gentle face, but lacking the awareness that his wife held behind her eyes. “We’ll look into this as fully as we can. But legally, we can’t hold this man. We have no grounds.”

“You have to,” said Pastor Kubrick. His voice was hoarse. “He’s a murderer.”

“There’s no evidence that he is. We have nothing to tie him to your son’s death besides your claims.
On the face of it, it seems most likely that your son died of natural causes. He’d been ill for some
time, hadn’t he?”

“I—yes—but he—that’s irrelevant!” Pastor Kubrick jerked upright, his face gripped with hatred. His
eyes burned with an acid light. “I saw him! He summoned the devil to possess his body and curse
my son. He did things. Disgusting things. I saw. And they were there!” A feverish gesture at Sam
and Cas and Meg. “They helped. They’re guilty too. A nest of devils and monsters. They killed
Martin. They killed my boy.”

For a moment his face crumpled horribly and Sam thought he might be about to cry. Then the
blazing look returned. “You have to do something. He is a killer and a witch. You have to lock him
up. Do your job.”

There was a long and awkward silence. Sam looked at Pastor Kubrick in something close to wonder.
He had never seen so much hatred and rage in one person before. Certainly he had not seen the
capacity for it in the quiet man in the graveyard.

“I say we keep him,” the uniformed policeman said roughly. “Let him stew for a few days. Victim’s
father says he did it, that’s good enough for me. And you know how these people are.”

For the first time, Lucifer looked up and met the policeman’s gaze. A smile as sweet and terrible as
poison touched his face. “These people,” he said quietly. The policeman glared back at him and then
looked away.

“There is no victim,” said Detective Mills, looking harried. “There’s no reason even to think that a
crime was committed yet. This is all hearsay and we can’t keep Mr. Shurley here based on nothing.”

“It’s not nothing,” Kubrick hissed. “He called on Satan. I saw.”

“Oh, for Heaven’s sake,” Meg snapped. “That wasn’t Satan, you idiot. It was Legba. He’s one of the
good guys.”

Detective Mills’ forehead creased. “What?”

“Pastor Kubrick requested my help,” Lucifer said tonelessly. “In the process he may have seen things
that were disturbing to him. But I am not to blame for that. And I had nothing at all to do with Martin
Kubrick’s death. And now I would like to go.”

He stood with a clinking rattle of chain and held his wrists out. Everyone stared at him for a stunned
moment. He raised an eyebrow. “You’re right. You have no grounds to hold me here, and I’d like to
go home. Will you please unlock me? These are very uncomfortable.”

Detective Mills collected himself and jerked his head at Lucifer’s wrists. Looking decidedly
disgruntled, the uniformed policeman jabbed his key into the cuffs and popped them off with a rusted
click. Lucifer pulled away, rubbing his wrists. Kubrick watched in paralyzed fury from his chair.

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click. Lucifer pulled away, rubbing his wrists. Kubrick watched in paralyzed fury from his chair.

“Can we go now?” Meg said nastily.

Detective Mills waved in her direction, looking very tired. “Yes, yes. Go. Get out of here. We’ll
probably be seeing you again soon.”

“What about their addresses?” the uniformed policeman asked unhappily.

“If you want to contact any of them you may do so through me,” Lucifer said. “You have my
address. And I promise you none of us will try to run.”
As they filed out of the police station in a ragged little row, Sam shot a glance back at Sheriff Mills. She was still seated behind her husband, scribbling something down on the sleeve of her sweater. As he looked back, she glanced up, met his gaze, and grinned. He grinned back, despite his best intentions. Her smile was too bright to ignore. She winked at him and went back to her sleeve.

They had not gotten ten steps away from the door of the police station when an incoherent shout rang out behind them. Kubrick slammed through the doors and strode out. Beside him, Sam felt Lucifer sigh deeply. He looked over as his friend closed his eyes.

“You don’t have to do this,” he said quietly.

Lucifer shook his head absently. “It’s all right.”

Kubrick grabbed Lucifer’s shoulder and spun him sharply around. His teeth were showing in a white animal snarl. He looked mad, out of his mind. It occurred to Sam that it was pretty ironic that Kubrick was the one accusing Lucifer of being possessed.

Behind him, the doors slipped open again and the uniformed cop walked out. His eyes passed over the two men expressionlessly. Carefully, he folded his arms and leaned back against the wall, close enough to hear everything, but doing nothing. He tilted his hat against the dusty sun.

Kubrick ignored him completely. Everything in him was focused on Lucifer.

“You think you’ve gotten away with it don’t you?” he said. His voice was surprisingly quiet. “You think you’re home free.”

“No, I don’t,” Lucifer replied.

A harsh humourless laugh. “Sure. Well, if that’s what you think, you’re right. You haven’t. I know what you did. I know what you are.”

“Pastor, I had absolutely nothing to—“


“I’m sorry,” Lucifer said, almost in a whisper. He hadn’t moved back and Kubrick’s hand lay lightly on his chest. From a distance it would look friendly, almost gentle. “I’m so sorry. But I didn’t.”

Kubrick shook his head, deaf and insistent.

“You killed my child,” he whispered. “I’m going to kill you.”

Tension crawled over Sam’s back like a disembodied hand. He looked at the uniformed cop. That was a death threat, a serious and credible death threat, of the kind that could be prosecuted. The policeman’s face was impassive. He tipped his hand back and gazed at the sky.

Lucifer said nothing. Kubrick’s mouth was trembling now. His hand curled into the fabric of Lucifer’s shirt.

“I want you to know that,” he said. “I want you to know. I’m going to kill you. I’m going to kill everyone you care about. I will make you suffer. God is with me. I’m not afraid of you. I want you to be waiting for me to come to your house and burn it to the ground and send you screaming to Hell. Where you belong. Demon, whoreson. You killed him. You could have killed me but you
killed him. I used to sing to him before he went to sleep. He wanted to be a chaplain. Why was it
him? Why couldn’t you have killed me?

Lucifer shook his head, mute, unmoving. His eyes were dark.

Kubrick drew in a deep shuddering gasp of a breath and bent his head. He was very close to Lucifer
now and his eyes were too bright, like a drunk or a child about to cry. His fingers clutched a fold of
Lucifer’s shirt and then let go. He took a step back.

“I’m going to kill you,” he said, in a slightly more normal voice. “You and all of them. You’re going
to hurt like I am. Know that. I’m coming.”

Then he turned and walked back through the doors of the station. The policeman paused for a
moment to shrug with exaggerated disinterest and then followed.

“We won’t be getting much help from the cops, I guess,” Meg said grimly, after a moment.

“Looks like it,” Sam agreed, still slightly flabbergasted.

Without a word, Lucifer turned away and walked down the street. Sam exchanged a dark look with
Meg and hurried after him. Cas started to follow, but Meg put her hand on his shoulder and he grew
still.

Sam drew to a halt beside Lucifer, who kept walking as if he wasn’t there. They kept pace for a short
while. There were red welts around his wrists where the cuffs had bit deep.

“So?” Sam asked, finally.

“So what?” Lucifer’s shoes scuffled along the pavement.

Sam took a breath. “Did you do it?”

A new stiffness moved over Lucifer’s mouth. “Do what?”

“You know what?”

Lucifer looked up at him, the frozen hurt more clear on his face than anything Sam had seen there
before. “Christ, Sam.”

Sam said nothing. Guilt pulsed hotly in his chest, but he did not apologize. He had meant to ask it
and he wasn’t sorry.

After a time, Lucifer said “No, I didn’t. I didn’t kill that boy.”

“You know I had to ask,” Sam replied quietly.

“Yeah, I know.”

“If it helps at all, I didn’t think you’d done it,” Sam continued. “And if you did, I knew you would
have had a good reason.”

Lucifer didn’t say anything. Behind them, Cas and Meg spoke in low murmuring voices. The sky
beat down with the white heat of summer. A car hurried by, burping gas. Lucifer’s wrists were as red
as if they had been burned. They walked back to the shop in silence.
Lucifer craved the feeling that the club would bring him. Everyday life was a dizzying chaos compared to the hot air and casual company that a good gin joint could bring a person. It provided an escape. And Lucifer needed one hell of an escape after the events of the previous week.

The establishment distracted him with its sweet inferno and raucous crowds instantaneously, and Lucifer felt himself let go of the tension that was mounting inside of him. He let a sigh of relief slide out from between his lips and into the smoke-clouded air as he stepped onto the dark wooden floor. Welcome relief swept over him immediately.

“Luci!” A familiar voice came through the crowd’s chatter at his left. Lucifer turned and regarded the man approaching him.

“Hello, Balthazar,” Lucifer said. Balthazar was the owner of the establishment and loved roaming the floor during the evening hours, though he worked upstairs in the restaurant during the daytime and late night. He had hired Lucifer after hearing the man singing along to the music that the band was playing during one rather under-populated night a few years back. They had become friends quickly thereafter, and, though the man had an odd sense of humor at times and was one of the most flirtatious human beings Lucifer had met since Gabriel passed. Balthazar’s personality made him more interesting, and Lucifer wasn’t surrounded by anything if he wasn’t surrounded by interesting people.

“You’re here early,” the man said as he approached Lucifer. “This is a rare sight to behold.”

“I had to clear my head,” Lucifer replied, shrugging dismissively. “I hope you don’t mind.”

“Absolutely not.” Balthazar clapped a hand on Lucifer’s shoulder and the two of them made their way backstage. Lucifer plucked his fiddle case up off of the ground sat it on his lap as he sat down in a creaky, folding chair. The sound of a flute and a clarinet playing through some smooth, calm improvisation jazz calmed the bokor’s mind even further. He flipped the latches on the case and opened it to reveal his old, sweet-sounding, Rudolph Wurlitzer fiddle and its relatively new (yet somehow already scuffed and well-used) bow. The instrument was one of Lucifer’s favorite possessions. Its original polish and stain job made it look golden-brown under stage lights, and it sang with a strong voice that brought the inanimate object to life. It was just in tune with him, too. The curves and scratches and scuff marks all lined up perfectly with how he held it; it always had, actually, even back when he had just bought it as a teenager. It was a beautiful piece of art, and he
took great care and pride in it.

Lucifer began tuning it as Balthazar stood in front of him, his arms crossed and his lips pursed. Lucifer finished tuning the first string and looked up at the man.

“Pray tell me, what is on your mind, my friend?”

“You’re acting strange,” Balthazar pointed out. “You’re all serene. It’s eerie.”

“Serene,” Lucifer laughed, “is not what I would call myself right now.”

“No, of course not. It’s all forced and I don’t like it one bit.”

“I’m sorry that I have already managed to upset you.”

“It’s not upsetting, just….” Balthazar trailed off and waved his hand, looking for the right word to use. Lucifer watched him with some amusement.

“J—just…oh, bollocks, I don’t know. It’s unlike you.”

“A man thinks that I killed his son,” Lucifer stated plainly and went back to tuning the next string on his instrument. There was a long silence between the two of them. Balthazar spoke again once the fiddle player began working on the third string.

“And did you?”

“No, of course not.” Lucifer gave him an incredulous look. “I am not the killing type, Bal, and you of all people should know that.”

“I know, I’m sorry, I’m sorry! I just was checking.”

“…I especially wouldn’t kill that boy. The poor kid was ill. I would have loved to have put him out of his misery, but I only make deals like that with the person receiving such treatment, and the child wasn’t going to request death no matter how bad it got. I wasn’t going to give it to him even if someone else asked after it on his behalf.”

“For heaven’s sake, Lucifer,” Balthazar groaned. “Who thinks you killed the boy?”

“The pastor at the new Southern Baptist church,” Lucifer mumbled.

“Does the man know your line?”

“Too well. He requested my help in summoning a loa.”

Balthazar whistled. He looked overwhelmed. Lucifer looked back down and continued to tune the fourth string on his instrument. He pulled his bow out once he had finished and rubbed rosin into the horsehairs. At the break in between songs on stage, he hoisted the fiddle up into position and dragged the bow across it a few times to check for any last problems.

“Second string’s flat,” Balthazar muttered.

“I can hear that,” Lucifer replied with a roll of his eyes.

“Yeah, I forget that sometimes, mister perfect-pitch.”

Lucifer adjusted the second string again and sat the instrument back down in his case.
“You’ll be on after they play ‘Snake Rag’, alright?” Balthazar sighed. He headed back out towards the main room once again, pausing to make sure Lucifer had heard him before exiting completely. Lucifer waved him on and said, “Yes, alright, alright. Go.”

When Lucifer stepped out onto the stage after the instrumentalists’ last number without him, there was a small rise in the applause. He knew he gathered quite a bit of attention since he was such an unusual musician for the area. Fiddle, vocals, and a few of the other instruments he knew how to play weren’t exactly all that common to hear in the New Orleans area. It all had a very Kentucky and Ohio River valley sound to it that the locals simply weren’t used to. He could do Louisiana jazz too, of course. He did New York City jazz, too. He just did it all a differently—and New Orleans sure liked different.

They struck up a new number as soon as everyone was ready. Lucifer played a few bars of the root tune on the fiddle before approaching the microphone. The tall canvas screen covered their view of the audience, save for the bright candle lights dotting each table and the few electric lights at the bar. Lucifer took a breath in and closed his eyes as he was pulled into the music.

“Let me tell you momma,
I ain't gonna sit here and grieve
Pack up your stuff and get ready to leave
I stood your foolishness long enough,
so now I'm gonna call your bluff
Oh, I'm gonna call your hand,
so, now, missy, here's my plan

“I ain't gonna play no second fiddle, 'cause
I'm used to playin' lead…

“You must think that I am blind,
you've been cheatin' me all the time.
Woah, did you still flirt,
And you'll notice I ain't hurt
to see you with my chum.

Do you think that I am dumb?

“You cause me to drink,
when I sit down and think
And see that you never take heed.
I’d gone your house the other night,
c caught you and your good girl havin' a fight.
“I ain’t gonna play no second fiddle, ’cause
I’m used to playin’ lead.

“Caught you with your good-time vamp,
so, now I’m gonna put out your lamp.

Oh, momma, I ain’t sore.

You ain’t gonna mess up with me no more.

I’m gonna flirt with another sheik,
then you’re gonna hang your head and weep

“I ain’t gonna play no second fiddle ’cause
I’m used to playin’ lead.”

Lucifer stepped back and let the trombone lead them out of the song. The audience didn’t ever seem to mind all that much when he played songs that were written for women. They didn’t mind when he switched up words and when he didn’t, either. It was likely because they were all so far gone after consuming so much alcohol that they didn’t care what he did as long as the band as a whole kept making music for their entertainment.

Lucifer played a quick improvisation as the rest of the band transitioned that started as a pretty little fast-paced tune, then turned into something that sounded something like a rag from his repertoire of George Gershwin show tunes. He lost himself in the music for a couple of minutes. A satisfying release to ebb all of the negative energy that had gathered inside of him, mounting like a pile of snow during a blizzard as he had sat in the jail cell down at the station for questioning and observation. There were very few things more relaxing than letting his feelings flow through an instrument.

The notes built up until he reached the climax of what he could get out of the moment. He suddenly decrescendoed and started on the root chords for the band’s next song. The reeds joined in first, playing their mezzo-piano counter melody; then the trombone added depth with the middle-range harmony; finally, the trumpet came out on top with the melody and Lucifer joined it up in the rafters, strings digging into the callouses on his fingertips, and he moved in time with the rhythm of the piece until the first solo started. He finally stepped back and dropped his bow arm as the saxophonist stood to take a solo. His fingers plucked quietly at the strings and he closed his eyes to listen to the music and let his mind drift away.

The next hour and a half passed by in a dreamlike state. When he stepped off of the stage, he was out of breath and his arms ached. He had to focus on wrapping his fingers tightly around the handle of his instrument case so that it didn’t fall out of his (slowly cramping) bow hand.

“You really played hard tonight, Luce,” the saxophonist commented as he approached him.

“I needed the distraction,” Lucifer stated.

“Well, maybe you should go lookin’ for distractions more often, ‘cause the house loved it.”

Lucifer laughed breathily and shook his head.

“I’ll try to remember that next time I’m in.”
He put his case away in a small locker backstage and strolled out towards the bar. The smoky, warm air surrounded him once again and he slowed his pace. There was no need to rush; there was time enough in the night to relax.

“Hello, angel.” A voice said from the table to his right. Lucifer stopped in his tracks and turned his head to see none other than…Crowley.

“Hello,” Lucifer replied tentatively.

“Lovely gig you boys put on up there just now.”

Lucifer hummed and turned his head to look out at the crowd instead of at the other bokor. There was no doubt in his mind that the man had come to talk to him specifically. It made him nervous that he knew so little about Crowley outside of what Meg was willing to let slip. The fact that she was so uneasy even at the mention of his name, though…that alone left Lucifer feeling uncomfortable.

“Why don’t you join me for a moment?” Crowley offered. “You must be tired from all of that playing. Take a seat.”

Lucifer hesitated, but eventually gave in and sat down in the chair across the small table from the other bokor. The man smiled and it made Lucifer’s skin crawl. He scratched at his arms like he could dig the sensation out physically, but stopped after a couple of seconds since all it did was draw Crowley’s curious gaze to him even more.

“Care for a drink?”

_I would love one, Lucifer thought, but not in your company._

“No, but thank you for the offer.”

“Suit yourself,” Crowley said, lifting his own glass of—scotch, maybe?—in a mock toast to Lucifer. He took a drink and sat it back down carefully on the table.

“So how was it being a fish in jail?” Crowley smiled smugly at him.

“None of your beeswax,” Lucifer replied with a bitter glare. “That is, unless you had something to do with it.”

“I might have.”

Lucifer squinted at him.

“Why would you want to harm the pastor’s son?”

“How much would I benefit from discrediting you?”

Lucifer nodded and leaned back in his seat. That’s what this was about. He truly was trying to oust him. Lucifer hadn’t wanted to believe it at first, but it appeared that Crowley wasn’t bothered by the idea of hurting others for his own personal gain, and Lucifer had to face that fact now more carefully than ever.

“Why not just cooperate?” Lucifer asked. “People already have a habit of hating me after only one interaction. You didn’t honestly have to do anything to damage my reputation—especially with the Southern Baptist church. They already dislike all of us equally.”

“I am like you, in a sense,” Crowley said. “I make deals and I don’t back out of them. Sometimes I
merely work for myself. I am truly neutral, you see?"

“I don’t curse people, though, Crowley. I do have several associates who aren’t so averse to the idea, however, and I would label them as the protective types. If I were you, I would leave for another quarter of the city before any of them catch on.”

“Lucifer,” Crowley sighed, leaning forward in his seat again, “I no longer feel the need to create unnecessary conflict between the two of us. You are worthy of your grand reputation, I see. You have managed to avoid every one of my careful traps I’ve laid out for you.”

“The spider fetish included,” Lucifer pointed out. “I burned it. Whatever it was going to do will have to be contained in an airtight jar, from now on.”

“I was well aware that you had destroyed the thing,” Crowley said with a smug smile. “It would have served its purpose by now if you hadn’t.”

The two of them stared at each other intently. Crowley grinned; Lucifer deadpanned. He didn’t want to associate with the man across the table from him. He appreciated the call for a truce, but the trouble wasn’t nearly over quite yet. The Southern Baptist pastor would be on a headhunt for him, seeing as how he was still blaming Lucifer for the death of his son…who he had tried to help save, not kill. He still had no idea what Papa Legba had said when he had ridden him the night of the ceremony, and that worried him. Maybe the loa had been unable to help the pastor’s boy…maybe that was why the man had lashed out at him. That would be just dreadful—not only was he being blamed for something he hadn’t done, but he was also being blamed for acting out [read: acting like a mad man], and the ignorant pastor would deny the existence of loas so that he could blame a human being for the cause of his grief.

Lucifer rose from his chair and stared down at Crowley. He was too drained to deal with this. Crowley understood, apparently, and took another sip of scotch, remaining seated.

I need to drink until I can’t see straight. Good night, is what Lucifer wanted to say.

“Garth will be wondering where I am if I don’t leave now. I hope to not have to see you around anytime soon,” is what he actually said.

“Go get your drink, angel,” Crowley replied with a smug smile on his face.

Lucifer turned away without another word and weaved through the crowd until he finally reached the bar. He slouched onto an open bar stool (rather unceremoniously) and buried his head in his arms as he folded himself over the bar. Around a minute later, he heard something like a drink glass being placed next to his elbow. He lifted his head just enough to see his usual mixed drink and Garth standing directly in front of him.

“Bad day?”

Lucifer sighed heavily and plucked his drink up off of the table.

“You have no idea.”

He downed at least a third of it in one go and felt it burn down his throat, heat his insides up, and then rush straight to his head. Perfect. He blinked as his eyes watered slightly from the odd and sudden onslaught of sensation.

“I can see,” Garth said, casting him a sympathetic look. “Let me know when you need anything else.”
“Absolutely, Garth. Thank you.”

It was going to be a very long night for the two of them.

Chapter End Notes

Snake Rag: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nklm3JoAh3o

I Ain't Gonna Play No Second Fiddle: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cyffii8pjGio
Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

this chapter written by: Mer

Chapter Notes

Again, I'm going to mention that it's weekly updates for this fic from here on out! Hope you enjoy this one. Let us know if you've got something you want to say, even if it's awkward or you feel like we've heard it already.

The shack was surprisingly empty, as Sam walked in the front door a couple of days later. He looked around the front room and called out into the house to see if maybe the bokor was just being more quiet than usual. There was no such luck. The electric lights were on, and the gas lamps had been put out; the front door was unlocked, but the sign outside read "closed".

He was supposed to come in that day…right?

Sam decided to wait and see if the bokor showed up. Maybe he was just running late from a previous appointment. That was no problem. Sam could make himself busy with some of his tasks he knew Lucifer had been skirting around asking him to complete for several days. The shiny brass knocker for the front door sat idly on top of the bookshelf with several nails scattered around it. The hammer was thankfully in its usual place in the shelves under the front counter. Sam went to work replacing the old, weather-worn knocker on the grayish, wooden door as the sun began to set, casting vibrant orange and pink light over the front porch.

It was clear, after two of the four nails were put in place, that something was amiss. Lucifer never took this long to get from place to place. Sam could assume all he wanted to, but was he actually able to predict what the bokor was doing? It wasn’t exactly that he was worried over the man’s whereabouts, but…well, alright, he was worried for Lucifer. Sam could think of any number of odd things that might be holding the bokor over a few minutes anywhere, but he also could think of plenty of places in which he could be in trouble. He did have a pastor on his bad side, after all…

Sam wasn’t going to think about that. No. Lucifer was just held up someplace. He had to clean up after himself or buy a few extra things or talk to a concerned associate on the street or something. He was not in any sort of trouble.

The last two nails were driven into the door, and Sam took a step back to check over his work. He stood there with his hands on his hips for a moment, trying desperately to not overthink his situation; Dean was right. He worried too much. Satisfied with the placement of the new door knocker, he took the old one and its nails back inside and shut the door behind him. He sat down at the table and placed the hammer, nails, and piece of weathered iron on the table in front of him. A sigh escaped him and he leaned back in his chair.

It wouldn’t hurt to check the time, right? It wasn’t considered worrying just to look at his wristwatch
once in a while, just to see how long he’d been working. No, it was completely fine and it absolutely was not him checking how long he had been there without Lucifer.

It had been 30 minutes.

Sam let his arm rest on the table and shook his head. No. No, he was not going to think about this right now. He was easygoing and flexible with his time management. He could just wait another fifteen or so minutes for the bokor to show up.

Meanwhile, he focused on the room around him. Its furniture had been rearranged ever so slightly. Half of the books in the bookshelf were on the floor, and half of them were arranged in order of the color of their binding and covers in the shelves. It was like Lucifer had been in the middle of re-organizing them when he’d been distracted. Sam never quite understood why every so often things would move around in Lucifer’s home and shop, but he never could bring himself to question it, simply assuming that the man liked to change things up every now and then. The rug from Lucifer’s back room had been moved to the floor of the front room, and the larger rug that normally was in the shop was rolled up and shoved up against the wall in a corner of the room. The large, upholstered chair that had previously been in the corner where the rug was had been moved to the end of the rectangular table like a throne at the head of the table. Sam could only imagine what the back room looked like.

That was when he heard the back door swing open and shut again. Some cheerful humming came from the back room, and a shadow of a person moved back and forth behind the green curtain that separated the two main rooms. Items clattered around as the person moved around in the small, dimly-lit space. Sam rose to his feet, carefully walked over to the doorway, and peeked behind the curtain.

He was met with a bright lantern in his face.

Sam recoiled and blinked hard, trying to get rid of the colorful spots that were starting to dot his vision. Lucifer stood in front of him, squinting at him curiously from behind the small opening in the curtain. The bokor lowered the lantern and tipped his head to the side, but the gesture was much more animated than his usual subtle tilt. Sam sighed.

"Lucifer, you scared me."

The bokor’s face morphed into an expression of realization. He lowered the lantern with a high-toned hum and looked Sam up and down. He smiled at his assistant.

"You’re the fella working with him, aren’t you?” Lucifer said with enthusiasm, his voice slightly higher in his range than usual—more alto than contralto/tenor.

"I’m sorry?" Sam asked.

Lucifer giggled and ducked back behind the curtain once again. Sam frowned and followed him into the small living quarters. The lantern had illuminated the room a bit more so that Sam could now see how the bokor had been rearranging things in there as well as in the front room; the small, round table had been pushed all of the way into the corner of the room; the trunk that usually sat along the wall to Sam’s right was open and its contents had been rifled through; the bed sheets had a nice, cherry-red woman’s shawl lying on top of it along with a corked bottle of liquor.

The truly interesting part of the room was Lucifer himself. He was dressed rather effeminately in a loose, white, sleeveless blouse and a pair of high-waisted, blood-red, baggy pants with a fitted waist that looked more like a cummerbund with small buttons down one hip, and, when he stood still, it
looked much more like a skirt than a pair of trousers. Black-colored bangles jingled on his left forearm, and his serpent tattoo peeked out along his shoulders and cascaded down upper arms. Sam had to force himself not to stare as the bokor spun back around, a mischievous smile on his lips.

"He didn’t warn you I was coming?" Lucifer asked. "Oh, what a shame. I will make introductions for myself, then."

The bokor stuck out his hand and looked up at Sam through his eyelashes.

"My name is Maman Brigitte."

Sam didn’t know what to do for a moment. He reached forward, after his hesitation, and shook the bokor’s…the spirit’s hand.

"Sam. I’m—my name is Sam."

"Sam what?" the spirit asked with a comically raised eyebrow.

"Sam Winchester."

"Ahh, I see." Lucifer’s eyes were focused on him as if he was being thoroughly inspected. The spirit held his hand slightly longer than what was considered comfortable, once the handshake had ceased. The bokor’s hand was drawn away slowly and delicately, though, and their eyes made contact once again.

"You get along very well, I take it?" the spirit asked.

"We work together, yes," Sam said. "I’m a temporary assistant of sorts."

"It is an absolute pleasure to meet you, Sam Winchester." The spirit sat down on the bed and snatched the bottle up, pulling the cork out in one easy, swift motion, despite how far it had been jammed into the bottle’s neck. It drank the alcohol like one would guzzle water after a long day’s work under the hot, Louisiana sun. A contented sigh floated out from Lucifer’s lips, which turned up in a lazy, satisfied smile as the bottle was brought back down to be held in his lap.

"Do sit down, dear, I don’t think there’s much for you to do, at the moment," Maman Brigitte said in a lofty tone. "You look like you’ve been working already."

"I…I have been," Sam stuttered. He sat down in a chair, which was haphazardly placed at the foot of the bed. The spirit swung itself around so that it could lie on its stomach, feet at the head of the bed, chin rested in the bokor’s hands and pointed towards Sam.

"Hmm? And what have you been up to?"

"I fixed a part of the front door for Lucifer…?"

"Ah, very nice," the spirit replied. "I’ve been out and about, drifting along for a while, but Lucifer called on me, and I just had to come along. I remember him from last time…nice and snug in here, especially for a man."

Sam wasn’t sure how to respond to that. He hummed and nodded his head. The spirit was female; that much was certain at this point. Whether it was a normal spirit or something more powerful like a loa, however, was still unknown to him. Sam had definitely heard the name "Maman Brigitte" before, but he couldn’t recall the context.
"Sam, dear, you’re getting lost in your head."

"Right," Sam said, snapping out of his thoughts. "I’m sorry. That…that happens sometimes."

The spirit squinted Lucifer’s bright blue eyes at him and frowned skeptically.

"You’re not a psychic, are you?"

“No, no. Not to my knowledge, at least," Sam laughed and shook his head.

The spirit smiled at him again and offered him the bottle of liquor. Sam gave her a questioning look, but the spirit just nodded at the bottle again. A kind offering, then? Was he expected to accept or decline? It was possible that such a casual spirit would expect him to take a sip, but Sam wasn’t exactly accustomed to the behavior of individual Vodou spirits. If it was custom to do one thing and he suddenly did the other…

"You’re over-thinking it, sweetheart."

Sam hesitantly plucked the uncorked bottle from the outstretched hand in front of him. He lifted it to his lips, but before he could take a sip, he caught a whiff of something strong and bad coming from the liquid sloshing around in the bottle. Sam frowned and lifted it to his nose instead to check it for what he thought he had smelled. His eyes watered and he had to hand the bottle back to the spirit as he brought his free hand up to rub at his face.

The spirit laughed like Lucifer.

"What? Is there something wrong with it?"

"What did you put in there?" Sam asked, having dabbed at his eyes with the cuff of his sleeve. The spirit snickered.

"A little pepper, that’s all," she said, trying to hold in her amusement. "It’s spiced rum. Literally." She sighed wistfully and added, "I was almost hoping you would go ahead and drink it. Your face would have been priceless."

Sam laughed as his eyes calmed down.

"How the hell can you drink that?"

"I’m a Ghede loa, darling—I do what I want."

Loa. Right. She was a loa. A Ghede loa. Everything suddenly made much more sense. Maman Brigitte was a flirtatious, neutral spirit who loved a good, fun time. She had been covered in one of Lucifer’s rants about Vodou lore. She was keeper of the cemeteries and protector of children. Although she was married to Baron Samedi, she would unashamedly would romance and seduce attractive humans left and right if she so desired. Nobody could control a Ghede loa, according to Lucifer. Nobody would want to, even if they thought they could, either.

Lucifer probably hadn’t wanted to call Sam into any more possession rituals after the last one. He had also explained at some point that he never knows how long a spirit will have a hold of him when it begins to ride him. The loa must have been strolling about town, taking her time before returning to Lucifer’s home, unaware that someone was waiting there for her chwal (or "vessel" or "horse" or whatever one’s preferred term is). The least Lucifer could have done was alert him to the fact that this was happening; it would have made his evening much easier.
"It doesn’t hurt him, if that’s what you’re worried about," Maman Brigitte added after another swig of the strong, spicy liquor. "As long as I’m in him, he’s perfectly fine."

"That’s…that’s a relief, I suppose," Sam replied. The loa reached out to brush Sam’s arm with a gentle hand. Sam stiffened initially, but found himself relaxing into the touch. Lucifer’s mouth was turned up into a crooked smirk.

"So what are you doing working with a man like Lucifer?" the loa asked. "You aren’t of the Vodou faith and practices, are you?"

"I’m not immersed fully into it, no," Sam explained. "I have a deal with Lucifer”—the loa giggled at that statement—"to work off part of my payment for healing sessions with my brother."

"Oh, you have a brother?" the loa asked, suddenly interested. "Is he as pretty as you are?"

Sam felt his face heat up and he looked down at his feet instead of at the loa. He laughed and shook his head.

"I suppose he must be attractive to other people, since impaired vision hasn’t stopped him from finding a few interested folks now and then."

The loa inched closer to him and looked up at him, cocking Lucifer’s head to the side as she stared calculatingly. She hummed and looked up and down Sam’s body quickly. It felt like she was trying to undress him with her vessel’s eyes alone. (Sam hated to admit to himself how nice it felt.)

"You don’t believe me when I say you’re pretty?"

Sam didn’t reply. The loa frowned.

"Sam."

"I don’t…I don’t really know."

"Is it because of my horse or because of me?"

It wasn’t because of her. Sam knew she was flirtatious and sometimes rather sexual. He knew what to expect, and he had intended to take the compliment, but…apparently that was much harder than he had expected it to be. The idea of the compliment coming from Lucifer wasn’t nearly as shocking as it should have been, either. If Lucifer thought that, and if it came up in conversation, he seemed like the type to have no problem with saying it aloud. Sam didn’t feel like it was a terribly false compliment—he’d received it a few times from other ladies and gents, so some part of it must have rung somewhat true—but he didn’t feel as though he could agree with it, either. Maybe it was the fact that the compliment was coming from Lucifer’s mouth. Maybe it was Sam’s own self-confidence, though. Something was holding him back from answering the loa, in any case.

Sam closed his mouth in a tight line, unable to say what he wanted to in the right words.

"Lucifer’s pretty, too," Maman Brigitte mentioned, rolling over onto her back so that she could look up at Sam from a new angle. "Don’t you agree?"

Sam laughed quietly at that.

"What is it with people asking me if Lucifer is pretty?" he mumbled.

"What is your answer, though?" the loa persisted.
"He’s…I suppose…yes, he is rather aesthetically appealing."

The loa’s mischievous smile returned to the bokor’s face. She reached a hand up and turned Sam’s head to face her by grabbing at his jaw and physically moving it slightly closer. Sam didn’t have a chance to resist the motion and stared in surprise at the bright blue gaze that met his all of the sudden. Maman Brigitte squinted at him, then relaxed the hand holding onto Sam’s jaw, sliding her fingertips down from back by his ear to his chin. She dropped the arm lazily back onto the bed and continued to stare up at him.

Sam had not a single clue as to how he should have been reacting to any of it. He sort of just sat there and let her go ahead with her ministrations, both unwilling to keep the thought that this was Lucifer’s body doing someone else’s bidding out of his mind and unwilling to move away at the same time. The loa seemed to notice this, and a pleased, smug expression danced across the bokor’s features as they each stared at the other.

"You weren’t lying," the loa said in a lower, quieter tone. "You do think that he’s pretty."

"I…I don’t…"

"Oh, yes you do. Don’t try lying to Maman Brigitte. I can read you like a book from here."

Sam shut his mouth and didn’t say another word about it. Anything that might come out of him at that moment would have been excuses and denials. He believed the loa when she said that she would see right through them.

"Tell me," she said, suddenly interrupting his thoughts, "does Lucifer wear these clothes around anyone else, or does he just save them for me and some of the other spirits?"

"I can honestly say that I have never seen him wear these before," Sam admitted. It was sort of humorous at first—the whole feminine look Lucifer had going for the loa’s comfort. Over the course of their conversation, however, he had begun to notice how well-fitted they were and how well taken care of they appeared to be. Lucifer had to have these tucked away in his trunk specifically for the feminine spirits who possessed him. Otherwise, Sam would have seen them before that moment. (Lucifer wasn’t exactly one to hide his habits and preferences from the world—especially not from Sam.)

The loa sat up and placed the liquor bottle on the floor at the side of the bed. She swung her chwal’s legs over the foot of the bed and sat up so that her face was mere inches from Sam’s. Sam leaned back a short ways, but couldn’t go far due to the way the back of his chair impeded any further movement on his part.

"Sam," the loa said, almost inaudibly, "if I didn’t know any better, I would say that you like having me around."

"I…” Sam didn’t know what to do, where to go, what to say. He just sat there and stared back at the loa in Lucifer’s body. He didn’t want to pull away, even if he knew he should. It was wrong to…it felt like taking advantage of someone who would have no recollection of any of this when the loa left him. Sam didn’t dislike how Maman Brigitte was acting at all. (He normally liked women who were rather forward with him.) There was that small thought that waved a warning whistle in the back of his mind, pointing out that Lucifer was unable to control these actions in any way, shape, or form. His consent would have to come after the fact if Sam allowed the loa to do anything…interesting with him. Lucifer always seemed to value Sam’s permission over anything else when they worked together, so why should Sam allow the question of just how dubious the bokor’s consent was to persist?
Still, Sam could not pull himself away. He was frozen in that spot, his heart pounding and his breath becoming enticingly shallow. The loa gazed seductively at him through Lucifer’s (okay, fine—so they were pretty) eyes and smiled in a painfully knowing way with Lucifer’s lips. She raked her gaze across his face and chuckled softly, though it was more to herself than it was to Sam.

"You should really hear what he thinks about you," the loa murmured. "It’s all very intriguing. Rather sweet, really, how much he cares about you. You’ve called each other, what, friends, now? I think you two may need to look at a dictionary definition of that word again, because your definition isn’t the one I’m familiar with."

Sam huffed out what might have been a nervous laugh—he wasn’t too sure.

"I’ll have to go soon," Sam interjected, trying to be as polite as he could. Maman Brigitte pouted jokingly at him.

"So soon?"

"I…suppose so, yes."

The loa leaned forward slightly, and Sam could feel the breath coming from between Lucifer’s lips blowing lightly across his own. He was terrified for a moment that he had waited too long to move out of the way, and he closed his eyes, bracing for what could come next.

What he was bracing for never came, though. Instead, he felt the loa lean over to the side and place her head alongside his, cheek to cheek, so that she could nuzzle her vessel’s nose into the space just below Sam’s ear and where his jaw and neck met. She breathed in deeply and exhaled a warm breath slowly over his skin. When Sam felt the presence disappear, he opened his eyes again in time to see Lucifer’s body flopping back onto the bed with a dramatic sigh.

"Go on, then." Maman Brigitte waved her hand at Sam.

"S-Sorry?"

"Before I change my mind and really see what you’re made of. Go back to your brother or wherever you have to be. I won’t mess with what you two have going here. Besides that, Lady Erzulie would give me hell for tinkering with toys that are currently hers."

"Right." Sam shook his head in an attempt to bring himself back down to earth. He stood and walked to the other side of the room. He ought to go. The loa was right. He would return the next day and see if Lucifer had returned. Get a good night’s rest in, too, if he could. Yes, that sounded nice.

"As I said earlier, Sam Winchester, it has been an absolute pleasure meeting you."

The loa grinned at him from where she lay sprawled out on the bed; one leg was bent with the knee leaning against the glass covering over the cabinets by the bed while the other was stretched out towards the end of the mattress; one arm was raised and bent at the elbow, resting behind her chwal’s head while the other had settled with a hand on the knee of the bent leg. Maman Brigitte winked teasingly at Sam and smiled again.

"Likewise," Sam stated. He felt himself bow slightly out of cautious respect before he ducked out of the thick curtain and into the front room. The cool air snapped him quickly back into reality. Whatever had just happened, he would have to wait until he returned home to think over it properly. Sam closed his eyes and took a deep breath in, and let it out in a controlled exhale. He made his way to the front door and stepped out into the night.
As he walked away, he did everything in his power to ignore the cheerful humming that trickled out from the back room and followed him out into the dark street.
Whenever Maman Brigitte came to visit, things got weird. Lucifer’s records would be used as floor decorations, his books organized by colour or by height. On one memorable occasion she had switched the labels on his spice jars, allowing him to enjoy the really unique experience of a muffin made with what was supposed to be sugar and cinnamon but turned out to be salt and cayenne. She was a Ghide. They did things differently. Lucifer woke draped in the sort of ridiculous blousy clothes she preferred, with a ringing exhausted ache inhabiting his body which meant that yesterday there had been a Loa sharing space with him.

He peeled himself off the floor and wandered around for a bit, looking for a glass to put something vaguely drinkable in. Being ridden was a bit like the world’s most intense high, with the accompanying crash. He remembered only bits and pieces, if that, but what he did still have was electric and angelic and insane. The feeling was like black lightning streaming through his bones, a violent divine orgasm. There was no pain and no physical consequence. He knew everything and was everywhere. He could feel the singing untouchable life in each of his cells, the perfect burning white place with no size and no true location. He was flooded with glory and everything was beautiful because everything was complete and he could see it as it truly was.

Afterwards, however, he felt a bit like he had been run over by a train. The physical ills all healed themselves but the pain hung around like a hangover, clinging to him for hours. He always felt vaguely hollow and dead once the loa had left. With some it was worse than others. Ougoun had an unpleasant habit of leaving him with sore genitals for days at a time. With Maman Brigitte there was always the headache, the exhaustion, the pervasive rubbery feeling of his body. She was fairly gentle, but also unpredictable.

The worst part was trying to figure out what had actually happened. While the loa were in control, anything was liable to take place, including things which were embarrassing, dangerous, or disgusting. Usually he could get someone else to tell him, but sometimes they kept things back for the purpose of amusement (especially if the person he was asking was Meg). With Maman, it was always hard to tell. She had a taste for the more exotic aspects of human experience. Normally this was not terrible, but around new people, it could get very awkward. He wondered if Sam had come by for work yesterday. He had not thought to tell him not to.

On the front counter, there was a crumpled note. He unfolded it. Meg’s precise slender hand informed him that she had been with him for the end of the possession yesterday. Everything had gone as planned; there was no major property damage and no one he had to apologize to. She had left him sleeping.

Last night he had walked through a forest of trees with corpses hanging from their branches like rotten fruit. The air was thick with the strange sweet perfume of death. He understood that he was looking for his own branch, the place where he could hang himself among the others and swing there
forever, gently decaying. When he found it finally, someone had sawed it off. The stump was bleeding. The other corpses dangling from the branches of the tree wailed in a pathetic miserable storm of dead voices. He had stood there, lost, waiting for the world to tell him what to do next.

It had been a hell of a dream. He shook his head. He was getting thoroughly sick of nightmares. They were like the mental equivalent of someone breathing down his neck; the knowledge that something was wrong without the knowledge of what exactly it was. He would rather just have an identifiable enemy, no matter how intimidating or mysterious.

There were no enemies in the crystal light of day. He ran his hands through his hair and stared out the window. Time to start living again. There were things to do. There were always things to do.

At the club, Balthazar welcomed him with his usually extravagant affection. Lucifer gave him a vague smile and shrugged out of his hold. The room was the usual mess of laughter, rowdy talk, and cheap alcohol. The lights burned in a strained yellow haze. Meg was at one of the tables, drinking idly from a flask. Lucifer elbowed his way over to her. She raised the flask in his direction and he grabbed it and took a heavy gulp.

“Rough day, huh?” Meg’s fingers rapped slowly across the surface of the table.

Lucifer shook his head. “There should be a law about having to sing the day after being ridden.” He swallowed and shuddered. “Jesus! How are you still alive?”

She twitched her eyebrows significantly. “Sold my soul to the devil. How’s Sam?”

“Quiet,” he said, which was technically true. Sam had come by to do his work in uneasy silence and left. Whenever Lucifer had tried to initiate contact with him he was repelled by awkward smiles and confusion. It was very strange. Lucifer had decided it was probably due to the whole murder issue, which was a lot for anyone to take in.

“I bet,” Meg smirked, grabbing her flask out of Lucifer’s hands.

He frowned. “What does that mean?”

“He was over there while you were with Maman yesterday. Left as I was coming in. Looked like he had been smacked. What’d you do to that poor kid?”

“I don’t know, do I? I can’t remember.” Lucifer’s frown curled deep. Sam had seen Maman Brigitte riding him. No wonder he had been skittish. “Did he say anything?”

“Nope. Just went running for the door.” She nodded up at the stage. “It’s your set.”

He nodded distantly and made his way to the stage. The band welcomed him in their normal cursory way. He knew none of their names, but nonetheless had a gut-deep understanding of them that comes to soldiers and firefighters and professional musicians; that integral knowledge which can only come from having to work together perfectly without questions. The microphone opened for him like a steel flower. He drew in a smoky breath of the air and the lights and the applause.

“Folks, I know a girl named Cemetery Liz...”

Bessie Smith. Technically it was a woman’s song, but that had never bothered him, and this one fit
him better than most songs written by men. “Cemetery Blues”, God bless her. At this point he knew his routine well enough that he could send his body through the song while his mind was mostly somewhere else. He leaned in close, licking the air over the microphone, letting his voice pour out like wine. The harmony of brass and piano roared behind him. The world spun fat and golden and shining around him, waiting to be tasted.

“I’m going to down to the cemetry ‘cause the world is all wrong…”

Sam had been with him while he was Maman Brigitte’s chwal. That bothered him more than it should have. Brigitte was not inclined to violence, although she did sometimes play flamboyant practical jokes. More than anything she loved the pleasures of the flesh, the luxury and possibility of sensation, especially when it came to sex. There was nothing she liked better than a pretty young man. And Sam was entirely too pretty for his own good.

It shouldn’t have been so troubling. If Brigitte flirted, that was completely typical. It was just what she did with everyone and not his fault. But in every chwal there was an element of the original personality, as well as the Loa riding them. He had been present yesterday in some way, with Maman Brigitte loosening his inhibitions. Given his very intense and uncertain feelings about Sam even when he wasn’t being ridden, any number of things could have happened. He felt something turn over in his stomach, a feeling like the moment when you truly understand that you are falling.

“Got a date to see a ghost by the name Jones,” he sang, and the trumpet screamed behind him to the pounding dizzy delirium of the blues.

It was about halfway through the song when he noticed Crowley sitting in the audience. The man was in the back, a black lump nursing something fruity in a glass. Lucifer’s hands tensed around the microphone. One more thing to deal with before he could go home. The chaos of the club seemed a lot less comforting. A quick once-over of the room confirmed that Meg was gone, which was something at least. Having her and Crowley in the same room could only lead to disaster, especially if it was a public place. Second time in a week the son of a bitch had attended his show. There were no good reasons for Crowley to become a consistent audience member. There were no good reasons for Crowley to be anywhere at all.

The kid had been fourteen. Wanted to be a hospital chaplain, Kubrick had said, probably so that he could follow his father’s example with people whose problems he understood. At least it had been quick.

“Every time he kisses me that funny feeling creeps up my back,” he sang, and for some reason that line, which had always appealed to him with its sly morbid outrageousness, just made him feel sick and angry. There was an awful lot of death around lately.

The song ended in a crash of instrumentals. The trumpeter leaned over in a way which looked suspiciously like he wanted to say something, but Lucifer ducked him and slid off the stage. His throat was rough and the air of the club was clammy and hot. Crowley watched him coming with a flat ironic smile, and toasted him idly. Lucifer dropped into the other chair at his table, feeling the damp grind of sweat at the back of his neck.

“What do you want?” he asked, before Crowley had time to open his mouth.

Crowley’s eyebrows hitched. “Not even any foreplay? You must be losing interest in me.”

“I’m tired and I’ve been having a really weird week. As fun as your little games are, I have better things to do right now.” Lucifer leaned back in his chair. The band was launching into something crazy and fast.
“Good point.” Crowley swirled his drink around lazily. “How’s Meg, the dear creature? Still raising hell, pun intended?”

“She’s fine. Not here, lucky for you.”

“Yes. Lucky for me.” Crowley was silent a moment, looking at his drink and smiling in a vague dim way. Then he said, “And you? How are you doing?”

“No worse than usual,” Lucifer said tightly, wondering where this was going.

“Is that so?” Crowley’s smile was slightly fixed and he was very pointedly looking at absolutely nothing. “Nothing unusual? Bad dreams, for instance?"

Lucifer’s heart seized in a very alarming way, and for a moment he could not breathe enough to answer.

“How did you know that?”

“Seemed like a solid guess, with this sort of thing.” On closer inspection, Crowley’s face looked very pale and sort of shapeless in a way unique to people who have been running on very little food and even less sleep. He lifted his glass and Lucifer abruptly realized that his hand was trembling.

Lucifer peered at him. “What the hell is wrong with you?” he said softly.

“The same thing that’s wrong with you, I suspect.” Crowley took a slightly shaky sip and put the glass back down. “So. Nightmares. Bad ones.”

“Would it do any good if I said no?”

“Not really.” Crowley lifted his head in a distracted way and watched the band. “Last night a spider crawled out of my mouth and walked over my blankets. It left footprints in ink. This morning there was a human fingernail in my coffee, which disintegrated in sunlight. I keep feeling like I’m experiencing things I’ve experienced before and I just don’t remember. Like there’s something crawling around my head and breeding. It’s very distracting. The air is different. The city is different. Something is wrong and it’s gotten into the world, like a pollutant in water. I can feel it in everything now.”

He looked back down into his drink. Lucifer said nothing. His heartbeat whispered to his ribs in a strange language.

“I have,” Crowley said at last, “in the course of my work, done very terrible things. I have done unspeakable things, fucking awful things.” A glassy, petrified smile touched his lips without any humour whatsoever. “And I have come into contact with truths that exist beyond life and death, or good and evil. The things that lie below the bone, you understand. The really…strange things, the malformations. And, after decades of exposure, what I’ve noticed is that at the point where the rules of reality begin to break down, there’s a very particular smell. I can’t describe it—it’s not like anything else. The smell of the universe cannibalizing itself. And you stink of it, mate. You have it all over you.”

“I haven’t noticed,” Lucifer said, keeping his voice light with some effort.

“You wouldn’t, would you? You don’t smell it until you know what it smells like.”

“That’s a logical fallacy.”
“Logic has very little power here.” Crowley tilted the silty remains of his drink back and forth and was silent for a moment.

“I think you need to be extremely careful,” he said at last. “Things are only going to be getting stranger from here on out, and the source is very close to you. There’s someone you trust, someone who means a lot to you, and they are slowly dismantling your life. If it feels like things are falling apart, it’s because they are, and it’s all got to do with you, darling. It’s all got to do with…” Crowley’s voice seemed to fail and he stared intently at his drink.

“If this is true,” Lucifer said, with deliberate evenness, “you’re being very helpful for someone who tried to have me convicted of a capital crime last week.”

“No judge is going to accept ‘he killed him with vodou’ as legitimate grounds for conviction. I was more interested in discrediting you than having you locked up.” Crowley passed his hand over his forehead. “What’s happening now is much bigger than us, or any feud we might be developing. I can’t afford to try to hurt you. And you can’t afford to hold a grudge against me.”

Lucifer nodded, reflectively. “This is all very interesting, but you’re forgetting something important?”

“Am I? What’s that?”

“You framed me for murder,” Lucifer answered, and smiled in a very unpleasant way. “Why would I listen to anything you say?”

With that, he pushed away from the table, grabbed his coat, and left. He did not look back, and Crowley did not follow him. Outside the sky was wild with diamond stars. He was trapped between wanting to get drunk and wanting to go to sleep. Mostly he just wanted to be someone else. The stars were only beautiful because they were so far away.

It was dark back at his house, but not so dark that he couldn’t see the slight figure lingering by his door. He climbed the steps, which welcomed him with a whining crescendo of rotten wood. “Mrs. Mills. How lovely to see you.”

She stepped forward, a bar of pallid moonlight falling across her warm masklike smile. “Sorry for dropping by like this, Mr. Shurley. I was out shopping and got a little lost, but I remembered you live in this area. Can you help?”

He smiled to hide the growing ache of exhaustion in the back of his head. “Of course. Come inside.” His keys fumbled into the lock with a bit of shoving. “Want some water?”

“That would be nice.”

It wasn’t even a good lie, and she had delivered it in the kind of fluid toneless way that meant she knew it and didn’t care whether he believed her or not. They both knew why she was here. The door moved open into the musty dark of the shop. As he moved around putting the lights on, she said, “Is it all right if I call you Lucifer? Mr. Shurley seems so formal. Although I guess ‘Lucifer’ doesn’t always make for easy familiarity either.”

He dropped a match into the bowl of a lamp, and a bright rush of flame leapt up. “You can call me Lucifer if I can call you sheriff.”
Her face did not exactly change, but her smile widened and took on a kind of hard honesty. “I see,” she said. “No bullshit, then?”

“No,” he agreed with a flicker of pleasant surprise. He had heard women swear like that before, but the women he knew were not exactly ladies, and Sheriff Mills, with her respectable haircut and white blouse, was definitely a lady.

“Okay.” She put her elbows on the counter and propped her head in her hands. “Did you kill Martin Kubrick?”

“No,” Lucifer said. That much he was more or less sure of.

She nodded and didn’t say anything for a moment. He asked “Do you believe me?”

“That’s not important. My job is knowledge, not belief.”

“Well.” He sank into the wicker chair with a wry smile. “My job is belief. So where does that leave us?”

She returned the smile. “Here, I guess. It leaves us here.”

If he mentioned Crowley’s name to her, it would set some things in motion. Of course it would be impossible to charge him with the death, since, as he had pointed out, ‘murder by vodou’ was not admissible in any court, but there were doubtless other unpleasant truths in his past. He was the sort of person who could be destroyed by one solid police investigation, regardless of the cause. He turned the idea over in his mind. It would certainly solve a lot of his recent problems.

“If you didn’t kill him, why does Kubrick think you did?” Sheriff Mills asked.

“I don’t know,” he replied, gathering himself. “Prejudice and shock, probably. Is there any reason to think he was killed at all? He was sick.”

She shot him an acute glance. “I thought I was asking the questions.”

“This isn’t official police business,” he pointed out. “And you don’t have to answer, of course.”

Her smile grew sharper and she looked down. “The way he died isn’t indicative of the symptoms of his condition.”

He blinked. “It isn’t?” Crowley had been careless.

“Right now it looks like he had a massive stroke of some kind. The blood vessels in his mouth and nose burst, which explains the blood, but there’s no reason for him to die like that to begin with. Fourteen-year-old boys don’t suffer fatal strokes, no matter how sick they are.”

“So what—poison?”

“Could be. It’s all very mysterious.” She glanced around the shop. “Kubrick thinks it’s witchcraft.”

“My witchcraft in particular, I suppose.”

“That’s the idea.” Her gaze returned to him. “A slightly more personal question? Do you actually believe all of this? Vodou, possession. Do you buy it or are you just taking advantage of the credibility of stupid tourists?”

“Will my answer have any impact on my standing in the case?”
A brisk, dry, laugh. “Let’s hear what it is, first.”

“Most of my customers are locals. From this neighbourhood, actually.” He shifted and looked over to the side at a glittering row of jars. “And yes. I do believe—all of this, as you so eloquently put it. I was raised in this tradition, and I’ve seen and done enough to have no doubt. Knowledge, not belief, right? It’s not like Christianity. My gods are physical. They speak to me and occasionally use my body for their purposes. I know how crazy that must sound, but it’s the truth. It’s just how I live. Yes, I believe. I don’t really have a choice.”

Sheriff Mills was watching him carefully. There was an expression on his face which he suspected did not represent what she was actually feeling. She put her hands under her chin. “Okay,” she said curiously.

“So I sound insane, and therefore much more suspicious,” Lucifer supplied.

She laughed. “No crazier than Kubrick, actually. It’s kind of funny that you two are on opposite sides but you’re the only ones who believe this whole mess.” She pulled away from the counter and stretched for a moment, quiet, looking reflectively at him. “So if all of this is real, is it possible that someone killed Martin Kubrick with magic?”

“Completely,” he answered smoothly.

“Really.” Her eyes were too intelligent, with a clear observant shine. “Any ideas who might have done that?”

He looked at her too-wise eyes and made a decision. “No.” Despicable though he might be, Crowley was still a practitioner, and these things were always better handled outside of the normal authorities, who had neither the knowledge nor the ability to punish Crowley the way he deserved. The justice of outsiders had no place in this. He would handle it on his own.

“None? No ideas at all?”

“Well, it’s not me. That’s all I know. I’m sorry I can’t help you more.”

“Kubrick is awfully convinced it’s you.”

“Kubrick and I had a business dealing a day or two before his son’s death. It was all very secretive—I’m a bokor, he’s a respected pastor, it would be disastrous if he was known to be associated with me. When Martin died he probably made a leap of thought without the benefit of reason and ended up with me, someone he already disliked. It’s probably no more complicated than that.”

“What did you do for him?”

“It was a ritual to help his son, actually.” That sounded vaguely suspicious, even to Lucifer; he hurried on. “He wanted me to intercede on his behalf to Papa Legba. Which I did. I suppose he thought maybe I cursed him.”

“It’s not a huge stretch.”

“Not if you think vodou is devil worship, no it isn’t.”

She held up her hands. “No offence meant. Just pointing something out.”

“None taken, Sheriff.” He pulled himself up from the chair. “I don’t want to be rude, but I doubt that I can be of any more use to you and I have things to do before I can sleep. Is there anything else you
“Want to ask?”

“We’ve about covered it.” She stepped away from the counter. “Murder or no murder, it was nice talking to you, Lucifer. And you’ve been very helpful.”

“I hope so. Do you need someone to walk you home?”

She barked a laugh. “No, thank you. My husband is waiting in an unmarked car a block away. If I was still here in five minutes, he’d come in and shoot you dead.”

“Oh,” said Lucifer mildly. “How convenient. I’m glad we managed to avoid that.”

“So am I,” she said, smiled, and left. Her footsteps rattled across the porch for a few minutes and then died into nothing. He fell back into the chair and sat there for a moment, watching the serene drift of dust motes in the amber glow of the lamp.

“All right,” he said finally. “I know you’re there. Too good to miss, right?”

And then Gabriel was there, sitting on the edge of the counter, swinging his legs idly. The dull light made his hair look almost fluffy. “She seemed nice,” he commented. “Nosy, but nice.”

“Being nosy is her job.”

“It’s her husband’s job,” Gabriel corrected. “And she’s still nosy. Job or not.”

“I kind of like her.” Lucifer rolled his head back over his shoulders, grinding out the ache in his neck. “Where’d you put the ashes from Crowley’s goddamn toy?”

“It’s in the basement. By the stairs. Maman Brigitte took care of it for you.” There was a slight tightness in the ghost’s voice as he said it.

Lucifer tilted his head back around and peered at him. “What’s happening, Gabe?”

“Well, it’s night, and we’re talking.”

“That’s not what I meant. Something is happening and I don’t know what it is. To you, to me, to Martin Kubrick. There’s something bad coming, or maybe it’s already here. Maybe it was always here. I don’t know.” He rubbed his eyes. “Have you ever felt like everything’s changing at once?”

“Not for a very long time,” Gabriel said, quietly.

Lucifer opened his eyes and stared at him. “You know what I’m talking about. You’ve been feeling it too. You’ve been behaving like a complete maniac lately, and I don’t know how these things work for ghosts—maybe what’s physical for me is mental for you, or the other way around, but—”

“Luce,” Gabe interrupted him. “Is this about yesterday?” His face, insubstantial though it was, looked narrow and waxy.

“What yesterday?” Lucifer replied, with an edge of bewilderment. He remembered almost nothing from yesterday.

“You know,” Gabriel said nervously, and then, with an emphasis that indicated this should mean something, “yesterday. With Sam.”

Lucifer had the abrupt sensation of a spider crawling across his scalp. “Sam? What about Sam?”
Gabriel said nothing, looking down, his fingers twisting compulsively in his lap. His face was bleak. Lucifer forced down a wash of sudden terror and said, very slowly, “Gabe, what are you talking about? What happened yesterday?”

“I thought you’d remember it,” Gabriel said to the countertop. “I thought you…oh jeez.”

“Remember what?” Lucifer said, biting back panic.

Gabriel heaved a huge sigh and looked up with that awful expression on his face.

“When Maman was riding you yesterday, Sam came over for work. Normal time and everything,” he said miserably. “And you know how Maman is, she gets flirty.”

“Yes, I know.” Lucifer’s nails gnawed into the skin of his thigh.

“Well, you started getting really…intense with Sam, and it was making him uncomfortable, but it was like you didn’t care. Then you grabbed him and he told you to stop. That made you really mad so you threw him at the wall and then you kissed him, even though he was trying to get out. You started pulling at his clothes. He kept telling you to stop, but you didn’t. He managed to get out eventually and he ran. Meg came in a little after that and you acted like nothing had happened.”

Gabriel’s voice was the painful, flat, recital of a confession.

When he was very young, Lucifer had broken the third finger on his right hand in a door. There was a moment that he remembered very clearly, before the pain took everything away. It was right after he had heard the click and snap of the break, and had turned to see his finger twisted and stunted in a way that it should not be. He had stood there staring at it, wondering what he was supposed to do, and feeling that sick electric numb that comes before a lot of pain.

This was like that, except much worse. “No,” he said. His voice was a dizzy rasp.

“I’m sorry.” Gabriel had gone back to staring at the counter.

“No. That can’t be—that’s not right.” He cleared his throat, struggling for a coherent thought. “It was Maman Brigitte. She’s not like that. She wouldn’t—she doesn’t do that to people.”

“It wasn’t just Maman Brigitte,” Gabe said. His voice had the thin sound of a scared child. “It was you. You were in there too.”

Lucifer couldn’t speak. He felt the slow black crawl of poison in his heart.

“You know what Mom said,” Gabriel continued. “There’s always part of you in there with them. Maman releases people’s inhibitions. She makes you do what you really want to do. And I guess you wanted to—“ he stopped abruptly.

“Oh, God.” Lucifer whispered. He dropped his head into his hands. “Oh, God. Oh, no, no, no, no.”

“I don’t think he blames you,” Gabriel offered with useless optimism. “And I don’t think you hurt him too badly.”

The poison clawed at him and he breathed it in, wishing it would tear him apart, choke him, eat him alive. In his head were Sam’s eyes with all that kindness and light in them, Sam’s quick gentle hands, Sam’s laugh that made everything better. He must have been so scared and so confused. The kind of violence that comes from friends is always crueler.

This was the truth about him, then, and maybe it was inevitable. Living somewhere in his skin,
beneath his pretty face and all the books he’d read and all the people he’d fooled into loving him, there was a diseased and deformed thing that liked hurting people and took what it wanted whether or not it was given. His own personal nightmare, the septic stitch-work holding him together. He should have expected it. It had been waiting his whole life. In the blood.

There is a kind of relief that comes with knowing your worst fear is true, because at least now you don’t have to wonder.

“Luce,” Gabe said tentatively. “It wasn’t—“

“Can you go now, please?” Lucifer managed painfully. “I don’t want to talk right now.”

There was a moment in which he could feel Gabe holding his breath in hesitation, and then he was gone. The shop spread out around him like a maze. In the darkness of his hands, it might have gone on forever.

Under everything, there was this terrible, guilty, thought that mattered much more than it should have; now Sam would never look at him the way he wanted him to, or smile at him like that. Sam would never let him do the things he let him do in his dreams. Every time he even looked at him, this would be between them. It was all different now.

He dug his fingernails into his face, and sat like that for a long time.

Chapter End Notes

"Cemetery Blues" by Bessie Smith: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ecH8deDHKJE
Sam knew it was a dream when Lucifer’s dead brother sat down in front of him with a sunny smile and began to pour a stream of Earl Grey into a china teacup painted a very pretty shade of pink.

“This is a dream,” he said, deciding to get it out of the way.

“What a mind the boy has,” Gabe proclaimed, and switched to his own pink teacup. “Was it the ghost that gave it away?”

“Actually, it was the teacups.” Sam lifted his and took an experimental sniff. “I would never buy something this colour. And if I did, Dean would break it with a golf club.”

“Dean’s blind,” Gabriel pointed out, taking a sip.

“He’d know.” Sam took his own sip. The tea was good, though extremely hot and a little bitter. “He always does.”

“Neat trick.”

Sam glanced around. They were in a café, which he recognized, although he had only seen it once, seven years ago. It was in a very small town in France whose name he had never really learned to pronounce. There was a charming patio with rickety little tables and scrolled iron chairs, which was where they were now. The swirling sign hung over them, shot through of ragged bullet holes, through which Sam could see clear blue sky and sunlight. The table next to them had a crimson smear of blood on its surface. A few feet away, a German soldier lay with a bullet through his head, sprawled on the cobblestones. His colourless eyes stared up into the luminous sky. Apart from that, it was a very pretty café.

“So is this supposed to be symbolic or something?” Sam asked, looking around with interest.

“I don’t know, I didn’t pick the setting. And that’s not really important.” Gabe put his cup down. “We need to talk.”

“Okay,” said Sam amiably. The sun was pleasant, and the dead German did not smell at all, which was not how he remembered it, but made a nice change.
“Do you care about my brother?”

Sam choked on a gulp of boiling tea and let out a series of violent hacking coughs. “I’m sorry?” he gasped, when he had regained control of his ability to speak.

“It’s a simple question,” Gabriel said, with a thin and evil smile. “Do you care about my brother?”

“Well—” Sam struggled to keep his voice under control. What was he supposed to say? *Maybe more than I should.* “Of course I do. He’s my boss and he’s helping me. And he’s my friend, too. A good friend, maybe my best friend. He’s treated me well and I owe him a lot and he is currently keeping me from complete bankruptcy, and he’s kind, and funny, and he—” Sam swallowed the rest, sensing an impending line which, once crossed, could not be uncrossed. He reminded himself that this was a dream, and it shouldn’t matter, but it did. Waking or sleeping, it still mattered.

Gabriel was watching him with that smile and one eyebrow raised very slightly in a style which Sam had longed to achieve for years but had never reached.

“I care about him a hell of a lot,” he said, because that was true.

“Yeah. I do too.” Gabe leaned back in his chair with a sigh. “We were always close. I knew what was going on with him, and he knew what was going on with me. He puts up that whole mysterious act but I’m his brother, y’know? If anybody knows him it’s going to be me. If anybody’s looking out for him, it has to be me.”

“Yeah,” Sam said. “I know.” Dean had still been awake when he had fallen asleep, steadily making his way through a clock and a jug of whiskey. *Sweet dreams, Sammy.*

“I figured.” The smile flickered and was gone. Gabriel was quiet for a moment, squinting up at the sky. Then he said “This isn’t a dream.”

Sam’s brow creased. “Are you sure about that?”

“Yes. I mean, well, yes, this is a dream, but—” Gabriel inhaled in frustration. “What I’m trying to say is that while you are dreaming, I am not a part of your dream. Okay? I dropped by to talk and I just happen to be having this conversation with your unconscious mind. The me you are seeing is exactly the same me as the one who hitched a ride on Luce that day in the shop. We clear?”

“I think so,” Sam said, and then, with reckless honesty, “That’s really weird.”

“ Weird it most certainly is. And I wouldn’t be doing this if I didn’t have to talk to you and it wasn’t really important.”

“What is it?”

“I can’t get to Lucifer.”

Sam frowned. “What does that mean?”

“What it sounds like.” Gabriel fiddled irritably with his cup. “Normally I can just show up whenever I feel like it, but I haven’t been able to for a little while. And when I am with him, he has these extremely confusing ideas about conversations we had that never happened. I’ve been trying to talk to him for hours tonight but I can’t.”

“That doesn’t sound good.”
“Yeah, it’s not.” Gabriel laughed with a sort of forced humour. “It’s really not.”

Unease cramped in Sam’s stomach. “Why can’t you reach him?”

“That’s the thing. It could mean that he just doesn’t want to talk, but he hasn’t done that in years. And never that often. He could be unconsciously blocking me because he’s under a lot of stress. Or —“ A darkness moved over Gabe’s face.

Sam swallowed. “Or what?”

“Or it could be that something’s deliberately blocking me from getting to him. What, or why, I have no idea.”

A chill passed under Sam’s skin. The sun suddenly did not seem so bright.

“The fact that he thinks I’ve been talking to him when I haven’t—I don’t know. It could just mean that he’s been having dreams about me without me actually being in them, which wouldn’t be the first time. But if it’s not that…”

“Why are you telling me this?” Sam asked. “What do you want me to do?”

“Someone needs to know. And he trusts you. I’m not sure he’d listen to me.” Gabriel sighed. “Keep an eye on him, okay?”

“Always,” Sam said, and meant it.

Gabriel looked at him with an odd, abstract, grin, and then looked up, his face twisting in irritation. “Ah, shit. You’re about to wake up. Well, it was nice talking to you.”

The world trembled, spun on its side, and shattered with a vast roar.

When Sam stumbled out of his room, scraping sleep out of his eyes, Cas was there. This had gotten to be a common enough occurrence that Sam wandered past him before Cas touched his shoulder. “Sam. I have news.”

“Yeah.” Sam took a few steps backwards and propped himself against the wall. The morning light was as sharp as new wine. “Okay. Shoot.”

Cas’s face folded with confusion. “Shoot?”

“Means say what you have to say,” Dean clarified. He was sitting on the edge of his knotted nest on the sofa, his hands on his knees. His hair and clothes were still a mess. He was staring at Cas, or at least in the direction of Cas’s voice, with his glazed eyes, and he had a very peculiar expression on his face; a quiet kind of light, like a man in church. Sam had never seen Dean look like that, and wondered if he might still be drunk.

“Dean, are you okay?” he asked.

“What? Me?” Dean did not turn away from Cas, his eyes fixed, that strange distant smile in place. “I’m fine.”

“You do look a little odd,” Cas said uncomfortably.

“No, I’m just fine.” Glassy eyes and a very strange smile. “I’m great.”
“Right,” said Sam, decided that he could deal with this when he was more awake, and turned to Cas, who at least still seemed to be in possession of most of his mental faculties. “You’re here early.”

“It’s important.” Cas buried his hands in the pockets of his trench coat. “Sheriff Mills is asking questions. About the murder. She was at Lucifer’s shop yesterday and she’ll probably try to talk to you at some point too. She knows basically everything, so if you lie or conceal something, it’ll just make you suspicious. Be honest.”

“Wait, wait,” Sam pinched the bridge of his nose. “Murder? I thought it was natural. The kid was sick, wasn’t he?”

“That’s the other thing.” Cas shifted, his face stiff. “It wasn’t natural. Crowley. He was attempting to discredit Lucifer.”


“He presents a significant problem,” Cas agreed serenely. “Sheriff Mills doesn’t know that he’s responsible. And we can’t tell her.”

“Why not? He can’t do any more damage if he’s locked up.”

“Actually, he’s probably just as dangerous in prison. In any case, Lucifer wants to deal with this outside the law. He was very insistent about that.”

“How long has he known this?”

An awkward shrug. “He only told me this morning.”

“Yeah?” Sam wished fervently for a shot of whiskey, or coffee, or both. “Why didn’t he come himself?”

“I don’t know. He seemed—upset. I believe he may have had an unpleasant night.” Cas’s mouth grew tight with worry.

“Upset?” Sam looked up. “What do you mean?”

“Just upset. You’ll see him later today.” Cas glanced out the window. “I have to go. There are other people I need to tell this to.”

And then he was gone, striding out the door in a brisk flap of his coat, without a backward glance or a farewell. The door banged shut behind him. Sam let out a brief surprised jerk of a laugh. “Goodbye to you too.”

Throughout all this, Dean had been eerily silent. Now he was leaning back against the couch. His face was still transfixed with that same odd look, somewhere between calm and religious awe. He put one hand on his forehead, distractedly, and then let it fall. His eyes were luminous.

“Dean.” Sam sat on the couch next to him. “What’s going on? Why are you acting like this?”

Dean drew in a breath. “That obvious, is it?”

“Yeah. That obvious. What is it?”

A brief, almost desperate, shake of his head. Then, in a whisper of cautious amazement, “I can see him.”
Sam’s heart kicked in his chest. “What?”

“I can see him,” Dean repeated, a little bit louder. “Not clearly. Just outlines. But they’re real. They’re there. And he has blue eyes. I can tell that much.” He nodded insistently a few times. “Blue eyes.”

“Dean, I—this is—Jesus.” Sam groped for words and then gave up. Something in him was howling and clapping its hands. “Are—are you sure?”

“Yeah. I’m sure.” Dean rubbed his eyes with a choked laugh. “I’m definitely sure.”

“Oh, my God.” Sam punched the arm of the couch. He felt like a balloon, so full of weightless excitement that he could rise off the floor. “Oh, my God, Dean. It’s happening. This is it.”

“I think so. I think it is.” Dean’s grin was so wide it could have split his head in two.

“Fuck,” Sam gasped, and he threw his arms around his brother’s shoulders and yanked him close. He could feel the desperate, almost crazy, pounding of Dean’s heart against his chest, the tattered growl of his breathing. Dean held him so tightly it hurt, laughing in a stunned frantic way, slapping his back.

They pulled apart. “I don’t want to get too excited,” Dean said breathlessly. “I don’t know if it’s…it might not stick.”


“It’s just him.” Dean looked down, his voice suddenly soft. “Everything else is still dark. But not him.”

Then, before Sam could work out how to respond to this unique piece of information, Dean shoved him off the couch. “Go to work, lazy. You’re still the only member of this household with a consistent source of income.”

“It’s not a house,” Sam pointed out, picking himself off the floor.

“Apartmethold? I don’t fucking know. Get out of here.” Dean pushed his hair back and sat up. “It’s still life, right?”

It might have been. But as Sam left for the Roadhouse, he couldn’t stop grinning.

Once he was actually in the Roadhouse, his good mood was short-lived. He had not been at work for ten minutes before an unpleasantly familiar shadow crossed the door. Crowley oozed in, dressed in his usual black. Sam stopped in the middle of a rolling piece by Gershwin.

Passing by him with a pitcher of beer, Ellen poked him in the back of the head. “I’m not paying you to look pretty, boy.”

“You’re barely paying me at all,” Sam replied, but his heart wasn’t in it. Crowley’s gaze flickered over the bar and landed on him. He started to make his way over. Sam swore and dove back into the song, pounding it out without much attention or enjoyment.

The top of the piano creaked balefully as Crowley leaned on it. “Thought I might find you here.”

Sam’s jaw was very tight. “I have nothing to say to you.”
“That’s a shame, because I have something I very much want to say to you. Especially since your master is so uncooperative lately.”

“You keep calling him that.” Sam slammed down on a chord. “My master. He’s not. He’s my friend. Not everyone has a master.”

Crowley scrutinized him for a moment. “So you know,” he said finally, apparently from nowhere. “He told you.”

“About what you did? Yeah, I know.” The song dropped into a dizzy, spiraling, plunge of notes. “I know and you’re very lucky there are other people around right now.”

“Oh, please.” Crowley let out a harsh burst of air somewhere between a sigh and a laugh. “Let’s move past this, shall we? Yes, I cold-bloodedly murdered a child to discredit your friend, oh, how terrible, what a senseless waste of human life. I’m a cad, a bastard, a sick son of a bitch with no morals whatsoever. It’s positively tragic. Now can we talk about something else? Because believe me, we have much more important things to talk about.”

Sam looked up at him for the first time and stared. Crowley did not look well. His skin was damp with sweat, and there were ugly bruised circles under his eyes. He noticed Sam’s sudden attention and made a brief pinched gesture with his mouth. “The picture of health, I know.”

“Winchester.” Ellen thumped a tin bucket half-full of something crusted and reeking on the top of the piano. “Kid in the corner had some stomach trouble. You know what to do.”

“Yeah, sure.” Sam stood, his eyes fixed on Crowley, mind whirling. He didn’t know what was going on. He had never seen Crowley looking like this.

Ellen glanced over at Crowley and her eyes tightened. “Who’s this?”

“No one,” Sam said automatically. A lot of things about this situation were confusing, but he knew that he didn’t want to get Ellen tangled up in it.

“A friend,” Crowley supplied, remarkably smoothly. “We were just talking.”

“Mmm.” Ellen shot Sam a questioning look and he nodded. “Well. I’ll leave you two to your talking. Sam—“ and a quick gesture of the head to the bucket.

“I’m on it,” Sam promised, and as Ellen slid behind the bar, he grabbed the bucket and made for the door, resolutely ignoring Crowley. The clogged mass of vomit at the base of the bucket sloshed back and forth. Crowley kept pace with him, stepping neatly over Pamela’s legs. “Personal feelings aside, we have a shared problem and we need to talk about it.”

“Everyone seems to be saying that to me lately.” Nodding tersely at Benny, Sam shouldered through the half-opened door into the blistering dusty heat of the day. “As far as I’m concerned, my biggest problem is you.”

“Yes, but you say that because—“ Crowley stopped abruptly. They were on the baked cobbles of the sidewalk and Crowley squinted at the bucket. “Is that vomit?”

“Yes, it is.” Sam flipped the handle up.

Crowley stared at him in vague horror. “And you’re going to throw it into the street?”

“It’s a job.” Sam tossed the bucket out and a thick spray of semi-digested waste splattered across the
road. “And, you know what, you kill people, so I’m not going to let you judge me for—“

“Excuse me,” a voice interrupted from behind Sam, very calmly. Sam turned on a rush of irritation, saw who it was, and said “Oh, hell,” before he could stop himself.

“Hell, exactly,” Kubrick said, and grinned wide and hungry. If Crowley looked bad, he looked distinctly close to death; his face was stretched and skeletal, and he reeked of sweat and something sour and toxic. He smelled sick. His clothes were ragged. Sam only saw the flash of sharp edges in his hand for a moment before the preacher lurched forward. One hand clamped over Sam’s wrist with a wiry, manic, strength. The other flew up, clutching the knife, until the needle point quivered less than an inch from Sam’s throat. The bucket dropped to the sidewalk with a hollow rattle.

Kubrick’s breath was foul and his eyes glittered with shining, joyful, hate.

“Good God,” said Crowley, looked genuinely shocked. Across the street, a woman with a shopping basket gasped, turned, and quickly walked the other way.

“Your master is very well protected,” Kubrick said, sounding remarkably sane for a violent, foul-smelling skeleton with a knife. “Seems like the only way to get to him is through you.”

“He’s not my master, why does everyone keep saying that,” leapt out of Sam’s mouth before he could swallow it, and he cursed himself bitterly inside his head.

The knife drifted down to rest, almost tenderly, in the hollow of Sam’s collarbone. Kubrick smiled in an almost beautiful way. “I don’t care,” he said quietly. “I don’t care. I know what he is.”

Sam was abruptly very aware that he was extremely close to death, maybe closer than he had ever been before. He had come close to dying a few times in France, but it was different there. In France death was everywhere, a massive, faceless, pitiless, thing with no personal interest in him, terrifying because it was as vast and unpredictable as God. The death that he tasted now was sharp and precise as the point of Kubrick’s knife against his throat. This was personal and violent and deliberate. He knew, with a sudden, painful, certainty, that he really did not want to die. It wasn’t the sort of thing you seriously thought about until the moment it became relevant.

“Do something,” he said to Crowley, who was standing by rather uselessly with a look of distress.

Crowley glanced around helplessly. “What?”

“Move and I gut him like a fish,” Kubrick told him. The knife drew a quick bubble of pain out of the base of Sam’s throat.

“Isn’t that what you’re going to do anyway?” Crowley pointed out, and Sam spent a moment wishing that he had absolutely anyone, any other human being alive, with him right now rather than Crowley.

“Listen,” he said to Kubrick, trying not to look too far down, at the risk of accidentally slitting his own throat. “You don’t want to kill me.”

“I do.” Kubrick’s smile grew tight. “I want it more than anything.”

“No, you really don’t.” It occurred to Sam that this man might be beyond the reach of reason, but he pushed on. His wrist was starting to hurt. “If you kill me, they’ll put you in jail, and you’ll never get the chance to kill Lucifer. And he doesn’t even like me that much. I just work for him.”

“No,” Kubrick hissed. “You were there, that night. You were with him.”
Sam drew in a sore, gulping, breath. “What you thought you saw that night—it wasn’t. I mean, we
didn’t do what you think—“

Kubrick’s smile disappeared and he jabbed the knife into Sam’s skin. “Lies,” he said. His voice was
a low grind of fury. “You’re all full of lies. All of you. Demons.”

Ellen, in the doorway, said “Get away from my pianist,” and cocked her shotgun.

Sam turned his head to look at her before he could think better of it. She was standing in the door,
faded hair in a windblown mass, face utterly calm. She held the gun in her hard competent hands,
one finger resting lightly on the trigger. Behind her was Benny, hands curled in fists, and Jo with a
baseball bat. The barrel of the shotgun was barely an inch away from Kubrick’s head.

Kubrick’s face twisted with irritation. “Go back inside, woman.”

“I don’t think I will.” Her voice was even, almost casual. “I happen to be employing that young man
and I’d hate to lose him. He classes up the place considerably. Sam, honey, you okay?”

“Not really,” Sam said. He felt the languid slide of something warm and wet down under his shirt
collar, like a tongue. He had cut himself on Kubrick’s knife when he turned to look at Ellen.

“You’ll thank me for killing him when you know what he is,” Kubrick growled.

“I already know what he is. He’s a damn fine pianist.” Ellen hefted the shotgun up. “Now take a step
back, please. I’d hate to have to hurt you, but I will. You’re not the first moron I’ve had to chase off
these premises.”

“No.” Kubrick had a strangled look of increasing panic. “You don’t understand. He’s a murderer.
He killed my son. He worships the devil, and he killed—“

“Oh, for God’s sake,” Crowley snapped furiously. Everyone turned to stare at him. His face was
purple with exasperation. “He didn’t kill anyone, you daft fucking bastard. I did. I killed your bloody
son. You’ve been barking up entirely the wrong tree this whole time, which is because you are an
idiot, and I should have killed you instead, you mad, malodorous, piece of bird shit.”

Kubrick’s face was white and vacant. He gazed at Crowley, paralyzed. The knife drooped in his
hand. Sam’s hand flew up and clamped over the thin but insistent bubble of blood at his throat.

Ellen, displaying remarkable presence of mind given the circumstances, stepped forward and hit
Kubrick neatly over the head with the stock of the rifle. He collapsed without a sound, folding to the
ground, his knife jumping out of his hand. She watched with satisfaction and prodded him with her
foot to make sure he was really down and out, which he was.

Then she swung the shotgun easily back up and pointed it at Crowley.

“Now, why don’t you come inside, and we can have a talk about all that you just said,” she said. “Jo,
honey, go call the police.”
Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

this chapter written by: Mer

Chapter Notes

I missed last week's update. Sorry.
...so I hope that two chapters being posted at once makes up for it!

General warnings for descriptions of body horror in this chapter. Again.
(If you get 100% freaked out by body horror, I would recommend stopping where you are. A lot more is coming in this last batch of chapters.)

Crowley looked despicable in his jail cell. Even though he was locked up, he still seemed smug about something. It annoyed Lucifer to no end. He leaned against the wall across the narrow hall from the iron bars of the cell holding the arrogant Brit and stared him down. Meg stood at his side, a hand on her hip and a scowl on her face. She had insisted upon coming along when Lucifer mentioned that he was visiting the station to chat with Crowley.

“I want to see that smarmy bastard behind bars as much as any of us do,” she had ground out. Obviously, there was no way to keep her from joining him, so Lucifer let her walk with him to the quarter’s jail facilities.

Now the three of them stood in silence in the small, dimly lit cell block. Silence created a terrible, electrically charged, white noise in the air around them as each of them waited for the others to say something. Crowley moved his gaze from where it rested on Meg to focus instead on Lucifer.

Crowley broke the tension by speaking first.

“Are you missing your glasses, Luci? You are squinting a bit more than the normal person, currently.”

“Why, Crowley?” Lucifer asked in an even tone, betraying no emotion whatsoever. Crowley rolled his eyes at Lucifer and shook his head.

“No, wrong question.”

“How’s this to your advantage?” Meg asked before Lucifer could speak again.

“Oh, the bird speaks, does it?” Crowley remarked excitedly.

“Shut up, you limy—”

“What’s your beef, anyway?” Lucifer interrupted, wanting to hear no more of it. “I’ve been trying to
piece it all together on my own, but you keep shutting me out.”

“Oh, she hasn’t said anything about what she did before she moved to New Orleans?” Crowley asked, an amused gleam in his eyes. “I’m shocked.”

“I know enough,” Lucifer stated. “I don’t need to know more than I do.”

“Oh, but our relationship runs deep,” Crowley mused. “She spoke of the types of work she did, correct?”

Lucifer didn’t grace him with an answer. Crowley glanced at Lucifer then smirked as he turned his head to look at Meg once again. Lucifer stared Crowley down, unwilling to give the bokor the reaction he wanted to get from both of them.

“She worked in a little shop for another bokor, making hex bags and mixing crossing powders and such. Her jinxes were always the best. There was a lot to be proud of in her, I must say. And the death droughts she made…divine. Or hellish, depending on how you look at it. She could cater to any need that her customers had. Most of the drama in town came from her bokor’s business, but nobody outside of the underground seemed to catch onto it.

“Then she got threats from a person whose mind was changed after the horror of one requested spell became evident. Soon enough, she got tricked into some funny business with one of the enemies of her bokor. They worked like crossroads devils do—it’s always a fair deal or trade of some sort. Never did they attack anyone, really. Not without proper payment or motivation. They served themselves. She couldn’t take it anymore, so she ran, leaving little old me to clean up after her mess. I train her and she repays me by running off. Now, tell me how that’s a fair deal?”

“Fuck you,” Meg spat. Lucifer knew without looking at her that she was staring daggers at the bokor in the cell.

“She’s changed her tune, Crowley,” Lucifer sighed. “I’m not worried about her past behavior as long as her future behavior doesn’t reflect it. She was your student at one point, but then she was mine. Now she is her own person, and I will not take that away from her just because of your stories of years gone by.”

Crowley looked back at Lucifer.

“I’m surprised at your level of composure, Luci, dear,” he said. “I am truly shocked, what, considering the amount of sleep you’ve gotten as of late—or, my apologies, I mean to say the lack of sleep you’ve gotten.”

“Luce?” Meg asked. Her tone suddenly turned more confused and concerned than hard and bitter. She turned her head to carefully examine his outward appearance. Lucifer knew he looked haggard, but he couldn’t…he didn’t want to get into this topic. Not now. There were more important matters at hand.

“It’s nothing of import, Meg.”

“Oh, but it might be,” Crowley said. His expression had turned serious. “Your nightmares are continuing, aren’t they?”

“Nightmares?” Meg muttered. Lucifer ignored her, knowing that she would only ask him about it again later.

“Amongst other things, yes.”
“There’s still that cloud around you,” Crowley commented. “You reek of negative energies, Lucifer. What is going on, exactly?”

“You don’t know?” Lucifer replied, unable to raise his voice to a loud volume. Crowley was right; he wasn’t getting much sleep. The recent session with Maman Brigitte hadn’t helped him by much, and neither had Gabriel’s rather dark comments about the loa’s behavior. It seemed like he was damned, and sleep might as well be a forgotten concept altogether.

“I know nothing about this thing other than its presence,” Crowley stated. Lucifer resented the man’s frustrated gaze. Of course he couldn’t blame Crowley for not being able to tell what was plaguing him. It wasn’t like the man was a full-blown psychic like Missouri or anything.

“Before I leave this building,” Lucifer sighed, “do tell me what your reasons are for sitting in a jail cell of your own free will?”

“I felt like following the rules,” Crowley replied. “Is there anything so wrong with that?”

“For you, yes, there is,” Meg said for Lucifer. Crowley smirked.

“I’ll need to be in one place, anyway,” he said with a sigh as he leaned back against the far wall of the cell.

The three of them stared at each other.

“What for, may I ask?” Lucifer frowned at the bokor in the cell again.

“You will know when you come to get me again. Which you will—come to get me. You will need me at some point in the near future. I won’t say anything further, since that’s probably more than I ought to say in the first place.”

“You’d like that, wouldn’t you, you absolute—”

“It’s been interesting seeing you again, Crowley.”

Lucifer turned and strode down the narrow hall, through the officers’ desk space, out the front door, and onto the street. Meg followed, hot on his heels, a frown firmly planted on her face. They were around three blocks from the station before she grabbed at his elbow and spun him around mid-step.

“What—”

“When were you gonna tell me about the dreams, then?”

Lucifer looked in her eyes. They were wide and full of concern, despite her otherwise hard expression. Meg was most certainly among the few people who could bend him to her will in an instant if she so wished to. He closed his eyes and rubbed at them. A sigh eased out of him and he shook his head.

“I probably wouldn’t have. I’m sorry for that.”

“I can help in this area, Luce! You know I make the best dream catchers and banishing talismans in town! What could be so bad that you wouldn’t want to tell me about any of it, huh?”

“It’s…” Lucifer took a deep breath in and tried again. “It’s bad, Meg. It’s gotten to the point that I can’t sleep. Crowley wasn’t lying about that.”

Meg stared him down for a moment, contemplating her next move. She loosened her grip on him,
stroked his arm gently, and let go completely so that they could continue walking.

“What are they about?”

Lucifer hesitated. He had had so many within the past few nights alone that it was all but impossible to pick out the worst ones of the lot. Meg was someone he could tell his dreams to, though, and whether it was a dream about Gabriel putting a rubber snake in his bed when they were little or a dream about being shoved off the edge of a giant levy wall, she would always listen and try and interpret them for him. She was always reliable in that aspect. Lucifer took in a deep breath and began to explain.

“One I had last night began with me sorting through things in the room above my shop. Someone kept throwing pebbles through the open window, and when I looked out to tell them to stop, I saw Castiel standing on the steps leading to the front door. But it wasn’t Castiel. It looked like him, but it wasn’t him. There was blood and black liquid running from his mouth and eyes and ears, and his veins had all swelled—you know, like they do on the backs of your hands when your blood has been pumping faster than usual—and he grinned with a closed mouth at me and waved his blood-red and black-ooze-covered hand at me like he was just saying hello. He looked down and I couldn’t see what he was doing for a moment, but when he looked back up, there was more blood coming from his mouth and he threw another pebble up at me. I stepped back to get out of its way and looked down at where it and the others landed and...he hadn’t been throwing pebbles, he’d been throwing human teeth at me. Presumably his own teeth. I looked out the window to tell him to stop hurting himself like that, but he just ignored me, walked up to the porch, and...there was a sickly noise, and I saw a giant pool of that black stuff growing like someone was pouring it in buckets onto the floor of the porch, and it flowed down the steps and Castiel’s trench coat went floating with it.”

Lucifer shuddered. He had woken up screaming for his cousin after that and had to check both the front porch and the upstairs storage area to be sure that it had actually been a dream. He hadn’t gotten back to sleep for nearly three hours, and he had barely been asleep for one before he woke up from another nightmare.

“That was last night,” Meg said, a darkly serious edge now evident in her voice. “So what about the ones before that?”

“I may have dreamt of a forest full of people who had hanged themselves from the branches of every tree in sight. And possibly of Mary Winchester giving me a warning of some sort, but I can’t be certain about that one.”

“I can tell when you’re leaving things out, Lucifer.”

“I don’t...there are so many that I--”

“--You could try and tell me these things before I have to hear them from someone else, okay?” Meg exclaimed. “You should, in fact, tell me these things right after they happen. I can help with this shit, Luce.”

“I know you can, Meg,” Lucifer said on a shaky breath. “I honestly don’t know what I was thinking, in retrospect.”

“Tell me about any of the other ones you want to get off your chest now,” Meg demanded.

“I dreamt of Sam the other night,” he started. “It was night and he was sitting in the middle of an abandoned crossroads with yellow wildflowers at the four corners of the area. He’d dug a hole in the middle, and held a small box in his hand. It had something in it, but I couldn’t see just what from
where I was standing. I watched him close the box, and a howling wind swept around us, kicking up
dust and dry grass and dead leaves. There was a loud noise somewhere in the distance like a pack of
excited, large dogs. I was scared to death of those dogs for some reason, and I needed to talk to Sam
about it as soon as possible. I still don’t know why that was...but, in any case, as Sam turned to face
me, it all calmed down—the dogs, the wind, the adrenaline and fear—and I could finally see him
clearly. His eyes were pure black and everything about him was very...oh, he looked somewhat
younger—kind of like he does in his pictures from his time in France. I thought he was wearing a
laurel wreath on his head at first, which would have been nice, but as he approached me, it was clear
that it was a thin crown made from entwined or woven rose stems, thorns and all. He stopped only a
short distance in front of me and held out the box for me to take, and when I checked inside of it I
saw all of the ingredients to summon a spirit of the crossroads...but the photograph was burned so I
couldn’t tell which one of us had buried it. Then I noticed the dirt on my hands and under my nails
and...and Sam smiled at me. I almost asked him what was going on, but he asked me first if I would
like to ‘make another deal’. And I said yes because for some reason that was going to stop the dogs
from getting me and...”

“And?”

“And I woke up.”

Lucifer didn’t mention that he had answered with, yes, of course, with the feeling of a large dog’s hot
breath and sharp teeth ghosting over and nipping at his calves. Nor did he mention that he had
woken up just as this black-eyed Sam was only a hair’s breadth from kissing him, leaving the feeling
of their noses brushing and the thorns from that rose-stem crown scratching at his scalp and Sam’s
delicate, warm fingers under his chin, tipping his jaw upwards so that they would meet if he leaned
in just a bit further--

“That’s it. I’m giving you something to help with this,” Meg determined. “I prescribe one new dream
catcher in your back room somewhere and a healthy dose of lavender incense and chamomile tea.”

“Thank you, Nurse Masters, I don’t know where I’d be without you.”

“Probably dying from sleepless insanity.”

Lucifer chuckled softly.

“Yes, that is probably true.

The Roadhouse was bustling yet somehow relaxing.

Until Lucifer spotted Sam, of course. A terrible wave of guilt swept over him, and he avoided his
assistant’s eyes as best as he could as he and Meg approached the bar. Jo Harvelle smiled warmly at
them from behind the wooden counter and stools.

“How are you two doing?” she asked. “It seems like everybody’s showing up for a drink today.”

“Well, I think I need a good one,” Meg grumbled as she climbed up onto a stool. She dragged
Lucifer up onto the one next to her where he practically collapsed. Jo eyed him questioningly.

“I’m assuming you’d second that motion?” she asked the exhausted bokor.
Lucifer groaned from his head-down position, his face completely hidden from view. He couldn’t bring himself to form actual words in response to Jo’s suggestion, but the woman seemed to understand exactly what he wanted to say.

“What’ll it be, then?”

“I’ll have whatever you’ll make me as long as it has absinthe in it,” Meg said, surely with a wink. “Luce, do you want your usual thing, or…”

“Can you make a French 75 for me?” Lucifer asked, lifting his head just high enough to be heard clearly.

“Can you make a French 75, the man asks,” Jo said. “Pssh, can I ever.”

“Bless you,” he grumbled, dropping his head back down behind his arms.

“I’m gonna hold you accountable for that—blessing me.”

Lucifer mumbled something along the lines of “of course, of course” and rather flimsily and pathetically waved his hand in her direction. Jo laughed quietly at his reaction. Meg, despite her show of sympathy earlier on their walk, snickered as well.

He froze as he felt a familiar presence walk up behind him. Meg stopped her laughing. Lucifer assumed that she was frowning at his sudden shift in behavior. He begged her mentally to not make a big deal out of it now and to wait until later to ask any questions. The only voice that asked him anything was the one that came from behind him.

“Hey, Lucifer, you doing alright?”

Sam didn’t sound upset or put off or nervous or anything like he should have. Maybe he was just a good actor…yeah, that must have been it. Lucifer didn’t know how he could bring himself to look his assistant in the eye for longer than a few seconds. It would be torture for one or both of them. The guilt was so damn overwhelming…what had he done?

“Obviously not,” Sam answered for him.

“He’s wiped out,” Meg explained for him. “Been having nightmares, haven’t you, Luci?”

Fuck. Meg, why would you—

“Is that true?” Sam asked. Lucifer nodded slowly, but didn’t lift his head.

“That’s too bad,” his assistant said with a genuinely concerned tone. “Does it have anything to do with anything that’s happened recently, or has it been going on for longer than that?”

“Both,” Lucifer replied. A glass was set down next to his head and he looked up at it. It looked delectable. He picked it up and took a deep, greedy drink. The effects took place almost immediately. Jo must have slipped him a bit more alcohol than the recipe called for, because the drink was the strongest thing he’d had in ages.

“Geez, I’m sorry that’s happening,” Sam said sympathetically. Lucifer looked up at him and—shit—accidentally made eye contact. He looked away quickly, too ashamed to indulge himself by staring into those kaleidoscope, hazel eyes. Sam didn’t appear upset in the least, but Lucifer knew better. He continued to think of excuses for Sam’s behavior: he was shocked, he was in denial, he’d been blaming himself instead of Lucifer, he just had a fantastic poker face and wouldn’t let up in front of
his friends. All of those things made perfect sense to Lucifer.

“It’s…it’s unpleasant, but it’s not the worst thing in the world to experience.” Lucifer tried to back his words with belief and meaning. Sam didn’t appear to be convinced.

“No, Luce, insomnia and nightmares are terrible. You shouldn’t just pass them off like they’re nothing.”

“See, Lucifer? Your moose assistant agrees with me.”

“Please, Meg,” Lucifer groaned.

“Just tryin’ to look out for you’s all.”

Lucifer took another deep drink. He shook his head as the tingling sensation from the champagne in the concoction shot through his head and throat. He sat upright, breathe deeply in, and let his lungs deflate slowly. Fear be damned—he was going to act like a proper human being and not allow his friends to worry over him. Not right now.

Through the buzzed sensation that came from downing his drink too quickly, Lucifer felt a new presence halt just between him and Sam. Lucifer let a small smirk to play at his lips for a moment. He closed his eyes and hummed before opening his mouth to greet the newest member of their crew gathered at the bar.

“Hello, Castiel.”

“Hello, Lucifer.”

Sam jumped. Lucifer tried—he really did try—not to laugh. He failed miserably, of course.

“Sam, I have a query for you,” Castiel said, ignoring his cousin’s strange mood.

“Ask away, Cas.”

“Do you still have that extra room at your house?”

“Yes, I do,” Sam replied in a curious tone.

“Would you be willing to consider a boarder living with you?” Castiel suggested. “It would be a good way to earn money, if you and Dean are still having a hard time with funds.”

“I suppose that that might work out,” Sam admitted. He seemed surprised and interested in the concept. Had Castiel brought this up before? Lucifer had no idea. He simply listened to the conversation and took another drink from his glass, hoping that it would effectively distract him from his own internal conflicts.

“Would you be willing to consider…” Castiel trailed off and fidgeted with the sleeves of his trench coat.

“Consider…?” Sam prompted after a moment.

“Would you be willing to consider me as a tenant?”

Sam blinked and thought over the idea for a moment. Castiel stared at the man next to him with a subtly hopeful glint in his eyes. After a few seconds had passed, Sam shrugged and looked down at him.
“Sure, Castiel, I’d love to have you stay with us.”

Sam knew that Cas didn’t have anywhere to stay. He frequently lived either out of hotels or off of the kindness of strangers. (Lucifer said “kindness” when more often than not it was “carelessness” instead; someone leaves their barn door unlocked and has a fairly well-maintained space—bam: perfect overnight location for a displaced young man.) Sam also knew that, although Castiel’s sources of money weren’t known by anyone, including Lucifer, the man always came through on deals and arrangements revolving around cash payments.

“Will Dean be comfortable with the arrangement?” Castiel asked as a last-second thought.

“I believe that he will be more than comfortable with it,” Sam said. Castiel didn’t seem to pick up on his amused tone, even though Lucifer definitely had. That smirk slid across his face again as Castiel thanked Sam and walked away from them and back into the crowd of the restaurant.

“You were right, Jo,” Lucifer mused. “Everyone is here today.”

“Got that right.”

That wasn’t Jo.

Sam, Meg, Jo, and Lucifer turned to face none other than Jody Mills approaching the bar from behind them. Meg and Lucifer blanched; Sam and Jo smiled. Lucifer was sure that she was going to slap down an arrest warrant onto the bar in front of them. Instead, she slid into the open stool on the other side of Sam.

“What’s good today, Jo?”

Meg sighed heavily as Jo poured a glass of whiskey for the woman in front of her. Lucifer wanted to laugh. Again.

“Actually, I’m glad I ran into you here, Lucifer,” Jody said.

“Anything I can do to help this town’s fine Sheriff?” Lucifer asked. It thankfully didn’t come out either jokingly or cynically. Everyone knew that Jody did all of her husband’s work. Even the Vodou underground of the city called her Sheriff instead of her husband.

“I was just wondering if you could get Crowley to explain his sudden confession,” she asked. “He won’t say why, only how. He somehow manipulated Kubrick’s kid’s already fragile health and it lead to the boy’s death. Therefore, he’d pleading guilty but not for murder of the first degree.”

“There was clearly some malicious intent there, though,” Lucifer pointed out.

“I know that, but there’s not much we can pile on top of the charges he’s already gotten himself.”

“Oh, trust me,” Meg murmured. “Anything else that’d get him in more trouble would go over state lines.”

Jody’s curiosity was clearly piqued by the comment, but she didn’t ask the female bokor anything about it.

“I wish I could help you out, Sheriff, I really do,” Lucifer sighed, “but I couldn’t get anything out of him even if I sat there for hours.”

“Well, I’m glad it ain’t just me, then,” Jody said. She lifted her glass in the air in a toast. Lucifer
reciprocated the gesture and nodded sympathetically. They each tossed back their drinks at the same time and set their glasses back down on the table dejectedly. Jo turned to face them with a somewhat concerned look on her face before she reached under the bar for the ingredients to mix up a second round.

At that moment, in the Roadhouse, the row of silent people was the strangest sight in the entire seating area.

Chapter End Notes

This is a French 75, if anyone's unfamiliar:
http://cocktaildb.com/recipe_detail?id=3082
“Really, Cas?” Dean’s voice echoed around the house just as Sam finished packing up the herbs Lucifer had requested he bring along that day.

“--terrible habit to get into, Dean, and--”

“It ain’t your problem to deal with, Cas! It’s my choice to--”

“To what? Destroy yourself from the inside out?”

“Fuck you.”

“You are shutting me out, Dean.”

“Yeah, I’m well aware of that.”

The two stormed into the kitchen, bickering and shouting like an old married couple. Sam threw a questioning look at Castiel and dodged Dean as he stormed past him and towards the cabinets under the sink. Castiel heaved a sigh and shook his head.

“Stop this nonsense,” he said in a gruff, perturbed voice.

“Fuck you and fuck your nonsense. I don’t need this right now. I really don’t. And I’d appreciate it if you’d respect that--”

“You are practically drinking gasoline!”

“Makes engines go, so why wouldn’t it make me go, eh?”

“I do not think that that is how it works.”

“Woah woah woah, okay,” Sam shouted to interrupt them. “Cas, did you get rid of Dean’s liquor stashes?”

“Yes!” both Dean and Castiel shouted at the same time. Sam looked back and forth between them. He needed to get to work and honestly did not want to get caught in the crossfire of this particular
argument at that particular moment. Dean looked like he might suddenly combust with the level of frustration he had reached. Castiel simply looked like a parent who had spent an entire morning lecturing a child on why it shouldn’t eat worms out of the garden. Any action on Sam’s part would only excite the situation even more.

“I’ll just leave you two to this,” he said hesitantly. “Lucifer’s expecting me to be at his place in a few minutes.”

“Alright, Sammy,” Dean grumbled. “Just hurry on over there. Don’t mind the fact that Castiel, here, just stole my stuff and moved it around so I couldn’t get to it. Sure. No problem.”

“Bye, Dean. Cas.”

“We will see you later, Sam,” Castiel replied with a wave of his hand. Sam dismissed himself from the house and began his trek down the dirty roads that led him to Lucifer’s shack. His canvas bag’s strap dug into his shoulder with the weight of the glass jars he was toting. Sam’s footsteps blended in with the rest of the clattering and clanging from various levels of activity on the street. The book table was up and open for business again, and the owner waved to Sam as he passed it. Sam smiled and nodded his head in response. A woman swayed in a rocking chair that creaked the floorboards on her front porch underneath her and sang to herself in the warm glow of the summer day. A couple of kids played jacks on the side of the road and whooped and laughed in delight as they quickly scooped up the little metal trinkets before catching their red bouncing ball again. Sam smiled as he recalled playing a version of the game with Dean when they were children.

Lucifer’s shack came into view and Sam’s nostalgic reflection faded away. He braced himself as he approached the small wooden house. The bokor had been brushing him off, lately, dancing around him like he was a stick of old dynamite that could potentially explode at any given moment. The bustling people and the noises on the street all sort of faded around them as Sam walked up the steps to the porch. What he’d done to deserve this treatment, though...Sam had no idea what could have triggered such a response from Lucifer. He wasn’t a fragile individual, so why was the bokor treating him like a porcelain doll? Maybe Lucifer was nervous that Sam had come into contact with Maman Brigitte or something...the bokor wouldn’t remember the loa’s laid back and flirtatious actions...maybe he was embarassed for not telling him about the possession beforehand.

Sam took a deep breath in and sighed it back out slowly in an attempt to clear his thoughts before he entered the shop. He opened the screen door and was hit immediately with an overwhelming smell—something like chamomile tea and lavender blossoms. Lucifer stood at the counter at the front of the room, slouched over, nursing a steaming mug, and squinting down at a book, which sat open on the counter in front of him. The blond man snapped his head up as soon as Sam shut the door behind himself.

“Hello, Sam.” He wouldn’t meet Sam’s eyes. The small gesture set Sam on edge. It was the sort of look Dean gave him when he had to request that Sam stand in front of an uncovered window so that he could see him while they talked.

Shame. That’s what that look was.

“Hello, Lucifer.” Sam tried to reply as warmly as possible. “I brought the stuff you asked for.”

“Oh, good, good. Just set it on the table. Thanks.”

Sam did as he was told and turned to face the bokor once again. Lucifer looked away from him quickly. He’d been staring at him. He and Cas had a problem with staring, Sam had noticed. Apparently Castiel just never learned the concept of subtlety. Lucifer tried to look when he thought
Sam couldn’t tell, at least...but now, his confidence and un-caring manner was completely gone from view. Lucifer indulged in things like stolen glances. He didn’t hide the fact that he did it from Sam at all.

At least, until recently, that was the case.

The embarrassment and shame was somehow worse. Sam knew that Lucifer wanted to look and talk, but he was holding back for some reason. Lucifer used to seem to have excuses for looking at Sam--there was a leaf on the back of his shirt, there was a strand of hair hanging over his face, his suspender was crooked on one side, he had gotten a bit more tanned in the sun, he looked more tired than usual--and they were all acceptable and welcome. Suddenly, Lucifer seemed to look on but not have any reasons for doing so. That wouldn’t have been all that bad if he didn’t look away quickly with a guilt-laden expression cloudsing his face like Sam had caught him with a hand in the sweets jar one too many times.

At some point, Sam had apparently come to terms with the concept of enjoying Lucifer sizing him up occasionally. It was hard to focus on that fact when Lucifer constantly looked like he had something important on his mind and was intentionally not sharing it with Sam. And he looked like he really did want to share whatever it was with Sam.

“Sam?” Lucifer's voice pulled Sam away from continuing to stew in his thoughts. Sam looked up and stared back at the bokor. (He tried not to think about how Lucifer sat all of the way on the other side of the room from him.)

“Hm?”

“You look a little...I don’t know, ruffled? Annoyed at something? Is everything alright with the new living arrangement?”

“Yes,” Sam replied. “Castiel is doing well by my standards. Maybe not by Dean’s, but he’ll get used to it in time.”

“Oh, good.”

Silence weighed down on his shoulders like a ton of ice. Sam waited for the bokor to speak again. Nothing happened. Sam finally snapped.

“What is going on with you, lately?” Sam said sharply. Lucifer jumped at the sudden burst of noise; Sam almost felt bad about surprising him like that. Almost.

“What makes you think that something is amiss?” Lucifer asked.

“Do you know how strange your behavior has been over the past several days?”

“I...I am sorry if my behavior has been...different as of late. I just didn’t know how--”

“And another thing. Did I do something to upset you?”

Lucifer frowned.

“No, Sam, of course not. You have done nothing of the sort. It’s not…” The bokor trailed off and an awful, guilty look contorted his face. Sam watched him carefully and softened his own confused expression.

“It’s not what, Luce?”
Lucifer opened and closed his mouth as he calculated what he wanted to say. He looked like he wanted to be sick. His gaze was cast downwards, and his free arm hugged him around the middle tightly. Sam wanted to tell him to relax and just say whatever he wanted to say. A quiet Lucifer was a normal Lucifer, yes, but a reserved Lucifer? Sam had no idea what that was supposed to entail. The only thing that made sense to him at the moment was that the bokor was upset over something. Sam wanted to do something to change that, but he didn’t know how to start. His feet took action for him, though, and moved him across the floor until he stood next to Lucifer. The bokor shied away from him, but didn’t move from where he had been by much. Sam frowned.

“I don’t know what to say to you, Sam.” Lucifer said this with his voice barely raised above a whisper. He set his tea mug down on the counter next to his book and crossed his arms over his chest.

“Does this have to do with me or with something else?” Sam asked carefully.

“It...it’s me. It’s my fault, my problem, and I should have warned you. I’m so terribly sorry.”

“What are you talking about?”

“The other night. The possession. I didn’t alert you to it ahead of time and…”

“...and what?” Sam asked. “Nothing strange happened, Luce. I mean, yeah, you were dressed up in rather feminine attire and you acted a little strange, but that was the loa, not you. You’re embarrassed by that?”

“...Didn’t Maman Brigitte make advances on you?”

“Well, she was very flirtatious, I will admit,” Sam said, a hint of amusement in his tone as he recalled the loa’s conversation with him. “She might have invaded my personal space a bit, but she didn’t hurt me or anything.”

“You are certain of that?” Lucifer looked terribly confused.

“Yeah, I’m absolutely certain.”

Lucifer looked over Sam for a moment. He was looking for something important--some clue to confirm that Sam was as confident as he said he was. Sam stood still, but the silence that fell over the two of them did very little to ease his worried mind. After a few seconds, Lucifer appeared satisfied with what he saw and allowed his arms to loosen around him and simply rest in their place crossed over his chest.

“Did you think that something had happened?” Sam asked him after a moment.

“Gabriel told me that...that I had violated you while I was being ridden by Maman Brigitte. She’s a Ghede loa, and some elements of me are left in her more often than not and I...I don’t know exactly what she did, and usually I can trust Gabe to tell me what happened. Now, I’m not so sure anymore.”

“I don’t know why Gabriel would say something like that,” Sam said. “Nothing really happened, truth be told. The two of us chatted a bit, yes, and she leaned into my personal space at times, but she didn’t do anything to make me uncomfortable. That’s what’s been bothering you?”

Lucifer sighed and rubbed at his eyes with the heels of his palms.

“Yes, Sam, I’m sorry if it has seemed like I have been alienating you. I simply thought...”
“I’m just glad I understand what was making you act like that. It was honestly the strangest thing you’ve done to me—ignoring me like that.”

The bokor’s shoulders slumped and his arms dropped to rest at his sides. His head hung low as he tried to relax again. Sam’s arms tingled slightly. He wanted to reach out to Lucifer and hold him—it’s what he was used to doing with Dean when he was feeling down—but he wasn’t sure how welcome the gesture would be. That was normal, right? Sure, it was; one friend embracing another after having received good or relieving news was fine. So Sam gently placed a hand on Lucifer’s far shoulder and stretched his arm around the bokor’s back in an attempt to comfort him. Lucifer surprised him, though, as he curled into the touch and rested his head against the area where Sam’s shoulder met his chest. The bokor was tired and calm once again and that was all that should have mattered to Sam, but a small voice in the back of his mind whispered, *You’re touching him and he’s touching you and you feel good like this, Sam.*

He didn’t try to deny it. It felt nice to have Lucifer leaning into him, just letting them hold each other for a moment. Sam’s head felt like it was half the weight it should have been, and his chest and gut and arms felt like they had soda water bubbles tickling his nerves and flowing through his veins. His knees and ankles felt weak and his heart rate was skyrocketing. The feeling he had on the night with Maman Brigitte came back to him, then, and realized that he felt all of these same sappy emotions and sensations back then too...only they didn’t even compare to how he felt at this current moment. No worries of consent or judgement hung over his head. He could stand there in peace and enjoy the moment if he so wished. He didn’t have to question it.

“What did she do, then?” Lucifer’s voice came out muffled from where his face was half-planted in Sam’s shoulder.

“Well, she did try to trick me into drinking rum with hot pepper in it.”

Lucifer snickered and looked up at Sam.

“But you have to love her sometimes.”

“Yes, she was nice. I liked her.”

A long pause hung in the air around them.

“I had a dream recently,” Sam stated. “Gabriel visited me, I think.”

“What did he say?” Lucifer leaned back from Sam’s chest, but didn’t completely pull himself away from the arm slung across his back and shoulders.

“He’s had a hard time contacting you. He said you had been talking about conversations that he didn’t recall having with you, too. And, I suppose that since Dean and my home is cleansed so regularly, he tried to get me to pass the message on instead.”

Sam didn’t mention that there might have been something else assisting Gabriel’s access to his dreams on top of that. He didn’t want to admit to Luce that…

“Sam?”

“Sorry, what did you say?”

“Lost in your thoughts again,” Lucifer mused.

“Sorry.”
“Gabriel was acting off, as I was saying, when he apparently lied to me the other day. I passed it off as him being uncomfortably with having to be the one to tell me what I--what Maman Brigitte had done, but now that I think about it, Gabriel was forgetting things and confusing simple facts and...honestly, that just isn’t ever how he talks or acts at all. How was he when you saw him?”

“He was lighthearted for the most part. Joking as always, but he did seem to be a bit worried when he asked after you.”

“Good, that sounds like him,” Lucifer muttered. “I’ll trust what he told you. This...I’m concerned about what this might entail.”

“What’s that?”

“Either there is something wrong with Gabriel or I haven’t been talking to him at all lately. I need answers, nonetheless.”

Sam felt his face pull itself into a frown again.

“What do you mean to do about it?”

“I have an idea, but I will have to prepare quickly and carefully.”

“Sure, alright, what are you thinking of?”

“Marinette,” Lucifer stated easily. He pulled away from Sam, but leaned against the counter not too far away from where his assistant stood.

“Sorry?” Sam asked.

“She’s a loa. She was my mother’s patron, so she’ll likely have some connection to my brother and me from our childhood. If I call upon her, she will likely be able to tell us what is happening to Gabriel. Maybe she’ll even tell us the best method of fixing the problem.”

“Are you sure that that’s a wise plan?” Sam asked. He received a frown in response from Lucifer. The bokor blinked at him and, after a short pause, he shook his head and looked away from Sam once again.

“I should be fine. I’ve rested enough since Maman Brigitte visited.” He then added, as if in an afterthought, “Thank you for the concern, though.”

Sam smiled at him. There should have been a problem with how much he appreciated Lucifer’s thanks. He should have been even more concerned over how nice it had felt to just have the bokor lean against the countertop next to him, not nudging Sam’s arm away and, instead, relaxing into his place at Sam’s side. He wasn’t bothered by any of it, though.

Lucifer had no one. The fact hit Sam like a train hurtling towards him at high speed. He had Meg, a friend and coworker; he had Missouri, a family friend; and he had Castiel, a cousin he had reunited with only a few years earlier. There was no one truly close to him, though.

Excepting Gabriel, that was. He’d lost his little brother once before and, though Sam wasn’t there when it happened, he knew that Lucifer might not be able to handle losing Gabe all over again. When Gabriel was brought up in conversation, Sam could see an entire range of emotion fill Lucifer all at once--joy, nostalgia, frustration, grief, longing, determination. None of that ever happened outside of those conversations. Maybe he would be joyful when visiting with Missouri or frustrated when he couldn’t thread a needle or determined when he found a customer with a worthy cause in
mind, but he never exhibited every one of those emotions all at once. Not without some mention of his younger brother.

Sam concluded that that was the only reason that Lucifer felt like he could be so relaxed around him; Sam was empathetic, patient, and strong-willed. Then there was the fact that Sam had a similar determination to save his brother from what looked like the inevitable. The only difference between Sam helping Dean and Lucifer helping Gabriel was that Dean welcomed help when it was offered if it meant that it would make Sam happy. Lucifer understood the struggle of a protective brother all too well, but couldn’t help Gabriel even if he had wanted to--Gabe would never have forgiven him for going against his wishes and performing some sort of complex, experimental vodou ritual to save him. Lucifer had no one left, and Sam had the chance to have someone left. It was as simple as that. If Lucifer could help Sam do what he couldn’t for Gabriel, he was more than pleased to assist.

If that meant that they bonded over the course of their time together, there was nothing wrong with that.

A knocking noise caused both Lucifer and Sam to turn their heads away from each other and towards the screened door.

“Mr. Shurley,” a familiar female voice called out into the shop from the front porch, “your sign says you’re open and I thought I should swing by for a chat.”

Three figures stood at the door, but the sunlight coming from outside made it impossible to tell who they all were. Lucifer squinted at the door anyway. Sam moved away from the front counter and opened the door for their visitors.

“Hello again, Sam.” Jody Mills strolled in the door with a smile on her face. Sam returned the smile and said a short “hello” in reply. Outside of the door, Dean leaned against the porch railing and Castiel had taken to sweeping the steps. They made up quickly, Sam thought to himself. It was good to see Dean out of the house, if a bit unusual. Maybe Cas really was doing some good by being around the house with them. Dean hadn’t allowed anyone to walk him this far away from their apartment for a long time.

“Sheriff Mills, what can I do for you on this fine day?” Lucifer said, some of cheer having returned to his voice.

“I’ve got a bit of news that you might find handy,” Mills replied exhaustedly, “and you might want to sit down for this one.”

Lucifer’s eyebrows drew together in a concerned expression, but he said nothing as he pulled his stool closer just in case. Sam shut the screened door again and leaned against the wall by the countertop. Jody Mills sighed and stared at Lucifer but adjusted her stance so that Sam was stuck in her peripheral vision as well.

“I’m listening,” Lucifer said calmly.

“Pastor Kubrick’s gone missing.”

There was a beat of silence, then a slightly confused, “Shit,” from Lucifer.

“That was about what my husband said, too,” Mills replied. “I’m not sure what has happened, and I’m looking into it, but I thought that you ought to know. You know how word spreads through a congregation like his, and I’m sure that the Baptists’ll be on your tail any day now.”

“Yeah,” Lucifer said, “that’s fairly safe to assume.”
“There are no leads, then?” Sam asked. “I mean, I understand if you can’t share any of them with us, but if there’s anything we can do to help...”

“No, I’m afraid there’s nothing so far,” Mills sighed. “We can’t make heads or tails of this. He’s just up and vanished. Everyone’s assuming the worst, though, and that’s really impeding the investigation right now.”

“The worst being that I’ve captured or killed him,” Lucifer muttered. Mills nodded.

“Sorry I can’t give you boys anything other than that, but I saw your brother and your cousin walking over here and they looked like they could use an extra bit of help, so the information’s gotten to you sooner than I’d intended to get it to you.”

“Well, we are thankful for that,” Lucifer stated.

“I’m a busy woman, though,” Mills said, “and I have more investigation to do. Sorry to cut this meeting short, fellas.”

“It’s good seeing you again, Sheriff,” Lucifer said with a tired looking smile.

“And you too, Mr. Shurley.”

With that, Jody Mills showed herself out of the shop, leaving a shaken Sam and a deadpan Lucifer behind to watch as she strolled down the front steps and back into the bustling street.

“Well,” Sam asked, “what do we do now?”

“I have no clue,” Lucifer stated.

“Grand.”

Chapter End Notes

As much as I enjoyed the groans of frustration that I could practically hear every time I checked the comment section, they had to make up at some point, didn't they?

Looks like we'll just have to come up with something else to occupy them.

[cackling noises]
Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

I was out of town and without a computer! Sorry for the late update.
-Mer

At some point, sleep loss became preferable to dreaming. Lucifer sat upright in his bed and stared at the wall in the darkness. Around him the room broke up into distinct particles, separating into a thousand different fractals of light and shadow. He needed sleep. He knew that; he could feel it, tugging at the back of his mind, a constant buzz of tension. He also knew, just as well, that he was not going to sleep tonight, and maybe not ever again. The dreams were waiting for him behind his eyes. He didn’t know when the last time he had closed them was. Things were happening within his body. With years of practice watching others get sick or injured, he could observe the changes taking place within himself. Hot bursts of light ricocheted off the highways of his blood and bone. Everything was very clear and very dreamlike at the same time. Even if he had not chemically prevented himself from doing so, he didn’t think he would want to sleep right now; the process that was occurring was too interesting. He wanted to see where it went.

It was raining outside, the kind of dark merciless nighttime rain that periodically swept the city and left everything wet. The air was like ink. On the flimsy roof, the rain tapped out a ceaseless liquid chatter, like fingers on a typewriter. There might be leaks in the morning. He would have to remember to check. The window was streaked with glittering threads of water, which trembled and shattered as more fell.

He realized he was very afraid, in the terrible powerless way that only children are afraid. At first he didn’t know why, and then he saw Gabriel standing at the foot of the bed. He was silent. In the restless shadow of the rain and the night, his skin looked very pale.

“Hello,” Lucifer said amiably. “Who are you?”

“I’m the same person I always was,” Gabriel answered, without a trace of humour.

“That’s good news,” Lucifer said, mentally running calculations. Would anybody else be in the shop? No; he had sent everyone home and barring extraordinary circumstances they would stay there. He was alone until the morning.

Crowley was in jail and Kubrick was gone, present whereabouts unknown. That was two problems he had been worrying about gone in one fell swoop. It figured that what was left would be an even bigger problem than the two of them combined, and he still didn’t know what the damn thing was.

“The thing is,” he continued, very carefully, “I don’t think I know who that person is.”
Gabriel looked at him for a moment, expressionless, and then his face broke into a wide, strange, smile. “You think you’re pretty clever, don’t you?”

“I am pretty clever,” Lucifer replied. Maybe it was the sleep loss, but he was no longer afraid. This situation had the same perfect self-contained logic as a riddle. There was no reason to be afraid, because he knew how these things worked, and as long as he followed the rules, he would be fine. Outside the rain pounded down on the slick streets and bent-backed roofs of the city.

“You are,” said Gabriel, still smiling. “You are. But not as clever as you think you are.” Then, after a moment, he said, “There’s something you’re going to want to see.”

“Is there?” Lucifer did not move. “Where is it?”

“Not far. In the house.”

And, because he had no other choice, and because he still couldn’t seem to make himself be afraid, Lucifer said “Okay,” and got up and went with him. It was like any other ritual; as long as you complied with the rules, no matter how bizarre and twisted they were, everything would be fine. He went with Gabriel because it was the thing to do. And because he was curious.

They walked out into the main room of the shop. Beyond the windows the rain fell through the black air, and the shop itself was dark in that quiet shadowy way that only comes with rain. Gabriel, or whatever he was now, walked to the cramped crooked door that led down into the first floor below the porch. He looked expectantly at Lucifer.

“Down there?” Lucifer asked, feeling for the first time a prickle of hesitation.

“Yes.” And then, cryptically, “Most important things happen underground.”

Lucifer decided not to figure out what that could possibly mean and poked at the door. It moaned open into the bleak claustrophobic tunnel of wood leading down. The smell of old, dry, decay rose. Gabriel drifted down the steps. Lucifer followed him, resolutely ignoring the shrieking voice in the back of his head which sounded an awful lot like Sam’s and was telling him that this was a very bad idea.

The steps were shallow and uneven, like jagged teeth curling into the ground. They squealed alarmingly under Lucifer’s bare feet. Gabriel moved ahead of him without a sound. At the base of the steps stood a low set of shelves that Chuck had made when Lucifer was ten, sagging under the weight of years of accumulated trash and oddments. At one corner was a cloudy mercury glass lantern, which Lucifer lit and tucked under his arm. There were no lights in the basement. The quick flutter of the wick reflected off a glass jar further in, where Crowley’s spider sat in a pile of ash.

The basement was not large; a pitted maze of a room with no real purpose or order. Lucifer had never really known what it looked like, because it was always dark and there was no way he could see more than one point of it at once. There were shelves, he knew, and stacks of old boxes, and all the things he’d thought he’d use one day and never had, and somewhere in there was the decrepit old claw-footed bathtub Raphael had given his mother’s mother thirty years ago and was now too proud to ask for returned. Mostly it was just a winding, precarious, darkness, illuminated for a few feet around him by the uncertain yellow quiver of the lamp. The scent of decay was stronger here. Somewhere off in the shadows he heard a drip, steady and mindless, and made a mental note to check for it tomorrow, which he knew he would forget.

Gabriel turned and looked at him, his face like a crescent moon in the darkness. “It’s here,” he said. He was no longer smiling.
Lucifer walked over and stood by him. A few feet away, huddled against the wall, there was a shapeless mass of something like a pile of sticks. Lucifer raised his lantern and the dim light fell across the thing. It resolved itself out of the dark. It was Pastor Kubrick and he was clearly very dead. He sat slumped against the wall, his head dangling at a fractured angle. His eyes stared vacantly at nothing. He looked like a broken toy, thrown away by a bored child. Lucifer had never fully noticed how thin he was until now.

So there was a dead preacher in his basement. This came as something of a surprise. Lucifer was surprised that instead of relief at being rid of such an unpleasant enemy, he felt dread. Kubrick being dead meant not that his problems were over but that something worse was coming.

“Is this your handiwork?” he asked Gabe, or the thing that was wearing Gabe’s face. He had given up trying to determine which one it was this time.

Gabe laughed roughly. “Course not. No body, remember?”

“Then who?” Lucifer rubbed his eyes, trying to dig for an answer. “The family?”

“In a way.” Gabriel was smiling again, placid and still. “The little family you’ve made here. If I’m not mistaken, the culprit should be almost here by now.”

“Here? Why?”

“Guilt. Obligation. I don’t know. These things are confusing to me.” Gabriel shrugged. “They feel bad and they want you to know. Like confession. It’s all quite Catholic.”

“You’re making a habit of this,” Lucifer said. “Keeping me up the night before ceremonies.” He was fairly sure that the thing he was speaking to was not his brother, and he didn’t know what to do with that information. The preacher’s corpse watched them through glazed flat eyes, mouth a little open.

“It’s not intentional.” There was something like compassion in the thing’s smile. “Sometimes things just happen.”

It was awful in a way that defied description to see it now, knowing it for what it was. It had Gabriel’s smile and voice and warm eyes, but it wasn’t him. It was a horror wrapped in his skin. It had violated his identity for no reason except to hurt Lucifer.

“What are you?” Lucifer asked, quietly.

The thing’s smile grew wider, carnivorous. “I’m your brother,” it said. “I always have been.”

Then its eyes rose to the ceiling. “That’ll be her now,” it said.

Lucifer stared at it in confusion until a series of sharp ringing knocks shook through the house. He glanced up. Someone was out in the rain, pounding on the door. When he looked back down, Gabe—or the lack thereof—was gone. The first floor was open except for him and Kubrick’s limp, staring, body. He stared back at it and sighed heavily. The lamp flame shuddered and the knocking sounded again, with an edge of desperation this time.

When Lucifer went up the steps, crossed the shop, and yanked the door open, Meg was outside, soaked and shivering. Her appearance was like a slap. Lucifer reeled for a moment and then gathered himself, putting the pieces together. Honestly, he should have seen this coming.

“Lucifer,” Meg said, her jaw shuddering, hair lank. “I know it’s late and it’s raining, but I had to—I just—“
He put up a hand. “Let me guess. You were seized by guilt, so you had to run all the way here, at night, in the rain, to tell me about how you murdered Pastor Kubrick in some nasty and theatrical way and then saw fit to shove his dead body in my basement?”

Meg’s mouth hung open, water running down over her cheeks. “How did you—“

He sighed, stepping to one side. “You’re drenched. Get in here.”

The first issue was getting Meg in a chair, her jacket stripped off, wrapped in a blanket with a mug of tea bubbling for her in the kitchen, all of which Lucifer did. Once that was done, he took a deep breath and proceeded to shout at her for two minutes straight without pausing for breath again. It was fairly predictable stuff, everything he’d had brewing since he saw her outside the door; a lot of I trusted you and do you know how stupid that was and are you insane. He fired it off at her like a volley of artillery, letting her have every inch of his anger as she sat there, tucked inside his spare blanket, still dripping slightly.

“I’m sorry,” she said, once he was finished.

“Sorry? Does sorry get rid of the fucking body in my basement? Does sorry do shit for any of us, Meg?” He turned furiously away from her. “You know what kills me? You said you were done with all of this. No more curses, no more killing. You were going to be straight from here on out. And I believed you. I actually thought you meant it.”

Her head came up. “I did. I do.”

“Oh, you do? Then what the fuck is this? Why the fuck is there a body in my house? Do you realize how incredibly difficult this makes things for me? I am currently one of the primary suspects in a murder investigation into the death of the son of a man whose body I am now somehow going to have to dispose of, who was threatening me and my friends, who, in the eyes of the law, I had every reason to want dead. I could go to jail. I could be fucking executed. And that’s on you.”

“I know. I’m sorry. I—“she swallowed, almost imperceptibly. “I thought it would help. He was accusing you. He tried to attack Sam. Seemed like it would be easier if he was gone.”

“Gone, maybe. Not dead. Locked up.” Lucifer sagged into a chair. “God, Meg. This isn’t you. This is Crowley’s kind of logic.”

“I know.”

“I thought more of you. I thought you knew better.”

“I know. I’m sorry.”

“Is that all you can say? ‘I know’, and ‘I’m sorry?’”

“I mean it.” She smiled in a faintly wounded way. “Doesn’t seem like there’s much else to say.”

“Maybe not.” He leaned his head in his hands and watched her in a bewildered mixture of frustration and affection. She was a mystery to him, still, after all these years. He would get comfortable with her—his friend, his dark daughter—and then she would throw out something like this, as if to prove that he really didn’t understand her and never could. There was a kind of random violence in her, like an animal with no concept of good or evil, just a direction in which to be unleashed. And now there was a body in his basement, a body which any rational person would think he had killed. And
still he couldn’t hate her. He couldn’t even stay angry at her. It slipped away from him, much as he tried to keep a hold on it.

“There are lots of people coming this way and they look extremely angry,” Cas said, stepping out from behind Meg.

Meg jerked spasmodically and put her hand over her heart. “Fuck! Cas.”

“Yes, it’s me,” he agreed serenely.

“How do you do that? Where do you come from?” She looked back at Lucifer in utter confusion. “How does he do that?”

“How do I do what?”

“I don’t know. I’ve stopped questioning it.” Lucifer nodded to Cas. “You said something about angry people.”

“There are people coming this way. Maybe fifty. Lots of torches. There’s a man yelling about how you’re a servant of the devil and you killed Kubrick and his son. I think most of them are part of the church. Couple of the men have guns.”

Lucifer’s breath drew to a halt. “How far away?”

“Not far. Five minutes, maybe.” Cas’s face was impassive, his eyes shining in the dull light. “They’ll be here soon.”

“Damn,” Lucifer muttered bitterly, turning away. “Damn it, damn it.”

“Luce,” Meg said worriedly.

He drew breath in and let it out, slow, shuddering. He should have expected this. With all of the aggression and hatred boiling under the surface, the heat of the city, and the sudden violence that had gripped him and those around him, it was inevitable that something dramatic would happen. Pitchforks and Bibles, the villagers coming after the monster at last. It was the oldest story in the book.

He let the breath out again. He could handle this. He knew he could. Whatever else was happening, he was still a bokor, and there was power in his heartbeat and the core of his bones.

“It’s okay,” he said. Meg was watching him with wide, still, eyes. He gave her a thin smile. “It’s okay. It’s not a huge leap for them to blame me.”

“I’m so sorry,” she whispered. “God. I didn’t know.”

“Nobody knew.”

“They’re coming,” Cas said. Outside, below the rain, there was the echoing pound of footsteps. A voice howled something cruel and a chorus of others roared it back. His neighbours would be locking their doors and turning out their lights now. They would know it was him the mob wanted. In this neighbourhood, it couldn’t be anyone else.

“So what are we going to do?” Meg asked, slightly more composed.

“Do?” Luce repeated in dull confusion.
“Yes, do. To deal with the large homicidal mob coming towards us right now.”

“We don’t know for sure that they’re homicidal,” Cas pointed out.

“They have guns,” Meg said incredulously.

“If they want to pay us a visit, we’re going to do what any good host would do,” Lucifer said. There were the dull scorched lights of torches drifting beyond the window. Actual torches, for God’s sake. “We’re going to welcome them to my home.”

He turned to the door. Behind him he sensed, acutely, the look that Cas and Meg gave each other, and ignored it. They would follow.

_Damballah, serpent du ciel, aidez moi, he thought. You have always held me in your care, when I bleed and when I am hungry. Protect me from these people’s ignorance and fear. Marinette, protector of my mother, burning woman, be with me tonight. Ougoun, warrior of heaven, be with me tonight. Papa Legba, guardian of the ways, be with me tonight._

He knew, with perfect certainty, that he could handle these people. He felt it moving in him, that strength, like needles in his blood. There were powers beyond comprehension standing with him. He had nothing to fear.

As he pushed the door open and stepped out onto the porch, the crowd was milling and gathering on the street. Torches dotted the darkness in flickering blurs of soot-stained light, hissing as the rain fell. An angry, wordless, murmur rose, like the distant sound of swarming wasps. There were a lot of people. The rain pelted down around them, stinging. He could hear it bouncing off the roof. The night air was hot and wet and heavy. There was rage hanging in it, a presence as strong as the rain.

“Hello,” he said out loud, and inwardly promised a bottle of strong and expensive liquor for whoever was keeping his voice steady and clear.

A woman in a ragged dress looked up. Her face twisted into a snarl. “It’s him. Look! Look!”

A ripple of realization ran through the mob and the street was chaotic with screamed obscenities and threats. A thousand glittering eyes turned on him, staring up with mindless hatred. Meg, to his right, shifted uneasily. The torches reflected in the trembling puddles of rain on the concrete.

“Satan,” hissed a man near the front of the house. “Hellspawn.” The distinctive smooth shaft of a shotgun was tucked under his arm.

“I know why you’re here,” Lucifer went on. The shouting died down somewhat, and he was gratified by that. If they were willing to listen to him, they might still be convinced to leave quietly. “I know what you think I did. And if I had done it, I wouldn’t fault you at all for being here. I would do the same thing, for someone I loved.”

“He’s admitting it,” someone yelled. “Murderer!” An angry stir passed over the mob, and a few others yelled ugly things.

“No, I’m not,” Lucifer countered. “The fact is that I haven’t done anything wrong. I am not guilty of killing anyone. Pastor Kubrick has gone missing. His son’s death was cruel but unrelated. I had nothing to do with either of these events. We subscribe to different systems of belief, but I ask you, please, don’t assume I’m guilty just because I’m different from you. There is another man in custody for Martin Kubrick’s death. The police have already confirmed my innocence. What more do you need?”
“You may have fooled the police, but God knows you’re guilty,” the woman snarled.

“Do you think that you’re doing God’s work? Won’t God just take care of me himself?”

“It is the responsibility of all good Christians to take part in cleansing the Earth of evil,” another man said, sounding only marginally more rational. “Like you, and your master.”

“I have no master but myself.”

“You call yourself by his name!” The woman yelled, and there was a rumble of agreement.

“Look,” Lucifer said, deciding in frustration that trying to speak rationally to these people was a waste of time. “I honestly don’t care what you think about me. I don’t worship the devil and I haven’t killed anyone. You are being loud, threatening, and stupid in a public place. Leave now.”

“Or you’ll do what?” The voice was ragged and very young; the boy stared at him, wild. “There are many of us and only one of you.”


Swallowing a sudden rush of affection, Lucifer met the boy’s eyes. “I’m perfectly capable of taking care of myself, superior numbers or no. Get out of here before I feel I have to.”

“He’s threatening us,” the woman said.

“You’re the ones with fire and weapons,” Cas said reasonably.

“Yeah,” the man replied angrily. “Yeah, we are. So what are you going to do about that?”

“Whatever I have to,” Lucifer replied.

The gunshot cracked out like a blow. Lucifer felt something fast and hot snap past his ear and then the wall behind him erupted into a rain of charred splinters. A shotgun blast. There were bits of metal in the debris. He hoped it hadn’t broken anything expensive on the inside of the house.

Meg, who had been closest to the shot, let out a pinched kind of squeak which was actually kind of adorable and then breathed in sharply. She had her hands over her head. Cas stared at the scarred wall in puzzlement.

“Deal with that, you evil bastard!” the boy screamed. His face was slick with rain and sweat and terror. There was a fine trail of smoke blowing off the barrel of his gun. “Deal with that!”

Lucifer brushed bits of wood out of his hair, feeling the boiling rise of fury. “You shouldn’t have done that,” he said, as calmly as he could.

“Don’t touch him,” the woman yelled, her voice breaking, and she grabbed a torch from another woman and threw it at the house, where it landed just below the deck.

The flames caught immediately. The house was sufficiently wet that it wasn’t an immediate burst of fire and light, but as he watched, the red and orange clawed up the wall beneath him, sinking its teeth into the damp wood and spreading. A surge of heat blew upwards. Behind him, Meg was saying “Shit, oh shit,” in a conversational way. The woman laughed in the shrill insanity of fear. Someone else in the crowd fired a gun into the air. The fire licked outwards, climbing towards them. He could smell the burning wood of his house. The rain hissed and cracked as the fire ate it. Something in the depths of the house moaned.
“Let him burn,” the man in the crowd howled. He was grinning wide and joyful and cannibalistic. “Let them all burn. Let the flames take them back to hell.”

“Burn,” the boy yelled. He looked delirious in the jumping light of the fire, his mouth wet. “Burn, burn, burn.” A few others took up the call. It moved over the crowd like a crashing wave.

“Lucifer,” Meg hissed. She tugged his arm, her face tight. “We have to get out of here, now. It’s moving fast.”

“I know.” Lucifer said. He closed his eyes. He could feel it, the killing heat and hunger, the collapse of the house. He had lived here his whole life, in this house. It was the only place that mattered. The rest of the world could disappear and it wouldn’t matter because as long as he had this house, he would be safe.

“Lucifer,” Meg said again, this time with an angry edge of panic.

_Burn, burn_, the crowd screamed. He decided to give them what they wanted.

It was almost a relief, opening himself to the fire. He didn’t do this very often. He was not powerful—not by himself—simply a conduit for power, and it was by the intervention of the loa that he could do anything at all. Mostly he left it to them to use his body and let him go, but tonight there was no time. It wasn’t important. They were with him, even though they might not be in him. And more and more, he felt that being ridden was as much a realization of what was already inside him as the introduction of something new. The loa saw things as they truly were, in a dimension totally unfamiliar to human eyes, when he was with them he did as well. And that was its own power.

There was a perfect bright thing in the fire, a brilliance that existed also inside him. The angel-force, the wordless unexplainable force that spoke in the language of screaming and songs. He was breathing the fire in and out, as close as a lover. It whispered in his lungs. His fingers were the liquid tongues of the flame crawling over the wood, picking it to pieces. The heat did not hurt him. How could it? The fire was there to protect him.

When he finally moved it, it was easy. Easy as breathing. It peeled away from the charred wall and curled through the air, beautifully, a halo of radiance leaving precious sparks in its wake. It wriggled out from under the porch, with a trail of blackened grass behind it. He tasted the earth withering and crumbling under his tongue. The crowd was still shouting with the hysterical tension that could at any moment lead to an actual riot. He would have to be careful of the guns.

He didn’t want to be careful of their guns. He wanted to burn them alive. Already he knew what their sour flesh would taste like, and he wanted it. He was so tired of being understanding and forbearing for people who would gladly tear him to pieces if they could. They had tried to hurt Meg. For that alone, he should eat their bones.

“Holy shit,” Meg said, as the fire slid its tongue out. People on the edges of the crowd had started to notice. Shrieks went up. The fat coiled whip of fire floated in the air, luminous and terrible, like it was consuming itself. Which in fact it was. It looked nice, but he would have to give it something to eat or put it out pretty soon. The woman with the dirty dress saw it and her face went grey. Someone was babbling meaningless prayers into the smoke. Several other people, demonstrating better sense than their fellows, broke and sprinted off into the shadows. The fire flexed and twisted. Rain spat down and dissolved on its scalding, rippling, skin, leaving tiny black pockmarks that evaporated in a matter of seconds.

“Oh Jesus,” someone said. “Oh God protect us.”
Lucifer moved his fingers and the fire warped and billowed outward, scarlet and gold, beautiful but annihilating. The trigger-happy kid with the gun screamed and fired off a shot at the flames, which seemed to be his reaction to everything. The fire swallowed it seamlessly. Lucifer felt it pass through his gut painlessly, the sting of the metal, the exit. It buried itself in the wall under the porch. He would have to dig that out later. They had done serious damage to his house. He hated that. He looked at the kid and wanted to peel his teeth out of his mouth.

Sam would kill him if he actually killed anyone, which was ironic to say the least. He sighed and gathered in his self-restraint, pulling the flames tight.

“Leave,” he said, and was glad that he could still make his voice heard over the rage of the flames and the screaming, which at this point was quite dramatic. “Leave and don’t come back. You want holy fire? Have it.”

He snapped the fiery rope out across the street, feeling the starving excitement of the flames leap brilliantly against his rib cage. The fire raced across towards the shrinking group of people. Screams rose like a great gust of wind. With a crackle of scorched air, the flames cut to a stop just at the edge of the mob. Not touching one. Nowhere near the guns. Lucifer closed his eyes. The fire wanted to squeeze closer, flicker out, swallow. He could feel it tugging at him, like a needy child.

“Now,” he said, and gestured. This was more for effect than anything else; they were all watching him, eyes glittering with terror and firelight. The writhing circle of flames drifted to one side, carrying the group with it on a burst of shrieks. There was a street nearby. He carried them to it and then pulled the flames away, ringing the alley mouth like teeth. The crowd, or what remained of it, made short work of running away. The woman in the dress gave him one filthy look and stumbled off into the darkness.

It was getting harder and harder to keep the fire sustained. He reached for the shining thing in him that had allowed him to find the fire in the first place and pulled it tight, like he was pinching a wound closed. The fire coughed and twisted in on itself into nothing. A faint stain of smoke hung in the air.

Meg and Cas were staring at him in various degrees of bewilderment. He turned to them and smiled faintly.

“Well,” he said, “that’s over,” and abruptly felt crushing exhaustion close over him. His legs folded and he sank to his knees on the porch.

Meg took a step towards him. “Luce—“

“It’s okay. It’s fine.” He put his hand up. There was a roaring dizziness in his head and he rested his forehead against his knees. This was to be expected. You couldn’t pull something like this off without costs.

“That was,” Meg said reverently, and stopped, apparently unsure how to finish.

“It was extremely impressive,” Cas added, looking somewhat shaken.

Lucifer laughed dryly. “Thanks.” A wave of nausea rolled through him and he closed his eyes. Fuck, fuck. The ceremony was tomorrow. Now was not the time for this.

“That was amazing,” Meg said. Her voice was very quiet. “I’ve never seen anything like that.”

“Yeah?” He squinted against the pounding in his head. “Not even when you were with Crowley?”
For a moment a spasm of pain crossed her face, and it was as shocking as a blow. Meg never let people see things like that.

“You know I’m sorry,” she said softly. “I wish I hadn’t done it. I—“

“Yeah, Meg. I know.” He put his hand over hers. “It’s all right. We’re all right.”

It was a little bit surprising to hear himself say it and mean it. He had forgiven her more fully than he realized. Tonight he had been closer to murder himself than he had ever wanted or expected to be. Another flicker crossed her face, this one of surprise, and then she smiled in her sharp catlike way. “Of course we are. When were we not?”

He smiled back and shifted himself with a groan. “That’s enough excitement for tonight. Help me get inside. I need to find something to do to keep me from falling asleep, and you two have a body to move.”
Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

this chapter written by: Mer

Chapter Notes

Here's another body-horror-heavy chapter for you all. Just a heads-up so you aren't surprised by any of it.

Hope you all have a wonderful 2015 filled with lots of strange fanfic and good Samifer shipping!
And, you know, other good stuff, too.

The bokor was tired; Sam could tell that much from just looking at him. His walked slowly from place to place, he dropped things with much more frequency, he couldn’t read more than a page of a book without having to get up and move around, he had a weak grip on things he handed off to his assistant to take care of. The show he was putting on was good, but not good enough to fool Sam. Meg and Castiel had briefed him on the events of the previous evening, and, after warding off the angry civilians outside, there was no way that the bokor could restore his energy quickly enough to function at his normal levels of productivity.

“Are you sure you don’t want me to do that for you?” Sam asked after watching the bokor struggle with threading a needle for far too long.

“I’m not an invalid, Sam,” Lucifer grumbled. He squinted at the needle and tried poking the string through the needle’s eye once again. A frustrated expression took over his calm one as he managed to fail once again.

Sam stood up, walked into the back room, grabbed Lucifer’s reading glasses off of the night stand, and brought them back into the front room to set next to the bokor’s work station at the table. Lucifer glanced down at them and set his project down for a moment so that he could put on the glasses. He tried threading the needle only a couple more times before it finally worked.

“Thank you, Sam,” he said through a heavy sigh. “I didn’t think of that.”

“You’re going to do damage to your eyes straining them like that,” Sam commented. “I don’t understand why you insist on not using those glasses more often.”

“They make me look odd.”

“They do not.”

“Of course they do.”

“They look great on you, if anything.”
Lucifer glanced up from the needle with a curious look on his face.

“Really?”

“Really.”

Lucifer hummed and looked back down at his work. He was stitching up the few holes in his ratty, old, canvas bag. Sam knew that there was something on his mind, though, and the fact that he wasn’t sharing it was making him anxious. What happened the day before…that had apparently been some pretty impressive magick. Nowhere in any of Lucifer’s books (even the ones on defensive magick) could Sam find anything on the kind of stunts that Castiel and Meg had described in great detail. The bokor truly lived up to his reputation, after all.

“What are you not telling me?” Sam finally asked as Lucifer cut the string, having finished with the bag. The bokor looked up at Sam sheepishly.

“Do tell me what makes you think I’m omitting anything.”

“The way you’re acting. You’re exhausted, you’re still on edge, you’re not talking much…you’re sewing.”

“Sewing?”

“Yes, you do productive things when you’re trying to avoid people. More specifically, you do them when you’re trying to avoid me.”

Lucifer continued to stare at his project, but stopped stitching.

“I do, don’t I.” It was more of a statement than a question, muttered just loud enough for Sam to hear. Lucifer set the bag and the needle down onto the table and studied his assistant for a moment, trying not to look him in the eye for too long. The tension could have been cut with a knife. Sam waited patiently for a reply. He wasn’t perturbed; he was concerned more than anything.

“I am going to be performing the possession ritual today,” Lucifer stated, breaking the silence at last. Sam considered not responding for a moment. He decided that he didn’t want to, though. There was absolutely nothing that sounded alright with the situation Lucifer had put himself in.

“You’re joking, right?”

“I do not joke about these things.”

Sam sighed and leaned back in his chair.

“You’re joking, right?”

“I do not joke about these things.”

Sam sighed and leaned back in his chair.

“Lucifer—”

“I knew that you would disapprove, so I decided not to mention it. I didn’t want you to worry about it.”

“Of course I’m worried, though, Luce! Don’t you see anything wrong with this idea?”

“It’s necessary,” Lucifer shot back. “I am going to find out what this—this thing is that’s been creating this huge, goddamn black cloud of negative energy around me. Crowley won’t let up on it, Missouri wouldn’t either, and now that you’ve started to feel it too…and now that Gabriel is possibly not Gabriel, I simply have to know what’s going on.”

“But a possession?” Sam heard the intensity in his voice rising, but he didn’t care. “Lucifer, look at
you’re going to just waste yourself away doing this, too?”

“I’m not going to waste away, Sam.”

“You’re sure as hell not going to be able to take care of yourself for a while, though.”

“Watch it.”


“I know what I am doing, Sam,” Lucifer said plainly. “I’m going to do it whether you attend or not. It’s not going to be a pleasant experience, and I will be rather exhausted afterwards, but if you think I should ignore the recent events surrounding me and Gabriel, you don’t have to attend the ritual. I can get Meg to carry things for me and I can have Castiel help me on my way back to the shop after it’s all over. This is far from my first time doing this.”

“Have you ever done this while so exhausted, though?”

“Not for a while, no.”

“And you remember who you are summoning, correct?”

“Yes. Marinette.”

Sam shook his head.

“You have to be messing with me.”

“I am not messing around, Sam.”

“Marinette has violent possessions, doesn’t she?” Sam asked. “Or am I thinking of the wrong loa? How much of that can you handle?”

“I can handle it just fine. She is violent, comparatively, but it’s nothing I haven’t done before.”

“That is no excuse!” Sam paused to compose himself again. He asked, in a much calmer tone, “Can’t you just wait a couple of days?”

“No. It has to be done now.”

Sam put his face in his hands and took a deep breath.

“There’s nothing I can say to stop you, is there?” Sam asked quietly.

“No. I’m sorry, but there isn’t.”

“Then I’m coming with you.”

“Sam, last time—”

“I know what I’m getting myself into as well, Lucifer. I’m prepared, this time.”

The two of them stared at each other for a moment. Silence fell over the shop, disturbed only by the sound of wind chimes on the front porch and chatter from the streets beyond it. Sam looked away first. He rose from his seat and crossed his arms over his chest.
“Put me to work, because I’m helping whether you like it or not.”

Dean insisted on coming along. Sam tried to ask him not to, but he wouldn’t let up. He said he was “in this with all of them”. He didn’t say that he wanted to be there as a protective force over Sam. He didn’t have to, because Sam knew that that was what he had meant. That was why he hovered around Sam when there was nothing left for them to do.

Castiel and Meg assisted Lucifer with the construction of a woven straw bag with something undisclosed inside of it (Sam didn’t really want to know what it was) and sent Cas out into the woods to do...something with it. Sam didn’t ask what exactly they were going to do in preparation and just inquired about his own involvement. They lit a fire and laid several blankets on the ground, out of reach of the embers. Meg fed the fire with a can of something that smelled like gasoline and something else that looked like salt. When Castiel returned, he asked Sam to help him set up a medium-sized tent (really just the top part of the tent and a few poles, not a whole four-sided structure) next to the fire and over top of the blankets.

Sam tried not to worry. He really did his best. Dean could read him too well, though. He stood by his younger brother and placed a reassuring hand on his shoulder. Sam smiled at the gesture, but it didn’t quite reach his eyes. He was almost glad that Dean couldn’t quite see him wear that expression.

Meg was talking in urgent, hushed, rapid-fire words with Lucifer. She didn’t like this any more than Sam did, but she wasn’t going to try and stop the bokor from trying to do what he thought was best. She wasn’t in a position to criticize anything that anyone did after the incident with the pastor. Lucifer listened to her, though, and would calmly reply every time she said something to him. Sam wasn’t sure if Lucifer forgave too easily or if he simply couldn’t remain angry at Meg for very long. She was like family to him; Sam understood that feeling.

Castiel returned several minutes later and helped the two bokors put together their materials for the summoning. As the three began their invocations and percussive music and movement, Sam turned to Dean and grabbed his elbow to get his attention.

“You’re going to hear a lot of weird stuff, alright?” Sam stated. “And you’re going to want to do something about it. Don’t. Don’t do anything. Everything’s gonna sound a bit crazy, but it’s all supposed to.”

“I know possession’s weird shit, Sam.”

“Yeah, but Marinette’s…she’s supposed to be different, okay?”

“Okay?”

“She’s gonna make the beginning a bit rocky.”

Dean nodded.

“If anything makes you want to leave at any point, Cas already said he’d take you out on a walk or something to get away from it for a while.”

“Aw, shucks,” Dean said mockingly. “Sammy, if you can handle this stuff, so can I.”

“I…I couldn’t, last time.”
Dean didn’t comment, surprisingly enough. He just frowned and nodded. Sam patted his brother’s shoulder in what he hoped felt like a comforting gesture.

It was around then that Lucifer stopped moving normally. He dropped to the ground. His body undulated and convulsed in some of the most surreal and chaotic ways that Sam had seen. It was much different from when Papa Legba had entered him. He twisted his body more than he seized, and his hands formed claws and he raked at the blanket below him and at the exposed flesh of his forearms, collarbone, lower neck, and ankles. The bokor made strangled, inhuman noises that almost sounded like choked screeches, and his eyes stared up at the sky. Meg and Castiel stood on either side of him, at the ready in case anything out of the ordinary happened. (Out of the ordinary might not be the best choice of words to describe a chwal’s actions during a possession, but it was good enough for Sam at the moment.)

Sam felt the hairs stand up on his arms and a shiver run through Dean as manic laughter bubbled up and out of Lucifer—literally bubbled, along with a trickle of blood out the corners of his mouth, meaning he must have bit his tongue at some point. The bokor arched his back, his arms and legs bent at awkward angles, and his neck bent just a little further than it should have.

The convulsions slowed and became less frequent as he slid downwards from his contorted position, relaxing each of his tensed muscles out of order and one at a time; his left bicep went slack, then his forearms relaxed, then his core sagged, then his shoulders dropped, then his neck and legs and feet all slackened, and, finally, his face went blank. From where they stood, Sam began to see Lucifer’s face become pained, at first, then he watched as it transformed into a hysterical smirk, then, at last a mad man’s grin. Sam could hear him whisper and whimper broken pieces of words. Meg knelt by his side and held onto one of his hands and pet his hair as if he was confessing sins instead of babbling nonsensically.

At least, Sam thought that what Lucifer said was too quiet and unintelligible to make any sense. When he turned his head to check on Dean, Sam quickly came to the realization that that wasn’t the case. Dean wore a somewhat horrified expression on his face and he was clearly paler than he had been at the beginning of the ritual.

“Sam, can you hear him?”

“No, not all of it.”

“Jesus, Sammy…”

“What is it?”

“Are you sure you’re inviting a helpful spirit into him? ‘Cause the things he’s saying…he’s saying he’s done all sorts of ridiculous…he hasn’t done that stuff has he?”

“I can’t hear him, Dean.”

Dean shook his head.

“Nah, man. I’ve just started to really trust the fella. I don’t look at him and see that shit. It’s complete baloney. Nah, Sammy…this is fucked up.”

“Mama Marinette?” Meg helped the bokor into an upright position. She pulled a small tin out of her bag and opened it in front of Lucifer’s face. Lucifer’s eyes made contact with hers. His chin tipped downwards as he looked into the offering in the woman’s hand.

“Sweets for me?” The voice that came out of him was distinctively accented and slightly hoarse. Sam
let out a breath he hadn’t realized he’d been holding. It had worked. Lucifer was able to keep a hold on the loa just long enough for her to mount him.

“Yes, they’re just for you,” Meg said with a smile. Lucifer’s eyes flicked up to her then back down to the tin. The loa plucked a single candy from Meg’s hand and popped it into its mouth. Once it seemed satisfied, Meg sat the tin down next to the loa and sat down a safe distance from it.

“For what purpose do you call upon me?” the loa asked with a frown. She turned Lucifer’s head towards Sam and Dean and made a beckoning gesture to them.

“Come closer. I don’t like you standing all of the way over there.”

Sam held Dean’s forearm and guided him over to where Meg and Marinette sat. Castiel took Dean’s arm for Sam as they approached so that Sam could sit closer to Meg and the loa. Marinette’s unblinking gaze never once wavered from Sam; she didn’t seem particularly concerned about Dean. When Sam sat down near her, her gaze transformed from a harsh one into a curious one.

“You two clearly desire something,” she stated outright. “So does my horse.”

Sam explained the situation with the negative energy with as much detail as he could recall. The loa nodded and listened to him intently. She hummed at his mention of being able to feel it himself, but didn’t make any comment until he had finished.

“Before I ask anything else, what is Lucifer’s relationship to me?”

“He told us that you were his mother’s patron.”

“I was?” Marinette frowned for a moment before her expression quickly changed.

“Ah, yes, I was. I remember his mother. Strong woman, she was. Lucifer Shurley. I knew that I recognized this boy from somewhere. It’s been a while since I last saw him.”

The loa shook her vessel’s head and chuckled.

“He has gotten into a bad”—Marinette popped another candy into Lucifer’s mouth—“bad place indeed. This thing is clever.”

“What is it?” Sam asked.

“It’s an entity, and an intelligent one, at that. It’s left its mark on him. I can feel it.”

“What is it?” Meg asked. The loa looked at her and frowned.

“It is old, very old. It is talented when it comes to imitating other spirits. I would guess that it was a vengeful spirit, but it has transformed into something else. Now it refuses to carry on from this realm into the next. It does not like Lucifer. It does not like you. It does not like any one of you.”

At the last comment, the loa pointed a finger at everyone in the group. Castiel tipped his head to the side; Dean looked down towards his shoes; Meg wrinkled her nose; Sam suppressed a shiver. Marinette popped another candy into her chwal’s mouth and hummed around it.

“I am thinking there was another boy…a Gabriel?” the loa suggested. Sam nodded, and she went on, “Lucifer has not spoken to Gabriel on a regular basis recently. He may think that he has, but he has not spoken more than a few times with him in the past couple of months. The entity is acting as Gabriel.”
“Can you tell what its end game is?” Sam asked. Marinette wrinkled Lucifer’s nose and pursed his lips before answering.

“It wants Lucifer dead…and it is willing to take down anyone who stands in its way.”

The group fell silent as they took in the new information. Marinette kicked off Lucifer’s sandals and stretched his arms and legs, like the tension that was in his body earlier was still seeping out of the bokor’s muscles, but not quite fast enough. She rubbed at his knuckles like they hurt.

“How are your eyes?” the loa asked, looking up at Dean. “He’s been working long and hard on your case, boy.”

“Me?” Dean asked.

“Yes, you,” Marinette replied.

“I’m…I’m seeing a little bit better, yeah.”

“Like little outlines of shapes?”

“Yeah...uh, yes, ma’am.”

“And colors, too?”

“Sometimes, yeah.”

Marinette smiled at him and sighed.

“Healing isn’t exactly my area of expertise, but I can see the good work he has done on you.”

Dean nodded and looked back down in the direction of his feet. The fire popped and a flaming branch fell off of it. The loa squinted at it and hummed, stood up easily, and walked over to the small fire. Before it could spread any further, she stomped it out with her vessel’s bare foot. Sam winced, even though Marinette was clearly not feeling any pain. The loa grumbled something and threw the branch back into the fire. She sat back down in front of Meg and Sam. There were no scorch or burn marks on Lucifer’s feet. Sam almost couldn’t believe what he was seeing. He blinked hard and turned his focus back to the loa, who was taking two candies out of the tin and placing them both into her vessel’s mouth at once.

“Marinette?” Sam asked tentatively.

“Yes, boy?” the loa responded, words garbled through the sweets in Lucifer’s mouth.

“Do you know why the negative entity wants to kill Lucifer?”

“It wants his power. The physical ventilation of his soul’s connectivity to the spiritual realm. If it can take that, it will likely have enough energy to manifest its own body.”

Sam practically felt the color drain from his face. No. That was…no… How was he supposed to react to something like that? He had asked the question, but he wasn’t sure that he could form full words after hearing the answer. The idea of some dark, powerful force attacking and killing Lucifer after taking on Gabriel’s image was…

A shudder ran through Sam. He shook his head and brought his attention back to Marinette. She was licking her chwal’s fingertips, ridding them of the powder that coated them after she had reached into the tin of sweets so many times.
“Are we able to banish it?” Meg asked. Marinette hummed and nodded her vessel’s head.

“Yes, yes, of course. It will be a difficult task, but if Lucifer is as much of a fighter as his mother, he should have no problem leading the actions.”

“How would you suggest we get rid of it?” Meg asked, leaning in as if she might miss some detail if she was too far away.

“I would—I suggest—I—” Marinette scrunched up Lucifer’s face and shook his head. “No you do not do that to me. You will have hell to pay if you do not stand down this instant!”

“Mama Marinette?” Meg moved forward, reaching carefully towards the loa, but clearly not sure if she should touch.

“I am sorry! I do believe that I can help, but there appears to be interference,” the loa exclaimed. An expression of frustration and pure discomfort contorted Lucifer’s face, and his hands were brought up to his ears and head as if the loa was trying to block out a loud noise. He buckled over and fell forwards, suddenly. Meg caught him before he could hit his head against his knees and held him for a couple of seconds as his entire body went limp.

“What the hell just happened?” Dean asked from behind them. Castiel quietly described to him what had just occurred as Sam and Meg scrambled to lay Lucifer down flat on the blanket-covered ground.

“That’s not normal,” Meg said quietly, but frantically. “Whatever that was, it was bad. Very bad. Anything that can boot Marinette out of her horse…”

“Is he breathing?” Sam asked quickly. Meg brought a hand up under Lucifer’s nose and over his mouth, letting it hover by a few centimeters. She nodded quickly after a pause. Sam checked the bokor’s pulse for good measure, and sat back on his heels, running his hands through his hair.

*What the hell?* he thought to himself. *What does that to a loa?*

“We should get him back home,” Meg stated after a long, quiet minute. Sam nodded and stood up.

“Cas,” Sam said, “could you take Dean back to our place? Maybe take the tent pieces with you, too? Meg and I are able to take care of Lucifer for now.”

“Absolutely,” Castiel replied stiffly. He quickly disassembled the tent with some help from Dean, then he guided the elder Winchester brother to a path at the edge of the clearing and led him back towards town. Meg tossed a bucket of water and a pail of sand onto the fire to extinguish it as Sam stood still and observed Lucifer.

He looked limp, pale, and dead. That was all that Sam could think. He knew that the possession was a bad idea, but the earlier complications clearly hadn’t come from Lucifer’s lack of energy. Something had attacked him. Something had attacked him and Marinette—a Petro loa, known for being strong and powerful, sometimes wicked and war-like, a spirit of both bondage and emancipation…and she was shoved away just like that. It had to have been the Gabriel-impersonator. There was no doubt about it, in Sam’s mind. Nothing he had witnessed or read about was that malevolent or powerful.

Sam shook his head in an attempt to clear it.

“Hello? Hey, moose.”
“Sorry, what?”

“Are you gonna help me carry him or what?”

Sam nodded. They each draped a blanket over their shoulders before they lifted Lucifer up off of the ground. The bokor hung between them as they looped his arms around the backs of their necks. Sam swallowed down the bitter taste that Lucifer’s helplessness left in his mouth and they carried him through the woods and back to the shop. They entered through the back door and deposited him onto the bed as carefully as they could. Meg dropped her bag in the corner of the room by Lucifer’s trunk and collapsed into one of the chairs at the small, round table. Sam stood at the foot of the bed and stared down at Lucifer with only one thought running through his head.

*What are we supposed to do now?*
Chapter 24

Chapter Summary

dthis chapter written by: Mer

Chapter Notes

General warnings for the rest of this fic:
- lots of body horror
- (not this chapter, but soon) romantic and foreplay actions
- past/revisited character death
- major character death (but don't let this discourage you unless it hardcore bothers you...just wait to see what happens)
- general confusion and mind-fuckery.
- character experiences resembling worsening/ incurable illness

FOR THIS CHAPTER ESPECIALLY: there is some timeline-jumping and feels a bit weird. It's kind of obvious why this is the case, after a little bit, so don't get too freaked out on us, here.

Okay. We're good now. Hope you enjoy the chapter!

Gabriel is there, sprawled out on his bed, only half-covered by a quilt, face flushed and tired-looking. He sleeps most of the day and groans most of the evening and breathes heavily through most of the night, only to exhaust himself by sunrise and finally fall asleep again to continue the vicious cycle. He toes the line of life and death and it almost feels like it's more painful to watch than it is to experience this excruciating process.

He’s going to die any day now, and there’s nothing that can be done about it.

He’s happy, smiling, joking about some ridiculous spell he found written in enochian in an old book in his step-mother’s old book collection.

“Look, Luci. ‘You breed with the mouth of a goat,’ it says. And people probably think that it actually means something like ‘demons be gone’. Can you believe that nonsense?”

He’s content and tired and happy all because Lucifer’s there with him. Not what he should be feeling, no, but he’s always a ball of sunshine when his step-brother’s present. Sweet little Gabe...don’t get emotional, now. He’s almost gone. Not much time left.

“Hey, Gabriel.”

“Hey, big brother.”

“How’re you feeling?”
“I’m about the same.” Gabriel shrugs and stares up at his brother with drooping eyelids. Not okay. Not okay not better not fine not nice just…the same.

“I’ve been…I’ve been looking around and I think I’ve found some stuff, you know? I think maybe—”

“Lucifer, stop right there.”

Lucifer clamps his mouth shut and listens.

“I don’t want to go and leave you and my father here, but I don’t really have a say in it, do I? The doctors say I can’t be helped. They’ve got no clue what’s wrong, but they know for a fact that nothing’s working. Hey, look at me Luce…I want you to just let it happen, alright? Let me go. If the Baron’s here to take me somewhere else, then who am I to argue with him, hm? Just some sick fella from New Orleans who’s led a colorful life. If the spirits say it’s my time to go, then it’s my time to go.”

“Gabriel, please just let me…I can…”

“Lucifer, don’t.” Gabriel smiles at him. “I’m okay. I really am.”

“No, Gabriel, you aren’t.” Lucifer stares at his brother, shocked. “How can you say that? You want to die, then? You think this is fine?”

“I’m accepting my fate, Luci. I don’t want you exhausting yourself over me. I hate to break it to you, but I’m a lost cause.”

Lucifer frowns but keeps silent. This is Gabriel? This isn’t Gabriel. There is no way that…Gabriel would never…giving up isn’t his mantra. Admitting defeat isn’t what he does. He rebels against fate. He runs away from authority and tears the rule book apart. He does not give up his freedom to exist and he does not…no, this couldn’t be Lucifer’s real brother. This isn’t happening this isn’t happening--

“Luce…”

*Gabriel is staring at him. Beaming like a kid in a candy shop.*

“I wanna be like you when I’m older, Luci.”

*Lucifer laughs bitterly.*

“No, you don’t, Gabriel. Do not aspire to be like me.”

“I’ll aspire whatever I want, thank you,” Gabriel proclaims. “And I think you’re a swell guy.”

“Nobody else does…” Lucifer sighs and ruffles his kid brother’s hair playfully. “But I’m happy that you do. If you’re by my side, I’ve got no problems. You hear me?”

“I do hear, Lucifer; I’ve got two ears.”

*Lucifer laughs as Gabriel tugs at his ears and makes a face.*

“As long as I’ve got someone who thinks I’m alright, I think I’ll be alright,” Lucifer says. He slings an arm around his younger brother’s shoulders. Gabriel throws his arms around Lucifer’s middle and squeezes. Lucifer stands still and watches as his brother nestles into his side. He smiles
“As long as I’ve got you, Gabe…”

“It’s not like it’s your fault I’m like this.”

“No, I know that, Gabriel. I know that. Can I...can I do anything for you? Anything at all?”

Gabriel doesn’t answer as he thinks. Lucifer watches him and it’s like the two of them are kids all over again. Gabriel doesn’t know which type of candy he wants Lucifer to get while at the market. He isn’t sure whether he wants to go to the park or to the ship docks to play. He can’t decide whether he should answer the school teacher’s question correctly or with a smart remark. He isn’t deciding whether or not he wants relief for the small amount of time he has left on the mortal plane.

“Do you want me to stay here with you?” Lucifer suggests, unsure of which actions are the most appropriate for the moment. He fidgets in place and picks at his fingernails and bites at his lip and watches carefully as Gabriel grins up at him.

“Yeah. I’d like that very much.”

“Good. Good.”

“He isn’t doing well, today. He’s ill again, and the doctors are baffled. I don’t...I can’t help him if he doesn’t wish to be helped. I need his consent before trying any healing spells out, though, you know? I simply do not know what I should do at this point. I need him right now. I need someone, at least. Solitude isn’t a pretty color on me. I’d know.

“My point is that I need help. I’m lost. I’ll be more lost if I can’t have the one person who knows me better than I do…and it’s only a matter of days, now. I want to comfort him, but I think my efforts are all in vain at this stage in his...well, I think he’s being strong to comfort me, anyway. He’s a tough fella, and you sure know how to make those, don’t you? Made me into one to a certain extent, too, right?

“I need your guidance and I need your wisdom and I need your strength. Why couldn’t I inherit that, huh? Would’ve been too easy, I suppose. That would make sense. Instead, all I get is what you could teach me before you left…

“Anyway, I love you. I miss you. I hope all is well. Your little devil’s marching on as he must.”

“Can you fetch Dad for me?”

“Sure. Absolutely. Just him and you for a little while?”

“Yeah, why not?”

“Alright. I’ll go find him for you.”

Chuck is sitting on the front porch, writing something in a notebook that looks frayed and weathered--well-loved. His glasses have inched down the bridge of his nose and are awkwardly perched at the tip, just barely unable to slide off all of the way. Lucifer sat on the porch rail and released a tense and shaky sigh.

“How is Gabriel?” Chuck asks eagerly, dropping his pen onto the middle of his page.
“He’s not…” Lucifer clears his throat. “He wants to see you for a while.”

“Oh. Al-right, then. I’ll…I’ll go do that.” Chuck fumbles with his pen and paper then walks swiftly inside, glancing back through the screen door to shoot a weak smile at his stepson before moving into the house. Lucifer sighs and hangs his head low. He can’t take much more of this and he knows it. Chuck won’t be able to, either. He’ll leave the city after Gabriel isn’t around to keep him grounded. Lucifer’s an adult and can take care of himself, so he should technically be capable of handling his life without his stepfather to guide him. There are a few vodouists in town who could take him under their wings and show him the rest of what he wants to learn.

Look at this. Planning for a post-Gabriel world already. This is sad. His mother would never forgive him for giving up so close to the finish. Make the most of the time left, right?

Gabe’s a little ladies’ man already. He’s just hit his teen years and already he has the smooth talk and walk of a young man down perfectly. He has picked up where Lucifer left off in school--making jokes, reading advanced and supposedly inappropriate materials, defying authority, and making Chuck’s job as a parent just a bit more difficult with every passing day. Chuck is an introverted, bashful man and isn’t sure what to do with a child like Gabriel (not to mention that he has Lucifer to deal with as well). He does his best, and the boys know it. Lucifer likes Chuck. He always has. Having a kind and patient father was all he needed after all that he had put up with from everyone else during his childhood.

His brother only makes things better--or worse, depending on how one looks at it. They both have something of a sweet tooth and they both love fantastic adventure stories and unconventional teachings. Lucifer has an extensive book collection (most of which is frowned upon by the school boards and churches alike) and has caught Gabriel sneaking them out one by one only to replace them in a few weeks’ time and pull out another. They are every teacher, preacher, and cynical adult’s worst nightmare. They wouldn’t ever wish to be anything less than that.

“That Lucifer fella’s quiet all the time. No clue what’s supposed to make him such a rotten apple.”

“I hear there’s somethin’ the matter with his head.”

“Why don’t folks like ‘im anyway?”

“Well, you see, his mama--”

“I might request that you do not continue with that thought.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“I’ve heard it a million times before, and I do not wish to hear it repeated once again. Just because I keep to myself does not entail that I am idle or distant in any way. I can hear you and if you speak one word in a tone that could entail a negative emotion towards my mother, you will regret it, I assure you.”

“What, are you threatening me? Huh? What’s it you think you can do to us?”

“You are familiar with my brother, are you not?”

“Yeah, uh, Gabriel.”
“I taught him everything he knows...and I haven’t finished teaching him yet.”

“...shit, I ain’t saying anythin’ about your family, Lucifer. Don’t worry yussel about us none.”

“Consider any transgressions forgotten...for now.”

It’s funny, really, how not only the little pale boys and girls don’t let him interact with them on a regular basis, but the darker-skinned children won’t treat him fairly, either—half of the time, they treat him like he’s more privileged than them, and the other half of the time they just ignore him, as if that’ll make him go away. There were some kids from both ends of the skin color spectrum who were kind to him...when their parents weren’t looking, that was.

Gabriel is charismatic, though. Nobody thinks twice about his parentage, and when he’s with Lucifer, none of the kids question either of them.

“They’re a couple of rebels.”

“Yes, I know.”

“Gabriel will thankfully run from a fight, but I don’t think that Lucifer will, and I’m worried about that.”

“Have they gotten into any fights?”

“They’re boys, Chuck. They are going to get in fights sooner or later.”

“That’s a strong assumption.”

“There have already been fights this school year.”

“But my boys haven’t actually gotten into any of them?”

“It’s come close, but no. Not yet.”

“Then there’s nothing to talk about, here.”

“I believe that there is--”

“You are basing this off of theory alone, and I can not accept it as fact or do anything about it unless something other than hormonal posturing actually occurs. I can’t punish them for something they haven’t done.”

“I’m not suggesting punishment, just awareness.”

“Thank you for your input, but I think that I know these kids pretty well on my own.”

“Gabe?”

A grumbling noise answers from beneath a pile of blankets and pillows.

“How are you fairing?”

“Well, now that the...room smells all nice...and fresh like cedar...and such, I’m alright.”
Still kicking, even after his entire body has become so fatigued that it hurts to move, and speaking aloud leaves him winded. That’s the Gabriel everyone knows and loves. That’s the Gabe who runs off into the woods to sit and think when life becomes stressful. That’s the Gabe who still smiles when he comes back home to a worried father and a relieved brother. That’s him at last.

“Glad it’s not bothering you any,” Lucifer says. Gabriel peeks out from under the blankets and wiggles his eyebrows. Lucifer chuckles.

“What?”

“Nothing,” Gabriel croaks with a tired grin. “Just...I dunno. Wanted to...make a face at you. Acted on an urge.”

“Classic Gabe,” Lucifer teases. He ruffles his brother’s hair and then smooths it back down after receiving a small frown of discontentment.

“I do try to...stay in character, y’know?”

“Yeah, yeah, I know.”

They stare at each other for a long moment in silence. Gabriel is pale and his eyes are half-open in a squint as if the lighting in the room is just a little bit on the bright side. Lucifer smiles as comfortably as he can.

“You look like hell, Luci.”

“Yeah, I figured that I would.”

“You getting any sleep?”

“Some.”

“Hmm.”

Lucifer looked down at the top blanket and picked at a loose thread.

Your little devil’s marching on as he must...and so’s your little cherub. Not for long, though. Mama, give me strength.

“Hey, Luci.” Lucifer’s head snaps up at the sound of his name. Gabriel smiles warmly, but his expression turns...it clouds over, and not in a dark sense, it just looks unfortunately overcast. That’s regret. That’s longing. That’s premature grief.

Lucifer listens.

“Hey, brother...I ain’t doing so well.”

“Is that so?” It was supposed to be a sarcastic question, Lucifer thought. It came out of his mouth more like a murmured surrender, instead.

“No, really. I’m worse today...I know it.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah.” Gabriel sighs this last word out, and the room falls silent. The air is heavy; it almost hurts to breathe. Lucifer watches his brother with sad eyes. He won’t admit it aloud, but he is suddenly
terrified of everything all at once, and it hits him like a punch in the gut. He’s going to be alone again. He’s going to have to keep his head up and move forward despite the absence of this mother and Gabriel. He’s going to have to crawl out of the deep, dark, all-consuming chasm that he has already fallen into once before and honestly didn’t want to have to conquer ever again.

He doesn’t know if he can actually make it, this time.

Gabriel makes a shushing noise and weakly waves his hand at his older brother. Lucifer frowns at him. Gabriel peeks through heavily lidded eyes.

“What?” Lucifer asks.

“You’re thinking too much. Stop that. You can’t...wallow in your misery until I’m...gone, you got that?”

Lucifer sits down on the edge of the mattress and takes Gabriel’s (now somehow ridiculously thin) hand in between his own.

“I will try.”

“...you’d better not lie to me.”

“I don’t lie, Gabriel.”

“No, you don’t, do you?” Gabriel tries to laugh, but the result of his effort is pitiful and hard to listen to. Lucifer’s vision blurs and...no. No. He tips his head back and stares at the ceiling in an attempt to clear his eyes of any and all obstructions. A melting sensation fills his sinuses and pressure builds in his head, up behind his eyes.

“Luci…” Gabriel whispers apologetically.

“I’m trying. I really am,” Lucifer protests. His voice is quiet and his words are clipped.

“I believe you,” Gabriel replies. “You know what I’d like?”

“No, I don’t, Gabe. What would you like?”

“Could you sing me a song? And...make it something good, too. Not just...any old song that comes to you. Make it...something I might like.”

“Anything for you, Gabriel. Of course.”

Everything freezes as Lucifer looks up from where his brother lies. Time has stopped. There’s an uncomfortable silence that fills the room slowly as Lucifer looks around the room. All of the sudden, he feels a prickling sensation on the back of his neck as the hairs there stand on end. Ah, yes--that’s it. He whips his head around to face...Gabriel--no, not Gabriel, the thing pretending to be Gabriel--who is now sitting upright in front of the headboard, his legs crossed and his posture perfect and confident as he stares smugly at Lucifer.

“Hello, Luci.”

“You.”

“Yes. Me.”
“...Why?”

“You’re clever. You figure it out.”

“You want either me or Gabriel, I would presume. What for, though? Power? Satisfaction? Is it a vendetta, or is it not personal at all?”

The not-Gabriel laughed.

“It’s nothing personal, Lucifer. I don’t have some plot for revenge against you or your half-brother. It’s all got to do with me, for the most part. I’ve escaped the Baron so far, but it’s only a matter of time before he catches up to me. I only can access so much energy from what’s around me...oh, it’s such a bore, working as best as I can while keeping out of his line of sight all of the time. There is so much power in you, and your brother’s spirit’s still floating around, so...well, gee, how could I possibly resist? You were such an easy target, truthfully. So distractible.”

“I...I can’t possibly be the strongest individual out in these parts,” Lucifer insists. “There are a whole slew of people with stronger connections to the spirits than I have.”

“No, no. You have a natural power in you. It’s only amplified by the ridiculously strong bond that you have to the vodou magicks that you practice so frequently. You steep yourself in a metaphorical catalyst for your power. You’re no Merlin or Marie Laveau, but you are a brilliant spiritualist and healer. That’s all I need--one person with a strong sixth sense and a weakness...or two, in your case.”

“Two?”

“Gabriel is one.”

Gabriel chuckles as Lucifer glares at him. The pranks and jokes are endless. Lucifer has created a monster...and he honestly doesn’t regret it one bit, even though he’d never admit it to his brother’s face. He rolls his eyes at Gabriel and throws his book at the teen. Gabriel yelps and dodges it as best as he can. He had replaced the title page of Lucifer’s book on religions of Ancient India with a pin-up of a rather promiscuous-looking girl in a ruffley...could the scraps of fabric on her body even be considered clothing?

“Oh, come on! You don’t entertain yourself with this art form often enough for a fella your age-...”

“No, and there’s a reason for that.”

“And that is?”

Lucifer laughs, “It’s not my style.”

“What, so you’re above pin-ups, hmm?”

“No, no...that’s...she’s just not my type.”

Gabriel humms mischievously before leaving Lucifer to his own devices once again. A week later, Lucifer’s copy of The Iliad has a picture of a well-sculpted, scantily dressed young man who is staring seductively back at Lucifer from its place, taped on top of the page where there was supposedly an illustration of a scene from the previous page. In pencil, and in his brother’s
Lucifer can’t help but cackle as he thinks of his brother’s process in getting this picture, just for the purpose of making a joke. Gabriel still somehow manages to have the nerve to risk Lucifer’s own prank-war wrath even after he’s faced it so frequently in the past and has regretted it every single time. Gabriel is good at sensing things about people, though. This time, it was probably less of a prank and more of a way of confirming his suspicions regarding Lucifer’s “preferences”...Lucifer laughs to himself again and turns the page.

“You still have that book, I noticed,” the not-Gabriel says in an amused voice.

“It’s a good memory.”

“I believe you.”

“What do you think my other weakness is, then? I’m curious. And if you say narcissism, I will be extremely disappointed in you.”

“You’re distractible, as I said earlier.”

“And just how have I been--”

“Your sweet sheik, for instance.”

“...I’m sorry?”

“The boy you’ve fallen for. You spend so much time with him, after all--”

“Wait, do you mean to say that I have some sort of infatuation with Sam?”

“Bingo! You win a grand prize of confused sexuality! Or, wait, no, that’s his prize, not yours. Yours is a bit different.”

“What?” Lucifer laughs nervously. “Just because Gabriel teases me about the idea doesn’t--”

“Oh, I think it does, Luce. You think that man’s the cat’s pajamas.”

“I...he’s fine, yes, but--”

“Fine? Fine--oh, hell, Lucifer, you really don’t get it, do you? The way he looks at you when you talk to him? How flustered he gets around you all of the time? How he stares sometimes, just when he thinks you aren’t looking? Please. You’d have to be as blind as Dean to not see it, and even he’s got a sense of what’s going on.”

“Sam...he does all of that?”

“It ain’t just your imagination, Lucifer. That boy’s so confused over you, it’s almost painful to watch him try to figure himself out. It’s more adorable than anything I’ve seen for ages, and believe me when I say I’ve been around for quite some time and have seen a lot of things along the way.”

“Sam...really?”

“Sam really, yes.”
Sam is laughing at his joke. Lucifer can’t help but grin at the sound. A warmth fills his chest and spreads up his neck and down to his fingertips; he’s light-headed, and there are all sorts of odd, fluttering sensations filling his gut. He wants to lean on Sam’s shoulder, nuzzle at his neck and jaw with his nose and forehead, feel the vibrations of his laughter echo through both of their bodies...he wants to be something other than what he currently is to Sam. In his mind, sometimes, he isn’t Sam’s boss, he isn’t his brother’s doctor, and he isn’t some mysterious stranger visiting Sam’s life. He couldn’t possibly ask for that, though. Sam was risking enough by being associated with vodou at all. Being seen with Lucifer in public already calls for the wrong kind of attention.

But when their hands brush or when they chat like they know each other better than they know anyone else in the entire world, they feel like something else. Something undefinable. They feel happy and invincible. They feel whole for once in their miserably difficult lives when they feel that momentary, terribly cliche spark every now and then.

They feel right.

“The things that boy does to you by merely existing…” The not-Gabriel whistles and raises an eyebrow. “It’s sweet. You’re a couple of sweethearts.”

“How is he a weakness?”

“Oh, pay attention, will you? He distracts you.”

“How is Sam a distraction?”

“He creates diversions—unintentionally, of course—and keeps you from noticing me. He’s one more pin that’s been tossed into the juggling act, and that makes it just a bit harder to keep everything up in the air. Am I correct?”

“...I see.”

“So he’ll be the first to go, obviously.”

Lucifer blinks. He can feel his blood boiling at these words. No. That oversteps the last boundary in place. That does it.

“And what is that supposed to mean?”

“Exactly what it sounds like,” the not-Gabriel says in a matter-of-fact tone, far too casual for the conversation at hand. “The whole lovesick story line has just been grand so far, but it isn’t necessary anymore. It only gets in the way from here on out. I can’t really risk him coming to your rescue like some sort of moose in shining armor, can I? No. He’s first on my list. Of course, there’s you after that, as long as Gabriel remains incapacitated and no one else tries to step in. So, when all of that’s said and done, I win this game. You see? Might as well give in now.”

“I highly doubt that that is the most obvious option,” Lucifer replies as calmly as he can manage. “And who said anything about lovesickness?”

“What would you call this thing between you and Sam, if it isn’t love?”

Lucifer is at a loss for words. Love? He knows that he feels something for Sam that isn’t exactly normal for one friend to feel for another or for one business partner to feel for the other, but he
hasn’t ever considered that his emotions are profound enough to be called love. Maybe, though...maybe that is why his feelings make no sense to him. Love isn’t always supposed to be rational, according to popular belief. Lucifer always thought he’d know if he was in love. Apparently, that isn’t the case.

There is no doubt, though, that this is love. It might be one-sided, but that is one of the many hazards of loving a friend. If Sam truly feels this way, and if they both make it out of this alive, then maybe he could inquire. Maybe Sam is actually open-minded enough to consider a more private affair with another man--with Lucifer, specifically.

The not-Gabriel smirks (in a very not-at-all-like-Gabriel way) at Lucifer and chuckles quietly to itself. A storm is rising inside of Lucifer. Adrenaline courses through him like a flood of ice-cold water breaking through a levee.

“You’ve been studying me for quite some time, have you not?”

“I most certainly have been.”

“Then you know how I react when people I care about are placed in grave danger.”

“Yes, with blind actions driven by passionate anger.”

“No.”

“No?”

“Not anger. Passion, yes, but emotions do not cloud my judgement. Nothing holds me back for long, do you understand? I am very dangerous when my loved ones are threatened.”

“Maybe I should have said that narcissism was your fault, after all.”

“Confidence and determination are much different from narcissism.”

“Of course.”

Lucifer fixes the entity with a cold gaze. He feels the air shift in the room as the thing shifts uncomfortably. Good. That’s right. Be worried. Be nervous. Doubt.

“I’m going to make you wish that you had never entered my home, my life, or my head,” Lucifer states smoothly and calmly. He’s almost afraid of his own voice’s tone for a moment. “I am going to be waiting, and when you come to find me, I will destroy you in the most painful and humiliating way that I can. Do I make myself clear?”

“Taking the blood money approach, are we? Only resorting to violence and black magick when it’s personal. I see.”

“Do I make myself clear?”

“...Clear as crystal.”

“Good.” Lucifer says. His voice is barely above a whisper, but he knows he’s dreaming now. It’s his dream, and that means that he is in control. There is such a deep intensity behind his words that he has to resist allowing his pride to swell at the sound of them.

“Now. Get out of my head.”
Lucifer lifts his arm and flicks his wrist in a swatting motion at the air in between the two of them, and the not-Gabriel disappears. The noise comes back. The room is empty of people other than Lucifer. Everything is fading...going black...everything is becoming hazier and spotty and much harder to hold onto.

The last thing he heard before consciousness dragged him back into the land of the living was:

“...might be too late, Luci.”

And the room came into focus. He was lying on his back in his bedroom. Choking noises—gurgling, sputtering, strangled noises—came from his right. Maybe he was too late...

“No.”
The guard at the prison was chewing tobacco with loud wet slapping sounds and when Meg told him who they were there to see, he said “That freak,” without tone or inflection.

“Yes, that one.” Meg said flatly. “Can we get in?”

“What’s a nice girl like you doing seeing him?” The guard grinned his spotted grin at her, reaching for his keys. “Seems to me you ain’t got much cause to be here, with or without your gentleman friend, darling.”

Meg did not look at Sam as he said this. “He’s not my gentleman friend,” she replied, her voice like granite. “And I’m not a nice girl.”

The smile vanished from the guard’s face. He led them back into the depths of the prison. This was not a large building, and it mostly held people who were awaiting trial, but it was a strikingly unpleasant place. They wound their way through the damp grey tangle of cells. A few prisoners yelled some ugly things at Meg and one of them at Sam. Sam ignored them. He was still rigid with tension. Images of last night skipped through his head relentlessly. He had no time for anything except the vast unbearable ache of worry that filled his body. Somewhere at home Lucifer was in bed, silent and pale and unmoving. He looked at the blasted faces of the men in the cells and felt nothing.

Crowley was sitting very peacefully in the grimy corner of his cell, watching a fly crawl across the ceiling. His clothes were rusty and dank and he had a ragged growth of stubble, but he still possessed an untouchable composure. As Meg and Sam walked in front of his cell, his eyes drifted down to fix on them.

“So it’s time, then,” he said. His voice was quiet and slightly hoarse.

He nodded and stood, stretching languidly. In this dingy state, it became clear that he had a slight fold of fat on his stomach. “Where’s the one with the unfortunate name?”

“He’s not doing very well,” Sam said, keeping his voice even with difficulty.

“I thought as much. What was it?”

“Got Marinette to ride him for information. Didn’t end well.” Meg chewed her fingernail and glanced irritably down the hallway.

“Of course not. What’s the news, then? Did you get any?”

“Ghost of some kind. It wasn’t very clear. It’s been floating around looking like Luce’s dead
brother.” Who was, himself, nowhere to be found. Sam swallowed.

Crowley nodded again, understandingly. “I hate it when they do that. Shall we go?”

“Woah, woah, wait. Go? You’re not going anywhere.” The guard stepped forward, face heavy with distrust. “What is this?”

Meg rolled her eyes, dug in her pocket, and turned to face the guard. His look quickly melted from suspicion to surprise but before he could move she opened her hand and blew a puff of thick, smoky, powder in his face. It glittered slightly. The guard coughed, looked confused, and flopped over backwards onto the floor.

“Not exactly subtle,” Crowley commented, as a rumble of excitement went through the neighbouring cells.

“We’re the ones breaking you out,” Meg muttered, and dropped to her knees. A fan of shining pins emerged from her jacket, and she tucked a few between her teeth and set to work on the door of Crowley’s cell. A few cells down someone screamed “Break! It’s a break!” and she sighed heavily.

“Listen, we’re not breaking any of you assholes out,” Sam yelled. “Just this guy. So keep it down.”

“Why not?” someone called back.

“Because we don’t like you,” Meg said, and tugged Crowley’s cell open with an expert twist and whine of hinges. “These locks are pathetic. They need more focus on quality here, this place is about as escape proof as a paper bag.”

“Not really our problem,” Sam said tensely, looking around. He could hear footsteps. It was only a matter of moments before the guards started checking out the uproar.

“Thank you very much,” Crowley said, dusting himself off and walking out of the cell. “As soon as I’m done with our mutual problem, I will be exacting a grotesque and personal revenge on everyone involved in putting me there. It smelled. And the food was disgusting.”

“You’ll be short one person,” Meg said as they headed off down the hall between the rows of howling inmates. “Kubrick’s dead.”

Crowley’s eyebrows flew up his pale forehead. “Is he? Who do we have to thank for that?”

“Me,” Meg replied expressionlessly.

Crowley nodded easily. “Quite sensible. What I would have done. Can’t have him running around the city posing a threat to your people.”

“That was my thinking,” Meg said.

Someone yelled “Hey!” and they all turned at once. A guard was hurtling down the hallway towards them, fumbling for his nightstick. He was a big man, and moving fast. “Stop where you are! What are you—”

Sam waited until he was in reach and then hit him in the face as hard as he could. The man stopped short with an ugly crunch and plunged to the floor. There was a bright splash of blood on Sam’s knuckles. The guard was still moving, conscious in a vague sputtering way, so Sam kicked him in the head. He felt something collapse beneath the toe of his boot and the man stopped moving. He wasn’t dead. There was blood spreading dark through his hair. Sam’s hand hurt in a dull, elastic,
way. He clenched it and opened it, and looked up to see Meg and Crowley staring at him.

“The giant isn’t taking this very well, I see,” Crowley observed finally.

Sam shrugged. “It was quicker than the powder thing.”

“There are many uses to having an enormous ex-military type on your team,” Meg said, and grinned at Sam. “Let’s get out of here before you have to demonstrate any more of them.”

As they blew out of the doors, Crowley said “So the situation is dire. Do you people have a plan?”

“Sort of,” Meg answered grimly. “That’s where you come in.”

After Crowley had listened to the patchwork outline of the plan, laughed, and told them that they were insane but at least they were ambitious, he demanded that Meg and Cas both come with him as he went off to get supplies. “I’m wanted by the law and there’s something deeply nasty on the loose. I’m not going anywhere without at least two bodyguards,” he said. “And I don’t trust this one—” a nod at Meg “—to not stab me in the back if someone else isn’t watching.”

“You shouldn’t,” Meg replied, and so Cas was brought into the equation. Sam had declined. He was in no fit state to be wandering around the city, and besides, he wanted more than anything to be with Lucifer. It had been hard enough leaving him for this. They headed back to the shop, hiding Crowley’s face behind his coat on the trolley car and turning away at the least sign of a policeman or just a car moving too fast. The city seemed grey and tense, like it had been awake too long. The light was dull and numb. At the shop, Cas was collected, the situation was explained, and the three of them went back out in search of supplies. The type of ceremony they were attempting was, according to Crowley, “outrageously difficult and downright suicidal if not done right. At the very least we need some decent liquor. I don’t have any money, we’ll use yours.”

Before they left, Meg gave Sam a level, cool, look and asked him if he was really okay.

“I’m really okay,” Sam said, and gave her what he hoped was a convincing smile. “Just worried. I’ll feel better once I can check on Luce.”

And then they were gone. The small house was immense with silence. Outside crickets struck up a warm drone and the pale sunlight glazed the sky. Sam listened to the others thundering over the porch and down the road until they vanished. Then he went and got himself a glass of water, and went into Lucifer’s room to sit by his bed. He sat there, drinking his water and staring at the silent man who lay asleep in the tangle of blankets. The room was grey and still with all the lights turned off. Lucifer was utterly unmoving. Only the hollow rise and fall of his chest indicated that he was still alive, and that they hadn’t spent the last fourteen hours watching a corpse slowly decompose. His eyes were closed and his eyelashes lay perfectly delineated on his cheekbones, like they had been drawn in ink. If he wanted to, Sam could reach out and count them one by one.

He had not been prepared for this. He had not expected anything like this to happen to him. He was sitting at the bedside of a man who served ancient terrible things of immense power, a man who had been accused of murder, who lived in a world of insanity and unreality and shadows, and all he could think was that if this man died there would be nothing in the world that was bright or good or worth doing. Five weeks ago, he could not have cared less if Lucifer lived or died. Five weeks ago he was living a life where even the most frightening things could be defeated with a level head and a steady aim.
It wasn’t exactly that he had thought he knew how his life was going to go. Growing up the way he did, with Dean the only constant, life was full of questions—where’s Dad, where will we be tomorrow, what are we going to eat. He had been born into uncertainty. Then the war came, and that had brought with it a new type of chaos, chaos without meaning or explanation, chaos on a vast uncontrollable scale that happened no matter what he or anyone else could do. He had become used to the idea that any moment might bring death, and there was nothing to be done about it. He had never known where his life was going to take him, or how long it was going to last.

But this was something else. This was something he had never known existed. He was a different person now, living under totally different circumstances, in a world that had opened up around him like a flower. In this world, symbols were weapons. In this world, gods and ghosts showed up on a regular basis to make life incredibly complicated. There was magic running in the hot blood of the city. Women swore like sailors and snakes were holy. In this world, it wasn’t wrong or sick to feel about a man the same way you were supposed to feel about a woman.

He loved it, this strange, wonderful, new world. It was getting harder and harder to believe that he had ever thought he could be satisfied somewhere else. Most of all, he couldn’t believe he had thought he could be satisfied, or even survive at all, without Lucifer. There were things moving inside him when he looked at Lucifer that were stronger and more important than any of the loneliness or fear he had known. He felt lit up from the inside, like a Chinese paper lantern. The world was new and beautiful, and he knew, somehow that everything would be okay, that nothing could really touch him, as long as he could be with Lucifer through all of it.

He was also more afraid than he had ever been in his life. The fear of mustard gas and mortar blasts was nothing compared to this. The prospect of his own death was so easy. It occurred to him that this thing that was happening to him, which he still did not want to call by name, was awful as well as beautiful, because it meant that his life no longer belonged to him. You were so much easier to hurt when what was keeping you alive didn’t live inside your body anymore.

He did not know how long he sat there, consumed by these thoughts. He didn’t notice when the house door swung open and shut with a click. There was a soft rustle of footsteps, which he didn’t hear. The moment at which he realized someone else was in the house was when he looked up and Dean was standing in the door.

He started, before recovering himself. “Dean. You startled me.” He passed a hand over his face. “Who’s with you?”

“Nobody.” Dean took a few steps into the room. “I came by myself.”

“Very funny. Is it Cas? He’s supposed to be out with Crowley?”

“No, it’s not Cas.” Dean leaned against the wall, folding his arms. “I’m by myself, Sam.”

Sam blinked. “What—all the way here?”

“Yes,” Dean’s head turned. His eyes fixed on Sam, and Sam had the sudden, nauseous, feeling that Dean was actually seeing him. “All the way here.”

Which was, of course, impossible. He looked away, unsettled. “Why?”

“Wanted to see how things were.” Dean nodded absentl at the bed. “How is he?”

Something in Sam’s chest turned over and his blood ran backward, because Dean had never been in this room. He had no way of knowing where the bed was or if Lucifer was in it. He looked down
and saw his nails digging deep into the skin of his palms.

“Not great, but alive,” he said. His voice sounded stiff to him, and he prayed that whatever was pretending to be Dean wasn’t paying attention. “That’s the best we can hope for, right?”

Dean looked at him for a long, silent, moment, and then smiled brilliantly.

“Ahh,” he said. “I forgot. He can’t see, can he? And he’s never been in here before.”

Sam’s throat closed up. “That was it,” he said, very quietly. There was nothing even remotely weapon-like around him. The closest thing was the lamp by Lucifer’s bed.

“Thought so. Clumsy. Oh well.” Dean stretched. “Looks like we’ll have to do this the old-fashioned way.”

“Who are you?” Sam whispered.

“Right now? Dean.” That smirk again. “He wasn’t making much use of his body, so I thought I’d take it off his hands.”

Horror punched through Sam’s chest. “You mean that’s—you’re actually in his—”

“Exactly. So be careful.” Dean gazed at Sam and it was bizarre, almost terrible, to see awareness in his eyes. “He’ll still need it once I’m done.”

“I’m sorry to hear that,” Sam said, and grabbed for the lamp. His heart was beating so madly that he could barely hear; his fingers closed around the lamp and he glanced over at it. The second that he was looking away, something hit the side of his head with such force that for a moment the entire world shattered. The lamp dropped from his nerveless hand. He tried to remember how to breathe.

Dean had never been that strong.

There was blood rolling down his face. He rubbed a hand over it. Dean was standing over him, bending down, and on a flash of instinct Sam kicked out and caught his legs with all of his strength.

A jerk of surprise and Dean was down hard, on the floor with a crash that shook the windows, and Sam was crawling desperately away from him, trying to dig the ability to walk out of the static that was currently occupying most of his mind. The lamp was a few feet away; he didn’t know if he could reach it in time and he didn’t know if he wanted to. That was still Dean’s body, whatever was riding around inside it. When it came to Dean he was incapable of a lot of things which would otherwise be easy.

In the next second, what he was capable of became completely irrelevant as a hand closed around the back of his neck like a claw of steel wire. Sam choked helplessly as all the air pulled away from him and left him hanging in a grey vacuum. Dean peeled him off the floor with one hand, like he weighed nothing. His fingers felt like they were biting into Sam’s spine. For a moment there was nothing but the feeling of dangling from Dean’s hand like a broken doll, his mind screaming, and then the wall came rushing towards him like an oncoming train. Shrapnel and white noise exploded into his skull. He couldn’t feel anything above his neck. Plaster caught in the sticky smear of blood on his face. Dean’s hand pushed relentlessly forward, pinning him against the wall. He struggled to breathe or think.

“You know,” Dean said dimly, from behind him, “this is a shame. I was planning something slower for you. But when he wakes up and you’re already dead—that’ll have to be good enough.”

No, Sam thought. No, this isn’t how I’m going to die. It can’t be. He felt oddly sure of this, despite the fact that his throat was filling with blood and there were dark spots floating before his vision. He
pounded his fist against the wall, weakly, uselessly.

Then Lucifer said, whispering, “No,” and the pressure on Sam’s neck disappeared. He dropped to the base of the wall, twisting to look up. Lucifer was there, standing behind Dean, his face wasted and white. He was swaying but upright and his eyes were glittering and wild. Dean snarled incoherently and struck out in fury, clawing at Lucifer’s chest with a terrible blow. Lucifer’s shirt tore and bright flowers of blood sprang up against his skin. He stumbled but did not fall. His mouth opened, slowly, almost dreamlike. Blood gurgled down into his shirt and stained in black. He reached out and put his hand on Dean’s shoulder.

“No,” he said again. “Get out.” His voice was ragged and strained, but there was power humming in it, like the roar of the sea far away.

Dean’s eyes rolled back up in his head with pearly grace. His body went stiff, then limp, then stiff again. A colourless liquid oozed out of one of his legs and his face grew still and empty. He stood there for a moment and then folded to the floor. His eyes slid shut and he lay there unresponsive, amid the fragments of plaster.

Sam stared at him in shock, feeling the dumb struggle of injury inside his head. His body ached. He still hadn’t fully caught up to what was happening. He could feel blood on his face and a terrible fractured pain in his neck. Lucifer, miraculously, impossibly, awake and walking, dropped to his knees. There was a wet vivid stain of blood across his chest.

“Are you okay?” he gasped.

“Yeah,” Sam whispered, and threw up on Dean’s legs.

They put Dean out in the main room of the shop. He was heavy and they were both hurt; it took them a while, and Lucifer nearly passed out again at one point. Dean had no visible wounds and seemed largely like he was sleeping. Sam tried listlessly to scrub some of the vomit off him before Lucifer dragged him back into the bedroom.

“Will he be okay?” Sam asked, as Lucifer pulled him inside.

“He’ll sleep for a while and then he’ll be fine. Being ridden isn’t fun.” Lucifer shoved him at the bed. “Sit.”

Sam blinked, doing as he was told. “Why?”

“You’re hurt.” Lucifer was digging behind the bookcase, tossing things away.

“So are you,” Sam pointed out.

“You’re hurt worse.” A burlap bag emerged from the mess and Lucifer crossed to the bed and knelt at Sam’s feet. “Let me see that face.”

“Luce,” Sam protested weakly.

Lucifer waved his objection away. “Shut up. Here—” and he was holding Sam’s face, his clever fingers curling over the gash on his cheek. A sting of sudden pain struck and Sam flinched. Lucifer’s hand tightened around his jaw. “Stay still.” He had a tube of some pale greasy ointment in his teeth, which he was squeezing out onto his fingers.
Sam watched him the work. The absurdity of this situation gripped him. “You’re awake,” he said, somewhat stupidly.

Lucifer’s eyes flickered up at him. “Looks that way.” The ointment smeared over the pads of his fingers.

“No, I mean—how? You shouldn’t be. You were out for hours.”

A shrug. “It was my time to wake up.” He rubbed the ointment across Sam’s cheek and a fierce burst of chemical fire leapt across his skin. Sam jerked back. “Ow!”

“I can’t believe you were in the army.” Lucifer taped a bandage across the gash with quick deft strokes. “Move your head for me.”

“Do I have to?”

“Sorry.”

Sighing, Sam rolled his head back against his shoulders and around. There was a sharp complaint from his neck, but his spine felt more or less intact. Lucifer watched him, nodding. “Just bruised, probably. Anything numb, anything you can’t move?”

“I don’t think so.”

“Good. Any other problems?”

“I have plaster in my hair?”

Lucifer’s look darkened. “I’m being serious, Sam.”

“So am I! Luce, you’re fucking bleeding. Look at this!” He grabbed a wad of bandages out of the bag and pressed them to the crusted marks on Lucifer’s chest. “Look! He hit you. You need to take care of yourself too, this is—”

His voice failed. He realized, a bit too late, that his hand was on Lucifer’s bare chest, tangled in the rags of his shirt. He could feel the soft warmth of his skin, and the deep even beats of his heart. He wanted to pull away but at the same time had the sense that something luminous and impossible was happening, something almost magical that he had never experienced before. He was touching Lucifer. His hand was on his skin. He was terrified and he felt like his whole body was lit up, like he was full of fire.

He looked up at Lucifer, unable to breathe. Lucifer was staring up at him, lips parted. At first a crippling panic seized Sam. He doesn’t like it. He doesn’t feel it. Then he saw the glassy, drugged, look of his eyes. The opium stare. Lucifer’s chest was rising and falling underneath his hand. Too fast.

Lucifer swallowed and looked down, not moving. He didn’t try to remove Sam’s hand.

“It’s not bleeding anymore,” he said, voice carefully level. “It wasn’t as deep as it—“

Sam reached down, tilted Lucifer’s face up, and kissed him. There was a roaring delirium in his head. He was burning from the inside and he knew that if he didn’t do this now he might never do it, and if he never did it he would lose this shining madness in his nerves forever. Lucifer’s lips were silky, with an edge of wet heat. Sam felt his throat draw into cords of tension underneath his hand, and then let go. His lips softened. He tasted like sleep. After a moment, Sam felt the slick touch of
Lucifer’s tongue moving between his lips.

Sam had kissed people before. There had been girls, in school, and of course there was Jess; a thousand kisses with Jess. None of them had been like this. Lucifer’s mouth was sweet and clean, and he felt like there was light everywhere in his body and blood. He had not really understood what it meant to before now to kiss someone and recognize yourself, to welcome yourself home. And in the middle of all the insanity and violence, things suddenly seemed okay, somehow. The world was fucked up and bleeding, but that didn’t matter so much, because he was kissing Lucifer and that was so wonderful that it made everything else irrelevant. He was a good person and the world was basically decent and everything was going to be all right, because he was kissing Lucifer and Lucifer was kissing him back.

They pulled apart after a long moment. Sam’s hand lay on Lucifer’s throat. They stared at each other in perfect silence, and then one of them started laughing. Even later, neither of them was sure which one had started it. But within moments, they were both folded over in helpless, cramped, laughter. Sam gasped and choked with happiness. He felt delirious. He could taste God on his lips.

Lucifer gazed at him, shaking his head helplessly. “I thought you—“ he said after a moment, and then stopped, unable to continue.

“You thought?” Sam whispered. He still didn’t fully believe this was happening. Everything was too bright and too perfect. This had to be a dream. He wasn’t this lucky.

Lucifer shook his head wordlessly. There was a look of wonder on his face. He reached out and touched Sam’s cheek.

“I don’t believe this,” he said quietly. “I don’t—“

And then they were kissing again, long dizzy drowning kisses like they were trying to devour each other. Lucifer’s tongue curled around the edge of his mouth. His body was so close and so hot. Sam became aware that he was painfully hard, like a straining knot of nerves between his legs.

A hand slid up under his shirt, over his ribs. Fingers passed over one of his nipples and he gasped into Lucifer’s mouth, a searing pulse of arousal gripping his body. He felt Lucifer’s smile curling deep and evil against his lips. “You like that?” he whispered, and Sam nodded desperately, tasting the words under his tongue. He was harder than he could remember being in his life. He reached out and passed his hand over Lucifer’s crotch, feeling the bulge there, feeling Lucifer’s body stiffen. The button of his trousers caught his fingers. He pinched it open, and reached up to slide Lucifer’s suspenders off his shoulders. The other man pulled away, leaving an inch of space between Sam’s hungry lips and his. He was breathing hard and his eyes were glittering with excitement. One of his hands curled around Sam’s wrist. “Are you sure?” he whispered, his voice ragged.

“Yes,” Sam said, because this he was sure of, out of all the contradictions and complications and confusions in the world, he was sure that he wanted this and nothing could change that, and he reached out and pulled Lucifer back with him onto the bed.

Chapter End Notes

So how’d you like that one? Hmm?
Chapter 26

Chapter Summary

this chapter written by: Mer

Chapter Notes

yes, yes, I know. I missed last week. You know what that means, though.
Posting two at once, this time.

So general warnings for mind-fuckery, weird description, gore, and horror from here on out.
And...well, lots of emotions.

Hope you enjoy!

The air was warm and calm as it slowly filled Lucifer’s lungs and trickled back out. His pulse pounded and echoed through his body and his eyes were transfixed on the ceiling. Everything was good. Everything was at a stand-still, and everything was good.

Lucifer’s arm was lined up with the wall by his bed, and his head rested on a warm shoulder instead of a pillow. One long, tanned arm was draped behind his head and neck, and another was wrapped around his middle, both holding him in a lazy half-embrace. A contented (and it might have also been amused) hum sounded just next to his right ear. A nose nudged at the side of his head, almost reminiscent of a dog seeking attention from its human companion.

Sam Winchester: Great War veteran, protective younger brother, terribly handsome, ridiculously selfless, and arguably a human personification of a puppy.

“I don’t know what to say, now,” Sam’s voice murmured.

“I don’t think anything necessarily has to be said,” Lucifer replied. “If you wish to say something, though, I will listen.”

“If I come up with something, I’ll get back to you on it.”

Lucifer could think of too many things to say, however, and that was why he wasn’t starting a conversation. He wanted to say so many things in that exact moment. I think I might be in love with you. That was one idea that could discussed in depth at a later time, though. You’re beautiful. He’d heard that, though, hadn’t he? Lucifer had mentioned it...whether that was aloud or not, he wasn’t certain. Your brother is unconscious and in this house in case you forgot at some point. Not a good idea to do that just yet...he would give that a few more minutes before bringing it up. I want to do this again. That one...that just might have been the best choice.

Lucifer was clearly taking too long to reach a conclusion, because Sam said something as he was lost
in thought and he hadn’t heard a word of it.

“I’m sorry, what did you just say? I missed that.”

“Can this not be a one-time event? Can we...may I...well, I think you know what I’m trying to say.”

Lucifer turned his head to face Sam, which left their noses only a few centimeters apart. Sam stared at him with what could only be described as a hopeful, tentative look in his eyes. Lucifer’s gut flooded with a warm, contented feeling.

“Yes, I would very much like that, Sam.”

A soft smile settled onto Sam’s face as a relieved sigh escaped him. Lucifer mirrored his...what were they? Friends? Lovers? Partners? Something else entirely? He couldn’t decide what sounded best at the moment, but, then again, he couldn’t exactly get his mind to calm down for a single second anyway as he remained fixated on Sam’s eyes.

Those hazel eyes stared into him like nothing else ever had. They were like sunlight peeking through a canopy of leaves in late summer; they were colored glass flecked with gold dust; they were...they were unique, and they were Sam’s, and now Lucifer could gaze into them as much as Sam would let him and he wouldn’t feel self-conscious about it in the least. Lucifer felt the corner of his mouth curl upwards into a lopsided smile. Sam tipped his head forward so that their foreheads rested against each other. Lucifer’s eyes slid closed and he sighed contentedly. Sam turned his head and leaned forwards. There was a moment’s pause before Lucifer felt a pair of lips meet his own with a delicate touch.

Sam. That was Sam. Oh, hell, he wanted to repeat that name over and over again like a thankful prayer or a faithful vow or a joyous sigh or a relieved whisper…

Sam pulled away from him and let out a breathy laugh.

“What is it?” Lucifer asked as he opened his eyes again to look at the man in front of him.

“I’m...I don’t know. I’m happy, I suppose.”

“Happy looks good on you, Sam,” Lucifer replied. “Actually, most things look good on you, but--”

“Oh, quiet, you.” Sam nudged Lucifer’s shoulder jokingly. He then casually traced his fingertip over the outline of the part of the serpent tattoo that he could reach easily. Sam’s hand was warm, and even though it was rough and calloused, it felt like the softest thing in all of existence as it ran slowly down Lucifer’s arm. The bokor suppressed a shiver as Sam mumbled, “I don’t know if I’ve said this enough before now, but this tattoo is beautiful.”

Lucifer smiled and echoed Sam’s words: “Oh, quiet, you.”

“You know,” Sam commented, “you are far too pale for someone who spends so much time in the sun.” Lucifer hummed in agreement.

“I have a mixed-race family background, too.”

“Even more strange, then.”

“Simply improbable,” Lucifer stated with a shrug. “My mother always told me that we were descended from Marie Laveau--do you know who that is?”
“Yeah, isn’t she the one whose grave is out in the oldest part of the St. Louis Cemetery?”

“So it is believed, yes. That Marie Laveau.”

“Wow...I wonder if you really are, then.”

“It would explain the strength in my connection to the spirits and loas, I suppose,” Lucifer conceded. “I like to think that my mother was correct in her statements. She rarely said anything without thoroughly investigating the veracity of her words beforehand.”

“Your mother sounds like an interesting person,” Sam commented.

“She was that. In most senses, it is probably accurate to say that she was much like Marinette, actually.”

“Really?”

“Strong, beautiful, confident...of course, she might not have been the best with children in her natural state, but she did an excellent job with the life she was given. Not everyone is dealt a good hand in life.”

“That is true, I suppose.”

Lucifer smiled and watched Sam as Sam continued to watch him.

“What was Mary Winchester like?” Lucifer asked on a whim. The question made Sam pause for a moment as if he was completely caught off guard. He blinked after a moment and shrugged before he continued tracing his fingers over Lucifer’s skin.

“I don’t know first-hand. She died in a house fire when I was six months old. Dean says she was sweet and patient beyond belief. She was tough, but there was a softness about her at the same time. I...wish I’d been able to meet her.”

“I see where you get it all from, then,” Lucifer stated quietly. Sam chuckled.

“That’s the single most clichéd thing that I have ever heard you say to me.”

“Oh, I doubt it will be the last comment of its kind coming from this sap,” Lucifer said while pointing to himself. Sam laughed at him and shook his head.

“Questioning my choice in bedfellows.”

“I sure hope that there aren’t too many more bedfellows you’ve had to choose lately…”

“Figure of speech, Luce. It’s just you.”

Lucifer grinned and pecked Sam’s nose with a light kiss before sitting upright. Dean wouldn’t likely wake up soon, but just in case they had any more unexpected visitors anytime soon...clothing would be a good option. He grabbed his shirt from where it had been discarded and began buttoning it up. Sam reached over and gently tapped Lucifer’s hands, offering to take on the task himself.

“I can button my own shirt, Sam.”

“Who says that I’ll let you, though?” Sam retorted with a sly expression on his face. Lucifer rolled his eyes and allowed Sam to finish fiddling with the garment. He could get used to this, he decided--Sam standing close to him, Sam smiling like Lucifer had his pure, undivided attention, Sam trying to
take care of him...all of it was too perfect.

They were most of the way assembled again by the time they heard a rhythmic knock at the door. The two men frowned at each other. It was a bit early for anyone to be arriving. Sam shrugged and walked through the green curtain that separated the two main rooms of the shack. Lucifer grabbed his arm as he reached the other side. Sam stopped obediently in his tracks and threw the bokor a confused look until Lucifer reached up and ran his fingers through Sam’s hair to keep it from looking like he’d just rolled out of bed.

Just as Lucifer had finished, a loud crashing noise came from the basement and caused both of them to jump. Another knock sounded from the door. Lucifer glanced between the two directions with a frown on his face, suddenly feeling very uneasy.

“I’ll get the door, you check what’s in the basement. Okay?” Sam suggested. Lucifer nodded and grabbed a drum mallet off of the table as he walked slowly towards the basement door. He pressed his ear up to the wooden panelling, but he heard nothing. He flipped the light switch by the door to its “on” position and opened the door cautiously.

From the top of the staircase, he couldn’t see anything out of sorts, so he followed the stairway down a little further so that he could peek into the rest of the room. The entire ground floor smelled like dust and dead things...dead thing, to be precise--the pastor’s body was supposed to be taken care of that day, and, due to recent complications, it had nowhere to go until Lucifer had enough free time to recruit some help in removing it in a discreet manner. Something had to have made that noise, though, and Lucifer was afraid to think of what that might entail.

And there it was: a jar, now only broken glass, lying on the floor about two meters away from the pastor’s body. That was the jar that was supposed to hold the ashes of the spider charm Crowley had given him...except the ashes weren’t among the shattered glass. Lucifer glanced around the area of the basement. The lights flickered, and all of the sudden…there it was. A cloud of ash that resembled billowing smoke surrounded the dead man’s body on the floor. The bokor could only watch in horror as he remained helpless in the middle of the small stairway.

The ashes shot into the mouth of the pastor; the body arched off of the ground and trembled as the smoke-like cloud completely disappeared into it. Lucifer couldn’t move. He was somehow frozen in place, unable to act or even think coherently.

Shit.

He did somehow manage to stumble back up a couple of steps as the pastor’s body rose to its feet. The thing raised its head and stared at Lucifer with solid black eyes. The lights continued to flicker, but not as intensely as they had earlier.

“Hello, Luci,” the thing said. It began to slowly move across the floor and towards the stairs. “So nice to see you again in person, and so soon, too.”

“I thought you couldn’t take a physical form,” Lucifer replied. This was the thing impersonating Gabriel; there was no doubt in his mind about it. The thing smiled wickedly back at him, the flesh taught in some places and decaying in others. Although it was difficult to see at first, Lucifer could tell that the entire back of the body was bruised from the blood simply sitting there for multiple days. Despite the rigor mortis setting in, the thing seemed to be succeeding in working out the kinks in its joints as it moved with unnatural calm across the floor.

“I can’t call it my own form, if I do this all of the time,” it replied with a raspy voice that sounded more like it was being made with a dry double-reed than with human vocal chords. A shiver ran
down Lucifer’s spine.

“What do you need a physical form of your own for, though?” Lucifer asked in an attempt to stall its progress. “I still don’t understand your motives.”

“I need it because I want it,” the thing explained. “I am a creature of desire. I have no motive other than a want for more. More everything all of the time. I want and I want and I always get.”

Lucifer’s heart pounded in his chest as he stumbled backwards up a couple more steps. He wasn’t nearly strong enough to take this thing on his own. Not in his current condition, at least. He’d sooner pass out from exhaustion than he could summon the energy that it would take to combat with the creature that was approaching him (now somewhat faster than it had been just a moment before, he noted). Maybe he could reason with it.

On second thought, no. That was a terribly stupid idea. That never worked with unfamiliar vengeful spirits.

“You call up Sammy Winchester and the vodou crew yet? I’m sure they’d just love to come running to your aid against an unknown force, wouldn’t they? I’m up for a fight, Lucifer. Are you?” The thing cackled at him mockingly. Lucifer’s throat felt dry.

“How do you fight something you don’t know how to define, anyway?” It smiled at Lucifer from the foot of the steps. “Well, that’s simple, isn’t it? You don’t. You flail about and you fight and you go down swinging, of course, but you fail despite it all. You either resist it futilely or you give in before you get a chance to waste anymore time and energy. You’re done for, Lucifer. Might as well admit it now and get this over with.”

“You think you’re invincible, don’t you?” Lucifer asked, hit with a sudden realization.

“I know that you can’t fight something you don’t--”

“But do you know that there’s a problem with your plan, here?” Lucifer interjected.

“What would this problem be?”

“While you were gloating, you see, you managed to confirm my one suspicion that I had about you.”

“And that is…?”

“Baron Samedi.”

The thing’s smug expression faltered slightly, but it kept quiet and listened intently as Lucifer continued.

“While he doesn’t seem to care too much for my requests, he always, always, comes when a Novak or Shurley calls. I’ve never understood why, but he does. And, from what it sounds like, he’s got a high price on your head...or at least on whatever head you’re in at a given moment.”

The thing stared calculatingly at Lucifer for a moment before speaking.

“You’re too weak to call upon him.”

“I’m not the only Novak or Shurley in town,” Lucifer said, “and I am most certainly not the only bokor who is capable of contacting Ghede Loas.”

“Why you...you are much more impressive than I thought you were. Fuck...” It shook its body’s
head frustratedly and laughed bitterly to itself.

“I suppose that that will just make killing you that much more satisfying, now, won’t it?”

_Now would be a good time to run._

Lucifer whirled around and swung the door to the basement open and slammed it shut behind him as fast as he possibly could. The thing clambered up the stairs with very little grace and attempted to lunge at him, but it was too late by the time it made it to the top of the steps. The thing hit the back of the door hard. Lucifer stood with his full weight pressed up against the outside of the door and braced it as best as he could while he fumbled around for the key to lock it once again. He snatched the small key off of the near corner of the cluttered rectangular table, shoved it into the slot on the handle, and gave it a firm twist. He switched the lights in the basement back off and, just for safe measure, shoved the back of a chair up under the door handle. With a heavy and relieved sigh, he finally moved away from the door. The thing continued to try and break into the shop space, but its attempts were useless. Lucifer blinked his eyes hard and tried to control his breathing again; he was far too low on power to be shooting his system with that much adrenaline all at once.

“What the hell was that?”

Lucifer spun around and stared at Sam who had somehow approached him from behind. He had half-expected to see the creature from the basement standing there instead. He stared up at a worried looking-Sam and stated as plainly as he could:

“What problem.”
Chapter 27

Chapter Summary

this chapter written by: Mer

Chapter Notes

Long chapter with some surreal description in it at points, okay?
Same note: warnings for weird narration, trippy shit, body horror, gore, and all of the stuff in the tags. All of this shit and more is going down in these last several chapters.
Hope you enjoy it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sam opened the door to see a confused-looking Castiel and a rather smug-looking Crowley on the porch, each holding a couple of canvas bags filled with miscellaneous items, most likely intended for use in the summoning ritual.

“But I don’t understand why--”

“Cassie, luv, it was a figure of speech. Don’t worry your pretty little head over it. Hello, there, moose.”

“Meg’s not coming?” Sam asked.

“Not sure,” Crowley replied. “Cas made sure that she knew all of the details of our rather hazy plan to rid everyone’s favorite bokor of this dark entity creature, but I haven’t heard a yea or nay from her since then. Poor dear’s exhausted from breaking me out of the pen, I suppose. Then again, maybe she just thinks that Lucifer no longer trusts her enough to let her lend a hand.”

“Lucifer’s pretty forgiving to people he likes,” Sam said. “I doubt that she has much reason to worry about as far as his trust in her goes. Here, come on inside so we can get working.”

Crowley and Castiel entered the shop and set their bags down on the front counter. Sam shut the screened door and the main door behind them. He eyed the basement warily, his curiosity making him feel antsy and nervous. The crash downstairs had sounded like it was created with a good deal of force, even though it didn’t sound loud enough to be a shelving unit or something large toppling over. It sounded like someone had broken a window, even though he knew that there were no windows in the entire above-ground basement.

“Where is Lucifer?” Castiel asked. Sam snapped out of his thoughts and watched Castiel peek around the counter as if his cousin was hidden somewhere preparing to pop out of nowhere and surprise them all.

“He went downstairs to check on a noise we heard. Should be up anytime soon.”
“Got mice or something?” Crowley asked with a frown.

“I hope,” Sam mumbled in reply. He took the bags from their place on the countertop over to the rectangular table, which had been pushed up against the shelves by the basement door.

“Could you two help me out by getting all of the furniture out of the way?” Sam waved his hand at the other two men in the room. “I’ll roll up the rug once you do.”

“Certainly,” Castiel said. He and Crowley went to work immediately, shoving piles of books up against the walls and stacking chairs for easier mobility. Sam watched as Castiel approached the upholstered chair in the corner of the room and offered to help, only for his suggestion to be politely turned down. Sam stood back and waited to see how Castiel struggled with moving the heavy piece of furniture; it was one of the heavier pieces of furniture on the main floor of the shack and was only ever moved or adjusted while Lucifer was possessed by some loa. At other times, Lucifer and Sam just deemed it pointless to even try moving it because of how much effort such an action would take.

It would be an understatement to say that Sam was surprised as Cas pushed the chair back against the far wall of the room (with what appeared to be very little effort). Sam realized that he had no idea of what Castiel looked like when he wasn’t wearing his trench coat and his hand-me-down-looking dressy-casual clothing. He could be lean and soft like his cousin, but he could also be extremely physically fit and well-toned, too. And he had thought that Lucifer was the mysterious one all this time...in fact, knew very little about Castiel at all, even though they technically lived under the same roof.

Sam pulled his mind from thoughts of his strange friend and rolled up the Persian rug with some assistance from Crowley. They carried it over to the side of the room with the turntable and the shelves with obscurely labelled bottles and jars. The group then examined their work space for a brief moment. After receiving a nod of approval from Crowley, they began to set up what they needed for the summoning.

The door to the basement suddenly swung open and a familiar blond figure darted out from behind it before slamming it shut again as fast as possible. The bokor pushed his shoulder against the door as if holding it shut for some reason when, all of the sudden, something rammed into the door from the side of the basement and shook the wall, door, and bokor with all of the force that it had expended. Lucifer grabbed a small, brass key off of the table with the canvas bags on it and he fumbled with it for a moment before slipping it into the lock and forcefully turning it and pulling it back out. He flipped the switch that was on the wall next to the basement door and shoved one of the only not-stacked wooden chairs underneath the jiggling handle in a flimsy barricade of sorts. Lucifer stood back and panted, staring at the door. Sam approached him carefully to check if he was alright, but all that he could manage to say was:

“What the hell was that?”

Lucifer spun around with his arms raised to defend himself, but relaxed as soon as he made eye contact with Sam.

“Problem,” Lucifer stated, clearly trying to catch his breath.

“Unusually large mice?” Crowley asked, his tone half-mocking and half-hopeful.

“Much worse,” Lucifer said. He shuffled over to the long side of the table and braced himself against it. “The thing. It’s down there right now, but we don’t have much time before it gets out.”

“Damn,” Crowley hissed. Sam ran a nervous hand through his hair and exchanged a glance with
Crowley. The other bokor nodded to him and picked up the pace. He threw ingredients and objects around to the rest of them so that they could cut down on preparation time. Lucifer explained to Sam exactly what to do with the offerings that Crowley had had him assemble, and Sam suddenly realized part of the way through, that the pounding on the basement door had ceased. Every one of them paused to stare nervously at the door before hurrying to get back to their tasks.

“Sam, I’m not strong enough mentally or physically to fully commit myself to doing anything helpful during...whatever it is that you’re doing. I might not even be able to do talk you through this if you need my help. I need you to be able to take this task on without me. Just get rid of this thing for good, will you? Do this for me, Sam, and I promise all debts will be considered paid.”

“Why wouldn’t you be able to help?”

“I will try to do what I can, Sam, but I don’t know exactly what you all are planning to do, and although I will hope for the best, you have to be my second in the case that I can’t assist you all.”

Sam nodded. He sat a few things down on the table, but Lucifer clearly didn’t pay much attention to them. If he’d seen the top hat and jacket, he would have known exactly what was going on in a matter of seconds. Crowley, Castiel, and he were perfectly capable of following their plan on their own, but it would all go over so much easier if Lucifer could work with them, too. If Lucifer wore himself out any more, though, Sam was worried that the poor fellow would simply collapse and sleep for two or three days afterwards.

“Are you okay?” Sam asked. He watched Lucifer’s small, slow, and almost painful-looking movements as he sat down in a chair by the table.

“Hmm? Oh, yes. Just mentally exhausted.”

“Sure that’s all?”

“I would tell you if I thought otherwise.”

Sam patted Lucifer’s shoulder and let his hand rest there as they stared at each other. They were both aware of the other assessing their condition, but neither of them made any motion to stop it from happening. Both of them came from families in which they filled the role of a protective brother, Sam realized; it would be against their natures to not bring their instinctual care for their families over into their own relationship, even if they didn’t have a specific label for themselves just yet.

“I’m going to get the colored specs from the other room,” Sam said in order to break the silence. Lucifer nodded in response.

“Good idea. Be careful.”

“I’ll be right back,” Sam stated over his shoulder before he ducked into the back room. The air smelled like stale soot and a little hint of mineral water. It was weird, but Sam decided to ignore it for the time being. He searched the room until he found the dark-tinted glasses that sat on one of the shelves by Luce’s bed. (Apparently Baron Samedi had snatched a similar pair off of a vodouist’s face at a ritual that Crowley had been at a few months prior. The loa had stated that he simply wanted to try them out and he proceeded to wear them for the next couple of days. Sam just happened to have a pair of tinted glasses of his own and brought them along in hopes that when they summoned the Baron, he would appreciate them as an offering along with the hat and jacket.) Sam picked the glasses up, stuck them in his pocket, and turned quickly to walk back into the shop.

...Except when he walked through the curtain, he found himself stepping back into the back room as
if he was entering through the door that led outside. Sam blinked hard. What? He glanced back through the curtain he had entered through and...yes, sure enough, there was an exact replica of the same room on the other side.

*I'm going crazy*, Sam thought to himself. *I've been on this job far too long and I have finally gone one-hundred percent insane.*

He walked over to the washroom door in the impossible room and opened it. On the other side, there was a staircase like the one that should have led up to the storage room on the second floor. It should have opened to show a washroom with a tub and a single, curtain-covered window.

*What the hell?*

Sam shook his head and stepped back out of the doorway. He had to be dreaming. He fell asleep next to Lucifer or something and then just had the most ludicrous dream he’d had in months. That would have made sense.

The only thing that made him think otherwise was that it was all far too real. It felt like reality felt. Controllable dreams never lasted very long when Sam had them, so why would this one be so ridiculously long? Sam slapped the sides of his face and rubbed at his eyes. What was he supposed to do? Nothing had prepared him for this--not training in the armed forces, not fighting in France, not working in the Roadhouse, not learning about vodou culture, not anything. It was terrifying.

He didn’t have to make any immediate decisions, thankfully, because at that moment, a familiar person stumbled down the steps cursing the whole way and absolutely scaring Sam to the point of making him jump.

“Dean?”

“Sam! Oh, thank God I finally found you. Where the fuck am I and why is this place so damn huge?”

“You’re in Lucifer’s home and shop,” Sam explained, “but this place is tiny. I don’t know what you mean.”

“Nah, Sammy, those stairs are a helluva hike.”

“There are probably twenty-five steps tops in the entire place--”

“Nah, this set’s got more like a hundred.”

Sam practically felt the color drain from his face.

“You aren’t exaggerating or joking with me or anything, are you?” he asked in as serious and sturdy of a voice as he could manage. Dean frowned.

“Why would I joke about stairs, Sam? No. Those steps are a fucking nightmare for somebody who can just manage to make out an outline of something that’s five feet in front of him.”

“Something’s horribly wrong,” Sam muttered. “We need to get out of here as soon as possible.”

“I second that motion. You lead the way...as long as I don’t have to go back up those damned steps again, I’ll probably complain only minimally.”

They walked back into the original room that Sam had been in and through the washroom door in
there, they walked into what looked like the stairwell that led into the basement. *Not right not right not right*, Sam’s mind chanted at him as he and Dean walked down the short flight of stairs. Dean grumbled—something about steps and darkness—but followed closely behind Sam, one hand placed on his younger brother’s shoulder to keep track of him in the dim lighting. The bottom of the stairwell led to what looked like the top floor’s storage room. Sam could feel his heart rate pick up as he went back up the stairs and found himself entering the back room of the shack through the green curtain would have been...if it had been there...which it wasn’t.

“Easy there, Sammy,” Dean said from behind him. “What’s going on? You’re panicking. And don’t lie and say you aren’t because I can tell that you definitely are.”

“This house has a shop room, an above-ground basement, one small stairwell to the basement, one somewhat larger stairwell to the top floor, a back room that serves as a living space, and a washroom. That’s it. That’s all there is. So why do we walk through one door, and walk into the wrong room?”

“...so this place isn’t supposed to look like some sort of freaky labyrinth?”

“No. It’s easier to navigate Lucifer’s shack than it is to navigate our place, Dean. This is wrong. This is all wrong.”

Dean stiffened and suddenly stepped past Sam and walked towards the back door.

“Let’s keep moving, then.”

“We’ll just confuse ourselves even more, Dean.”

“Something’s following us. I don’t know how I can tell, so don’t ask me, but I don’t really want to be minotaur chow or something because I stood around and acted all confused and stuff, alright? So let’s get moving.”

Sam followed Dean through the door that was supposed to lead them into the backyard but instead they found themselves...in the basement. This time, when they climbed the stairs, it seemed like the stairwell was stretching with each step they took. They eventually reached a door at the top of the now 200 or so steps that led up from the basement. Dean put his hand on the doorknob and, after allowing Sam to catch his breath for a second, opened the door. A long, dark room stretched out in front of them. It looked like someone had taken the basement and pulled it apart lengthwise like a clump of taffy. The brothers trudged down the middle of the space and searched for doors hidden in the shadows, but found absolutely nothing of use until they reached the end of the long room. A window with a small curtain that dangled over it stood before them. Sam pulled the curtain back and opened the window. On the other side, there was a view of the washroom from over the tub...but the room was tipped on its side like the entire thing, furniture and all, had been rotated 90 degrees.

“Oh please tell me we’re not--”

“We are.”

“Through a window?”

“Yep.”

“Shit.”

Sam crawled through the (thankfully not very small) window and helped Dean follow after him. As soon as they both stepped into the new room, gravity shifted around them and they both fell to the floor of the tipped room. They stood upright after making sure that both of them were okay and
stared back through the window. Sure enough, they had rotated with the room itself.

“Let’s keep moving.” Sam said, his voice starting to waver ever so slightly.

Dean nodded in agreement and followed Sam into the next room through the door at the other end of the room. The back room of the shack stood before them just as it should have, but someone walked past them without sparing them a single glance, carrying a small pot with what smelled like melted wax in one hand, and exited through the curtain that led to the shop room...and Sam could have sworn...no, that’s not possible.

“Sam? Was that...did I just see you walk right past us?”

“...Let’s just keep moving, Dean.”

Sam followed his doppelganger through the curtain and was absolutely unprepared for the sudden shift in gravity that occurred once again, flinging him to his side and onto the floor of the new, rotated room. Dean must have paid more attention, though, as he grabbed onto the door frame just in time to swing down next to Sam on the hardwood that made up the floor of the uppermost level of the house. Instead of taking off down the stairs again, the brothers climbed out of the window that led onto the roof...well, it normally led onto the roof, at least. This one led back into the basement.

A figure stood with its back to them in the middle of the room. The back of its head and neck were severely bruised and the skin looked wrong...and it was slightly bloated in a few places, too. It straightened its posture as soon as the brothers entered the room. Sam and Dean froze in place.

“How lovely of you to join me.” The voice came from the man...thing...in the middle of the room. The voice was unfamiliar, even though Sam knew exactly who the body belonged to.

“Luci and I were just talking about you boys a little while ago, and I must say I am astonished by your sudden show of confidence, Sam, and your stonewall brother over there, too. Your codependence is really something unparalleled, as well.” It turned to face them. The body of the pastor from the Southern Baptist church stood before them, but its eyes and the way it carried itself across the room towards them...that was just not natural.

“Now, I’m afraid I have to follow up on a promise that I made, and I would say that I’m sorry about what comes next, but I’m really not.”

It lunged at the brothers suddenly, much faster than a decaying body should have been able to move (even when miraculously animated). The two dodged its first attack, but had only one quick means of escape available: the stairs. Dean shoved Sam up the steps first and shouted, “Go!” as the thing in the room gathered its strength and awareness for its next move.

“Come on, Dean!” Sam said as he backed up the stairs.

“Go, Sam! You better damn well make it up those stairs, I swear to all that is holy.”

Yes, sir.

The thing approached the stairs and Dean began backpedaling up the staircase, staring at the space where the pastor’s body stood about to spring. It lashed out and tripped over the first few steps as Dean stumbled backwards and out of its way. Sam scrambled up the stairs with his brother close behind him. The thing made an animalistic growl and threw itself at Dean again, this time snagging its nails on Dean’s pant leg and slicing through the fabric and into the skin. Sam reached out to help his brother, but Dean shoved him up the last couple of stairs.
“I said GO, goddamnit!”

The thing sprung up and sank its nails and teeth into Dean’s back and neck, knocking both of them forwards and sending them tumbling out of the doorway as soon as Sam turned the doorknob. Dean cried out in pain, and Sam jumped up onto his knees from his place on the floor of whatever room they’d gotten into that time. Dean gasped for air as Sam shoved the pastor’s body off of his brother and all but threw it back down the stairs before dragging Dean all of the way into the room and closing the door firmly behind them.

Sam tried to catch his breath for a moment but was interrupted when Dean made a sputtering, gurgling noise next to him.

Nonono.

He hadn’t gotten a good look at Dean as they were scrambling out of the basement. His neck looked like it had been shredded down to muscle on the side that the thing had attacked him. Its nails had sliced clear through his clothing and into his back and side, digging deep grooves past his skin and… and into the muscle and possibly past that too. It looked like the creature’s fingers had dug into the wounds, making them resemble bullet wounds. Everything was bleeding profusely. Arteries, veins… nothing was spared. It was like an animal attack. Reminded him of images of livestock that had supposedly been ripped to shreds by a chupacabra or a wendigo out west and up north. No human could do this with bare teeth and nails even if one put forth one’s best effort.

Sam felt like he was going to be sick.

He felt sick because he’d seen Dean die in his nightmares so many times—shot down by enemy troops, beaten to death by torturers who couldn’t get intel from him, hit by an automobile he couldn’t see coming, alcohol poisoning finally getting to him—but he had never imagined… no, he’d never thought of Dean as torn apart by claws, bitten at like a piece of roadkill, or lying there in front of him, suffocating on his own blood as it oozed out of him and onto a hardwood floor in a Vodou bokor’s shack in New Orleans, Louisiana.

“Dean…” His voice was breaking and he knew it. His brother didn’t care, though. Dean leaned into Sam’s touch as he was pulled into an embrace.

“Sam?” he’d managed to croak back. Sam tipped his brother back away from him but he braced the back of Dean’s mostly shredded neck and scratched head so that they could see each other, eye-to-eye. Sam whispered a “yeah?” in response.

“I’m…I want to let you know that”—wet coughing interrupted him, and with a gurgling inhale he continued—“I’m… I’m proud of us.”

Sam smiled at that. It was a grim, devastated smile, but he agreed with Dean. They had made it this far. How could they ask for more? Dean returned the faint smile for a moment before his breathing slowed and his eyes closed and…

He’d stopped breathing. Sam knew it the moment that it happened. He could practically feel it. Sam pulled his brother into a tight embrace and let himself release everything he’d been holding back, opening the floodgates after a few moments of pure agony. He knew that he was sobbing quietly, and he knew that Dean wouldn’t care that he did, even if he could hear it at that moment.

A gentle hand rested on Sam’s back, in between his shoulderblades, and moved in comforting circles. Maybe Sam was actually developing a sixth sense, because he didn’t need to ask to know who it was in the room with him. He’d met him more than once before, after all. Sam looked up to
see a familiar man with golden-brown hair and hazel-leaning-light-brown eyes that Sam wanted to say looked terribly sad and distant, but he couldn’t be certain. The man knelt down next to him and had a virtually unreadable expression on his face.

“Gabriel,” Sam whispered as he tried to compose himself again. “You’re okay?”

“Not entirely,” Gabriel replied in a soft voice. “I need to ask something of you, and this is a terrible thing to do right now, but you need to help and I don’t want to sit back anymore than anyone else in this house wants me to.”

“Prove that it’s you,” Sam said. “Just for the sake of logic.”

“I came to you in a dream,” Gabriel stated with ease, “and only because your house had undergone several different cleansing treatments and you had a talisman tucked under your pillow that you didn’t want to tell anyone about. It was a unique thing, somewhat resembling the Seal of the Power-Angels, but not quite copying it down to perfection. You added a bit of your own personal flair to it. I was impressed that you’d given into your urges to practice a bit of magic, to say the least.”

“And the dream?”

“Those tea cups that Dean would have smashed if you ever brought them home.”

“That’s good enough for me,” Sam replied shakily. He looked down at Dean for a moment, and then laid him gently down on the floor. He rose to his feet and stared for a long moment, embracing the buzzing numbness in his head before it left him entirely.

“So,” he said without tearing his eyes away from Dean’s body, “what do you need?”

“A vessel,” Gabriel explained. “I need to possess you. Temporarily, of course. It’s still a possession, though, and I still need your consent.”

Sam sighed. After a long pause, he nodded his head.

“Do it.”

Chapter End Notes

...not gonna lie. This is the first chapter I've ever written of any story that made me choke up while I drafted it. Don't let it discourage you from future chapters though. It gets more...weird from here on out, I suppose. Let us know how badly this crushed your souls.
Chapter 28

Chapter Summary

this chapter written by Sarah

Chapter Notes

Terribly sorry for the long wait. I really just was out of it these past few weeks. But now I'm updating with two chapters again! 'Cause maybe I'll just give you two at the end of this week, too, so you don't have to wait for an epilogue, hmm? Sound good?

General warnings again for surreal and disturbing descriptions, body horror, gore, and general "wtf" moments. Major (but relatively expected) supporting character death coming up at some point in the near future, too.

Sam wasn’t there.

The world grew narrow and delirious around him, because when he turned away from the basement door, Sam wasn’t there. Lucifer felt his heart give a weak start and fall out of his chest. It was more than the fact that he couldn’t see Sam; it was the sense that he truly wasn’t there, that he was not in the building in any way that Lucifer would recognize. Maybe that should have been comforting. It wasn’t.

A second after realizing this, he came to the more immediate realization that his house had gone extremely strange. He stood in the middle of a funhouse madness of walls and beams and broken glass, the walls rippling and bending, the floor twisting into impossible, many-dimensioned geometries of confusion. A door opened up in the wall by his head, but instead of looking out into the room he knew was beyond it, there was a river of blood speckled with small silver fish within. He stared into it, mesmerized. The house was melting around him, shifting into something demented and bizarre. A cloud of shattered glass floated past him. The ceiling buckled and swelled outwards, as if it were a sore about to burst.

Inside him, a very small, calm, voice, the voice that had kept him alive through years of dealing with nasty, incomprehensibly powerful, beings, said, this is it. It’s all happening now. Everything is ending. This is the moment that determines if we win or lose.

And then, with perfect certainty: I need Sam.

“There you fucking are,” Meg hissed, and grabbed his wrist. He stared at her numbly. Her eyes flickered up above his head and she yanked him to one side with such force that she almost pulled him to the floor. He stumbled towards her just as the ceiling sucked towards the floor with the fluid inescapability of quicksand. Lucifer stared as the rolls of wood smacked shut right where he had been standing. “Fuck,” he said mildly.
Meg was tugging on his arm, dragging him backwards through the shifting architectural nightmare. He drifted behind her, staring around them in glazed shock. One of his windows drifted dreamily past them. A thin stream of something that looked disturbingly like viscera ran across the jigsaw floor.

They turned a corner in a whirl of splinters and steps that led nowhere, and Crowley looked up from the veve he was sketching on the floor in chalk and cornmeal. There was a bulging purple bag by his side, looking somewhat the worse for wear but still intact. There were splinters in his hair.

His eyebrows flew up. “This is a surprise.”

“He’s awake,” said Meg grimly, hauling Lucifer forward.

“So I see.” Crowley returned to the veve. “How convenient. More hands.”

They were in the remains of what had at one point been the front room of the shop. A halo of glass bottles lay scattered in the air around them, glittering in the ghost light. The floor shifted into spirals and hieroglyphs of melting wood. The windows and door were floating aimlessly around as usual, but, strangely enough, even as they blew through the air, they seemed to be looking out onto a dozen different views, none of which Lucifer was familiar with. A shattered pane of glass blew past him, and through it he saw a vast scorched desert of cracked earth under a mercilessly bright sky.

All he could think was, what if Sam tried to leave and went out somewhere. What if he gets lost. What if he can’t come back.

“Sit down,” Crowley said sharply.

Lucifer found his voice in the back of his throat. “Where’s Sam?”

“Don’t know. We got separated. He went into your room to get something, right before the house went crazy, you remember?”

Fear leapt in Lucifer’s throat. “I have to find him.”

“No, you don’t,” Crowley replied calmly.

Lucifer stared at him. “Are you paying attention to what’s happening here?”

“Acutely. And you need to stay and help with the ritual.”

“Sam is out there,” Lucifer hissed. He could feel panic strangling him. “He can’t deal with this on his own.”

“He’s a big boy. You’re worried.”

“Yes, I’m fucking worried.”

Crowley nodded evenly. “You probably should be. But here’s the thing; you can’t help him. Whatever’s doing this to the house is mean and very powerful, and if you go out there on your own, it will kill you. No avoiding that. The best way to help Sam is to stay here and start the process of getting rid of it for good.”

“He’s got a point,” Meg offered.

“I don’t care,” Lucifer spat, the fear twisting into frantic anger. “I can’t just leave him.”
“You can. And that’s what you’re going to do.” Crowley dragged a finger through the cornmeal. “Think about it. This thing wants to kill you. You go to Sam, you’ll be drawing a great big target on his forehead. You’re safer here. And Sam’s safer where he is.” Crowley glanced up. “Far away from you.”

Lucifer struggled with the irrational panic, like a knot of barbed wire in his throat. The small, calm, voice was pointing out that Crowley was actually right and making a lot of sense, but the idea of leaving Sam out in the mad wasteland that was now his house made him sick. He hated that the best thing he could do was nothing. He hated that Sam was out there and it was his fault and he couldn’t fix it.

Meg’s hand slipped into his, her soft fingers lacing with his own. He looked at her in numb surprise. This was very unlike her. In the years they had known each other, she had touched him maybe twice to indicate affection.

“Come on,” she said. “You can help here.”

He breathed out. The barbed wire curled tighter. “Okay.”

A heavy crash rang out and Cas stumbled away from one of the floating doors. His coat was singed and he was holding something big wrapped in his arms. He glanced around wildly, or at least wildly compared to his normal expression.

“Any luck?” Crowley asked.

“This is all I could find.” Cas laid the object at Crowley’s side, glancing at Lucifer. “You’re here.”

“So I am.”

“It’s a bit small,” said Crowley, scrutinizing the thing. It was a hand mirror, with a pitted surface and a silver frame.

“I’m sorry. There’s a shortage of mirrors here at the moment.”

“That can’t,” Meg said, and then stopped sharply. Everyone turned to look at her. She shook her head, her eyes glassy. “That can’t be right.”

“What’s not right?” Lucifer said impatiently.

“The mirror. It was my mom’s. She used it to fix her hair.” Meg’s voice was hushed, hypnotized. She stared at the mirror fixedly. “I haven’t seen it in—it was broken. I mean, she lost it. Or something. It was gone. But that’s it there.”

There was a moment of uneasy quiet. Outside one of the shattered windows, something that could have been an animal or a human howled.

“Maybe it’s just a really similar one,” Cas suggested.

“No.” Meg shook her head again. “That’s it.”

“It’s pulling things from our minds,” Crowley said coldly. “It has some degree of access to our thoughts. We need to be very careful.”

“Have you ever heard of anything like this?” Cas asked, his face white and drawn.

“Never,” Lucifer replied quietly. In his mind, Sam was wandering around the house, helpless and
alone, not knowing that this thing could reach into his head and pull out whatever it felt like.

“It’s a big strange world,” Crowley said. “Let’s get started.”

He tugged a silk scarf out of his jacket and knotted it around his wrist. It was the delicate purple of irises, and had a band of white around the edge. Understanding jumped suddenly to the front of Lucifer’s mind and he glanced at the veve on the floor which lay like a ragged lacework of charcoal and dust. It looked very much like a bulky box with a filigree cross on the top surrounded by stars.

He stared at Crowley in something like admiring horror. The other bokor grinned back at him, wild and slightly feral. Lucifer shook his head, fighting back his own smile. “You’re completely insane.”

“Undoubtedly.” Crowley fumbled inside the purple bag and tugged out a glossy and slightly battered top hat, which he dropped on his head “How do I look?”

“Stunning.” Lucifer bent, getting on his knees on the shifting floor. “I’ll set up the altar.”

With rituals of this kind, the altar was fairly simple. The veve, a purple dropcloth, a glass of water with numbers from one to nine marked in chalk around its rim. Then there were the other artifacts—a deck of playing cards, cigars fragrant with brown tobacco, a bottle of fine rum, a slender wooden rod scratched with vexes and prayers. At the bottom of the bag was a creased tarot card, printed with a lanky skeleton and the number thirteen. Lucifer laid it at the base of the altar.

“The setting isn’t ideal. In a lot of ways,” he observed, standing back and throwing a critical look around what was left of the room. In a crack in the wall, a forest of scarlet flowers bloomed and withered in seconds, white teeth snapping among their petals. Beyond a window, a silhouette glided by over a field of golden grain, a silhouette that from far away looked disconcertingly like a man with wings. “Not a crossroads or a graveyard. He might not come.”

“Not a crossroads? Mate, look around you.” Crowley gestured fluently at the tangle of overlapping realities. “Our ghostly friend has undone himself. We’re in the ultimate crossroads, my son. Ghede central.”

“Too clever for your own good,” Meg muttered. She laid a shallow dish of grilled peanuts on the altar. “Do we have a sacrifice?”

“We can do without.” Lucifer arranged the stubby candles around the glass of water. “We need the nose plugs. And a walking stick.”

There was a moment of silence. “We have a fire poker,” Castiel volunteered eventually.

Lucifer stifled a huge sigh. “Okay. That’ll do. Put it on the altar.” He tugged the edge of his shirt out and, with a straining effort, ripped two long rags of white cotton out of the hem. The effort made static pass before his eyes and a rubbery emptiness swirl in and out of his head. He was still very weak. Shaking the specks out of his mind, he dropped the rags on the altar. “We’re ready.”

Meg looked around doubtfully. “This isn’t a ritual. This isn’t even like forty percent of a ritual. This is the saddest excuse for a ritual I’ve ever seen.”

“It’s what we’ve got,” Lucifer replied, at the same time as something above their heads let out a ringing, echoing, crash. They all looked up in a moment of perfect synchronicity. Lucifer’s house did not have a second story, or at least it never had before. A look of slight nausea crossed Meg’s face. “Okay. Let’s get this done with.”

Crowley sat in front of the veve, his eyes closed, breathing in a slow, tranquil, rhythm. The mirror
reflected his face as a dark blur. In the absence of a drum, Cas beat time on the splintered floorboards, uncertainly at first, but then with greater conviction. The beat shuddered through the floor like the heartbeat of the house. Crowley’s voice rose above it in the fluid patter of the salute to Hounto, sliding seamlessly into the Lord’s Prayer like a ribbon of words. It was surreal to see Crowley sitting there in his drab black, reciting the cool piety of the Lord’s Prayer as if he had any right to it. He had a good voice for ceremony. Smooth and measured, with a deft understanding of the words. Somewhere far away there was the sound of a crowd howling rage or approval or both. Meg stood off to one side, her arms wrapped very tightly around herself, wearing the look of pinched distaste she always wore when she was afraid and didn’t want other people to know it. Cas’s hands rapped out a pounding unceasing language of thuds and taps on the floor. His face was very still, transfixed, like a death mask.

Cas never seemed afraid, Lucifer realized. Not really. Confused or worried, but never that brutal bone-deep terror that everyone else was feeling right now. Either he didn't feel it or he was very good at hiding it. For some reason Lucifer thought it was probably the former. There was an element in Cas’s soul that did not acknowledge fear. It was a stranger to him.

He realized, with a sudden terrible pain of emotion, that he cared about these people, deeply, horribly, in a way that he had never fully understood. Even Crowley, sitting there rattling off the Hail Mary, seemed somehow fiercely precious. He liked this little life he had put together. He liked who he was. He had grown up to be the kind of person he wanted to be when he was little. And that was good. He was happy with himself and his life. He was very, very, lucky.

“Papa Legba, hear me,” Crowley said. His voice was dropping into the low drone of hypnotic ritual. “Papa Legba, open the door for me. Let me pass. When I return, I will thank the loa.”

“Someone’s coming,” Cas said sharply. His head was raised, but his hands continued to rap at the floor. Crowley’s voice faltered but did not stop. Above them a heavy rattle of footsteps shook the roof and stopped. Then another, then silence. Lucifer’s spine grew tight. “Where’s it coming from?”

Meg glanced around in restrained desperation. “Who knows?”

Lucifer turned away from the altar, his flesh crawling with sick fear. “Whatever else, the most important thing is that the ceremony continues. Keep Crowley safe at all costs,” he said, trying to sound firm.

“The one thing I never thought I’d hear you say.” Meg muttered. She had animalistic white shining panic in her eyes, but she wasn’t running. Lucifer watched her with a sudden hot fierce pride. She was so much braver than she let anyone see.

Behind him, something was abruptly knocked over with a rattling thud of impact. A very familiar voice roared “Fuck it!” and there was a pounding report of steps on the floorboards. Lucifer turned and Sam was there, huge and harried, looking around him with a slightly wild look. Dean lay limp in his arms, eyes wide and staring. Lucifer saw him and was struck in the stomach with a blow of relief so intense that he could neither breathe nor speak; it was like his whole body was occupied with the gratitude and he had no room for anyone else. He thought, God, you and I have had our differences, but we’re okay now. I don’t care about all of the shit you put me through, because you also gave me this and that’s all that matters.

“Fuck it,” said Sam conversationally. “Fuck fuck fuck it.” He limped forward and poured Dean’s unmoving body onto the floor beside the altar. Dean’s head bounced off the wood in a broken way, and his glazed eyes showed no reaction. Sam slapped his hands against his sleeves. There was dust on his hair and blood on his shirt. “Fuck it,” he said again.
“Sam,” Lucifer whispered.

Sam seemed to notice him for the first time and grinned in a somewhat hysterical and very un-Sam-like way. “Hiya, Luce. Not exactly Sam right now.”

“How are you still alive?” Meg asked bluntly.

“Not really that either, to be honest.” Sam glanced around at the ramshackle altar and Crowley, sunk deep into a trance of chanting and candlesmoke. “What’s all this?”

“A ritual. We’re summoning—“ Lucifer broke off, squinting at Dean. “Is he all right?”

“Nope. He’s dead.” Sam frowned slightly. “Tried to save our boy here, didn’t go so well.”

“Our boy?” Lucifer pressed a hand to his eyes. “Dean’s dead? What the hell, Sam?”

“I’m not Sam.” That grin again, wide, shameless, and naggingly familiar. “I’m just catching a ride.”

Lucifer’s heart jumped and he stared. “Gabe?”

“Right on the money. Sam’s still in here, but he let me take control of the ol’ corpus for a moment.” Sam, or Gabe, glanced around the shifting room, the mosaic of windows and doors sliding across the walls. “It’s tall in here. Good thing I’m not afraid of heights.”

“But he’s okay,” Lucifer said slowly, his mind whirling.

“As okay as he can be, under the circumstances. I mean, he’s alive. We got bigger problems.” Sam gazed at him, and Lucifer thought he could see the distinct strange spark of Gabriel’s presence in his eyes. “We have to move. Now.”

Lucifer shook his head, gesturing at the clutter of the ritual. “We can’t. We’re—“

“Yeah, no. Not important. We really have to go. Bad things coming this way.”

Lucifer’s eyes narrowed. “What bad things?”

“That son of a bitch who’s been wandering around with my face. He got into the ashes of that spider thing, pumped them into our old friend the—“

“Baron La Croix,” Crowley called. His voice was loud and clear as glass breaking. The cup was in his hand. He tilted it and a crystal ribbon of water splashed onto the ground. “Master of the Cemetery! Heavenly judge! M’ecoutez. M’aidez. Maman Brigitte, Queen of the dead, beautiful woman. Baron Ghede! First among Ancestors! Papa!” The cup tilted again and a few more drops of water tumbled into the shallow mirror collecting on the floor. “Hear me. I beg you. Come here and see the offerings I have prepared for you.”

“We can’t leave,” Lucifer hissed. “We’re almost done. This is more important.”

“You’re not listening.” Gabe was grinning again, but it was stretched and shining with hysteria. “It’s got a body now, Luce. It killed Dean and it is going to kill all of you without breaking a sweat. Partially because it can’t sweat. Because it’s dead.”

A pulse of white-hot fear went off in Lucifer’s chest. “It has a body?”

“That’s what I’m trying to tell you. It’s—“
Behind them, Meg made a desperate swallowed noise. It was unlike anything Lucifer had ever heard before; it was like there was a small animal trapped inside her body. Gabe’s eyes slid off of Lucifer’s face and focused on something behind him. His face went perfectly empty with brilliant, flawless, fear.

Time seemed to slow to a dreamy crawl, like honey rolling off a spoon. Lucifer was aware, even as he was turning, that he was doing it far too slowly; he was existing in the weightless space between heartbeats, wondering if he was capable of feeling a degree of fear that was appropriate for this situation. The moment fell into place. He turned and a window was open. Kubrick was there, dried blood crusted in a cracked rusty kiss on his lips, skin the bloated pallid white of a drowned man. His mouth distorted back from his teeth in a white snarl of blind cannibal fury. There was something dark and shapeless moving behind his teeth like a swarm of flies.

Somewhere else Cas let out an incoherent sound somewhere between a shout and a surprised cough. His hands hung in the air, caught between beats. To one side, Gabe-in-Sam was moving, but too slowly, with a surreal liquid urgency. Only Kubrick was in a bubble of normal time. He stepped out of the window and started walking across the room. His flat eyes were fixed on Crowley. Meg threw herself at him in a desperate suicidal lunge and his hand snapped out and caught her in the throat. Her head clicked backwards and she soared across the room and landed in a pile at the base of one wall, where she lay with the fractured angle of her neck caught in her long dark hair and did not move.

Next to the altar, Crowley stumbled over the prayer but stayed where he was. Cas was pushing himself up off the floor, so slowly, too slowly. Gabe took a step towards the corpse with a hard blazing look on his face that was part him and part Sam. Lucifer looked at him and knew what was going to happen with paralytic clarity. Gabe would go to Kubrick and try to hit him with Sam’s heavy hands, and Kubrick would break his neck or punch his heart through his chest and walk over his body and it would all be over. Everything would be over. The world was dying around him.

“No,” he said. He didn’t know whether he had actually said it out loud or only in his head. It sounded like a weak, sad, whine, a child complaining that something wasn’t fair.

Sam was on the floor, his face tight, his chest heaving up and down in ragged gasps. Kubrick had done something, too fast to be seen. He walked past Lucifer, not even looking at him. He moved in a nightmarish shuddering way, like all his bones had been broken or he was a puppet being badly controlled. His hands flapped and twitched at his sides.

Crowley wasn’t speaking anymore. He stood there, next to the veve traced on the floor, perfectly still. There was no color in his face and his eyes were swollen and vacant. Kubrick walked right up to him and put one twisted hand on the side of his neck. He tilted him backwards, almost gently. Crowley’s mouth drifted open and his chest rose and fell in fractured jerks. Kubrick was smiling now, serene as a painted angel. He brought Crowley’s head very close to his, as if he was about to whisper to a secret to him. His stained mouth opened wide. He bit deep into the side of Crowley’s face.

There was the wet pop of skin breaking. After a moment, Crowley started screaming. It was a terrible, keening, sound, barely human. His mouth stretched open too wide and the scream poured out of it uncontrollably. Kubrick shifted and sunk his teeth deeper into Crowley’s face. He had bit his right cheek, just above the point where the jaw joined the neck. He shook his head back and forth for a moment and then pulled away. His mouth detached from from Crowley’s face with an awful damp ripping sound, like wet paper being torn. Crowley’s screaming stopped, abruptly, as if he had lost the ability to breathe. A scarlet flower opened across the side of his face, eating away at his skin, with a bright glint of bone at its center. Kubrick’s mouth was soaked in slick arterial red. He parted his teeth
and spat a shapeless crimson wad of flesh onto the floor at Crowley’s feet. His hand was still locked around Crowley’s neck.

Blood vomited out of the red wound in Crowley’s face. He stared at Kubrick in speechless amazement, his eyes glassy with shocked tears. Kubrick stared back, smiling, licking a bright flicker of blood off of his lips. Then he put his hand on Crowley’s stomach and made a vicious jagged motion which Lucifer did not fully see. Crowley’s eyes rolled up into blind pearly white and he folded helplessly against Kubrick’s grip. Kubrick threw him aside, away from the altar, where he lay curled on the floor. Lucifer could not tell if he was breathing or not.

Cas was standing now, motionless. His eyes were two terrifying blue stars, and there was a vivid spray of Crowley’s blood across his chest. He looked up from Crowley’s shattered body on the floor and met Lucifer’s gaze, and there was a moment of flawless, terrible, understanding between them, the kind of moment that can only be shared between two people who have both seen something awful and both failed to prevent it.

Then Kubrick was in front of Lucifer, very close, close enough to tell that he wasn’t breathing. His bloody smile hung on his face, like a poisoned sickle moon. “Hello again,” he said. “That was very clever. Shame it didn’t work.”

Lucifer stared at him, numbly. He had never been this weak in his life. He thought to himself, I’m going to die here. Something moved under the surface of Kubrick’s deflated left eye, like a reflection, and Lucifer realized it was a maggot. The body had, after all, been rotting in a basement for several days.

Kubrick’s hand was on his shoulder. It felt skinny and brittle as a bundle of bones. Then the right side of his body dissolved in a soundless spasm of idiot agony. He felt his arm break, felt the bone snap apart. His shoulder was a knot of hell grafted onto his body. His mouth opened but he could not speak. White points floated in front of his vision like dead stars.

He was on the floor. The ceiling above him whirled deliriously. He had an image of himself lying there thin and broken in the middle of all this madness. Above him Kubrick floated into view, Kubrick’s dead face.

“This is sad, isn’t it?” he said. “It’s a hell of a way to die.”

In his mouth, the black thing twisted and broke into a cloud of filth. Dimly, Lucifer remembered Gabe saying he got into the ashes. A meat puppet being walked around by a haze of soot and malice. How ironic; Kubrick was going to get to kill him after all, in some form.

Cas was there, across the room. He stood next to the motionless lump that was Crowley, next to the broken altar. Through the static mist of pain, Lucifer saw the look on his face. It was the look of someone who had reached the utmost end of desperation, and had no room left for fear. Lucifer saw the decision resolve itself on his face. There were no questions left. He stepped forward in front of the altar.

“No,” Lucifer whispered. His voice was a collapsed wheeze. He couldn’t do this. He was just a child. It would tear him apart.

“Sorry,” Kubrick said cheerfully. He put his stiff cold hand on Lucifer’s throat. “I’d say this won’t hurt, but it probably will. No lies between us.”

Lucifer shook his head feebly, a grinding horror of pain moving through his arm. Cas stood in front of the altar, his eyes closed, his face tilted up to the ceiling.
“Baron Samedi,” he said. His voice was like a bell tolling in the dark. “I offer my body to you. I offer you gifts and I ask for your aid. It is I, Castiel, who calls you. Hear me, judge of the dead.”

Lucifer breathed in and did not breathe out. Above him, Kubrick’s face twisted into a rictus of shock and rage. He could see the realization climbing up behind his decaying eyes. He felt, beyond the pain, pride and terror. He couldn’t lose Cas like this. Cas deserved better. It was the bravest thing he had ever seen anyone do.

As Kubrick turned slowly to look at him, Cas’s body went rigid. He started to jerk and twitch in the familiar spastic dance of the chwal. His head fell back and the burning blue of his eyes went dull. Despite himself, Lucifer felt a weak smile start to spread across his cracked lips. It had started. It had begun and there was no stopping it now.

*We beat you*, he said, to the thing wearing Kubrick’s body, in his mind, unable to say it out loud. *You may have killed all of us but we fucking beat you, you bastard. We did it. The Baron is coming. We kicked your ass.*

Kubrick let out a rabid wordless snarl, like the sound of a knife sawing through raw meat. He started to push himself up on his hands. Cas was locked in the shuddering delirium, saliva oozing down his chin. Kubrick lurched forward, half-standing, his rotting body hobbled by its crippled limbs.

Then something very big crashed into Kubrick at a very high speed. Kubrick howled and went down in a tangle of bodies, spitting and clawing. They rolled on the floor in a knot of violence for a second before the other man pulled himself on top. Lucifer’s heart stuttered painfully against his bruised ribs. It was Sam. Or Gabe, in Sam’s body. His hair was a ragged mass and his eyes were fever bright. He was holding Kubrick down but it wouldn’t last long.

Over by the altar, Cas dropped limp to the floor and lay there still.

Gabe bent over Kubrick and kissed him. Their mouths closed and locked in a devouring hot union. Kubrick’s eyes flew wide. Lucifer stared at them, bewildered and half-conscious. Gabe kissed Kubrick like he was trying to eat him alive, crushing him against the floor. The muscles in Sam’s neck flattened and dimpled with strain.

Lucifer saw this, and understood, with a rush of sickness. The ashes. The ashes swirling in the priest’s hollow body, lurking behind his tongue. Sam’s eyes fluttered faintly as he bit deep into Kubrick’s neck, sucking out the ashes like poison from a wound. Kubrick kicked and writhed, but it was weaker and jerkier by the second. The hideous glow of awareness was ebbing from his eyes. Underneath all of them, there was a roar of motion and the floor bucked upwards. The walls started to slide inwards like falling chess pieces. The floor splintered down the middle into a jagged seam of shattered wood and Meg’s limp body rolled to one side and hit the wall. The pain clawed deep into Lucifer’s arm and for a second he drifted in and out of consciousness. Around him he felt an earthquake of walls and ceilings, the nightmare structure of what used to be his house re-shuffling itself. The walls fell together in a shattering pile and the floor kicked again, rippling like a living being. They were rising and then falling, trapped in the terrible restless anatomy of a giant, tossed between pounding teeth of wood and brick.

Sam toppled off of Kubrick’s corpse, his lips swollen with the aftertaste of Crowley’s blood. He crawled over to Lucifer, retching. Ashes billowed and streamed around his mouth and nose. Kubrick lay motionless on the floor, nothing but a bloated corpse now, like an empty glove. His body pitched sickeningly into the clockwork off the changing house and then disappeared. Lucifer watched it go. He could not see Crowley or Meg or Dean anywhere. The only thing he could still see was the ramshackle silhouette of the altar and the pile of limbs which was Cas laying in front of it.
Sam collapsed next to him, twitching and spasming. His eyes were wild and luminous. The walls slid close around them, closing in as they lay on the wrecked floor.

“I can feel it,” Sam whispered. “It’s in me. God. I can’t. I’m dying.”

The last thing Lucifer saw, before the walls drew in and locked him in the airless darkness, was a slender silhouette unfolding from the floor in front of the altar. It had a top hat in its hand. In the moments before the walls crashed together, the figure tossed the hat in the air, caught it neatly on its head, and laughed.
Chapter 29

Chapter Summary

this chapter written by Sarah

Chapter Notes

And here's your part 2 for this week's update.

Jess was smiling, and her hair was like honey. She leaned forward. He thought, I am lucky. He thought, God, god. God help me. They had bought ice cream streaked with cold blood. Her eyes were full of petals. She said to him, I don’t think I can do this anymore. You're always so far away. I don’t miss you anymore. I realized that yesterday. I've stopped missing you. I can’t even remember what missing you was like.

He opened his mouth and fire came out. That was Gabe; that was Gabe’s memory of a fire that had eaten a house on their street when he was five. He had gone outside and watched it burn. The night was restless and wild with shadows. The fire was so beautiful, like silk. He had wanted to touch it. Lucifer had come out and brought him back inside.

The other thing, the creature crawling up his spine into the chambers and hollows of his brain, was in that memory also. It was the claws of the fire sinking into the soft flesh of a child who had died screaming in that house. It was the taste of her eyes popping and liquefying to run boiling down her face into her mouth. It was the moment when she knew she was dying. All the beauty and mystery of Gabriel’s memory reduced to nothing but charred meat and bitterness.

“Sam,” Lucifer said. “Sam, please listen to me. It’s okay. We’re going to be fine. Okay? We’re fine.”

Inside Sam’s lungs, the creature with Kubrick’s face mashed its teeth. Not okay. Not fine. That was what it lived for, notokaynotfine. He felt its hunger like a churning lipless mouth of razors and broken bone. It was a cancer moving through him, disfiguring as it went. There was nothing clean for it and nothing kind. The world was a cigarette being stubbed out on an open, staring, eye. The world was grave dirt and ground meat being stuffed down his throat.

No, said Gabriel. Not that. He was twisting and changing. Sam felt him in his bones and in the tips of his fingers.

He said, You get to know God. You get to suffer and then you get to get better. And that’s as good as it is for anyone, kid. The getting better. That’s the best thing there is.

“Sam,” Lucifer said. He was there, with him in the dark, one hand on his shoulder as if physically trying to hold him together. The other hung uselessly at his side from a crushed shoulder. He wasn't crying. There were things inside him that bit like tears but couldn’t find a way out. Lucifer hadn't cried in a long time.
Sam couldn’t answer him. His words were consumed and turned to steam. He didn’t know how to say, "there are worms in my heart and I’m not dying and I’m not alive." He didn’t know how to say, "I love you. I’ve always loved you. All my life I’ve been reaching out for you."

There is a girl in a basement, skin like polished wood, pretty and broken and too thin. A ghost girl with big empty eyes. Blood on her face and between her legs, her whole body crucified with pain. There is a terrible poisonous knowledge growing in her mind of what people truly are and what they are truly capable of. There is a knot of new life growing in her stomach, waiting to be born and to die. Waiting in the silence. O Marinette, make my skin into armor and my hands into claws. O Marinette, make me hard and mean and terrible. Take away all the parts of me that can be hurt. I don’t want to be a person anymore. I don’t want any of this. O Marinette, give me the strength to destroy my enemy. Give me the strength to feel nothing at all.

A man kisses his wife and his daughters goodbye. He takes a gun and goes to a little town in France, wearing clothes that do not fit him and mouthing along to words that are not his. His head is opened up by a bullet from an American soldier with soft eyes and a pure heart, who is waiting for someone to love him and make him perfect. As he dies on the cobblestones, he sees the face of a man with blonde hair, and does not know what it means.

Somewhere across the hysterical landscape of the house, the lord of bones rises. He tells a fatal joke and the Earth laughs. His hat is tall and dark and his grin is wide. He stands amid the rubble and the bodies and he laughs because his work is here and his work is good. Skeleton hands reach up to scatter the stars. Skeleton feet create a new path from nothing. His horse begins to bleed inside but he doesn’t care. The blood will pass. The body will pass. Slowly, he begins to solve the jigsaw of the house, shifting space and time into their proper configurations. The world breathes out again as order is restored.

“Nature abhors a vacuum,” Lucifer said. But it wasn’t Lucifer. It was a man in a jacket, a meterstick in one hand. The child at the desk in front of him cringed. Later, the man would take the child somewhere in the dark and touch him and make him cry, and say; this is your fault. You bring this out in me. You’re filthy. They should have killed you when you were born because no one is ever going to love you.

Human waste. Human trash. Human nightmare. This is what they do. They burn the books and kill the innocent. They paint the sky with ash. They scar the children with acid. They corrupt the truth and shit on the bones. Why is it worth it? Why is anything worth it? You have hell inside you. Nobody gets to decide to be a good person.

Across the house, the man in the house slid a door back into place. The walls reoriented themselves around him. He was a walking focal point, a compass needle. He called out to his celestial wife and she laughed, tossing her skirts, saying, my darling, my love. Break all the mirrors. Fuck priests and virgins and dance with the thunder. But cruelty we cannot allow. Cruelty we can never allow.

Lucifer was praying softly to the sky serpent, his voice low with pain. Sam wanted to tell him, "You are a prayer. You all by yourself. I know you. I see what you are."

Gabriel laughed in his head, like a rain of golden light. Good. It’s good to see. All things, seen as they truly are, are beautiful. Infinite complexity in infinite variations.

In Sam’s mind, Gabriel and the other ghost sat across from each other at a table in France, over the bed where one or the other of them lay dying, or on the altar of a ruined church. Why are you laughing? the other ghost said. I’m eating you. I’m going to tear you apart. Why the hell are you laughing?
Because you’re funny, Gabe said amiably. Honestly, you’re ridiculous. Your sense of the dramatic is so overdeveloped I’m surprised you can do anything at all. You’re a big fucking joke. Big fucking joke and you think you’re so scary. You’re a glorified bedsheet, pal. You’re pathetic.

Laughter, Gabe said, is the best weapon we have against evil. Evil always takes itself very seriously. You can be scared and you can hurt and want to die, but you have to be able to laugh.

The graveyard clown opened his fleshless hands around the house and breathed out. Reality flexed and bubbled. The roof reassembled itself, flying back together like a body being stitched together again by surgeons. Surgery to remove the corruption. It was accurate in more ways than one.

Listen, Sam said to Lucifer. It’s going to be okay. The Baron is coming for us to put things right. The universe is putting itself back together. It’s a jigsaw puzzle. It’s a pattern too big for us to see. And everything’s a part of it. All the madness and death fits into the pattern, and seen within the pattern it’s beautiful and it’s useful. Even if we die we’ll be okay. Even if we die. Because there’s only one thing that really matters and we have it now.

The parasite screamed inside him and dragged its fingers down his ribs. Its nails were hypodermic needles filled with acid. It was always hungry. Inside its mind, he saw the earth ravaged and burnt black. The sky was gaping and white from the brutal glare of the sun. The parasite ghost would walk the scarred ground and look on the emptiness around it. All life cut out like a tumor. Maybe then, it thought, it could be satisfied. Deep within itself, it knew it would not be.

The face of the graveyard baron opened around them.

“Bring out your dead,” he said. His voice shook the moon from the sky and made the dead leap up and dance. The walls split open and the house began to peel apart. Light flooded in in a hot blinding rush. Sam could still feel Lucifer’s hands on his shoulders but he could not see him anymore. His head was full of the blossoming light.

Gabriel let out a long screeching cry of triumph. The parasite ghost was silent. With an abrupt start, Sam realized one of his fingers had broken. He had been holding Lucifer’s arm far too hard.

Lucifer glanced over at him, away from the opening walls. Sam shook his head, and didn’t know what shaking his head was supposed to mean, or if it was really him doing it, or Gabe, or the parasite. The room yawned wide around them, the walls splitting like jaws to let the rest of the house in.

They sat there together at the bottom of everything, and waited for whatever was going to happen next.
Chapter 30

Chapter Summary

this chapter by Sarah

Chapter Notes

So here it is. Last update.
Wow.
It finally happened.

Warnings are mostly for hardcore bittersweet feelings and a bit of blood. Enjoy, friends.

The purple spectacles of the Lord of the Dead had been Sam’s contribution to the ritual, and they had been well-received. The hyacinth-coloured glass and the wrought wire frames were very pretty. When he put them on he felt wise and important and full of secrets.

Cas took the spectacles off and looked around the ruins of the front room. His eyes were terrible blue and somehow awful to see. There were ragged plugs of white cotton in his nostrils, and Crowley’s tall silk hat was perched on his head at a delicate angle. The fire poker rapped neatly at the floor.

“Well,” he said, “you asked, and here I am,” and he giggled. His voice was a high nasal whine.

Sam’s eyes rolled back into his skull and he fell limp into Lucifer’s lap. Lucifer wrapped his one good arm around his shoulders. There was a dark smear of blood under Sam’s nose. Lucifer wanted to wipe it away, kiss it, taste it. Every beat of his heart was pain.

“Please,” he whispered, looking up at the Baron.

“Please what?” The Baron perched the glasses on his nose and looked severely down at him. “You got problems, kid. Couple dead bodies. Couple bodies not quite as dead as they should be.” He shook his head ominously. “Problems.”

“We’re aware,” said a distinctively British, if very faint, voice, and Crowley crawled over the flattened wall. Lucifer could only manage a dull start of surprise. Crowley was still alive. He hadn’t expected that. The other bokor’s face was an awful plaster white and blood had dried in a huge black scab on his cheek, but he was awake and moving.

Dimly, Lucifer realized they were in the front room of the shop. Almost everything was smashed; the floor around them was a gritty mess of splinters and broken glass. A green scatter of crushed herbs lay under one of the windows. The desk was half-useless, two of its legs reduced to stumps. But the house itself seemed intact. The walls, windows, and roof were all in the same place. Nothing was moving. Dean’s body lay sprawled by the altar, now a heap of purple rags and spilled food. Meg was sitting up against the wall, one hand pressed to the side of her neck. Her face was bloodless and patched with bruises but she was alive, and Lucifer felt a lurch of genuine, glorious, relief. She
glanced over and gave him a tight smile. Her gaze was still fixed on Cas, radiant with the presence of the Baron, as he stood in the rubble.

In Lucifer’s arms, Sam jerked and made a soft noise. Lucifer felt a terrible pain lash through his body at the motion. He looked up at the Baron, holding Sam out as best he could.

“Please,” he said again, his voice hoarse. “Get it out of him.”

The Baron gazed at him through Cas’s pitiless eyes, and shook his head. “You sure got yourself into a mess here. Wish you’d brought me some more food. All right.” His gaze slid down to Sam’s still, bloody, face. “I said all right! Get yourselves out of that boy, both of you. Come on out.” His fingers flickered and a bright cold light passed across his eyes.

Sam’s body convulsed and twitched. His mouth opened and spread alarmingly, like his face was about to split open. Lucifer’s breath caught in his chest. As he watched, Sam’s body arched and stretched. A trickle of ash drifted out of his mouth like smoke. It seemed to glow, almost, in a strange ghostly way, like the moon behind clouds.

“My God,” Crowley whispered. His hand was held close to the mutilated side of his face. He stared in wordless fascination as soot floated out of Sam’s mouth. Sam made a small agonized sound, moaning and pathetic. Helplessly, Lucifer stroked his hair. A bubble of ash slid past Sam’s lips and he coughed sharply twice. A black cloud of soot twisted weightlessly around them. The Baron beckoned, smiling wide and skeletal.

Sam gasped and spasmed, his eyes flying open, and then there was something brilliant flowing out of his mouth and his eyes. Lucifer flinched despite himself. His eyes stung. The light was like honey, streaming hot and luminous, a glow that made everything else in the room dull and colourless.

Then it was done. Sam sagged back into Lucifer’s arms, his eyes barely open. On the floor in front of him was a shining amorphous shape, like a bright absence. Lucifer blinked and it reshaped itself. A head lifted—brown hair, soft eyes.

“Gabe,” Lucifer whispered.

Gabe smiled, but it was sad and somehow almost translucent. The cloud of ash billowed and folded like liquid darkness. Within it, faint glimpses of a body could be seen. The edge of an elbow, a pitted skeletal side, a glittering eye swallowed up by shadow. Crowley was staring at it in horrified fascination. Across the room, Meg shielded her eyes, as if she didn’t dare to look.

“There you are,” The Baron said, and Cas’s mouth stretched wide. “There you are, now. Nice to meet you.” And, to Lucifer, “You’re lucky that boy of yours is big, or these two would have burst him from the inside out like a rotten melon.”

Sam moaned. His chest was rising and falling in quick, shuddering, jerks, but he was breathing, and there was no longer the sick tension in his face there had been before, when the spirits were fighting inside him. Lucifer put one hand over his chest, drinking in the faint flutter of his heartbeat. It was the sweetest thing he had ever felt.

The cloud of soot, and the thing within, hissed and spat as if it were still burning.

“You’ve been away from home a long time, little brother,” the Baron said serenely. He rubbed one of Cas’s pale hands under the silk brim of his hat. “Time to come back. Time to rest.”

“No,” the ghost rasped. Its voice was like the crumble of ash, and like a knife being sharpened, and like the noise a child makes when it is too scared to cry. “Not now. Not like this.”
“It’s your time,” the Baron replied implacably. ‘It was your time a long while ago, but you chose to stay here and suffer. You got lost, little brother. You got messed around and you hurt these people bad. But that’s over now. Now you lay your head down and you come with me.”

“You can’t make me,” the ghost said. Something black and skittering slid under the ash like the legs of an insect. Lucifer had an abrupt and sickening sensation of being watched.

“You don’t seem to understand the situation,” the Baron said calmly. “I’m Baron Samedi. I can make you do whatever I damn well feel like. If it pleases me, you’ll go stick your prick in a tub of baking lard and get yourself some fat ugly little lard babies.”

“I’ll hurt them. I’ll tear them apart.” The ghost’s vacant scratching voice was hurried with desperation.

“You’re not hurting anybody,” Gabriel said sharply. He was standing now. Watching him, Lucifer felt the sudden familiar sting of pride. He might be dead, but he was still a good man, and there was a bizarre kind of comfort in knowing that he had raised his little brother right.

The Baron gave Gabriel a slow, unreadable, look, and something slipped down Lucifer’s spine like a drop of cold water. “No,” the Baron said. “No one more is getting hurt today.”

“There’s been quite enough of that already,” Crowley muttered, pressing his shirt collar to his face.

Sam’s eyes fluttered and then slowly opened. He took a sharp, ragged, breath, as if out of shock at finding himself still alive. His fingers locked into Lucifer’s sleeve. Lucifer gripped his wrist, unable to speak. Every time Sam’s heart beat felt like moment-by-moment permission to breathe.

“What,” Sam gasped, and then his eyes focused on the wrecked shop, and Cas in his graveyard finery and the dark thing that writhed and mutated in the air in front of him. His eyes went very wide. “What—”

“It’s okay,” Lucifer whispered, hand pressed against his chest. “It’s all fine.”

Sam shook his head, wildly. His gaze was fixed on the dark bundle of Dean’s body and something voiceless screamed in his eyes. “No,” he said. “No, no, no, no.”

“What’s hurting him?” the Baron asked curiously, looking away from the spirit.

“His brother,” Lucifer managed, nodding at Dean. “Killed.”

The Baron glanced over at Dean, and seemed to get caught. He stared at him, and a flickering expression crossed his face that seemed almost confused. The cotton plugs in his nostrils lifted like antennae.

“Yes,” he said finally, looking back. “Lots of dead today.”

“I am much sinned against,” the ghost snarled.


“Just make him go,” Gabe said. He sounded exhausted. “Please.”

“He’s not the only one,” the Baron said evenly, “who is coming with me.”

Something in Lucifer’s chest simply stopped, as if it had been switched off. He didn’t want to look
up or move or breathe. If he didn’t respond, maybe the Baron had never said it. Maybe he could still
wake up tomorrow and have everything be the same as it was yesterday.

There was a long, terrible, silence. Then Gabe said “Really?” His voice was too quiet.

“You’ve hung around here longer than you should. You’re in the wrong place,” the Baron said
blithely. “It’s your time.”

“I see,” Gabe murmured.

“No,” Lucifer said. His throat was raw. He glared up at the Baron. “You can’t.”

“It’s what I’m here for,” the Baron said gently. “World’s off-balance. I got to put it right.”

“It’s not right. It isn’t.” Lucifer wanted to spit acid and tear himself apart. “You can’t do this.”

“Is that so?” The Baron’s smile was too kind. “And you’re going to stop me?”

“He hasn’t done anything wrong,” Meg said. She was almost whispering, still not daring to look up.
“He’s not like the other one. Please. No one knows he’s here but us.”

“That’s not how it works, sister.” The Baron chewed reflectively on one of Cas’s broken nails.
“Ain’t about what people know or don’t know. He’s where he shouldn’t be. And it’s long past time
he moved on.”

“It is not. He’s safe here. He’s staying,” Lucifer snarled. He could feel the toxic crawl of terror
within him. Gabe couldn’t go. His whole life, from the beginning, was Gabe. There was no length of
stupidity or cruelty he would not go to in order to keep that. His fingers knotted in the cloth of Sam’s
shirt.

The Baron looked down at him with a great gentleness. Lucifer knew that gentleness would
probably still be there while the Baron was tearing him into pieces. “I knew your mother, little snake.
Don’t make this worse for both of us.”

“Luce,” Sam said quietly. His voice was thick with tears, but he was speaking and seemed, despite
all odds, to be fairly coherent. “Maybe we—“

“No.” Lucifer shook his head bitterly. This must be what madness felt like, this scorching certainty,
and the tidal fury of panic behind it. “I don’t accept this. I don’t. He’s staying.”

The Baron looked down at him, saying nothing. He didn’t really look that much like Cas, even
though they were currently sharing a face. Cas had never looked this distant and cold, impersonal as
a bullet and just as fatal.

Gabe, who had stood silently through all of this, tilted his head up and gazed at the ceiling. His face
was very still and calm. After a moment, he said “No, it’s okay. Luce, it’s okay.”

There was an awful moment where Lucifer actually felt something in his heart crack, like a pane of
glass. He wanted to stop breathing.

“Maybe,” Gabe continued, “I should go.”

“That’s what I’m saying,” the Baron agreed. “Thank fucking God someone here has more than the
brains due to a headless chicken.”

Gabriel nodded. He looked very tired. His eyes were dark as wounds.
“You don’t mean that,” Lucifer said. He had the sensation that his body was falling to pieces around him.

“No, Luce. I think I do.” Gabriel looked at him and smiled, a strange twisted smile, and Lucifer found himself unable to speak. “When Death tells you to go, it’s usually a sign that you should go. I got a few more years than I was supposed to. And what I was supposed to get was pretty good. I was lucky. I still am.”

“Gabe,” Sam said quietly, after several seconds in which Lucifer said nothing. “You don’t have to —”

“Yeah, but I do, don’t I? That’s the thing. I do have to.” Gabe’s smile was sharp. “It’s about balance, like he said. I don’t belong here anymore.”

“You belong here,” Lucifer said abruptly. It was painful to speak, and he realized that the heat in his chest was tears. He was about to start crying. “You belong with me.”

Gabriel turned to look at him. Lucifer breathed in sharply, shuddering, looking down. Sam’s hand twisted in the fabric by his knee.

“Luce,” Gabriel said. His voice was very soft and very close. Lucifer shook his head desperately, not speaking.

“Luce. Come on. Look at me.”

Gabriel was on his knees next to him, gazing at him quietly. One hand was draped over his knee. He smiled faintly. “God, you look terrible.”

Lucifer became aware that he really was crying. Tears lay sticky on his face. He had never thought anything would hurt this much. Everything inside him was breaking.

“You can’t do this,” he said. His voice was wet and ragged.

“I can do whatever I damn well feel like,” Gabe said mildly.

Lucifer shook his head again fiercely. “No. Not after all this. Not after everything I did. And everything you did. You can’t.”

“It’s not like that.” Gabriel’s voice was very soft and even. “I can’t be here anymore. I’m not meant to be here. It’s been years. How long is it going to be before I start forgetting? Before I end up like that?”

Next to Cas, the ghost whispered idiot bits of rhyme and obscenity to itself, dissolving and reforming inside its cloud of ash.

“You won’t be like that. You’re a good person,” Lucifer insisted.

“It’s not about being a good person. It happens to everyone, right? Bad things happen to good people.”

“I won’t let you go that way,” Lucifer whispered. “I’ll stop you.”

Gabe laughed dryly. “Get over yourself. Some things nobody can fight. Not even you.”

They stared at each other for a long silent moment. Lucifer felt suddenly, agonizingly aware of how close they were physically. Not just now, but always. They had slept inside the same womb for nine
months each. They had lived in the same house their whole lives and breathed each others’ breath. The same blood beat in their veins. Even now, when Gabe had no blood, and Lucifer’s blood felt like it was turning to ice.

Crowley coughed and looked away, hand still pressed to his face.

“It was pretty good, wasn’t it?” said Gabe, very softly. “I mean, we had it pretty good. We got more years than we were supposed to. Almost thirty. We got a long time. And it was all good, Luce. All those years we were okay. Some people don’t get two okay years in a row their whole lives.”

“Please don’t leave me like this,” Lucifer whispered.

Gabe smiled, deep and sad. “I’m not leaving. I’m never leaving. Not really.”

There was another silence. In the quiet, Lucifer realized, like something falling into place, that this was really happening; this was actually, genuinely, going to happen, and there was nothing he could do to stop it. All the arguing and threatening and crying in the world would have no effect. It was like gravity, or the tide. Gabriel was leaving. Death was taking him, really this time. This was simply an event. It would happen and then it would be over and he could do nothing. Everything seemed suddenly very clear. He was crying without meaning to, without making any sound. He couldn’t stop it. He had never been able to stop anything, just postpone it. And even that not for very long.

“This is happening,” he said out loud. “This is it. It’s finally happening.”

“Yes,” said Gabe, watching him.

Lucifer nodded. This was it. You never think these things will happen until they do.

“You’ll be okay,” Gabe said. “You’ve got other people now. You made yourself a good little family here.”

“You’re my family.”

“Not just me. Not anymore.”

“This is touching,” the Baron said idly, “but if you want to hold on to this cute little thing I’m riding, you might shake it. He’s not doing too well.”

“Cas,” Gabe sighed, and closed his eyes. Lucifer gazed at him, staring at the fall of his hair and the shadow of his lashes. There were so many tiny important things about him that had never seemed so precious before. Infinite complexity in infinite variations.

Gabriel’s eyes were open again, and he was smiling faintly. “What are you doing?”

“Memorizing you,” Lucifer replied quietly. He reached out and passed a hand over Gabe’s face, just barely not touching it. He knew if he tried to touch Gabe’s skin, there would be nothing there but cool air. He wasn’t a person anymore, and he didn’t really have a face, just a memory of a face. You couldn’t touch a memory. You couldn’t hold a memory, or cry on its shoulder, or hold its hand. You couldn’t keep it with you.

“This is better, right?” Gabe whispered. “We get to say goodbye this time. Really say goodbye.”

“Yes,” Luce said softly. “This is better.”

Gabe put his hand over Lucifer’s. Lucifer felt nothing where it lay, no warmth, not even pressure.
That was why he had always avoiding touching Gabe.

He was aware of Sam’s hand on his leg, holding him almost desperately, as if afraid that he was going to disappear too.

“What little brother,” the Baron said. “Come on, now.”

Gabriel’s hand hesitated for a moment, and then drew away. Lucifer did not look up. If he looked up, he knew he would lose something he could never recover. He stared at his numb hand, and the splintered floor, and felt so many things it was like feeling nothing.

“What do I do?” Gabe asked.

“Just be calm,” said the Baron. And then, a little louder, “Hey. Little snake.”

Lucifer shook his head, not looking up.

“I’m giving you a gift,” the Baron continued. “You’ve done me a favor today with these two. Put the world back in balance. But it’s not all the way back. Someone’s dead who shouldn’t be. You’re getting him back. Don’t say I never did nothing for you.”

Lucifer stared at the floor blankly. He wasn’t sure he could comprehend anything right now. Gabe stood there and he was sharply, brutally, aware that this was the last time he would ever see him. We are almost never given the luxury of knowing what the most important moments of our lives are when they are happening. But this he knew. This was the most important thing he had ever lived through.

Not the last time he would ever see Gabe, a quiet voice said to him. Not really the last. Just a matter of time.

“Cover your eyes,” the Baron said. Lucifer turned away and buried his face in Sam’s shoulder. Behind him, there was a sound like ripping paper, immense and echoing. The space behind Lucifer’s eyelids flooded with something that wasn’t light and wasn’t darkness. The world shuddered for a moment in the grip of something vast and nameless. Then there was silence. The only sound was a dull thud of impact. Cas had slumped to the floor, top hat rolling off his head. The plugs in his nostrils were soaked with blood.

The ghost was gone. Gabe was gone. Cas, Crowley hunched in a ball, Dean’s body, Meg with her hands clamped over her eyes. The room was too quiet. After the roar of the past few hours, the silence seemed somehow wrong.

Cas’s eyes flew open, and he drew in a damp struggling breath. His hand pawed at his face, yanking out the cotton stubs. Blood trickled down over his mouth. “Dean,” he gasped.

Meg rose, slowly, from her corner of the room. “Cas?” she said, cautiously.

“Dean,” Cas gasped, thrashing uselessly on the floor.

“Dean’s not,” Sam said, and then stopped, his face twisting.

“I’m not what?” Dean said.

He was sitting up on the floor, rubbing his eyes. “What the hell is this?” As he blinked, his whole body stiffened and his eyes flew wide. “Holy shit. Holy—oh my god.”
Sam made a choking sound. His face had gone blasted and white. Meg laughed sharply and then clapped her hands over her mouth.

“Oh, what the bloody hell,” Crowley said flatly, and sat down where he was.

“I can see,” Dean whispered. “I can see, I can see. Holy shit, I can see. I can see.”

Someone who shouldn’t have died. Dean was the only one the ghost had actually killed. And if you were going to bring him back from the dead, why not speed up the healing process a bit? Lucifer rested his head in his hands. Why not. Why not. All things connected.

Sam sobbed once and threw his arms around Dean’s shoulders.

There was a wet sound from the middle of the room. Cas had rolled onto his back. His mouth was open and loud, rattling, noises were issuing from it. He was laughing, Lucifer realized. Laughing with blood in his lungs. He hauled and choked with laughter, the hysterical joy of a man who just got a joke, who understands something which was waiting for him all along. His hands beat at the dust on the floor. His eyes stared blindly at the ceiling, as if they could see the sky through it.
Chapter 31

Chapter Summary

this chapter written by both Sarah and Mer

Chapter Notes

Epilogue chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“And a five-six-seven-eight--”

Lucifer stood by the piano and tipped his head back against the wall, eyes closed and mouth wide with a blissful grin. Sam ran over the keys and let the music flow freely, accompanied by the sound of Lucifer tapping his foot and Meg cheering and clapping somewhere across the room from them. Ellen, laughing, poured a half-inch of scotch into her glass just out of the corner of Sam’s vision. The room smelled like alcohol and sweat, as always, and the windows were bright with the sun.

It was a shining Tuesday morning and the bar was much closer to full than it normally was. The sun was straying away from the earth again; there was a new crisp cool in the air which Sam had never known in New Orleans before. He took a deep breath in and poured even more energy into his playing, glancing up at Lucifer again.

Luce swayed to the music. His arm was done up in bandages, all somewhat tattered by now, and the sunlight illuminated his hair. He peeked at Sam from his place against the wall, saw that he was being watched, and smiled warmly down at his...no, Sam wasn’t his truly worker anymore, nor was he exactly an assistant, nor could he really be called an apprentice, but he was more of a partner--his piano player. That was it. That was good enough. That suited him.

It had been nearly a month since the Baron was called upon. It had been nearly a month since Dean had regained his vision and the treatments had stopped, and Sam no longer had a contracted excuse for going to visit Lucifer’s home. It had been nearly a month since Sam and Lucifer gave into themselves (and each other) at last.

Things were different now, to say the least.

Lucifer looked up from the piano and its (beautiful) resident musician. At a table over by the window, Cas was tying conjure bags. Dean sat in the seat next to him. With his new eyes everything was beautiful. Under the table, his index finger was linked loosely with Cas’s, like a good-luck charm.

Jo sat with Meg. They watched the two men at the piano with bright interest. Ellen planted her pitcher of liquor down on the table and dropped into a chair beside them. Her hair was tied back and there was a faint, artless, smudge of rouge on her cheeks; Bobby was coming over later. Absently, Jo tilted her head onto her mother’s shoulder, and Ellen stroked her hair, folding a curl back behind her
The root tune played and Lucifer picked up his first lines.

“When people contend
That we’ll soon see the end
Of the dear old sentimental song,
Don’t trouble your brain,
Just learn this refrain,
For it proves that they’re completely wrong...”

Sam played to the sweet (yet strong) melody, relishing in Lucifer’s voice all the while. The bokor still smelled like smoke and white sage, even though the bundle was no longer in his hand. It sat in a shallow bowl across the room and was burning away slowly. Sam had grown to love the smells of sage and cedar; it was a part of him, now. It was a part of them, now.

The reason for the sage scrub in the Roadhouse was predictable enough. As soon as Lucifer had set foot in the establishment, for the first time after the summoning of Baron Samedi, he had stopped dead in his tracks, turned to face Ellen, and stated plainly: “You need cleansing.”

Of course, Ellen immediately reacted by taking offense. Sam had to intervene quickly and explain that the kind of cleansing Lucifer was suggesting had nothing to do with personal hygiene and everything to do with the Roadhouse as a whole. Apparently running a speakeasy was liable to catch a whole lot of bad juju, dragged in with the drunks and the fights and the hiding from the law. Ellen viewed the whole thing extremely dubiously, but consented to have Luce wave a stick of dead plants around her bar, so long as he did it quietly and didn’t disturb the customers. She likely only agreed to it because of Sam’s look of innocent pleading from just outside of Lucifer’s line of sight. (She’d mumbled something about “damn puppy eyes” as she’d walked away.) Ellen and most of the employees at the Roadhouse knew the majority of what good Lucifer had done for the Winchester boys, which lent some credibility to whatever he asked of them.

When Lucifer came back with his supplies (some of which had to be carried by Castiel, thanks to the bandaged arm), Sam was playing around with a tune at the piano. It took Lucifer all of fifteen seconds before he sat down what he was carrying and said, “Oh! Wait, I know that one!” He then began to sing along with plenty of enthusiasm. That was generally how they found themselves performing an impromptu concert for their friends and family along with a handful of early morning customers.

Sometimes these sorts of things just happened.

“As long as spoon rhymes with night in June,
And meet me soon rhymes with honeymoon,
As long as heart’s a-whirl rhymes with a pretty girl,
As long as stars up above rhymes with falling in love...”

Crowley was not there, though. Crowley had not been anywhere for the last few weeks. His big house sat empty on the waterfront, occupied only by cobwebs and silence. Every trace of his
presence had been neatly and skillfully removed. Technically, he was still the subject of a half-hearted manhunt, but everyone knew that would be over soon. Kubrick’s church was dissolving as most of its members realized that they had better things to do than hate people they didn't know. No one really cared anymore. Crowley, Sam was confident, would be fine. If any one of them knew how to disappear, it would be him.

And Kubrick was gone along with his body. It was in several pieces and had likely drifted somewhere far away in the Gulf already. Lucifer had muttered some indistinct prayer to the waves as the current dragged the rotten fragments of the body away for what was hopefully the last time. Everyone had returned home and sat around idly for around an hour until Castiel suggested that they play a game of cards. No one objected to the idea.

Castiel had taken up a fairly permanent residence with the Winchesters. He took Dean out and around town, showing him the roads so the man could eventually learn how to get from place to place. Benny even took the two of them out on his boat one time to show off the bayou. Dean had been mesmerised. He began writing in his old war journal again after clipping together the pages containing his reports from France, not wishing to have to re-live any of those entries any time soon. He had requested that Sam lend him some books around three days into having his eyesight restored. (Sam discovered his brother’s secret love of satire by noting which books had disappeared from his shelf each week. He didn’t bring it up, though. Dean deserved to enjoy something of his own without any additional commentary.)

Dean and Castiel were nearly inseparable. It was nice to see both of them bonding with someone else, Sam and Lucifer concluded after a night on the town with the two of them. Castiel talked all of the time, now, and Dean would smile at him. Dean jested but with less bitterness than before, and Castiel would listen attentively, still attempting to grasp Dean’s brand of humor.

Meg was in a great place with Crowley gone. She became a regular at the Roadhouse and made quick friends with Jo and Pamela. The three women joked and gossiped behind the boys’ backs (and to their faces, of course) like they all had known each other their entire lives. Meg had also gained quite a bit of business from her visits to the Roadhouse. As it turns out, folks who drank to forget their stress and worries generally tended to have some strange dreams. She advertised herself subtly by chatting up the clientele, and prescribed more dream catchers and talismans than she could manage to make on her own. The white magic coming from her work was commended by Lucifer; they had slowly built up their trust again, as they always did.

And Lucifer, of course, couldn’t be better, unless one would like to count the broken arm and the lack of a ghostly brother. He had grieved over Gabriel all over again, but he had friends and family to comfort him this time. Last time, he’d only had Chuck and Missouri. Chuck didn’t know what to do with a young man in grief--he dealt with the loss of Gabriel, too. He didn’t have the people skills to talk things over with his step-son. Lucifer couldn’t blame him, though. He knew that Chuck tried. That was what mattered to him.

Missouri had been a different story. She had visited the house after Chuck told her that Lucifer wouldn’t function properly; he had cried over Gabriel all over again, but he had friends and family to comfort him this time. Last time, he’d only had Chuck and Missouri. Chuck didn’t know what to do with a young man in grief--he dealt with the loss of Gabriel, too. He didn’t have the people skills to talk things over with his step-son. Lucifer couldn’t blame him, though. He knew that Chuck tried. That was what mattered to him.

And that carried on. She whipped him into shape day-in and day-out until he was finally able to pull himself out of bed to walk to her place on his own. Lucifer worked under Missouri’s wing for a few months and, once Chuck moved out, he started up his own business in the front room of their home.
That was around when he began to see and hear Gabriel.

And he was more than okay with that.

Then, of course, a few years later, a tall, handsome, and desperate Great War veteran had walked in his door.

“As long as true rhymes with eyes of blue,

And room for two rhymes with I love you;

As long as such rhymes endure,

You can always be sure

Of another sentimental song...”

Lucifer watched as Sam hammered out an improvised interlude with a smile on his face. Sam was happy. Lucifer was happy. Did anything else matter? Of course other things mattered...these things just mattered more.

Gabriel’s unfinished business had to have been that Lucifer find himself happy without the assistance provided by a ghostly younger brother. It was obvious after a while that they were made for each other. They fit together so perfectly--Sam’s piano and Luce’s violin and vocals, Sam’s tall stature and Luce’s smaller one, Sam’s subtle sense of humor and Lucifer’s sarcasm, Sam’s need to give attention and Luce’s need to receive it. There had to have been some otherworldly meddling. Happiness like this didn’t just happen on its own.

Or did it?

“Come out and spoon ‘neath this night in June,

Oh, meet me soon ‘neath our honeymoon,

You’ve got my heart a-whirl,

You’re such a pretty girl,

And all the stars up above

Know I’m falling in love...”

Lucifer winked at Sam as he came to the “pretty girl” line. Sam laughed and had to look away so that he could keep playing. Yes, this was good. If all things went according to plan, the Roadhouse would slowly gain business, shrink its debt, and could afford to give Sam a break for a few days. Then Sam would be able to afford nights on the town with Lucifer and the rest of their crew. Maybe even a few nights in as well, if they’re lucky.

“I will be true, dear, to eyes of blue,” Sam sang quietly, looking back up at Luce. “There’s room for two, dear--”

“And I love you,” Lucifer sang along with him. They finished out the rest of the song together:

“As long as such rhymes get by,

Why don’t you go home and try
Lucifer liked Sam’s smooth, low voice. He could get used to that. Maybe he already had.

Sam liked Lucifer’s voice. He most certainly had gotten used to that. And maybe he had mentioned that to him, along with one of his terrible, sappy musical instrument metaphors or similes. Maybe Lucifer had kissed him deeply after that, uncaring of how much of a romantic Sam was (he actually enjoyed it quite a bit). That was just between them, if it had happened. No one’s business but their own.

Their friends applauded. A few of the Roadhouse’s patrons joined in, too. Meg was probably the one who whistled teasingly. Or maybe it was Dean. The two men by the piano just smiled at each other like a couple of fools. Yes. This was it. This was right.

Sam ran his hands over the piano keys again, churning out a new melody and watched as Lucifer tipped back his head, sighing in contentment. They were good. That was what mattered in the end. A couple of odd men out were always welcome at a piano if they could sing or play, and they were always welcome behind a counter, stitching up dolls and combining spell ingredients to make charms and talismans. They had found their place in the world, and it was right there, tucked into a corner of New Orleans, down by the bayou in a shack wired with makeshift lighting, dancing the night away in a speakeasy in some restaurant’s basement...playing and singing for a crowd of people in a café-saloon, smiling so big it hurt their faces.

And, after all, who could really ask for anything more?

Chapter End Notes

I did drop a little Gershwin reference in that last line, yes, I am utterly shameless.

"Another Sentimental Song" by Cole Porter
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=34F9Y_lhxPo&index=1&list=PL9Evx_PCcctNgL5VPfWq_1oUGVfV-2I

Thank you all so much. I really can't say it enough. This gigantic story has meant so much to us. Sarah and I worked over this from May all the way through October...just for you all. It’s been an excellent adventure and a wonderful journey. We learned that people at the library in our town don’t give young women strange looks when they check out the only copy of “The Voodoo Hoodoo Spell Book” but that they give anyone who presents a library card issued around fifteen years ago a mocking laugh. We learned that sitting in a hospital waiting room is much easier to deal with when there is sufficient WiFi and plenty of chapters to write. We learned that technology always fails us just when we need it to work for us. We learned that Spotify has nearly an endless supply of 1910s and 1920s jazz and show tunes. We learned that editing is a painful task. We learned some strange insults from our beta (wingedscribe on tumblr).

We learned a lot. And we did a lot. And I'm...heh, I'm proud of us.

You, our dear readers, may have noticed that this is part of a series. While we don't have any plans for a sequel, we do have a few pre-story snippets that we'll be writing and posting as part of this "series" for you all...and partially because we can't let go of these characters so soon.
Thank you very much. Every single one of you who left kudos, wrote comments, sent me messages on my tumblr account(s), helped us out with errors, bookmarked our story, and made us feel like we really did something worthwhile. We can't express our gratitude enough. You all really make us feel like we've done something worthwhile.

Thank you.
- Mer

(And here is one late addition, copied and pasted by a procrastinating!Mer from the comment section...)

This is Sarah, the other author of this beautiful little slice of verbiage. I don't have an AO3 account so I'm anonymous here. This is the first piece of my creative writing I've ever released for public consumption and let's just say that the response leaves nothing to be desired. I'm so happy that Mer and I made this, and I'm so happy that you guys seem to have liked it so much. Your comments and kudos were both very surprising in quantity and incredibly sweet and flattering. It was a great experience seeing such an amazingly positive response to our efforts. I want to really, deeply, thank all of you for reading this, and for being as wonderful and supportive as you have been. You are all spectacular examples of evolutionary success and deserve all kinds of awards.
In short: it's been a great time. Thank you so much.

Sarah

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!