And There Was Light

by ariaadagio

Summary

When Lucifer Morningstar is found half dead in the desert, Chloe Decker is determined to find out why. The problem is ... not even Lucifer knows the answer. As Chloe's world is flipped upside down by incontrovertible evidence of the divine, Lucifer grapples with feelings of violation and futility. God's meddling has started a chain reaction, but to what end? Deckerstar. Fits with canon through S2. [COMPLETE]

Notes

I've been dying to contribute something to the Lucifer fandom, and the idea for this story has been eating at my brain since the finale concluded. It felt like kismet. I had to try! I'd fully intended to post this as a hiatus fic, but seeing as how the hiatus only has a matter of days left, I guess I missed the mark a little. *is sheepish*
Anyway, I hope you all enjoy this.

TRIGGER WARNING: The first crime-to-solve in this story involves the aftermath of a sexual assault. I don't go into great detail, and nothing happens to the main characters we know and love, though some not-so-loose parallels are drawn. (I've never written a trigger warning before. I sincerely hope this was sufficient. Apologies if it isn't.)
He thinks he must be blind. Half the world is beige. The other half, cerulean. All of it is harsh, and hot, and bright, and he can't do much more than peer through his eyelashes at the beige. At the blue. He'd always assumed blindness would mean blackness, but ….

“Bloody priceless,” he grumbles.

He licks his dry, cracked lips. His whole body hurts. He's thirsty. His stomach's churning, he's out of breath, his head is pounding, and his back ….

His back feels like it's been slashed by knives, and the skin's been left in bloody ribbons.

It's so bad, he can't lift his arms anymore, let alone … Them.

The wings.

He won't think of them as his wings, because they're not. He refuses.

The wings drag behind him like a spent parachute he can't disentangle himself from.

“You don't like my gift?”

The words flicker past his ears, and Lucifer stiffens.

“No, I don't bloody like it, Dad,” he rasps, the words a bare croak between wheezing breaths. He's been re-gifted with two limbs he didn't want, and each is attached to muscles and tendons he hasn't used in years. Worse, in the world's cruelest of ironies, he's caught in one of the few scenarios he can think of where he might regret cutting the damned things off. But his back is so ravaged by the sudden addition of bone, and flesh, and feathers, he can't take advantage of the potential lifesaving utility of them, anyway. So, why in the hell would he like it?

He stumbles, dropping to his knees onto the scalding sand.

He licks his dry lips again.

“You're dying, you know,” the voice says.

“Shut up,” Lucifer replies.

“I can't. Because you're also hallucinating.”

Something tightens in his chest.

“I'm the hallucination,” the voice adds.

As if there were ever any doubt. Dad would never show up for real.

Lucifer squints ahead, staring at the beige and the blue. His limbs are shaking. Everything's spinning like a top, now. He swallows as he drops onto his side on the hot ground, and the sand digs into his raw skin. The wings are a sweltering blanket of down that he can make invisible, and intangible, but he can't remove. Every exhalation makes him feel as though he were breathing fire. The wind is a blast of hot air like someone's opened an oven next to his face.

“I bet you'd like a glass of water. Or a flood. Forty days and forty nights, perhaps?”
He could pray, he supposes. Pray to his father for deliverance. He could.

“You could. Any time, now.”

Frankly, though, he'd rather rot.

At least, that's a choice he can still make.

He wishes he had any clue why his father would do this.

He's too far gone to understand, though, when a very real answer arrives.

“You'll see.”
Lucifer Morningstar is gone.

Insecurities that won't go away, no matter how much logic Chloe injects into the situation, of course, drive her to wonder. Did he leave her on purpose? Again? What the hell is she to him, anyway? Is there a new, new wife? Petty things she wishes her brain wouldn't even consider until she's ruled out foul play, first.

*So, I'm coming over, now, to tell you the truth about me,* he said.

The words echo in her head, over and over and over, like ringing church bells. Five days ago, he'd said that, and he'd never shown up after, and she doesn't understand. He's disappeared before, for a lot longer than five days, but when he'd done that, he'd never said or implied he wouldn't. It took her a while to come to terms with that fact. That she'd imagined him saying things he'd never said. Created this whole fantasy in her head.

*We'll talk later, yeah?* she said.

And he'd been, in retrospect, conspicuously silent.

Because Lucifer Morningstar doesn't lie. At least, not to her.

*So, I'm coming over, now,* he said. The bells won't stop ringing. *Now. Coming over now.* As in, directly after this phone call. *Now.* As in, he'd already started walking toward his car when he'd dialed her number. *Now,* he'd said.

She'd played his message several times. She'd even played it for Dan.

She hadn't imagined the word now.

Dan had confirmed he'd heard it, too.

Except Lucifer's car had been impounded because he'd never picked it up from the hospital lot. Except his cell phone had been tracked to said hospital lot and been found tossed with a cracked screen into the gutter. Except, according to security cameras, he'd never walked into or out of the parking structure where the phone and his car had been found.

Now, he'd said.

Except he'd never shown up.

And there is not one thing about this disappearance that is similar to his previous one.

Before, he'd fled. This time, he's in trouble. He has to be.

Right?

Right. Of course.

Except ….

She can't help it when her mind wanders to Candy.

"Got a hit on your BOLO," Dan says, a grim look on his face, as he slaps a fax down onto her
cluttered desk. The interruption snaps her out of her spiraling thoughts and sends her pinwheeling to keep her chair upright. "Sorry," Dan rushes to say as he catches her. "Sorry!"

She pants for a second, letting her heart ease back out of her throat and catch up with the situation. She rubs her tired eyes and gives herself a hard shake for good measure. "Don't worry about it," she says. She swallows, and she can't keep the hope out of her tone when she says, "They found him? They found Lucifer?"

"Might have," Dan says cautiously. He pulls his fingers through his hair and sighs like he, too, is upset by this disappearance. Maybe, he is. Though she wouldn't call it friendship, yet, Lucifer and Dan had developed … something. Something beyond antagonism, at least. "It's a John Doe," Dan continues. "No wallet. No I.D."

It occurs to her that for Lucifer to be considered a John Doe, he'd have to be too incapacitated to tell the hospital otherwise.

A lump forms in her throat.

She skims the fax. Dark brown hair. Dark brown eyes. Six foot three. About 180 pounds. Everything matches. She squints at the grainy picture that was faxed along with the particulars. Is that him? It could definitely be him. Then she glances at the particulars. "What the hell is he doing at UMC Trauma?" That's a hospital in Vegas. Vegas is where he'd picked up Candy ….

"Medevaced from Death Valley. A park ranger found him."

She gapes. "What in the hell was he doing in Death Valley?"

To that, Dan has no answer except a helpless shrug. Chloe scoots back her chair, folds up the fax, and grabs her keys. "Will you take Trixie?"

"Of course," Dan says, stepping out of the way as she flails herself into her coat. His tone is soft. Understanding. He's been so great, lately. They seem to make far better friends than spouses.

"Thanks," she says, offering him a small smile.

"I hope he's okay," Dan replies.

And then she's off. She won't even entertain the idea that this John Doe isn't Lucifer until she sees that it isn't him. She dials Maze on the way to her cruiser.

Despite the fact that she knows, whoever this John Doe is - Lucifer, she corrects herself. He's not not Lucifer until she sees that he's not - he won't be well, she builds things up in her head. She builds things up so far that, in her fantasy, when she finds him, Lucifer will be sitting in his bed, propped upright by a thousand down pillows, surrounded by drooling, moon-eyed staff, and he'll have a wisecrack and a snarky smile already prepped for her consumption when she arrives.

"Detective!" she can almost hear him say as he pats the blankets suggestively, eyebrows delightfully quirked in nefarious suggestion, "Care to play doctor? I'm in a perfect position for it."

And she'll snort with disbelieving amusement. "Lucifer ….

And he'll flash her his hospital wrist band and say, "Didn't you know, Detective? I'm John Doe. No known allergies."

Denial is a heady drug, and, other than that brief time around Halloween, no matter his prevailing
mood, she's never not seen Lucifer vibrant, sardonic, and overflowing with *joie de vivre*. The comedown off denial, though, is an ice bucket challenge, and she snaps to a halt by his bedside, doused.

"This is him," Maze murmurs to the waiting nurse, sounding utterly boggled. "This is Lucifer."

Lucifer.

Chloe wraps her fingers around the bed railing, squeezing so hard her knuckles loose all hint of color.

He's conscious in the sense that his eyes are open at half mast, but he says nothing at all, even when she's hovering so close she must be an eclipse of anything else he could potentially be seeing. Instead, he lies on the gurney in the ER, wrapped in cooling blankets, groin and armpits stuffed with icepacks. His breaths are rapid and shallow, almost invisible if it weren't for the telltale fogging of his oxygen mask. His pulse is thready. His face is marred by burns. He's naked, and filthy, and nothing like the man she knows.

Heatstroke, the doctor tells her. Dehydration. Third degree burns. Acute kidney failure. Head trauma. A horrifying litany of bodily malfunctions that could mean death in the nearish future if things progress too much further.

"Does he have any family we should contact?" someone asks her in a soft, sympathetic tone. "*In case it's the end,*" they don't say. But she's a police officer. She knows this drill all too well.

"I'll call Amenadiel," says Maze, expression grim.

The staff is kind enough to let Chloe sit on a rickety stool beside the bed while they work, as long as she stays out of the way. She crams herself into the small space next to his I.V. pole, making herself as nondescript as possible. Swallowing, she picks up his hand. His fingers are hot like the sun, but lifeless and limp.

"What in the hell happened?" she asks him as she strokes his thumb.

Of course, he doesn't answer. Doesn't even twitch.

None of this makes any fucking sense.

Amenadiel arrives in a matter of hours. Fewer hours than it should take to drive from L.A. to Vegas. He must have been flying. Or, well, at least, driving 100 m.p.h. Not that she can blame him, much. The only reason she didn't get a speeding ticket on the way here herself was because of professional courtesy. Cops didn't pull over cops. It was sort of an unspoken rule.

"Should we make her leave?" Amenadiel is saying to Maze when Chloe finds them. His body is a hulking, solid mass in the corner. He and Maze are hovering together by the bay window at the edge of the sunny waiting room, away from prying ears and eyes. "Maybe, he'll heal faster if-

"What's the point?" Maze says with a shrug before he can finish. "He was like this before she got here."

"I don't understand how this could happen," Amenadiel says.

Maze folds her arms. "Whoever did it is *dead.*"

Amenadiel frowns. "Already?"
"No," Maze replies with a curt shake of her head. "I mean as soon as I find him."

Amenadiel looks beyond Maze's shoulder, sobering. "Chloe," he says, surprise filling his tone. "We didn't see you there. Hello."

"Should we make who leave?" Chloe says, the words dull and tired and lifeless.

"No one," Maze says, at the same time Amenadiel blurs, "A nurse!"

Maze and Amenadiel share a look.

"Erm." Amenadiel clears his throat with an awkward laugh and shifts from foot to foot. "A nurse. There's a nurse here who …." 

Maze laughs, too, just as awkwardly. "They didn't end well. You know how these things go with him."

"Never well," Amenadiel adds, only to have Maze elbow him in the ribs. He glares at her as he rubs his bruised torso indignantly.

"Oh," Chloe says. She feels hollow.

The silence stretches like a rubber band.

"Did you need something?" Maze says a little too brightly when the rubber band breaks from the tension.

Chloe swallows. Shakes her head. Rubs her arms, trying to stifle the chill running through her. She wishes her hands were Lucifer's. He's always been so warm and supportive. "I just came to tell you that they told me his temp is finally dropping," she says.

"Hey." he slurs, the stars in his gaze making it clear he's talking to someone only he can see. He's been … seeing things. For hours.

She has so many things she wants to say to him. Did what? Who did this to you? What happened? A little less importantly, what were you going to tell me before? The multitude of possible answers he could give slam around like bumper cars in her head. She has so many things to say.

But the first time she notices he's looking at the ceiling instead of through it, all of that frantic premeditation flies right out the window, and all she can utter is an upset, thick, "Hey."

His gaze lackadaisically follows the word and lands on her face. He blinks. Her stomach twists at the lack of recognition staring back at her. But then he blinks again. Swallows. The cloudiness leaves his gaze a little, replaced by confusion of a different kind. Then a tired, raspy, "… Detective?" slips from his chapped lips and fills the quiet space.

She opens her mouth, and a few hitching syllables that don't make words fall out. When he makes no leering wisecrack about having rendered her speechless, she realizes how close this came. She knew before. But … she didn't know. Didn't let herself. Not really.

She has so many things she wants to say to him.

In that moment, though, she says the only thing that matters. "I'm so glad you're alive."
He spends a day in the ICU, and another day in a step-down unit. Most of the time, he sleeps. When he's awake, though, he seems … not all there. He understands that he's in a hospital, and that he was hurt, but he seems to lack any curiosity about how he was found, or how long it's been since he was picked up, or what happened, or anything, really. He's not even apologetic about how badly he's scared her, not that he has anything to feel guilty for this time.

The doctors told her to expect the grogginess, and they told her to expect his uncharacteristic lack of energy. That would last at least a week or two, they said.

But it feels like there's more to it than that.

Lucifer's just … wrong.

He's been too out of it to question, and everything about his demeanor when he's conscious screams, "treat with kid gloves," anyway. But even without his input on the matter, after seeing him be so … anti-Lucifer, she's more convinced than ever that something happened.

Why'd you d'this t'me, he said, in the midst of his fever dream.

Something was done to him.

He didn't leave her.

He was taken.

"You needn't concern yourself," is his response when she finally deems him sentient enough to try asking him what in the hell happened. The effect of his imperious tone is somewhat dampened by the fact that he's wearing a hospital johnny that's at least two sizes too big for his slender frame, and bits of his normally coiffed hair are pointing in seven different directions.

She blinks. "I needn't …." She's not even sure what to say to that. "Are you serious right now?"

Lucifer frowns. "Have I given you reason to doubt my sincerity?"

The stool squawks as she yanks it as close to the hospital bed as it'll go, and then she sits. He watches her with stony eyes. Which is wrong. All of this is wrong. He shouldn't be stony. Lucifer is a fire. He always has been.

The Lucifer she knows would be boiling with rage, eager to punish whoever's done this to him.

"Lucifer … you disappeared," she says. "You just … disappeared. That's not …." She swallows, not sure what else to say. All her countless hours of professional training have gone by the wayside, and she's not a cop. Not in this moment. She's just Chloe. A women whose dearest friend was maybe kidnapped. "You disappeared."

His upper lip twitches. The beginnings of what she'd almost call a snarl. The anger she's been expecting. But then his expression flattens out, and all he says is, "Apologies, Detective," in a cool tone.

For a moment, she can only gape. She's seen this behavior before. But only in victims. Victims who don't want to think about or deal with whatever they've experienced.

It's sobering.

Lucifer is not someone she sees as easily cowed.
Which means …. What *does* it mean, exactly?

She's pulled from her thoughts by the sound of him fumbling with the television remote. His hands are shaking, but he manages to flip to a movie channel. The volume is low, almost inaudible. She's not sure what movie he's found. Something with guns and explosions and gore. Dan would love it.

She frowns.

"Don't look at me like that," Lucifer says.

Her frown deepens. "Like what?"

He diverts his gaze from the television long enough to look her in the eyes. "I'm not broken, Detective," he tells her evenly. "I'm bored out of my bloody mind, but I'm too knackered to fix it."

She laughs. She can't help it. Ice broken, at least. "I always figured you for a terrible patient."

"You can't misbehave when you're asleep," she says.

He snickers, but he doesn't reply. They watch the movie in comfortable silence.

Lucifer Morningstar *is* a terrible patient.

"I'm all for novel experiences, I assure you, but I'm quite done with this one," Lucifer groused as Chloe herded him into the back seat of her cruiser. "I'd prefer to-"

"The humans said you shouldn't be alone," Maze says before he can finish.

"When have I ever been one for doing what I'm told? And what would they know about my species, anyway?"

Maze gives him a humorless *why-are-you-being-an-idiot* glare. "They knew enough to save your life, didn't they? They're not *all* morons."

Lucifer snorts. Like he's still not quite able to admit his life had needed saving. He gestures at the cage barrier between the back seat and the front. "So, I'm to be under house arrest, is it? Leaping from one prison to another?"

Chloe sighs and tosses the car keys to Maze. "Oh, I'm chauffeur, now?" Maze says in disbelief.

Chloe gives Maze an expectant look.

Maze rolls her eyes. "Fine," she says, before sauntering to the driver's side door, boot heels clicking on the hot pavement. "But you can't complain when I break the sound barrier."

Oh, boy. "I wouldn't," Chloe says, though she's dreading what she's just gotten herself into.

Chloe climbs into the backseat beside Lucifer while he glares silently ahead. This is wrong. This is all just … wrong. The fact that he played the house-arrest line straight, with no sexy wisecracks about handcuffs or punishment, and the fact that he isn't making any suggestive comments, now, about being in the backseat of a police car with her. Wrong.
"Lucifer," she begins quietly. She risks putting a hand on his arm. He doesn't pull away. "The only reason the hospital released you is because we said we'd watch you. Please, just …"

He turns his unhappy gaze on her. "Just … what, Detective?"

"Would you, please, let us help you?"

Lucifer's eyes narrow, and he folds his arms, pulling out of her grasp. "I don't need help." And he sits there, staring ahead into space, jaw pulsing as he clenches and unclenches it. A human embodiment of all things cactus. The fury she's been expecting.

She scoots closer. "I was worried about you," she admits. Hell, she's still worried, but she doesn't think he'd take that well, not after he told her not to concern herself.

His lip twitches, and he glances at her.

"I was worried," she repeats, meeting his dark eyes.

His gaze softens. Just a little.

"Just stay with us for a couple of days," she insists. "I'll have Dan keep Trixie. She won't be in your hair or anything. Deal?"

If anything gets him to play ball, she thinks making it a deal will. The "devil" can't resist a good favor.

The silence stretches for a long moment.

"For me?" she adds, trying to nudge him off the ledge.

He heaves a put-upon sigh, and he says, "Very well," in tone that suggests he's willing to humor her, but only her, and only because she turned it into a _quid pro quo_ sort of thing. She has no doubt he'll be cashing in on that favor sooner, rather than later. But then his head thunks against the window, and he closes his eyes with an exhausted sigh, ceasing any further hopes of discussion.

The first day home, a testament to the wringer he's been put through, all Lucifer does is sleep. Chloe has time to get in a full eight hours, go to work, and come back again before he emerges from the guest room.

"Thank you for my things," he says, quiet, sounding … almost nervous.

She looks up from the paperwork she's been pecking away at, and her breath catches. He's wearing his black silk bathrobe. His hair is mussed, and his stubble is well beyond a five-o-clock shadow at this point.

"Maze went and got them," Chloe says. "She's um …" Chloe swallows. Despite his banged up appearance, he looks … good. Really good. "Out, now. Said she had to track someone down."

Lucifer gives a small nod. He sits in the chair across from her with a soft grunt of pain and a visible wince.

"How are you?" she says, gaze creasing with concern.

He gives her a dismissive wave. "Oh, my back aches; that's all. Wings are heavier than I
remember." He grins, but the grin is a hollow one that doesn't reach his eyes. "Not to worry. I'm sure I'll bounce back in no time."

She frowns. "Lucifer …"

"Look, I …." He sighs. "I know you don't believe a bloody word out of my mouth when it comes to my point of origin, but …." She sets down her pen. She bites her lip. "You … kinda hinted that you were ready to … talk about that. Before …." She swallows. "Before."

"I was," he says. Was. Past tense. She resists the urge to growl in frustration. "But not now?"

He slumps, and suddenly, in the dim lamplight, he looks old. Older than any human has a right to be. Old, and weary, and feeling his long life like a ten-ton weight stacked on his shoulders. "Everything is different, now," he says quietly.

"Different how?"

"It's just … I'm not quite ready for you to stop looking at me like that," he admits, pushing his fingers through his hair. "Not after the week I've had."

"Look at you like what?" she says.

The silence stretches forever as he regards her with dark eyes. "Like I'm a person," he says, the words harsh and raw.

"Of course, you're a person," she says, horrified. He shakes his head, staring into space. "That's just it," he says with a sardonic laugh. "I'm not." She's seen behavior like this before. In the aftermath of abuse, particularly longterm. What in the hell happened to him?

She pushes away her papers, and her pen, and she slides out of her chair.

"What are you doing?" he says.

She shrugs. "I'm tired of paperwork. Want to watch some tv?"

He doesn't answer her, but he follows her to the couch in the living room, which is answer enough, she supposes. "Not some bloody soap opera, I hope," he grumbles as he settles into the cushions. He looks far too glad to be taking weight off his feet, considering he's been awake all of thirty minutes, and on his feet for even less time than that. "I've had quite enough family drama as of late."

She grins as she brings up Netflix and hands him the remote. "Dealer's choice," she says. "Just, please, no porn."

His face lights up. "Netflix has pornography? How have I not discovered this feature?"

She rolls her eyes. "I imagine, if it does, you'd find it."

"Quite right."
She settles onto the couch next to him. He smells good after his shower, and he's warm, and he's solid, but he seems … stiff. She doesn't miss how he flinches when she tries to put her head on his shoulder. She frowns. "It hurts that much?"

"How about this?" he says as he navigates to *Body Bags*. Like she hasn't even spoken.

She seems to have found a minefield. But is the problem that he hurts, or that he doesn't want to be touched there? His silence on the matter lends itself toward what he did before when she'd asked him a weighty question. *We'll talk later, yeah?*

"Like I said," she repeats with a yawn she can't quite stifle. "You pick."

She won't let herself draw wrong conclusions in the wake of his silence, this time. So, he doesn't want to be touched, there. Okay, then. Instead of resting her head on his shoulder, as her body keeps urging her to do, she settles for the pleasure of sitting next to him, with a small bubble of space between them as a line of demarcation. That, he doesn't seem to mind at all. Perhaps even likes it. Because the stiffness in his frame bleeds away over the moments as he seems to realize she isn't going to accost him.

He's alive, and he'll have a chance to be well, in time, and she lets that be enough, for now.

The opening credits roll.

"No, Lucifer," Chloe overhears Maze say, almost a hiss, later through the guest room door. "I won't do it. Not again. I refuse."

"Well, why not?" Lucifer replies in a petulant tone.

Chloe doesn't mean to eavesdrop. She's not a spy. But ….

"Do you have any idea what that was like for me?" Maze says.

"Well, I-"

"No, you don't," Maze snaps. "You only remember it from your perspective."

"Well, of course I only remember it from my perspective," Lucifer insists. "It's my bloody perspective. And, believe me, if one of us has a reason not to care to repeat that wretched experience, it would be me."

"No."

"Please, Maze," he says softly. "I've no one else to ask. Amenadiel would never help with this."

"Correction," Maze replies without pause. "You don't have anyone to ask. Because I'm not doing it."

Chloe barely has time to dash to her bedroom before her roommate stalks into the hallway, slamming the guest bedroom door behind her. Chloe frowns. What in the hell was that about?

She sits at the center island, newspaper sprawled in front of her, while Lucifer toils at the stove. He insisted on fixing her breakfast as repayment for her hospitality. A shaft of sunlight cuts in at a slant through the window, framing him in a bath of light, and she can't help but enjoy the view. His body forms a long, graceful line as he reaches for the salt. She rests her face against the backs
of her hands and props herself on her elbows, just … watching. She could get used to this, she thinks. Watching. Having him here every morning. Would he ever do that, though? Be that domestic? Somehow, she finds it hard to imagine, even when she's just playing with what-ifs in her head.

"I could do it," Chloe offers.

Lucifer looks up from the stove with a frown. "Do what?"

"Whatever the thing is that Maze won't do."

He blinks. "I beg your pardon?"

"I overheard you two last night, and I …. " She swallows. "I'm here, too. You can ask me for things."

He shakes his head. "I can't ask you for this."

"But-"

"I couldn't possibly," he snaps, cutting her off as he turns back to the griddle. His fingers clench around his spatula so hard that his hand visibly starts to shake. "Not this."

She takes a deep breath, counts to ten, and approaches him. His torso is hunched and defensive. He flips the pancake with what could almost be described as vengeance. She risks touching his shoulder, and he pulls away with a hiss. She whips her hand back immediately and presents both her palms to him as a peace offering. So, he definitely doesn't like being touched there.

"Lucifer, what happened to you?" she says.

"Nothing," he replies. "Nothing bloody happened. I called you, left a message, and then I was in the desert sans shirt and shoes in exchange for a bloody pair of wings I neither wanted nor asked for. The rest is just a big … nothing. I walked for a while, and then I …. " He shakes his head. "I was too hot." He laughs without amusement. "The Devil got too hot. Lovely."

This is, bar none, the most he's said about his disappearance thus far, and she's trembling with suppressed rage when she says, "So, somebody did take you." She'll find the bastard who did this if it's the last-

He sighs. "Something, maybe."

"Something," she says in a flat tone, eyebrows raised.

"Given the fact that you were nowhere in the vicinity, I can categorically say that whatever bested me was not a human." A low-pitched growl loiters in his throat, and then he throws the spatula in the sink, leaving the pancake to start smoking. "You're a right bloody bastard, you know?" he shouts to the ceiling.

"Lucifer …."

He glares at her. "What?"

"Are you … trying to tell me that your dad did this?"

He sniffs like he's irritated and turns away again. "Well, if the shoe fits …."

At first, she's not sure what to say, or what to do. From his references, some oblique, some direct,
At first, she's not sure what to say, or what to do. From his references, some oblique, some direct, she's always suspected his father of being a pretty scummy piece of work. But leaving someone with a head injury in the middle of Death Valley without water or shelter or adequate protection is no better than attempted murder. No, it is attempted murder, no comparisons needed.

"Why would he do that to you?" she says around the lump in her throat.

Lucifer rolls his eyes. "That's the bloody crux of it, isn't it?" he says. "I don't know why he does anything."

This is … so far out of her element. She swallows. Just … be a cop, she tells herself. She knows how to be a cop. "What's your father's full name?" she says. The first step is to track this asshole down.

"God," Lucifer says. "Spelled G-O-D. Though I doubt he'll be in your police database …." He waves his hand in a weird flit-y motion. "Thing."

She sighs. The pancake smells like it's charring to a briquette at this point. She slips around him to turn off the burner. His body is solid steel, immovable. "Lucifer, can you, please, be serious, for one second? I can't help you if you're not straight with me."

Whatever were the right words to say, those weren't them. He ices over. The life in his eyes blows away like snow. She can almost feel the temperature in the room drop. "I told you, Detective," he replies, the words frosty and dangerous. "I don't. Need. Help."

"I thought you never lie."

"I don't," he says. "That's kind of my jam."

"Well, you just asked Maze for help with something last night."

A frustrated noise catches in his throat before he gets a handle on it. "I meant I don't need help with this," he says, gesturing vaguely at himself. "With me." His onyx ring glitters in the sunlight. "I'm not a bloody invalid, and there is no case to solve. A case implies a mystery, and in this instance, there is none. My dad's a bastard. Full stop. The answer to life, the universe, and everything."

"So, you don't want to press charges," she says.

"I want to do more than press charges. I want to bloody throttle him," he snaps. "But that's a tad ineffective, considering he's God and all. It's a bit hard to throttle the almighty, wouldn't you say?"

She sighs. "Damn it, Lucifer."

"I. Don't. Damn things, Detective." He jabs an index finger at the ceiling. "That's his thing." His eyes narrow. "Or haven't you been listening?"

Shit. "I didn't mean ….""

But it's too late. "I've had enough," he says, and he stalks away like a wounded tiger.

And, now, she has no idea what to do except let him cool off.

He's not at the house when she returns from work. The bed in the guest room is made, each sheet folded crisply. His things are gone, too.
"What is it?" he says unkindly when she calls him. No preamble. No sing-song, "Detective!" No nothing. Just … that.

She swallows. "I just wanted to make sure you're okay."

"I'm bloody perfect. Is that all?"

She sighs. "Look," she says. "I get that you …. I get that you need space right now. I get the message loud and clear. But … if you change your mind. I'm here."

For a moment, she can hear him on the other end of the line. Breathing.

And then he hangs up.
Black Sheep

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much for the feedback, everybody! I really appreciate it -- hearing from you all makes my day :) For this chapter, please do mind the trigger warning I posted at the beginning of the story. It's most relevant here.

The alley smells of gore, sex, stale urine, and death.

Over the years as a homicide detective, Chloe has learned distance. As long as she can think about a dead body as a shell, rather than a person who's ceased to be, she can get through crime scenes without too much mental strain. Every once in a while, though, she'll run across one of those "empty shells" that bears too much of a resemblance to someone real and wholly special in her life, and the empty shell becomes a victim again. Those are the crime scenes she struggles with.

The dead girl sprawled haphazardly on the pavement looks like Trixie - if Trixie were about eight years older, that is - and Chloe has to fight back a wave of vomit. She presses the back of her hand to her mouth and swallows. Who could do this to another human being, let alone someone who hadn't even grown up, yet?

"So, what is it, this time?" a familiar voice says to the right.

Chloe, happy for the excuse to back away, turns to him. Lucifer Morningstar. In the flesh. His crisp, black suit and button-down shirt both scream spent money. It's only been a matter of days, but he looks like he's been healing for weeks. The burns are gone from his face without even hints of discoloration left behind on his pale skin, and he's moving with his usual feline grace.

"You're here," she says, unable to curb her surprise.

"I'll note you didn't call me," he says with a cold smile that doesn't meet his eyes. "Careful, Detective, or I might be driven to conclude that you consider our partnership to your detriment."

"I'm sorry," she says. "I thought you wanted-"

"Space," he finishes for her. "You did think that. Yes." He brushes nonexistent lint from his perfectly-pressed sleeve, his projected ennui so thick she could cut it with a steak knife. It has to be an affectation. Has to be. But then his bland look sharpens into something dangerous. "I'm feeling rather wrathful."

She's not sure how to respond to that, but before she can do more than blink, he claps his hands together like a stage director and says, "So, what dastardly deed needs punishing today? A robbery gone wrong? A crime of passion? An act of rev...." He trails to a halt when Ella pulls back the blue tarp concealing the body, and he gets a good look. His jaw clenches. And, for once, Lucifer has no words whatsoever.

"Jane Doe," Chloe says in a soft voice.

Ella stands up with a sigh. "She looks like she's about sixteen," she says, for once without a hint of morbid humor. "Based on temperature and lividity, death occurred approximately eight hours
ago. No idea on cause, yet. She'll need an autopsy."

"How on earth can you have no idea on cause?" Lucifer demands. "She's …. I mean, she's …."
Whatever "she" is, in another uncharacteristic bout of speechlessness, he's too upset to finish his sentence. "Well, look!"

"There's just …." Ella swallows. She gestures at the body. "Too many possibilities."

Chloe dares another look at the victim. The girl-who-looks-like-Trixie has been dumped naked in the alley, discarded like refuse with the rest of the trash. Bruises mar almost every inch of her skin that isn't an open wound. Her black, wispy hair is matted thickly with blood and other bodily fluids.

"I want fingerprints run as soon as possible," Chloe says as her stomach roils.

"Already done," Ella says. "Hers and maybe … his."

Chloe raises her eyebrows. "You got the killer's prints?"

"Maybe," Ella says with a shrug. "Just a partial on her arm."

Chloe nods. That's a start, at least.

"I sent a DNA sample for testing a few minutes ago, too," Ella adds.

"Her DNA," Lucifer says, pointing at the victim, "or his?" Lucifer's gaze shifts pointedly to one of the stains that isn't blood. His lip curls in disgust.

Ella's mouth forms a grim line. "Both."

"Any witnesses?" Chloe says, trying to swallow back nausea. "Who found the body?"

Ella barely has a chance to point to a homeless man huddled forlornly beside one of the squad cars, before Lucifer's stalking toward the man in question. "Right," Lucifer says, tone full of menace, "you, there!" The homeless man's eyes widen in fear. "Did you do this?"

"Lucifer!" Chloe hisses.

Damn it, why does he always do this? She doesn't have the fortitude to wrangle him into some semblance of appropriateness right now. She barely has the fortitude to keep the tidal waves of this-could-be-Trixie from bowling her flat.

She swallows once, twice. The world seems to slow down, and for a moment, all she can hear is her own heartbeat thundering in her ears. This could be Trixie. This could be ….

"So, you like power, is it?" she can hear Lucifer saying, an echo far away. He's holding the homeless man by the lapels of his dirty, lice-infested coat.

"I didn't do this!" insists the man.

Trixie. It could be Trixie. It could-

"You like to take it out on people who can't fight back? There's a special place in Hell for people like you ….""

"No! I swear!"
"Oh, really," Lucifer says in a dark, velvet murmur. "Well, what is it you do desire, then?"

Her fists tighten until her nails feel like they might be breaking skin. She blinks, the chorus of could-be-Trixies stops, and the world snaps back into place. "Lucifer, stop it," she snarls, covering the distance between them in a few strides. "This is a good samaritan, and a potential witness, not a perp." As an aside to said witness, she adds a sincere, "I'm so sorry about this."

She grabs Lucifer's arm, zillion dollar cufflinks and all, and tries to yank him away. He doesn't budge, and she gets the distinct impression she's trying to move a mountain. When he turns and peers at her, one perfectly sculpted eyebrow arched in incredulity, like she's some sort of fly daring to buzz around his filet mignon, the impression is only intensified.

"What is wrong with you?" she snaps.

For a moment, the silence stretches, and her breath catches. In that moment, his eyes are cut diamonds. Sharp. Cold. Eternal. "Everything," he replies in a voice that makes her shiver. "If you believe the hype, that is."

"Well, cut it out," she tells him. "Or leave my crime scene."

He sighs. "Detective-"

"I'm serious, Lucifer," she snaps. She glances at the body. Some of her righteous fury bleeds away. "I … I … ."

He frowns. "Detective?" Concern overrides the coldness in his expression. He puts a palm on her shoulder. "Are you all right?"

"I'm fine," she lies. From his skeptical look, she's pretty sure he doesn't believe her. But she doesn't let that matter anymore. She can't. She resumes her attempts to drag him away, adding a harsh, "Now, will you please, come with me?" for good measure.

He lets her move him. That's the only way to describe how it feels when she pulls him away from what had been an excessive-force lawsuit waiting to happen. He lets her, but he could just as easily continue to be the mountain.

She's seen him lose his temper before.

But he's never felt so "other."

She doesn't think about the implications of that, though.

Not when she has a rapist murderer to catch.

Not when the victim could have been Trixie.

After she manages to get the homeless man, Seymour Watkins, to calm down - which he would only do once she'd frogmarched Lucifer to the car, around the corner, well out of sight - Seymour's able to tell her that, no, he doesn't know the dead girl's name, but that he's seen her several times at the homeless shelter on 6th. Homeless shelters require sign-ins, usually by some sort of record number if not photo I.D. She thinks, maybe, she'll get some information, there.

"No, I.D., yet," Chloe says as she climbs into the driver's side seat of her cruiser. "Got a lead,
Lucifer's futzing with his onyx ring. He doesn't reply or look up or anything. His jaw is clenching and unclenching often enough to make his temples dance, though.

She sighs. Wrathful seems like an understatement. But if he's not interested in talking, she can't make him. He's made it clear she can't make him do anything.

She jams her key into the ignition and twists it. The car sputters to life. Barely. Yet another thing going wrong. On top of that, the silence is only giving her more mental space to remember that the body looks like Trixie.

"So, why are you angry?" she says, hopeful for anything that isn't thinking about that.

He gives her a look that says, You can't be bloody serious. But what he says is a much more measured, "Well, aren't you, Detective? A girl is dead."

"Of course, I'm angry," she snaps, at wit's end. "But-" "Rapists. Are. Vile," he says before she can finish, fingers clenching, lip curling like he's sniffed something in an advanced state of decay. He stares into the space beyond the windshield with his dark, hating eyes. "He should be punished."

"Not by you," she says.

Those words garner his attention. He looks at her, silent, for what feels like eternity, leaving only the hum of the engine and the traffic noise to fill the space. "Yes," he says slowly, like she's ruffled him somehow. "Yes, of course." He waves his hand. "I'll let your little wheels of justice roll, as they say." His gaze shifts back to the road.

Let. There's that word again.

And once again, she gets the feeling that she's wrangling a mountain who's only deigning to play along with her delusions of wherewithal. Yes, he'll let the justice system take a crack at things. Sure, Why not? What's the harm? But she's learned that, while he doesn't lie, he'll happily let choice silence create false assumptions, and he's said nothing about what he'd do to the suspect after due process. She can't suppress the shiver that creeps down her spine.

She swallows. "I just meant … you said you were angry before you'd even seen the …." Trixie. She looks like Trixie. "The vic."

"I did," he admits.

"… Are you still angry at me?"

He frowns. "Detective, I was never angry at you."

"You stormed out."

"Well, I didn't say I wasn't angry," he replies. Finally, he gives her a smile that reaches his eyes. Just a bit of warmth poking through the frigidity. A peace offering. "Just not at you."

"Your dad?" she hazards.

He doesn't reply, but the way his smile drips away like water is enough of an answer.

She wishes he would give her enough information to mount a case. For kidnapping, if nothing
"I think her name was Anita," the administrator, nametag: Hi, I'm Latanya!, says with a frown after looking at the proffered picture. "Anita ...." She taps the edge of the picture with a manicured nail, like she's trying to shake the memory loose from her cuticles or something. "I'd need to check the register for the last name."

Chloe nods. "Please, do."

The disheveled administrator brushes her frizzy hair out of her face and begins to root through the thick stack of papers on her desk for her keyboard. Well, "stack" is being a bit generous. The office looks like a cluster bomb went off in it. It's impossible for Chloe to determine if there's any actual form of organization going on.

She glances at Lucifer as the sound of clacking keys and mouse clicks fills the silence. For once, he isn't being pushy. In fact, he's been quiet the whole time except to say a distracted hello, and all he's done for the past fifteen minutes is stare into space. Which ... isn't like him at all. She knocks her knee gently into his, and he reanimates, blinking languidly at her.

She tilts her head toward him, covering her mouth at a slant with her palm. "Can you at least pretend to pay attention?" she whispers in his direction.

"Ah, here it is!" Latoya says, oblivious, as she points to her computer screen, and Chloe snaps away from Lucifer to look. "Anita Rosario."

"Do you have an emergency contact for her?" Chloe says, leaning closer. "Anything?"

Latoya shakes her head. "I'm sorry; we don't collect that information."

"It's okay," Chloe says. "Do you know if Anita had any enemies? Anyone who'd wish her harm?"

"Hmm." Latanya looks up to the ceiling, thinking. "I can't recall anyone." The administrator frowns. "But she always seemed so sad." She glances back at her desk. "I do hope you find the person who did this."

"Oh, I will, I assure you," Lucifer says. "If not now, he's mine when he dies. There's no lying in Hell."

Latanya's eyebrows knit in confusion.

"Right," Chloe says before Latanya can think too hard about what Lucifer just said. "What a joker, this one." She adds a forced laugh before clearing her throat. "Thank you so much for your time, Ms. Appleton."

"Oh, you're quite welcome!" Latanya says brightly as Chloe grabs Lucifer by the sleeve and yanks him out of the woman's office.
"Would you cease dragging me about?" Lucifer grumbles, pulling his wrist away from her when they're in the hallway out of earshot. "I'm not a bloody dog you can put on a leash."

"Are you crazy?" Chloe snaps.

Lucifer gives her a long, leonine shrug. "Merely stating fact."

"Yeah, well," Chloe says with a growl, "try not to state it in a way that sounds like vigilante murder next time."

"I said nothing of the sort!"

Chloe raises her eyebrows at him. "'He's mine when he dies?'' she says, putting his words in little air quotes. "'He's mine when he dies?'"

"Well, I didn't say I'd kill him, did I?" Lucifer replies with an irritated sniff as he brushes off the arms of his sport coat. The look that follows is far more pointed. Vulnerable. Wounded. "You think I would?"

She sighs. "Of course, not."

"I don't kill," he says. Something haunted oozes into his expression, and he amends, "I don't kill humans."

"Lucifer, I know that."

"It's the only rule he's ever made for me that I follow," he says.

She thinks, maybe, there's some major subtext she's missing, here. She's just not sure what. She folds her arms. She swallows. "Would you, please, talk to me?" she says in a soft voice.

For a moment, their gazes meet, and she thinks he might. Talk to her. His lips part, and the look in his eyes is a desolate one. He wants to reach out. She can see it written in the way his body is tipped toward hers. In the way he's pleading with her without so much as a word. He's not the type to actually say, "I have feelings I don't like. Please, help me sort them." His body language is as much speaking as she'll ever get on that matter, she thinks.

But then, like a switch flips, he hardens.

"Detective, I can't," he says.

And then he's gone in a whisper of air and rustling Prada, leaving her to follow him back to the car, confused, in his wake.

Whatever the hell is going on with Lucifer, it extends to a refusal to do anything that could be construed as grunt work. As soon as she heads back to the police station, he rolls his eyes and asks to be dropped off at Lux. "I'm the Devil," he says in a huffy tone. "I punish evil administrative assistants with paperwork. I don't bloody do it, myself."

"But you've done paperwork before," Chloe counters.

"Yes, well," he replies, glaring. "I was feeling magnanimous at the time."

She frowns. "But not now."
"Now? Wrathful is what I believe I said, Detective."

"Lucifer …," she has a chance to say before he's out of the car, slamming the door behind him.

"Call me when there's a guilty party to rip apart," he snaps at her through the open window.

The worst part about the whole exchange, though, is that Chloe can't tell if he's speaking metaphorically or not. His tone is deadly enough to make the hairs on the back of her neck stand on end. His whole demeanor screams predator as he stalks away in a huff, and she thinks he could. Rip someone apart. He's certainly strong enough, if what she's seen in the past is any indication. And he's certainly mad enough. But ….

She sighs. She can't help someone who doesn't want to be helped. That's something she learned a long time ago.

Maze returns that evening, disheveled and filthy with detritus. Like … she's been rolling around in a sandbox or something. Her lip is busted, and she's got a blue-black shiner the diameter of a baseball swelling up around her left eye. Chloe's already perplexed by the injuries, and by the dust forming a cloud around her roommate, when Maze peels off her leather coat to reveal a wet-looking leather bustier. Not wet as in with water, either. Chloe's been a cop far too long not to be able to recognize bloodstains on sight, even when the color isn't apparent. Blood is, after all, quite a unique substance. And, from the unhindered way Maze is moving, the blood on the bustier, at least, isn't hers.

"I … take it you found who you were looking for?" Chloe says, curiosity burning as Maze hangs her grungy coat on the back of one of the chairs in the dining room, presumably to air out.

"Nah," Maze says with an irritated shake of her head as she kicks off her boots. "Turns out that guy is a little … untouchable."

Chloe frowns. "Then who …?"

"Let's just say I killed the messenger he sent."

Chloe's frown deepens. "You don't mean literally, right?"

Maze regards Chloe for a long, long moment, eyebrows arched as if to say, Pretty damned literally, actually. But you don't want to hear that. The expression bleeds away as Maze snorts, eyes twinkling, and then the snort morphs into a full blown guffaw. "Relax, Decker. You're so uptight! I didn't hurt any of your precious humans." She heads into the kitchen. "I'm gonna crack open a bottle of wine. You want?"

Chloe licks her lips suspiciously. There's … nothing about this moment that feels … right. Nothing whatsoever. But she shoves her doubts away.

This is Maze. Maze is weird. Maze has kinks. And Chloe's just letting this horrible could-be-Trixie case get to her. End of story. Never mind that Lucifer was just kidnapped and nearly killed, and Maze is totally the type to reply to that transgression in an eye-for-an-eye sort of way.

"Please," Chloe says, shaking her head. Paranoid. She's going full-blown paranoid. She needs help. Or booze. Something that will take the edge off. "Fill the glass to the brim."

Maze laughs again, glasses clinking as she roots around in one of the cabinets. "You got it, Decker."
"We're in luck!" Ella says just as Dan says, "Got something."

Chloe glances up from her computer to peer at them. Ella's practically bouncing. Dan is a bit more subdued. Ella and Dan stare at each other, and then an odd, hitching, you-first-no-you-first dance ensues. To Chloe, it's a bit incomprehensible, but Ella and Dan apparently decide that Ella is the winner.

"DNA's already in the system," Ella exclaims with a brilliant grin. "Ryan Radcliffe. Sex offender. And the partial print I lifted off the victim's arm is a 97% match for his left thumb." She claps her hands together. "Boom! Busted!" She grins, and she looks at Dan. "Your turn."

"Anita Rosario," Dan says as he places a printout on Chloe's desk. "Reported missing six months ago by Maria and Juan Rosario."

Chloe frowns as she skims the sheaf of papers. The address listed for Maria and Juan is in Pacoima. Not the greatest of neighborhoods. She glances up at Dan. "Parents?"

Dan shakes his head. "Looks like grandparents. They're the legal guardians on file with CPS."

"Hmm," Chloe says. "So, this might actually be pretty cut and dry. Girl is kicked out or runs away, bumps into a rapist."

"Ryan," Dan says.

Chloe nods. "Unfortunately." She scoots back her chair. "So, we'll pick him up, and case clo-"

Ella winces. "Well ….

Chloe sighs. "Well, what?"

"Ryan … kinda jumped parole."

Chloe deflates. "Of course, he did."

"But … that's good!" Ella's quick to say.

"How on earth is that good?"

Ella shrugs. "You'll still catch him. You always do. And this will give Lucifer something to do. You know. Catching the bad guy. Yay, work! I mean, there's nothing like getting back up on the horse to take your mind off things. Am I right, or am I right?"

"Lucifer doesn't need something to do," Dan snarks, putting the word "do" in air quotes. "He needs-"

"Hey," Chloe says, giving Dan a withering look. "He was kidnapped. I think. And God knows what else. Give him a break."

Ella sighs. "Still no luck on prying it out of him?"

Chloe shakes her head. "Not one bit. And he's …." She bites her lip. "There's something up with him. Something bad happened. He needs help. I just …." She slams her fists onto the desk in frustration. "I can't do anything for him until he lets me. I can't even build a damned case."

"You don't have a single lead?" Dan says, frowning.
"He says God did it," Chloe replies. "God. What in the hell am I even supposed to do with that?"

Ella shakes her head. "Man. That guy won't break character for anything, will he?"

"I don't understand why we're here," Lucifer says with a sigh as they pull up to the crumbling curb in front the Rosarios' small duplex in Pacoima. The lawn is brittle and dying, and the house's maroon-colored paint has mostly chipped off to reveal a yellowish stucco skeleton. The setting sun casts long shadows, and the ancient-looking eucalyptus tree giving shade to the driveway looks gigantic and foreboding as a result.

Chloe puts the car into park. "We have to notify the family."

"Yes, but … can't that come later?" he says. He points at her notepad. "We have the name of the rapist. We should punish him, now." He directs a disgusted look at the dilapidated house. "Not the negligent wastes of space she called guardians."

"I put out a BOLO," Chloe assures him as they climb out of the car. "We'll find him. But, right now, I need to get to this family before the press does." She swallows. "It's awful to hear this kind of news from the press."

"Who cares?" Lucifer scoffs. "They didn't."

She frowns at him. "Where on earth would you get an idea like that?"

"Well, Anita wasn't at home for a reason," he says. He gestures at the house. "And I doubt it's because they were stellar examples of parental skill. They probably drove her away."

"They're her grandparents," Chloe corrects. "And kids go out on their own for a lot of different reasons, Lucifer."

"Name a single one that doesn't involve the family being awful."

"Mental illness, a bad external influence, an infinite but premature sense of independence, financial trouble, irrational fear, misplaced heroics, kids being kids …. Any number of things." She knocks on the door. "Mr. and Mrs. Rosario?" she calls.


"Yes?" an old woman with an earthy voice says, peering out at them. "Can I help you?"

"I don't understand," Mrs. Rosario keeps mumbling. She sits on her sofa, rocking back and forth, her scruffy white dog whining with distress from her lap. Mr. Rosario is out running errands, and once again Chloe finds herself wishing they'd waited for him to return, before imparting the bad news, but Mrs. Rosario had insisted. Too late to fix it, now, Chloe thinks. Mrs. Rosario continues, "Please, I don't …. How can she be dead?"

"Oh, it's quite simple," Lucifer says in a bored tone. "You humans are terribly fragile, really."

The old woman chokes on a sob. "But ….

Chloe glares at Lucifer, but he isn't paying any attention to her. He's standing by the mantel, fixated on a long row of photographs framed with antique brass. Most of the photos are pictures of the victim. Her and two young adults - Anita's absent parents, probably. The most prominently placed photo, one that Lucifer has picked up to inspect with his long lithe fingers, is a picture of
Anita riding down a cracked sidewalk on a little pink bike with no training wheels. A young, black-haired woman with an olive complexion stands at the end of the walk, cheering, and Anita's wearing this look of glee that only children can wear. In that moment, nothing is wrong, and nothing can be wrong, and ….

She remembers Trixie making that exact same face during a similar moment. *Mommy! Mommy, I did it!* Trixie warbles, an echo in Chloe's ears, as streamers flap in the wind behind her little bike. A lump forms in Chloe's esophagus, and she can't swallow. She can't-

"So, tell me, Maria," Lucifer says as he sets down the photo and turns. "What did Anita do to make you kick her out? Didn't pick up her toys? Didn't mind her manners? Didn't act like a proper little clone?"

Maria Rosario turns white. "I don't know what you're talking about. I …." Her lower lip starts to quiver, and fresh tears run down her face. "She can't … be dead. *Mi tesorita* ….

Lucifer rolls his eyes. "Well, what did you bloody expect when you-"

"Her parents died eight months ago in a wreck," Maria snaps, interrupting him. "*My daughter died. Mi hija.*" Her tone is twisted by grief like the gnarled roots of an old tree. She wipes her tears away with shaky, wrinkled fingers. "We took Anita in. Juan and I. But she wasn't the same. Her heart was gone. And then … she was gone. We looked everywhere, but she was gone. We didn't kick her out."

Lucifer has the good grace to look stricken.

Chloe clears her throat roughly. She needs to take control of this situation before Lucifer makes even more of a diplomacy mess. Chloe's likely to receive a complaint, as it is, as soon as Maria calms down enough to think rationally about what a bastard Lucifer's being.

"So, Anita ran away after her parents died?" Chloe says.

"Yes," Maria replies with a tearful nod. "Yes, I …." She breaks into sobs again.

Chloe leans forward and places Ryan Radcliffe's photograph on the coffee table. "Do you recognize this man?"

Maria shakes her head, but is too distraught to speak.

Chloe nods, a little too quickly. "Well, thank you for your time, Mrs. Rosario. I'm so very sorry for your loss."

Chloe can't stop the echoes from bouncing inside her skull.

"So, can we catch the killer, now?" Lucifer dogs her as they head down the front walk and back to the car.

The sun has sunk behind the horizon, and the sky is turning indigo, with pinks and oranges and brilliant reds painted like brushstrokes at the western edges. A breeze tinged with the faint scent of salt and creosote billows against her face. A motorcycle roars past on the pocked road beside the old house.

"When we find him," she says, vision blurring. She swipes at her face with the back of her palms,
"Well, pardon me, Detective, but we don't seem to be doing much searching," he scoffs. "I-

She wheels about on her heels to face him. "Dan went to his last known address earlier today and asked around," she says, interrupting Lucifer as she jabs her finger at his chest. His suit is silk and soft and she can't resist the urge to linger. She just needs …. She's not sure what she needs. "There's really not much else we can do without a hit on the BOLO."

"But he needs to be punished," Lucifer replies, gaze creasing with irritation.

"Well, what do you want me to do, Lucifer? Conjure him out of thin air? Wouldn't that be more your department than mine?"

"I …." He blinks, seemingly dumbfounded. God, his eyes are so … fathomless. His gaze wanders to her hand, at last, like he's only just now noticed that she's poking at the red handkerchief folded in his breast pocket. "I beg your pardon?"

"Well, if you're some all-powerful archangel, why don't you snap your all-powerful fingers and fix it?" she says, almost a growl.

Another dumbfounded blink as he looks back up at her. "Chloe …." It's the first time he's used her name since before he was taken.

"Well?" she says.

He swallows. And then he looks away. "I won't."

Strangely, not, I can't. "Why not?" she demands.

"Because Maze cut off my wings," he replies, tone overwrought, almost a hiss.

She folds her arms. "I thought you said you had your wings back, now."

"I never said they were mine," he snaps. "They're not mine."

She rolls her eyes. "Oh, look. He found a technicality. Again."

_Mommy! Mommy, I did it!

When she reaches the car, Chloe can't hold it in anymore.

"Chloe?" he says, a distant word she can barely hear. At least the horror in his tone is gone, replaced by concern. For her. Such a welcome change from the defensiveness. And the anger. And the hurt.

If only she were in a right state to appreciate it.

She spills over with tears as she replays the moment in her head. Trixie. On her bike. Dan is clapping in the background, and the air smells like … a barbecue. He was grilling hamburgers while he watched them go up and down the sidewalk, Trixie pedaling, Chloe trotting close behind with arms outstretched.

_Mommy! Mommy, I did it!

_I see, Monkey! Look at you!
She's too distraught to notice it happening, really. Lucifer leaning across the parking brake and wrapping his long arms around her. But he does, nonetheless, and in her blur of grief, all she can do is sob into the lapel of his suit jacket.

"Don't cry, love," he says softly. His warm fingers splay against her back. He rubs her in a slow, soothing, up-and-down motion.

"It's just …." Chloe sniffs. "She looks like Trixie."

For a moment, he seems confused. Then his gaze ticks back toward the house they just left. Understanding sweeps in like a slow tide. "Ah," he says, a gentle exhalation. "But she isn't, Detective. Your little miscreant is staying with Detective Douche. Remember? She's right as rain and just as annoying as always, I'm sure."

"I know," Chloe says woefully. "I know, but I can't help but think … what if Mrs. Rosario were me? What if-"

"But she isn't," he says.

"Why is the world like this?"

"I wish I knew." He shakes his head. "Bloody terrible design, if you ask me."

For a long moment, he holds her while she cries, and he says nothing. Does nothing but be there. For her. It's an unconditional warmth and love he hasn't offered her since she brought him home from the hospital in Vegas, and she can't help but melt against him.

With her eyes closed, the world is a fleshy, pinkish black. The black begins to shift to peach, though, and she feels warm. Warm like she's just lain out on the beach on a sunny day in June. Her worries drift away on the receding tide, and she doesn't see the girl who looked like Trixie anymore. She doesn't see anything at all.

She's safe, and she's warm, and she's loved.

Trixie will happily live to a ripe old age, and she'll still be living, long after Chloe has passed into memory.

Be at peace, a soft blessing fills her mind.

And she knows everything will be all right.

Everything is all right.

Her breath flows out in a sigh as her body turns boneless.

"Lucifer," she whispers, but he doesn't reply, this time. She cracks open her eyes, only to snap them shut again. The light. It's like her car's been engulfed by the sun. "Lucifer … what is …?"

He flinches against her, and the light blinks out like someone flipped a switch.

She risks another blink. The car is dark, now, and all she can see is his blurry outline, the glisten of his pupils, and the telltale technicolor spots of a flash-bang exposure. Except there was no flash-bang grenade. Was she hallucinating? What in the-

"Apologies, Detective," he says, breathless, like he, too, is stunned. "I shouldn't have done that." And then he scrambles out of the car like he can't get away from her fast enough. She hears a
strange rustling. Like … leaves or … feathers or … something.

"Lucifer!" she has a chance to say as she climbs out after him.

But he's gone. Not gone as in retreating around the corner, out of sight. Just … gone. Like he was never there in the first place.

As she gapes at the empty street, a balmy breeze rifles through the palm trees, through the old eucalyptus tree, making them all sway like dancers. She rolls her eyes. Leaves. Wind. Right. Exactly. Stupid, she scolds herself. She'd heard palm fronds rustling. Nothing more.

That still doesn't explain her would-be Houdini, though.

What on earth?

She finds him later at Lux. A noisy, unhappy crowd mills outside, blocked by a ginormous bouncer, who's standing there with his arms folded and a grim look on his face. He steps aside for Chloe without comment, though, much to the chagrin of everyone who's been barred entry.

The club is empty, save for the wait staff, and the music sounds even more earsplitting than usual without a wall-to-wall party to absorb some of it. She's not sure why he hasn't let anyone in, yet. It's well past 10 p.m. Prime hours for Lux's eager, waiting tills.

"Detective!" Lucifer shouts with faux cheer. He sits at the piano at the center of the empty club. Shot glasses, one of which contains a soggy clump of countless used joints, line the top of the piano.

"Lucifer, what are you doing?" she says.

"What's it look like," he slurs, arching sloppily backward to look at her with his too-dilated eyes. His spine seems impossibly long as he stretches out. "They jus' replaced m'piano."

"It looks like you're trying to kill yourself," she says, concerned as he tips back the second-to-last glass in the row, and then slams it back onto the waiting coaster, empty. There has to be at least fifteen glasses. All but one empty, now. How in the hell is he even conscious?

He waves a hand sloppily at her. "Nonsens. Jus' trying to overcome a celestial constitution. S'a right big challenge, y'know." He glances at the man wiping down glasses behind the bar. "Bring out the Bowmore, would you? Cheers!"

Then he reaches for the last glass, but she blocks him with her palm. Their hands touch. "Please, don't," she says.

For a moment, he stares at the contact, and it lasts longer than it should. His skin is warm, and it's hard to resist the urge to close her hand over his. His fingers curl a little, like he might close them into a fist. And then he pulls away.

"Pfft," he says, not without affection. "Killjoy." But he listens, at least, and he leaves the glass untouched as she sits on the bench beside him.

She licks her lips as she plinks aimlessly at the keys in front of her. He doesn't join her, and she feels awkward. She never feels awkward around him, and it's a weird experience. She flails for some way to start the conversation.

"About earlier …"
"Don't," he says.
She frowns. "Don't what?"
"Don't ask me about earlier."
"But ...." She swallows. "But what you did for me ...."

"I said don't ask me," he snaps. He grabs the last shot glass before she can stop him. She watches his Adam's apple roll down his throat as he swallows. When he puts down the glass, he gestures at one of the servers. "Justin, be a darling and open the doors, would you? I've an empty club that needs filling."

She grinds her teeth. "Lucifer, would you quit avoiding-"

But it's too late. Bodies spill into the club like grains of sand filling an hour glass. Steady. Unstoppable.

Lucifer ignores her, standing up to clap. "Come, come, come," he says, waving his revelers forward. A buxom blonde wearing a too-tight little black dress catches his attention immediately, and he arches an eyebrow at the woman's curvy figure. "Oh, hello there."

Chloe clears her throat.

He meets Chloe's glare with flat expression. All hint of warmth or welcome is gone. "Come, now, Detective," he says in a scolding tone. "You've always known I'm no angel."

And then he wraps his long, lithe arm around the blonde with the spray-painted LBD and yanks her onto the dance floor with him. His definition of dancing, in this case, is basically sex with clothes on. A lump forms in Chloe's throat as she watches him lick the woman's throat from collarbone to chin.

She can't retreat fast enough.

The horrible thing about it all, though, is that she still feels great about before. Whole, and restored. Free of worry. Dunked in a liquid bath of sunshine. When she thinks about the victim, lying dead in the alley, broken and bleeding and violated, she doesn't see Trixie, anymore. She sees a poor young girl who had a rough break and is nothing like Trixie at all. Trixie is fine. Chloe's found her distance, again.

Lucifer helped her find it.

She just wishes she had a clue what he'd done.
He shows up at work the next day without being prompted, though it takes him until just before lunchtime to show his face. He makes no snarky comments upon arrival. He doesn't inform her that he's "wrathful." Or anything of the sort. He merely pulls up a chair beside her desk, looking pasty and sick and unkempt, like he just rolled out of bed after a bender that ended only an hour ago. He stinks of cigarettes and skunk weed, and alcohol wafts from his pores. The reek of it all stings her eyes and clogs her throat.

"God, Lucifer," she snaps, blinking away tears, "take a shower."

"I did."

She gives him an incredulous look. "Well, take another one."

He sighs. "Detective, I-"

"I don't want to hear it," she replies before he can finish. "I don't want to hear about you and your bad, bad self. You're a rebel, and you'll never ever be any good. I get it, already. Message received. So, just stop."

The fact that he has no retort, sarcastic, genuinely wounded, or otherwise, doesn't sit right. His shoulders are slumped, like he wishes he could just melt into the floor and have this part of their reconciliation done with. His disquiet is a palpable, discordant, stifling thing that makes it hard for her to breathe. None of this sits right.

Nothing has sat right since Vegas.

Lucifer Morningstar is not this standoffish creature sitting at her desk.

She sighs. "Look, if you want to take your finger off the self-destruct button, you know where to find me." He seems intent on inspecting his cufflinks instead of meeting her eyes. "I'm here for you, but I can't do anything unless you let me, and you've made it painfully clear that you won't let me. So … as far as I'm concerned, we're done until you bring it up again. Okay?"

He still says nothing.

She looks at her lap for a moment, swallowing around the lump in her throat. "Thank you for yesterday," she says, offering an olive branch. A tiny one. "You made me feel … better. I'm …."

Her heart squeezes. "Whatever you did, I'm better."

That gets his attention. He squirms in his seat, looking distinctly uncomfortable. He was expecting a diatribe about the blonde in the little black dress, she thinks. Not thanks for … whatever the hell magical cleansing flashlight he'd whipped out yesterday.
He probably would have preferred the diatribe.

Still, she has to say it. "Thank you, Lucifer," she repeats. "I mean it."

He looks at a fixed point on the floor, and he takes a barbed, quick breath, like he's trying to cleanse himself. Then it all slips away behind an insouciant mask. He's quite the chameleon when he puts his mind to it. "You're welcome," he says, absent the lovely dulcet tones that he often speaks his pleasure with.

Wrong. It's all just … wrong.

She pushes her desk chair backward with the backs of her knees and rises to her feet. She reaches forward to give his wrinkled sleeve a tug. Then she glances in the direction of the locker room and gestures toward it.

"Now, please, take a shower, or go home until your blood isn't solid booze," she tells him.

She's made it less than five strides toward the break room before she notices that he's acquiescing.

Without a single argument.

With gusto, even. Like he can't, in this moment, get away from her fast enough.

She watches incredulously as he skulks away toward the showers.

Not having to fight tooth and nail with him just to get him to give an inch is another card in the royal flush of wrong that he's been playing since he got here.

She thinks once again about yesterday.

That moment when he'd hugged her.

The moment he'd made her feel better.

_I shouldn't have done that_, he said.

And he'd fled, then, just as fast as he'd fled, now.

She frowns.

His behavior today and his behavior yesterday have to be connected. Yesterday, he did a thing he thought he shouldn't do, and he fled. She tried to talk about it with him later that night, and he drank himself into oblivion. Fleeing of a different sort. Today, she thanked him for the thing he thought he shouldn't do, and he fled again. Anytime the "thing" comes up, he flees.

But why does making her feel better suddenly fall within the bounds of something he shouldn't do?

He's hugged her before ….

_Well, if you're some all-powerful archangel, why don't you snap your all-powerful fingers and fix it?_

_I won't._

The words sink like a stone in her mind.
She bites her lip, thinking about how, when he'd wrapped his arms around her, she'd been bathed in light, and then everything wrong had faded away. Not faded away like she'd been able to overcome the wrongness with her own perseverance. Not faded away like when one takes comfort in another, and the wrongness is muted for a while. But faded away like something had popped open a lock for her, and whisked her away from the wrongness by force. Something, or … someone.

He'd snapped his fingers, and he'd fixed it.

She shakes her head.

No. No, she can't possibly be entertaining this idea.

She can't.

Can she?

She sighs, and she changes directions, heading toward the forensics lab instead of the break room.

Chloe finds Ella peering into her microscope, bopping her head along to Gangsta's Paradise as it blasts from the small stereo she keeps on her desk. "Hey, Decker," says Ella. An unused set of headphones hang around her neck, obscured by her wispy black hair. "Were you expecting some results from me or something? I thought I'd done every-

"If angels were real … what do you think they'd look like?" Chloe says without preface.

Ella pauses. Looks up. Blinks. "Wow," she says. "You're quite the bearer of the big questions, aren't you?"

Chloe sighs. "Sorry. I just don't know who else to talk to about-

"It's okay," Ella replies with a smile.

Chloe sidles up to the table at the center of the room, and she leans against it. The edge of the countertop cuts into her side, but she prefers the discomfort. It keeps her grounded, and right now? She needs grounding. "So …?" she says.

Ella shrugs. "Well, as far as the bible goes, they look like us." She thinks for a moment. "I mean, except for the giant wings. Not all of them have those, though. At least, not explicitly."

"But why would they look human?" Chloe says. "Why wouldn't they look like some crazy … indescribable …." She deflates, gesturing helplessly, as she runs out of words. "I don't know."

Ella's attention shifts briefly to the speakers as the song changes over to U Can't Touch This. Once she gets the rhythm, she starts to bob her head in time with it. Then she shifts back to the discussion at hand. "The idea presented in Genesis is that humans are built in God's image, right?"

Chloe nods. "Okay, sure. I guess."

"So, why's it so weird to think God built angels that way, too?" Ella says. "I mean, heck. Maybe, angels are the first draft." She shrugs. "God may be omniscient, but even the best writers edit."

"Oh," says Chloe, frowning.

That's … actually a good point. And this is doing absolutely nothing to dissuade her from falling
down the rabbit hole of actually considering that, maybe, the problem with Lucifer, is far more literal than she ever could have guessed.

"What brought this up, anyway?" Ella says.

"I'm …. I don't know," Chloe lies.

She glances back at her desk. No sign of Lucifer returning, yet. He seems like the type to take long, luxurious showers that last until the water heater sputters its final, dying breath. Even when using borrowed towels in the middle of a scuzzy locker room at a police station.

"Do you think …?" Chloe sighs. Should she …? Oh, hell with it. She's already asking crazy questions. She turns back to Ella. "Do you think Lucifer could ever ... be ... good?"

Ella's brow wrinkles. "Our Lucifer?"

"No," Chloe says. "The fallen angel."

Ella considers for a moment. "I think ...." She squints at the ceiling, musing, before she decides, "I think the whole point of my faith is that anybody who asks for forgiveness and means it can be forgiven. Forgiving Biblical Lucifer might be a big ask, but ...." She gives Chloe a Gallic shrug. "I don't see why not."

"But what if Lucifer isn't asking for forgiveness?" Chloe prods. "What if he still thinks he's right?" What if he is right?

"Well, you know that asking for forgiveness doesn't have to be actual asking, right?" Ella presses her thumbs to her fingers and makes talking motions. "It doesn't have to be like wawa-wawa-wawawawa please forgive me. Actions can speak louder than words."

"So ... you're saying he could be redeemed? Like if he just started acting ... good?"

Ella's eyes narrow. "You mean ... like if he started fighting crime and saving your life on a regular basis and stuff?"

"I never said that," Chloe rushes to say. "I never-

Ella laughs. "Please. You didn't have to."

"So, you don't think he's a method actor?" Chloe says anxiously.

"I totally think he's a method actor," Ella replies. "I'm just entertaining your hypotheticals because I'm a good sport."

"Oh."

"Gee, thanks, Ella, for playing along!" Ella says out of the side of her mouth like she's playing at being a ventriloquist.

Chloe snorts with amusement. "Thank you."

"You're so welcome," Ella says brightly before continuing. "So, I think Biblical Lucifer is neutral evil, and he would totally fit with a good redemption arc. Our Lucifer, though, is chaotic neutral, with a slight kink in the works. I'm not sure redemption is even applicable."

"Chaotic ... what?" Chloe says, frowning. "Was that English?"
"Alignments," Ella replies. "It's a D&D thing."

Ah. Chloe resists the urge to roll her eyes.

"I know, I know," Ella continues as if she's read Chloe's mind. "It's nerdy, but I love it anyway." Ella takes a deep breath. "So, you have chaotic, neutral, and lawful, and then you have good, neutral, and evil. An alignment is any combo of one of the former and one of the latter. I find it helpful for categorizing people." Ella nods in Chloe's direction. "You'd be lawful good, for instance. And chaotic evil is basically a let-the-world-burn-because-it's-fun type." Ella brightens. "Like King Joffrey! Totally chaotic evil. Do you watch that show?"

"I don't have time," Chloe says with a wry look, "but I'm aware of the purple wedding."

"Right on," Ella says with a nod and a fist bump before continuing. "Speaking of alignments, don't ever try to role play as neutral neutral. It's a headache of migraine proportions." She frowns. "Come to think of it, chaotic neutral is really hard to play, too." Her eyes widen. "Hey! Maybe, that's why our Lucifer went method! That might be the only way for him to really get in there and understand the motivations of his character. He can't play Lucifer. He has to be Lucifer, for it to work."

"O … kay," Chloe says slowly. "So … what's chaotic neutral?"

"Chaotic neutral is about personal freedom and independence above all else. Rules are considered stifling, but they aren't broken for the sheer sake of breaking them. Good and evil take a total backseat to self-interest. When choosing what to do, someone who's chaotic neutral will pick whichever side of the morality spectrum is most expedient for his purposes at the time, without consideration for what's allowed and what's not."

Chloe blinks. "That's …"

Ella raises her eyebrows. "Totally our Lucifer?" She claps her hands together. "I told you it's a good system for characterizing people."

"So … what's the slight kink in the works?" Chloe asks.

"Well, duh," Ella says, eyes twinkling. She stares expectantly for a beat, but when Chloe doesn't experience any sudden revelations, Ella gives Chloe a conciliatory pat on the shoulder and says, "It's you, silly."

"Me?"

"You're the reason he keeps ending up lost without a map in the chaotic good lane," Ella says. "He's not really meant to be there, and it causes him a lot of internal friction, because it runs counter to his whole manifesto, but you make him want to try."

And something about whatever happened in the desert has accelerated this existential crisis of his. Her stomach is sinking into her shoes, the more she analyzes this new picture of him. This new picture that seems scary accurate and doesn't dissuade her from a damned thing. "Do you think … chaotic neutral is bad?" Evil and bad are not synonymous.

"It's not bad or good," Ella says with a shrug. "I think it just is. Lucifer … is. And, while I'm not saying the dude deserves accolades for it, either, why should he ask for or need forgiveness for that?"

Chloe glances toward the men's locker room again to see Lucifer emerging. His gray suit is still
wrinkled - she doesn't think that's even fixable without a year and an iron - but his damp hair is
coiffed again, and he seems … almost rosy-hued, thanks to the heat from the shower. The new life
in his complexion does a lot to reduce his sickly appearance.

She bites her lip, staring anxiously.

Chaotic neutral with an encroaching infestation of good. Ella seems to have pegged him to a T.

"Has anyone ever told you that you should be a profiler?" Chloe says.

"Who, me?" Ella says with a snort. "No way. It's just a hobby."

The question now becomes … could the Lucifer of legend ever be chaotic neutral?

The only rendering of Biblical Lucifer she's ever seen that isn't evil, is in the stories Lucifer
himself tells.

That's … sort of Lucifer's recurring point, though, isn't it?

That history got him wrong?

Still ….

"He really doesn’t … seem like some great part of the Demiurge, does he?" she says, doubtful,
watching him for a moment as he wends toward the lab like a prowling tiger. The problem is,
she's not sure if she's trying to dissuade herself because not dissuading herself is crazy, or because
she really can't see him as who he says he is.

Ella snorts. "I don't think the Demiurge would bother with solving-"

"Talking of me, are you?" Lucifer says as he pulls open the lab door.

Ella's mouth clacks shut, and she doesn't ever finish saying what she thinks the Demiurge
wouldn't bother with. "Busted," she says with a sheepish look.

Had he actually heard their conversation through the glass? Chloe didn't think they'd been that
loud.

"That's one I haven't encountered in a while," he says.

Chloe frowns. "What is?"

"The Demiurge," he says with a sigh as he turns from Ella to Chloe. So, he had heard. "Well," he
continues, gesturing to himself, "am I acceptable to you, now, or do I need to have another go
with a good lather?"

She bites her lip, unable to stop staring at him.

Is he? Is he really?

"Oh, this is positively sinful," Lucifer says with a happy purr. A smile slides across his face. It's
the first bit of genuine pleasure she's seen him expressing in what feels like forever, but it's
ephemeral, lost quickly to the undertow of his prevailing angst. He takes another bite, and the
overstuffed taco he holds precariously in his grip drips a glob of sour cream onto the napkin
resting across his lap. "How did you find this place?" he asks.
They sit side by side in her cruiser. After taking him to her favorite hole-in-the-wall to pick up lunch, she'd pulled them into a sandy lot close to Venice Beach. With the windows rolled down, and the fresh salt air billowing through the car cabin, it's almost as good as lying on the beach itself.

"Taco Tuesdays with my dad," she says slowly, seat squeaking as she leans back against the headrest. "We used to go to a different place every week when I was a kid. The sketchier looking, the better."

Crunching fills the quiet as he chews on what's left of his cheesy bounty.

She can't reconcile this gluttonous man with the immortal ruler of Hell.

She just can't.

The idea is patently ridiculous for more reasons than one.

Hell.

Lucifer as in Satan.

Satan eating a taco.

Not one of these three things coincide with the reality she's spent the last thirty-nine years experiencing.

Swallowing, he wipes his mouth with his napkin and peers out through the windshield at the distant surf. "I know what you're doing," he says.

She freezes. "Oh?" she says. Has he noticed all the staring? "What am I doing?"

"You think, if I relax, I'll talk," he replies. "Or share my feelings. Or do something else painfully maudlin."

She can't lie. She won't insult him that way. "The thought had occurred to me," she admits. "But, Lucifer, that's not why I brought you here."

He takes a breath and gives her a humoring look. "Why, then?"

She shrugs. "I brought you here because it's a nice day."

His eyes narrow. "That's all?"

"Something terrible happened to my best friend," she says.

He sighs. "Chloe, I-"

"Not ... you know. Not the desert thing. I swear, I'm not fishing. I told you I wouldn't bug you anymore about that, and I won't," she says, interrupting him before he can go on a tear. "I meant all the stuff you've already told me. About before."

"Before?"

"When you got kicked out of your home," she says. When he … fell? "And you were alone, and you felt abandoned, and suddenly everybody in the world was blaming you."

"Oh," he says. He rolls his eyes. "That before. Lovely."
"So, my friend," she continues. "This happened to him. And he's been feeling beset and misrepresented ever since."

"What of it?" he says, sounding slightly miffed. She misses the smile from earlier.

She shifts in the seat, turning until her hip hits the steering wheel. "It's just a nice day. And I thought … it might help." She sighs. "Plus, I think I might be going nuts, and I really needed some fresh air."

He gives her a strange look and opens his mouth to reply, but she gets a squawk on the radio before he can say a word. She picks up the receiver. It's Dan. They'd gotten an anonymous tip in exchange for a hefty reward. An address for Ryan Radcliffe. And, now, an undercover prowl car had reported sighting a man who looked like Radcliffe entering the domicile.

"Finally," Lucifer says.

Chloe shoves the empty bags and food containers into the back seat and starts the engine.

The neighborhood where Radcliffe is hiding is a sleepy one, and she can hear a group of young kids playing street hockey a few blocks down. Their shouts and laughs intermingle with the birds and the breeze, and if this were any other moment on any other day, she might stop to smile and enjoy the moment.

She and Lucifer stand on the front stoop of an old, Spanish-style single-family home. The lawn is comprised of rocks and weeds, not grass, and the house is a little worse for wear, but she's seen far less well-kept residences in her years on the force. Because the residence in question is not listed under Radcliffe's name, and all they have to go on is an unverified sighting by a prowl car, and an anonymous tip, unfortunately, Chloe didn't get permission for more than a knock-and-talk.

The door opens just enough to draw the interior metal chain taught. A greasy blond man with a goatee stares back at them. A television blares from somewhere within the house. She has a chance to utter, "Hello; I'm Detec-," before the man's gaze darts to her badge, and then to the gun at her hip in its holster, and then he slams the door in her face. The deadbolt locks with a resounding thunk.

"I don't think that was Ryan," she says to Lucifer, recalling Ryan's mugshot as her heart sinks. There goes her probable cause, down the drain. And any chance they have at surprise. She'd been hoping Ryan would answer the door without thinking.

Lucifer makes a noise deep in his throat, almost a growl. "Well, we knocked," he says, the words clipped. His eyes are dark and wreathed in almost palpable fury. "And we talked."

She sighs. "Yes, but-"

"My turn," he says.

She doesn't even see him move. The door just … flies apart into splinters with a riotous snap, and the heel of his palm is hovering there in the space where the door used to be.

Her jaw drops. She's seen him demonstrate some serious He-man strength before, but this is-

"What the fu-" the blond man snarls, voice choking off to a gurgling croak as Lucifer's fingers close around his shirt collar, and then Lucifer drags him across the threshold onto the crumbling stoop.
"Yes, hello," Lucifer says with disturbing nonchalance. "Might you tell me where your accomplice is, so that we can get on with this? I'm not in the mood for cat and mouse today."

The man sputters and chokes and Chloe's about to try to put a stop to it when Lucifer loosens his grip on the man's throat just enough to receive a vitriolic, spitting, "Fuck you, man!" in return for his query.

Lucifer rolls his eyes, tosses the blond man aside, and steps forward, into the house. "Ryan, Ryan, Ryan," he calls in a singsong voice. "I'm looking for you, darling. I will find you."

Shit.

Before Lucifer can get too far ahead, before he can get himself killed, she handcuffs the blond guy to the chipped iron railing at the bottom step. That should keep him secured and out of the way. She hopes.

She raps her knuckles against the wall beside the ruined door. "Ryan Radcliffe! LAPD. We know you're in here!" she shouts into the dark house. "Come out with your hands up!"

There's no response, save for the blaring of the television. Some talkshow she doesn't recognize.

She elbows Lucifer aside and takes the lead, sidearm drawn and pointed.

The dark living room contains nothing but a dingy, threadbare couch, a scratched wooden coffee table covered with Playboy magazines, and an old television. Ratty curtains hang limply by the closed windows. Why would the windows be closed on such a nice day? She inches toward the television, keeping her back to it. When she reaches it, she fumbles with the power button.

The television winks out, plunging the room into tense silence.

"Ryan Radcliffe!" she repeats. "LAPD. Please, step out with your hands up."

No response.

The kitchen and dining room are similarly empty and dark, though there's two place settings at the dining room table. On one plate rests only crusts. On the other plate, though, is a half-eaten sandwich. When she waves her hand just above the bread, she can still feel heat radiating off the toast.

She inches toward the hall leading to the back of the house, her boots padding on the stained carpet. Lucifer steps in behind her, large and looming. She rounds the corner, pointing her gun into the hallway before she presents her center of mass to an unknown space, and she pauses, listening. She can't hear a thing. Not a peep of movement. Nothing. Unless Ryan is holed up in the rear bedroom already, maybe, he's really not here. Maybe-

That's when things go south.

Hollywood doesn't adequately demonstrate how cacophonous a gunshot is, particularly in an enclosed space. Heroes and villains pop off shots without ear protection like they're nothing. In reality, though, a single gunshot can cause permanent hearing loss.

The roar is deafening as a bullet punches like a fist through the wall by her leg, sending chunks of drywall flying in every direction, and then plants itself in the opposite wall. One of the chunks smacks into her hip, sending a resounding jolt of pain roaring down her leg like a flash fire. Stars fill her vision.
"Shooter!" Chloe shouts, dive-rolling out of the way.

She can't hear a single thing but the hollow ring of tinnitus. Lucifer gives the wall a look that would burn it to cinders if his eyes were lasers. But instead of pressing forward like she expects, he inches back, tugging on her sleeve. His lips are moving. What's he saying? What's-

"-smell gas?" she hears when the ringing begins to recede.

Shit. Shit, shit, shit.

"Go!" she hisses at him, and she scrambles along the hallway at a frantic crawl, back the way they came from.

"Are you all right?" he says, worried tension gripping every syllable.

She sniffs, blinking tears of pain out of her eyes. But she nods. "I'm just bruised."

She hears a door opening, footsteps thundering down the hall, and another door opening farther away, toward the back of the house. Lucifer glares. He wants to chase. He wants to, but he doesn't. She tries to get to her feet, but her hip is screaming at her. Any weight on her leg sends throbbing pain from her femur all the way to her toes.

"Come, come, come," Lucifer says, a breathless whisper when she trips.

He grips her under the shoulders with strong, warm hands, and he lifts her to her feet like she weighs nothing. The smell of gas is so thick, now, it's nauseating, and she's seeing funny colors. He helps/drag her back to the front door.

An old red Camaro screams out of the driveway just as they're stumbling down the front steps, back into the fresh air. As she sucks in a breath, she gets a good look through the windshield at the fleeing driver. Radcliffe. Definitely Radcliffe. A black cloud of burning oil plumes behind the exhaust pipe of the Camaro as he peals into the street. The license plate is covered in mud - probably intentionally - and she can't read the number as it zips past.

"Yeah!" the blond guy cheers, still handcuffed to the railing. He gives Chloe a smug look. "Serves you police-state fascist fuckers right!"

She glares. She really wants to leave him there, but she needs to get him away from the gas explosion that's just waiting to happen. All it would take is another gunshot - just one - and the whole house could go up.

She tosses her car keys at Lucifer, assuming he'll chase Radcliffe no matter what she does, and then turns her focus to Blondie. "Um," Lucifer says. "Detective? Slight snag."

"What?" she snaps.

She looks up to find Lucifer gesturing at her cruiser. All four tires are flat. What in the-?

"This neighborhood don't like the po-po," says Blondie with a smirk.

A chorus of shrieks to the left draws her attention back to the street. To the fleeing car. Her stomach sinks into her shoes as she sees the kids from the hockey game all scrambling to get out of the way of the oncoming car.

"No," Lucifer says, watching the bedlam. "No, no, no." He affords an irritated glance at the sky. "I'm not doing this."
She can't shoot Ryan, not when he's at the wheel and there are kids darting everywhere like mad ants. She knows it. She also knows she has no hope of getting there in time. No hope whatsoever. But she takes off across the yard anyway, pain in her hip be damned.

They're all going to get clear.

She thinks the kids are going to get clear.

"Not budging," Lucifer says, tone sharp with stubborn denial. "I'm not."

Ryan accelerates, blowing through the first of the portable goals.

One of the littler kids - she can't be more than six - trips on her pink shoelaces and sprawls onto the broken pavement, hands first.

"Oh, for the love of Dad!" Lucifer snaps, exasperated, somewhere just behind Chloe.

She hears a rustling sound.

And then he's down the street, in front of the car - how in the hell ...? - bringing his closed fist down onto the hood like he thinks he can punch the car into submission. It's impossible. It's flat out- Something white and huge whips out behind him, spreading across the road curb to curb like a shield wall.

"HAPPY NOW?" Lucifer bellows as the Camaro slams into him, accordion-ing like it just ran headlights-first into a solid concrete barrier instead of a freestanding human being.

Metal shrieks.

Glass shatters.

Airbags deploy with a forceful thud, followed by a hiss as they deflate.

"Lucifer!" she yells.

Her partner steps out from in front of the car - how in the fucking hell...? - brushing bits of glass and refuse off his sleeves like they're nothing more than lint. He doesn't look like a man who just got pulverized by a thousand pounds of roaring metal. He just looks annoyed. The gleaming white things fold away behind his long frame, and then they're gone.

Did she even see them at all?

The whole thing happened in seconds.

Maybe, she inhaled too much gas.

She blinks and shakes her head, frantically trying to clear the remaining spots from her vision.

Lucifer steps around to the driver's side of the smashed vehicle, reaches into the car cabin, yanks out a squirming, cussing Radcliffe by his shirt collar, and drops him onto the pavement beside the door like a sack of trash.

The little girl who tripped is sitting in the road, a mere five feet from the collision. Her cheeks are red, snot is bubbling from her nose, and she won't stop wailing. Lucifer gives her a miffed eye roll. "Well, get on, then!" he snaps. "Get on out of the bloody road, or I'll leave Darwinism to have its day!" When all the girl does is cry, he adds a disgusted sigh and gestures her away with
his hands. "Shoo, small human!"

Chloe limps down the sidewalk, closing the distance between them.

She has to get there. She has to get to him.

Ryan tries to crawl away, body scraping along the asphalt. He makes it perhaps six inches before Lucifer is hauling him to his feet. Lucifer sneers, his perfect, pearly teeth on display, almost like fangs. "Did you seriously think vehicular homicide would help your cause with me?" he says, so full of menace it makes Chloe's heart skip. "It didn't."

Radcliffe shakes his head. "I don't know what you're talking-"

"I loathe people like you." Lucifer's grip tightens to the point that all color drains from his knuckles. "You who would pilfer freedom of choice from another. You are *filth.*" He turns away from her, wheeling Ryan around. Two long tears, one over each shoulder blade, trisect the back of Lucifer's suit. "See what awaits you!" he commands. Ryan screams like he's been set on fire, and then starts to whipsaw in Lucifer's grasp as he tries to get away.

"Lucifer, enough," Chloe says softly as she reaches him at last. She lays her fingers on his arm. His muscles are steel cords. She dares a look at the car. It's totaled. The tires are nearly twisted off the axles, and the hood is just … gone. Pancaked into the windshield like crumpled tissue paper. It's a miracle the cabin is even remotely intact. "Lucifer."

Ryan is hysterical, but Lucifer won't let go.

"You got him, okay?" Chloe says, squeezing his wrist. Her hip is throbbing like a drum. "You got him!"

He clenches his jaw and doesn't speak. Unmoving. Unforgiving.

"Lucifer," she repeats.

"He forced-"

"I know," she says, lump forming in her throat. "But, now, we caught him. Okay? So, let the system do the rest."

Lucifer grimaces like he hurts. His gaze wanders to where her fingertips touch his wrist.

"Please," she says.

He looses a frustrated snarl, but he does let go, and she steps between him and Ryan immediately, making her body a barrier he'll have to get through, just in case he changes his mind.

She tries to ignore the way her stomach is churning.

Denial is a difficult game to play, at this point.

Lucifer the Morning Star, free-agent archangel with daddy issues, stands behind her, held at bay by nothing.

Nothing but she.

*Shit.*

Hands shaking, she withdraws her other pair of handcuffs from her back pocket. Glass crunches
underneath her feet. "Ryan Radcliffe," she says to her gibbering charge, "you're under arrest. Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law."

*He's mine when he dies,* Lucifer said.

She believes him, now.

---

After she finishes booking Mr. Radcliffe, she finds Lucifer sitting at her desk, staring into space. She leans against the edge of the desk, letting it dig into her hip. He doesn't speak, doesn't even acknowledge her presence. Not, she thinks, to be rude. But because he's somewhere else. In his head. Far away.

"You didn't do your thing," she says.

He blinks, broken from his eerie trance, and frowns at her. "My … thing?"

"You didn't ask him what he wants."

His gaze hardens like obsidian. "Do you need me to?"

"No," she says, shaking her head. "No, we have his prints and his DNA. He has priors. It's pretty much an open-shut case, even without a confession."

Lucifer nods. "Then I won't," he replies in a flat tone, and he looks … beyond. His gaze begins to flatten out into the empty stare she'd seen before, when he'd been communing with outer space.

She swallows. "Lucifer-"

"I already know what he wants," Lucifer replies quietly before she can say anything else. His fingers clench into fists, and his jaw tightens. "He is … anathema … to me." He rises to his feet, glancing at his watch, and then he looks up from his timepiece to peer at her, his expression saying nothing, and everything.

She should talk to him, she thinks.

But she has no idea what the words should be.

He's ….

He's *Lucifer.*

*The* Lucifer.

He was telling the truth, this whole damned time.

When she comes up with nothing but silence, he says, "Goodnight, Detective," gifting her with a hollow smile, and then he turns, his shiny shoes clicking against the floor as he retreats.

He uses her title like a suit of armor.

She licks her lips and glances around. It's late, and the precinct is staffed only with a skeleton crew. Her shift finished hours ago. She'll have to fill out a request for overtime, but given the bag-and-tag, she doubts she'll run into any opposition. She looks at her desk. At the waiting stack of paperwork that always follows an arrest.

Later, she decides.
She'll do it later.

He's Lucifer. He's Satan. She thinks, tomorrow, she might be having a nervous breakdown about that. But, in this moment, the reality shift hardly matters.

_He's what matters right now._

The man. Her friend. Not the myth.

She takes a deep breath and chases after him. He's already in the deserted parking lot, fiddling with his car keys by the time she catches up. She grabs his wrist, staying his hand before he can unlock his Corvette.

He peers at her, eyebrows raised in question, but he says nothing, and she pulls her hand away once she's stayed his retreat.

"Lucifer, I know I said I wasn't going to push, and I meant it, but …,” she says. And then she blanks. Of course, now, she blanks. Because isn't that how it always goes? Seriously, though. How does one simply come out and ask …? She shakes her head. "Look, did something … happen?"

His eyes narrow as he pockets his keys and leans against the side of the car. He looks lithe and leonine and deadly. It's the kind of unconcerned nonchalance one sees in residents at the top of the food chain, and it's … unnerving. Particularly now that she knows it isn't a front.

It's a truth.

"Come, now," he says in that soft, velvet tone of his. "You surely saw me." When she doesn't immediately reply, the first hint of baffled concern enters his expression, and his eyebrows knit. "You … didn't see me?"

"No," she says. When his bafflement deepens, she quickly shakes her head and adds, "I mean, yes, I saw. But I didn't mean that." Surprise flickers in his gaze. "I meant …." She swallows. "I meant, in the desert. When you were taken."

"When I was taken …"," he echoes in a mystified tone.

He still doesn't get it. What she's asking. How can he not get it?

"Were you … you know … forced?" she continues gently.

Because she hasn't missed it. How personally he's taken this case. How he suddenly doesn't like to be touched. How he's prickly and angry and acting victimized. How he keeps swearing that he's bad, and acting bad, and not in a way that suggests he wants to be contrary for contrary's sake, but in a way that suggests he's trying to … reclaim himself. He's the Devil, and he's _bad_, and he wants the world to know it.

The accelerated existential crisis.

His self-identity has been capsized by whatever happened.

And rape? Well, rape would fit with that. She'd seen it happen. Too many times.

When he doesn't reply immediately, she adds, "I just want to help you. Please, let me help."

The silence stretches to an almost unbearable degree.
"Forced is ... a good word for it," he says softly.

She swallows, horrified to hear him say it out loud. That this happened to him. How could this happen to him? She wants to say that she's sorry, but she doesn't think that's the right thing. What is the right thing? All her training on incident response seems to dribble out her ears when he's the victim.

And all she manages to say is, "Lucifer ...."

His breaths seem to tighten in his chest as she watches.

Like hearing his own name sets him off.

"I was changed," he says, in a deep, dark, dangerous tone. "Without my consent. I didn't ask for them. I didn't want them. But he did this to me, anyway."

"The wings?" she hazards.

He nods. "And, now, I can't get rid of them, and I can't not use them." His gaze is an inferno. Her heart skips in her chest. "They are my shackles. And you ...." He looks at her, then, with fury. She's not afraid - she could never be afraid of him, not after everything - but she has the good sense to realize, in this moment, that she should be. "You hold the keys. That's why he put you here. Not for a bloody love story, but ...." He laughs, but it's a miserable sound. "It was a perfect plan, really. I can't fault it." And then he darkens like an eclipse. "He forced me. To be his angel. He forced me."

She has no idea what to say.

And that's when she sees them. Huge. White. Luminous. More than a twenty-five foot span of blinding brilliance flaring out behind his body through the holes in his sport coat. He spreads them, first, like he took them out for a stretch, but then he folds them. Incandescent primary feathers jag like knives to the ground, stopping just before they touch the dirty pavement.

"Oh, my Gggh ...." Somehow, the last shred of common sense she possesses prevents her from uttering the final word in the sentence. A word, she thinks, that if he heard right now, his already brittle composure might shatter.

This isn't like before, when they were there and then gone again so quickly she wasn't even convinced she'd seen them in the first place. No. Now, she can't breathe. She feels like she's caught in a vise, and it's squeezing, and squeezing, and squeezing, and she can't get enough air.

She's staring at divinity.

He is light. He is the Light Bringer.

His pulchritude is a razor, and she wants to slit her wrists with it.

A sound that isn't a word hitches in her throat. Her lungs feel as though they're collapsing on themselves. Her diaphragm won't function. She's-

"Fuck," he snaps in a rare flash of obscenity. The Devil, she realizes, doesn't like to swear. How strange.

And then they're gone.

The wings are gone, and she's bereft, and cold, and desolate. She has a hole inside. A gaping
The wings are gone, and she's bereft, and cold, and desolate. She has a hole inside. A gaping chasm where something solid used to be. She's empty.

She takes a deep, sucking breath.

They're gone. They're gone, they're gone, they're gone - why are they gone? she needs them - and he's ....

Staring at her like she's the worst mistake of his life.

"I'm ...," is all he can think of to say. To stammer. "No ...."

The denial is raw regret.

For a long moment, the silence stretches like it has no end. No end, and no beginning. Her eyes water with despair. She starts to shiver. He shrugs off his ruined sport coat in a rush and wraps her up in it. He's so warm, when she's so cold. The coat smells faintly of cologne.

"I wasn't thinking." He swallows thickly. "They do this to people. Seeing them. This is why Amenadiel says we don't belong among .... This is .... I'm ...." His gaze collapses further. "No."

He really didn't mean to show her.

But she can't string words together.

She has the vaguest memory of him driving her home while she's still wrapped in his coat. Of him jamming the heels of his palms against the steering wheel in frustrated rage, with so much applied force that the wheel breaks. Of him carrying her to her bedroom, because she can't get enough of her synapses to fire to walk. Of him, with wet eyes, sounding like he's on the edge of falling to pieces as he calls in sick for her.

Beyond that, though - for a time - she remembers nothing at all.
Thank you so much to everybody who takes the time to leave feedback. I really appreciate your comments!

Birds. She hears birds. Outside.

Why is she …?

Wait.

She snaps awake like she's tied to the end of a bullwhip, and she snatches her clock off her nightstand. Her mouth feels like something crawled between her lips and her teeth and died there. Her pulse pounds in her sinuses, and nausea coils in her gut.

Did she go on a bender last night?

Hell, she feels like she drank the entire contents of Lucifer's wet bar or something. She pinches the bridge of her nose, wincing as she tries to read the time. Her hands are shaking, the room is sort of spinning, and she …. Is that a 12? No. 2? 2:30 p.m. 2:30 p.m.? How is it 2:30 p.m.?

Her shift was supposed to start hours ago. Shit. Shit, shit, shit. She's so late for work, she might as well not show up, but she can't just not show up. Shit. Why didn't they call?

She slides out of bed, only to sink to her knees when the room fuzzes, and her watery legs won't immediately hold her weight.

This is …. Does she have the flu?

With shaking arms, she hoists herself upright.

Barely.

She's stumbling like a newborn fawn into the master bathroom, wearing nothing but a wrinkled t-shirt and her underwear, when all of it comes crashing back in a brutal wave.

She wasn't drunk last night. And she's not sick, though he called in sick for her.

He. Him. …. Them.

She's …. 

Her chest tightens when she thinks of Them, every sloping feather, every sharp, devastating edge, and she slides down the doorframe to the floor in a boneless heap. A soft whine loiters in her throat. She saw an angel's wings last night. She saw an angel. She saw, "Lucifer." The word is a twisted whisper that gets caught in her throat.

The light from Them was so warm.
The puddle of sunlight at her feet seems so inadequate in comparison.

She wraps her arms around herself, shivering.

The light was so warm, and she's … glacial.

She's glacial, and she's alone.

He left her. He left her yearning. He left her empty.

How could he do that to her, when she feels like this?

She crawls to the bathtub, turns on the faucet, and twists the temperature dial as hot as it will go. She doesn't even bother to strip. When she sees steam billowing up from the bathwater, she crams the rubber stopper into the drain, and then she climbs in like a drowning man claws for a life preserver. Almost-scalding water envelopes her shivering body.

Maybe, she'll warm up.

She wants to warm up.

A soft knock at her bedroom door raises her from a slack-jawed stupor. Lukewarm water sloshes as she tries to rise to a sitting position. "Monkey?" Chloe says, frowning. She didn't even think of Trixie before. How could she not …?

"Decker?" Maze says softly through the door. That's right. Trixie is staying with Dan for some extended father-daughter time. "Decker, are you okay?"

No. No, she's not okay. How could she be okay?

"Lucifer told me you got an eyeful," Maze says.

Chloe swallows. Lucifer. "Why isn't he here?"

A long, tense silence stretches into infinity before Maze says, "… Decker, can I come in?"

"I need him to be here," Chloe says, unable to stop her eyes from watering. The shivering is starting again. She needs Them to be here. She needs …..

Her teeth are chattering when Maze decides to come in, regardless of whether she's received an invitation. The demon sits on the toilet beside the tub. "Decker, he … can't be. Not right now."

"Yes, he could be," Chloe protests. "He could." He's the Light Bringer. He ignited the sun. What about her little apartment could ever stop him? It can't be too much to ask that he make her warm again, in light of that.

In light.

He brings light.

She laughs, but it's a desperate, manic sound.

Maze peers back at Chloe, mouth forming a grim line. Her leather pants squeak as she leans forward to rest her elbows on her knees. "He can't be here. Not if you ever want to stop feeling like this."
Chloe swallows. "It'll stop?" She wants it to stop. This awful needing. This … cold. "It'll stop if he stays away?" Yet the idea of him staying away is black hole in her mind, consuming, and then she's empty.

Maze sighs tiredly, swiping her hands over her face. Which is answer enough. She either doesn't know, or she knows, but it's not an answer Chloe wants to hear.

Chloe's eyes prickle, and the room blurs as she fumbles with the drain.

She needs to refill the tub. This water is too cold.

Everything is too cold.

It takes Chloe three days to recuperate the point that she can function again. Three days to be at the point where she doesn't feel like her insides have been scooped out with a spoon and replaced by liquid nitrogen. Three days to feel like a human being and not some mindless, slavering … thing. Three days of sobbing and whining and wanting and succumbing over and over and over to the desolation. Three days to regain enough sense that she can admit Lucifer abandoning her was probably the kindest thing he could have done in the wake of … that.

It takes Chloe three days to even be able to, with any sort of rationality, approach the idea that it's all real.

All of it.

Everything Lucifer ever said.

Chloe shuffles into the kitchen. Birdsongs filter in through the open windows, along with a lazy breeze that ruffles her ratty hair. She's thirsty. Dried out from crying. Empty from grief. And the light hurts her eyes.

"Decker," Maze says in a neutral tone.

Chloe skips to a stop. "Maze."

She forgot about Maze. She forgot about … Maze had helicopter-parented the first day, but she'd eased off when Chloe had started coming back to herself a little. On day three, Chloe hadn't seen Maze at all. Chloe scrubs at her hurting eyes with her knuckles.

Her wayward roommate sits at the kitchen island with a bowl of cereal and a bottle of gold-colored liquor, watching. Just … watching. For a long moment, Chloe can't even get her legs to move.

"You look better," says Maze in a neutral tone.

How pathetic. How pathetic it is that this is better. But it is. "I … feel better," Chloe rasps.

Awkward silence ensues. A dog barks outside somewhere. Someone passing by on the street is laughing with a group of his buddies. Chloe swallows. Without Them, she's not sure how anyone could be happy enough to laugh. And she hates that she's not sure how.

"So, are you scared, now?" Maze demands without further preamble. "Do I scare you?"

"No," Chloe's quick to say, almost like the lash of a whip.
Maze's eyes narrow. She doesn't look like a demon. She looks like a human. Though, it occurs to Chloe, as she's standing there like a post, that she has no idea what a demon should look like. Lucifer clearly doesn't match any depiction of the Devil she's ever seen. What devil has splendorous white wings?

"If I don't scare you, then why aren't you moving?" Maze says.

That's enough to get Chloe's legs working again, and she skitters into the kitchen to the fridge. "I'm moving," she says. She grabs the fridge door with a yank that's not in any way commensurate with the effort required. Everything stored on the fridge door clanks and wobbles. She reaches for the milk, but the carton isn't there. Where's the-?

"Milk's over here," Maze says, and Chloe winces.

"Oh," she replies.

She closes the fridge door and finally looks. Really looks. Maze actually put out a bowl for her. And a spoon. And the Raisin Bran. And a glass of water. Even a little bottle of ibuprofen. Thoughtful.

Chloe inches back toward the island, trying to ignore that her muscles are tense to the point of pain. And all the while, Maze just sits there. Staring at Chloe like a bird would size up a tasty bug. Or, maybe, she's misreading things. She hopes she's misreading things. Her brain is still mushy enough that misreading things might be the only thing it can successfully do right now.

She sighs.

She pours herself a bowl of cereal and sits as far away from Maze as she can possibly sit while still sitting at the island. She has to pull herself together. She can't keep taking off work, and Dan can't keep Trixie indefinitely. He doesn't have the space for it. And-

"I wouldn't hurt you," Maze says.

Chloe blinks and looks at her roommate. "I . . ." She swallows, feeling like she's about to poke a grizzly with a stick. Let's just say I killed the messenger. The words are chilling like a brand. "Would you hurt someone else?"

"Only people who want it because they like it," Maze replies baldly. "Or people who deserve it."

"Who deserves it?"

"People I'm paid to retrieve after they've broken your laws, for one. People who belong in Hell. Or people who are trying to hurt me, or Lucifer, or . . ." Maze glances at Chloe for a long, long moment. "Or my family." The way Maze says that word: family. The way she intonates. The pointed way she's staring at Chloe. Chloe gets the distinct impression that she's become a member of this so-called family.

A demon calls Chloe family.

Lucifer is . . .

What is he, now?

Family? Friend? Foe?

She doesn't know.
Chloe's hands start to shake as she futses with the placemat. People who belong in Hell, Maze said. Because Hell is a place that's real. Like Los Angeles or Paris or Seoul. It's .... Reality feels unreal. The whole world is so different, now. One look at a pair of wings, and everything's topsy turvy.

"Does he decide who goes there?" Chloe says around the lump in her throat. She can't even say his name right now. Not .... Not in this context. She can't. Not when she's been whining his name for three days. Whining like he's her pusher, and she needs a high. "Does he ....?"

"He could; but he doesn't," Maze says, shaking her head. "You do."

Chloe goggles for a moment. "Me?" she squeaks.

Maze snorts and waves a hand dismissively. "Not you, specifically," she says. "I mean people in general."

"Oh."

"People have guilt," Maze explains. "It's how you were designed. If you feel that you gotta be punished for something, then you will be. You're self-policing, really."

Chloe frowns. "But what about sociopaths? And psychopaths? Or people who are too sick to understand right from wrong?"

"They won't go."

Chloe gapes. "But how is that fair?"

"Since when is anything about life fair?" Maze says, spitting out the word fair like it's a spent piece of gum. She takes a bite of cereal. The crunch fills the momentary silence. She washes her breakfast down with a swig of Jameson, and follows that with a wet grunt to clear her throat. "That's why Lucifer got into trouble, you know. That's why he fell."

"Because life isn't fair?" Chloe says.

Maze regards Chloe for a long moment. "Humans have complete autonomy. Free will. Choice. But angels never did. God made them to blindly follow. And Lucifer asked why."

"That's it?" Chloe says, frowning. "That's why he's .... He asked a question?"

Maze sneers. "Doesn't seem hardly fair, does it, Decker?"

No. No, it really didn't seem fair at all. Unless ....

"Can you lie?" Chloe says.

"We both can," Maze replies. "For him, it's just principle that he doesn't. He hates manipulators."

The Devil hates manipulators.

The irony is almost unreal.

History got him wrong, all right. History got him so wrong.

"You don't share that principle?" Chloe says.

Maze shrugs. "Let's just say ... I'm a bit more pragmatic about it than he is."
"Let's just say I killed the messenger. The recent memory lances her like a spear again."

"Who did you kill?" Chloe blurts.

Maze blinks. "When?"

"When you killed the …. You said you killed the messenger."

"Oh, that," Maze says, in such a nonchalant tone it makes Chloe feel sick for a moment. How could someone be so blasé about …. "God doesn't do grunt-work shit," Maze continues. "He sends one of his host to do the work for him."

"His … host."


Right. The heavenly host. Of course.

Chloe swallows. "You killed …. You killed an angel?"

Maze regards her for a long moment. "Most of them are just brainwashed thugs, anyway," she says, like she's trying to diminish what she did.

How can someone diminish murder? "But … you killed one?" Chloe persists. "One of Lucifer's … brothers? … Sisters?"

Maze sighs. "I killed the asshole who left Lucifer to rot in the desert, yes. And they're siblings, yes. But I doubt Lucifer ever even met this one. He was young." She glances at Chloe, eyes narrowing like she's calculating something in her head. "Well, younger. He was only a few eons old."

*Only* a few eons.

This is Chloe's reality, now.

Where a few eons can be quantified by the adjective "only."

"Like … he was born before the Phanerozoic?" she says faintly.

Maze shrugs. "Just guessing."

The room feels like it's going in and out. Lucifer's younger brother is older than the existence of multi-celled organisms on Earth. Lucifer's *younger* brother. Which means Lucifer is … older than …. 

She drops her spoon.

The man she bought tacos for a few days ago might literally be older than time.

"The only reason he got the drop on Lucifer in the first place is that Lucifer is practically a kitten without his wings," Maze continues.

The reality shifts are starting to feel like warp-speed plate tectonics at this point. And instead of the next "Big One" arriving every few centuries, they're arriving every few seconds. Chloe bites her lip through the next rumbler, thinking of one time Lucifer threw a guy through a glass window. Using only one arm. That … hardly seemed kittenish.
"Anyway, I wasted his ass," Maze is saying, oblivious. "So you don't need to worry."

Chloe blinks. How is any of this not worrisome? Whatever the hell Lucifer is, he clearly has feelings. He has likes and dislikes. A distinct personality. He's a sentient being. It stands to reason that his sibling would be, too. "But you murdered him."

Maze's eyes narrow. "So? He'll be fine."

"… What?"

"He bounced back to the Silver City the second my blade went in. He's banished from the physical plane, Decker. Not obliterated. Only Azrael's blade can obliterate, and that's … gone."

Chloe shakes her head. She can't wrap her head around this. She can't. "This is … how is this real?"

"I'm still the same," Maze continues, almost pleading. "I'm still the same as before. Lucifer's still the same. We didn't change. You did."

"Yeah, I did," Chloe says. She's not sure what else there is to say. Because it's true.

Three days ago, Chloe Decker changed.
She saw literal divine intervention.
And she saw Them.

She can't help the tiny shiver of desire that winds through her, unbidden. She can see Them. In her mind's eye. Every detail is bright, like hot metal. She can see Them, and she wants to see Them again. She needs to. She- She grits her teeth with so much force that her jaw hurts. The pain brings her back to the real, only to find herself reaching toward nothing, trying to touch the divine. Divinity that isn't here. Her fingers close over empty air as she drags her hand back.

"I'll move out, if you want," Maze says, slumping.

Chloe blinks again. "No, that …" She swallows. "That isn't necessary." She doesn't think, even if Maze were lying about her good-ish intentions, that kicking her out would help things. Nor does she really see the point in running away from a woman - thing? - whose job it is to hunt people down. Whatever or whoever else she may be, Maze is good at her job. "I just need …"

What does Chloe need?

That's the crux of it, right there.

She has no idea. She thinks about the last week-and-a-half. How quickly everything went from normal to … not.

She wishes he were here.
A lump forms in her throat.
She wishes he were here.
Not because she wants Them - though she does. She does want Them - but because he's her friend.

Her best friend.

Family, friend, foe. Maybe, he's all three, somehow. But in this moment, he's definitely at least one of them.

And how in the hell is she supposed to come to terms with this reality-bending insanity when she can't even see her best friend?

It's been five days since her whole world fell apart.

"So, where's that crazy partner of yours?" they ask her at work, but she can't answer, and she stumbles through the day like a zombie.

He's still there, at least. In the city. He hasn't run away, this time. That much, she knows for sure - a twenty dollar bill bought her that information easily enough from one of his exiting bar patrons.

She thinks she even saw him looming on the penthouse balcony above Lux. A dark figure. Nothing more. But then, before she worked up the nerve to go inside and talk to him, she imagined him diving off the edge of the railing into the air, his beautiful wings flaring into the balmy night, and she fled.

She wants nothing more than to see Them.

She wants nothing more than to stop seeing Them.

From the time of Radcliffe's arrest until now, it's been seven days.

She makes it seven days before she can't stand it anymore.

Not the idea that she can't see Them, though that idea is still agonizing.

The idea that she can't see him.

She can't live her life on the assumption that merely glimpsing him will destroy her sense of self again.

Not without trying it at least once.

At least, now, even if things go south, she knows the worst of it will be gone in seven days.

The front door of Lux is unlocked - as it always is, during the day - and Chloe is able to slip inside, unimpeded. Traffic noise decreases to mute hush as the cool air from the dark interior buffets her. The downstairs of the club is empty, save for one busboy wiping down tables, and a man taking inventory at the bar. The man … she recognizes him. His name is Patrick, maybe. But she doesn't know him. Not well enough to make assumptions.

She takes a breath. "I'm looking for--"

"Boss is upstairs," the man says without looking up, "but if you want a favor, don't expect to be well-received right now."

If you want a favor. She swallows. Lucifer does favors for people in exchange for them owing
him something. Suddenly the meaning of "a devil's bargain" takes on a whole new light.

*Who would take a deal like that?* she remembers asking him.

And he replied, *They all do.*

She pauses to let that roll around in her brain for a moment, and then she takes a deep breath, and presses onward. She has more things to do today than have a nervous breakdown in Lucifer's den of iniquity.

"I don't want a favor," Chloe says softly.

She just wants her friend.

The man puts down his pen and regards her with a frown. His demeanor changes in moments. "Oh, it's you," he says. His tone is tense. "I'm not supposed to let you up."

Her heart sinks into her shoes. She's never not had a *carte blanche* to come and go from Lux as she pleases. "Why not?"

"Don't know," says the man with an indifferent shrug. "Don't know, don't care, didn't ask."

She stares at him, calculating. The guy is standing behind the bar. She's by the entrance. She's closer to the elevator than he is, and she has no obstacles to overcome, while he has to get out from behind the bar.

"Okay," she says, looking down with what she hopes appears to be disappointment. "I'll go."

"Seeya," he replies.

She waits until she hears his pen scribbling. And then she runs like her life depends on it, because, maybe, it does. She's halfway up the steps before she hears the bartender guy snap, "*Hey! Get back here!*" Her lungs are burning by the time she reaches the elevator, steps inside, and jams her thumb on the door-close button like a piston, over and over and over. She doesn't relax until she hears the ding, and the doors are sliding shut in front of the bartender's red, furious face.

Strains of the *Moonlight Sonata* flood the elevator as the car rises slowly to the penthouse floor. She stands in the back corner with her arms folded. She doesn't think she's ever felt more intimidated by an elevator in her life. Or-

The doors slide open.

"Whatever it is," Lucifer says, frigid, "I'm not in the mood for-" His words choke to a halt when he looks up from his piano and sees her. His fingers slide from the keys to his lap, slack with shock, and his lips part just a fraction. He looks … stunned. "Detective, how did you …? What are you …?" And then it's like someone unplugged the Christmas tree, and the lights just … wink out.

"Come for a fix, have you?" he says darkly.

"No," she says, daring a step closer. Her brain doesn't *seem* to be incinerating. That's a good sign. Right? "No, I ...." He shifts in the light. Into the shadow. Instead of obscuring him, though, the darkness sets him off in sharp relief. He has a near luminescent quality. How could she not have known that he's divine? How? It's so obvious to her, now. "I ...." The image of Them overwhelms her. Just for a moment. But she counts to ten in her head, shoving the memory away. When her mind's eye is dark again, she takes a deep breath. "I came to see you."
He regards her for a long moment. "You mean the divine."

"No, I mean you," she says, and he blinks like he didn't understand a word she just said. She takes another step. She's entered his home without invitation. Though it kills her, she has to ask. "Do you not want me here?"

If he tells her to leave, she will.

She'll make herself.

But he doesn't say anything.

The piano bench squawks as he pushes it back and rises to his feet. His eyes narrow as he approaches her, closing the space between them until only a matter of inches separate their bodies, until she's eye to eye with his breast pocket. He searches her face. She can feel the heat radiating from him. His aftershave smells of sandalwood.

And then he just stands there. In her orbit. Or is she in his? She has no idea anymore.

She has no idea how much time passes, either. A few seconds. A minute. An hour. Whatever the length, the stretch of the moments seems like eternity.

Until, at last, he says, bewildered, "You're … resisting." His eyebrows knit as confusion intermingles with suspicion, and then he demands, "How are you resisting?"

"I don't know," she says. She shrugs, giving him a helpless look. "I just … am?"

He frowns. "And you're not … frightened?"

She looks at him. "I'm terrified," she snaps. The words are unintentional knives, but the wound is grievous. "Not of you," she rushes to say before he can bleed out. "How could I be? But …." Her eyes water, and it all starts to shake loose. Everything. All of it.

Her roommate is Hell-forged.

Her best friend is divine.

Divine as in: of God.

God is not figurative.

God is.

And she's a trembling, sobbing mess. He shifts, swaying on his long, long legs. "… May I?" he says, the barest, concerned murmur. May he touch her? He's never bothered to ask before. He's always just done it. But she's never had her reality shattered before, either.

Everything is different, now.

She answers him by pressing her body against his. He wraps his arms around her almost reflexively. He splays his long fingers and cups the back of her head, pulling her close.

"I thought I'd broken your mind," he says quietly.

"I feel broken," she replies, and his arms tighten. She rubs her tired, hurting eyes, sniffing. "Please, please, Lucifer, don't whip those things out again, or I'll blow apart at the seams. I know
it. I'm …." They were so lovely. Her heart constricts, and she feels like there's a knife stuck in her chest. She can't help how forlorn she sounds when she admits in a soft, twisted whisper against the lapel of his bathrobe, "I still really want to see them."

"It was an accident," he says. "I was … upset."

"I know," she says against his chest.

He's deep and dark and broken when he adds, "You have my sincerest apologies."

But she doesn't see the point in dwelling on it anymore. He didn't mean to do it. It's done. He can't take it back. All they can do is move forward from here.

She looks up at him. "I'm trying to wrap my head around all of this. I'm really trying."

"I … understand that this is shocking to you."

"I have so many questions," she says.

He acknowledges her with a nod. "Yes, I'm quite sure that you do."

He nudges her toward the couch, and she lets herself be guided. In this moment, she's grateful for the brief respite from thought. She sinks onto the leather cushions, exhausted, while he heads to his bar, presumably in search of fortitude.

She thinks whiskey will turn her already-mushy brain into pure muck. "Do you have wine?" she rasps against her palms. "Wait. Never mind." He doesn't keep wine in his apartment. He prefers hard liquor, and Lux has a ginormous wine cellar in the basement. She doesn't want to wait for him to go down there to retrieve a bottle.

She doesn't want him to leave.

She hears something liquid sloshing in a glass, and she lets her tired mind fade out. His presence doesn't incinerate her brain at all, really. If anything, he makes the disquiet wane a little. If anything.

"I'm so tired," she confesses.

He replies in a worldweary tone, "I know."

She's vaguely aware of him pulling an afghan over her body as she dozes.

She thinks she might have murmured a thanks.

She definitely says, "Please, don' go."

And he says, "Wild horses couldn't drag me."

"Pretty sure nothin' can drag you," is her enlightened but slurred reply.

"… Probably nothing terrestrial," he admits, though he sounds … almost sad.

After that, she's aware of nothing.

She dreams of him. She dreams of him sitting on a jagged cliff by the ocean. She dreams of him framed by moonlight, his great white wings sweeping down behind him like brushstrokes in a painting. She dreams of him, and she dreams of Them.
She dreams, but she doesn't remember.

The shriek of her alarm yanks her out of slumber with such ferocity, she feels a bit like a bungee jumper reaching the end of the bungee. She's not in the penthouse anymore. She's in her own bed. He brought her home.

When had that happened?

*We'll talk when you're ready,* says the unsigned note he left on her nightstand, in his unmistakable almost-calligraphy.

If her rapid deterioration last night was any indication, she isn't ready, now.

She isn't ready at all to deal with this. With … him.

But she thinks she *will* be ready.

Soon.

Her mind is already a quieter place.
Wow! Thank you so much for the feedback everybody :) You made my entire week. I really appreciate the kind words, and I'm glad to hear everybody is enjoying this! I agree with everyone - the show is great and fun this year, but it leaves a little to be desired when it comes to fully realizing the gravity of what's going on with Lucifer & Co. I hope I have brought and continue to bring justice to these darker parts that the show overlooks.

P.S. The wing thing. As "funny" as Lucifer chopping off his wings at every opportunity is, it was a little bit much for me to swallow in a plausibility sense (I know, I know, arguing about plausibility in a story about the freaking Devil is a little silly, but it's how I feel). Since this is fanfic, and I can do what I want, I "fixed" it. Also, for what it's worth, though I don't read them, I am cognizant of the comics -- I tried to play nice with that canon, at least w/r/t what Lucifer is capable of, unless the show flat out debunked it with its own developing mythology.

Between having to deal with her new reality, working, being a mom, and the fact that the world ends whenever she thinks of Them, four days pass before she isn't wilted over with exhaustion. They don't talk on the phone. Or anything. Lucifer gives her a wide berth, and she doesn't feel compelled to close the gap right now. It's a relief to have her own bubble for a while, and to know he isn't desperately hovering just outside of it, ready to drown her in all his insecurities when she has enough insecurities of her own. For all his impetuousness, he can be patient, too, if given good enough reason. He can be granite, not flame. Like a geologic age. She supposes this mentality comes with the territory of living forever.

When she's found enough equilibrium to see him again, she calls him, and he comes to her. After Trixie is asleep, and the night is thick with an orchestra of crickets. Chloe's wearing a wrinkled navy-colored tracksuit and no makeup when she answers the door to find him standing in the shadows on the front stoop, but he makes no comments about her disheveled appearance. If anything, the concern on his face only deepens.

"I could try to … repair it," he says without preface or even a perfunctory greeting. His tone is suspiciously nonchalant, and his flat expression gives nothing away. He raises his eyebrows. "If you desire."

She frowns. "Repair what?"

"I could try to pull the knowledge of my true nature from your mind."

She grips the doorknob, and her heart beats faster. "You could … take it away?" How can he …? "You mean you can take it back?" Does she even want that?

His eyes are dark, and his mouth is a grim, neutral line. "I could try."

"You didn't offer before," she says.

"Because the power to do so comes from them," he says, revealing his cards, at last. He uses the
word "them" like a curse, when it should be a benediction. Her mind's eye fills with light. Just for a moment, she sees all the stars he lit, embodied in every feather. Eclipsing everything. When she comes back to herself, he's looking at her like she just stabbed him in the gut, and the look only deepens when she looses a wonderstruck sigh. They break eye contact. He collects himself. As does she. Then he continues in a grumbling tone, "And for some bloody reason, you seem to be about as susceptible to divinity as Mother Teresa was to a good shag."

How could he say that after she just …? "But I'm-

He rolls his eyes. "You'd still be prostrated and drooling right now if you were anyone else."

"Oh." She frowns, wondering what he would have done if she'd stayed the way she'd been. And then she frowns deeper. "Wait. Please, don't tell me that you and Mother Teresa-

"So, do you desire me to try or not," he snaps without answering, "because-

She swallows. "Don't, please," she says, gripping the doorframe. She doesn't miss the way he wilts as his hackles lower. He didn't want to do it. He didn't want to do it at all. But is he just relieved that he doesn't have to use Them again? Or is there more to it than that? She has no idea. Regardless, she assures him, "I swear, it's … getting better. And I …

She wants to know all of him.

No going backward.

She steps aside, gesturing to her living room. "Do you want to come in?"

He gazes into her apartment as though he hasn't seen it before. Perhaps he hasn't. Not as the invited, anyway. Not like this.

"All right," he says.

"So, what exactly can you … you know … do?" she asks.

They sit on opposite ends of the couch, each holding a glass of wine poured from a $7 bottle of chianti she'd found on sale two weeks back. She can't picture Lucifer ever drinking it voluntarily outside of this setting - she imagines he'd call it swill - but he takes a sip, now. A mild wince follows, and he sets the glass on the coaster with a pained look.

"You don't wish to know about Hell, first?" he says, frowning as he returns his attention to her. "Dr. Linda was … quite fixated."

Chloe's eyebrows creep toward her hairline. "Your therapist knows?"

"Yes."

There's a story there that Chloe wants to ask about. She can see it written all over his face. But … later. All she needs to know, now: "Is she helping you with …?"

"She's … unwell," he replies with a grim look.

Shit. "So … no, then."

He shakes his head.

Chloe takes a sip of her wine, trying not to let the implications of that overwhelm her. "I already
had my Hell questions answered when I talked to Maze."

"Ah," he says. "And I suppose I would be your next supernatural nut to crack, wouldn't I?"

His tone is void of all amusement. His stiff posture, the gulf of distance between them, the way he has trouble meeting her eyes. All speak of a nervousness she has no idea how to assuage.

"You needn't apologize," he says with a dismissive wave, as if he's read her mind. Maybe, he has. Maybe, that's one of the things he can do. He affords her a brief glance with his dark eyes. "This is quite a lot for … one of you." One of you. As in humans. As in a species of which he is not a subset. That's just it, she remembers him saying. I'm not. Not a person, he meant. Her next sip of wine is a gulp. "When I have wings-," he continues, and she chugs the remainder, trying to stamp out the memories of his resplendence before they trample her flat.

As she sets her empty glass on the coaster on the coffee table, his eyes narrow. He considers for a long moment, not speaking as he pours her another glass. And then he amends, "When I'm … as Dad intended … it would perhaps be easier to tell you what I can't do."

"Which is?"

He's silent again. The fire crackling in the fireplace fills the silence. He watches the flames when he admits, "I'm not particularly skilled at altering time or seeing patterns."

"That's a …." She blinks. "That's the level of capability we're talking about? We're so high up in the stratosphere that the idea of not having any particular aptitude for time manipulation is worth mentioning?"

He shrugs. "Time was Amenadiel's domain, not mine."

"But you could muddle through?"

"If it were required of me," he says. "We all have our own strengths and weaknesses, much like you humans. Even if I say I can do something, there's a chance I can't do it well or easily."

Like he's trying to downplay whatever he's about to tell her. Why would he think he needs to downplay this? Her heart starts to thud. She eyes him warily. "What are your strengths?"

"Light and flame," he replies. "They're always mine to call upon."

The Light Bringer. Right. "I guess that should have been kind of a given."

"I'm neither omniscient, nor prescient," he continues, barreling onward without pausing to react to her interjection. Like he's trying to work his way down a to-do list before he loses the will to finish it. "I can't create something out of nothing. I can't die of old age or illness."

"Okay," she says, nodding. "And?"

He regards her for a long moment. "That's it."

Her jaw drops, but she picks it up. "That's it?"

"That's it."

"You're telling me that the only definitive limitations you have are that you can't die of natural causes, whip up a universe from scratch, or pick guaranteed lotto numbers?"

He winces. "I could … pick guaranteed lotto numbers."
"But you said you're not prescient."

"No, but I can will the numbers I choose to become the winners."

She fights the continued urge to openly gape at him. Because if he can do something like that …. "Why didn't you just will Ryan's car back into the driveway, or borrow a concrete barricade from downtown so he ran into that instead of the kids, or zap the kids out of the street, or-"

"Because I've no wish to be my dad," he snaps like a whip, and she can't help but flinch. He glances at her, stricken, and then adds in a more measured tone through gritted teeth, "Just because I can, doesn't mean I will." He sighs and shakes his head. "And if I'd wanted to be the bloody guardian angel of someone's snot-nosed genetic proliferation, I wouldn't have cut my wings off in the first place." He rubs his temples like the mere idea of being someone's Clarence gives him a headache.

If it were any other day, she might laugh. But … she's not laughing, now.

_I can't create something out of nothing._

"Can you go the other way?" she says slowly. "Turn something into nothing?"

"I wouldn't," he replies. "Not without a bloody good reason, and, maybe, not even then."

"But … you could?"

A long, long pause this time. "If I willed it; it would be so," he admits.

She swallows, stomach churning when she starts connecting the scattered dots he's provided. "So, if you wanted to, say, de-create the universe …."="If I willed it; it would be so."

"Oh, my _God_," she can't help but blurt. Shit. She claps her hands over her mouth. "I mean …," she mutters against her palm. "Damn it. God, damn it." Shit. No wonder he tried to downplay. "_Shit._" She shakes her head. "I mean." But she doesn't know what the hell she means, at this point. She's too flabbergasted.

If he's offended by her God-strewn invectives, he doesn't mention it. He offers her a hesitant smile - a hint of the playful man she's grown to know. "For what it's worth," he says, "I'm not bloody suicidal, and I rather like it here, so you needn't worry."

"Suicidal …?" she says, faintly.

He shrugs. "Dad would murder me and scatter my atoms to the void if I tried to break his favorite toy."

The universe. Is a toy. Like Trixie's Tammy Twinkletoes.

And Chloe just has … no idea what to say.

What does she say to something like this?

"I don't wish to frighten you," he rushes to add in the awkward silence.

Except she is. She is frightened.
I'm not quite ready for you to stop looking at me like that.

Look at you like how?

Like I'm a person.

He's anxious. He's so anxious, he's polishing the truth, hoping she'll find it more palatable when it's shiny. This not-a-person who could literally destroy the world with a capricious wouldn't-it-be-nice-if-Earth-weren't? sort of thought. He cares about her opinion. He cares about her opinion that much.

And that's terrifying … but ….

I'm not quite ready for you to stop looking at me like that.

"I really don't mean to make you feel like a zoo exhibit," she says to her knees.

His gaze softens. "I know you don't mean to."

But she does. He doesn't say it, but she does. Another telling silence.

They're both instilling feelings in the other that they don't want to instill.

Maybe, she should shift the subject matter to … something else. Something not so directly about him.

She leans forward to grab her wineglass from the coffee table and takes a gulp. Until he'd stopped that fleeing Camaro, she considered herself agnostic. And, now, there is no "a." She's just gnostic. And she's sitting next to living, breathing proof of intelligent design. He may not be omniscient, but she imagines the kinds of questions he could answer. Questions humanity's been seeking the answers to for as long as humanity has existed. Such as-

He pinches the bridge of his nose. "Please, please, don't ask me about the meaning of life," he says with a dramatic roll of his eyes.

She blinks.

"No, I didn't read your mind." He sighs, exasperated. "It's what everybody bloody asks me, and the answer never pleases."

She opens her mouth. Closes it. And then she can't help but snort as something he'd said recently flits at the edges of her mind. Of course the answer wouldn't please, coming from him. My dad's a bastard. Full stop. The answer to life, the universe, and everything. He's … quite a bit biased. Not that she can blame him.

"Oh, you think it's funny, do you?" he grumbles.

"No," she says, grinning. "I just …." Realized he was "human," after all. In spirit, if nothing else. She shakes her head. "It's not important."

She takes a sip of wine, and then she takes a deep breath and blows it out. The tension drains. Her frantic need to understand slips away like a receding tide. He's not so unlike her, after all. The world is … not so different. Understanding will come. She's happy to wait, and to let it.

Without waiting for an invitation, because she thinks she isn't likely to get an explicit one when he's this apprehensive, she scoots across the couch, wineglass in hand. The leather squeaks as she
moves. His eyes narrow as the space he'd clearly demarcated as hers melds with the space he'd clearly demarcated as his. But she can't think of a more explicit way to tell him exactly what she thinks of all this.

"What are you doing?" he asks, a little too quickly.

She shrugs. "What's it look like I'm doing?"

She settles against him, careful to avoid his shoulder. Careful to avoid Them. She's happy just to be beside him again after what felt like an eon with a gulf between them.

"Suffering from apoplexy?" he says, frowning.

"No," she says with a snort.

For a long moment, he stares back at her. Not like he simply has no idea what to say, but like she knocked anything he might have said loose from its moorings, and he hasn't recollected the scattered remains of his ability to speak, yet.

"Will you stay for a while?" she adds, driving it home. "I've got another bottle of wine."

A rough sound catches in his throat. He clears it. He spares a glance at the crackling fire. A dancing reflection of the flames lights up his pupils. "Yes," he says softly, relief coming off him in a huge wave. "But spare me the wine." He makes a face. "It's bloody awful."

She nods, smiling. "Okay."

The world feels a little more even-keeled when he offers her a warm look in return.

"Chloe, hello," a familiar, soft voice says, and she looks up from her computer.

Her mouth falls open, and for a few moments, she can't pick it up. He's standing there, arms folded like he thinks he's Superman or something. Lucifer's brother. "Amenadiel," she manages, and it occurs to her for the first time, then, that he, too, is like Lucifer. Divine. Older than time. An angel. Maybe, another archangel.

Right in the middle of the precinct.

The surreality is profound.

"I just thought I'd stop by and see how you are," Amenadiel says, voice deep and soothing and earthy. His gaze is warm like glowing embers. "Lucifer said he was taking care of things, but, well …" Amenadiel shrugs. "I think you and I both know he's not always the best at empathy."

"I'm fine," she says. "He was … fine." Considerate, actually. Which, while unusual for him, isn't unprecedented. "He was giving me … space. For a little while." And, now, they've decided that he's not. He'll visit her when he feels like it, and she'll visit him when she feels like it, and they'll figure things out as they go.

"Hmm." Amenadiel nods. "Well, I stand corrected, then. And I don't want to intrude."

Amenadiel fits the mold better, she thinks. Her preconceived notion of what angels should be, thanks to maudlin movies like *It's a Wonderful Life*. Like Lucifer, his presence is a brilliant, burning magnet that attracts attention. But he's gentle, and sweet, and polite by default. And Lucifer is none of these without effort.
Silence stretches. She's not sure what to say. What does she say?

"Listen," Amenadiel adds as she shifts awkwardly in her seat, "if you ever want to chat, and Lucifer is in one of his moods, Maze has my number, okay?"

One of his moods. She wonders what kind of moods Amenadiel might mean. The dark, glowering, angry ones Chloe's been encountering lately? Or something else? "Right," she says quietly with a nod. "Thanks."

Amenadiel turns to go, and she imagines Them, then. Huge, sloping, luminescent feathers that could be weapons, and a warmth like she'll never feel again. His must be beautiful, too. Her fingers clench. "So, are you …?" she says before she can stop herself.

He turns back to her, eyebrows raised. "Am I …?"

"You have them, too," she says, mouth dry. "You have …"

Understanding floods his gaze. "No, it's …" He swallows. Clears his throat. "No. I don't have my wings."

"You cut them off?"

"No, I'm like you, Chloe," Amenadiel says. "I'm hu-" He clears his throat. A flash of pain fills his gaze. "I fell."

She frowns. "But Lucifer fell, and-"

"He fell," Amenadiel concedes curtly with a nod. "But not like me."

She wonders how it was different, but she can't bring herself to ask. She gets the impression this is a deeply personal thing for them, and she doesn't know Amenadiel well enough to pry. He's always been this fixture. In the background. A moon to Lucifer's sun.

The dynamic makes sense, now, she supposes.

He glances at his watch. "I'm glad you're okay. Call me if you need anything."

And then he's gone as quickly as he came.

Understanding does come. Slowly. Surely.

"My best friend is the Devil …," she says with a slight frown as he places down a shot glass full of gold-colored liquid onto a coaster in front of her. The Devil has coasters. "I'm sitting at the Devil's piano. The Devil just poured me a drink." She grabs the shot glass, tips it back, and downs the contents in one gulp.

She's been visiting him after work. Or he visits her after Trixie's gone to bed. They trade, but not with any rhyme or reason. Lucifer, after all, lives in the moment. Revels in it, even. And it's next to impossible to tie him to a particular schedule.

The piano bench creaks as he sits beside her. "Would you rather it be an apple?" he says with a smirk as he nods toward her shot glass. A hint of his old sense of humor returning. At long last.

She feels as though she's swallowed fire. "No," she croaks, clearing her throat and blinking tears away.
He splays his fingers against the keys. A slow, haunting song she doesn't recognize begins to fill the quiet penthouse, and he plays for her, uninhibited. It's a pretty song, and she lets herself drift a little. Sunshine is slanting into the penthouse from the balcony, and it heats her face. Makes her feel warm. Or, maybe, it's he who does that.

And then it all stops, and she looks up to find him rubbing his temples and the bridge of his nose like he has an encroaching headache or something. "Bloody Hell," he mutters, almost inaudible.

"Are you okay?" she says. And how can he not be okay? He's immortal.

A soft, unhappy noise loiters in his throat. Like … discomfort. And then he blinks, puts his hands back on the keys, and continues to play without answering her.

She bites her lip, not sure whether to press him when their current equilibrium is so new.

"It wasn't an apple, you know," he says absently as he sways with the music. "They always get that part wrong." She doesn't miss the sudden wistfulness in his gaze. Like he wonders how things would have gone if he hadn't been so thoroughly rejected by God and by everyone. "They get most of it wrong, really. But history, as they say, is written by the victors, and I'm … not one."

His shoulder brushes hers when he sways a little too far to the left. She feels bereft when he leaves.

Later, she thinks. She'll press him later. If it happens again.

"What was it?" she says, instead. "The forbidden fruit."

"It was a …." He looks up at the ceiling, thinking, and then he speaks a word that sounds like gobbledygook to her ears.

She blinks. "What language was that?"

"The first one," he says. As in the first language ever spoken? "There isn't a modern word."

"Oh," she says, boggling.

She listens to him play for another however long. Time gets lost somewhere along the way.

Her best friend is the Devil.

And, somehow, she's getting to be okay with that.

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Things have slid back into a rhythm, save for one thing.

"So, where's that crazy partner of yours?" they ask her again at work, and she still can't answer.

He hasn't offered to come back.

She'll tell him she has a case, and his measured response is, "All right," with no accompanying offer to assist her. After which, he hangs up. Not in a rude way that implies he's curtailng the conversation prematurely. Just as a succinct, "Message received. Have a nice day at work, where I will not be." Or something.

She's not sure what to make of it, since he's not avoiding her outside of work. For social calls, he's readily available. Offering himself up, even.
She gets the impression that asking about why he's not working with her anymore might be the equivalent of popping open Pandora's Box. Once the box is open, there's no closing it. The ramifications are all-encompassing. And the contents are never worth a look-see.

She doesn't ask.

She sits at the center island, working on some of the paperwork she's put off. Her apartment smells of rosemary, and the repeated thunk-thunk-thunk of the chef's knife hitting the cutting board overlaps with Trixie's cartoons in a sort of … domestic bedlam. Lucifer has taken over her kitchen. She has no idea what he's making.

She'd been on a stakeout for sixteen hours, and he'd barged in with shopping bags just after she'd gotten home from picking up Trixie. Right, he said with a wince as he'd endured an excited Trixie wrapping herself around his left leg. I'll not have you starve on my watch. Not that she protested, much, despite her exhaustion. He is, after all, a purveyor of sin, and his skills in the service of gluttony are not unremarkable.

"Why can't you will your wings to fall off?" she wonders aloud.

Lucifer looks up from dicing a tomato, frowning. "It's, unfortunately, an issue of recursion."

Chloe frowns. "Huh?"

He shrugs. "I can't destroy with a thought that which gives me the power to destroy with a thought."

Oh. Well, that makes sense, she supposes. As much as angels and demons and everything else will ever make sense, anyway.

"Hey, Mommy, can I watch this?" Trixie yells from the living room.

Chloe cranes her neck and peers at the television. It looks like some sort of Schwarzenegger marathon. She sees a hysterical Sarah Connor screaming for Reese. "No, Monkey," Chloe replies, resisting the urge to make a beeline for the remote to turn it off. "Switch it back to Nickelodeon." She watches until Trixie flips the channel back to Spongebob.

Chloe turns back to an aghast Lucifer. He's chopping a zucchini, now. "You should let the child watch the bastardized cable version of Terminator. At least that might be somewhat intellectually stimulating." He grimaces. "Really, how do you expect your offspring to develop properly whilst subsiding on the mental equivalent of a Twinkie diet?"

Chloe snorts. "You can't seriously be picking on someone for watching Spongebob when you enjoy the Body Bags franchise."

"Yes, but that has artistic violence and sex, and this has ...." He frowns, knife pointed at the screen. "This has a ...." The knife waves as he searches for the appropriate term. "It has a bloody talking lobster."

She rolls her eyes, but doesn't dignify that with a reply. "So, why can't you reach around and rip them off?"

He visibly shudders as he dumps a whole pile of chopped vegetables into the sauté pan. "Why can't you tear off your own arm?" he replies in a wry tone. He wipes his hands on the kitchen towel.
"But that's not the same," she protests. She can't benchpress a planet, for one. "You're way stronger than me."

The sound of something sizzling fills the air. He stirs the contents of the pan once and leaves the spoon resting against the edge. Then he turns to her and folds his arms. "So are the bones, muscles, and tendons I would be attempting to rip," he says, "and I can't reach well enough to get the requisite leverage without utilizing some of my abilities."

She bites her lip. "So … another recursion thing."

"Yes," he replies. He turns to stir the pot again. The smell of rosemary thickens in the air, and she can't resist the urge to breathe deeply. Fresh rosemary is one of her favorite cooking smells. "Isn't your paperwork more interesting than considering new ways to savage my anatomy?"

She glances down at the forms she's filling out. A battle won, but the war is still in progress. She'd caught the slime ball who'd provided a twenty-year-old art major with the fentanyl-laced heroin that had killed him. But she has no leads on who'd given the fentanyl-laced heroin to the slime ball. Slime Ball had lawyered up and wasn't talking.

"You know anything about a dealer who stamps his heroin bricks and baggies with a sun logo?" she says.

Lucifer stiffens, but doesn't turn around. "I won't discuss your work."

Your work. Not ours. She blinks at the sudden chill in the room. O … kay. "… Why not?"

"Because I won't," he says. "Don't ask me."

She regards him for a long moment, feeling a little bit like she just stepped into a minefield. She wants to press him for more information. But he's radiating quills like he's a porcupine.

Pandora's Box, she thinks, swallowing.

"Sorry," she says, backing away.

He gives her a dismissive it's-quite-all-right wave, not even looking up from his culinary endeavor.

"So, what if I was sitting next to you while you tried to pull off your wings?" she persists as he shifts his attention to the chicken breasts he's left thawing on a paper towel. She doesn't miss his exasperated sigh. "You'd keep your strength but lose your resilience." She gives him an expectant look. "Right?"

He sprinkles salt on the chicken. "Putting aside the fact that I can't bring my wings out in your presence without you devolving into a gelatinous pile of human-shaped goo … have you not noticed that you don't make me vulnerable anymore?"

She frowns. "But I thought …"

"How did you think I stopped Radcliffe's car?" he says patiently.

"I thought I was far enough away."

"Not hardly," he replies as he moves the chicken into a second pan on the stove. "The wings must … counteract your … mortality effect."
Damn. "And you can't cut them off by yourself?" she asks. "With Maze's fancy Hell knives?"

A long pause follows before he admits, "Anything that would require me to think straight for more than the first few seconds isn't feasible."

Whoa. "It's that miserable?"

He gives her a considering look, but he doesn't answer. So, yes, then. That's a checkmark in the horrifically miserable column. "Thank you for … trying," he says. His expression softens. "It means a great deal."

But you can't help me, he doesn't say.

That doesn't stop her from wanting to try, though.

"So, you really did all of that?" she says, craning her neck backward until it hurts, marveling.

Lucifer shrugs. "Dad said, 'Let there be light.' So, I strung up the lights."

Like he was decorating a Christmas tree or something. She clears her throat, trying not to laugh at the ludicrous picture unfurling in her head - Lucifer circling the tree, dragging tangled light cords behind him, God staring over his shoulder, criticizing whether Lucifer’s achieved even distribution. No, God's saying. You must wrap every branch at least once! Not every other branch!

She glances at her companion, wondering at how her life got so damned strange. Lucifer, oblivious to her sudden mirth, darkens, and he continues, "It never occurred to me back then to question him."

They walk along the beach, listening to the surf pelt the wet sand. The sky hangs overhead, flecked with scattered stars like bits of broken glass. The city lights of Los Angeles proper have turned what should have been black into something purplish, and the stars visible to the naked eye number in the dozens. Not in the thousands, like they would out in the country. The sight still instills wonder, though. Particularly when she's walking next to the man who painted the whole brilliant tapestry.

She's walking next to the painter.

Her grip tightens around his arm, and her chest feels squeezed like her ribs have become a compactor for her innards.

"Detective," he says, and they stop walking. "Chloe, are you quite all right?"

"Sorry!" she rushes to say between wheezes. "I just get. I still have these moments when …. I mean." He raises his eyebrows, peering at her expectantly. She swallows, mouth dry. "I'm strolling down Santa Monica Beach with the man who lit the sun. Literally lit the literal sun."

His grin is a sly one. "Not my best work; I admit."

"Well, it seems pretty A-plus to me …," she says faintly. He lit the sun. "I …." She takes a deep breath, trying to calm down. But then she makes the mistake of looking up again, and, combined with the company she's keeping, she suddenly feels … very small. "Do aliens exist?" she blurs, wincing once she realizes what she just said.

He frowns. "I … beg your pardon?"
She feels her face heating. "Life. Elsewhere." She shrugs, expressing sudden, intense interest in his shoes. He's sacrificed his usual leather Prada boots for rubber Adidas flip-flops, and it's just … incongruous. Even for a stroll on the beach. But she supposes even impeccable archangels get pissed off at sand collecting in their socks. "Will SETI ever find …? I mean ….

"Well, no life exists like Ridley Scott imagines," Lucifer scoffs. "That franchise is just a peek at his twisted but admittedly fascinating collection of kinks."

She swallows. "But … like something? There's something out there to find?"

"… Yes," he replies slowly. "Dad has … other playgrounds in his sandbox."

"Wow." She can't keep her mouth from falling open. "I mean … wow."

She wonders what they're like. Whether Lucifer has been there. Seen them. Conversed. He seems to have a preference for Earth, but what does she know?

And then she thinks about what he said - *it never occurred to me back then to question* - and her wonder's wings are clipped. "You regret it? Lighting the stars?" How could he regret perfecting the lynchpin of the universe?

"No," he says. "Just my naïveté."

Lucifer. Naive. That's another thing she has trouble imagining.

Lucifer is many things, but naive isn't one of them.

They keep walking. The soft sand churns under her bare toes. A pair of night-faring seagulls argue over a bread crust someone left in the sand. They posture, and they caw, wings spread and flapping at each other. Chloe watches them for a moment, until they're too far behind to observe without craning her neck.

"I have a question," she says. The night is chilly, and she hunkers in her sweatshirt. For armor, or for warmth, she's not certain.

Eyebrows arched, Lucifer gives her an amused look.

She sighs. "Okay, another question," she corrects herself.

"Ask."

They stop again, and she looks up at him. "Why don't you want wings?" He opens his mouth to reply, and she rushes to add, "I mean, I understand the physical implications of these wings that were forced on you." The violation. She understands that. "But you cut the first pair off. And they let you do things like …." She looks up at the stars. "Well, like that." And how can that be all bad?

"Because I am not Dad's mindless little messenger, bearing his word to the wide-eyed masses," Lucifer replies without hesitation, bitter and dark. "I am not part of his convoluted, impenetrable plan." He looks out at the water, expression reminiscent of indigestion. "And I am not … good."

"So, to you, the wings represent service?" she says, trying to understand. "Service to God?"

He glowers. "More like they're a leash that requires it."

"So … what, then? He tells you to be good - to be his angel - and now you feel like you have to
refuse to be good?"

His scowl worsens, and he doesn't reply. *You make it sound so juvenile,* she imagines him saying.

She watches a wave spread across the beach, stopping inches from their feet before retreating. Moonlight reflects off the newly wet sand, giving it a bit of a glow. She swallows, watching it, trying to gather her courage before the receding tide washes it all away.

She takes a deep breath.

"How is doing the exact opposite of what God wants, every time, without fail, any different than following his plan to the letter?" she says. "How is that free will? Isn't breaking the rules just to break them another form of predestination? By that logic, all your dad would have to do to get you to do what he wants is imply that he wants the opposite, and given that you've been throwing this same wrong-is-right tantrum for millennia, he has to have figured that out by now."

Lucifer snorts with derision. "Well, I sincerely doubt he's trying to get me to be *bad.* And wouldn't that be the opposite of angelic?"

"My point is you *don't* know. You *can't* know. So, if you want to do good things even when they don't benefit you, why not do them?" she continues. *Embrace that little chaotic good streak,* she doesn't say. "As long as it's what you want to do, who the hell cares what God wants, or whether he stuck wings on you?"

Lucifer regards her for a long, long moment. "Who says I want to do good things even when they don't benefit me?" he asks, giving her a dark look.

She rolls her eyes. "Lucifer, you're the most licentious, egotistical, imperious, vain, vindictive, impulsive, supercilious man I know, but-"

A dangerous grin slides across his face. "You seem to be sabotaging your own hypothesis, darling," he practically purrs, a velvet tone that makes her shiver. He steps closer, and the only way she could possibly describe the movement is "he's stalking prey."

She gives him a gentle slap, breaking his hypnotic spell. "Shut up, and let me finish before you get all butthurt about it."

He blinks. Looks down at the place her hand impacted with his chest. Looks back up at her. His predatory smile drips away, replaced by an incredulous frown.

She imagines he's not used to silly little humans telling him to shut up, or accusing him of being unduly offended. Not when they know he could end them with a thought. Her heart starts to thud, and her mouth goes dry. Shit, did she really just-

She shakes her head.

She can't let herself think about that.

"You've also saved my life more times than I can count," she says. "You're there when I need you. You support me, always. I've seen you help crime victims. You're kind, when you want to be. Gentle, when you want to be. Considerate, when you want to be. You're the best partner I've ever had. And you were doing all that way before God dropped you into the desert with a spanking new set of wings."

He licks his lips, considering.
"Lucifer, you can't tell me all of that was in the service of self-interest."

"As we've established," he replies darkly, "there's very little I can't do."

He's trying to scare her, she realizes. He's trying to ruffle her. He's like some sort of freaked out cat, all puffed up and hissing and spitting. At least, she hopes she's reading this right.

"Has it occurred to you that maybe God wasn't trying to steer you in a particular direction?" she says, pressing onward. "Maybe, he's not forcing you to be an angel. Maybe, he was acknowledging that you'd already chosen to be one." She frowns. "Well, kind of." She wonders if there's a word for a hedonist antihero with wings.

He sniffs and looks away. "That doesn't make it right. And I didn't choose this."

"I didn't say it did," she replies softly. Of course, it isn't right. There's nothing about this that's right. But there's very little she can do but try to help him move forward from it. "And didn't you? Choose this, I mean. Helping me? He didn't make you do that."

"To punish -"

"What does saving my life or being nice have to do with punishing people?" she says, before he can finish.

"It …" He blinks, flustered. "How else was I to pursue the perpetrators?"

She gives him an incredulous look. "You're Lucifer the Morning Star. What could possibly be stopping you?"

"So, what, you think that's all this is?" he scoffs. "A divine pat on the back? A, 'Good job, son!'" He looks down at her like oh-you-precious-thing, and it pisses her off. "Come, now. You can't presume to know that."

"And you can't presume to know he's steering you like some sort of boat rudder," she spits back at him. "You told me point blank that you don't know why he does anything. You called his plan convoluted and impenetrable. You're just guessing. You're not omniscient. You don't know."

"Educated guessing," he says.

She folds her arms. "But guessing."

"I …" He swallows. Looks everywhere but at her, and she knows. She got him. She knows she got him. And at last, he admits in a low, quiet voice, "Yes. Yes, I … suppose."

1-0 Chloe-Lucifer. Game. Set. Match.

She can't know what he's thinking as he stares out at the black, churning surf. He's unreadable a lot of the time. But she believes she's making progress.

Regardless, he's the type that doesn't respond well to losing, so she opts not to rub in her victory. She glances at her watch. They still have a half hour before Dan expects her to pick up Trixie. "There's a good place to get frozen custard," Chloe says with a grin. "A little bit up the beach. Have you been there?"

"No," Lucifer says, frowning.

Sometimes, she seems to render him perpetually confused.
She tugs on the arm of his suit, giving a pointed look down the beach. And then she trots away, leaving him with the choice to follow or not follow. In case he wants some space after she just trounced him. In case he wants some time to figure out how $2+2=4$ again.

He doesn't, it seems.

He catches up to her in three paces.
I hope you guys like this. It was nice bringing this particular Lucifer out to play for a bit. We haven't seen him on the show in a while. I've missed him. *sniffle*

Thanks again for the feedback, everybody :)

It's been four weeks since the world ended.

"Mommy, what's chickenpox?" asks Trixie as they walk through the front door. The sun hangs low in the sky, spilling light into the apartment through the windows at a slant. "Susie had to go home early." Trixie makes a "yuck" face as she hangs up her book bag on the hook by the door. "She had all these red spots on her face, and it was gross."

"Ah, Varicella," Lucifer says from the couch. His hair is mussed, and he rubs his eyes and blinks like they'd woken him from a doze, which is … odd. He gives Trixie a look that could almost be described as fond. "You can thank my mum for that one. She had a thing for plagues."

"Lucifer!" Trixie exclaims, lighting up like Santa Monica Pier at night, and she makes a beeline for him.

Since he's sitting, she can't grab a leg or his waist, and she dives into his lap instead, paying no mind to his wrinkled, thousand-dollar suit. He grunts with the impact, but he makes no comments about his rough treatment other than his usual befuddled, "Hello, small human."

He gives her an awkward pat on the head like he thinks she's a dog, and Chloe can't help but snort. His aversion to "small humans" makes a lot more sense, now, given that he hasn't been small in literal eons, and he's never been human. In fact, she finds this whole scene heaps more endearing than she used to. He's one of the most powerful creatures in the universe, and he's perplexed by an eight-year-old.

Chloe swallows.

He's one of the most powerful creatures in the universe.

By all rights, people should be nothing more than bugs to him.

Except, instead of whipping out a celestial fly swatter, he's letting said perplexing eight-year-old climb all over him and put shoe prints on his expensive pant legs.

"I can write my name in cursive, now!" Trixie announces.

"How scintillating," he replies in a bored tone, but the glance he shoots in Chloe's direction is a troubled one. "Should her educators already be giving her the means to sell her soul? Seems a bit dodgy to me."

"Well, luckily," Chloe says, grinning as she sets her purse on the table, "we have laws about minors signing contracts. So, soul selling isn't much of a concern."
Trixie tugs on Lucifer's lapel, dragging his attention back to her. "What's scintillating mean?"

"It means exciting."

"You don't seem very excited," she says.

He arches his eyebrows at her. Chloe imagines him saying something along the lines of, *Tell me, offspring, have your instructors explained sarcasm, yet, or does that occur later in your baffling educational schedule?* But she intervenes before he can convert thought to action. "Hey, Monkey?" Chloe says. "Let Lucifer breathe, okay?"

Trixie sighs, but she slides off of him, at least, and he pulls out a handkerchief to wipe his hands. Like he thinks she leaves some sort of "small human" residue, or something. Chloe resists the urge to laugh at him.

"To answer your question, chickenpox is a disease that makes you itchy," Chloe says. "But you don't need to worry. You're vaccinated against that."

"What's a vaccine?" Trixie says.

"Me, if you believe Jenny McCarthy," Lucifer grumbles under his breath as he works on dusting away the shoe prints Trixie left on his thighs.

Chloe bites back on a snort of amusement. "Vaccines tell your body how to fight off a disease before you get sick with it," she says.

Trixie frowns. "So, I won't get it?"

"No, Monkey. You'll be fine, okay?" She kisses Trixie's forehead. "Now, why don't you go get your reading done, and then we can play?"

"Okay, Mommy," Trixie says, before darting off to her room.

Chloe lets herself fall onto the couch beside Lucifer as he's folding away his handkerchief. "Okay, out with it."

He frowns. "Out with what?"

"Why were you camped out on my couch?" she says.

"I require a reason?"

"No," she says. Certainly not anymore. "But you always have one, anyway." Particularly when Trixie is here.

"Well … yes," he admits slowly. "I suppose I do."

"Something you want me to look into?" she prods. "A dead guy you found? Maybe, you need another BOLO for missing-?" She clamps her mouth shut before she says wings. Shit. Insensitive. So insensitive. She coughs, frantically pressing onward. "Er." She frowns. "Wait, you're not being evicted again, are you?"

But Lucifer shakes his head, stretching his long, long arms over the back of the couch in a graceful motion. "Detective, has it occurred to you that perhaps my only reason for being here is that I enjoy your company?"
She blinks. Swallows. Glances to the right, to his hand, resting by her shoulder, and she realizes she's almost being embraced, and she didn't notice it, and how the hell did she not notice that? That stretch of his was smooth.

"Not before now, no," she says slowly.

She's still not used to this Lucifer, yet. This Lucifer who won't come to work because of some heretofore unknown Pandora's Box reason that she's afraid to ask about. This Lucifer who's spent the last month doing nothing but social calls with her. Of course, this would be a social call, too.

And, speaking of social calls … she spares another glance to his hand. At the not-much-space between them. Whatever this is, she can't call it romantic, but … it sure as hell isn't platonic.

"I guess it should have," she admits. "I …"

The skin around his left eye twitches. His fingers flex. A soft, unhappy noise vibrates in his throat, so quiet it's barely audible. And then he uses his free hand to rub the bridge of his nose.

"Hey, are you okay?" she says, frowning.

"Apologies," he's quick to say. He wipes his face with his palm, blinking like he's exhausted, and then he sighs. "I've been under … strain."

That's as close to an outright no as she'll ever get from him, she thinks. "You want to talk about it?"

But he shakes his head.

For a moment, she thinks their conversation will cease there in exchange for a comfortable silence, but as she peers at him, his whole tired expression oozes behind a mask of content. The tired lines around his eyes relax. His mouth, before a grim, frown-y curve, eases into neutral line. He takes a deep, cleansing breath. And then he flashes one of his look-at-me-and-my-kissable-mouth grins that's likely meant to melt all intelligent thought from her brain. Her heart skips a little when he brings his charm to bear on her.

"What I desire," he says, almost a purr as he leans a little closer, "is to spend time in this domicile with you and your miscreant, and even Maze, should she deign to make an appearance. I desire not to be left to my own thoughts." He raises his eyebrows. "So, will you provide, or shall I pester my poor brother for my required distraction, instead?"

And, really, how can she say no to that?

And why would she want to?

Except …

"Depends," she replies with an apologetic look.

He raises his eyebrows expectantly. "On?"

"If you want my company badly enough to play boardgames with me and my 'small human,'" she says, putting the words small and human in air quotes. "I owe Trixie some Mommy time as soon as she finishes her homework."

"Yes," he says without hesitation.
"You heard the Trixie part, right?" she says.

"Yes," he repeats, again without pause.

"As I have said," he replies, words as smooth as syrup. "I desire not to be left to my own thoughts."

Okay, then," she says with a shrug.

Whatever floats his celestial boat, she supposes. And she can get behind the need to keep one's mind off something. What something? her irritating, tiny voice interjects, but she pushes it away. If he wants to spill, he will. If he doesn't, he won't. It's pretty much that simple.

Still, she can't help but wonder at the weirdness.

"What's your favorite Monopoly token?" she says.

For a moment, he doesn't reply. She wonders if he's ever even played it before. The game initially strikes her as something beneath his notice, and definitely not worth his time, infinite though it is. But with the "Passing Go" mechanics, Monopoly is easy to turn into a stripping game, or a drinking game, or both, so … she puts the odds at seventy to thirty, yes to no.

"I'm … fond of the automobile," he replies at last, tone cautious.

She snickers. Of course, he is.

"Okay," Chloe says into her desk phone. "I'll be right there."

She gathers her things with a sigh. A body'd been found in Rieber Hall at UCLA. A possible O.D. Another possible O.D. She's really not interested in dealing with the death of another kid who hasn't even hit the drinking age, so soon after the last. Sometimes … she hates her job.

The sound of a clearing throat makes Chloe look up to find a familiar-looking, dark-haired, bespectacled woman sidling up to Chloe's desk. "Hello; I'm Emily Blake," the woman says in a rich, alto tone, as she holds out her hand for a shake. Her face is round, and her nose is button-ish. She's beautiful, but in an unconventional way, and her fashion sense seems to rival Lucifer's, if her leather jacket and riding boots are any indication. "I just transferred here from vice."

"Chloe Decker," she says, returning Emily's greeting. "Homicide." She clears her throat. "Listen, I have to go … ."

"Oh, I know!" says Emily as she swipes her wispy bangs out of her face. The solid gold wedding band and diamond engagement ring encircling her ring finger both sparkle in the light. "That's why I'm here."


Emily grins. "I'm your new partner! The lieutenant just assigned me."
"But I have a partner," Chloe says, hackles rising.

Emily shrugs and holds up her hands, displaying empty palms. "Hey, I'm not here to ruffle feathers. I'm just going where I was assigned." She seems thrilled about it, too, and why shouldn't she be? Vice squad to homicide detective is a huge promotion.

Chloe sighs. "Sorry," she says. "I'm sorry." She shakes her head. "It's just .... I wasn't told." A lump forms in her throat. "I mean, I wasn't expecting ...."

Had Lucifer cut the ties between him and the department? He hadn't mentioned anything to her at all. Not in two whole hours of Monopoly yesterday, not during dinner, and not after. Not even when Trixie had been put to bed, and he hadn't had to watch what he said anymore.

"Detective Decker?"

Chloe blinks, realizing Emily is staring at her. "I'll ... talk with the lieutenant," Chloe mutters. *This has to be a mistake,* she wants to say. But she has a sinking suspicion that it isn't.

"Okay," says Emily, as Chloe walks away.

Lucifer hasn't spoken to the lieutenant about anything. At all. In as many weeks as he's been stonewalling Chloe about work, he hasn't called the department once. And the lieutenant, it seems, has jumped to the natural conclusion.

"It's not normal for detectives to work solo," says Lieutenant Monroe. "And I can't let you continue by yourself indefinitely. It would be irresponsible of me. You need someone to watch your six."

Chloe grinds her teeth. "But I'm not working solo."

The lieutenant's eyebrows creep toward her hairline. "Oh? I was mistaken?"

Chloe can't help but look away.

"I didn't think so," says Lieutenant Monroe. She sighs, and her chair creaks as she shifts in it. "Detective Decker, I know you liked your partnership with Mr. Morningstar. You had an unprecedented solve rate. You two did great things together. I never would have broken you up if it were up to me. But all great things come to an end, at some point, and Mr. Morningstar has, in my mind, made it pretty clear that that point is now."

"But ...," Chloe says, only to trail off.

*I'll talk to him,* she wants to say. The words sit on the tip of her tongue, ready to leap to freedom. *He loves the work, and he'll see reason if I just have a talk with him.* After all, she really hasn't, yet. Oh, she's mentioned work, and he's blown her off, but they haven't had a real two-way conversation about his future plans or intentions.

Except ... the Box.

Asking him about work would be opening the Box.

And every gut instinct she possesses is screaming at her not to touch that damned Box if she values her friendship with him.

She slumps. "... Okay," she says, aware that she sounds like she's being walked off a plank, but
unable to help herself. She … needs the eggs. She'd convinced herself that she'd always have eggs. No matter what. But ….

Olivia regards Chloe for a long moment. "Look, for what it's worth, if Mr. Morningstar changes his mind, I'm happy to reevaluate."

"Thank you," Chloe says, lump stuck in her throat.

She can't help but shake her head as she slogs back to her desk.

If she had told the Chloe of two years ago that she'd actually protest an assignment away from "Mr. Morningstar," she'd have laughed in her own face. And if she'd told that Chloe that "Mr. Morningstar" was actually a seven-zillion-septillion-whatever-year-old archangel with enough issues for a lifetime subscription to Time, well, younger Chloe probably would have had older Chloe committed. And if she'd also said, "And, by the way. The archangel? With the issues? You have feelings for him, and the majority aren't bad ones. But you don't tell anybody that, least of all him, because baggage, and missed opportunities, and reasons, and talk about a mismatch made in Hell, anyway." Well. Who knows what she would have done with that information. Probably nothing smart.

She sighs.

She hopes she's being smart, now. That not opening that stupid Box is the right thing.

That it's worth it.

"Okay, let's go," she tells Emily, who's waiting back at Chloe's desk.

Emily hops out of her chair to follow.

And Chloe tries not to wish Emily was Lucifer.

The dorm room where Steven Winterset died is a typical one. Well, typical in a Woohoo! No more parents! male-frosh cesspit of dirty clothes, dirty dishes, unattributable funny smells, and junk strewn everywhere sense. Two loft beds are crammed into a space the size of a tin can, and there's barely any room to maneuver for two roommates, let alone two cops and a crime scene unit. The body is sitting at the desk underneath the loft bed on the left, and the victim still has a rubber tourniquet tied around his bicep, and a needle stuck in his arm.

"Absolutely nobody touch anything," Ella says. "Don't pick it up; don't bump it; don't brush it with your shoulder. Do not let your bare skin or your clothes come in contact with anything at this scene, and throw everything you're wearing into the washer after you leave. Fentanyl can be absorbed through the skin. You don't want to track it anywhere."

Chloe sighs. Unless there'd been some amazingly weird confluence of circumstances that could kill a human being-

"I think it's probably safe to say that this is an O.D.," Emily says with a grim look. She shakes her head. Her voice is somewhat strained when she says, "Stupid kid."

"Yeah," Ella says with a sigh. She steps backward, out from underneath the loft, and straightens. She winces as her back audibly pops. "That, or preexistent health problems exacerbated into a fatality by this whole mess."

Chloe inches forward, now that Ella is out of the way. The baggie is still lying on the desk, mostly
full of fine white powder. A telltale sun logo mars the surface of the plastic. The sun is orange and yellow, with wavy flames spreading out from the epicenter, and it has a distinct face with a bulbous nose and mean-looking eyes. It's the same as the logo she found on her victim's drug stash last week.

"I saw this when I was on vice," Emily says, looking pointedly at the logo.

Chloe frowns. "Where?"

"On a window decal," Emily replies. "A guy I arrested last week."

"For dealing?"

Emily shakes her head. "Nope. For a drunk and disorderly, believe it or not."

"Well, this makes my O.D. from last week more than a tragic one-off," Chloe says. She glances at Ella. "Any outward sign of fentanyl, or are you just being cautious?" The only really outward sign of fentanyl is that people tend to drop dead, but it can't hurt to ask.

"Just cautious," Ella says with a shrug.

Chloe takes one more glance at the clutter-strewn dorm room. A dealer distributing fentanyl-laced anything was a quick ticket for intense police scrutiny. A dose the size of a grain of sand is enough to kill indiscriminately, and a potential victim only needs to touch it to receive the full, deadly effects. "Narcotics is gonna want to steal this."

"Not if we solve it first," Emily says, folding her arms.

Chloe glances at her new partner and affords her a small smile. "That was my plan."

"So, where'd Steve get the smack?" Chloe asks the roommate as they sit in the common area.

The roommate is a black-haired, wiry young engineering-major named Rashid. His eyes are red-rimmed, a sharp carpet of black stubble covers his jawline, and he looks like he wants to do nothing more than crawl into a bed somewhere and hibernate, away from overdoses and dead friends and pain. She really can't blame him.

She puts a hand on his shoulder when he doesn't answer. "Rashid," she says softly.

He rubs his eyes. "Oh, um …," he says, shellshocked. He sniffs. "At a party last weekend, I think."

"Like a frat party?" Emily prods. "A dinner party?"

Rashid shakes his head and pulls his fingers through his hair. "No, I mean like … a weekly thing at some random place," he says. "The location moves once a month."

"A rave," Chloe says.

"No, not like that," Rashid says. "It's just a big party."

Emily frowns. "So, a frat party," she reasserts.

"Look, it's not limited to Greeks," Rashid replies with a sigh. "Anybody can come. Anyone looking for a good time."
"Have you gone to this party?" Chloe asks.

Rashid shrugs, staring over his knees at his shoes. "A few times."

"Do you know if the baggies with the sun logo were passed around by the partygoers, or if there's a particular dealer that attends?" Chloe asks. She's seen both kinds of parties. The former is more popular with students, who tend to be less able to afford a decent high by themselves and are willing to share the love around. The latter tends to happen at parties where the high rollers with money clips go.

"I don't know," Rashid says with a helpless look. "I don't do that shit. Steve offered some to me last night, but … I said no." He shudders. "In retrospect … probably the smartest thing I've ever done."

"Hmm," Chloe says, nodding. "When and where is this party?"

Rashid's gaze twists into something agonized. "Man, they're never going to tell me the new address when it changes if they find out I squealed the location to the cops."

"Well, I guess it comes down to what's more important to you," Emily says, leaning in with a stern look. Her hazel-colored stare is intense. "Going to a party, or getting some justice for your dead friend." She glances at Chloe and then back to Rashid. "I promise, we're discreet."

"I …." Rashid glances back and forth between them. He slumps. "Fine. Fine, but please don't tell anyone you got this info from me." He rattles off an address that's down by the docks. "It starts at midnight every Saturday."

Emily and Chloe share a look. Saturday is tomorrow night.

How fortuitous.

The party isn't a rave, superficially. There are no glow sticks or face paints or neon colors that come alive in the dark, and as hard as Chloe looks, she doesn't see any stamped ecstasy tablets being passed around like they're candy. Aside from that, though, the mechanics are similar.

A large group of people gathers at a particular address - in this case, an abandoned warehouse - where a DJ is set up on a central stage equipped with speakers the size of small houses. The crowd is a frothing tangle of limbs and body heat and noise. The music is so loud it's physically painful, and Chloe finds herself pressing the tragus of each ear closed, trying to block some of the bedlam from spearing her brain. Even then, the party is such a feast for the senses that she has a hard time not glutting herself.

"I'll circle 'round!" Emily shouts over the din. "Maybe, I can talk with the DJ or something."

The last thing they need is for someone to realize the party's been infiltrated by cops. The whole place might turn into a stampede to escape, and then there's a high risk of someone getting trampled.

"Don't flash your badge," Chloe shouts back at her, already going hoarse trying to be heard. "I'll see if I can find a dealer."

Emily nods, takes a few steps to the left, and is almost immediately enveloped by the writhing mob. Chloe swallows, heading in the opposite direction. Her head is already pounding with the throb of the bass, and she has to squeeze her eyes shut for a moment to reorient. This congregation is why Lucifer was able to pick on her for not having any friends. Because she'd always found
that "friends" think this shit is fun, and, meanwhile, she thinks it's torture. Ugh.

And that's when she hears it. Over the music. Over the bedlam.

Because his is a laugh that carries like it has wings of its own.

No. No, no, no, no.

She opens her eyes and pushes through a clot of people, heading in the direction she thinks she heard him. A gyrating couple blocks her view. She plows past past leather and pleather and squeaky vinyl and all manner of impractical clothing that would better serve as upholstery, past squirming bodies, everywhere. She weaves and wends and-

She sees him just in time to watch a huge wad of cash and a little baggie emblazoned with a familiar sun logo exchange hands.

"Lucifer!" she hisses, barely audible in the cacophony.

Archangels, it seems, have great hearing. Because, despite the noise, he turns, eyebrows raised in wary curiosity. When she gets a full view, her jaw threatens to loll open. His usual vest and jacket are absent. His shirt is halfway unbuttoned, exposing a divine set of pectorals, and only one shirt tail is tucked into his pants. His hair, normally coiffed, is a come-fuck-me mess that's just begging to be grabbed in the throes of- She swallows, trying to calm herself down. Holy shit, she gets it, suddenly. Why people tend to fall apart around him.

And then he smiles. At her. He's smiling at her.

Like someone just dealt him a royal flush at the poker table.

The crush of the noise surrounding them seems to fade away, eclipsed by his presence.

"Detective!" Lucifer purrs as he approaches. The sing-song word is silk, sliding down her spine.

His gaze sweeps down to her feet, and then up, up, with a long pause at the chest, and up, and he meets her eyes with his own. His smile deepens with genuine warmth. She hasn't seen him this happy since before he'd been taken.

Then he says, "Don't you look smashing!"

And her world just … stops.

She blinks, disarmed. She glances down at herself. She's not wearing anything special. "I … do?"

He reaches out with a long arm, pulls her gracefully into his space, and he sways with her like he means for them to dance. "Yes, you're quite lovely," he says, the words low and throaty. "But then I always think that." He does? Holy shit, holy shit.

It's hot in here. Is it hot? "Lucifer," she manages, the word strained.

"Darling, you know what they say," he rumbles against her ear. His breath on her skin is warm. "Say?" she parrots uselessly.

"Speak of the Devil, and the Devil … shall … come," he whispers, and she can't breathe. He says the word "come" with such guttural carnality that she can't help but shiver. And, now, she's imagining inappropriate, smutty, pornographic things, and she- He presses closer. He smells delicious. She thinks he might kiss her. She thinks she might let him. Her lower body tightens like
a screw. She has a void between her legs that she would die for him to fill. And when he adds a low-pitched, seductive, "Do you desire me?" her heart starts to pound in time with the distantly remembered thumping bass.

"Yes," she admits, breathless, but she bites back on a please.

He pulls back just enough to look at her with a languid grin. Heat fills the tiny gap between them as he stares at her with his dark, dark eyes. This close, she can see her reflection in them.

And the fact that his sclerae are bloodshot. His pupils are constricted. And his gaze isn't altogether focused. He looks ... a little flushed, too.

The spell is broken.

Just like that. In the space of an eye blink.

No wonder he's so happy.

"You're completely strung out, aren't you?" she says, sinking with disappointment as she pulls back from him.

"Nope," he says, lips closing over the p to make a playful popping noise.

Oh, yeah, right. "Nope?"

"The word completely implies that there's no room for improvement, and that," he says, smirk exultant, "would be a lie."

She sighs as the familiar damn-it-seriously? feeling of sexual frustration unfurls through her body. No, no, no. Why the hell had she let herself fall for his wiles? When she was working, even! One smile, and she'd melted. And ... how many trucks full of drugs would he need to consume to be strung out, anyway?

She resists the urge to tilt her head back, stare at the ceiling, and scream. "Why are you here?" she says, instead, in a slightly more measured tone. Slightly.

"Tell me," he says with incredulity as he inspects his onyx ring, "why does one come to a party?"

He regards her for a long moment, like Oh-you-poor-deprived-thing-having-to-live-vicariously-through-my-many-bootsey-sexcapades, and she can't help but sigh again. He humors her, though. "Well, I thought I'd meet Molly and have a nice shag, but I happened on my Aunt Hazel instead," he says, holding up the powder-filled baggie she'd spotted during the money-drug exchange earlier.

Why is he holding it up for her to see? He gives it an enthusiastic shake, as if to say, HEY, LOOK! I HAVE HEROIN! ISN'T THAT BLOODY FANTASTIC? You know. In case she hadn't gotten the message, somehow.

"Admittedly not my favorite - needles and messy prep and all that," he continues, "but I'm not terribly picky when I'm desperate." He looks back at her, and he practically waggles his eyebrows at her in suggestion. "Care to join me?" His grin is nuclear. "We can skip the shag if you like, though I admit, I'd be terribly disappointed." His gaze turns questioning. "Is that specific enough for you?"
She glares. "Lucifer, I am not gonna shoot heroin with you."

"Right," he says with a nod. "On duty, then?"

"Lucifer, I'm not gonna shoot heroin with you ever," she clarifies, careful to enunciate.

"Well, you can snort it, too, you know," he says merrily, undeterred. "That was my plan, since I don't have Hell-forged syringes, and I have a little invulnerability problem going on as of late. The high's not quite as good, but-

She grabs his biceps and gives him a hard shake. "Lucifer," she says. He blinks like he might be trying to focus. Or perhaps he's imagining her naked. It's hard to tell. "Please, please, don't tell me you didn't want to talk last week about that sun logo because you're neck deep in this. Please."

She frowns. "And what do you mean, you're desperate?"

"Desperate for some bloody peace and quiet," he says. Because it totally makes sense to get some quiet at a place like this. What the hell? His eyebrows knit, he cocks his head to the side, and then he says with curiosity, "Neck deep in what?"

She jabs her thumb at the baggie. "The logo! The deaths." She sighs. "And who in the hell did you get that from?"

"Oh, from a lovely young pre-med student named Chad," Lucifer says. "He was quite generous. Yes. He's right over ...." He frowns as he peers out over the writhing crowd. "Well, I suppose he's left, but-

"Do you have any idea what kind of position you're putting me in?" she snaps.

His gaze shifts back to her and then wanders south. His expression sharpens into something hungry. "You've made it quite clear that I'm not to be putting you in any position, Detective," he says, almost a purr. His low-pitched laugh makes her shiver. "Changed you mind, have you? You'll not regret it."

"No, my mind hasn't changed," she says, exasperated. She points at the baggie again. "That's a felony, Lucifer. Right there in your hands!"

"Oh, how naughty of me," he says with a leer. "Care to arrest me?"

She's not going to arrest him. She can't arrest him. The idea that humanity could contain him anywhere he doesn't want to be is laughable. But .... She blinks. Suddenly, all his escape artist moments over the past two years make a lot more sense.

"Lucifer," she says, pinching the bridge of her nose. She's suddenly very tired.

"Oh, Detective." He sighs. "Must you kill each and every joy? Can you not leave one of them unscathed?"

He yanks open the plastic ziplock, raises the bag to his lips, tips it back, and dumps the powder contents into his mouth like he's eating a damned Pixy Stick. Grimacing, he washes it down with a huge swig of god-knows-what from his flask, and drops the now-empty baggie onto the floor, where it's soon kicked away, and disappears underneath the crowd.

He arches his eyebrows at her. "A felony, you say?"

She gapes. "I can't believe you just did that."
"I can't, either," he grouses. "Completely ruins the high when you swallow it, you know. And, now, I need to find more." He folds his arms. "You're quite welcome."

She won't dignify that with a thank you. "Can you tell if it had fentanyl in it?"

He sniffs like he's offended. "I'm not a bloody mass spectrometer."

"I need to figure out where it came from," she says.

"It came from Chad," he replies, frowning. "Did I not say that? I thought I said that."

"No, I mean the actual dealer," Chloe says as she's jostled by the crush of the crowd. "Not sharing-is-caring Chad."

"Oh, Chad didn't share," Lucifer says. "I paid him quite well. Med school is bloody expensive, you know."

She sighs. Enough with the felonies, already. "Lucifer."

He raises his eyebrows. "What, Detective?"

"Do you know the next guy up in the supply chain or not?"

He shrugs. "I'm afraid I don't."

"Can't you … I don't know … desire-whammy people?" She gestures at the crowd. "Root out the name for me?"

His eyes narrow. "Desire-whammy …?"

"You know what I mean!" she snaps.

"Why, yes, I do," he says coolly. "And, no, I will not."

She grinds her teeth. "Kids are dying, Lucifer. I've had two overdoses in the last two weeks."

"And that's quite unfortunate," he says with a nod. "But what's to be done about it?"

She can't help but stare at him. "Are you serious right now?"

"An overdose is a choice, Detective."

"No, it's an accident," she snaps.

He rolls his eyes. "An accident that is the direct and self-inflicted result of a freely made choice," he corrects her. "So, unless you can tell me these youths were somehow force fed opiates, far be it from me to be the party police. Hypocrisy's not my jam."

A hand grabs Chloe's shoulder, and she snaps to the left, only to find Emily staring back at her. "No luck," Emily yells over the crowd. She glances at Lucifer, curiosity burgeoning. "Who's …?"

Chloe glances back and forth between the two. "Emily, this is Lucifer Morningstar, my former partner," Chloe says slowly. "Lucifer, this is Emily Blake. My current partner."

Lucifer peers down at the woman. "So, you're to be my replacement, is it?"

Emily frowns. "I … guess so?"
For a moment, Lucifer just stares. His eyes narrow. A fraction. Like he might erupt, and this tiny recoil is the precursor to Mount St. Lucifer.

Chloe thinks … this is it.

This is when he takes issue and horns in on her casework again with a "Detective!" here and a "Bloody Hell!" there, and things will go back to normal. She'll have her eggs again. It makes sense that the thing that would get him to budge would be the act of coveting what Emily took from him. After all, Chloe's pretty sure there's a thou-shalt-not rule about that, and the Devil is nothing if not contrary, lately.

"Right," Lucifer says, reanimating, and whatever she thought she saw in his face slips away behind insouciance. He claps his hands together, his onyx ring flashing under the intense party lights. "Well, good luck to you, darling. Don't steal from the vending machine - the detective quite dislikes that."

He looks out over the crowd, beyond, and his indifference becomes unadulterated glee. "Oh! Pete! Do hold up!" he calls, the words pealing out over the crowd like thunder.

Turning back to Chloe and Emily, he says, "I believe I've spotted my favorite font of Molly. Who knew he fancied this kind of get together?" Another clap. "Cheers!"

And then he's off without another look back, disappearing into the crowd like he was never there in the first place.

Emily gapes at his departure. "Get together?" she parrots incredulously, barely audible as the music swells to a brain-melting volume. "He calls this clusterfuck of a party a get together?"

"He's … slightly insane," Chloe rasps around the lump forming in her throat. "Don't mind him."

Her chest feels like someone sat on it. He didn't care. He really didn't care at all. They really are done, in a work sense. There was no mistaking things, this time. No talk needed. Not when his plain-to-see glee existed only at the prospect of yet more drugs. How can they be done?

"I'd heard he's a bit out there," Emily replies.

Chloe sighs. "Not of this earth, more like."

"I bet he was fun, though. He looks fun."

"Yeah," Chloe says, swallowing. Her heart hurts. "He was really fun."
Chapter Notes

Wow, the response to the last chapter was incredible. Thank you so much, everybody!

I think, given that we immediately got bad-boy Lucifer (stoned, no less!) on the show after I said I missed him in my chapter notes, I'm obligated to try this. I REALLY WANT LUCIFER TO TELL CHLOE. *ahem* Okay, got that out of the way. Fingers crossed ;)

And without further ado, here we go!

The party had been an absolutely useless diversion. Chloe and Emily had wound through the crowd three times, asking questions. Nobody knew where the sun-stamped baggies were coming from. They'd always been passed along from person to person like Lucifer's had, with no definitive starting point. And, Lucifer, well. Chloe hadn't run into him again. She assumes he found his candidate for a "good shag" and left with her. Or him. Or them.

Which left Emily's drunk-and-disorderly arrest from a couple of weeks before as the only remaining avenue of investigation.

A small Ford Focus that had suffered at least one fender bender sits in the parking space for apartment 3-E, collecting rust and dripping oil onto the pavement. The sunlight casts smeared rainbows in the puddle. And, sure enough, as Emily had said, the distinctive sun logo from the heroin baggies can be seen on a decal on the rear passenger-side window of the car.

"You've got some great observational skills," Chloe compliments Emily.

Emily blushes. "So they say."

"No, you really do," Chloe replies. There's no way in hell she would have noticed that little decal. Not unless she was looking for it, and a drunk-and-disorderly arrest wouldn't prompt her to look. She points at the decal. "So, what do we think? Maybe, an advertisement?"

Emily nods. "Or a keepsake from a purchase."

The guy Emily arrested last week lives in a garden-style apartment complex in Van Nuys. Chloe and Emily head up a creaky, wooden set of steps to his door, which he answers after about two minutes and a lot of raucous knocking. He's an older, lanky gentleman with a salt-and-pepper mane and a gold tooth that shines when he opens his mouth. And he's really not happy to see them.

"What the hell, man?" he says angrily when he answers the door. "I paid the fine for getting wasted in public. Now, leave me the hell alone!"

"We're not here for that, Mr. Jones," Emily explains. "We were actually more curious about your car's window decal."
Mr. Jones frowns. "My … what?"

"There's a little decal on the back window of your car," Chloe says. "A sun with a face?"

"What's that gotta do with anything?"

"We were hoping you could tell us that," Chloe says.

A woman on one of the lower floors walks in from the parking lot with grocery bags. The sound of her aimless humming floats up the stairs. Distant traffic swishes by on the street beyond.

"It's just a stupid decal," the guy grumbles, not meeting their eyes.

Emily nods. "Yeah. It's just a stupid decal with a logo on it that's now associated with two deaths."

"What?" the guy says. "I don't have anything to do with that."

"Really," says Chloe. She steps forward as far as she can go without breaching the threshold of his apartment. "It's a pretty unique decal, Mr. Jones."

The man folds his arms. "You like it?" He nods toward the parking lot. "Go buy your own."

"I'd love to," replies Chloe with a too-sweet smile. "Where did you get it?"

But Mr. Jones purses his lips, shifts his crossed arms so his biceps bulge, and doesn't speak. Emily and Chloe share a glance. There's no way in hell this guy's going to budge, and, without a warrant, they can't do much else. What Chloe wouldn't give for Lucifer's handy hypnotism skills, right now.

"Well," Emily says with a sigh. "Thanks for your time, Mr. Jones."

"Yeah?" he says. "Screw you."

Damn it.

Chloe visits Lucifer's place after work on Monday. It's been about forty-two hours since the party. He'll have had time to come down, she hopes. And he'll have had time to … come. She licks her lips at that imagery. And then she hates herself for licking her lips. Ugh.

She's not even sure why she's here. What could she say?

*So, what's the weather like in Hell this time of year?*

No.

*About work …. *

No.

*So, some party, huh. Did you enjoy your drugs and meaningless sex? Could you stop enjoying drugs and meaningless sex? Why, you say? Well … I was really hoping you'd enjoy meaningful sober sex with me, instead.*

*Holy shit, no. Just … no.*
Sighing, she rolls her eyes at herself.

When she steps off his elevator, she finds the living area empty and quiet. His utter lack of security always baffled her before, but she guesses he never had much to fear, even wingless. At least, not from anything that would be stopped by the presence of a door lock.

She walks a slow circuit around the room, unable to stop herself from playing detective.

He's left no shot glasses or tumblers out on the bar. No liquor bottles are out of place. The lid on his Steinway is pulled down over the piano keys. She finds no open books resting on the chair by the window or discarded cigarettes lying in the ashtray. The fire isn't lit.

This area hasn't been "lived" in. Not in a while.

The sound of thick, even breathing drags her gaze to the bedroom as she walks by the entrance, though. She squeezes her eyes shut before she gets a peek. "Lucifer?" she whispers. Please, don't have someone there, she hopes. Please, don't have someone. "Are you awake?"

When no reply seems imminent, she cracks open one eye, and then slams it shut again.

Shit, shit, shit.

No someone or someones, at least. But, she supposes, what she really should have hoped for is, please, don't be sprawled on your stomach in your California king bed, on top of the sheets, out cold, wearing nothing but your birthday suit, and why, why, why did his bedroom not have a door? Her face heats to a swelter, and she whips 180 degrees to face the un-lived-in living area, instead.

She shouldn't wake him, she decides. She should leave. She should just tiptoe right out of-

"Chloe?" he says thickly, the word full of sleep.

"No," she blurts, only to slap her hand over her mouth. "I mean, go back to sleep."

A muzzy I-just-woke-up-and-can't-be-sentient-yet noise loiters in his throat. Then a rustling sound follows, like he's sliding his naked body across the sheets, and she needs to just not think about-

"Did we have something scheduled?" he says with a loud yawn. "Apologies if I've forgotten."


"You're not often spontaneous."

"I know, right?" she replies, heart pounding. "Attack of the crazies. What can I say?"

Drawers open and close, and she can't help but picture him pulling on a pair of black silk boxers. He has a really nice ass. She knows. She just saw it.

And, now, her mouth is lolling open.

She snaps her jaw shut so forcefully that her teeth clack together.

A rasping sound follows behind her, like he's rubbing his stubble-y face with his much smoother palms, trying to wake up. He sighs. Then she hears his soft footfalls on the Italian marble floor.

She winces. "I'm really sorry I woke you."
"I was having a wretched dream, anyway," he assures her. A pause. An amused snort. "You can open your eyes, darling. I assure you; I'm decent." A pause. "Well, clothed, anyway," he amends.

With a cleansing breath, she opens her eyes.

He's pulled on a black silk robe and some slippers. He looks … about as unrefreshed as she's ever seen him. His delicious five-o'clock shadow has propagated into the beginnings of a real beard. The skin hugging his eyes is puffy and purplish. Bags, she realizes. He has actual bags under his eyes. Before today, she didn't think that could even happen to him. And his skin is a shade too pale.

Come to think of it, she's never known him to sleep. Ever. Except for the first few days after he'd been found in the desert. When he'd been nearly killed. And last week. When he'd been waiting for her at her place in hopes of receiving distraction. He had been dozing - she's sure, now, in retrospect, given his appearance today.

"Are you hurt?" she says, unable to stop the tidal wave of concern.

He frowns. "I'm not injured."

Which is a misdirect. She asked about hurt, which could mean any number of things. He answered about injuries, which are physical. He's good. He's really good at lying without lying.

"Lucifer ….

"What," he says with a flash of irritation, "am I not entitled to a day of sloth?"

"Of course, you are," she replies. She folds her arms. "But if I didn't know better, I'd say you were sick."

He shrugs. "Sick and tired, perhaps."

"Of?"

He heads for the bar with a sigh and pulls down a bottle of brandy. "Nothing that should interest you."

The way he turns away from her to service his not-so-inner functioning addict, his indifferent tone …. Something inside just … breaks. "I hate when you do that," she snaps. Her words echo off the marble, and she winces at how loud they sound.

His eyes narrow as he turns to face her. "Do … what?"

"Prevaricate," she says. "You might not lie, but you're still a tour de force in obfuscation."

He regards her for a long, long moment, his grip on the brandy bottle tightening. "I've … had to."

She sighs. "Of course, you did. Before I knew the score." She pads over to the bar, closing the space between them in a matter of strides. She looks down at the counter, pulling the brandy away from him before he can pour himself a glass, and she sets the bottle aside. He lets it go without even a token protest. So. The mountain is willing to be moved, today. She swallows. And then she looks up at him. "That doesn't explain why you're doing it now, though."

"I'm …." A thick noise coils in his throat. Like … he doesn't know what to say, and an aborted word unhappily got stuck in his larynx. He stares at the bar, gaze wandering back and forth like
he's searching for something but isn't finding it. "I confess, I'm not quite used to this."

She shifts closer. Into his space. "Used to what?" she prods.

He swallows. "Having someone who knows everything."

"Oh," she says.

Oh.

She starts thinking about his life. With her new context. Her heart hurts as she imagines him. Ostracized by his family. Constantly trying to outmaneuver a father who may or may not be sixteen moves ahead on the chessboard. Living for millennia in a place that's built on suffering, and on the art of the deal. Having exactly one friend, and that one friend is a demon who for eons had no idea what the point of kindness, warmth, or generosity was. And that's been his state of affairs for longer than the planet Earth has supported life.

"I don't have an ulterior motive," she says. Point blank. In case he needs to hear it. "I'm not looking for a weak spot. I'm just me. Chloe Decker."

"And you're … quite lovely." The gravity in his words says he can't think of anything lovelier.

"Look, I know you said he put me here," she says. "God did. But Maze said humans have complete autonomy." Chloe raises her eyebrows. "We do, right?"

She doesn't miss the flash of envy in his eyes before he schools himself. "Yes," he admits softly. "That is … your defining characteristic."

"So, the most he could have done is just that: put me here," she says. "What I did after that was up to me. What I feel is up to me. And I swear to you that I'm Team Lucifer all the-

He kisses her. Out of nowhere. A surprised squeak supplants the rest of her sentence as her back hits the counter with a thump. He tastes a bit like whiskey. Like peat, and like smoke. She splays her fingers against his hips, scrunching up tents of his robe, yanking him closer.

For a moment, time falls away. Space falls away. All of it falls away.

She murmurs his name, but the word is swallowed whole in the flames.

And then he pulls away.

She blinks, stunned, panting. What. In the hell. Was that? Her body is still humming, and a small part of her - the groin part - wants to dive right in and have another go, because holy shit, he's a good kisser. The best kisser. A bigger part - the brain part - is still suffering from blue screen of death.

"What you feel is not the bloody problem right now," Lucifer says, the words deep and dark and strained.

Clearly.

He hadn't even hinted- 

Okay, well, he didn't really have to hint, if she was being honest with herself. Sky-high Lucifer had spilled those beans explicitly and then some. She just hadn't been listening at the time, because
she thought the heroin had been talking for him. It'd never occurred to her that the heroin had, instead, just broken some locks, and gifted her with Lucifer unfettered.

Why hadn't she listened?

"I believe your miscreant is calling."

The sum total of her firing synapses is about zero, and all she says is, "Huh?" Her gaze drips in the direction he's pointedly looking. Oh, right. Her phone. Is ringing. Her phone is ringing. With Trixie's ringtone. Lucifer knows Trixie's ringtone? Interesting.

Chloe drags the phone from her pocket to her ear. "What's up, Monkey?"

A long pause follows. "You … sound funny," says Trixie.

Chloe glances at Lucifer. His lips are so- She shakes her head and pointedly looks at his piano instead. His not-sexy, not-kissable, inanimate piano. She forcefully clears her throat. "I'm fine, Monkey," she almost coughs, and then she repeats in a more natural tone, "What's up?"

"Why haven't you picked me up, yet?"

She frowns. "Picked you up?"

"School's over, and Extended Day is closing," Trixie says.

"But I thought you were going to Melissa's house?"

A blustery sigh floods through the line. "That's Wednesday, Mommy."

Damn it. Chloe glances at her watch. Still rush hour. Great. She makes some calculations. "Give me forty-five minutes, okay? I'll be there as soon as I can. Is there someone you can wait with?"

Another sigh. "Yeah. Ms. Franklin is still here."

"Okay, I'll be right there. I promise." Chloe hangs up the phone and stuffs it in her pocket. She glances at Lucifer. "I have to go."

"So I gathered," he replies. Between his flat tone and his flat expression, he's unreadable.

She licks her lips. They still taste like him. "I want to talk about this, Lucifer."

"I've made no plans to avoid you."

"So … you'll be here," she says. "When I come back tomorrow after work. No running away to Vegas and renewing vows with Candy or something."

That strikes a nerve, if the way his eye twitches is any indication. Other than that infinitesimal slip-up, though, his poker face is one for the books. He regards her for a long, languid moment, and then ambles toward his bedroom.

"Wake me if you wish," he says over his shoulder.

He plans to sleep? Until tomorrow? She sighs at the thrum of worry in her gut. Even a human who sleeps shouldn't sleep that much. What in the hell is wrong with him? But … he said he wasn't injured, at least. So, she's not going to come back tomorrow and find him dead from some celestial stab wound he was hiding or something. She hopes.
They need to talk.

She wants them to talk about a lot of things.

But it'll have to wait.

She grabs her purse and keys from the sofa and dashes toward the elevator. She jams her thumb on the down button. The elevator dings.

A thought strikes like lightning. Wait. Wait, wait, wait. No way; he is not pulling that same bullshit again. Not after she just nailed him for it.

"You'll be here, right?" she calls as the elevator doors slide open. "You'll wait for me?"

"... Didn't I say that?" he calls back.

"No, you didn't," she replies. She frowns. "And you still didn't."

A long pause follows. She bites her lip, trying to stave off the encroaching worry that he might never give her an explicit yes or no. But then he reappears at the entrance to his bedroom. "Yes, Chloe. Barring earthquakes, fires, or other pressing emergencies involving threat to life and limb, I plan to be here when you return tomorrow. If not in this residence, at least in this building." He folds his arms. "Does that satisfy, or do you require my room-to-room itinerary as well?"

His eyes have a bit of a twinkle to them, now, and she can't help but snort. Finally, some levity.

"Yes," she says. "Thank you."

"You're quite welcome," he says, sincere and without sarcasm.

And, with that, she steps into the elevator, and lets the doors close behind her.

Between the ringing telephones, clacking keyboards, noisy perps, and scrambling police officers, the precinct is organized chaos. Over the years, Chloe's learned how to ignore the bedlam. Today, though, her skill with selective focus is failing her. She doesn't hear the bedlam, at least, but she can't make her apprehension about Lucifer shut the hell up. She trawls through page after page on Google images, hoping to find the same sun logo from the heroin baggies somewhere on the Internet, all while what's going on with Lucifer buzzes in her head like a mosquito at her ear.

He's sick, somehow, and that's worrisome. And he kissed her, and that's .... She's not even sure what that is. He's shown interest before. That didn't end well. His actions had screamed commitment-phobe, and she'd resigned herself to Lucifer being a permanent no-fly zone when it came to romance. But ... that was before. When she had no context.

And, now ... she has so much context she's drowning in it.

He's literally died for her. Twice. When he said he'd been through hell, he meant Hell. The place. With the fire and the brimstone and the demons and the punishment. The place she now knows he'd rather eat ghost peppers and thumbtacks than ever go to again, yet he'd gone anyway. For her. And "marrying" Candy had been his admittedly flawed attempt to thwart his dad's meddling, and to get Chloe away from said meddling. Not his attempt to get away from her. He'd never wanted to get away from her.

So, she gets him, now. She gets him on a level she never did before.
But how does "getting him" help her when he's literally an immortal celestial creature older than time, and she's … not?

And … she's … somehow on page 75 of Google's sun pictures. The last page she remembers actually looking at is 32. Damn it. She clicks back to the page where her brain left her for Lucifer and starts over with a sigh. From Emily's repeated grumbling at the adjacent desk, Chloe's new partner doesn't seem to be having success, either.

A chair squawks as someone drags it along the tile floor and up to Chloe's desk. Chloe looks up just in time to see Dan collapse into it. He dumps his sunglasses onto her desk and rubs his bloodshot eyes.

"Any luck?" Emily calls across the aisle.

Dan shakes his head. "Whatever this Jones guy is into, it isn't dealing as far as I can tell," he says.

"What do you mean, he's not dealing?" Chloe says, wincing when she realizes how much she sounds like she's whining. But … if Jones isn't dealing, then that stupid door decal really is just a keepsake from Stoner Town. And they're back to having no leads whatsoever.

"Tailed him everywhere today and yesterday," Dan says. His expression turns apologetic when he adds, "No handoffs that I could see."

"So, we're back to square one," says Emily with a sigh.

"Hey, now, I didn't say that." Dan pulls a stack of photographs from a manilla folder and puts it on her desk. Chloe leans forward and squints, trying to get her eyes to focus. She's been at the computer too damned long.

A warm hand rests on her shoulder. "Hey, are you okay?" Dan says, frowning.

"I'm fine," she says tiredly. "I'm just sick of looking at pictures." And thinking about Lucifer.

She takes a deep breath through her nose and blows it out through her mouth. Once. Twice. She gives herself a shake for good measure, and then leans in again to see what Dan's come up with.

"Why am I looking at a picture of a store called Sunny's?" she says.

"It's a place in Redondo beach," Dan says. "A little mom-and-pop convenience store on Artesia Blvd. It's open 9 to 9."

"Okay," she says. "And?"

"That's just it," Dan says. "I don't know."

"You don't know?" Chloe parrots, frowning.

Dan shakes his head. "Jones stopped there today and yesterday. Stayed for thirty minutes each time."

Emily says, "Could be innocuous."

"Yeah," Dan says. "It could be, but the whole time I was there, my gut was screaming at me that something wasn't quite right. Redondo Beach is thirty miles out of his way, he didn't have any other stops on his trip, and who spends half-an-hour in a store like 7-Eleven?"

Chloe scans the pictures again. The storefront is eight parking spaces wide, and it consists of plate
glass windows and a door. The name of the business is a strange coincidence, but … they live in Los Angeles. The city of sun worship. There are any number of reasons why this place could have Sunny’s for a name that don't involve little sun decals pasted onto heroin baggies.

"Did Jones come out of the store with anything?" Chloe asks.

Dan nods. "Two generously stuffed shopping bags each day."

Which … who does that? People go into 7-Elevens to grab a soda or liquor or a stick of gum. Not to grab enough junk to refill their entire pantry. Maybe, once, she'll grant. But two days in a row? Chloe flips through the photos again. It looks like a normal store, but ….

"Maybe, we should watch this place for a while instead of fixating on Jones," Emily suggests. "See what we see."

Dan nods. "And I can keep tailing Jones for you, anyway, if you want."

Chloe sighs. It's not much of a lead, but it's a lead, and Narcotics is breathing down her neck. She doesn't think she's going to be able to fend off the unstoppable tide of office politics much longer. If Lucifer were still playing cop with her, claiming her turf would be a matter of sending him in to bat his eyelashes at the lieutenant. But Lucifer's not here. And she'll lose this case sooner, not later.

She needs results. Fast.

While it's not like Narcotics would do a bad job with the case … their motivations serve a different objective. They follow the money up the supply chain until they find the cartel involved. Chloe doesn't care about the cartels. She just wants to find some justice for the overdose victims. She wants to find the midlevel asshole who's adulterating his heroin with fentanyl, not the kingpin moving the pure heroin itself.

Chloe glances at Dan. "You've got Trixie tonight?"

Dan gives her a strange look. "It's Taco Tuesday."

Oh.

Shit.

"You forgot?" Dan says.

Chloe slumps. "I've had a lot on my mind."

"Do you have to cancel?"

Chloe resists immediate the urge to nod. She doesn't like the idea of sacrificing a whole night of this investigation when Narcotics is so ready to pounce. She doesn't like the idea of putting off her discussion with Lucifer, either. But she likes the idea of putting work or Lucifer before her daughter even less.

"No," Chloe says. "I'll be there. We can start surveillance tomorrow." And the Lucifer talk will be … when, exactly? She grits her teeth and tries to shove that intruding thought away. Lucifer is 39852023948 googolplex years old or whatever. He'll keep for a few days.

"This actually works great for me," Emily says. "My anniversary is today. I have dinner reservations."
"Happy anniversary," Dan says, smiling.

Emily grins. "Thanks."

Chloe doesn't miss Dan's furtive glance in her direction. A quick flash of sadness bursts into his expression before he buries it. She and Dan won't have another anniversary, she realizes. Happy or otherwise. Last year was their last. The thought is unexpected. Fleeting. But profound.

"So, it's settled?" Chloe says, clearing her throat. "Break tonight. Full bore on this case tomorrow?"

"So what was it like?" Emily says as she munches on some chips. The bag crinkles as she reaches into it for another handful. "Going from actor to cop?"

"Well," Chloe says, "the hazing I got the first year sucked. I kept getting stuck on graveyard shifts." She snorts. "Oh, and they hid my riot gear and my flak jacket in a random car trunk in the police lot, what felt like every other day. Took me like an hour to find them, usually. It always seemed like they were in the last trunk I looked in."

They sit in Chloe's cruiser, parked at the hardware store across the street from Sunny's. It's been six hours, and nothing has happened. Nothing but a bunch of random people buying soda and beer and lottery tickets. Mind numbing had flown by on the investigative highway a few exits ago. This was coma inducing.

"I think that's just what they do to everybody," Emily says. "When I was a rookie, I had to go on a scavenger hunt for my gear … oh … it felt like once a week. And I didn't see sunlight until my second year."

Chloe lowers her binoculars and peers at her new partner. "Really?"

Emily nods. "Really."

Chloe shakes her head. "Is it wrong that that makes me feel better?"

Emily laughs. "Nah." She reaches into the chip bag once again. The bag crinkles. She frowns. Then she tips her head back to pour all the little salty chip bits into her mouth. "Though, I'm surprised you don't know how they treat rookies," she says around her mouthful. She crumples up the bag and tosses it into the back seat.

"Nobody's ever asked me to help with hazing any of them," Chloe says with a shrug.

Honestly, when she thinks about it, that might be where the actor divide came into play. Other than Dan, and maybe Ella, Chloe doesn't have any friends on the force. Coworkers, sure. But not friends. Nobody ever really talks to her, save for the odd comment about the weather, or specific inquiries about casework, and it'd taken her years just to get to that point. The point where people had stopped looking at her and seeing that stupid hot tub scene in that stupid movie.

"They don't ask me, either," Emily says, looking at her lap.

Chloe frowns. "Why not?"

"It's hard to be 'one of the guys' when you're not a guy," Emily replies. She sighs. "That's my working theory, anyway." She gives Chloe a helpless look. "I mean, we work with a bunch of cowboys, after all. Or haven't you noticed?"
Chloe had definitely noticed. She regards Emily for a long moment. "You should come out for a drink with me, sometime."

"Really?"

"Yeah," Chloe says. She thinks of Maze and Ella and even, on occasion, Linda. As irritated as she was with Lucifer for that stupid little bet of his with Maze, something good had come from it. She could admit that. "I've recently started doing this thing where I have girlfriends, and we sometimes socialize."

Emily snorts with amusement. "Okay. You're on. Thanks." Her eyes narrow as she leans forward, peering at something across the street. "Hey ...."  

Chloe follows the direction of her gaze. The convenience store lot is empty, save for a white Camry that's pulling into the middle parking space. A woman wearing a scarf and sunglasses climbs out from the driver's side of the car, and she heads into the store, disappearing within. A break from the monotony, yes, but hardly a sighting that deserves a suspicious, excited, Hey .... Cars have been coming and going all day. For hours.

"No," says Emily, as though she's read Chloe's mind. "No, look. Look at the rearview window."

Frowning, Chloe picks up her binoculars and brings them into focus. She blinks. Whoa. There in the back window of the Camry, almost invisible at this distance, is a familiar sun decal.

Excitement begins to thrum. No wonder this woman had been promoted. She clearly deserved it. "Jeez, you're good at spotting those," Chloe says.

"Thanks," Emily says, blushing.

Chloe glances at the clock on the dashboard. "It's 3:42," she says as she writes down the plate number on her notepad. "Let's see when she comes out."

The woman wearing the scarf reemerges at 4:15. She'd been in the store a bit more than thirty minutes on the nose. The same amount of time Dan had said Mr. Jones had spent in there. And she's carrying a full shopping bag out with her. Also just like Mr. Jones.

"No way in hell that's a coincidence," Emily says.

Chloe nods, watching the woman climb back into her car.

They keep watching.

Chloe had warned Lucifer she wasn't coming on Tuesday, after all. And again on Wednesday. By Thursday, though, she feels some additional assurances are warranted. Emily sighs beside her, and Chloe peers at her passenger-side neighbor. Emily has propped her head against the window and is staring dully across the street at Sunny's.

"Ever been so bored you want to claw your eyes out?" Emily says, yawning. Her eyes water enough to spill over. "I'm there. Right now."

Chloe gives her partner a wry grin. "I was there yesterday."

A thunk echoes through the car as Emily stretches and resettles against the window. "It'll be worth it in the end," she says. "It'll be worth it in the end. It'll be worth it."
"Does saying that work?" Chloe says.

Emily looses another blustering sigh, blowing flyaway strands of hair in every direction. "No," she says in a woeful tone.

Chloe snorts, pulling her phone out of the cupholder. No new texts or e-mails or anything to distract. She opens the now-more-than-a-year-long chat she's been having with Lucifer. The last text was from yesterday, when she'd told him Wednesday was going to be a no go, too. He'd read the message. He hadn't replied, though.

I'm sorry about all this, she types. I'm not avoiding you. I swear. I have a stakeout that can't wait. If I don't get some movement on this case, Narcotics is going to take it, and I won't have leverage to stop them.

She hits send, and she stares at the screen until her eyes start to cross, and the message doubles. There's no timestamp indicating her text was read, but that doesn't mean much. She bypasses those timestamps all the time, simply by reading the texts as they pop up in her notifications, rather than navigating to the text messaging app itself to read them. Still ….

Lucifer?

She glances at her watch. 5:27 p.m. Not exactly prime time for partying at Lux, so … if he's indisposed, it's not because he's mingling. Maybe, he's at his piano, though. Or in his penthouse, snorting lines of coke off some woman's- No. She wills her brain not to go there. Except then she starts thinking about the state she left him in. Clearly unwell. Getting ready to go back to bed for a whole day.

You're alive, right?

His response is quick this time. Yes.

Okay, she replies with a sigh of relief. Just checking.

So … he's reading what she sends. But what does that mean when the most chatty man on the planet reads her texts and doesn't have anything to say except that he's not dying in a ditch somewhere? Well, to be fair, a tiny voice interjects, he could be dying in a ditch. You just asked him if he was alive. She grinds her teeth. No. He's not snorting coke, and he's not dying in a ditch, and he's just not. Archangels who can reshape the universe at will don't die in ditches.

Do they?

Emily reaches for Chloe's notebook and pulls it off the dashboard. Chloe frowns, torn away from her thoughts. "Another sun decal?" she asks.

"Yep," Emily says with a sigh, staring through her binoculars at a little red hatchback. She scribbles down another plate number. They're developing quite the list. "I recommend humor."

Chloe's frown deepens. "What?"

"For your text-dodging former-partner party man." Emily puts down her binoculars and offers Chloe a sheepish grin. "Sorry, it's super hard not to be nosy when I'm this fucking bored. I … read over your shoulder."

Chloe bites her lip. "You think he's dodging me, too?"

"Oh, yeah," Emily says with gravity in her tone.
Hmm. Chloe stares at the messages for a moment, thinking. Humor. Okay. Worth a shot. *This is the part where you're supposed to tell me it's okay, and you know I'm not avoiding you :)*

*Is it?* he replies. Almost instantaneously.

*Yes.*

He replies, *Well, you know me. {devil emoji}*

*I like to think so :p*

And then his responses cease again. Chloe stares at their text conversation, waiting for the little "…" bubble to show up, indicating he's typing something. It doesn't come.

"See?" Emily says. "He's clearly right there, reading. He's just cherrypicking when he replies. Total text dodger, and he's not even trying to be sly about it."

"He wouldn't be sly," Chloe says. He might prevaricate, but … he doesn't play games like that.

"A wizzywig, then?"

Chloe raises her eyebrows. "A wizzy … what?"


"Oh," Chloe says. She laughs. "Well, no. He's … not … exactly that." Holy Hell is he not.

She looks back at her phone and types, *So, what truth are you dancing around, now?*

That I don't lie, is his reply.

Her heart sinks. *You really think I'm avoiding you?*

*No.*

Oh, good.

Wait.

What?

She frowns, reading the conversation back to herself. That doesn't make any sense whatsoever. But then she sees the ellipsis. The little "…" that says he's not done yet. So she waits. And waits.

*It's not all right,* he adds at last.

Tell me about it, she wants to scream. She's stuck in a car, staring at a bunch of people buying drinks, and a couple of people buying maybe-drugs, and everything going on with Lucifer has to be on hold right now, and it sucks. But … sometimes … stuff just sucks. At least, he knows she's not avoiding him. And she can accept his right to be upset about this situation as long as he understands that it's just a "shit happens" type of deal.

Her phone vibrates, and she looks down at the screen.

*Good luck with your party policing,* he's said.

She smiles, some of the weight sloughing off her shoulders. *Thanks,* she replies.
That done, she tosses her phone into the cup holder and settles in to watch some more.

Saturday. 9:17 p.m.

Chloe yawns and stretches.

After four straight days of 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. surveillance, Chloe's list of plate numbers is seven long. Seven different cars, some with repeat visits. All with the decal. All with drivers who stay in the store for about thirty minutes, and then leave with a full shopping bag.

A quick visit inside the store had confirmed that the interior was that of a normal convenience store. Four aisles full of chips and cookies and candy and other snacks. A little section for common medicine-cabinet constituents, like painkillers, antacids, and cold medicine. A ring of refrigerated cases around the edge of the store, each filled with chilled beverages like beer.

Innocuous, typical stuff.

But there'd also been a closed door labeled, "staff only," which meant that the store had a storage area of some kind, and who the hell knew what was back there?

"They have to be dealing out of this building," Chloe says. "There's no other explanation. This is a pickup location where the low level street dealers grab product from a midlevel dealer."

"That's what I'm thinking, too," Emily says.

Chloe stares at their license place list.

The question, now, becomes … do they keep watching Sunny's? Do they leave and try to track down all of the drivers with the sun decals? Do they get a warrant to seize one of the full bags these drivers keep walking out with? Chloe's sure the bags contain heroin. Maybe, other drugs, too. She doesn't think she can get a search warrant for the whole store to fly with the judge who would have to sign off on it. Not based on the daily traffic of a bunch of cars with sun decals. But, maybe, the bags ….

"Hey," Emily says. She pats Chloe on the shoulder. "Hey, hey, hey."

Chloe looks up in time to see an unmarked dirty semi driving up over the curb and into the lot, where it barely fits. A hiss emanates from the truck as the airbrakes engage. The back compartment slides open, a ramp extends, and a man wearing a red ball cap, jeans and a black t-shirt ambles down the ramp, rolling a neck-high dolly stacked with unmarked boxes in front of him.

"This doesn't look like a snack food delivery," Chloe says. Those are done in marked trucks blazoned with huge pictures of potato chips and whatnot.

"No," Emily says, frowning. "No … it does not." She checks the truck in her binoculars. "Hah. Jackpot. Look at that." She hands Chloe the binoculars. "Check the driver's side window."

Chloe squints. The darkness makes it hard to see, but … yeah. That's a sun decal.

They've been watching for an hour, and the unmarked truck hasn't moved. It's just sitting there. Idling. The guy in the red ball cap had unloaded six dollies full of corrugated cardboard boxes. All told, the unloading had taken about five minutes. Then he'd wheeled the dolly back into the truck, pushed up the ramp, closed the truck bed, and … gone back into the store. The truck is huge and
blocks the storefront, so there's no way to tell what the delivery guy is doing in there, but he never came out after dolly number six.

The minutes creep past.

"Inventory, maybe?" Emily wonders.

Chloe shrugs. "Maybe."

It's 10:52 p.m. before the guy in the red ball cap reappears and climbs back into his truck. The airbrakes hiss, and the semi begins to roll forward.

"We're following this guy, right?" Emily says. "We have to follow this guy."

Chloe nods, reaching for the radio to let dispatch know what's going on. Once the semi is in the street, blocks down, headed eastbound, Chloe pulls out of her parking space at the hardware store lot, and gets onto Artesia Blvd to follow.

"This is just too weird," Emily says as they follow the truck through the darkness, headlights off to keep from being spotted, far enough back that the semi's red taillights are the only thing they can see. "Kate would call it freaky-deaky. She's a Buffy fan."

Chloe grits her teeth, steering around a nasty curve that has nothing but a small guardrail to separate the cruiser from an open air plunge. "Kate?"

"My wife," Emily says.

"Oh. Yeah, this is definitely bizarre."

After leaving Artesia Blvd, the truck had made its way to the 110. That was normal. The 110 was a major highway, a normal route for semis. And if the truck had stuck to major highways for much longer, Chloe would have discontinued pursuit and asked dispatch to see if the CHP would take up the reins. If the truck had stuck to major highways.

But that wasn't what had happened. They'd ended up on Angeles Crest Highway, going into Angeles National Forest. Angeles Crest Highway is a winding, two lane road, cutting through a large swath of zero civilization, with nothing but a double stripe down the middle to separate traffic going in opposite directions. The road is unlit and, at this time of night, it's pitch black. If it weren't for the sliver of a waxing crescent moon in the sky, Chloe would have had to turn the headlights on. As it was, she already felt like she was driving a car accident waiting to happen.

"Um …," is Emily's comment when they see brake lights ahead in the darkness.

Chloe slows to a crawl. "What in the hell are they doing?"

The truck turns left. Why is the truck turning left? There are no lefts on this road - not for miles - discounting the couple of lefts they'd already passed.

The glow of the truck's taillights disappears into the woods.

"A service road?" Emily suggests, frowning.

No semi driver in his right mind would turn onto a service road. They're typically poorly paved, if they're paved at all, and they're built with small SUVs in mind. There's no room for a truck the
length of a house to turn around.

But … sure enough. Where the truck turned left, there's a little cavern-sized break in the trees, with a pocked, dirt road filling the space. Branches scrape the windows as Chloe turns onto the road. "I have to turn the lights on," she says, wincing. Moonlight isn't enough for this.

"Yeah, no kidding," Emily says. "Wow. How did that guy even get through here?"

"Clearly," Chloe says, grunting as the car's shocks absorb the rough terrain, "he knows the road pretty well."

Maybe, it's his road, not a service road. Some marijuana growers had taken to using national parks for their agricultural needs. Maybe, a heroin dealer had gotten a similar idea and decided to grow poppy. Would poppy grow out here? She had no idea. Or, maybe, these people had commandeered an abandoned ranger cabin for some nondescript, unlikely-to-be-searched storage space.

Chloe squints as the car bounces and jerks. There's no sign of the semi truck's tail lights. She takes a curve, barely avoiding the jutting branch of a hemlock tree. Pine needles scrape the glass on Emily's side of the car with a high-pitched shriek-y sound. And then something pops underneath the car.

The feeling of the road underneath the tires changes from rough into agonizing, and the steering wheel feels next to useless. Tire pressure warning lights start blinking on her dash. She brakes with a sigh. No. Not now.

Seriously?

Emily groans. "Please, tell me you have a spare?"

"Yes, but not two," Chloe says. And from the warning lights, two tires just bit it. Damn it. God, damn it. "Maybe, we can patch one. I'll check."

Emily nods and picks up the radio receiver. "I'll let dispatch know."

Chloe pulls out her flashlight and pops open the front door. The ding-ding-ding noise echoes into the night, prompting her to grab her keys. She opts to shut the door behind her instead as she climbs out.

Her feet settle onto cold, dry gravel. The night is thick with the sounds of crickets and bugs and nocturnal birds. The air smells fresh, and the breeze is a bit bracing, but not frigid. If she were out here for any other reason, she might find it enjoyable, and despite her and Emily's current predicament, Chloe can't help but pause. And breathe. And look up.

Through the tree canopy.

Out here, at population zero, elevation … not zero, while looking away from the small halo of light casted by the crescent moon, Lucifer's visible stars number in the infinite. Even with only a few breaks in the trees to peer through, she still sees more stars tonight than she saw that night on the beach a little while ago.

She swallows.

Lucifer did that.

Her best friend did that.
She hopes he stops to look at them once in a while.

*Lucifer, they're so worth looking at, she thinks. You did a beautiful thing.*

With a sigh, she returns her attention to the car, feeling along the cool metal of the door to the back of the vehicle. She points her flashlight at the rear driver's side tire - the first of their two flats. She grimaces.

The warning light wasn't lying.

The tire is definitely flat.

She lowers herself to her haunches, moving the flashlight beam around the edge of the tire as she scans for the cause.

Her stomach sinks into her shoes when she sees it.

A caltrop.

Hooked into the rubber that's facing the back of the wheel well.

Her heart starts to thud.

This flat wasn't an accident brought about by a rough road. This flat was-

A deafening honk fills the forest as Emily jams down on the horn in the cruiser.

And then Chloe's careening forward, into the dirt, propelled by a force. She sees stars that aren't Lucifer's.

Then she sees nothing.

Her phone vibrating in her pocket is what wakes her.

Her head is pounding, and at first, all she can do is lie there, curled in a fetal ball on the floor, trying not to vomit. Her arms and legs are bound, and someone's stuck a piece of duct tape over her mouth. If she vomits, she's going to drown in her own fluids. She's cold, and sick, and everything is swim-y. When she opens her eyes, she sees nothing but black. Something rumbles underneath her, and a soft hum fills the air. She starts to shiver.

"They been following me for at least ten miles," someone says, outside, muffled. Outside … where?

A second guy says, "Why?"

"How in the hell should I know, man?"

"They're the chicks who asked Bob about the decal," says a third one. "Aren't they?"

Bob. Bob Jones. The first guy Chloe and Emily had spoken to. But Chloe doesn't recognize any of the voices conversing. She swallows back a wave of nausea, trying to test her restraints. There's no give at all.

"How in the hell did they get from Bob's decal in Van Nuys to here in the middle of bumfuck nowhere?" second guy says.
"Beats me," says the first one.


"A little too late for that, Ron," snarks the third one.

A long silence follows. If they're discussing something, it's too quiet to hear. Or, perhaps, they're having a discussion entirely contained in glares and gesticulating. Either way, Chloe gets no more hints.

Her phone vibrates again. She squirms, but with her hands bound crisscross behind her, she can do nothing but feel her lifeline buzzing in her pocket. Inches. She's a matter of inches from getting help. She twists and yanks frantically at her bonds. They're not ropes. They must be zip ties. Completely unyielding. Still, she fights with them anyway.

She fights until she's out of breath. Until everything is spinning, she can't focus, and the phone has long been silent.

She's cold. Her head feels way too big. She closes her eyes.

She loses time for a while.

She's in the truck, she thinks. Or … a truck, anyway. Maybe, not the semi. And they're driving somewhere over rough pavement. But that's as much as she can glean.

She wriggles across the floor until she bumps into a wall. It's cold and smooth. Metal? There's nothing jutting that she can use to try to cut her ties with. She squirms up and down the wall until she's exhausted and panting and her vision - what little there is of it in the dark - is fuzzing out, but she can't find a single tool that might assist her in an escape. She scoots back the other way, inch by inch.

She doesn't make it to a wall.

Her body hits something solid, but soft. Squirming, she rolls to get her hands adjacent to the solid thing. She reaches with her fingers. She's touching something smooth and supple. Not skin. But … like leather. Like a leather coat. Emily?

"Emily!" she shouts, but the word is a muffled, "Emyfy," that's barely audible over the rumble of the truck's engine.

She pats the maybe-a-coat, but it doesn't move in response.

"Emyfy!" she repeats.

Again, nothing.

Chloe's heart starts to race. Why is she not moving? "Emyfy, Emyfy, Emyfy," she repeats, frantic, but it's futile. There's no response. Maybe, it's not Emily. But, maybe it is, and she's hurt, and … maybe … maybe …. Chloe's head is spinning, and she feels sick. Her stomach roils. She wants to try something else. She wants to do something. Anything. But … she's tired. And she might vomit.

She'll try more in a minute.

She lies on the cold floor in a heap by the maybe-a-coat, shivering, and the darkness becomes
She wakes when she's mercilessly dragged by her shirt collar out of the truck. When she hits the lip of a truck bed, she can't catch herself because her hands and feet are tied, and she's sent careening into the dirt. The landing is brutal. Her collar bone snaps, and pain spirals through her body. She presses her face into the cold ground by the tail lights. Exhaust spills against her and she coughs into her gag until her lungs hurt.

Someone's shoe rests right in front of her face. The shoe is attached to a leg. The owner of the leg is shifting his weight back and forth. That's all she can see. All she can hear is the truck idling. All she can smell are fumes and garbage.

She swallows back vomit. She can't vomit right now. She has to figure out how-

Someone else falls onto the ground beside her in a heap, but doesn't move.

"Get the Glock out of the glove compartment," says one of them, cold and without sympathy.

Footsteps retreat and return.

"No way," a second one says. "I'm not doing this. I didn't sign up for-"

The gunshot nearly breaks Chloe's eardrums, it's so close, and a third body hits the ground.

And that's when Chloe panics.

She starts squirming and shrieking into the gag. Everything hurts and she's dizzy and she's too restrained to move and why can't she move and she can't breathe and she's going to die and she screams so hard her throat feels like it's disintegrating.

Time seems to slow to a standstill as the Glock is brought to bear on her.

She has time to blink.

Her eyes widen.

Sweat drips down her face.

*Please, let me see Trixie again,* she thinks, frantic, writhing. The restraints bruise her to the bone she's struggling so hard. This can't be her. She's not a damsel in distress. *Please. Please, help me. Please, help me see Trixie again. Please.*

*Lucifer, please, help me. Please, help me.* Please, help me.

A scream that isn't hers breaks through the ringing of her tinnitus.

"Do you know regret?" Lucifer asks. He's standing over her, filling space with his burning presence where, before, no one had been. He sneers at them. At the wicked. At the unrepentant. "Allow me to introduce you."

And then the world goes up in flames.
Of all the fights that one could ever have the misfortune of picking by mistake, none so closely resembles fly versus nuclear bomb as does human versus archangel.

She sits in the back of the ambulance, wrapped up in someone else's coat, staring silently into the black, billowing cloud of smoke. Two guys she has yet to learn the names of - her would-be murderers - sit cuffed in the back of a squad car, both of them babbling nonsensically about the Devil in a bathrobe. Whatever Lucifer had done to them had left nothing functioning inside their skulls but their amygdalae.

The Glock they'd threatened her with is ash. The pickup truck where she'd been held captive is ash. The third guy - the one who'd been shot to death beside her - is ash. The garbage dump in a one mile radius out from the truck is ash. The air reeks of burning ozone, and the earth where the garbage had been piled is smoking, blackened char and glittering streaks of sand turned into glass.

Lucifer incinerated it.

All of it.

Everything.

The crime scene - the eastern edges of which are still a solid wall of fire - looks like the aftermath of a meteor strike.

Worse than white-hot, the writhing flames are blue from base to tip, and the air around them quivers with the heat. The wind has been "inexplicably" cooperative in keeping everything
contained to the garbage dump and away from California's vulnerable dry vegetation. Still, though, firefighters scramble around in heavy SCBA gear, spraying chemicals and water, trying to assist "nature" with containment, and a plane from CAL FIRE had already dumped suppressant everywhere the eye could see. What isn't burning is covered with orange dust.

She'd known in theory how powerful he is. He'd told her. Reality is basically his to shape as he sees fit.

This, though ….

Well, knowing he can do something is a different thing entirely than seeing him do it.

*Light and flame,* Lucifer had said. *They're always mine to call upon.*

All he'd done was make a gesture - a brief flicker of movement as he opened his fist into splayed fingers - and burning whorls of fire had exploded from the earth at his feet.

He brings visceral meaning to the phrase "avenging angel."

She pulls the coat tighter.

She wonders if fire is blue in Hell.

"Ma'am, can you follow my light?" the concerned EMT sitting beside her says as he flashes a penlight at her eyes.

She shrugs. "I'm fine."

"But you have blood all over you," he says, eyebrows knitting in confusion.

"I do," she admits. "But he healed me."

The EMT frowns. "He … who?"

She remembers him splaying his long fingers against her chest. She remembers pressure as he put weight on her breastbone. She remembers a bright light, and a warmth, and then the pain had vanished, and the nausea had vanished, and the numbing fear had vanished.

He'd laid on hands.

And all of it had vanished.

Including him.

"Lucifer," she says, still a little too shocked by the whole thing to establish a verbal filter.

The EMT gives her a strange look, followed by an "… Um."

She thinks she'll be in the hospital later, receiving an MRI to diagnose her unfortunately-timed veracity, but …. She blinks, staring into the weird, blue, not-spreading fire. She'd been two seconds away from being murdered. She would have ended up as a dead body, buried without care at a garbage dump. An empty shell left behind to rot with the refuse, possibly never to be found. And, yet, she doesn't care.

Or, well, she cares.

She cares intensely.
But not in the visceral, terrified, flashback-y sense often resultant from acute stress. She feels like when he'd embraced her - back before she'd known what he is - and he'd taken all her worry about Trixie away. She's safe, and she's warm, and she's loved.

"Be at peace," he'd said as if by rote.

And she is.

And everything is okay.

"It's a miracle," she hears them saying. A cluster of whispers and amazement at the door of the other ambulance, just fifteen feet across the dirt. "Never seen anything like it," she hears. "How in the hell is this possible?" Because Emily is breathing again. She's awake, and she's talking, and she's still half-wrapped up in the body bag they'd planned to take her to the morgue in.

He'd returned briefly, unnoticed in the chaos except by Chloe, over thirty minutes after his initial appearance - like he'd intended to leave Emily to rest in peace, and then thought better of it at the last possible moment. He'd glared at the body bag like he would rather torch it, but, instead, he'd unzipped it just enough to slip his hands inside. The air around him had become luminous and painful to look at. And then Emily was coughing, and he was gone again.

Chloe had witnessed a resurrection.

A literal reversal of fate.

If Lucifer's fiery expression of wrath hadn't already stupefied her into non-function, witnessing the fact that he could flip off death sure as hell would have. And then there's the most amazing part of all: the fact that he'd done the flip off for Emily. A woman he didn't even know except by way of a thirty-second introduction. A woman with whom he had no emotional connection. No favor owed. No reason whatsoever to help.

Yet, he'd helped her anyway.

And everything is okay.

Chloe Decker, it seems, has a guardian angel, however reluctant he may be.

Maybe, he's entertaining that little chaotic good streak, after all?

"I don't understand what happened," Emily says. She shakes her head. "I ….

Chloe, already given a clean bill of health, had come to sit with Emily in the bustling ER. Emily's sudden attack of aliveness had baffled the doctors even more than Chloe's concussion-that-wasn't (anymore). They'd been combing Emily over with every diagnostic test they could think of.

"Is Kate on her way?" Chloe asks.

"Yeah," Emily says absently, clearly busy churning on something else.

Chloe keeps expecting Lucifer to appear, now that she's away from the fiery crime scene.

But he doesn't.

"Your party man," Emily says, frowning. She squints at empty space, like she's trying hard to remember a dream that's slipping back into her subconscious, never to be thought of again once it
gets there. "He … did something." She gives Chloe a pleading look. "Didn't he?"

Chloe bites her lip. She's not sure what to do. Whether to tell the truth, or …. "Do you remember him doing something?" she says, stalling.

"I … th-thought …." Emily shakes her head, and then she sighs like she's completely disgusted with herself. "Oh, this is so fucking silly." She rolls her eyes. "Owner of an exclusive downtown night club appears sixty miles outside the city in his bathrobe to heal me, and then disappears. Yeah, right." She laughs. "Of course, he didn't." She looks at Chloe with a smile. "He was probably just on my mind because of your texting drama."

Chloe nods, relieved. She wonders what Emily would think if she realized the actual Devil had done her a solid. "It's … been a crazy night."

The sheets rustle as Emily shifts on her gurney. "Is he coming to get you?"

"Who?" Chloe says, frowning.

"Your party man, silly," Emily says. She makes a sweeping gesture at the surrounding ER beyond the privacy curtains. "Surely, this clusterfuck would trump any disagreement you two were having."

Chloe blinks. Emily's observational skills are insane. How had she jumped from seeing a little piece of a vague, text-based tiff to concluding Lucifer and Chloe had a close enough relationship for him to be her emergency contact? Emily's talents had been utterly wasted on vice squad.

Chloe swallows. "I … thought he might, but …."

Apparently not.

"Code blue!" someone shouts beyond the curtain. Monitors screech. A team of nurses stampedes past with a crash cart.

She takes a deep breath, and turns to face Emily directly. "How are you, really?" she says. Emily might be physically fine, but … she'd just died. And she was aware that she'd died. That … had to mess with one's head.

When Emily doesn't immediately speak, Chloe leans a little closer. "Emily, I've been through some crazy shit on this job." Not the least of which is Lucifer. "If there's something you maybe don't want to dump on Kate, or … if you just need the ear of someone who's been there, or been somewhere similar, you can always talk to me."

"See, that's just it," Emily says, an odd look on her face.

Chloe frowns. "What is?"

"He told me, 'Be at peace.'" She shrugs. "And … I am."

"He?" Chloe says.

Emily gives her a helpless look. "I can't remember. I can't remember anything except that he was really grouchy."

"Grouchy?" Chloe says. That's … weird.

"Yeah," Emily says with a nod. "The whole, 'Be at peace,' thing was more like, 'Fuck peace and
the horse it rode in on." She shrugs. "But I guess tone doesn't matter, because it worked. Voila."
She gestures to herself. "I have an abundance of peace."

"You feel safe," Chloe says with a smile. "Safe, and warm, and loved."

"Yeah," Emily says. "Yeah, exactly. You'd think I'd be hysterical or something, but … nope. He … made me safe. I'm safe."

"It's a nice feeling," Chloe says. One of the best feelings, really. It rivals her wedding night with Dan, and the day Trixie was born.

Emily laughs. "I wish I could bottle it so I could have some more later."

"Yeah," Chloe says with a sigh. "That would be nice."

She glances down at her phone. The chat with Lucifer hasn't seen any activity since Thursday, when he'd wished her luck. She wants to thank him for saving her life, but … that's not the kind of thing one sends to someone in a text. She wants to thank him, and she definitely doesn't want the first words he sees or hears from her to be, "Where are you?" or, "Why aren't you here?" Because talk about rude and ungrateful.

She wants to call Lucifer.

She calls Dan, instead.

"Mommy!" Trixie shrieks as Dan leads Chloe through the front door. "Mommy!"

She leaps off Maze's lap and launches for the entryway.

"I'm okay, Monkey," Chloe says as Trixie wraps her arms around Chloe's waist. She pulls her fingers through Trixie's hair. "Mommy's okay." She glances over to Maze. "Have you seen Lucifer?"

"Nah, I haven't talked to him in days," Maze says. She frowns. "Why?"

Chloe tries her best to act nonchalant, despite the growing pit of worry in her gut. "No reason."

Chloe manages to get some sleep. Just the barest wink before the sun rises. The ordeal with the pursuit, and the kidnapping, and the conflagration, and then the too-long ER visit, had taken all night. She's just fallen into the liminal world where reality starts to bend into dream, when the sound of the television yanks her back to consciousness.

She finds Trixie sitting on the couch with a bowl of Lucky Charms, munching quietly. She's watching the 7 a.m. news, which is going into the mess from last night in detail.

"Did Lucifer save you, Mommy?" Trixie says as Chloe eases onto the couch beside her daughter.

Chloe frowns. "Why would you think that?"

Trixie points her spoon at the television. The fire is still going, apparently, if the scene behind the live correspondent is any indication. The flames are less weird-looking, now, having cooled to a normal orange, instead of blue, and they're a lot less tall overall. But they're still flickering along the horizon, a bright, burning wall. The reporter is going on at length about firefighting efforts and the potential threat to residents to the east of the landfill. Chloe isn't worried, though. The fire
hasn't spread an inch since Lucifer ignited it. She doubts it will suddenly decide to jump toward civilization.

"Why would you think that has anything to do with Lucifer?" Chloe says.

"Because it's on fire. Like Hell." Trixie frowns at the television. "Plus, they said they can't figure out what the accelerant is or why the fire won't stop burning."

Chloe can't help but raise her eyebrows. "And how on earth do you know what an accelerant is?"

Trixie rolls her eyes. "I looked it up on Wikipedia."

Of course, she did. Chloe can't help but sigh. There really seems to be no stopping this kid from growing up. She scoots closer, wraps her arm over Trixie's shoulder, and pulls her daughter close for a thunderous rain of kisses.

"Mommy, I'm gonna spill!" Trixie says, giggling, squirming, so Chloe declares a brief armistice, takes her daughter's cereal bowl, and puts it on the coffee table for her.

They settle together, snuggled on the couch. The news finally switches from the ongoing conflagration to the weather. A meteorologist shows them seven projected days of sunshine. Big surprise.

"Trixie … you know Lucifer isn't really the Devil, right?" Chloe says softly. She doesn't understand why this has come up now, suddenly, after two straight years of I'm-the-Devil this and I'm-the-Devil that, which Trixie had never once taken seriously, but …. 

Trixie looks up. Her eyebrows are wrinkled in incredulity. "Yes, he is."

Chloe pulls her fingers through Trixie's hair. "Why do you think that?"

"Because he said so," Trixie replies. "He doesn't lie, Mommy."

"Well, no, he doesn't lie, but-"

"So, he's the Devil," Trixie says with a shrug.

Chloe frowns, baffled. "And … that doesn't scare you."

"No," Trixie says. She grins. "He's funny. I like him."

Chloe smiles. "I like him, too."

The silence stretches for a long moment. She doesn't see the point in arguing when Trixie doesn't seem disturbed, and Lucifer really is the Devil. That being said, Chloe doesn't feel the need to elaborate, either. Lucifer is the Devil, and there ends the PG narrative. For now.

"He'll always save you, right?" Trixie says in a tiny voice.

And Chloe's heart squeezes as the puzzle pieces fall into place. Trixie's had a horrible couple of years, full of far too much death and pain. She'd been kidnapped once, and her mother has now nearly died three times and been saved three times by Lucifer. It makes sense that this is how Trixie would deal with it. That this is how she would cope. By envisioning that Lucifer really is who he says he is, because it means Mommy has divine intervention waiting on standby.

"I'm sure he will," Chloe says. She kisses Trixie's forehead.
She's not sure at all if he will, given his troubling absence right now, but in this moment, the state of reality matters very little.

He's not hard to find when she starts looking, at least. That evening. After she's slept more than two minutes, spent quality time with Dan and Trixie, and given Lucifer a little space, since he seemed to be demanding it.

She's not sure what she expects. A smile. A, "How are you, Detective? You had quite the rough night." Something snarky but sympathetic.

But she gets none of that.

"Detective," he says, the word devoid of welcome or warmth, as she steps off the elevator and into his penthouse. But he doesn't turn her away, and he doesn't deny her entry. So … she's not sure what to make of the chill, yet.

He's sitting in the chair by the fire with a book cracked open across on his lap, a tumbler full of scotch clutched in his hand, and a two-thirds-empty bottle resting beside him on the table. Another bottle lies empty on the floor at his feet. And the smashed remains of yet another bottle lie scattered like diamonds along the wall behind him. The glass glitters in the flickering firelight.

O … kay.

As she approaches, he marks his place and closes his book. She can't help but glance at the table where he sets the thickly bound piece of literature. The dim light makes the faded title hard to read, but ….

La Divina Comedia.

She doesn't know a word of Italian, but that's pretty translatable, regardless. She raises her eyebrows. "The Divine Comedy? Seriously?"

He shrugs. "It's best in the original Italian." He gestures at his copy. "I've lost my first edition, but this suffices."

"I'm surprised you'd even want to read that." Satan is portrayed as a horrendous, three-mouthed beast trapped in ice. He feasts on Judas, Cassius, and Brutus - the betrayers - for all eternity. She frowns. "Isn't it a bit …?"

"It's a libelous, odious piece of tripe," he says with a derisive snort. "But it's amusing, sometimes, to see what presumptuous humans think they know of me."

The thing is, he doesn't sound at all amused. Self-flagellating is more like it. Morose. Angry in a wrathful, biblical sense. But not amused. Worse, his haggard appearance today seems like the natural crescendo from his poor state the day he'd kissed her. He's pale and unkempt, and his eyes are puffy with exhaustion. His bathrobe is a wrinkled mess.

Chloe can hardly remember how he'd looked - she'd been too fixated on the mere fact that he'd come for her - but the assholes who'd nearly murdered her hadn't been able to stop wailing about the Devil in a bathrobe. Emily had mentioned a bathrobe, too. And Chloe wonders if he's even gotten dressed since she last saw him.

"You know why I'm here?" she says.

"To thank me, I imagine." His tone isn't arrogant or conceited. Rather, it's dreading. But he doesn't
add, *Don't do that right now, or I'll break.* He doesn't need to. His presence is a cold snap that makes her shiver.

Something is … really wrong, here.

Her heart starts to thump. "I said I wanted to talk with you about before," she says. He's tracing her hesitant steps with a gaze so sharp it could wound. "I said I wasn't avoiding you. This is the first night I've had free since we last spoke. So … here I am." She sits on his couch. "Let's talk."

Except he doesn't.

Not one syllable.

She resists the urge to yell at him. Something is clearly going on right now. Something bad.

He didn't want to do good, he'd done good, and now he resents her? Is that it? But that wouldn't manifest physically. Would it? Even if it did, that wouldn't explain his weeks-long downward spiral.

When the silence stretches to a full minute, she sighs.

Fine. She'll start, and it'll be his own damned fault if he doesn't like the subject matter. "Lucifer, what in the hell is wrong with you?" He looks away. She realizes how that just sounded. "I'm not drawing attention to a character deficiency; I'm worried. What's making you sick? Why are you …?" She gestures helplessly at his wrinkled bathrobe. "Have you even been out?"

His gaze darkens. "I was out last night."

"I don't mean out burning crime scenes to a cinder, Lucifer, I mean …." She shakes her head. "Have you been downstairs? Played the piano for your many revelers? Anything?"

He swallows. His mouth opens. Like he wants to speak. But nothing comes out.

There's a veritable canyon of space between them.

Figurative. Literal.

She bites her lip. Okay. New plan. She shoves off the couch, moves over to the chair where he's sitting, and folds her arms. This close, the stench of alcohol wafting from his pores is enough to make her choke, but she forces herself not to think about that.

"Move," she commands.

To his credit, he doesn't protest. He just says darkly, "Where?"

"Over."

He gazes at her, eyes narrowing like he can't quite figure her out. And then he moves. Four inches to the right, away from her. The shift leaves enough space for her to slide into the gap between his hip and the arm of the chair.

She sits, so close that his body is a literal line of warmth along her side, and she puts a hand on his knee. His leg twitches at the contact. His interest in the balcony is sudden and intense.

"Team Lucifer," she says, gesturing to herself. "Remember?"

"You prayed to me," he replies. Like he's making some sort of accusation.
She regards him for a long moment. "O … kay," she says slowly. She swallows. "And I can see that that … upsets you."

He snorts like she said something funny.

"I was really scared," she admits, "and I had no idea you would hear it."

"Of course, I heard it," he says in a dark voice. And then he looks at her, everything laid bare. His eyes are a wasteland. "That's how this works. You pray to God; he'll hear. He won't bloody do anything for you because he's a bastard, but he'll hear. You pray to Michael; he'll hear. You pray to Gabriel; he'll hear. You pray to Lucifer; I hear." His eyes are wet-looking. He shakes his head. "I hear all of them." The words come down like a gavel.

She blinks. All of them. All. As in plural. As in hers was not the only prayer he's received. As in …, "Lots of people pray to you?"

He shrugs. "Almost every monotheistic religion has its Devil, and almost every polytheistic religion ascribes pieces of me to various names, or to a whole. Satan. Shaytān. The Adversary. The many Asuras." His gaze sharpens like a knife. "They call me Abaddon, Apollyon, Beast, Belial, Deceiver, Father of Lies, Son of Perdition. It doesn't matter. All addresses go to me." He grins, but it isn't a happy expression. Rather, it's almost a grimace. "Such is the price of infamy."

A lump forms in her throat when she gets an inkling of where this is going. "What do they ask you for?"

"What in the bloody hell do you think they ask me for?" he snaps.

"People think you're evil."

"Yes," he replies. "They do." He gestures to the table. To that awful book. "This is what they think I am. A mindless beast who gluts himself on the likes of Judas."

She swallows. "Can you normally hear prayers? Without your …?"

"No." He pinches the bridge of his nose. "And they're like ice picks. Jammed into my ears. I can't bloody make them stop. Not without resorting to smiting every last one of them, down to their last vile thought, and I will not." He glares at the book, pointing to it with a hooked finger, like he wants to claw the thing to shreds. "That. Is. Not. Me."

"Of course, it isn't," she says, the words soft.

The weight of what he's telling her …. The extent of what God did to him truly sinks in. This wasn't just the addition of an unwanted body part. This was the addition of an unwanted internal narrative. One of self-loathing and darkness. Lucifer hears nothing but humanity's filth, begging him for filthy things. He's forced to. God forced him.

Desperate for some bloody peace and quiet, Lucifer'd said he was, and it'd made no sense at the time.

Why in the fucking hell would a father ever do that to his kid?

Even as a potential punishment, it's just … sick.

No wonder, Lucifer's not feeling well. No wonder his sense of humor's D.O.A. when he's not high as a kite.
"I'm sorry that I added to it," she says softly.

"Don't bloody apologize for your own sense of self-preservation," he snaps. "Not to me."

She looks at her lap. "I don't know what to say, then."

"Nothing," he says. The word is cold fury. "Say nothing. There's nothing to be said."

He grabs his tumbler from the side table, kicks it back, downs the whole thing in a gulp, immediately pours another, and downs that, too. Like he can't possibly get to the bottom of the bottle fast enough. Maybe, he can't. Not with his "celestial" metabolism, or whatever the hell he'd called it.

She's not sure what else to do but be there. Without any more hesitation, she curls up against him, pressing her ear against his chest. She can hear his heart beating. She swallows. It's so weird to her how similar he is to a normal human. He can love, and he can hate. He can hurt, and he can be hurt. For some reason, these things feel like they should be foreign concepts to a being like him, but they're not.

She sighs when she feels his left arm snake around her, and he pulls her closer. Finally, she's not just sitting next to him like an unwelcome growth coming out of his hip. He rubs his hand from her shoulder to her elbow, up and down like he's trying to soothe her.

"It was the one nice thing I've heard in weeks," he confesses, the words a soft rumble against her ears.

She frowns. "What was?"

"Your prayer."

Her frown deepens. "My mortal terror was nice?"

"No," he says with a short, wry laugh. It's a small sign of mirth, but she'll take anything right now. "When you were stargazing."

"You heard that, too?"

"You addressed a thought to me with intent, darling," he says. "That's what a prayer is."

And then he falls silent. The moments tick past, and the fire burns. She sees that Box again. Sitting there in the corner collecting dust. But this time … she reaches for the lid.

"Lucifer, why don't you come back to work? It could really help you. It'd be fulfilling. You'd be distracted …?"

"I can't," he says.

She frowns and looks up at him. "You mean, you won't."

"I mean, I can't," he says, a bit more forcefully. He reaches for the scotch bottle again - it's a Bowmore single malt - but she grabs his wrist.

"Stop," she says. "That doesn't fix it."

His resultant sigh has a tinge of desperation to it. "Chloe, I can't bear it."

"I don't understand why," she says. "Can you, please, tell me why?"
"Because God exiled me," he says, the words deep and dark and hating, and the chill they bring is like being thrust into absolute zero. "He turned me into the bogeyman. I hear and I'm blamed for humanity's ordure. All day. Every day. From now until the end of time. And using these ... these abominations ... makes me feel like I'm saying that's all right." He's so upset he's shaking. "Well, it's not all right that he did that, and it's not all right that he's now taken my one palatable escape away from me. None of this is all right."

"So ... it's not that you don't want to do good things."

"I don't want to do anything. Not. With them."

She splays a palm against his chest. "Lucifer, nobody is asking you to use your wings to solve cases, least of all me. We can work like we always used to. Terrestrially."

"That's the bloody problem," he says, distraught. "You've somehow made it so that nobody needs to ask me."

"What do you mean?" she says.

He sighs. "I thought I could continue our arrangement without using the wings he forced me to have, and look what happened. His gaze is one that's devoid of hope, and it makes her chest hurt to see it. "I didn't make it two bloody days."

"But that was just a freak-"

"And how many 'freak occurrences' have we experienced since I started working with you?" he says.

Too many. She can't deny it.

He looks at her with a hollow smile. "You help others. Often at great expense to yourself. If you have the power to assist, you will assist." He looks at his lap. "It's ... never been one of my traits. I've always found that approach in life to be rather foolish. His fingers clench. "But when I'm around you ... for some bloody reason ... I can't help but emulate you."

"That's not a bad thing," Chloe says. "Lucifer, it isn't. It isn't bad to be selfless at times."

"It is when the 'great expense' to myself is using them." He swallows, shaking his head. "I don't care why he gave them to me. I don't care what his intentions were. All I know is what's actually happening. And I won't assist in my own subjugation." He rubs his temples like he hurts. "I'm already being crushed as it is."

She bites her lip.

"Please, stop asking me to work with you," he begs. "I can't. And I don't know how much longer I can keep saying no."

"Okay," she says, disconcerted. She didn't think he could beg, and she feels wrong to know he's begging her, of all people. The Box is open, and it feels terrible. She squeezes his knee, blinking back tears. "I won't bring it up again. I promise."

He sighs, and he rises to his feet to pad over to the fireplace. His movement is not graceful. He's not catlike or predatory, as he often is. He's just a man. And he's upset. He stares into the flames with a gaze that's also burning.
"Hey," she says, climbing out of the chair.

When she reaches him, he snakes his arms around her and pulls her close, pressing his nose into her hair. Then he just stands there by the fire like a wilted flower, breathing roughly. She feels … oddly like a teddy bear being squeezed for comfort, and it's … The fact that he's the one doing it is …. She's not even sure what it is. Her chest hurts.

"I'm … feeling poorly," he admits. His whole body is trembling.

She isn't sure what to say. She isn't sure what's right or reasonable. She settles on, "Okay."

He presses his lips to her forehead, and then he turns to go with a sigh. When he reaches the entrance to his bedroom, he stops, leans against the wall like he thinks he might collapse if he doesn't, and turns back to face her.

"I … regret that you had a bad night, and that you were frightened," he says, words hesitant but sincere as he offers a shaking olive branch. Like he realizes he may have dumped all his baggage, but she's still carrying a full suitcase that he hasn't yet given her an opportunity to discard. "I admit, I'm quite a lot rusty, but … I hope I served in a pinch."

She smiles at him. A small, wavering one. "Thank you for saving my life," she says. She gets the impression this might be her only opportunity before he closes the figurative door again. "And Emily's, too. She's doing well. Completely baffled, but well."

He nods. "You're quite welcome," he says. The words aren't warm, but … they're not cold, either. Like he's trying on the idea of her gratitude as though it were an ill-fitting coat.

The silence stretches, but he doesn't move from his barely upright spot by the wall, doesn't retreat into his bedroom. He regards her for a long moment with tired eyes. He shifts his weight from foot to foot, agitated.

"What is it?" she says.

He looks at the ceiling with a sigh. Resigned. As though he's wondering, How in the bloody hell did I get to this place that I'm in? It's a feeling she can identify with. She'd had it when she'd been sitting in a hot tub with cameras rolling. She'd had it on and off during the Palmetto investigation. She'd had it when she'd signed her divorce papers. It's one of those unavoidable, stomach-churning moments of free fall that happens on any roller coaster worth riding.

"Lucifer?" she says, frowning.

He shakes his head. And at first, she thinks, whatever's on his mind, he won't say it. But then he looks at her, and it's clear that he will.

He takes a breath. "Should you … find yourself in future peril," he says slowly, "will you do me the honor of one small favor?" He clears his throat awkwardly and is quick to add, "I'll always repay, of course."

Her frown deepens. "I swear, I'll try not to-"

"I ask that you disregard this conversation," he says, interrupting her. "Always pray."

And then he slips around the corner, out of sight.
Hello, everybody!

I've started trying to do more with my Tumblr account: http://ariaadagio.tumblr.com/ since that's where Lucifer fans seem to hang out most. I admit, Tumblr mystifies me to no end. I've been trying to figure it out for weeks. But ... yeah. Working on it. And you can always join me on Twitter @ariaadagio for occasional updates as well :)

I had to set a lot of stuff up. So, this is a bit of what I'd call a "pivot" chapter. I hope you enjoy it! Credit for the chapter title goes to Muse.

Maze is sitting at the dining room table, nursing a bottle of wine, when Chloe returns from Lucifer's place. Maze gives Chloe a nod as she drops her keys and purse on the table by the light switch. She'd stayed with Lucifer for a little while. Discreetly. Sitting on the couch in his living area until it was clear that he was either asleep, or doing a bang up job at faking it. The night is deep, now, and Trixie will have gone to bed several hours ago.

"Thank you for babysitting," Chloe says.

Maze shrugs. "No problem, Decker. You know she's my favorite."

Favorite human, Maze doesn't say, but her meaning is clear. She takes a big sip from her wineglass. What she's thinking, her face gives no hints, and Chloe sits at the dining room table across from her, frowning. The only thing audible is crickets and the hum of the refrigerator. She doesn't get it. How Maze could profess to being Lucifer's closest friend for eons, and yet leave him suffering to this degree when she has the power to fix it. This is just … unconscionable.

"What do you wanna know?" Maze says as her distant gaze shifts to Chloe.

"I don't-," Chloe finds herself saying, but Maze only rolls her eyes.

"Come on, Decker, you've been asking me shit nonstop for weeks," she says. "I know your I-have-a-question face, and you're wearing it right now, so, ask." And then she raises her eyebrows expectantly and waits.

Chloe swallows. "I …." It occurs to her that she's sitting across from what amounts to a supernatural assassin. One who laughs at things like laws and boundaries, and whose favorite hobby seems to be sharpening knives and stabbing things. This is a fight that's stupid to pick, because Chloe will lose. Every damned time. But …. "I don't understand why you won't help him."

Maze frowns. "Won't help who what?"

"Lucifer," Chloe says. "Remove his wings. He wants to remove them."

"Because it's mutilation," Maze says with a grimace. "And he isn't meant to be diminished like he was, anyway."
Chloe folds her arms. "Isn't that for him to decide?"

"Sure, but I don't have to help him," Maze says. "Do you have any idea what it was like for me?"

"Do you have any idea what this is like for him, now?" Chloe says, only to note Maze's curious but blank look. Chloe frowns. "He hasn't talked to you about it, has he? He hasn't talked to you at all."

Maze shakes her head. "I've seen him maybe twice since you found out about him," she admits, and Chloe's stunned.

Somehow, over the past six weeks, Chloe had become the Devil's confidante, and she hadn't even noticed it happening. It makes sense, though, really. Maze might be his longest, dearest, most loyal friend, but she isn't well equipped for sharing feelings. Not sensitively, anyway.

"Please, just do it," Chloe says. "Just do what he wants."

"Why?" Maze says.

But all Chloe can say without breaking this new confidence is, "Because I asked you to."

Maze regards her for a long moment, eyes narrowing, and then she sets her wineglass on the table. "Decker, have you ever performed an amputation?"

"No ... but ... people get amputations all the time, and they're fine."

"Not awake, they don't," Maze replies. "And not with knives like mine."

She rises to her feet and disappears into her bedroom for a moment. When she comes back, she's carrying one of her crescent-shaped Hell-forged blades. She sets it on the table in front of Chloe. It's slate gray and wicked-looking, but it's only about six inches long. Not even the length of a chef's knife.

"Ever carved a chicken?" Maze says.

Chloe nods. "Sure."

"You have to dislocate the wings to cut them off."

"... Right," Chloe says.

"Well, an angel's wing bone isn't small like a chicken's. It's huge. Like a human femur," Maze says. "Imagine trying to dislocate someone's hip on purpose with that little blade." She points at the table. At the gleaming knife. "It's like wrestling with a tiger, even when he's holding still." Her lips form a grim line. "He doesn't hold still, Decker. He can't. Not for that. I had to hold him down."

*Anything that would require me to think straight for more than the first few seconds isn't feasible,* he said.

Chloe's hands shake as she reaches for the knife. She picks it up. It's light. No more than half a pound. It's obviously meant for a quick kill. Slitting a throat. Gouging a liver. Not prolonged surgery like Maze is describing.

"Ever cauterized a wound the size of a baguette?" Maze persists.
"No," Chloe says. She blinks, and tears spill.

"He couldn't talk when I was done because he'd yelled himself hoarse, and he sure as hell couldn't walk," Maze says. "He spent his first few days on Earth curled up under a tarp in the back of a pickup truck I jacked from the beach parking lot. I-"

"Stop," Chloe says softly. Her stomach is churning and her chest aches. "I don't want to hear any more."

Maze is silent.

Chloe wipes her face with her hands. She sniffs. She's seen some gruesome stuff over the years, but … if anything, Maze's disturbing narrative only makes Chloe more sure that what she's asking for is a thing that Lucifer needs. This isn't some trivial desire of his, given flight by whim.

"Maze, don't you think all that horrible stuff is worse to receive than to give?" Chloe says. "I mean, you can admit that much, right?"

"Yes," Maze says as she takes her seat again.

"And he knows exactly how awful it feels, because you did it to him before."

Maze nods. "Yes."

"So … don't you think it's pretty telling that he wants you to do it again?"

Maze stares into her wineglass a long moment, and then she takes a breath. "Look, Decker, if there's somebody else out there who you want me to hurt for you, just ask, and he's meat."

"But I never signed up to hurt Lucifer. The only reason I did it the first time is because I swore an oath he's since released me from. I can say no, now, and I say no. I torture people who deserve it or who like it, and he doesn't fit in either category."

Chloe sighs. Maybe, Maze is a little more human when it comes to emotions than she lets on. "Okay," Chloe says. "Okay; I'm sorry I asked."

The engine rumbles as Chloe pulls into the drop-off lane at Santa Ana Elementary and puts the car in park. The drive outside the school is an organized chaos comprised of cars and busses. The U.S. flag flaps in the breeze atop the flag pole, and a distant bell rings somewhere inside the big brick building. Kids are scurrying everywhere like little ants, talking, laughing, and several teachers Chloe vaguely recognizes stand at various points on the lawn, directing the foot traffic.

Trixie's seatbelt clicks as she unlatches it, and then she twists to grab her little pink backpack out of the foot well behind the driver's seat. Instead of getting out of the car, though, she unzips the bag and rifles through the contents. She pulls out a wrinkled sheaf of papers and inspects it with a discerning gaze.

"Got everything?" Chloe asks, watching her daughter in the rearview mirror.

"You didn't sign the form, yet," Trixie says.

Chloe frowns. "What form?"

"I told you about it on Friday. You said you'd sign it."
Chloe's frown deepens. She'd been in a rush on Friday morning, thanks to the Sunny's stakeout. She'd barely had time to drop Trixie off at school, let alone make it across town to pick up Emily with any time to spare. Chloe remembers Trixie babbling that morning about chickenpox or something, but ….

"Why didn't you give it to Daddy when he picked you up?" Chloe says, reaching to take the stapled permission-slip whatever thing from Trixie's outstretched hands.

"I did, Mommy," Trixie says.

Chloe glances at the form with a sigh, skimming the top page. Dear Guardians, it begins. It's a letter from the principal. Apparently, the school had had a second case of chickenpox crop up last week and is asking that all unvaccinated students stay home for the remainder of the school year. At the bottom of the page, there's a small blurb asking her to verify that the vaccination records the school possesses for Trixie are true and accurate, and that she's read the whole packet. Sure enough, Dan's chicken scratch of a signature is scrawled on the top line, which is labeled "Guardian #1," but there's also an additional signature line for "Guardian #2, if applicable." And that line is blank.

She flips through the packet. The second page is an info sheet about the symptoms and treatments for Varicella. The third page discusses the benefits and risks of the Varicella vaccine. Seems straight forward enough.

She leans across the car to pull a pen out of the glove compartment, flips back to the front page of the packet, presses it against the window, and signs it. Once she tears the page at the dotted line, she hands the torn off part back to Trixie. "Okay?" Chloe says, eyebrows raised.

Trixie nods. "Thanks, Mommy," she says as she climbs out of the car.

Chloe smiles. "Have a great day, okay? I love you."

"I love you, too."

"Oh," Chloe calls before her daughter turns away. "You're going home with Lakeesha, right?"

Trixie nods. "Bye, Mommy!" she says.

Chloe gives her daughter a wave, drops the chickenpox packet onto the passenger seat, and pulls slowly out of the drop-off lane, into the crawling traffic that's trying to exit the lot.

Amenadiel lives in Venice Beach. He's not remotely on the way to work from Trixie's school, but Chloe took a detour, anyway, because she needs …. Well, she needs to pursue every avenue. She can't not. Not after last night.

Amenadiel's apartment building is so close to the ocean, a small flock of seagulls perches on the roof of the building, and the air smells thickly of salt. She steps past the low hanging fronds of a palm bush, into the complex. The halls are lined with sand that's been tracked in from the outside, and two shirtless guys wearing bright-colored swim trunks and flip-flops step past her as she enters. They're careful to dodge her with their large lacquered surfboards, but the hallway is only so wide, and she has to flatten against the wall for a moment to make way for them. Once they've passed, she strides past a busted pair of vending machines to apartment 1Q.

"Chloe," Amenadiel says warmly as he opens the door for her. "I wasn't expecting you."

"I got your address from Maze," Chloe says, stepping inside.
"Sure," Amenadiel says, nodding as he waves her inside. "Sure, no problem."

Much like Lucifer's place, Amenadiel's home is pristine. He has no clutter lying about. He's left nothing out of place. Unlike Lucifer, though, his tastes seem far less opulent. He lives in a studio apartment with a small pullout sofa, a kitchenette table, and a tiny television that isn't even flatscreen, but not much else. On the walls hang no adornments, on his windows hang no curtains or drapes, and his floor is bare, scratched linoleum. No carpet. He reminds her, almost, of a monk.

He directs her to the couch, a mere few feet from the front door. She sits, swallowing nervously. "I came because I have a question," she says.

He sits beside her. The cushion dips under his considerable weight. "What is it?" he says.

"I …." She sighs. Shit, is she really doing this? She'd gleaned before that this is a personal matter, and so she hadn't pried at the time, but …. She pulls her fingers through her hair. Yes. Yes, she's really doing this. Things are different, now. "I want to know how you lost your wings."

The light in Amenadiel's eyes fades. He looks at his lap.

"It's important," she adds, feeling like shit at the same time. "I'm sorry." What is she doing, really? Nosing into another family's business. But … maybe, if Lucifer could do whatever Amenadiel had done … somehow.

"I let my father down," Amenadiel says quietly.

She frowns. "I don't know what you mean."

He shrugs. "I let my father down, and he saw fit to take back my gifts."

Her jaw drops. From the reverence in Amenadiel's tone, from the stars in his eyes when he talks of them, his feelings on the matter are not something that needs clarification. He didn't like his wings. He loved them. And he's not a human by choice, as much as Lucifer's not an angel by choice. Still, she can't help but slowly ask, "Gifts as in … you felt positively toward them." Because, frankly, this whole fucking thing defies belief.

"Yes," Amenadiel replies.

"And God took them away from you without your consent."

"Yes," Amenadiel says with a nod. "He's testing me."

"So, let me get this straight," Chloe says slowly through clenched teeth. "Your father robbed you of your wings, which you desperately want, and he force fed Lucifer his wings, which he desperately hates." Like God thinks that two fully grown angels older than time, for some reason, need timeouts.

Amenadiel nods. He seems serene. A firm believer in the "everything happens for a reason" doctrine. For a moment, all she can do is stare. Well, no wonder Lucifer assumed Amenadiel wouldn't help him. And the more she learns about God, the more she becomes certain. God is a real dick.

"So, when you say … you fell," Chloe says, gut churning, "what you really mean is … God pushed you off a ledge."

"No," Amenadiel is quick to reply. "No, not at all. I behaved badly. I let myself be petty. And
vengeful. I laid with someone I shouldn't have. I fell from grace. God turned me human for …
acting human."

"Well, why didn't that happen to Lucifer, too, then?" Chloe says. He's petty and vengeful and
"lays" with just about anyone who asks. He's way-too-human all the damned time.

"I don't know," says Amenadiel.

_I don't know why he does_ anything, Lucifer said, frustrated.

She sighs. None of this makes any sense, but it feels like it should. Like there's some divine
message buried in the twisted wreckage, some glaring memo from on high that everybody
somehow missed. Otherwise … the universe is run by a sadist. Some omnipotent guy who just
wants pain for pain's sake because he gets his jollies from it. And that's too disturbing an idea to
entertain.

Amenadiel puts his hand on her shoulder and smiles warmly. His palm is like a furnace. "Chloe,"
he says evenly, "yes, I do believe everything happens for a reason." Like he's read her mind or
something. "God has a plan for you, and for me, and for Lucifer, and for everyone." His words
are deep and rich. "I also believe you'll do yourself a great disservice if you try too hard to figure
out what that plan actually _is_. Sometimes, it's best just to let things be."

"But I can't just not try to help," she says. "That's the whole reason I'm a cop. Because I like to
help."

Amenadiel frowns. "Who are you trying to help, specifically?"

She gives him an incredulous look. "Who do you think?"

"Ah," he says. "He's been in kind of a tailspin since Death Valley."

"Understatement," she says. "Has he talked to you?"

"He turned me away last time I visited," Amenadiel says.

Her heart twists. Shit. Lucifer really is isolating himself. He's not going out, and he's not letting
people come to him. He's only talking to _her_, and what the hell can _she_ do?

She looks at her lap. "This is so frustrating," she says, clenching her fists. "I feel like I'm way out
of my league. Between demons and angels and God and whatever the hell else is involved, I'm
nobody. I mean, what can I do for a man who can already do almost anything."

"You're a miracle," Amenadiel says softly. "I'd say you're on even footing." He leans closer and
wraps his arm over her shoulder. He's warm and supportive and she needs it. She can't help but
sink into his embrace. "There's a reason you're here," he murmurs. "Just like there's a reason for
everything else. It'll all come together eventually."

She sighs. "I hope so."

"I _know_ so," he says, with such overwhelming faith that his words burn like one of Lucifer's fires.

A lump forms in her throat. He really is meant to be one, she thinks. An angel. A guardian.

She finds it profoundly sad that he isn't.
"So, what you're saying is … we have nothing," Chloe says as she throws the manilla case folder back on the lieutenant's desk and sighs. She glances at Emily, who's sitting in the chair next to her. Emily's teeth are almost audibly grinding.

"You have the two kidnappers," Lieutenant Monroe says.

"Two kidnappers who went inexplicably *Looney Tunes,*" Emily says with an eye roll. "They don't even know their own names anymore."

Lucifer fried them over easy.

Chloe sighs.

The unfortunate price of divine intervention, she supposes.

They can't run plate numbers or fingerprints when the truck they'd been held captive in is a pile of slag. They can't I.D. the dead kidnapper when the dead kidnapper is urn-worthy, and the two living kidnappers can't tell up from down anymore, let alone relay a narrative about their drug operation.

A chopper team had flown over Angeles National Forest for hours in search of a poppy grow - poppies are bright colors and are easy to spot from the air - but none had been found. The team hadn't been able find the mysterious semi-truck, either, nor were they able to locate Chloe's cruiser. Without Chloe's cruiser, they have no license plate list. Without the license plate list, they have no one to talk to except Mr. Jones, who's already shown he's less than cooperative. And to top the shitty cake with a craptastic cherry, a Narcotics task force had used the kidnapping incident as ammo to serve a warrant on Sunny's yesterday morning, and had found nothing but empty storage in the back room - no drugs. Not even residue.

Apparently, eight hours is plenty of time for a drug dealer to pull up roots and move.

Chloe supposes she could, theoretically, ask Lucifer to un-destroy everything, or at least un-destroy the license plate, so they could maybe get a damned lead. But after their talk last night, after seeing the cost to him just for coming to her rescue …. No. No way. She won't ask him for more.

"So, what, now?" Chloe says.

Lieutenant Monroe gives her an incredulous look. "How about taking some time off?"

No. No, no, *no.*

Emily protests, "But we're fine!"

"You were nearly murdered less than forty-eight hours ago," Lieutenant Monroe says, looking at Chloe. Her gaze shifts to Emily, "And you *were* murdered. You're only alive by the grace of God."

"That's *not* true," Chloe blurts without thinking. That asshole shouldn't get credit. "He had nothing to d-" Oh, shit. "Um …." She shrinks in her seat while Olivia stares incredulously.

"Look, I don't care what the doctors said," the lieutenant continues. "You both might be physically healthy, but I sincerely doubt you're fine." She glances back and forth at both of them. "And I don't want to see either of you again before next week. I'm shocked you two bothered to come in today in the first place."
Chloe has a chance to say, to beg, "Please, don't make us-,

"This is the part where you leave, ladies," the lieutenant interrupts. She shoots an expectant look toward the door. "So, go lie on the beach. Read a book. Relax. I don't care. Just do something that isn't here. And turn in your sidearms on the way out. I don't want you off playing independent cowboys."

_Fuck._

"Well, my promotion is off to a great start," Emily says with a sigh as she walks past, stilettos clicking against the floor tiles. She gives Chloe a despondent look as she adjusts her leather coat. "See you next week?"

Chloe nods. "Yeah. Sure."

Her throat hurts. She keeps swallowing, trying to hold back a deluge, but it's getting harder and harder as the lump expands. Lucifer's disintegrating, and she can't figure out how to help him. The drug dealers got away. The families of her two overdose deaths will never get any closure. And, now, she can't even distract herself with work. She feels like she's trapped on a ride called Downward Spiral, and she can't get off.

"Hey," says a familiar voice behind her.

Chloe grabs her cellphone from her desk, stuffing it into her purse. Where are her sunglasses? Her desk is covered with junk from this stupid overdose case. She can't find _anything._

"Chloe."

She sighs, pinching the bridge of her nose as she turns to face him. "What, Dan?" she says tiredly. "I'm fine."

Dan stands next to her desk wearing old jeans and a faded t-shirt. His arms are folded, and his expression is neutral. Barely. The silence stretches as he regards her. The lump in her throat won't stop expanding, but she can't cry. Not until she gets out to the car. Why won't he leave, so she can find her damned sunglasses and go?

"You're … really not seeming all that fine right now," he replies slowly.

"Well, I am," she says. Her voice cracks. God, damn it. She rubs her eyes.

"Uh huh," he says without a drop of belief. He steps closer. Puts a hand on her shoulder. "Hey," he says. "You were held at gunpoint. It's okay to be freaked out."

"But I'm _not_ freaked out," she says. "He made sure that I'm not. That's literally the only thing that's _not_ wrong."

Dan frowns. "He …?"

Shit. She's a blabbermouth today. "Never mind," she rasps, shaking her head. "It's not important."
Another long silence.

"Okay," Dan says in an *I've-had-it* tone as he shifts on his feet. "What did he screw up, now? Do I need to shoot him?"

She frowns. "Who?"

"Lucifer."

"He didn't screw anything up, Dan."

Dan rolls his eyes. "Right. You've been distracted ever since he quit, and you also refuse to tell me *why* he quit. There's no way that's a coincidence."

"It's not because he screwed something up," she insists. She sighs. "He's just … he needs help, and it's …. He's not doing very well." She sniffs. "And everything else is going to hell, now, too, and this," she says, gesturing to the surrounding office, "is supposed to be my *escape*."

Dan's lips form a grim line. He glances around, notes Emily's empty desk, grabs her chair, and rolls it over. Then he sits, and he reaches for the hem of Chloe's shirt, pulling her down as well.

"I don't want to talk about this," she says. "Please, I just want to go home."

"Not to Lucifer's place?" he says.

She shrugs.

"I thought you said he needs help."

"He *does*, but I can't …. I mean, I don't know what …." She sighs. "Dan, I don't know what to do for him. He's basically turned me into his only support system." She squeezes her eyes shut and leans forward over her knees. "I didn't even notice until today."

Dan places a warm palm on her back and rubs her along the spine. "Look, I get feeling a bit overwhelmed," he says. "Like a problem is too big for you."

"It's too big for *anyone*," Anyone who's not God.

"So, break it down," Dan says with a shrug.

"How?"

"Well, what's something about the situation that you *can* fix?"

She shakes her head. "I don't …." She rubs her face with her hands. She can't help Lucifer with his wing thing. But …. "He isn't getting out at all. I don't think he's left his penthouse in over a week." Discounting the three minutes it took for him to rescue her and incinerate everything else. "That can't be helping." She can't imagine how claustrophobic being trapped in her house for a solid week would feel, and she's not nearly the extrovert that he is.

"There you go," Dan says. "So, take him out."

"He's not gonna let me take him out."

"He'll let you."

"Do you have *any* idea how impossible it is to get Lucifer to do something he doesn't want to
"Like I said," Dan replies with an easy shrug. "He'll let you."

"What makes you say that?" she asks.

Dan gives her an incredulous are-you-serious? look. But instead of answering, he just shakes his head and says, "He will. I don't care how depressed he is."

"But, Dan-"

"Have you tried asking him to do something with you?" Dan prods.

She bites her lip. Come to think of it … not … really. Lucifer comes to her and tells her he wants to do something. Or he waits for her to come to him, and they spend time at Lux. But she's never just said, "Hey, let's go out somewhere." She's not sure why.

It can't be that simple, can it?

"Trust me, Chloe," Dan says as though she's been thinking aloud, "it's that simple."

But where could she take him, exactly? Her admittedly sad idea of a fun night out is bowling or a movie or something. She can't take the Devil bowling. And a movie just turns off the brain for the duration, which won't do anything but postpone his mental dissolution. She needs something actively relaxing. Something that might heal him a little.

Maybe, start small. A nice walk? Like their stroll on the beach a few weeks ago. Walking is said to be the world's greatest natural mood stabilizer. Or …. Oh.

"You just thought of something, didn't you?" Dan says, smiling.

"Thank you," she replies.

Dan nods and gets up to leave. She resumes her search for her sunglasses. She really needs them, now. She- Her sunglasses hover in front of her face. Where Dan found them, she has no idea.

"You love him," Dan says as she clutches the sunglasses. "Don't you." Not really a question.

She sighs. "It's … complicated."

Dan regards her for a long moment. "You want my advice?"

"Sure, why not?" she says. "You're batting a thousand."

"Make it less complicated."

"Easier said than done, Dan," she says with a snort. If he even had a clue about the craziness she was currently dealing with, he'd probably have a stroke.

He shrugs. "Look," he says. "Forget about all the reasons you know it won't work." He peers at her, eyebrows raised. "Is there at least one reason that it will?"

"I don't know."

"I think you do," he says.

She sighs. "Dan ….."
He holds up his hands. "Just saying," he says.

"Since when did you join Team Lucifer, anyway?" Chloe says.

"It's hard to hate the guy when he saved your life," Dan replies. "I have no idea what he did to get that cure formula - the guy was a wreck, after." Chloe's chest constricts. Dan folds his arms. "But I'm not Team Lucifer."

She frowns. "Then … what?"

"I'm Team Chloe," he says with a warm look.

And then he walks away.
Thank you, thank you, thank you 1000x to wollfgang for being an emergency beta reader and talking me off the ledge. I was really nervous -- like sick to my stomach nervous -- about this chapter, and no matter how many times I edited it, I couldn't quite seem to reach that satisfied, "It's done!" feeling. But I'm good now. Mostly. Only a small touch of the vapours remaining. Anyone have some smelling salts?

Anyway. I hope you like this.

Chapter title credit goes to Halsey.

He's still asleep, but at least he isn't buck naked, this time. Or, well ... he is. She swallows as she follows the curve of his spine with her gaze. The sheet, which comes to an uneven stop at the small of his back, only barely makes him decent. But whatever. It counts as far as preventing this situation from being mortifying (for her, not him).

"Lucifer," she says, the barest whisper.

His breathing hitches like she woke him, but then it evens out again. His fingers scrunch, and he pulls the pillow tighter over his head. He looks like someone who fell asleep while trying to block out the noise of a jackhammer, and it makes her heart hurt. She can't imagine being inundated by so many voices, let alone the voices of humanity's creeps. She hopes this plan helps him stop listening for a little while.

"Lucifer," she repeats. Just a little louder.

He doesn't budge. Maybe, she shouldn't wake him. Maybe, he really needs the sleep. But .... She glances at her watch, frowning. 10:17 a.m. He's had more than fourteen hours to sleep. And it's not like she's trying to drag him out of bed at the crack of dawn. She steps a few inches closer. With a wince, she bypasses his shoulder and reaches for his bicep. His skin is hot like a furnace to the touch, and the little hairs peppering his arm are soft.

"Lucifer," she says in her normal speaking voice as she gives him a gentle shake. He tries to roll away from her, but she keeps hold of his arm. His bicep bulges in her grip, but he doesn't make use of his far greater strength to shake her off. "Lucifer, wake up."

"No," he says, voice muffled by the pillow. And then he sighs as though resigned. "... What is it?"

She swallows. Well, here goes nothing. Operation Get-Lucifer-out-of-His-Penthouse is a go. "Do you own swim trunks?"

That gets his attention. He pulls the pillow away from his face and squints at her, like she just asked if he's decided to give up Lux and move to Kansas to fulfill his lifelong dream of becoming a wheat farmer. His hair is mussed, and his gaze is cloudy with sleep.

"What are you on about, now?" he says.
She gives him a bright smile. "Good morning."

"It's morning, yes," he replies in an unamused tone as he glances at the clock on his nightstand. "I wouldn't call it good." He sniffs, rubbing his stubbly face with his hands. "What is this about swimming?"

She shrugs. "I'm looking for your swim trunks, and I didn't think you'd like me going through your stuff."

He regards her for a long, long moment. He gestures at his chest of drawers. "What's mine is yours," he says, like it's no big deal, like he gives away his privacy on a regular basis. Does he? she wonders. And then he flops back onto the mattress with a yawn and pulls the pillow over his head again. A muffled voice follows, "Top left drawer."

O … kay. Fine, then.

She steps over to the window and yanks open the blinds, letting sunlight fall into the room. His loud, irritated groan voices his displeasure. She tries not to think about the fact that she's not just visiting, for once, but actively invading his space. Or the fact that she's fully intending to strong-arm him, if necessary. She's never done either, before, and it feels a little like poking a hornet's nest, and should she really be doing this?

Biting her lip, she steps over to his chest of drawers and pulls open the top left drawer. Two tall stacks of black boxers and black boxer-briefs, all pristinely folded, stare back at her, along with a shorter stack of white ones. She can't help but gulp. She's pawing through his underwear. This is not a level of familiarity she'd expected to be granted any time soon, and she's kind of stunned that he just … dumped it on her.

She finds the aforementioned swim trunks in the back of the drawer. Again, black. What a surprise.

"What about a t-shirt?" she says.

"A t-shirt," he parrots, still muffled by the pillow.

"Yeah," she says. "Like do you still have that green one you got from Sol de Javier last year?"

"I used it as a rag."

Of course, he did. Good thing she came prepared, then. She reaches into her beach bag and grabs the crumpled white t-shirt she'd dumped there in her rush to get ready. "Here," she says. She throws the t-shirt in his direction. It hits him in the stomach.

With a grouchy sigh he throws off the pillow and sits up. "What the bloody hell is this?" he grumbles.

"One of Dan's t-shirts," she replies.

He frowns. "And why are you hitting me with it?"

"Because I want you to wear it," she says. "This, too." She tosses the swim trunks at him. He snatches them out of the air with a flicker of movement she can hardly see.

"I don't understand," he replies.

"I want you to put them on," she says slowly. She can't help but laugh at his perplexed look.
"What, did you seriously think I came all the way over here and woke you up to borrow swim trunks for someone else?"

His eyes narrow. "I've received stranger requests."

"Well, this request is for you," she says. "Where are your flip-flops?" Maybe, his closet.

Since he gave her free rein - holy shit, he gave her free rein - she wanders toward his walk-in, next, flipping on the light switch as she passes the threshold. Wow. She's never been in here before. She frowns as the smell of cedar tickles her nose. "Has anyone ever told you that your closet is obscene?" Seriously, it's bigger than her bedroom. He seems to own enough zillion dollar suits to, if they were liquidated, surpass the gross domestic product of a small country.

"I'm a great lover of excess," he says behind her, sounding a bit more awake, now. Still not happy, though.

Sheets rustle.

She resists the urge to turn around and stare.

She finds his shoe tree at the back of the sprawling space. He owns more shoes than she does. She didn't think that was possible. The Adidas he'd worn on the beach a few weeks ago are hooked on one of the bottommost rungs, next to some designer cross-trainers. He actually owns cross-trainers. If he refuses to wear t-shirts, what good are the cross-trainers?

Wait.

She shakes her head. This isn't show-and-tell right now. She's on a mission. She grabs the flip-flops and turns around to head back into the bedroom, only to plow right into Lucifer's chest.

He's a wall - a warm wall, with muscles - and he doesn't even wobble on his feet with the impact. The flip-flops fall and land on the floor with a loud smack, and she can't stop the yelp of surprise that flies loose from her lips.

"Apologies," he says with a voice as smooth as syrup, in contrast to her pounding heart. Still, he doesn't sound sorry.

She stumbles backward a step, trying to resist the urge to gape. He's standing there, his top bed sheet wrapped low and loose around his hips. His chest is bare, as are his abs, and she gets a good long look at the dark happy trail leading the way south from his navel. The morning light casts him in perfect relief. He looks … tired. A little strained. But nothing like last night. And, now, in this moment, he might as well be Adonis.

"Uh …," she says, swallowing.

The sheet looks like it's about one small draft away from falling down. Beyond him, she can see the t-shirt and the swim trunks lying discarded on the mattress, which means that the sheet is all that stands between her and the end of that happy trail. But … She forces her gaze upward, clearing her throat.

"You look good," she says. His lip twitches, but she can't read him at all. "I mean, you look better. I mean. You look …" She swallows again. "How often do you let people go through your underwear drawer?"

Fuck. Did she really just say that? Her face heats. She really, really did. Why?
"You would be the first," he says, looking down at her.

She blinks. "Really?"

His eyes are obsidian. "The bottom drawer is where most of my invitations begin and end."

"Do I want to know what's in the bottom drawer?" she says.

He doesn't reply to that except to fold his arms and direct a pointed glance at said drawer, like he's daring her to go look and see for herself. Which probably means that's where he keeps all his sex toys. She's never seen them before. She's never even asked if he has any. But she's sure he has toys, if Maze's ridiculous collection is any indication of how they kill time in Hell.

"So, that's a big fat no, then," Chloe says with a nervous laugh.

"Hmm," he replies with a nonchalant shrug. "Your choice." He glances at his fallen flip-flops. "Why have you woken me?" He doesn't add foolish mortal to the end of his question, but from his expression, he's thinking it.

Shit. Maybe, she's bitten off more than she can chew …. "You're going to do me a favor," she tells him, heart pounding.

His eyebrows creep toward his hairline. "Am I, now?"

Other than when she took him home from the hospital, she's never once asked him for a favor, let alone demanded one. And he doesn't look like he knows whether to be amused by her audacity or offended. Shit, shit, shit. She clears her throat.

"Yes," she says. "You are."

He leans closer, into her space. He towers over her. "And what is this … favor?" he says in a dangerous tone.

"I want some company today."

Whatever the hell favor he was expecting to be asked, that wasn't it. He blinks, and the air of menace surrounding him drops away in the space of a breath. God, how does he do that? She resists the urge to sigh in relief. Okay. Okay, he's playing ball, now. She thinks.

"I want you to go to the beach with me," she elaborates. "Please."

His eyes narrow. "… Why?"

"Because I like the beach, and I like you, and it seems like a no-brainer to combine the two," she says in a rush before she loses her nerve. She looks up at him. "I mean, don't you think?"

He's silent. For a long, long moment. Please, take the bait, she thinks. Please, just …. This would be so much easier if she could just cuff him and frogmarch him to the car.

"Why do I require swim trunks for a walk?" he says slowly.

"Because we're not going for a walk, this time."

"You expect me to swim?"

"And/or sunbathe, yes," she says with a nod.
"Hmm," he says, a soft rumble. He steps closer. So close she can feel the heat radiating from him. "And how do you propose to repay me for this … favor?"

"You take IOUs, right?" she says.

"With no stipulations?" he replies. A smile oozes onto his face. Finally. Finally, he's playing. Rather than playing with his food. "Living dangerously, are we?"

"I trust you not to take advantage," she says with a shrug. She doesn't miss his surprised blink. She bends over to pick up the Adidas and steps back out into the main room, hoping to draw him out with her. He follows. "So … are you coming with me or not?"

He reaches for the crumpled t-shirt he left on the bed. He holds it away from his body, between his thumb and index finger, like he's afraid he might get cooties from it or something. "Must I wear this … thing?" he says, frowning. "Is this part of the favor?"

"You want to go shirtless?" she says, only to see his eyebrows rise in incredulity. Of course, he doesn't care if he's shirtless. "Wait." He probably doesn't even care if he wears the swim trunks, but he seems at least somewhat willing to work within the bounds of human modesty on most occasions. "That was a stupid question."

"The many benefits of being shameless," he replies with a snicker.

She rolls her eyes. "So, one shirtless Devil for my beach trip in exchange for an IOU?"

"So long as you understand that I will collect, eventually."

Operation Get-Lucifer-out-of-His-Penthouse isn't just a go. It's going. She resists the urge to cheer. "Yeah," she says with a grin. "I figured as much."

He picks up the chickenpox packet before he eases into her passenger seat.

"Just … um …." She swallows. "Put it on the dash, I guess."

He complies.

"You're staring at me," she says as she turns the key in the ignition.

At least, he found a robe to wear, so she won't have to drive when he's sitting half naked less than a foot away from her. Which is good. Because she thinks, if she had to do that, with the way she's rubbernecking whenever she catches a glimpse of his skin today, she'd get in an accident in less than three blocks.

When he says nothing, she glances at him. A normal person would, having been caught, look away. But not him. All he does is give her a languid blink.

She snorts. Definitely shameless.

"Seriously, what?" she says as she pulls to a red light.

His shrug is leonine. "I'm wondering what prompted this excursion."

She swallows. "Just felt like the beach," she says.

"Right." His tone is noncommittal, unconvinced. But he doesn't press the issue, at least.
He turns to face the road in front of them and lets his eyes drift shut. A thunk follows as he rests his head against the window. She bites her lip at his subdued demeanor. Other than his sunken eyes and his paleness, he doesn't look that sick. But he's certainly acting like it. She hopes this trip helps him. She hopes.

"Now, who's staring?" he grumbles. Fog snakes along the windowpane, away from his lips.

"Guilty as charged," she says as she reaches for the radio dial. She can't resist asking, "Are you gonna punish me?"

"Do you feel guilty?" he says.

She grins. "Nope."

"Well, then, I suppose I'm on holiday."

School is still in session for another couple of weeks in most places, and the beach is relatively empty in comparison to how jam-packed it gets when tourist season opens the floodgates. The weather is gorgeous - not too hot, not too cold, not a single cloud in the bright, azure sky. Seagulls prowl for open picnic baskets and crumbs, accenting the roar of the waves with their caws and cackles. The air smells of salt, and she can't help but stop and inhale as cool ocean water creeps up to her toes, submerging them. She hasn't been to the beach without Trixie in forever. Honestly, she hasn't been to the beach. Not for the sake of being at the beach. Except for that walk with Lucifer.

"You enjoy this scent?" Lucifer says beside her.

"Yes," she says. "It's just so fresh." And the air in Los Angeles is not, so it's a nice change.

She turns to him. He looks … pale. And the sunlight makes the bags under his eyes look almost like bruises. He'd had a bad moment. In the car. Whatever he'd heard had made him look nauseated. But he'd been mostly placid since then.

"Why," she says, "do you not like it?"

He shrugs. "It reminds me of my arrival."

She blinks. "You mean … on Earth?" she says slowly. When he nods, she can't help but gape. Just for a moment. She doesn't get them often, anymore, but every once in a while, the reminder that he isn't natively terrestrial is mind blowing. "You … fell to here? The beach, I mean?"

"Climbed," he replies. "Not fell."

"Huh?" she says.

He makes a pointed look at the wet ground. "Hell is down, darling."

"Oh," she says. Right. She swallows. "Wait, how did you …? Did you poke a hole in the sand or something?"

An amused look crosses his face. "Hell is a dimension situated below this one, not a geographic level within Earth. To get here, I broke through the barrier between Hell and Earth, which coincidentally deposited me at the beach. No displacement of sand was involved."

Just when she thinks she gets it all. Huh. "Well, is your arrival here bad to be reminded of?" she
He's silent for a long, long moment. A wave rolls over their feet, and he looks down with distaste as the receding water yanks the sand out from underneath them. He steps back a bit to where the ground is dryer. "I don't know how to answer that," he says. He tips his head back and inhales. "It was the first time in quite a long while that I couldn't detect the scent of brimstone, which was lovely." His smile is a wistful one, but then it fades. "It was also when I asked Maze to cut off my wings, which was … unpleasant." He shrugs. "The end results were desirable, though. I suppose one could call it a tossup."

Hmm. "What's your favorite smell?" she says.

"I can't say that I've thought about it," he replies.

She grins. "Well, we have time. Come on."

She marches out into the water, until her ankles are submerged. The water is chilly, but not cold. It'll be tolerable once she gets used to it. She takes another step. "Do you …?" she begins to say. And then she realizes he hasn't followed.

He's still standing back. At the edge. Where some of the waves spill far enough up the slope of the shore to touch, but most of them don't. She frowns, expecting to see him rubbing his temples again when she turns to face him, but he isn't. He's just standing there. Watching her.

"Come on," she urges.

He folds his arms. "I don't understand the point of this."

She shrugs. "To relax."

"And how is this relaxing?" he says.

She marches back up to him and reaches for his hand with an expectant look. When he doesn't offer his palm in response, she sighs. Fine, then. She leans, and she closes her fingers around his wrist, tightly enough to feel his radius and ulna jutting into her palm. He doesn't pull away, at least. She takes that as a positive sign and steps back toward the water. He doesn't budge, at first, not even to counterweight her applied force. He's just rock, immovable.

Until she frowns at him and says, "This is my favor. Do you want a reputation for not paying up?"

That gets him wading out to his knees, but then he digs in his heels again.

"This is quite far enough," he says.

"You can't swim in knee-deep water," she replies.

He gives her an unimpressed look, and he sighs. "Why do you insist on swimming?"

"Because it's fun," she says with a shrug.

His expression not one of agreement. A wave tumbles into them, briefly raising the water level to his mid-thigh, and he flinches. Actually flinches. A piece of seaweed drags past her leg, tickling her. He traces the movement with his eyes, for all the world looking like he wishes he could smite the poor plant into oblivion. Except … he can smite it. So, he's mostly just trying to restrain himself.
"Haven't you ever gone swimming?" she says, incredulous.

He glowers. "I'm not a fish."

She can't help but laugh at him. "I bet that never stopped you from using your hot tub."

"That is not swimming," he counters.

"It's still submerging yourself in water," she says.

"Hot water," he counters. "With a partner."

She raises her eyebrows. "I'm not a partner?"

He opens his mouth. Closes it. Opens it again. "Not the kind that I meant," he admits.

"What if I said I could be?" she says. "The kind that you meant, I mean."

She's not sure what possessed her to open her mouth. And once she's made the offer, she gets that sinking feeling in her stomach, particularly at Lucifer's stunned look. She just propositioned the Devil. What in the hell is she doing?

He regards her for a long, silent moment, lips parted. Like … she's rendered him unable to think, let alone speak. Probably because you've spent the past two years telling him no, and now he's trying to figure out what you're smoking, her irritating, tiny voice says.

Why is she propositioning him?

Except ….

You love him. Don't you, Dan said.

She steps closer to Lucifer. Though his nipples are pert, he's a long line of radiating warmth. His dark eyes are like traps, and she can't help but swallow, looking up at him, as she slides her hands low around his waist. Her fingers hover against the waistband of his shorts.

"Detective," he says, looking down at her with a carnal sort of hunger. "What are you doing?"

She gives him an innocent shrug and pulls him forward. He moves with her, this time. Until the frothing water is even with his groin, and the waves swiping past them raise the water to his waistline, soaking his shorts in the process.

Dan is echoing in her head. Make it less complicated.

She steps even closer, until she's pressed up against Lucifer's body, and she can feel him breathing. She splays her fingers against his chest, and a soft, unintelligible noise of desire gets caught in his throat. He leans into her. Like he wants to kiss her. Like he's going to kiss her.

She wants him to, she realizes.

Her lower body tightens, and her mouth goes dry just thinking about it.

Forget about all the reasons you know it won't work, Dan said.

And then a wave smacks into them, submerging them to the height of Lucifer's lowest rib, and he flinches away with a displeased shout.
She laughs.

He grimaces.

"This isn't bloody relaxing," he snaps, looking in disgust at his dripping, wet skin. "It's like taking a bath in a bloody icebox."

But at his righteous, aggrieved expression, she can only laugh harder. The idea that Lucifer the Morning Star, the archangel who strung up all the lights in the subzero temperatures of space, could be cowed by a bit of coldish ocean water, is ridiculous. He looks ridiculous. And it's made more ridiculous by the idea that he could, if he wanted, part the water like Moses with a snap of his divine-but-pruning fingers.

"This water is fed by melting glaciers in Alaska," Lucifer says unhappily as she tries to catch her breath, but the hilarity is all-encompassing. "How is this amusing to you?"

She rolls her eyes, panting as she wipes tears away. "The water is like 63 degrees right now."

"Precisely," he says with an indignant sniff. "I'm not built for arctic temperatures."

"Lucifer, you're invincible. And 63 degrees is hardly arctic."

He clears his throat. "That's … beside the point."

"What's your point, then?" she says, staring up at him.

He looks down at her and licks his lips. He shifts his weight from foot to foot, and the water sloshes. "I'm … not sure that I had one," he admits.

"Uh huh," she says with a grin. "Do you not know how to swim or something?"

"Of course, I know how to swim," he says. And then he adds primly, "There's very little novelty left in my life."

"Uh huh," she repeats, unable to stop smiling. She takes another step. The slope at her feet abruptly becomes steep, and, now, she's in the water up to her neck. She reaches forward and tugs on his swim trunks, trying to coax him forward. She doesn't miss the way he seems to press against her hand. "Show me."

He glares. "I don't lie."

"Uh huh," she repeats once again. "Pay up on my favor, and show me."

He regards her for a long moment. At first, he's merely scowling, frigid like the melted glaciers he claims he's wading in. But then the temperature in his expression shifts, and what was anger becomes a bit of a mischievous gleam.

"This is not relaxing," he insists.

And then, with a smirk, he grabs hold of her and drags her under the waves with him.

"So, now that you've frozen me solid, you wish to bake me?" he grumbles as they trudge back to where she'd set up the umbrella and the chairs.

She gives him a long, considering glance as he ambles to a halt next to the towels. His hair is plastered to his head, and his shorts, which stick to his skin in all the right places, seem barely able
to hold onto his hips. They've slid down an alarming degree, to the point that the happy trail she so admired earlier is widening like an arrow, like, hey, yank down on the waistband here for a show. A lone water droplet slides down his left pectoral, and she's struck with the intense urge to lick it off.

And he's staring at her with raised eyebrows.

She was blatantly ogling him, and he caught her, and ... She shakes her head, clearing her throat once, twice, again. "Sorry," she croaks.

"Are you?" he replies without amusement.

Holy shit, what is wrong with her right now? This trip was supposed to be therapeutic for him. Not ... whatever the hell she's turning it into.

She looks away. Sand has blown onto the towels, and she grabs one to shake it out. He follows suit quietly beside her. When she resettles her towel, she drops onto it and lies flat on her back. The sun is blissfully warm against her face, and she sighs. _Think about the waves_, she tells herself. Waves. Not the curve of his-

Something eclipses the sun, and she squints up to find him standing there. Looking down at her. The sun's corona gives him an actual halo, and the surreality is almost too much to bear.

An angel came to the beach with her.

How is this real life?

"You're standing in my light," she says.

"It's technically _my_ light," he replies with wan smirk. "I did put it there, after all."

She rolls her eyes and gestures to the empty towel next to her. "So reap the benefits," she says. "Soak some of it up."

He gives the towel an unimpressed look. "Very well," he says with a sigh, and he drops to his knees beside her, and then onto his back.

They lie side by side, shoulder to shoulder. The sky is a brilliant cerulean that stretches into eternity. The breeze billows against her wet skin. The smell of salt tickles her nose, and the gulls scream above the crack and crash of the waves. She couldn't not relax, even if she were trying. But when she tips her head to peer at him, he looks for all the world like he's wishing the sky would fall on him, if only for a distraction.

"You're seriously telling me sunbathing holds no appeal to you?" she says.

He glances at her. "Why would it?"

"It's purely self-indulgence," she says, frowning. "Isn't self-indulgence kind of your wheelhouse?"

He rolls onto his side and props his head on his elbow. He looks like a goddamned supermodel, and it isn't fair at all. He gazes at her with his dark eyes, and he smiles. It's a predatory smile. Not a happy one. "I prefer my self-indulgences to be more ... sinful," he admits in a velvet tone that makes her shiver despite the balmy air.

She licks her lips. He's doing this on purpose, she thinks. Oozing sex appeal. He has to be. Right? Or, maybe he's not. Maybe, it's so ingrained at this point, he can't turn it off. The thing is ...
"Make it less complicated."

"So, if I'd offered you sex on the beach, I wouldn't have had to drag you here?" she says.

This time, her proposition doesn't feel so much like it's flying in from left field. She kind of likes the sound of it. Chloe Decker is propositioning the Devil because she wants him, and what's so wrong with that?

He regards her for a long, unreadable moment. "Are we discussing the cocktail, or the act of copulation?" he says, tone strangely wary.

"Well, kissing, at least," she says.

His Adam's apple bobbles along his throat as he swallows. Hmm. Maybe, she's doing to him what he's doing to her. That's a fun thought. She drapes her arm against her hip, accentuating the curve. She watches his gaze shift as he follows the movement. His stare lingers. On her hip. Shamelessly. She thinks she sees his tongue as it briefly parts his lips.

The sight of her actually makes him lick his lips.

Wow.

"A shag on the beach … isn't as fun as it sounds, you know," he says, sounding flustered.

She hadn't even known he could get flustered. Not like this. Not about sex.

She gives him a sheepish grin. "I sadly do know."

"Do you, now?" he says, almost a purr as he recovers. He smiles. "Oh, you must tell me."

"It was with Dan."

"Poor Detective Douche," Lucifer says with a cluck of his tongue and a roll of his eyes. "Did the sand chafe his unmentionables?"

"Well, it certainly chafed mine," she says.

He smirks. "You have my deepest sympathies."

He stretches, his body forming a long luscious line as he flops onto his back. He gives the sky a perplexed look that wrinkles his forehead and gives him crow's feet. "Really, you just … lie here and roast? And this is fun for you?"

She snorts. "You have no idea how to relax, do you."

"What can I say?" he replies. "I prefer lust to laziness. It's a much more enjoyable vice."

"Okay," she replies with an easy shrug.

His eyes narrow. "… Okay?"

She scoots closer. "I want us to do what you think is fun and relaxing," she says with a pointed look. This whole beach trip was for him, after all. "So, I'm open to suggestions." Even if his suggestion is snogging on a beach towel. She wouldn't mind. Actually, she kind of hopes it is.

She reaches across the space between them, intending to touch his arm. He strikes like a snake, grabbing her wrist and holding it away at arm's length. "Careful, darling," he says with a dark
look. He seems … almost angry.

She frowns. "What's wrong?"

"This makes three times, now, that you've tempted me."

"Does this mean I have to try again?" she says with a grin. "I was hoping the third time was the charm."

His eyes blaze. "You will cease toying with me," he snaps imperiously, shrugging away from her.

He stands like he intends to leave. He thinks she's teasing him, she realizes. Her heart sinks. He thinks she's been teasing him this whole time. All day. And not teasing in a good way, but plucking at desires he's made plain to her like they're a guitar meant for playing. Of course, he thought that, her irritating voice says. He's the Devil. He's conditioned himself to believe that nothing fortuitous ever happens for free. That's how his brain works.

"Who says I'm toying with you?" she says evenly, rising with him.

He gives her a seething look. "I'm not here for your pity, either."

She shakes her head. "It's not pity, Lucifer."

"What, then?" he snaps. He's stopped walking away, at least.

She swallows. She can't afford to screw this up, or their whole friendship is probably going to go nuclear. She steps into his space, looking up at him. His eyes are fire and wrath.

Make it less complicated.

"Well, isn't flirting kinda the natural followup when your friend kisses you unexpectedly, and you like it?" she says.

His gaze crumples like she struck him. "Stop," he says, almost a stutter. He takes a step back. "Stop."

She frowns. Stop … what? She isn't doing anything. "What do you want me to stop?"

But all he says is, "… Why?" in a pained tone.

"We never talked about it," she says, pressing onward, since he's not really helping in the clarity department. "We never talked about when you kissed me. That's what I came to discuss last night, but we never did. You weren't exactly in a good headspace for it. But I … I liked it."

He folds his arms. "You … liked it," he parrots, shaking his head. "You …." Like he thinks he's in some sort of waking dream and has to verify everything. A barbed, upset breath spills from his lips. "Why are you …?"

She takes a deep breath. "Look, Lucifer," she says. He isn't human. He's older than all her direct ancestors’ ages combined. They have a great friendship, and this could easily ruin it. Their personalities are almost exact opposites of each other. Children perplex him at best, but she's a single mom. He's an addict. He's depressed and going nowhere good. She'll grow old and die someday, but he … won't. "There are about a zillion reasons why this - us, I mean - is a terrible idea."

"Yes, I know that," Lucifer snaps. He sighs. "I had an unfortunate lapse last week." His gaze
shifts to a point in space beyond her shoulder. To the water and the waves. His eyes get a bit of a sheen to them, and he sounds like someone yanked his heart out and stomped on it when he adds in a quiet, strained voice, "Though I quite understand your ire at me for it, I wish you wouldn't punish me. I'm …." He exhales roughly, and adds, even quieter, "Please. Stop."

She gapes. He really thinks that she'd wield affection like a weapon? Or, maybe, he's not thinking that much at all right now. He just knows his own context. And he resided over Hell. For millennia.

"Lucifer, I'm not punishing you, and I'm not mad," she rushes to say. "It wasn't unfortunate." She feels like she's about to jump off a cliff. How in the hell did she get here from hey-how-about-we-go-to-the-beach? "There's a really good reason why it wasn't unfortunate." She swallows. "There's a really good reason why we're a good idea."

"I don't bloody understand what you're trying to tell me," he snaps, upset as he shifts from foot to foot in the sand.

Her heart is thumping in her ears, and she sees the cliff, and she can't breathe. She can't breathe. But …. She looks down at her feet. At the edge of the cliff. The precipice. The fall. She's not ready to say this out loud. She's not. But this is a mess. She's messing everything up. She didn't count on him balking, of all people. And nothing good will happen here unless she makes it happen. She looks up at him, trembling.

Make it less complicated.

And she leaps.

"I'm trying to tell you that I love you," she says as the ground drops out beneath her.

He blinks, shocked for a moment. And then his eyes go arctic, and all his turmoil falls away behind a wall of frost.

"No, you bloody don't," he says, the words dark and ugly and cold.

Her landing is merciless. "Yes, I do," she says, trying to stay calm as she feels things breaking.

"You're infatuated," he says, folding his arms. "It's understandable. You saw the divine."

She gapes. He's actually attaching her confession of love to her weeks-ago meltdown? Seriously? He's that hard up to believe that someone could like him? "Lucifer, I am not infatuated," she snaps. So much for calm. "This is not some crush. It has nothing to do with your stupid wings."

She hasn't even thought of them in weeks, except in the context of grasping fruitlessly for ways to help him cut the fucking things off. "And how dare you presume to know more about what I feel than I do."

"I'm an object of desire, not love."

"You're not an object at all," she says. God, how can he be so … damaged? "You're a person."

His eyes narrow. "No, I am not."

"You know what I meant," she says. "Don't be pedantic."

He arches an eyebrow. "It is not pedantry to remind you of my origin when you require reminding."
"Do you have any idea how contradictory you're being right now?" she exclaims. "First, you think I'm infatuated with your wings, and then you think I need to be reminded that you have them in the first place?" She wipes angry tears out of her eyes. How in the hell did this go so wrong so quickly? "You're that determined not to believe me?"

His glare is the Abyss, black and bleak, and she's so upset she's shaking.

"You make me want to scream, sometimes," she says.

"So, scream," he replies. His words slide around her neck like a noose and pull tight. "No one is stopping you."

And then he walks away. He's walking away. He can't walk away like this. Maybe after, when he actually gets it, if he still doesn't like what she has to say. But not before. Not when he's so triggered that he seems categorically unable to believe her declaration. No fucking way.

"Lucifer," she says, dashing after him. At least, he doesn't disappear in a rustle of feathers. But he could. And that makes getting him to understand even more urgent. "Lucifer, wait." She grabs his arm. "Lucifer."

His grimace is a rictus of hurt as he whips around to face her. "Why must you torment me?" he says, almost a hiss as he snatches his arm away from her. "Leave me be."

"God, damn it; will you listen to me?" she snaps. "I'm not tormenting you; I love you."

"No, you do not," he says with a sneer. "What you love is the idea of a mind-blowing shag. The idea that you could literally come to God. Well, I can't deliver you God, darling. You can only come to me."

His words are a knife, and he's gutting her with it.

"You can be such a bastard, sometimes," she says.

"I'm the Devil," he replies. "What the bloody hell did you expect?"

"Right now? In this moment?" she says, glaring through a wall of tears. She folds her arms. "Definitely not sex with a conceited dick."

"Oh, you bite, now, do you?" he says, leering.

"Putting aside the fact that you're being a giant asshole with all the sex appeal of a troglodyte," she says, "I haven't slept with anyone but Dan in years."

A dangerous glint slips into Lucifer's gaze. He steps closer, crowding her, looming over her. Her heart starts to race. "All the more reason to desire my services," he says in that velvet tone of his.

"Your 'services' scare the shit out of me, Lucifer," she snaps, putting the word services in little air quotes. "Would you come off it?" She stares up at him, defiant, refusing to be cowed. "And stop crowding me, you dick."

He blinks. His lips part. He takes a step back, as requested. Regret consumes the ice in his gaze like a flame. And then all his nasty swagger drains away.

"I … scare you?" he says softly. He looks … crushed.

"Your 'services' do," she says, again using air quotes. She watches a man throw a frisbee to a
child, many yards the distance. The kid is laughing and laughing, and it's so incongruous with the mess over here. She glances back at Lucifer with a sigh. "Not you. You just piss me off."

His eyebrows knit. "Why would the prospect of shagging me scare you?"

"You're … well." She swallows. At least, this is more like an actual conversation, now. "You're you."

He gives her a questioning look like, When it comes to a fantastic shag, isn't my me-ness rather ideal?

"Lucifer, I've only had like four sexual partners in my whole life," she says. She'd never been much for the one night stand. She licks her lips nervously. "Don't you think that kind of imbalance with you might be a little intimidating to me?"

Lucifer frowns. "Intimidating."

"Yes, intimidating," she says, exasperated. "I'm intimidated." While she's not bad at sex, she's under no illusions that she's some kind of prodigy at it, either. What can she possibly give back to him that he wouldn't have received already in sixteen zillion different ways from sixteen zillion other people? "It's what normal people feel when they're worried they won't deliver as much satisfaction as they're given. I mean, for God's sake, you have a toy drawer." Meanwhile, her idea of something unusual is, perhaps, the inclusion of whipped cream.

His frown is only deepening. "You care if I'm satisfied," he says slowly. Like she just presented him with an impossible calculus problem or something. Solve for x, y, z, and q.

She sighs. "Yes, because I love you."

He shifts from foot to foot in the sand. "You're … not lying," he says in a low voice.

She throws her hands up in the air. "Finally, he gets it," she says, unable to keep her tone from bleeding frustration. It figures that she'd punch through the wall in his denial fort with sex as a visual aid.

"You're not …," he says, staring at her. Well, through her, anyway. He blinks. "I'm … … sorry."

He sounds dumbfounded.

Like he's not sure how he's existing in a world where this apology is required, and did he miss the exit ramp back to reality somewhere? Is he lost? Where is the Google Maps edition for dimension-hopping archangels? She can practically see the little cartoon birdies circling his head.

If she weren't so rubbed raw and exhausted, she'd laugh. "It's okay."

It's hard to be mad at him when he's this confused.

"And you don't have to say it back, by the way," she rushes to assure him before the conversation destabilizes again. She figures he's going to need about a metric ton of therapy with Linda before he can even admit to residing in the same zip code as love, no matter what the hell he feels. And … that's okay. She doesn't need his words.

"I …," he says vacantly.

Well, okay, she does need some words. Preferably more than a lone pronoun.
"Lucifer?" she prods.

But he's speechless. Like blue-screen-of-death speechless. The lights are on, but no one's home.

She frowns. "… Lucifer?"

The sound of his name a second time makes him blink, and a little substance returns to his gaze. He makes noise, deep in his throat - a strange, flummoxed syllable that says nothing. His eyes are wet and almost spilling. He swipes at them with his fingers. "Huh," he says, an overwrought bark that sounds sort of like a laugh.

He's laughing?

But before she can take offense, his gaze shifts to her.

"You're … not lying," he says quietly. Like a stuck record, he can't seem to get the track to advance.

She frowns. "Of course, I'm not lying."

"No, I suppose not," he admits. "You have my sincerest apologies." This time, his regret is directed. Less, Why in the hell am I saying this? More, I really should be saying this.

"It's okay," she repeats. "Lucifer … what happened?" She sighs. "I mean, I said …." She still can't quite believe what she said. "I said …." Multiple times, even, thanks to a righteous helping of outrage. "And you just … snapped."

He stares out over the waves. "The weight of memory is sometimes crushing, I suppose."

"You've had … a bad experience?" she hazards.

"I'm old, Chloe," he replies. "Older than you can possibly conceive."

"… So?" she says, stepping closer.

He shakes his head. "So, I've encountered no one but liars who see me as a means to an end. And it's been quite a long time." He scowls. "I suppose you could say I've nothing but bad experience."

"Well, I don't want anything from you but you," she says softly.

He blinks and turns to her, his ire at the past draining away. He regards her first with warmth and then with awe. Like she's holy, and he's come to her altar to pray. He presses his palm against the side of her face, stroking her cheekbone with the pad of his thumb.

"Yes, you're … outside of my realm of experience," he says with stars in his eyes. Every star he's ever lit. "You're … unpredictable." He sighs. "I'm sorry I forgot."

She has never in her life been looked at the way he's looking at her now. She's never in her life been this special, not even to Dan.

His rapture over her makes complicated things so simple.

Her heart starts to pound, and her stomach is filled with butterflies. "I love you," she repeats, now that he seems willing to hear it. The words come easier, this time, and the landing after the cliff is far less brutal. She can't help but laugh as she regains her footing, because she said it, and it's out,
and *wow*.

The stars in his eyes only brighten at her felicity.

"It seems I've still some novelty left in life, after all," he says.

His smile is divine.
Chapter Notes

I just wanted to thank everybody again for the lovely feedback on the last chapter. I was really worried how it would be received -- I'm glad my doubts appear to be unfounded :)

Chapter title credit goes to Florence & the Machine.

After discarding a few ideas, they find a compromise that caters to his idea of fun and to hers. She lies on her towel on her stomach, sunbathing like she wanted, and he kneels over her, her self-appointed masseur. Meanwhile, the sun laves her body with welcome heat.

"All right if I open this?" Lucifer says as he gestures to her bikini top. Specifically, to the bow-tie at the back. His voice is soft when he adds, "I promise, no shenanigans."

Of all the ways she could have expected the aftermath of her leap off the cliff to go, she admits, she hadn't thought of this as a potential option, but ….

Well, I put the anxiety there, he said. I might as well remove it.

She licks her lips. "Mmm," she says with a nod. "Yes; it's fine." More than fine.

"Good," he says. He loosens the tie and brushes the straps away with his palms, presenting himself with her naked back. "You're quite tense, and I need a proper field."

She twitches as he draws a meandering, ice-cold squiggle down her back with the suntan lotion.

And then he lays on hands.

Not like before, when he'd healed her. But she thinks this feels just as good. Maybe, better, because it lasts longer. His touch is warm and sure, and she can't help it as Devil-induced lethargy makes her eyes drift closed. She moans when he finds a knot near her shoulder blade and puts his weight into it.

The beach umbrella flaps in the breeze.

He seems happy to let things lie as they are without further discussion. Almost like … he's basking in the moment, or something. Basking in the moment when someone told him he's loved and he believed it. Which is a relief, frankly, because she's not sure she has any talking left in her right now.

Let him bask.

She'll bask, too.

He's a masterful masseur.

By the time she pulls into the alley beside Lux, the sun hangs low on the horizon, and the shadows are long. They spent all day at the beach. Both in and out of the water. Mostly out, since
he seems to think the Pacific Ocean is the Arctic Ocean. They'd talked some more, but it'd been about nothing of substance, and the whole day had been an idyllic timeout from escaping drug dealers and evil prayers and everything else. Beach going might not be his first, second, or even third choice for entertainment, but he knows how to make just about anything fun once he sets his mind to it, and once he'd gotten on the same page with her, well, he'd set his mind and then some.

His *joie de vivre* is a tornado that's hard not to get sucked up in.

That's something that she loves about him.

"Do you mind if I come by tomorrow after I drop Trixie off?" Chloe says. Is that clingy? That's not clingy. "I mean ….

Lucifer regards her for a moment with a curious look. "Not that I don't love your company, darling, but I thought you said you were on forced leave."

She frowns. "Well … yes?"

"For a week," he adds, eyes narrowing.

"Yes."

"As in seven consecutive days."

"Six more after this one, yes," she says, frown deepening. "So?"

He gives her a pitying look, though his eyes have a glint. "You have *no* idea how to take a bloody vacation, do you," he says. Not really a question.

He's paying her back for criticizing his skills at relaxation, she thinks. "How is spending a whole day with you not a vacation?" she says.

"Because you can spend a day at Lux any time," he says with a devastating smile, and her heart skips. The leather seat squeaks a little as he leans closer. "You've a whole week off with no option to work from home," he continues. "So, why not go to Vegas? Oh, or Hawaii, perhaps? Something away from your routine?"

She shrugs. "I'll go to Vegas if you'll go to Vegas."

The offer is out of her mouth before she's really thought about it. Six days in the City of Sin with the Devil himself. The idea's either brilliant, or she'll end up getting arrested. Or both. Her heart starts to thud, and she squirms in her seat.

"Hmm," Lucifer purrs. "Another favor? So soon? You'll owe me quite a lot if you're not careful."

"Well, ideally," she says, leaning closer. "you'd be going because you want to, not because I made a deal with you." She looks across the parking brake at him. "Do you want to go?"

"What would be involved?" he says.

She frowns. What *would* be involved?

"Same hotel room?" he prods. "Or would this be a slightly more platonic trip?"

Oh.

"Lucifer, I'm not …" She swallows. "I mean, I don't think I'm …." She sighs. "I mean, not that
the idea of sex isn't …" Shit. Heat creeps across her cheeks. Why can't they go back to basking instead of talking? She prefers basking by far. She clears her throat. "More platonic, please."

His gaze creases. "You really are intimidated," he says. Like he didn't quite believe it before.

"Not by you," she's quick to say. He seems to have a complex about that. "And it's not just that I'm intimidated. I'm flat out not ready to do that. I'm just not." She's only just barely gotten used to the idea that she admitted she loves him. Out loud. To his face.

"I'm assuming you do want to go in that direction at some point, given the subject of your flirtations," Lucifer says. He raises his eyebrows. "Yes?"

His tone is not unkind or impatient. Just baffled. Still, she finds herself saying, "What would you do if I said no?"

"Probably the same thing I'd do if you said yes," he replies with an easy shrug.

"Which is?"

"Tell you I'll go to Vegas with you if you so desire."

She blinks. "Really … the idea of a relationship with no sex doesn't bother you?"

"It bothers me that you're intimidated."

"I'm …." She swallows. "It's just …." She also doesn't get it. Maybe, this is where his yay-choice yay-pleasure-for-all mentality eclipses typical male id. Maybe.

"I've no interest in doing something you won't enjoy," he says. "I'm not bothered by your happiness."

And … wow. How can he be so clueless about love and yet be able to say beautiful things like that without a second thought? She doesn't get it. Maybe, this is where his yay-choice yay-pleasure-for-all mentality eclipses typical male id. Maybe.

"So, tell me, are we discussing hypotheticals, or reality?" he says, pulling her back into the car with him. His eyes are dark but soft.

"Hypotheticals," she replies. "I mean, well. Vegas isn't hypothetical. Just the living celibate part." She looks up at him. "I want to do …." Him. She clears her throat. "Eventually." Damn it, why is this flustering her so badly?

"Shall I make reservations, then?" he says, amusement twinkling in his eyes. "Two rooms? The manager of the Bellagio owes me several favors."

"Let me see if Dan will take Trixie, first."

"All right," Lucifer says. "I assume you want to go home and plan everything to death, now. Make to-do lists and such. Eliminate all possibility of anything exciting or impulsive or fun happening. Shall I leave you to it?"

She snorts. He knows her well. "See you tomorrow?" she says.

"Yes," he replies.

His eyes are hooded and dark, and he hovers there for a moment, body tilted over the parking brake. Like he's trying to decide whether to lean closer or withdraw. She saves him the debate by grabbing the soft lapel of his robe and pulling him closer. A warm whuff of air hits her face as he
exhales, and then she presses her mouth to his.

Their kiss is quick and soft and full of promise. A hello and a goodbye wrapped into one.

She can't help but lick her lips as he pulls away, hoping he left a bit of himself behind.

He clears his throat. "You're … quite surprising," he says with a laugh.

Like he's giddy, almost.

She makes the Devil *giddy*.

And with that, he pops open his seatbelt and opens the door.

"Do you want this on the seat or shall I dispose of it for you?" he says after he climbs out of her car, and she drags her eyes away from his quicksand gaze to look at what he's holding. The packet. On chickenpox.

"I'll take it," she says.

He nods and lays the packet on the seat.

She watches him go, unable to stop smiling. Her heart is pounding in her chest, and she feels lightheaded. Like she might float away.

Chloe Decker is in love.

How in the world did *that* happen?

She shakes her head, trying to clear her mind a little. She still has to pick Trixie up from Lakeesha's. She still has to make dinner. And, now, she also has to call Dan to see if he'll watch Trixie all week, she has to pack, and she really does have to make some plans and some lists. She can't believe how quickly this suspension turned into a good thing. Six whole days to-

She glances down at the seat. A haphazard look, really. At the chickenpox thing.

*You seem to be about as susceptible to divinity as Mother Teresa was to a good shag,* she can hear Lucifer saying, what feels like eons ago, now.

She blinks.

*It has nothing to do with your stupid wings,* she said.

She has six whole days to do whatever the hell she wants.

*What's a vaccine?* Trixie said.

*Me, if you believe Jenny McCarthy,* Lucifer replied.

Her eyes widen.

*There's a reason you're here,* Amenadiel said. *Just like there's a reason for everything else. It'll all come together eventually.*

She scrambles out of the car to chase after Lucifer.
"Maybe, it's like chickenpox for me," she blurts as she bolts out of the elevator.

He's standing by the bar in his black robe and swim trunks, and he hasn't had a chance to do more than kick off his flip-flops and pour himself some bourbon. His gaze creases with confusion. "What's like Varicella?" he says.

"Your wings, Lucifer," she says, panting. She stumbles to the bar. Her lungs are burning from her race to get up to his place. "Maybe … your wings … are like chickenpox."

He snorts. "Well, I've seen myself compared to a great many unpopular things before, but this, I admit, is a new analogy."

She takes a deep breath and blows it out as her lungs catch up with the rest of her body, and she slumps against the bar. She shakes her head. "I meant, maybe, seeing them once was enough to make me immune to normal effects of seeing them." She swallows. "Like … like I'm vaccinated, now."

"An interesting theory." His eyes narrow. "What is your point?"

"My point is maybe I can do it," she says. "Maybe, I can help you cut your wings off."

He sets down his tumbler with a thunk, staring at her.

"I mean, you said I'm resistant to divinity, right?" she says, barreling onward. "So, let me try. Let me try to help you."

He regards her for a long moment. And then he takes his shot of bourbon and downs it in a gulp. "No," he says after he's swallowed, and he sets the tumbler down again. "Absolutely not."

"Why?"

"Because yours is not a hypothesis that I'm willing to test," he replies. "Particularly not on you."

She sighs. "If you could cut them off, would you, still?"

"That's beside the point!" he snaps.

"Would you?" she demands.

He looks away. "You know that I would."

"Well, my choice is to help you do that," she says. "Maze won't, so I will." She folds her arms. "Are you going to refuse my ability to choose for myself?"

"That's not bloody fair," he snaps.

"It's completely bloody fair, and you know it," she replies. She takes a breath. "Look. It took me a while to unkink, but I'm okay, now." She thinks of the moment that she saw them. When they stood by his car in the police parking lot after apprehending Ryan Radcliffe. She remembers them. Every feather. Every jagged line and sharp edge. She remembers how they looked soft and hard at the same time, and she remembers they shone like all his stars. But the memory is just a painting, hung in her mind's eye for her to admire when she wants. She can take the painting off the wall. "Your wings are pretty, and I saw them, and I can honestly say in this moment that I don't give a shit."

He looks at her like she's grown her own set of wings. "You're serious," he says.

"But-

"If I really can't handle it …. If I see them, and I completely lose it again, well, at least we tried. We won't try again, and I'll have a whole week to recover before I need to be back at work. No harm. No foul."

"I would hardly call that no harm," he says with a sniff.

She sighs. "You saved me two nights ago, even though it hurt you."

"A little angst does not compare to-"

"A little angst?" she replies. Because that's what seeing his wings was. Angst. She doesn't have any lasting effects as far as she can tell, and none of the effects she did have were grounded in physical damage. "Yes, it does."

He grinds his jaw, but doesn't reply.

She steps around the bar, into his space. His body is warm, but tense enough to be a bow string. He sighs when she wraps her arms around him. "Lucifer, let me try," she says. "Please, just … let me try. Maybe, we can get you some relief. Don't you want that?" She swallows. "I want that for you."

He stares at the balcony with his dark eyes. His gaze is a perfect storm, and she can see it, then. Yes. Yes, he does want that. He longs for it like a drowning man yearns for dry land. But …. He shakes his head. He pours himself another glass of bourbon.

"Do you have … any concept … of what you're offering me?" he says as the liquid climbs to the top of the glass. He's not pouring himself a shot. Or even a double shot. He's filling the whole damned glass. "This is not a five minute ordeal."

She bites her lip. "Maze … gave me a pretty graphic rundown."

"When were you talking to Maze about it?"

She shrugs. "I asked her to help you. Last night. After our …. After I went home."

He takes a gulp from his tumbler, and he closes his eyes. He looks for all the world like he's trying to imagine himself on a beach. The beach they just left, maybe. Far away from all his problems.

"Look, all I'm asking is to try," she says. "We have the perfect opportunity right now."

He snorts. "Your definition of perfect is perfectly questionable," he replies in a wry tone.

She leans into him. His arms wrap low around her waist.

He sighs. "I'll … consider it." He doesn't sound happy, though.

Still, she thinks this is the best offer she'll get, so, she doesn't press it any more.

Trixie's been in bed for several hours, and Maze has come and gone, in pursuit of some sleaze bag bail jumper, when a soft knock at the door drags Chloe's attention from her novel to the front stoop. She glances at her watch. 12:08 a.m. Lucifer's the only person who regularly visits this late,
but he also doesn't knock. Frowning, she sets her book down on the side table and rises from the couch.

She presses her palms against the door and leans forward to look through the peep hole.

Sure enough, Lucifer's standing on her welcome mat, half obscured in shadow. In the dark, his skin has a faintly luminescent quality that takes her breath away. Why in the hell didn't he just come in? That's what he always does, now. She flips on the front light.

"Hey," she says, opening the door with a frown. The air outside is cool, and the street beyond is quiet. From the look on his face, this isn't a social call. "Why are you knocking?"

He regards her for a long moment with bleak, black eyes, his lips set in a grim line. "It isn't pleasant," he says.

She doesn't need to ask what "it" is. She says, "I know."

"It isn't pleasant for anyone," he clarifies, looking at her like he expects her to recoil. "*Maze* refuses to do it again, for Dad's sake."

"I know," Chloe says. "I see dead bodies every day, and they're not people who died gently." She folds her arms. "I can handle a little gore."

"This would be quite a lot more than a little," he snaps. "And you wouldn't just be seeing it, you would be perpetrating it. On *me.*" He stares at her for a moment, dark eyes searching. "The 'great expense to yourself' for your assistance would be profound. It will cut your soul."

She swallows as her heart starts to thump. He's scaring her, now. And she can't tell if he's twisting some truths and omitting others just to get her to back off, or if he's serving her truth bald on a platter. He would know more than anyone else the ways people can pervert their good natures into something dark. This is unmistakably his wheelhouse, and she doesn't want to discount his experience.

But he doesn't know everything.

And he doesn't know much about the feelings that would spur her to offer him aid. He doesn't know much about the elasticity those feelings bring. And he doesn't know that one can bounce back from quite a lot in light of them, either.

"I know," she says. "I still want to help."

His expression is one of bewildered frustration.

He shifts from foot to foot, and her straw welcome mat crunches under his feet. "I can't …." He sighs. "I'll require assistance. After."

"Lucifer, I know," she says gently. "*Maze* made it pretty clear that it's incapacitating."

And how heartbreaking is it that his penultimate defense is that he'll need more help than she's maybe thinking he will? Like that might somehow make it not worth it to her, when the rest of his much more frightening concerns wouldn't. He's a stranger to charity. Not by choice, but through lack of exposure. And given the length of his life, that just makes her hurt inside.

He steps closer, leaning against her doorframe. He swallows. "You'll … help me?"

"That's why I offered."
His gaze is a broken one that makes her heart squeeze. He doesn't want to do this. He doesn't want to do this at all. And he definitely doesn't want her to do it, of all people. But he's reached his tolerance, and what he thought he would somehow have to endure for the foreseeable future suddenly has a potential solution. A solution that could fix things immediately. It's not a palatable solution, but it's an effective one. Maybe. And he can't not choose it.

"Please," he says in a soft voice.

She steps aside. "Why don't you come inside?" she says.

They have some logistics to discuss.

"You're quite sure you wish to attempt this, now?" Lucifer says. He's standing in the center of her living room like an awkwardly placed support strut for her roof. "You wouldn't rather do it at Lux?"

She shrugs.

They need to know if she can even look at his wings before they make any plans to cut them off. If things go wrong, it seems to her like it would be easiest if she's already where she needs to be, so she can drool and cry and whine without having to endure a long car trip with him. She already double checked that Trixie is asleep. Then she put a chair in front of the door that her daughter won't be able to move without making noise. They'll have plenty of warning if Trixie is trying to get out of her bedroom. So, there's no risk of melting the brain of a minor.

"You promise to take Trixie if I end up being wrong about this?" Chloe says. "At least, until Dan can come get her?"

"Well, yes, but-"

"So, let's just rip the band-aid, then," she says as she steps around and sits down on the couch.

He laughs but it isn't a happy sound. "Rip the bloody band-aid, she says." He rubs his face with his hands, a stressed almost-syllable escaping with his exhalation.

She looks up at him. "Lucifer, it's fine. Whatever happens, I asked for it."

"Well, pardon me if I prefer your brain when it's not an omelette," he snarks.

She folds her arms. "Would you stop stalling?"

He regards her with an irritated look, and his sigh is blustering when he says, "You're certain you wish to try this?"

"Yes," she replies.

He looks up at the ceiling with a Why-do-I-let-this-bloody-woman-do-this-to-me? expression. And then he reaches for his shirt and starts to unbutton it. She'd be drooling over the makeshift striptease, but he looks so miserable she can't enjoy it. She watches his button-down fall to the floor, leaving him bare-chested.

"I'm ready," she says, in case he's waiting for a go ahead.

His shoulders roll a little.
The human eye isn't really meant to perceive the appearance of something from nothing. Not without a leading fade-in. And she can't help but make a startled squeak when, in the space of an eye blink, her living room is filled with a sea of gleaming white feathers. His wings are so large that they brush the ceiling and the sides of the room, and they're not even fully extended.

He knocks over a planter by the window accidentally, followed by a stack of books. He glares at the literature in free fall like he's galled by its audacity. "Oh, piss off," he snaps at it. But in the process of scolding the books, he hits a hanging picture on the opposite wall, sending it crashing to the ground. At which point he sighs with resignation, gives up his protests, and says, "I'll buy replacements," in a woeful tone.

His wings contract a little, but he doesn't fold them behind his back. She doubts he has the space to maneuver them.

She blinks, mouth dry. "They … didn't seem that big in the parking lot."

He gives her an incredulous look, but he doesn't move.

"You're all right?" he says, anxious. "No drool? No heart palpitations? No sudden, overwhelming urge to declare your undying devotion and fealty to a bunch of glow-in-the-dark feathers?"

She rises from the couch, staring. They're just as beautiful as she remembers, and she aches to look at them. "I'm …."

What is she?

She swallows.

The wings cast a warmth that fills her to the brim, and she can't help but pause for a moment and soak in the feeling. They're luminous. The sight of them - of him - twists up her insides and makes her heart hurt. These are not normal feathers. This is not normal light. He is the Light Bringer, and he is divine. But … he's not something that she needs as anything other than a companion. And she can deal with a stomach full of snakes and a knife in her heart for a little while if it means he'll feel better afterward.

"I'm okay," she says, smiling. "No omelette."

As soon as she says the words, the wings are gone, and she feels bereft. A little sad. But nothing at all like she felt the last time he'd taken them away from her. Her mind is still hers.

"Bloody claustrophobic in here," he's grumbling when she starts paying attention again.

This is actually going to work.

"So …," she says hesitantly, "how do you want to do this?"

"Well, definitely in this shoebox," he grousers as he bends to pick up his shirt. "I can't even unfurl properly."
Maze's knives feel impossibly cold in Chloe's hands. Cold and light and deadly.

It's been one day. One day since she discovered she can look at divinity without imploding. Less than one day, even, since it's only mid-afternoon. Dan had taken Trixie with a little convincing, and Maze's knives were easy to borrow, since Maze hadn't exactly been around to say no when Chloe had gone into her room to retrieve them. Not that Chloe mentioned that little detail to Lucifer.

Lucifer sits shirtless with an open bottle of tequila at the long wooden table in his dining area. The drop cloth on the floor crinkles under her feet as she moves across it.

"You don't want to try something more …." She glances at the tequila, frowning. "More?"

"Oh, be still, my heart," he says with a smirk, taking entirely too much delight in her question. "Are you advocating the use of illicit substances?"

"Well, do you have some?" she says, humorless as she raises her eyebrows.

He gives her an incredulous look. "Of course, I have some. Who do you take me for?"

"More heroin, maybe?" she prods.

"No," he says, "I'm not fond of it." Needles and messy prep, he said.

Heroin is the more dangerous sister of morphine. Under normal circumstances, she wouldn't touch it with a seventy foot pole, but it's a narcotic analgesic that's easy to obtain under the table, and she's about to perform what amounts to surgery. On an angel. And if it might help him feel a little less like he's having his limbs removed while he's awake, well ….

"Can you get some?" she says. She can't stop herself from looking down at Maze's knives. She traces the designs on the handles with her fingers. Her heart starts to pound. She's really about to do this.

"It won't help, darling," Lucifer says in a soft voice.
"Hmm?" she says, looking up.

He gives her a sad look. "Celestial metabolism, remember?"

"Well, yes, but … after?"

"Removing my wings won't remove that."

She swallows. "Oh." She frowns. "But you get drunk all the time. And you were high at that party. So, clearly, there's some obtainable amount that will-"

"Yes," he says patiently. "With quite a lot of maintenance."

Maintenance he's not going to be able to do when he's not feeling well. Damn it.

He nods at the cabinet across from the table, where he keeps his fine china. "I've some Oxy stashed in the top drawer." He looks at her. "Assuming, of course, that your presence resumes interfering with my invulnerability, it might be effective at human-sized doses if you choose to stay in close vicinity."

"Of course, I'm staying in close vicinity," she says. When it comes to supernatural injury, apparently her presence means jack to him, wings or no wings. He'll heal as fast as he'll ever heal, whether she's there or not. And Dan took Trixie, so …. "Why wouldn't I stay?"

Lucifer frowns. "Well, I doubt I'll be pleasing company."

"So?"

He doesn't seem to have a good counter to that, though she doesn't miss his bafflement, either. "Regardless, I can't consume the Oxy until after," he says. "If I consume it, now, I'll burn through it in a few minutes, at most."

She nods. "Okay." She steps behind him. "We'll save it, then."

"Hand me one of the knives," he says.

She holds it out for him, handle first. As soon as he wraps his fingers around the hilt and pulls the blade safely away from her, the blade begins to glow incandescent orange, like metal in a smelter. He puts the knife on a weird-looking plate. Heat resistant, maybe?

"To cauterize," he says, nodding at it. "It should cool down enough to be safe by the time you're ready to use it." And then, before she can blink, the plate and the knife are gone. "It's at the bar when you're ready for it."

She licks her lips nervously, shifting foot to foot as she stares at the remaining knife. "And I can't screw this up, right?" she says, breathless. "I mean, I can't kill you."

"With that blade?" Lucifer says. "You … could," he admits slowly, and her stomach sinks like a stone. Something must show on her face, because he rushes to add with a reassuring grin, "You'd have to be pretty bloody determined, though, given that my ribcage will be between you and all my vital bits."

His assurance doesn't help.

"Oh, my God," she says, staring wide-eyed at the knife. She knew it could hurt him. For some reason, it hadn't clicked that she could actually murder him with it, though. And he's trusting her
He regards her for a long moment, saying nothing. And then he turns away. He takes several hearty swallows from his tequila bottle. Then he rests his head on his folded arms, presenting her with his naked back.

And then she's staring at his wings again, and for a moment, she can't breathe. Her insides get that twisty feeling, and her chest squeezes like it's stuck in the jaws of a vise. She steps closer. The drop cloth crinkles.

There's about a hand's width of space between the left and the right wing. She reaches, fingers splayed, and then she presses her palm softly against his back. In the between space. This is the first time he's ever let her touch him here.

He inhales sharply, like he's surprised, but he doesn't say anything. Doesn't tell her she's just committed some horrible wing etiquette faux pas. So, she shifts. To the left. Onto the wing.

The feathers closest to his shoulder are small. Like they're more meant to cover skin than they are to assist in flight. And they're so soft. Velvety, almost. She can't resist the urge to stroke. Just once.

She has her hand on an angel's wing.

The concept is mind boggling and insane.

She has her hand on an angel's wing.

This beautiful piece of divinity.

And she's going to cut it off with a demon's knife.

"I'm going to Hell for this, aren't I?" she says.

The wings disappear out from underneath her fingertips in a flash of light and a rustle of feathers. "We're not doing this if you're going to feel guilty for it," he says. "I won't allow it."

She sighs. "It was a bad joke, Lucifer."

"A joke?" he says, looking up at her incredulously. "You joke about Hell to me? Now?"

"I'm nervous!" she snaps. "I say stupid shit when I'm nervous." She shifts from foot to foot. "Give me a break, okay?" Her eyes water. "I'm not a surgeon, I have no idea what the hell I'm doing, and this is going to hurt you. Probably a lot worse than Maze did. At least, she knows anatomy.
And ….” Chloe swallows around the hurting lump in her throat. God, she's really going to do this. Yesterday, when this moment was still in the future, it had been so much easier to be sure.

*It will cut your soul.*

"And … I'm just nervous," she finishes.

"Whatever happens," he says softly, "I've asked for it."

"Don't you flip that around on me!" she says. "This is different."

His eyebrows arch. *Really?* he seems to say. *You really want to make this a false equivalence?*

"Shut up," she says, though he hasn't said anything.

His lip twitches like he might smile. They share a warm look that stretches, and stretches. And then, with a deep breath and another swig of tequila, he brings his wings back out.

This time, she considers them from a bit more of a logistical standpoint. She touches the edges, feeling along the big, thick bone that forms the framework of the wing. Maze compared it to a femur, and it is, in size, but … in an anatomical sense, Chloe thinks it's probably more like a humerus. And a radius, and an ulna. Literally, like another arm. Except bigger and with feathers. The wing bone meets his back below his shoulder blade, where she can feel a protrusion underneath his skin. A secondary shoulder blade, maybe. Then there's a long flap of feathered skin below the wing bone that connects the rest of the wing to his back. She moves the wing up and down, trying to gauge the range of motion.

She glances at Lucifer. He looks … almost asleep. His eyelids are drooping, and his breaths are relaxed.

"This feels good to you?" she says.

He blinks himself back to awareness, but doesn't say anything. He's probably taking his enjoyment where he can find it right now, given what's coming. She doesn't bug him about it.

"Can you stop holding it up for me?" she says, giving the left wing a little pat. "I want to see how heavy this is."

The limb goes slack, and the feathers slide along the floor as he relaxes. She swallows. This is just … so surreal. And it feels so wrong, seeing his immaculate wings mingling with whatever dust is on the drop cloth. But she tries not to think about that, instead, leaning forward to see if she can pick up the wing without him helping. She wraps her fingers around the edge with the bone in it, and she lifts.

Holy shit.

"How in the hell do you fly with these things?" she says, grimacing as she fights gravity with the wing flopping in tow. "This is like a Boeing wing, not a bird wing."

"It helps to be unrestricted by the laws of physics," Lucifer replies wryly.

But she's too stressed out to banter with him right now. She just … can't.

She thinks, once she starts cutting, this weight is going to be a problem. She doubts he's going to be able to hold up the limb while she's sawing through it. Her stomach twists. The fleshy part with the small, soft feathers. The part that feels like velvet. She's going to saw through it. She's ….
lump in her throat is a softball, and she swallows several times, trying to push it back down.

She thinks for a moment, and then opts to pull out the table leaves, so he has more length of the table to rest on. Honestly, it's a drop in the bucket compared to his ridiculous wingspan, but she's not sure what else to do.

Okay. Okay, she's got towels. And the knives. And ….

"And I really can't just pop it out of joint by bending it the wrong way, like you can with a shoulder?" she says. That would still be awful, but … less.

He sighs. "If it were that easy, I could have done it. You'll have to cut through all the ligaments and connective tissues." He gives her an apologetic look. "My body is rather bomb proof, unless the bomb is from Dad."

Stop putting this off, her tiny voice says.

She glances at Lucifer. This has to be killing him. The waiting. But he's being nothing but patient with her.

"You're sure you're ready?" she says.

"Yes," he says. He takes another swig of tequila.

Her stomach is twisted up in knots, and her fingers are shaking as leans forward. She'll start with the left, she supposes. She swallows. She's starting to sweat. She feels sick as she grips the wing along the bone. "Going in three, two …." And then she plunges the knife just above where the wing bone and his back meet, through skin, and through muscle, until the end of the knife hits the maybe-another-shoulder-blade. A centimeter at most.

Lucifer makes a soft grunt, and his body tenses underneath her fingertips like a tripwire. But that's it. For some reason, she expected … more drama.

The wound weeps blood at a slow ooze.

Why is there not more drama?

"Whatever you're doing," Lucifer says tightly, "please, do it quickly."

Right. Right, right. She starts dragging the knife around the top of the wing, trying to make a big enough gash to see where she's going to have to force the dislocation. This part is fast, and Lucifer doesn't make a sound.

It's too easy, her little voice is saying. It's way too easy. Or, maybe, she'd built it up so far in her head, that-.

He makes an awful stifled choking noise when she finds the joint with the knife tip.

"I'm sorry!" she blurts, teeth practically chattering with stress as she pulls away. "I'm sorry."

"You needn't apologize," he says, a little strained. His hands clench into fists, and he's panting with discomfort.

She's not sure what the knife hit that hurt him so badly so suddenly - nerves, maybe? - but- She shakes her head, blinking back tears as she inspects the joint. With the bone unsheathed from the surrounding muscles, she can see what she needs to do, at least. But she's barely touched the blade
to the wound again before he's flinching away like she's burned him, and he flaps his massive wing in startled reflex. He knocks over everything in a twelve foot radius around the left side of the table. She barely dodges him. Blood splatters everywhere, turning his dining area into a crime scene.

This is the first time she's really understood that his wings aren't for being pretty. They're weapons.

She takes a step back for a moment, panting, feeling sick to her stomach. Was this a mistake? This was a mistake. She can't do this. She can't hold down an archangel who doesn't want to be held down. Maze was right. This is going to be like wrestling with a goddamned tiger. Except this tiger can destroy the known universe.

"Lucifer, I'm not Maze," she says, trembling. "If you can't hold still, I can't do this."

Lucifer raises a shaky palm to wipe his face. "Sorry," he says, the word thick and woozy-sounding.

"It's okay," she says, heart aching.

"I need … a belt."

She frowns. "Why?"

"To bite."

Oh.

She gives his bicep a squeeze, trying to reassure him, and then she leaves him for a moment to grab a belt from his closet. He has nothing really appropriate for withstanding bite force. Just a bunch of skinny Prada-style stuff he'd probably chew through in a second because it's for looks, not function.

"Bottom … drawer," he calls roughly. "My chest of … drawers."

She blinks. His toy drawer? Seriously? Still, he doesn't seem like he's joking. She wanders back into his bedroom, biting her lip. She really doesn't want to see this. Not now. Not yet. Maybe, not ever. But ….

With a sigh, she yanks open the drawer.

She blinks.

Holy ….

Ball gags. Handcuffs. A riding crop. A cat o' nine tails. Cock rings. Cock cages. Nipple clamps. Paddles. Anal beads. Sounds. A couple of different vibrators. A veritable cornucopia of restraints that she wishes were strong enough for angels who aren't "playing." And a bunch of things she's never even seen before and couldn't guess at their use beyond something to do with S&M, given that many of them look painful. After all the shit she's seen on the job, she thought she wasn't that sheltered, anymore, but this drawer is making her rethink things.

"Um …," she says, frowning as she peers at a peculiar steel ring - about two inches in diameter - that's lined on the inside with wicked-looking spikes. It even has a tiny padlock. Holy shit, does he put that on his …? Maybe, she's right to be intimidated, after all. "Lucifer, I … um." She clears her
throat. "I don't … see a belt in here."

"No," he yells back, a weird, unhappy quiver in his tone. "The whip."

Oh. Yeah. She supposes that will work in a pinch.

She grabs the crop and the cat o' nine tails since she's not sure which whip he means, and she carries them back to him. He selects the cat o' nine tails with shaking fingers and slips the fat end between his lips. His jaw bulges as he bites down. His eyes are slightly glazed, and she tries not to worry.

"Ready?" she says softly.

He nods.

"Okay," she says.

She steps closer. Thanks to him shaking his wing all over the room, the gash she made is gaping maw of torn muscle, now. A huge piece of bone is exposed to air. Even if they don't succeed, this will be a horrible mess for him to heal. She can't let this be for nothing. She takes a deep breath. "Going in three, two …." And she presses the knife to the wound again.

He aborts a yell and replaces it with spluttering. His whole body tenses, and he presses his torso against the table, like he wants to get away from her by melting into the wood. Spittle dribbles around the whip and onto the table, and he trembles.

"I'm sorry," she says, a litany. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry."

And then she jams the knife as far into the joint as it will go.

He yells like he's dying, and he snaps away from her, mindless, frenzied. The whip smacks into the table as he loses his mouth hold on it. The damaged wing is suddenly useless and limp and hanging off-kilter. He twists like he's trying to reach around and yank out the blade. The knife is wedged, though, and he can barely reach the handle, anyway. His sweaty fingers slip on the hilt as he scrabbles for purchase. Chloe backs into the wall with a thump, trying to give him space. Space to flail. Space to panic. Space to not hit her.

"Lucifer, stop," she says, eyes watering as he snarls at nothing. Blood is running down his back, soaking into his boxers. Her hands are bloody. Blood is everywhere. "You have to stop. Do you hear me? Lucifer. Calm down." She feels like a hypocrite, telling him to calm down when she's about an inch away from losing it, but …. "Lucifer. Please, Lucifer. Please, calm down.

Something in her voice must get through to him. Or maybe her prayer is what does it.

He flops onto the table, spent, panting. Every exhalation is half moan.

"Lucifer?"

"S-sorry," he says, a bare rasp. Sweat is pouring down his brow.

He grabs the whip and puts it back into his mouth.

She swallows. Her chest hurts, and she feels like she's going to vomit. There's something innately wrong with him apologizing to her when she's the one cutting him open. Worse, she doesn't think he'll be able to hold still for the rest of this, having now seen him fail to do so twice in a row. But he's got a knife stuck inches into his maybe-another-shoulder, now. They're going to have to get it
out regardless, and it's going to be miserable regardless. She might as well try to get it out in a way that helps them achieve their goal.

"Please, don't move," she begs as she steps closer. "Please. I know you're trying, but …"

He thunks his forehead onto the table once, again, three times, hard enough to make the table shake. Like he's trying to slam some sense into his skull. When he's gained some semblance of control, she grips the knife, which makes it judder a little.

His breathless whimper makes her insides twist, but he doesn't move.

Somehow.

*Please, don't move, Lucifer. If you want this wing gone, you can't move.*

"Going in three, two …." With a shaky breath, she throws her weight into it and starts to pry open the joint, using the knife as a lever.

And he howls.

But he doesn't move.

By the time the left wing falls onto the ground, detached from its owner, Chloe is a shaking, exhausted, nauseated wreck, and Lucifer isn't moving at all, anymore. Not because he's trying to hold still, but because he's worn himself into a suffering stupor. His lips look almost bloodless they're so pale, his stare is vacant, and he's drenched with sweat. He bit all the way through the whip, and he's scraped deep runnels into the table with his fingernails. His left arm is hanging by his side like it's useless. Like it's paralyzed. And she's desperately trying not to worry that she's somehow broken something she shouldn't have.

All this. From one wing.

The right wing is still intact and gleaming, though limp and completely unsupported. She tries not to stare at the gore on the floor. What had once been beautiful is now a mutilated mess of broken feathers.

She presses a towel over the steadily weeping wound on his back. He flinches underneath her palms, and his breaths become even raspier, but his is a weak, almost token protest of his mistreatment. "I'm sorry," she can't help but say. "I'm sorry." It's all she's been saying.

She's not sure whether to wait - to maybe give him some time to recover - or to just get the remaining horror over with, now, while he's so wasted from stress and exertion and pain that he couldn't struggle if he wanted to. It'd certainly be easier for her to do this when he isn't fighting wars with himself not to squirm.

She glances at him.

The table by his face is spattered with drool and vomit and other fluids, and he's just … lying in it. Staring at nothing.

He's lying in his own vomit.

This man who can't even tolerate Trixie's occasionally sticky fingers

Chloe blinks back tears.
Oh, who is she kidding?

She can't. She can't wait for him to recover. Because she can't do this again. Ever. Once she stops - once she dries off from this stress bath - she's not starting again.

She's not cut out for causing pain.

She's just not.

He was right about the personal cost.

She takes another towel from the stack and wipes off the table with it. She has to pick up his head. His neck is limp. He doesn't help at all.

"Lucifer?" she whispers as she sets a clean towel underneath his cheek. She pulls her fingers through his sweaty hair, trying to show him something gentle after so much pain. He blinks languidly, and his focus wanders to her. He's not really looking at her so much as through her, though. She swallows, lump in her throat. "I'm so sorry. I still have to do the right one."

He doesn't say anything.

She thinks his voice might be gone.

He grasps feebly at the larger half of the broken whip. She has to help him pick it up.

"Ready?" she says.

But he just stares into space.

She sniffs, and she wipes her eyes, and she grabs the knife off the table.

"Going in three, two . . . ."

He doesn't move at all, this time. She doesn't even have to ask.

When it's over, she has no fucking clue what to do.

His wings are a mangled mess on the floor, far too big for her to dispose of by herself. The room smells like burning flesh and looks like the scene of a murder. And Lucifer's so destroyed that he seems unable to do more than slump over the table where she butchered him. His whole body is quivering, and his breaths are nothing but shallow, laboring wheezes.

"Lucifer," she says, a whisper at first. He's not asleep. Just drifting with his eyes closed. She's pretty sure, anyway. "Lucifer." When he still doesn't budge, she repeats his name more stridently. "Lucifer. Lucifer, wake up." She hates to do it, given the ravaged state of his back, but she gives him a shake. Just a little one. "Lucifer."

His eyes open to slits, and he stares vaguely into space.

"Hey," she says. She smiles despite the fact that she only feels sick. "Hey, it's over. It's okay. You're all done. No more of that; I promise."

He swallows.

"Can you get up if I help?" she says. She wants to get him lying flat, so he can rest.
But he doesn't respond.

She wipes her eyes. "Okay. Well, that's okay. Um." Now, what? "Um."

The Oxycontin. That's right. She remembers. She dashes to the drawer where he said he stashed it. Sure enough, there's a baggie with twelve tablets in it. She grabs two and brings that and a glass of water to the table.

"Can you take these?" she says, holding out the pills for him.

He doesn't reach for them. He doesn't even try. She's not even sure if he's interpreting English right now. All he does is shake.

She steps behind his chair. The deep wounds in his back look angry and oozing.

Unlike in the movies, where cauterizing is magically done in one excruciating second with a brand so hot it's glowing, the real deal is done in repeated three-to-five second bursts using cooler temperatures. This prevents burning tissue that doesn't need to be burned. But it also stretches the awful process into untold eternity, particularly with larger wounds. And she did that. She did it. To a living thing. To him. And he'd felt every agonizing bit of it.

A brief swell of nausea makes her look away, and she has to swallow four times to keep from retching.

She gently grips him under the arms, intending to sit him up so he won't choke if she puts a pill in his mouth. As soon as she tries to move him, though, he makes a sound like she just slipped a knife between his ribs. It's an awful, twisted noise that makes the hairs on the back of her neck stand on end, and her innards feel like they've entered free fall.

She snaps her hands away from him. "I'm sorry!" she blurts. She can't bear this. "I'm sorry!"

She doesn't know what to do.

Stress tightens her insides into horrible knots.

"Lucifer, is this normal?" she says. "Is this what happened last time?"

Because he seems way more than just "incapacitated," right now. And this aftermath is not at all what he described when they discussed how this would go. He made it sound like he'd be in debilitating pain - which he clearly is - but also that he'd need help to walk to his bed and that he'd probably sleep for a few days after. Except, right now, he can't even get up, let alone walk with assistance. Him staring racked with misery into space isn't remotely sleeping. Hell, she's not even sure if he can move his left arm. And Lucifer had been trying to talk her out of doing this, so he wouldn't have downplayed any of the bad stuff he knew about.

Which is the thought that leads her down an awful rabbit hole.

What if she really damaged him? Are there nonfatal injuries an angel can't heal from? Or, maybe, he's slumped there, dying, while she wastes time agonizing over whether she's done more hurt to him than intended.

"Lucifer?" she repeats in a small voice.

But he seems either unwilling or unable to console her right now, and she doesn't know what to do.
What does she do?

Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.

She takes a deep breath and blows it out. In and out. In and out.

She can't help him if she's panicking.

*What's something about the situation that you can fix?* she hears Dan say.

She breathes. In and out. In and out.

She can try to make Lucifer comfortable. Well, more comfortable than "not at all," that is. That's what she can fix. Until he recovers enough to move a little and maybe swallow a pill.

She *hopes* he recovers enough to move a little and swa-

She grinds her teeth, pushing that thought away. No. No. Not going there.

Okay. Action plan.

She wipes down the table, cleaning away all the remnants of his torture. She wipes off his face, too. Then she grabs a pillow from his bed for him to rest his head on instead of the cold, hard table. She drapes a blanket over his trembling shoulders and across his lap, cocooning him.

"I'm here, okay?" she says, trying hard not to cry in front of him. "I'm just going to sit with you."

For a moment, he looks at her. Not through her. Not in her direction. At her.

She freezes. "Hey," she says, almost a gasp as she leans closer. "Hey. Lucifer."

But then he's gone again.

She collapses into the chair next to him, exhausted.

His wheezing makes her feel sick.

God, she hopes she didn't damage him more than she meant to.

The first few hours pass in a horrible crawl. She can't sleep despite her exhaustion, not when she can't figure out if she's listening to Lucifer's death rattle or not. Maybe, she should forget about potential consequences and take him to the hospital. The staff at UMC Trauma had been able to help him after his ordeal in the desert. Clearly, he has human-enough anatomy that humans can treat him somewhat competently. The extra bones in his back might baffle the doctors a little, but....

A crash snaps her attention in his direction. The glass of water she left by his face is tipped and broken, and he's shifting like he's trying to get his arms underneath him. Like he's trying to get up. His left arm's still not moving at all, but his right bicep is bulging with the stress as he puts weight on his hand. His wrecked gasp of pain grinds him to a halt for a moment, but then he's trying again despite agony. He figures out he needs to put his weight on his legs instead of his arms.

"Lucifer?" she says, scrambling out of her chair. "Lucifer, wait; you're-"

He lurches to his feet like he's on the blackout side of drunk, and his blanket sloughs to the floor. He sways into her as she wraps her arms around his hips. He looks at her like he has no idea
where he is. Or why he's there. Or who she is. Or what happened. Or anything.

"Hey, snap out of it," she says, trying to break through whatever fog he's drifting in. God, she feels so helpless. "Lucifer!"

He exhales thickly, like he's trying to form a word, but all that comes out is a harsh rasp. His shaking grip on her shoulder is tight enough to bruise. His skin is ice.

"Can you tell me why you got up?" she says.

He speaks, then - just a few faint syllables she can hardly hear - but it's like no language she's ever heard.

Like no language on Earth, really.

"I can't understand you," she says, trying not panic. "Lucifer, I-"

He takes a logy step toward his bedroom. Maybe, that was his idea all along. Maybe.

The walk to the bedroom is eternity. But he's walking. Well, shambling. Still, she'll take this as a sign of improvement, and her urge to call 911 lessens somewhat.

She helps him into bed, lying him on his stomach, pausing only to try again with the Oxycontin, but he won't take it. She leaves a fresh glass of water on his nightstand, and two pills next to the glass. If he wants it, it's there: easy to see, easy to reach.

And then she climbs under the covers with him. He won't stop shaking. And his skin feels glacial to the touch. He's usually such a furnace that she can feel him radiating even an inch away. Lying on her side, she scoots as close as she can get to him, until they're skin to skin, and her nose is pressed against his throat. She's afraid to get anywhere near his ravaged back, so she clutches his arm, instead.

And, finally, she sleeps.

She has no idea how long it's been when something breaks her loose from visceral, violent dreams. All she can say with any certainty when she opens her eyes is that day slipped into night at some point, and at first, she has no idea where she is. A few blinks bring things back to her, though.

Lucifer lies trembling beside her.

At some point, she rolled away, but he hasn't moved at all. He doesn't seem to have slept, either. His eyes glisten in the dark.

Her shirt pulls on her shoulder.

He's tugging at her sleeve, she realizes. It's the only thing he can reach without moving.

"Do you need something?" she says.

His words are so hoarse and thready that she can hardly hear him, but she can hear enough. Enough to know that even if he were talking loudly, she wouldn't understand a word. All she can really work with is his tone. And his tone says something is desperately wrong.

"I don't know the language you're using," she says, trying to stay calm. "Do you remember
But he doesn't reply.

"Spanish?" she prods. "Recuerdes español?"

Still nothing.

She squeezes his shoulder, trying to reassure herself as much as him, only to snap her hand back in shock. He hasn't warmed up at all while she's been asleep. If anything, he's gotten colder. She'd piled on every blanket she could find in his closet when he wouldn't stop shivering, and he's somehow colder. Like someone stuffed him into a fridge. She runs her hands under the blankets, down his torso to the waistline of his boxers.

Stress floods back into her like a wave.

He feels like a corpse in the morgue.

He rolls his face into the pillow and makes a low-pitched distressed sound, deep in his throat, like the precursor to abject weeping, but that's as far as it goes. She scrambles out of bed to raise the thermostat. It had been set at 80 already. She bumps it up to 90.

This is wrong.

Something is wrong.

Really wrong.

"Lucifer, is this normal?" she says futilely when she returns.

But all she can hear in the deathly quiet is him panting.

"Lucifer," she snaps.

He's gone again, though. To wherever mental space he goes when he's awake but not really.

She can't take this anymore. She can't. Something is wrong.

She picks up the phone on his nightstand. Maybe, she can't call 911, but she has no problem eating crow and calling Maze. Not if it will save his life.

She lies along his side, rubbing his arms, trying to keep him warm. The lights flip on less than twenty-five minutes after her plea for help, spearing Chloe's eyes like javelins. "What the hell?" Maze yells. She points to the doorway, and Chloe imagines the feathery carnage strewn on the floor far beyond in the dining area. "You took my knives?"

"Maze," Chloe exclaims, rising from the bed.

"Decker, what did you do?" Maze snaps.

"What the hell does it look like I did?" Chloe snaps back, too tired and stressed for politeness. She gestures to Lucifer. Even with the thermostat set to 90, even with her wrapped around him and generating body heat for him as she sweats because she's roasting, he's still freezing. "Please, tell me this is normal. Please, tell me I didn't screw this up."

"Shut up for a sec," Maze says, and Chloe clamps her mouth shut.
Maze pulls away the blankets and inspects the wounds, and then she presses the back of her hand to his forehead. Whatever she feels doesn't seem to satisfy her. "Wake up," Maze says. "Lucifer." She shakes him. "Lucifer, you need to wake up. Lucifer."

His eyelids flutter, but that's it.

"Did I do something wrong?" Chloe says. The lump in her throat is painful. "Did I hurt him? Please, tell me I didn't hurt him."

Maze gives her an are-you-crazy? look.

"I mean, did I hurt him more than I was supposed to?" Chloe clarifies.

"How long since you did this?" Maze says, gesturing at Lucifer's back.

Chloe glances at the clock. "It's been about eight hours since I finished."

Maze frowns. "I … think he'll be okay."

"You think?"

"Hey, I've cut an angel's wings off once. I'm not exactly an expert on how it's supposed to go. I just know what happened last time."

"And this happened last time?"

Maze's lips form a grim line. "Decker, he was as fucked up as this and then some. I would have told you, but you stopped me before I could finish."

For a moment, Chloe can only gape, horrified. She can't imagine how it could be even worse than this. She sits by his hip and rubs his arms. He feels like he's been lying in wet snow. The friction doesn't seem to help at all, but she has to keep trying.

"Do you know why he's so cold?" she says. "Is it shock or something? Can he get shock?"

"Angels are huge reservoirs of divine power, and you just yanked the plug," Maze says. "He'll be cold until his body figures out what the hell just happened and turns on the backup generators."

She directs a glare toward the ceiling. "And when you fucking plug him back in out of fucking nowhere, after he's been running cold for six years, his whole fucking system gets blown out."

She sighs frustratedly and gives Chloe a helpless shrug. "That's my working theory, anyway."

As far as theories go, it's a decent one.

"He didn't warn me about any of this," Chloe says, lump in her throat. "He said he would sleep."

"He probably didn't remember most of it," Maze says, sparing him a glance. "I don't know if you noticed, but this is pretty fucking traumatic. I mean, beyond the physical shit, he's metaphysically hemorrhaging."

Hemorrhaging. That's … a terrifying word.

"But … this is what happened last time," Chloe says in a small voice. "You're sure."

Maze nods. "Yeah, Decker. Like I said. He got way fucked up. But he did get better."

Chloe can't hold it in anymore. She bursts into tears.
"Hey," Maze says, stepping closer. "Decker, it's okay."

"I thought he might be dying," Chloe says, sobbing. "I thought, maybe, I did something wrong." He still might be dying. Maze's assessment isn't altogether reassuring.

"You really did all this by yourself?"

Chloe wipes her stinging eyes. The lump in her throat is so big it hurts, and she can barely swallow. "Yes. You wouldn't, so I did."

Maze shakes her head. "How in the hell did you …?"

Chloe shrugs, sniffling. "He held still."

"How?" Maze demands.

Chloe shrugs again. "I don't know. I just asked him to, and he did."

Maze looks at Lucifer. And then at Chloe. She seems … categorically shocked. But whatever she's thinking, she doesn't voice it. She looks at Lucifer again, and then she says, "We need to get him into the shower."

Chloe sits with him on the floor of his ginormous walk-in shower. The steam is thick enough to choke on, and the water is just shy of scalding. She'd turn the heat up even more, but she doesn't want to boil herself alive. She has to hold him upright, draped over her shoulder, because he can't seem to do it himself, and his back is too screwed up to support his weight when she rests him against the wall. He's cold and he's limp and he's staring at nothing.

They sit for thirty minutes.

Forty.

Fifty.

If the situation weren't so dire, she'd take time to envy his water heater. But she feels like she's holding a corpse - if it weren't for his choppy, labored breaths, and Maze's repeated assurances that this happened last time, Chloe would be convinced he's dead - and she's close to breaking down again.

Metaphysically hemorrhaging, Maze said.

Chloe feels sick to her stomach.

But then he moves. Just a little. He tips his face toward her neck, and it's a purposeful kind of movement. Like he's consciously figured out her body is warm while his is not, and he's trying to get closer. Then he lifts his hand to put it on her thigh. Not in a sexual way. More like he's holding on for dear life. She wraps her fingers around his and gives them a squeeze. He's like an ice cube, clutched in her palm, but ….

"Hey," she says as the water pours down like rain. She swallows. "Lucifer, hey."

Her heart starts to pound. Though his eyes are pinched with pain, his gaze has actual substance as it sweeps from left to right in a slow arc, and then winds around to settle on her.

"Hey," she repeats. She pushes her fingers through his wet hair. "Do you feel warmer, now?"
He swallows. His lips are the shade of chalk. "This isn' … hhhow I … 'magined," he slurs. She can barely hear him over the thunderous spray.

The lump in her throat hurts. "I'm so sorry," she replies, almost a gasp. "I'm so sorry if I made this worse than it needed to be. I didn't mean to."

"No … shhower," he says.

She frowns. "What's wrong with the shower? Is it too hot? Do you want to get out?"

"T'd've m-mmade it … fun."

She blinks when she realizes what he's actually talking about - that this current shower is decidedly not what he fantasized about when he pictured her in it with him - and she can't help the smile that radiates from her lips. Oh, God. He must be feeling a little better if he's making a joke. Badly, in that it requires playing connect-the-dots to understand it, but he's making one, at least. In English. With innuendo, even.

"It's okay," she tells him. "We can pretend the next one is our first together. I'm sure you'll make it entertaining."

He doesn't reply to that. His soft, panting breaths buffet her ear. His weight seems to sink into her even more.

She strokes his wet arm, shoulder to elbow. "How are you doing?"

Her stomach twists when he can't seem to muster an assessment, and all he does is stare at the water spiraling into the drain. But at least he's talking a little in English, now. He's talking a little in English, and he's moving, and he sort of seems to understand what's going on. That's improvement.

"Is he alive, yet?" Maze says as she yanks open the shower door without knocking. "He should drink this if you can get him to swallow."

Chloe looks up to find Maze holding out a stainless steel thermos. Hot coffee, if the smell is any indication. Chloe reaches for it, cheeks blazng, only to have Maze roll her eyes with a snort. "Decker, I've seen everything he's got, and I have everything you've got. Don't be such a prude."

"Blame … Eve," Lucifer murmurs absently.

Chloe frowns. "What?"

"Gave 'er … f-frruit."

Chloe blinks. Every time she thinks she has a handle on the company she keeps …. A sudden, absurd wave of hilarity bowls her over - she blames exhaustion-spurred delirium - and she laughs. Fuck, her life is strange.

What little coffee she gets him to drink, he can't keep down. She thinks maybe his body is too shocked to deal with digestion right now. And he won't warm up. The best she can do is get him to the point where his shivering isn't paroxysms. It's like … he isn't generating any heat of his own. All he can do is soak it up from external sources, but his baseline is so high that nothing is sufficient. Maze swears up and down that he can't freeze to death, even without wings.
He might wish he were dead, Maze said. But he won't actually die. Probably.

Probably? Chloe almost growled.

Maze merely shrugged. Well, he didn't die last time, did he?

After Chloe towels him off, she helps him into a clean pair of boxers - the old ones are crusted solid with blood - and a pair of designer sweats she found folded in the darkest corner of his closet. The walk back to his bed is treacherous and slow. He actually swoons, and Maze has to strong arm him to keep him from sliding to the floor in a gangling heap of shaking limbs. After Maze deposits him on the lip of his mattress, she leaves him and Chloe alone for a little while.

Chloe strokes his left arm - the limp arm - as he sits slumped over by his nightstand, eyelids drooping at half mast. All of his weight is resting on her, and it's tempting to let him go back to the less suffering place he goes when he isn't lucid. But he's here, now. Well, more here than there, anyway, and she has to know.

"Lucifer," she says, and his eyelids flutter. She squeezes his triceps and gives it a shake. "Lucifer." Focus oozes back into his gaze. When he's looking at her, she squeezes his arm again. "Lucifer, can you feel this? Can you feel me touching your arm?"

She's not sure what she's going to do if he says no. Maybe, take him to a specialist? But …

"Mazzzkeen …" is all he says, faintly, slurred, and he doesn't move his arm at all.

Chloe frowns. "No, it's me," she says. "It's Chloe."

He blinks slowly. His gaze is bright with pain. "I mean … why?"

She tries and fails to keep her eyes from watering. "Because I thought you were dying."

His only reaction is a distant, bewildered, "Oh." He seems to have the same amount of emotional connection to what she's saying as he would if she were to tell him, By the way, Trixie won the spelling bee, and she has to stop and rub away recalcitrant tears as they spill out of her eyes. It takes him far too long to add, "Am I?"

A lump forms in her throat. "I really, really hope not." She swallows. "Maze thinks you're not."

"… Okay."

She strokes his arm again. "Can you feel this?" He doesn't reply, but his elbow flexes a little. She shifts her hand to his palm, and he grips her weakly with his icy fingers. She wilts with relief. "Why are you not moving it, then?" she says. "Does your arm hurt, or something?"

But he doesn't answer. His breaths are labored rasps. And a sinking, twisting part of her reminds her … she did this to him. She did it. She's why his arm is wrecked and he can't breathe and he's cold and he hurts and he's barely cognizant of his surroundings even at his most lucid. She's why.

And the fact that he wanted this without reservation does very little to make her feel better.

This will cut your soul, he said.

"I'm really sorry," she says, though she's said it many times. She can't help it.

"Where is … everything?" he says, eyes glassy.

Her heart starts to thump. Fear is a cold knife just like Maze's. "What do you mean?" she says,
frowning. But his gaze is starting to look through things again. "Lucifer?" She shakes him. "Lucifer! What do you mean?"

He blinks. "Your eyes're my favorite stars," he slurs.

And then he's gone again, and no amount of calling his name brings him back.

She finally gets the Oxycontin into Lucifer around hour eighteen. The analgesic effects don't seem to help him much at all, but the soporific effects are a huge boon. Instead of vacillating between here and not here, he sleeps. And she thinks that can only help. Between that and the fact that he's talking more, now, some of her stress sloughs away.

"Are you mad at me?" she asks Maze, who's standing at the bar, cleaning her knives.

The knives Chloe had taken.

The knives Chloe had used.

The knives Chloe had left on the table caked in Lucifer's blood.

"I'm mad you didn't clean them before this shit dried," Maze says, scrubbing. "I'm mad you stole them."

Chloe swallows. "But …?"

"I'm not mad you used them," Maze says. She sighs. "You could have just asked me, and I'd have given them to you."

"Oh," Chloe says, feeling slightly guilty.

Maze glances toward the dining area, toward the broken, bloody wings. "This was really stupid of you."

"Well, what was I supposed to do?"

"Um … try nothing?" Maze scoffs.

"That wasn't an option," Chloe says. "Maze, they were killing him. Maybe, not physically, but-"

"I'm not talking about him," Maze snaps. "He can do what he wants to himself. I'm talking about you. He could have killed you. He fights hard. Even without wings. And the part of his brain that says don't eviscerate friends isn't exactly firing on all cylinders when he's being cut to ribbons."

"He didn't fight me."

"But he could have."

Chloe blinks. "Maze, are you actually … concerned for a hypothetical me?"

Maze rolls her eyes. "More like worried about a hypothetical him moping for eternity because he clocked his favorite human."

Chloe grins tiredly. "Right."
He writhes in his sleep, and he shouts. Like he's living through what she did to him all over again. When he's awake, he drifts back and forth between present and away, like his brain is barely tethered to the rest of him. When he's present, he lacks almost any ability to connect thoughts together. And when he's away, he stares into a deep void only he can see. And he's cold. All the time. He hasn't stopped shivering in two days. Even when he's wrapped in her arms, soaking up all her body heat.

"I don't feel right," he says, hollow, distant, like he's floating outside of his body.

"What's not right?" she says.

"I'm … missing."

She replies, "What does that mean?"

But he can't or won't answer.

Maze swears up and down that this is what happened last time.

Chloe doesn't care if it's normal, at this point. It doesn't feel normal.

She wishes there was something she could do besides just be there.

By hour seventy-two, Chloe finds him sitting on the floor, one bloody wing draped across his lap. Color has yet to return to his lips. His hair is an unwashed, uncombed mess. He's wearing a black bathrobe that makes him look even paler than he already is. His body has yet to stop trembling. And even loaded up on Oxycontin, he's in a stupefacient amount of pain. She can't imagine how he did this before with no home but a stolen pickup truck, and no help but Maze. No wonder he doesn't remember.

"Hey," Chloe says softly, sitting down beside him.

He's stroking the now-dull feathers, staring into space.

"I'm sorry I left them on the floor," she says. "I had no idea what to do with them."

"They're gone," he says.

She frowns. "What's gone?"

He swallows. "I can't hear them anymore. I can't hear … any … anything."

Her chest constricts. "That's good, right?" she says. "That's what you wanted?"

"It wasn't a good vacation."

"I don't care about the stupid vacation," she says. "I care about you."

His response to that is a dumbfounded look. Like … even after everything … he still can't quite believe that somebody loves him enough to go through this with him for free. He makes a weird noise, deep in his throat. Like a hmm, but more guttural.

"Thank you," he says, though his tone is weirdly distant, and he seems like he might be drifting out of body again.
She smiles, trying not to worry. "You're welcome."

"I'm sorry I scared you."

"Don't worry about it."

He swallows, pulling a feather loose from the jumble in his lap. It's a long white primary feather with a bladed edge, unblemished save for a bent tip. Away from the devastated, bloody wing, she can see it still has a faint glow to it. Nothing like before, but ….

"You should take this," he says, holding it out to her with a shaking hand. "Take as many as you like. Strip the wings bare if you wish."

She frowns. "Why?"

"Because I want you to have an answer if you pray."

Okay. From the look on his face, this moment has a deep meaning she's completely missing. She'll need to ask Maze. Or him, when he's a bit less ruined by this whole experience.

She takes his offering without further protest. The feather is like velvet in her hands, and looking at it fills her with a hint of warmth. She can't help but sigh.

"Thank you," she says.

He shrugs like he barely hears her.

Something just doesn't seem right. Something beyond the fact that he's hurt. She peers down at his hands. He's petting them. The wings. The feathers. Like … they're something beloved. When she knows they're something he abhors.

"Are you okay?" she says. "I mean … aside from the obvious?"

He makes a soft, sick-sounding noise. "I forgot how empty it feels."

Her chest constricts. This sounds eerily familiar. She frowns, thinking. I need him to be here, she said when Lucifer revealed his wings to her and then abandoned her. She felt empty and cold when she couldn't see them anymore. The first few days. Just by getting a glimpse. How much worse would that feeling be when the source - the warmth and the light that fills one to the brim - comes from within, and then, one day … that source is gone? Not just gone, but cut out by violent force.

"Everything is … m-missing," he continues, staring at nothing. "I'm … missing."

And all at once, what his father did to him has a whole new facet of cruelty carved into it. And she feels sick. This can't be right. This just can't be. This can't be what God intended. For Lucifer to put himself through this again. And it also speaks horrifying volumes about Lucifer's perspective on God's will that he's willing to do this to himself just to escape from it.

"Lucifer," she says, lump thick in her throat.

His gaze shifts to her, and then he's back in the room. With her. Not somewhere far away. "I'll be all right," he says with a hollow smile. "I've done this before."

But that doesn't make her feel better.

It only makes her feel worse.
It only makes her feel worse.

This will cut your soul, he said.

And she's starting to feel all the gashes.

On day four, he's ready for a brief excursion outside his penthouse.

Maze and Chloe do all the work since he can't lift anything heavier than a coffee cup. They all stand outside Lux in the alley after dark. Next to the dumpsters by the rear fire exit. He still looks like death, but he doesn't need help to walk anymore.

He lights a match with still-trembling fingers. A blaze unfurls from the dumpster in moments, heating the air in the alley, and blotting out the light-polluted, purple sky above with black, billowing smoke. He watches the wings burn, an odd mix of hatred and rage and grief and glee in his eyes, and only when every feather is reduced to a fine black ash does he look away.

He sneers up at the sky.

"Thanks for the gift, Dad," he says without an ounce of gratitude.

And then he flips God the bird with both hands as he turns his back on the smoking remains.
Hello, all! Thank you for waiting so patiently. I had a very nice Thanksgiving and hope you all who celebrate did, too.

The reference in the last line of the chapter is to The Tyger, by William Blake. If you haven't ever read that poem, I recommend taking a look. It's often analyzed as religious allegory, with the Tyger representing Satan.

Chapter title credit goes to The Birthday Massacre.

Enjoy!

Chloe stands by the stove in the kitchen, scrambling eggs for breakfast while Trixie sits at the center island, and bacon sizzles in the microwave. The morning news murmurs faintly from the television in the living room, but she's hardly paying attention. Her eyes burn with exhaustion - she hardly slept. But today will be her first day back at work, and she can't contain how happy she is to go. The past week had been … harrowing. To say the least. And she's looking forward to some normalcy.

"Lucifer!" Trixie exclaims, and Chloe turns to look just as the microwave dings.

Trixie slides off the stool and runs to the front door, where Lucifer is stepping across the threshold. She flings her arms around his waist and presses her cheek against his hip. He sways under her onslaught. Like the impact actually set him off kilter.

"Hello, child," he says, absent all of his usual swagger, as he gives her a pat on the head with a trembling hand.

Trixie looks up at him. "Are you cold?" she says, and she hugs him tighter like she thinks she can help.

But he doesn't answer her except to spare a brief glance downward.

He's pale. Too pale. There's a pinched look to his expression that speaks of discomfort. And instead of his normal suit ensemble, he's wearing a black, padded coat that covers his body to mid-thigh. The neck is zipped up to his chin, and his free hand is stuffed into his pocket. Except it's 72 degrees and sunny outside, and his wardrobe choice sticks out like a jack-o'-lantern at Christmas.

"Offspring, will you be so kind as to allow me the use of my legs?" Lucifer says to Trixie.

Before, he would have just dragged her along until she got the idea and let go, and Chloe frowns, watching them. Once Trixie releases him, he shuffles ungracefully across the apartment to the kitchen, stopping once he's beside Chloe. He puts a hand on the counter. His presence beside her, normally large and looming, seems … less.

"Hello, darling," he says without gusto. He just sounds … sick.
"Hey," she replies, stifling a yawn. "I wasn't expecting to see you today." When she left to pick up Trixie from Dan's yesterday, Lucifer had been sleeping. Curled up under a down comforter, and a polar fleece blanket, and a set of flannel sheets she'd been surprised he even owned. He'd been sleeping more and more as the intense shock of trauma gave way, at last, to full-time healing. And she hadn't had the heart to wake him when his body so clearly needed rest. "Sorry, I didn't say goodbye yesterday."

But he gives her apology a dismissive wave, as if it hadn't even crossed his mind to be offended. "Are you all right?" he says, frowning. "You're not one to yawn in the morning."

"Fine," she says, nodding as she pushes the finished eggs out of her frying pan onto a waiting plate, and then pulls the bacon slices off the grease-laden paper towels resting in the microwave. "I just didn't get a lot of sleep," she says. She sets the plate on the island for Trixie. And then Chloe turns to him.

"Why didn't you sleep?" he says.

"I just didn't," she replies with a shrug.

He's looking at her, gaze hooded with suspicion, like he knows there's more to the story. But he doesn't press it, at least.

She steps into his orbit and embraces him low across the back, careful to avoid his injuries. Underneath the coat, he's shivering, and he presses closer to her, like he's still drawn to her warmth. She indulges him - or, maybe, herself - and pulls him closer. "How are you feeling?" she says.

"Like I've been butchered and stuffed in a bloody ice box for later consumption," he scoffs.

A lump forms in her throat, and her eyes water. "I'm … sorry," she says, voice cracking. For the briefest moment, her reaction seems to baffle him. And then a flash of regret crosses his eyes, and he tilts his head as he looks down at her. "I didn't intend to characterize your assistance as butchery. I only meant I feel cut up."

But suddenly all she can think of is the sound of him choking on vomit as his wing bone finally popped free of the socket. Her stomach turns. Her chest constricts. She squeezes her eyes shut, and then all she can see is blood, drowning her mind's eye by the bucket.

Their embrace shifts, then. She's not holding him. He's holding her. He rubs her back. "Darling, I swear," he says in a soft voice by her ear, too quiet for Trixie to hear, "I'm grateful. I'm more than grateful. I'm indebted. I know I look as though a light breeze could displace me, and I thought you might be less concerned for me were I to employ my usual sardonicism. It was my mistake."

She sniffs.

"I don't think of what you did as butchery," he assures her.

He doesn't sound like he's employing misdirection, at least. And he sounds genuinely better. Not well. But … better. So much better than he had the past few days, anyway.

She presses her ear to his chest. With such a thick coat in the way, she can't hear his heartbeat. But it helps. His arms around her help.

She strokes his arm, and the high pitched scream of her fingernails brushing nylon makes her smile. "I didn't even know you owned a real coat." Let alone ever wore anything made of nylon.
"Well, I didn't until yesterday," he replies. "Of all the lovely things humanity has invented, same-day shipping is one of the greater delights. The Internet is almost as good for the temerity of I-want-it-now as brick-and-mortar, at this point."

She can't help but laugh. At the sound, he tips up her chin with his thumb and smiles down at her. Though his pinched expression broadcasts his ongoing discomfort, his eyes are dark and fathomless and warm, and for the first time in too long, he seems happy without caveats. She likes him happy without caveats.

"Much better," he says to her, a soft murmur, and whether he's observing his success at improving her mood, or telling her about his own improved status, she has no clue. Either way, she'll take it.

When they pull apart, Chloe's attention wanders back to the center island. Trixie is staring at them, jaw open, eyes wide, fork clutched by her plate like a tiny trident. "Are you guys having sex?" she says with disbelief.

"That's rude to ask, Trixie," Chloe says, hardly more than a knee-jerk reaction. "That's a very personal question."

Trixie's fork sags against the plate, hitting the ceramic with a "tink" noise, and she looks at her placemat. "Sorry, Mommy."

"Also, this is not shagging," Lucifer adds, looking down at Trixie. "This is standing. A good shag involves quite a lot more friction, and were I to be participating in one, I assure you, I wouldn't be wearing enough layers to moonlight as an onion." And then he turns to Chloe, whose face is heating up faster than the eggs she just scrambled. "Really," he continues with a disdainful clucking noise, "your offspring's education is frightfully lacking. Shall I-"

"No," Chloe says, shaking her head. "No, no, no. My daughter is not getting sex ed from you. No way. You ... um ..." She gets a good look at his devious expression. His eyes are twinkling. "You're joking. Aren't you."

"Trouble with the obvious must be a longstanding family trait," he says with a smirk.

"Ha, ha, ha," she says without (much) amusement. "Monkey," she adds, looking at Trixie's empty plate, "if you're done with your breakfast, why don't you go finish getting dressed? I need to get you to school."

"But Lucifer-"

"Will still be here after you get ready," Chloe counters, giving Lucifer a questioning look.

"Yes," he says, looking at Trixie. "I promise not to abscond whilst you're indisposed."

Trixie frowns. "What's abscond?"

"He means he's not leaving," Chloe says. "Now, go get ready. Okay?"

Trixie heaves a put-upon sigh, slides off her stool, and tromps out of the room. That's definitely a conversation that's going to need to happen. Telling Trixie that Chloe and Lucifer are ... doing ... whatever it is that they're doing. Once they actually clarify what "whatever" is, and Chloe has something coherent to tell. She might need to bring Dan in, too, for that chat, because as much as Trixie likes Lucifer, Chloe doubts that'll be a smooth discussion. No kid wants to see a parent getting replaced, even if it's just the appearance of it happening, rather than the real deal.
"Okay, really, what are you doing here?" Chloe says, yawning as she turns back to Lucifer. "I mean, not that I don't want you here, but …?"

His eyes narrow. "Well, I thought I'd pop by the precinct with you," he says slowly.

For a moment, she feels like she might burst, and she's unable to stop the grin that pulls at her lips. "Really?" she says, though it's a silly question, given his utter lack of sarcasm. But then reality intrudes a little, and she notes his coat again. And his shivering. And the fact that he's leaning against the center island like a tree that's ready to topple. "Are you sure you're-?"

"I'm quite able to sit," he says. "I'll leave the heavy lifting to you and your new partner."

Emily. Chloe's heart sinks. She forgot about Emily. The woman just got promoted. Chloe likes her. Things can't return to status quo without leaving Emily out in the cold, and that's … not an option. But-

Lucifer eclipses her view as he steps in front of her, and his smile makes her heart skip. God, he looks good when he's happy. "Has anyone ever told you, Detective," he says, stepping closer, "that you worry far too much?"

As she noted earlier, Lucifer might be better, but he isn't well.

At all.

That fact becomes more pronounced in a matter of minutes, after they leave her apartment. He can't sit straight in the car. He leans forward, tipped at an awkward angle so his back doesn't touch the seat. And though he does converse with Chloe - and even Trixie - for a little while in the car, they lose him as soon as Chloe pulls onto the highway, and the rumble of the road noise and the car's engine intermingle hypnotically.

His dark eyes glaze, and he stares into a void beyond the windshield that only he can see. She reaches across the parking brake and rubs his arm, trying to see if she can rouse him from his out-of-body stupor, but he doesn't even seem to notice her touching him. He's just … gone. Like he'd been gone for a lot of last week. She'd been hoping the space-out sessions were over, but ….

"Mommy, what's wrong with him?" Trixie asks.

"He's just not feeling well," Chloe explains as she pulls into the passing lane and accelerates. "He … um … had back surgery last week."

"Why?"

"Because it was hurting him."

"So, his brain is mushy, now?" Trixie says.

Chloe frowns. "I … guess you could say that."

"He's not funny like you were."

"Funny like when?" Chloe asks.

Trixie grins into the rearview mirror. "When you came home from the hospital after that bad man shot you, and you were all spacey, and Daddy said the medicine they gave you made your brain all mushy like mashed potatoes."
Chloe snorts. "I … can't say that I remember that."

"Mommy, it was so funny."

"I'll bet it was," Chloe agrees.

"Lucifer," she says, giving him a gentle shake. The car engine ticks as it settles in the precinct lot. He spaced through dropping off Trixie. He spaced through the whole trip, really. "Lucifer, we're here." She debates whether to leave him in the car, so he can come back from the planet Neptune on his own time. Unlike a pet or a child, she thinks a sick, shivery archangel might benefit from roasting in a hot car for a while. Still …. "Lucifer."

He blinks, and a little substance returns to his gaze. A deep, confused sound loiters in his throat. He swallows. He looks without seeing at the black-and-whites parked to her left and right sides.

"Hey," she says, and that's enough to pull him back the rest of the day.

He rubs his eyes and squints at his new surroundings. He looks unwell. More like when she left him last week, and less like when he arrived this morning.

"We can call you a cab, if you want to go home," she says gently. She has plenty of experience with that irritating window of time after an injury or illness, when one feels well enough to think an excursion back into the real world is a doable thing, only to regret it later, when there's little opportunity to fix the situation.

"No," he says. "I'm all right."

She frowns. "You don't look all right, Lucifer."

"I've seen nothing but my bed and my bathroom for a week, and very little more than that in the week preceding. I'm going bloody stir crazy. I can't …." He sighs. "I'm all right enough to sit at your desk and people-watch. I don't plan on tackling suspects, or engaging in high speed chases, or even stealing Daniel's pudding, for that matter."

She regards him for a long moment. "Okay," she says. There's not much else to say. She's glad he wants to get out again without her dragging him, at least. She'll take that as a good sign. "Do you need help out of the car?"

"I can manage on my own, thank you," he says, not exactly grousing, but … not entirely kindly either. He disengages his seatbelt and reaches for the doorframe with a trembling hand. As soon as he puts all his weight on his arm, his expression opens up into one of abject pain, but he pulls himself up, anyway, and he lurches to his feet beside the car. He leans against the door, panting for a moment.

She lets him do his thing. He's an adult, she tells herself. He's an adult - he's older than the planet, for crying out loud - and he can decide on his own what he needs, and what he's willing to subject himself to.

Still, that doesn't stop her from stepping around to his side of the car and waiting - she won't call it hovering - beside him while he catches his breath. For a moment, it seems like there isn't enough oxygen in the world for him, and his fingers curl against the roof of the car as he takes noisy breaths. She stares at his hands as they slip on the metal of the car, and the memory of his fingernails scraping runnels into his table is only eclipsed by the memory of the awful keening noise he made while he did it. She flinches before she can stop herself.
"Chloe, are you all right?"

"Just … bad memories," she says.

"I regret that I'm the source of them," he replies.

She blinks. "How did you …?"

"I told you it would cut your soul," he says quietly. Not a haughty *I told you so.*

"But-

He gives her a soft look as he slides his arm around her and pulls her close. "I exist to punish evil," he says. "I know intimately what torture does to the victim. And I know intimately what it does to the torturer."

"But … at least you know the people you're … um." Torturing. She clears her throat, trying not to boggle that she's suddenly discussing the logistics of damnation with Satan. "They're in Hell for a reason. They feel they need punishment, and you're giving them what they feel they need."

"That doesn't change what perpetrating torture does to you," Lucifer says. "Not until you harden yourself. And you …" He presses his lips to the top of her head. "You are anything but hardened." He sighs. "I'm deeply sorry to have put you through that."

She shrugs. "Hey, you warned me up and down what would happen. It's not your fault I didn't listen. And I appreciate that you let me make my own decisions."

"It wouldn't bloody be free will if I didn't, would it?" he replies, though in this particular instance, he doesn't seem that enamored with the idea of choice.

She glances up at him. She has trouble seeing him as a torturer. No matter what he says. "You're … not hard, either, you know."

He snorts with amusement.

She elbows him in the ribs. "Shut up. You know what I meant."

"I … suppose you could say I'm not as I was before I arrived here," he concedes with a sigh. "The prayers never used to disturb me. I could make myself cold to them as easily as I could raise a whip to the guilty."

"Could you still raise a whip?" she says.

He's silent for a long, long moment, and his gaze becomes weighted. Like time is a thing with substance and heft, and too much of it is crushing. He's old. Far older than his flesh looks. He's old like a twisted, gnarled tree, and his is a life that's been shaped by more experiences than she can fathom. Those experiences are scars, like letters carved into the bark of the tree.

And none of those carved letters are initials scored within a heart.

"Do not mistake me for someone on a path of reform," he says, peering at her with that weighted gaze. "I'm not."

"I don't," she says. "And I wasn't implying that you should be. I didn't mean it like that."

He frowns. "Then what?"
She shrugs. "Just … it's amazing to me that you feel anything at all, at this point." She looks up at him. "You're strong. But I don't think you're hard."

Her eyes water as she thinks of him again. Yelling until his vocal cords are shredded, and he can't yell anymore. All while his blood spurts underneath her fingertips. And, yet, here he is, untroubled. She wishes she could feel pain in the moment and then, when it's done, be done with it, and let it go. Like he does.

"I wish I could be like you," she says.

"You shouldn't," he replies, older than time.

She doesn't know what to say to that. And the silence between them stretches. But at least, it's a comfortable one.

She leans against him with a sigh. He's shivering, but he's solid, and he accepts her weight without much difficulty. It's nice to talk with him, away from Trixie, away from the stifling claustrophobia of suffering in his penthouse. His ability, finally, to complete thoughts and to converse without losing his place on the page of reality, is much more reassuring than his current frailty is concerning.

"Lucifer … where do you go?" she says. Maybe, she'll finally get an answer.

He frowns. "Pardon?"

"When you … drift," she replies, watching a squad car as it rumbles past. "You're here, and then you're not here. Where do you go?"

His eyebrows knit. "I don't know that I can explain."

"Try," she prods.

He stares into space. "I was … bigger. Before. … Much bigger than my skin. And, now, it's all …." He shakes his head, thinking. "When I reach for it, it's … gone."

He doesn't sound disturbed by the idea anymore, at least. That things are gone. Not like he did last week when she caught him petting his broken feathers. Still, she can't help the lump that forms in her throat.

"So … when you space out," she says, "it's because … you can't find something that should be there?"

"It's … disorienting." He frowns. "Perhaps disorienting is an understatement."

No kidding.

"And that's better to you? Feeling like you're incomplete?" she says. "That's better than having wings?"

"I am diminished," he admits with a nod. "But I don't feel incomplete. What's left is mine and no one else's, and what's gone are only things I'd been made to borrow." He swallows. "Chloe, I understand your inclination to be disturbed by this, particularly in light of the current side effects, but … I assure you. That's all they are. Side effects. And I will heal. I'm already healing." His smile is unadulterated and perfect. "Really, did I seem incomplete or unhappy when we first met, or in the many months since then, before I was taken?"
"No," she says. She can admit that much easily enough. "Give or take a few weeks here and there."

"Well, anyone's entitled to a few mood swings, yes?"

"Yes," she says. She can admit that much easily, too.

"All right, then," he says with a nod. "Now, shall we?" He gestures toward the precinct entrance in the distance. "Or would you prefer to continue navel gazing on my behalf?" He smirks. "I'll admit, you're quite good at it."

"What can I say?" she replies with a grin. "I do like looking at your navel."

His chuckle makes her feel warm.

"Hey, why do you even have a navel, anyway?" she asks as they walk. "Aren't you basically a big ball of light when you're not on this plane?"

"You would perceive me the same way in any dimension," he says.

She raises her eyebrows. "But are you? The same, I mean."

His chuckle becomes a guffaw. "You've the most amusing questions," he says.

"Well, are you gonna answer?" she prods.

"Darling," he says, "I've a navel for the same reason I sound British."

"And that is?"

"Because it seemed like a fun idea at the time. Why else?"

"Well, what about the big-ball-of-light thing?"

He snorts. "Come, now, I need some air of mystery, don't I?"

"No," she says. "I like open books."

"Has it occurred to you that perhaps everything is a big ball of light? I mean, technically speaking."

"Really?" she says. "Even here on Earth?"

"I often wonder how you humans function with such limited perception," he says, eyes twinkling.

"You know," she replies with a sigh, "if answering questions with not-answers was a sport, you'd be a gold medalist and then some."

"I know," he says.

And he gives her what could only be described as a shit-eating grin as he reaches forward to hold open the door for her.

The second they enter the police station, Lucifer's entire demeanor changes. He shrugs off his coat and drapes it over his arm. Everything she's been seeing this morning - the shakiness, the discomfort, the weakness - melts away. He takes a long, leonine strides, moving with grace she
didn't know he still possessed. He's not even shivering anymore. The only thing he can't fix is his lack of color.

The meeting with Lieutenant Monroe is a quick one, and true to her word, she's willing to reshuffle partnerships immediately to get Lucifer and Chloe paired up again, though Lucifer insists he's quite happy to play third wheel for a while. Chloe thinks it's because he doesn't believe he'll be all that useful right now, anyway, but Lucifer makes no mention to the lieutenant that he's not feeling well. With no reason given to delay, the lieutenant promises she'll have things taken care of by the end of the week at the absolute latest.

"Lucifer!" Ella exclaims as they return to Chloe's desk. "Hey, buddy!" Ella wraps her arms around Lucifer's waist and pulls him in for a fierce hug.

He makes a disturbed noise and inches back a step. "Yes, hello," he says, holding his arms away from her like he thinks she has cooties. "Please, stop."

"Man," Ella says. "You have-"

"Boundaries," Lucifer replies.

"I was going to say a severe hug aversion," she says with a sigh and steps back from him. He sets to work immediately, brushing away any remnants she could have left behind, wincing in particular at a long black strand of hair that got caught on a button.

"Wow," Ella says as her attention shifts to Chloe. "You don't look like you just had a whole week off. Are you okay?"

"Fine," Chloe replies. "Just haven't been sleeping well."

"They got a new coffee maker in the break room," Ella says. "You should try it out."

"Oh?" Lucifer says, looking up from his molecule-by-molecule inspection of his cufflinks. "Espresso? Cappuccino?"

Ella shrugs. "Nah. Just some $40 thing we all pooled for."

"Well, that's terribly sad," he says, eyes gleaming with all sorts of why-won't-someone-ask-me-for-a-favor. "No special features?"

"It makes coffee, dude," Ella replies.

"And you pooled for that?" he says.

But Ella's already jumped the conversation's tracks, and she asks him, "Are you back or just visiting, anyway?"

"I'm back," Lucifer says. "But I thought I'd just sit and watch, today."


Lucifer pulls one sleeve straight, and then the other, to complete his Ella-cleansing ritual. "I'm quite capable of inactivity, you know," he replies in a prim tone.

"Yeah, right," Dan says with a snort as he steps into the room, carrying a manilla folder. "You have the attention span of a fruit fly."
"I bloody well do not," Lucifer says. "Not when it suits me otherwise."

"Right," Dan says. He gives Lucifer a head to toe appraisal, eyes lingering for a long, long time on the winter coat draped on Lucifer's arm. Eventually, though, he lets the oddness slide. "Nice to see you back, man," he says with sincerity.

Then he claps Lucifer on the back. Right where Chloe knows he's been cut open.

What little color Lucifer had drains out of his face like his throat is now a sieve, but he doesn't flinch. Doesn't make a sound of pain. Doesn't sway or give the appearance of buckling. He takes a deliberate, slow step to the side, leaning his weight surreptitiously against the desk, but if she hadn't known already that he was injured, she wouldn't know it, now. He made it look like he was just shifting his weight, not collapsing.

She had no idea how thoroughly Lucifer had let his guard down for her until this moment, when his walls are bricked back into place for everyone else, complete with mortar and fortifications.

His chameleon skills are second to none when he chooses to employ them.

She resists the urge to gape and draw attention to his performance. Instead, she leaves him behind to chat with Ella and Dan. Stopping only to inhale a cup of coffee - okay, two cups - she surreptitiously grabs Lucifer a chair from the break room. One of the chairs without arms. So he can sit sideways without weight on his back. She drags it back to her desk without comment, only to find him already sitting. At her desk. With his back pressing against her chair's lumbar supports like it's any other day, and he didn't just have two limbs removed in the vicinity of his spine last week.

As soon as he sees what she's brought for him, though, he's all too quick to transfer seats, shooting her a grateful look in the process.

"Hey, it's your party man!" Emily exclaims as she arrives wearing her knee-high riding boots and designer jeans. "Nice to see you again, Mr. Morningstar."

"Detective Blake," he says with a nod.

Emily smiles. "So … what did I miss? It looks like I missed something."

"And I promise, I won't leave you in the lurch," Chloe rushes to say after she brings Emily up to speed. They stand in the hallway outside, watching through the glass as Ella, Dan, and Lucifer interact. "The lieutenant swore to me that any move she assigns you will be lateral." Chloe's not sure how that's going to be accomplished, given that homicide has no un-partnered detectives right now, but the lieutenant's never given Chloe a reason to doubt her word.

"Chloe. Relax," Emily says, grinning. "We've been partners for like five minutes." She gestures at Lucifer, who's sitting imperiously with his arms folded, like he's some sort of king on a throne. "Meanwhile, your party man's been working with you for more than a year, now, and you have something else going on with him in an extracurricular sense. I wouldn't take it personally, even if you did ditch me." She gives Lucifer a considering look. "I have to admit, I'm kinda curious, anyway. It'll be cool to work with him for a little while."

"Curious?" Chloe says.

"About whether even half of what I've heard is true."

Chloe snorts. "Probably all of it is true and then some."
"Okay," says Emily, grin widening. "My anticipation has reached a fever pitch."

Chloe gestures to the open doorway, toward Lucifer, Dan, and Ella. "After you?"

Chloe thinks there must be some unspoken rule of the supernatural world. A rule that when someone is literally one of the worst people in the universe to tangle with, said someone will not point out to the general public that rolling the dice on an altercation, now, might be less unwise than usual. In the hour since Emily's arrival, Lucifer's facade hasn't crumbled once. He hasn't even looked longingly at his coat since he hung it up. And though he hasn't stood up, he hasn't hinted that his sitting has nothing to do with sloth.

"So, I watched Mr. Jones last week while you ladies were out," Dan says, as they all lean over Emily's desk, peering at the surveillance photos he's taken, "but it doesn't look like he's up to anything. I didn't even see him leave his apartment."

"In a whole week?" Emily asks. "Are you sure he was even home?"

Dan shrugs. "His car was in his parking space."

"That doesn't mean much with things like Uber," Chloe says.

"All I can tell you is what I saw while I was watching," Dan says. "And I didn't see him leave or return."

"And Jones is one of the dealers associated with Sunny's?" Lucifer says.

"We think so," Chloe says with a nod. "He's the one who actually led us to Sunny's in the first place."

"Well, I imagine the whole operation's gone to ground for a while," Lucifer replies with a cat-caught-the-canary smirk. "It probably got a little too hot for them."

Emily shakes her head. "You know that crazy fire is still burning?"

"It will for a while, yet, I imagine," Lucifer says. "Hellfire is quite resilient in this dimension." He inspects his onyx ring. "I wish I could tell your fire department not to bother wasting its resources, but you humans have an annoying habit of not believing a word I say."

Dan and Emily look at him, frowning.

"Case in point," Lucifer adds.

"Hey, man," Ella says and gives him a gentle pat on the arm. "I believe that you believe." She grins and glances at Emily. "He's flawless. Never breaks character for anything."

"I'm seeing that," Emily replies.

Chloe clears her throat. "So, Dan. About Mr. Jones. I don't see any pictures taken at night."

Dan turns back to his photos. "Yeah, I didn't tail him after hours because I had to watch Trixie," he says. "So, it's possible he's doing something in the evenings that I didn't catch. You want me to-?"

"Why surveil him at all?" Lucifer says.
Dan gives him an *are-you-serious?* look. "Because he's our only lead," Dan says slowly.

"Yeahhh," Ella says, frowning. "all the other leads got nuked by your so-called 'hellfire,' went insane, or disappeared."

"No," Lucifer says impatiently, "I mean, I could have a little chat with him."

"I thought you didn't like 'party policing,'" Chloe says, arms folded.

"Oh, I don't, no," he replies. "And if they'd stuck to parties, I'd not queer their pitch." His gaze is inferno as he brings it to bear on the photo of Jones. "But they've since graduated to kidnapping and murder, and I *do* take exception to that."

"So … you'll do your thing?" Chloe says, unable to stop the hopeful smile that crosses her lips.

She makes eye contact with him for a moment. His hard gaze softens, like he can't look at her without sentiment, no matter what kind of untouchable vibes he's trying to give off. "I will, if you desire it," he says.

"It would be a *huge* help," Chloe admits.

Emily frowns. "What are we talking about?"

"People like to tell me things," Lucifer says.

"Wait, so it's *true*?" Emily says.

"That I'm the Devil?" replies Lucifer. "Why, yes. Yes, it is."

Emily shakes her head. "No, I mean that you can make people confess."

"Well, I can't *make* people confess," he says. His smile is wolfish. "They just like to share their deepest, darkest little desires when I ask, and even sometimes when I don't."

"Oh, my God," Emily says. "Do it on me!"

Lucifer's smile drips away. "I beg your pardon?"

"I want to see how it works!" Emily says, almost bouncing. "Do it on me!"

"You're bloody serious," he says.

Emily nods. "I'd heard you could hypnotize people, but I thought it was bullshit. Come on, do it." She gestures to herself. "Hypnotize me up, already. I gotta see this."

"Um, Emily," Dan says, "it can be kind of embarrassing."

But Emily only shrugs. "I'm willing to be embarrassed," she says. "It's for science, after all." She and Ella exchange a fist bump, and then she turns back to Lucifer. "So, whaddaya got?"

He rolls his eyes, but he seems willing to play ball, at least. He leans forward, into Emily's space. "Emily, darling, look at me," he says in a low, velvet tone, crooking his finger just in front of his eye, drawing her attention to his dark gaze. As soon as he makes direct eye contact, Emily's jaw goes slack, and her stare glazes over. "Yes, that's a good girl," he purrs. He holds her gaze for a moment. "Now, tell me what you want. What you really, *really* want."

Chloe can't help but cackle at the ridiculous imagery he just conjured in her mind's eye.
"Dude," Ella says with a snort, "you can't use Spice Girls for-

"Sometimes," Emily confesses, "I want to take a candy bar from the checkout aisle. Just … slip it right into my pocket and not tell anyone."

"But have you?" Lucifer says, eyes gleaming.

Emily nods. "When I was on leave last week, I took some Reese's Cups from Ralph's."

"Well, well, well, you little kleptomaniac," Lucifer says with a smile. "I admit, I didn't expect you to have taken the plunge since I had my little look-see. Do the calories not count when you steal?"

"I felt bad," Emily adds, blushing. "I went back to pay for them."

The lights die in Lucifer's scintillated expression. "Well, it doesn't bloody count, if you have no follow through," he grumbles.

His disappointment seems to break his hold. Emily blinks once. Twice. And then she flinches backward, gaping. "I can't believe I just said that. How did you …? What look-see?"

Ella folds her arms. "I have lost all respect for you, man. Spice Girls? Really?"

Lucifer snorts disdainfully. "What I do is not a parlor trick," he says, giving Ella a dark look. "If you treat it as such, you'll receive it as such. Now, shall we proceed to locating Mr. Jones?"

"Thanks for doing this," Chloe tells him as they climb into the car. "I can't even begin to describe to you how much I've missed … having …." She frowns, voice trailing away as she watches him crumble before her eyes. He tips away from the seat with an unhappy grunt, his eyelids droop to half mast, and he starts to tremble as he pulls his coat over his body like a blanket. She reaches across the parking brake to touch his arm. His shaking is way worse than it had been this morning. "Hey. Are you okay?"

"Perhaps a half day for me," he admits softly.

Her frown deepens. "Lucifer, we can do this knock-and-talk tomorrow."

He gives her a dismissive wave. "No, I've already said I'll do it, now. We'll do it, now. I'm a man of my word."

Chloe bites her lip. "They're not lions looking for a wounded gazelle, you know. You don't have to fake-"

"Yes," he replies. "I do. Especially now." Which … why? Does he think someone's going to come after him? His coat rustles as he pulls it tightly around himself. "Would you mind the heater?" he says. "Just for a few minutes. I can't bloody stand this infernal chill."

"Sure," she says, turning the key in the ignition. "Sure, that's no problem."

The car rumbles to life, and she's reaching for the temperature dial when the back door of the squad car is yanked open, and Emily climbs in. The car rocks as she settles. Lucifer re-schools himself in moments, letting the coat slide into the foot well by his ankles as he straightens and resettles, back pressed against the seat like it's not agony for him to sit that way. And Chloe sighs on his behalf as his chance to recharge and warm up a little dissipates.

"Sorry," Emily says, oblivious. She holds up a set of metal handcuffs. They gleam in the light.
"Found 'em in my gym duffel." She shrugs. "No clue why or when I put them there."

"Perhaps you thought to use them recreationally on your dearest Kate," Lucifer says with a sly grin. His gaze shifts from Emily to Chloe suggestively. "I've often wondered if police officers bring home … props."

Chloe's hands tighten on the steering wheel, and she feels a throb down low.

"Yeah, right," Emily says with a snort. "If anyone's getting tied up, it's me." And then she claps her hands over her mouth as her eyes widen. She adds, horrified, through her fingers, "Oh, God. Why am I talking?"

"Yes … that's right," Lucifer says slowly, like he's recalling the plot in a book he read ages ago, "you're a sub, aren't you?"

Emily makes a tiny noise in her throat. Kind of like whyyyyy? but expressed in pitiful, inarticulate warbles.

"I told you," Lucifer says, the words a velvet purr. "People like to tell me things." His grin eases into a leer as he peers at her in the rearview mirror. "I'm just … magnetic that way."

"Can't you turn it off!?"

He snorts with amusement. "I'm not even 'on,' darling," he says, giving the word "on" air quotes. "But then why-"

"I imagine our little tête-à-tête the Saturday before last had some lasting effects."

Emily frowns as she pulls her hands away from her mouth. "Huh," she says, eyebrows knitting. "I don't remember seeing you that Saturday." She blinks. "And when did I tell you about Kate, anyway?"

"You didn't need to," Lucifer says. "I know your life from zygote to about nine days ago."

"What?" Emily says.

"I've held your soul," he clarifies. "The tête-à-tête." At Emily's continuing frown, he adds slowly, "You died; I fixed it. Remember?"

Emily's frown deepens. "Well, I remember the dying part," she says. Her eyes narrow. She seems on the brink of something. Some connection between the various scattered dots in her head. But then she shakes it off. "Ha, ha; very funny," she says with a laugh. "Decker must have told you, right?"

Lucifer rolls his eyes. "Why my father made humans so bloody incapable of accepting the divine as a literal concept, rather than a faith-oriented one, is beyond me."

"Ella said you were good, but wow," Emily says, marveling. "I hope you get whatever role this is for."

Chloe can't help but blush when she realizes Emily's frustrating denial was Chloe's frustrating denial.

To the letter.

For the past almost-two years.
She really had ignored a lot of blatant clue bats to the face, hadn't she?

"Yes," Lucifer says as though he's read her mind. "Yes, you bloody did." He sighs. "Though, for what it's worth, I'm starting to think it's by nefarious design more than anything else."

"Is it wrong that that makes me feel better?" Chloe says.

Lucifer merely grumbles nondescriptly at the window.

The sun decal is absent from the back window of Mr. Jones's Ford Focus. Only a dark, sticky square outlining the space where the decal used to be remains on the glass, and no new stickers are apparent anywhere on or inside the car that they can see, even after four circuits around the car. The three flights of stairs to apartment 3-E concern Chloe for a moment, but Lucifer climbs them deftly, without any sign of hesitation or stress. His I'm-perfectly-healthy-nothing-to-see-here mask is on in full force.

Lucifer is the first one to make it to the apartment. She can't see beyond his large frame as he stops and looks down at something. "Um ... Detectives?"

"What?" Chloe calls as she and Emily catch up.

Lucifer steps aside to reveal the door. It's cracked open a few inches. There's no damage to the doorframe or the lock, though. No immediate signs that this is the result of a forced entry.

Frowning, Chloe stands to the side and raps her knuckles against the door. "Mr. Jones?" she calls. "Mr. Jones, LAPD. Your door is open, sir."

No answer. Her second knock, as light as she tries to make it, ends up causing the door to swing back on its hinges with a creak. When the door creeps to a stop, she can see inside the dark apartment.

He's sitting there on the couch, a catatonic lump staring into space.

"Mr. Jones?" she says, frowning.

He doesn't even acknowledge that she's spoken. The guy is either stoned out of his gourd or in need of medical attention. That's probable cause enough for her.

She glances at Emily. They share a look. Emily gives her a tiny nod and withdraws her sidearm.

And then Chloe steps into the apartment. Followed by Emily. Followed by Lucifer. Between the three of them, they clear the small apartment in a matter of moments. No one is hiding in the bedroom or the bathroom or any of the closets. Mr. Jones is alone.

And he still hasn't even acknowledged that they're there.

Chloe frowns as she returns to the living room.

He's wrapped in a down comforter, sitting in the dark, staring at a television that isn't even turned on. A long, meandering line of drool drips off his chin onto his lap as she watches. A plate of uneaten food and a tipped over bottle of Dos Equis rests on the coffee table in front of him. The meat on the plate has attracted all manner of flies that buzz and zip about. Chloe slaps one away from her cheek.

"Mr. Jones?" she repeats.
"Was he like this before?" Lucifer says.

"No," Chloe says, grimacing as the urge to gag rises. Aside from the rotting food and old beer, she smells stale urine and excrement. "Not even close."

"He was belligerent, not baked out of his fucking mind," Emily adds.

"Perhaps he sampled his product," Lucifer says. He directs a discerning look toward Mr. Jones, waving a hand in front of his face.

Motion that close to his eyeballs seems to snap Mr. Jones out of it a little. He shifts his gaze to Lucifer. His eyes widen. He exhales, a deep, thick, overwhelmed sigh, like someone just gave him a huge hit of morphine, and he looks at Lucifer as though Lucifer were a pile of diamonds stretched from here to the distant horizon.

"You came back," Mr. Jones says.

Lucifer blinks. "Um …," he says slowly. "Right." He glances at Chloe. "Do you suspect Sunny's also of distributing psilocybin or LSD? Or bath salts, perhaps?"

She frowns. "I don't know. We've only run into the laced heroin."

Lucifer's eyes narrow. Mr. Jones is fixated on Lucifer, now, instead of the television.

"The product doesn't matter," Mr. Jones mumbles breathlessly. "None of it matters. Only you matter."

"Believe me, I'm no one to be worshipped," Lucifer replies coldly. "Not me. Not God. And certainly not whomever you're mistaking me for."

"How could I mistake you for anyone else?" Mr. Jones says.

Lucifer glowers. "Well, that's the question of the hour, isn't it?" He sighs. "Detectives, I think your suspect is completely cracked."

"He wasn't like this before," Emily insists. "He wasn't like this at all."

Chloe looks at Lucifer. She covers her nose. The smell is really starting to get to her. She suspects Mr. Jones soiled himself, and he's been sitting in it. For who knows how long. "Will you ask him …?"

Lucifer regards her for a long moment. "His answer is likely to be as cracked as he is, and that's assuming I can even get him to answer at all."

"Ask him, anyway." It'd be stupid not to at least try, given that Lucifer's here, offering to be a resource.

Lucifer sighs. "All right," he says, in a humoring tone. He steps over to the couch and he lowers himself to his haunches beside it. "Mr. Jones," he says. But the adoration in Mr. Jones's you're-the-sun-my-unworthy-self-revolves-around look doesn't wane. Lucifer waves, ring flashing in the light. "Yoo-hoo. Hello."

Mr. Jones beams. "Hi," he says, the word breathy, stretched, and oozing.
"Yes, look at me," says Lucifer, smiling. He crooks his finger like he did for Emily. "Look here." He wags his finger. "Here, Mr. Jones. Look here."

Finally, Mr. Jones seems to latch onto whatever vibes Lucifer's sending out. His eyes start to glaze, and then Lucifer's got him snared like a rabbit frozen in front of a snake.

"Tell me, Bob," Lucifer rumbles, "what is it you desire? What is your deepest, darkest-

"You're not him," Mr. Jones blurts, and his bliss fades away, replaced by crushing despair. "I thought you were him." His eyes water, and his lower lip starts to quiver. "But you're not. You're not. You're not."

Chloe and Emily exchange a glance. Him? Emily mouths, frown deepening.

Lucifer blinks. "Um … no. I am most decidedly not."

"I want him to come back," Mr. Jones says, sobbing. "Please, I want …. I need ….

"A bad breakup?" Emily suggests.

"Why won't he come back?" Mr. Jones says, barely more than a plaintive whine.

"Who is he?" Lucifer snaps.

But all Mr. Jones does is wail, "I thought he was you. Why can't he be you?"

Lucifer rises to his feet with a disgusted snort. "As I said. He's cracked."

"I don't understand how he could go crazy that fast," Chloe says, shaking her head.

Lucifer shrugs. "A bad batch of bath salts can snap the mind in one use."

"Maybe," Chloe says. But something about that idea just doesn't sit right.

"I'll go radio dispatch," Emily says with a sigh. "This guy clearly needs help. Maybe a psych hold."

Chloe can't help but follow Emily out, at least onto the landing. She gasps for air the moment she's free of the apartment, almost draping herself against the railing in relief. Lucifer steps behind her, and the wooden landing creaks under the weight, but he looks for all the world like he just stepped away from grocery shopping, or something equally inane.

"How are you not gagging right now?" she says.

He arches an eyebrow at her, and she slumps. Of course, he wouldn't be gagging. He's probably seen far worse than the worst thing she could imagine. Probably on a regular basis.

She frowns, glancing back at the apartment. She can hear Mr. Jones's mumbling, Why won't he come back? But it's not until he adds, I need him to be here, that her stomach drops into her shoes, and a chill runs through her. Her heart starts to thump.

I need him to be here, she told Maze.

No. No way. This can't be …. Can it?

You'd still be prostrated and drooling right now if you were anyone else, Lucifer said.
She looks at Mr. Jones, at the down comforter. She glances back at Lucifer, thinking of his coat, which he left behind in the car. His coat, which is stuffed with down. Lucifer's faking fine like he expects to get jumped, and he's trying to ward off any would-be challengers. And this thing with Mr. Jones is happening right after she cut off Lucifer's wings. This can't all be a coincidence. Can it?

"Could he be talking about one of your brothers?" she asks Lucifer. "Do you have a brother who looks like you?"

From the lack of surprise in Lucifer's gaze, from the way he follows her non sequitur without so much as a blink, this thought has already occurred to him. He pointedly ignores the question about a lookalike sibling, though, and says, "Why the bloody hell would any of my brothers care about a low-level drug dealer?"

"Maybe, because you're interested, they're interested?" she says.

He rolls his eyes. "They've not taken an interest in my work in all the years since I fell. I fail to see why they would take an interest, now."

"Could they be trying to send you a message?" she says. Maybe, it's not about the drug dealer at all.

"That's preposterous," Lucifer says. "There are burning bushes and lightning strikes for that."

She looks up at him. "Are you sure?"

"About the burning bushes?" he says. "Yes, quite. I've employed-"

"I mean, are you sure that it's preposterous?" she says gently. She directs a pointed glance to his shoulders. "I mean … we did just do something God maybe isn't pleased about ….

His eyes widen as he registers what she's talking about. And then an arctic chill slides in, and she feels like they're standing in the middle of a cold snap. "It's Preposterous," he says, glowering, and she can't help but shiver. "Don't project your misplaced guilt onto this man's cracked up nonsense."

She bites her lip. "Okay."

Maybe, he's right. Maybe, she's looking for zebras, when this is just a horse. Some guy who rolled the dice on using bath salts, and then paid the price. It's not like it would be a surprise if he were using illicit substances, given that he deals in them.

Lucifer's temples dance as he grinds his jaw, staring into space.

"Are you okay?" she says.

"No," he replies quietly.

She thinks, for a moment, she sees worry in his eyes.

And then he stalks like Tyger, Tyger down the steps and back to the car without another word.
"Stay at my place tonight," she blurts as he reaches for the door handle of her cruiser. Before she loses her nerve. "In the guest room. Stay. Please."

Emily stayed behind to deal with emergency services, leaving Chloe alone to drive Lucifer back to her apartment, where he'd left his car. He'd been largely silent on the trip back from Mr. Jones's. Not out of rudeness or anger or contemplation about this maybe-an-angel interfering with things, she thinks, but out of enervation. Away from Emily's presence, away from the precinct, he lets his walls crumble, and his exhaustion is so thick she feels like she could reach out and touch it like she could his coat. He might be great at faking perfect health, but his flash-bang grenade of a show seems to come with some massive recoil down the line.

His tired eyes narrow as he looks back at her. "Stay … here?"

Chloe shrugs. "It's a change of scenery, at least. You shouldn't be behind the wheel when you're this tired, anyway. And it'll mean painkillers will actually work for you tonight if you take them."

"Logical," he says. And then he raises his eyebrows as if to say, What's the real reason?

"I'd like the company," she admits.

He frowns. "You don't want … space?"

"Why would I want space?"

"You've barely had a day-and-a-half away from me in the past eight, and all but one of the days we did spend together were bloody awful."

"I'm not keeping score," she says with a shrug. "I just like having you around." Plus, exhaustion aside, he's more chatty, now. He's acting more like himself. And she finds him a comforting counterpoint to the gruesome intrusive thoughts she keeps getting. "It makes sense for you to stay."

He regards her for a long moment, silent, unreadable.

She grimaces as something occurs to her. "Do you want space?" she says. The week they'd spent together hadn't just been awful for Chloe. Maybe, he wants to lick his wounds in private for a while. And being around Trixie when he's this tired might not be appealing to him, either. "It's okay if you do."

"I … don't want space," he says.

She shrugs. "So, stay, then."
"All right."
She grins. "See you tonight after work, then?"
His gaze softens. "Yes. Tonight."

Of the many things Los Angeles is famous for, its horrendous traffic is perhaps second only to the fact that it's crawling with celebrities. Chloe's learned through trial and error what times of day it's safe to drive and in what particular directions. But she has to drive east from work in the afternoons to pick up Trixie from school. It's unavoidable, unfortunately. The window for rush hour traffic is approximately 3 p.m. to 7 p.m., and extended day closes at 7:30 p.m.

"Chloe, hello," Amenadiel says when he picks up the phone, sounding tinny over the car's speakers.

"Hey," she replies, creeping along in the caterpillar traffic jam.

She winces at the automated sign estimating travel times to various points from here. The estimates are way longer than they should be. Even considering rush hour. Maybe, an accident?

"I'm calling to see if you have any suggestions for how to deal with the chills you get after you lose your wings," she says.

A long pause follows. "… What chills?"

She frowns. "Lucifer's freezing. He's been freezing for days, now, and I thought-"

"Luci lost his wings?"

Her frown deepens. Sometime after Monopoly day - when Lucifer characterized pestering his brother for entertainment as an actual possibility - their relationship had soured like a lemon. Because I don't bloody need him telling me I should be happy, Lucifer said on the beach when she asked why he wasn't letting Amenadiel visit. I don't bloody need his judgments, or his assumption that everything Dad does is above reproach. I don't bloody need him. For some reason, though, she hadn't imagined that a somewhat soured relationship would mean a complete breakdown in communication.

"He cut them off again last week," she explains. She accelerates to close the gap between her and the blue Prius in front of her. "I helped him.

This pause is longer than a marathon. It's so long, she's prompted to say, "Amenadiel? Are you there?"

"… You're all right?" he says at last.


"You said he's cold?" Amenadiel says. He sounds … baffled. "And how on earth are you fine?"

"Well, I mean, you said I'm a miracle," she says hesitantly. "I thought, maybe, that's what's miraculous. That I can see the divine and not want to jump off a bridge."

"Hmm," is all he says, frustratingly noncommittal.

"So … weren't you cold after you fell?" she prods.
"No."

Which … what in the hell?

"Chloe, when I fell, I became human," Amenadiel continues slowly. "Are you cold under normal circumstances?"

She grinds her teeth in frustration as a degenerate in a pickup truck, amidst a chorus of angry honks, whips into the small gap between the Prius ahead of her and the car ahead of the Prius. Both she and the Prius are forced to slam on the brakes, and she grunts as she's thrown against the seatbelt by inertia. "Asshole!" she shouts futilely.

"… Me?" Amenadiel says.

She shakes her head. "Not you. Sorry. I'm in my car. Traffic's a bitch right now." And she's half inclined to throw her lights on to scare the guy in the truck a bit, despite the fact that she's not a traffic cop and hasn't been for years. But she resists her baser instincts and allows her anger to dissipate with a blustering sigh. "No, I don't feel cold," she says, shifting back to the discussion at hand. "Not unless it's cold outside."

"Then why should I be cold?" Amenadiel asks.

"So … you didn't feel bad," she says. "When you fell." She swallows. "I mean, obviously, you felt bad because of what falling meant to you as a concept, but the experience itself didn't make you feel sick or physically wrong in some way."

"Right," he says.

"But I was cold after I saw Lucifer's wings," she says, frowning. She remembers her singular need for warmth. She remembers climbing into the tub, fully clothed, because she was so desperate. She has never needed something as badly as she needed warmth in that moment. "Once he took them away, I was freezing. So, clearly, humans have a reaction to being depriv-"

"Because humans aren't meant to experience divinity in the first place," Amenadiel says.

"Does that mean, if you saw an angel's wings, now, you might have the same reaction I did the first time?"

"It's possible," Amenadiel replies. "I don't know for sure, since that hasn't happened to me."

"And you don't currently feel like …?" I was … bigger. Before. … Much bigger than my skin. And, now, it's all …. When I reach for it, it's … gone. "You don't feel like a part of you is missing? I mean, in a metaphysical sense?"

"I'm human, Chloe," he says. "Nothing is missing. I only had wings when I was meant to have them."

Her fingers tighten against the steering wheel. So. There's a difference between losing one's wings via devolution versus removal. The former is a smooth, gradual transition between one kind of whole to another kind. The latter leaves behind a fraction of a whole. But … what the hell does all this mean, other than the fact that Amenadiel is healthy and Lucifer is currently not?

She sighs. She has no idea.

"So, you don't have any ideas on how to deal with the cold?" she says.
"I'm really sorry, Chloe," Amenadiel says. "It's completely outside my realm of experience."

Which … damn it.

"Okay, well," she says with a sigh, "thanks anyway."

They say their goodbyes, and she hangs up, disappointed.

Lucifer's car is still parked outside her apartment, which means he stayed, as promised, but she hasn't even had a chance to retrieve her purse from the cruiser's front passenger seat when something feels … dissonant. Like when things in her desk have been rearranged without her having any recollection of rearranging them - the natural conclusion being that someone else had done it. It's a creepy, wrong, violated feeling that settles like a cold brick in her gut, and she freezes, key fob clutched in her hand, as Trixie climbs out of the car, humming an improvised melody.

The neighborhood is silent. No cars pass. No dogs bark. No people chat. The birds are silent. Nothing but the breeze fingering through the trees, and Trixie's atonal mess of a tune, fill the empty aural space.

And in a place like Los Angeles … that's … really fucking weird.

Chloe scans up the street. Down the street. The setting sun makes the shadows long and spindly - the tree shadows, in particular, look like emaciated monsters, clawing at the sky from the Pit - and the softening light has a surreality to its hue.

The hairs on the back of her neck stand on end. Her heart starts to pound.

Someone is watching her.

She knows someone is watching her.

"Mommy, are you coming?" Trixie asks from down the walk.

Sweat feels like bugs as it creeps down Chloe's skin. She tosses the keys to Trixie. "Monkey, do me a favor, and go inside, okay? Find Maze or Lucifer, and stick like glue."

Trixie frowns. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing," Chloe replies. "I just have to get something from the trunk."

Trixie doesn't seem to want to contemplate her mommy's oddities right now. She shrugs, and she turns to skip inside. Chloe closes her eyes, listening to the waning sound of her daughter's shoes as they scuff the sidewalk.

Once Trixie is gone, Chloe calls, "Hello?"

No one answers.

Yet the feeling of being observed is like a klaxon in her mind at this point, and her whole body is starting to shake as adrenaline dumps into her bloodstream by the truckload.

She itches to pull out her sidearm, but what the hell good would it do? Or … wait. Does she make angels other than Lucifer vulnerable? She's never asked.

Why hadn't she asked?
She takes her gun from her hip holster and disengages the safety, though she keeps the muzzle pointed at the ground.

"Um …," Chloe says, unable to stop herself from sounding tremulous, "Lucifer's … brother? Are you there? I'm sorry. I don't know your name, yet."

Still no answer.

She swallows. Her mouth is dry, and her tongue seems to stick to the roof of her mouth. She swipes unruly strands of hair out of her face.

 Angels don't kill humans, she tells herself. Not to mention, angels wouldn't care about her. Or Trixie. Right? Except for the whole part about Chloe being a miracle, which makes Trixie, by extension, Miracle Jr. And both of the angels she personally knows seem to find her miraculousness something to care about.

Shit.

"Hello?" Chloe repeats.

And … nothing. Again.

"Look," she snaps, shaking. "If you want to scare me, it's working. I'm terrified. So, either get your jollies and move along, please, or come say hello. I'm not interested in a having a stalker."

As soon as she says those words, the neighborhood bounces back to life. A car swishes past on the street. The birds resume their arias. And the feeling of a presence is gone.

Or, maybe, she's going fucking insane, and there was never anyone there in the first place.

That's also an option.

She half-laughs, half-sighs as stress and exhaustion overwhelm her. Then she re-holsters her gun, and she heads inside.

She finds Trixie playing Go Fish with Maze at the dining room table. A quick inventory of the apartment reveals that the guest room door is shut. Chloe doesn't want to invade Lucifer's privacy, but given what she maybe just experienced outside, she doesn't want to leave anything to chance, either. She cracks open the guest room door, just enough for a narrow shaft of light from the hallway to bisect the darkness beyond, illuminating the bed in the process. Buried underneath his winter coat, along with the entire contents of her linen closet - towels, it seems, included - is a lump. Said lump has a dark, mussed head of hair that's just barely poking out, and she can't help but wilt with relief.

She has no idea what she'd do if he got kidnapped again.

"What is it?" says the lump, muffled by the blankets.

For a moment, she debates telling him what happened outside, but …. 

"Nothing," she says. "Sorry to wake you." She frowns. He must have something like a foot's worth of helter-skelter layers lying on top of him. "Do you want my comforter?" she asks. "I can pull it off my bed." A pause follows, like he's debating how much he's willing to impose on her hospitality, and she rushes to add, "I promise, I don't mind. I've been hot the past few nights,
anyway."

The towel-blanket amalgamation rustles as he shifts underneath it.

"Lucifer?" she prods.

"Please," he says, at last. His tone is a frustrated one. Like he's sick and tired of being sick and tired. And cold. And hurting.

"I'll be right back," she says.

She grabs him her comforter - it's thick and billowing and blue. She also nabs a faded sweatshirt Dan left behind in her closet. And a plugin heating pad, too. She uses the pad for sore muscles, but she thinks it might prove effective for hypothermic archangels as well.

Lucifer is asleep again when she brings her bounty back to him, so she leaves the sweatshirt folded on the nightstand for him to grab when he wants. She flares the comforter over the bed like a parachute, letting the air break its fall to the mattress. His breathing shallows out abruptly as the comforter comes to rest on top of him.

"It's just me," she says.

His reply is a, "Hmm," that's still fuzzy with sleep.

"Can I join you?" she says as she plugs in the heating pad and sets the dial to medium.

He snorts, flopping his head the other way against the pillow, so he can look at her. His eyes are dark and warm, and they glisten in the dim light. "I was naked in a shower with you less than a week ago," he says, amused. "You slept beside me five nights in a row."

She shrugs. "Special circumstances. I didn't want to assume."

"You're always welcome," he replies without hesitation, so she kicks off her shoes and climbs in with him.

The air underneath the covers is barely warmer than room temperature, and his body seems a few degrees cooler than that. The chill makes her heart ache. His mile high mound of blankets can't trap heat when there's none to trap. She scoots as close as she can go without ending up on top of him, so close their noses are almost touching.

He tips forward and kisses her. "You needn't ask me permission for anything in the future," he adds against her lips, with another kiss for an exclamation point. "Have your wicked way with me whenever you like."

She laughs. "Wicked?"

"You've bewitched the Devil," he says, pulling away. "What would you call it?"

"I think, maybe, the bewitching part was done the other way around," she says wryly as he lets his eyes slide shut.

"Debatable," is his murmured, tired reply.

He's trembling. His whole body. And for once - perhaps in deferment to the fact that he's a guest in a house with a minor, or perhaps because he's freezing, or perhaps both - he's sleeping clothed, suit jacket, vest, pants, and all. The only layer not present is his winter coat, which he converted to
a makeshift blanket.

"Can you roll back?" she says.

His eyes open to slits.

"Onto your side, chest toward me?" she clarifies. "Just for a second?"

With a not-so-small wince as he puts his weight on his wrist and bicep, he does as she asks, pushing his upper body off the mattress and away. She reaches to the nightstand for the heating pad, wrestling with the cord for a moment to get it tucked underneath her body, and then she slides the pad into the space he just vacated. The pad crinkles when he resettles with his chest on top of it, and he closes his eyes again as his head sinks into the pillow.

"It'll warm up in a minute," she says.

His reply is a soft, "Thank you."

She pulls up on the hem of his button-down and slips her hand underneath, touching bare, lukewarm skin. Once she gets a feel for where his wounds are - the edges feel scabbed and rough to the touch, and he flinches a little as she skirts them - she splays her palm against his spine and rubs gently along the curve of it. The shh-shh-shh sound of skin sliding on skin fills the quiet.

He sighs like her touch is benediction.

"Oh," he says, almost a moan, "that's quite lovely."

"Is it?" she says, lengthening her strokes.

He replies, but his words are too caught in the undertow of torpor to be intelligible.

She kisses his shoulder through his shirt, listening to him breathe.

She stays that way for about twenty minutes. Listening. Long enough for him to pass into deeper sleep. Long enough for the air beneath the blankets to feel like someone opened an oven somewhere within.

And then she leaves him be.

Trixie is occupied with her homework, and Maze is busy in her room, rubbing moisturizing cream into her leather … somethings. Chaps? Chloe's not even sure she wants to know. She raps her knuckles against Maze's open door, and Maze looks up from her task, eyebrows raised in inquiry.

"Can I come in?" Chloe says. "I need to talk to you about something."

At Maze's insouciant shrug, Chloe steps inside and closes the door behind her. She sits next to Maze on the edge of the bed, unable to stop her gaze from wandering to the case where Maze keeps her knives. The knives.

And then Chloe's back in Lucifer's penthouse, sawing through his beautiful wing. The knife tearing flesh makes it sound like she's carving steak, and bright, oxygenated blood soils feather after lustrous feather. He's practically choking on distress, but it's-

"Spit it out, Decker," Maze says, dragging Chloe back to the real.

Chloe looses a panicked gasp. She swallows against her rising nausea, counting to ten in her head.
The room seems to pulse in and out.

"Are you … okay?" Maze prods.

"Fine," Chloe says faintly, pinching the bridge of her nose. "I'm fine."

"Right …," Maze says dubiously, but she doesn't pry more, at least.

When Chloe thinks she has a hold on herself again, she clears her throat and says, "Does Lucifer have a brother who looks like him?"


"Michael," Chloe parrots.

"Yep."


Maze nods. "Yep, that Michael. Why?"

For a moment, Chloe doesn't know what to say. Of course, there's a Michael. Lucifer name-dropped him less than two weeks ago. Gabriel, too. For some reason, though, the names hadn't seemed real, then. Not real as in angels she might meet in the flesh someday.

Her mouth goes dry.

Her maybe-stalker is maybe Michael, Sword of God?

How is this even a thing?

She thought she'd gotten plenty of practice, at this point, dealing with angels capsizing her perilous grip on reality. And, yet, this is almost as surreal as finding out her insane, ridiculous partner is neither insane nor ridiculous.

Almost.

"So … Michael's a much bigger deal than the little guy you killed?" Chloe hazards. "The one who kidnapped Lucifer before?"

Maze gives Chloe an incredulous look, setting her bottle of leather conditioner on the nightstand and shoving her somethings off to the side. "Michael's the other half of the Demiurge," Maze says slowly. "Lucifer is the will. Michael is the power."

"So … yes, then?" Chloe says.

"He's an archangel," Maze replies. Definitive. To the point. "Other than God and Goddess, archangels are the biggest deal there is. Michael and Lucifer, in particular."

"What about Amenadiel?" Chloe says, frowning. "I thought he was the oldest."

"He is the oldest," Maze replies. "And he was God's preferred thug for dealing with just about anything less than a winged Lucifer. But he's not an archangel. God created archangels for … special projects."

Like Demiurges and whatnot, Chloe thinks manically. She tries to contain a sudden, nearly overwhelming urge to laugh at the sheer insanity that is her life, now. She sighs, breathless,
lightheaded. "Why do I get the feeling God called in the big guns?" she says in a faint voice.

"Because if he called in Michael, he called in the biggest fucking gun he's got," Maze replies. Fuck. "I can't touch Michael without some winning-the-lottery style luck." Double fuck. "Why? You think he's around?"

"I … think someone was watching me earlier," Chloe says, rubbing her eyes.

"But how did you jump from that to Michael?" Maze says.

Chloe explains what happened at the crime scene with Mr. Jones. "Am I being stupid?" she says. "Am I just projecting guilt like Lucifer says?"

Maze's lips form a grim line. She stands up and begins to pace. "I don't know," she says. "That's ….

"Really flimsy?" Chloe supplies, feeling helpless.

"A crazy guy and a bad feeling is beyond flimsy, Decker," Maze replies. She blows out a breath. "But …." But it's bad. It's bad, bad, bad. Maze doesn't even have to say it.

"Is Michael the kind of sibling who'd kidnap Lucifer, forcibly tack on some new wings, and then leave him stranded in Death Valley to die of dehydration?" Chloe says. "I mean … again?"

Maze's grim look becomes grimmer. "It … depends."

"On?" Chloe prods.

"Well, he wouldn't do it for shits and giggles," Maze says. "But if God asked him to, all bets are off."

Chloe's heart sinks like a stone. "I think God might have asked."

Maze shakes her head. "Well, I hope you're wrong, Decker, because I'm a fly to Michael's windshield, and you're just ….

Maze seems to find it better not to say what Chloe is "just." Chloe suspects the descriptor was going to be something like "atomized," or, "dog food," or, maybe, the slightly more poetic, "star stuff."

Chloe swallows. "What about Lucifer?" she says. "If he's actually prepared for it, can he …?" Defend himself? Somehow?

"Well, he's got a better chance than you or me," Maze says with a shrug. But from her dire look, the real answer is no. No way in hell. Not versus Michael. Not without wings, and definitely not now, when he's still unwell.

The growing sense of futility feels like a noose pulling tight around Chloe's neck.

"You're sure you were being watched earlier?" Maze says.

"No," Chloe says, eyes watering. "No, I'm not."

And that's the worst part about all of this. She's not sure if she's writing herself a narrative to explain her bad feelings, or if she's getting bad feelings because reality's gone pear-shaped. And
Lucifer's insistence that the whole idea of a stalker brother is preposterous doesn't help. At all. Because Lucifer is nothing if not pragmatic, and he wouldn't label something he felt to be a legitimate threat as preposterous. Except, maybe, that's the whole problem. He's pragmatic. And pragmatists tend not to act on theory alone. They need evidence. Except Chloe thinks Mr. Jones is pretty damning evidence, and-

_Fuck._

Talk about a circular argument.

"I'll check around the apartment later tonight," Maze says, tone doubtful. "Okay?"

Chloe nods, scrubbing frantically at her eyes as she tries to pull herself together. From Maze's expression, she doesn't expect to find anything, whether Michael is involved or not. Chloe sincerely doubts an archangel older than time is going to pause to carve, "Michael was here, 2017 A.D.," into the eucalyptus tree out front. Still, though, Maze has a better chance of finding something than anyone else does.

"Okay," Chloe says roughly. "Thanks."

Michael probably isn't involved.

It's more likely that stress and sleep deprivation have driven her to crazy town for the all-you-can-eat delusions buffet.

Or so she keeps telling herself.

Repeatedly.

Maze and Trixie decide with a fist bump that tonight is going to be a night of thoughtful Disney review. Or, well, Trixie decides, Maze doesn't protest, and Chloe does her best to enjoy the quality time with them, despite all the what-ifs and maybes that are looming like a stop sign at the end of an exit ramp.

"Lucifer!" Trixie shouts happily over the blare of the television as he shuffles into the room.

His hair is chaos in dire need of product. His suit is so wrinkled it might never be salvageable without an industrial steam press. And Dan's fading gray sweatshirt is pulled over his suit jacket, making his upper body look bulky and strange.

"Hello, offspring," Lucifer says, the words still foggy with sleep.

He assesses all of the seating options in the room. The only empty place left is the spot on the couch next to Trixie. He has a brief, perplexed moment of _well,_ now _what?_ and Chloe's about to offer him her recliner, but he joins Trixie and Maze on the couch before Chloe can put thought to action.

"Maze," he says in response to the demon's nod. When his gaze wanders to Chloe, though, a smile blooms on his face like a rose. "Hello, darling."

Chloe's heart skips a beat. She isn't used to this. Being looked at like she's the one who lit up the stars instead of him. "Hi," she says, blushing.

He pulls the red afghan off the back of the couch and wraps it around himself. He's pale. And shivery. And disheveled would be an understatement. His eyes exude a crushing weariness that's
only just loosened its grip. But, "You look a lot better," she says.

He sighs. "I don't know how you humans can stand spending a third of your lives asleep," he says, rubbing his eyes. "It's such a bloody waste of time." From his tired cast, he could stand to sleep a little bit more, even, but he's irked enough by his lethargy to push against it. "But … yes. I'm a lot less fatigued." His expression warms again when he regards her. "Thank you."

"Does your back still hurt?" Trixie says.

Lucifer frowns, looking down at her. "Does my …?"

"Mommy said you had back surgery."

"Did she, now," he says, not really a question. "Well, I suppose that's … accurate enough." He glances at Chloe, eyebrows knitting. She can only offer him a helpless shrug. How else, exactly, was she supposed to explain to Trixie why his brain disconnected from the rest of him for an entire crosstown car trip?

"You don't seem that mushy anymore," Trixie continues.

"I don't …." He turns back to her. "I beg your pardon?"

Trixie laughs. "Okay, maybe still some mushy."

"The Devil is not mushy," he says, giving Trixie a cross look.

Trixie squirms out of Maze's arms and scoots closer to Lucifer, burrowing underneath the afghan with him. Her head pops out from behind the blanket by his shoulder, and she shimmies closer, pressing her ear against his arm.

His posture is stiff and unyielding, and he looks for all the world like someone just dunked him into a mud pit - his expression is equal parts shocked and miffed, with a small helping of indignation on the side. "Child, what are you doing?" he says as he peers down his nose at her.

"Snuggling," says Trixie.

"She does that," Maze adds with a snicker. "Just go with it."

He looks horrified. "I prefer not to partake in this activity."

"Is Hell really hot?" Trixie says, ignoring him.

His eyes narrow. "… Why?"

Trixie shrugs. "Well, when Aunt Gaby visits from Michigan …." Trixie holds up her hand and points to the tip of her index finger. "She lives there."

"In your finger?" says Lucifer, frowning.

Trixie giggles. "No, Michigan is shaped like a mitten, and she lives in the mitten where my finger is."

"I … see," he says, though from his tone and his befuddled look, Trixie might as well be speaking Klingon.

"Anyway," Trixie continues, oblivious, "when she visits, she always complains about how hot it is here because Michigan is super cold sometimes, and I thought, maybe, it works the same way
going hot to cold. So, like, it would be really cold here to you, if Hell is really hot." She looks up at him expectantly. "So … is it?"

He blinks. "Hell is quite hot, yes," he says.

"Is that why you're cold?" She scoots even closer. "Does this help?"

He doesn't seem to have any idea how to answer that, and Maze, at this point, can barely contain paroxysms of laughter.

"Trixie, give Lucifer some space, okay?" Chloe says, attempting to rescue him. "He doesn't like-"

"It's … all right," he says softly.

And, now, it's her turn to blink, stunned. Even Maze looks shocked.

He gives Trixie one last wary will-it-bite? look, but he seems to conclude that the answer is no. And while he's by no means participating in Trixie's "snuggling," he seems to find it acceptable to allow her to continue with her wretched display of affection as long as said affection impedes no more than his arm. He directs his attention the television.

"What is … this?" he says, eyes narrowing.

"Frozen," Chloe says, giving him an apologetic look.

His reply is an, "Ah," that's completely devoid of thrill. He peers at the television, frowning. "Well, at least, there's music, yes?"

Which Chloe thinks is hilarious for the sheer fact that he seems to know what Frozen is. How on earth had Disney wandered into Lux, of all places? His frown blooms into unfettered dismay when Elsa bursts into Let it Go, and Trixie starts singing off-key beside him.

"Perhaps I spoke too soon," he says with a grimace.

"Hey, don't knock it," Maze says, giving Trixie a look of respect. "Kid's got pipes."

Chloe snorts with amusement at Lucifer's pained expression. She has a feeling that if he were in any shape at all right now to party, he'd be dashing out the door, searching for the nearest source of Jell-O shots - stat - to cleanse himself of the odious malignancy that is Disney.

"You won't hurt my feelings if you vacate for a while," she tells him.

He doesn't move.

His lips part, but for the longest moment, he doesn't speak.

"It's … warmer in here," he says gruffly, irritated.

Like he thinks he needs to explain himself, but he's not sure how to explain the bucket of unmitigated crazy he's drowning in.

Because the Devil just doesn't do things like this.

Well, except for tonight.

Tonight, he does, in a perfect storm of circumstance.
The Devil, a demon, and a snuggling eight-year-old, watching *Frozen.*

The whole thing sounds like it needs a punchline.

And she can just imagine his perplexed, *How in the bloody hell did this happen?* as it flits through his head.

It's not until later, after Trixie is in bed and Maze has gone on the prowl outside in search of maybe-Michael trespassers, that Chloe finally gets a chance to grab her laptop and check her e-mail. Things … aren't quite how she left them. For one, Chrome is open. For two, Chrome is open to a page she *knows* she would never go to.

Lucifer shuffles back into the room with a bottle of Merlot and a corkscrew clutched in one hand and two wineglasses clutched deftly in the other. "Really, we must discuss your wine choices," he says, frowning. "You can take what you want from the cellar at Lux, you know. On the house. Don't waste your pittance of a salary on …." He gives the bottle an unhappy look. "… This."

"I really can't taste the difference," Chloe says as he sits beside her and sets the glasses on the coffee table. "A $9 bottle is the same as a $99 bottle to me. And both will get you drunk."

"Really?" he says, eyebrows knitting. "Perhaps my tastebuds are more evolved."

She snorts. More evolved. Yeah. Sure. She doesn't think he'd take it well if she referred him to some of the studies regarding the positive correlation between taste and *perceived* price, and the utter lack of positive correlation between taste and *actual* price.

"I'd be happy with wine in a box," she admits, just to enjoy his horrified expression, and boy, is it.

"A box?" he says, aghast. "Chloe, darling, wine that comes in a box is *not* wine. It's a bloody *mockery* of wine. It's *swill.*"

"But swill it taste good?" She snickers. "I think it swill."

He gives her an incredulous look.

"I know, I know," she says. "Bad pun."

"Criminal," he says in a silky, low-pitched voice, and the word slides down her spine. His eyes are gleaming with mischief when he adds, "I ought to punish you for that."

"Punish," she says, barely able to stop herself from giggling. "Pun-ish."

From his amused look, she thinks he said punish with puns in mind. He's playing.

"Are you certain you haven't already had your fill of swill?" he adds, smirking. "You seem sozzled already."

And the giggle she held back before breaks loose like a prisoner on a mad dash for freedom.

Lucifer is *playing* with her. Maybe, everything seems funnier because she's exhausted and feeling a bit punch-drunk, but holy shit it feels good to laugh. With him in particular. After all the dire crap from last week, with his penthouse feeling almost sepulchral, after today with maybe-Michael, laughter is like tasting Godiva chocolate after subsiding on white rice for a year.

"Glad I amuse," Lucifer says with a wry look as he turns his attention back to the bottle of "swill"
he brought in from the kitchen.

She’s reluctant to shift the conversation back to more serious things, but … She glances at her laptop. This … isn’t really something she should put off. Or she’ll lose her nerve.

"Um …," she begins, silently cursing herself for her not-so-brilliant segue, "speaking of punishment."

"Mmm?" he rumbles, focused on the wine bottle.

She tips her laptop screen toward him, so he can see. "Lucifer, what is this?"

He leans forward to look at the webpage as he peels the foil off the lip of the wine bottle. "Oh, I needed to order a new one, and the website wouldn't load on my phone," he says without inflection. Like he's talking about a can opener or a fridge magnet or paper towels.

"You needed to order a new whip," she says, disbelieving. A new cat o’ nine tails to be precise. The description talks about the supple, premium leather. The balanced, weighted handle for "absolute control in application." Apparently, this particular whip comes in multiple sizes, too. Who knew? "On my laptop, you ordered a new whip."

"Yes," he says as he twists the screw into the cork. "I bit through the old one. Remember?"

She remembers. She remembers his wretched cry of pain. His grimace. The way his fingernails tore the finish off his table as he clawed at it. The whip had smacked into the table, broken, a few moments later, dragging long, arcing lines of bloody spittle with it. The image is Technicolor. Surround sound. Lurid.

She shakes her head, forcing the image away.

"It's a reputable dealer," he's saying, and she blinks, trying to focus on him again. "And a reputable website. I assure you, I didn't infest your system with malware, and I didn't touch your settings. I wouldn't do that to you." He frowns. "Are you all right?" he adds. He leaves the corkscrew and the wine behind, forgotten, and scoots closer.

She rubs tears out of her eyes. "I'm fine," she says, voice cracking.

Lucifer touches her shoulder. His hand is cold, but not gelid like it was last week. "You don't seem fine," he says gently. He rubs her shoulder to elbow to shoulder.

"Just flashbacks," she says. "It doesn't matter."

"I know a lie when I hear it, darling."

"Fine," she snaps. "It does matter. But I don't want to talk about it right now. I want to talk about this whip that you bought on my laptop."

He regards her for a long, long moment. "All right," he says, the words quiet, and he withdraws. Not far. But enough to give her a little breathing room. Enough so he isn't a looming thundercloud of presence.

She clears her throat, sniffing. "First, how is it that you, a zillion-year-old archangel, somehow know what safe browsing practices are, but my sixty-year-old mother can't even be persuaded not to click on an email attachment named I'll-destroy-your-computer-if-you-click-me.docx?"

He snorts, following her subject change with ease. "I've eons of practice keeping up with the
times. Can you bloody imagine if I didn't? I'd still be marveling over the invention of the wheel."

She stares at him, momentarily thrown off her tear. What must that be like? For him, time must dash from one century to the next like it's going to miss its plane. Her lifespan must be an eye blink to him. But that thought is a sudden pit in her stomach. She pushes it away.

"Well, do go on," he prods. "A first point implies you have a second, yes?"

She shakes her head. Right. Her tear. "Second, how in the hell do you know my password?"

"Come, now, did you really think using your miscreant's name and birthday was secure?" he says as he pushes down on the corkscrew's arms, releasing the cork with a satisfying pop. "You didn't even use a special character to break it up."

And, now, she's getting cybersecurity advice from the Devil. This day is just weird.

"Third, you know Trixie's birthday?" she says.

"Of course, I do," he replies. "Contrary to popular belief, I do listen to you, you know. I listen to everything."

"You just don't do anything I tell you to do."

"Free will is a lovely thing," he replies with a smirk. He peers at her expectantly. "And, now, I'm sensing another bullet point."

"Fourth … you ordered a whip," she says. "On my laptop."

He nods as he fills both wineglasses. "I did."

"You ordered a whip. On my laptop."

He frowns. "I'm having difficulty discerning whether your ire is directed at the fact that I used your laptop or that I ordered the whip."

"Neither," she says. "I'm not mad."

His gives her a dubious look. "Really."

"I swear, I'm not mad," she says. She glances at the coffee table where her newly poured wineglass is sitting. Give it a moment, she can hear him say, like the complete wine snob that he is. Let it breathe. But she doesn't want to let it breathe. In this moment, she just wants the damned wine. "I'm just …. Why do you think you'll need a whip?" she says, and then she grabs the glass and upends it. A fruity wave of tannins crashes into her tongue, leaving her mouth dry after she swallows.

"Well, I am the Devil, darling," he says, watching with a frown as she chugs. And chugs. And chugs. Tiny slurp-gulping noises fill his brief pause. He continues, "It would seem odd if I didn't have one, wouldn't it?"

"But … I mean, are you expecting to use it?" she says, setting the glass down with a clink.

He regards her for a long moment. She can see the wheels turning in his dark eyes. He's looking for a trap. A gotcha. "I'm replacing an object that was damaged," he says carefully.

Prevaricating. Again.
"That's not what I asked," she says.

He doesn't even bother to speak around a truth this time. He just doesn't speak. He regards her, an unreadable expression loitering on his face, as he reaches forward to pick up his wineglass. He swirls the wine, and he takes a sniff, but not a sip. His nose wrinkles.

The silence percolates.

She sighs. Of course, it percolates. He's the Devil. His experience in maneuvering a conversation is eons beyond her own. And he thinks she's trying to trap him into saying something he'll regret having said.

"Look, is that what you get off on?" she says when he refuses to engage. She's trying desperately not to make it sound like an accusation, because it isn't. It's just .... "Whips and chains and …?" It's just not her. It's not her at all.

The cushions rustle as he shifts his weight. "You're asking if I find pain arousing?" he says, eyebrows arched. His matter-of-fact nonchalance, given the question, only makes her disquiet burgeon.

"I mean …." She swallows. "I saw what's in your toy drawer."

"I've those items so that I can cater to a wide variety of tastes," he says.

She bites her lip. He makes it sound so reasonable. "But … they're not your taste?"

"Well, some of them are," he admits.

"But not the painful stuff," she says. "Like that little spiked ring thing with the padlock."

He looks at her blankly for a moment, like he has enough spiked ring things with padlocks that he doesn't immediately jump to thinking of the one that she means, which only solidifies her fears into iron weights that drag her underwater. She gestures with her thumb and index finger, demonstrating the width of the ring in question. Recognition floods his gaze.

"Kali's Teeth," he replies with a nod.

"Whatever it is," she says with a shrug. "You don't use it?"

"It deters male arousal via punishment for said arousal," he says. He raises his eyebrows. "Do I seem like someone who would wish to deny himself arousal, let alone punish himself for it?"

"No," she says. "Are you?"

"It wouldn't work on me, even if I did use it. It's not Hell-forged."

"It would work on you if you used it while you're with me," she says. "And you still haven't answered me. About pretty much anything."

The silence stretches again.

"Look, I'm not trying to trap you," she says. "I just want a straight answer. I just want to know-"

"What kind of mess you've gotten yourself into?" he says. He gives her a dark look.

"I'm not assuming I'm in any kind of mess!" she snaps. "Knowing you is not a mess. Our relationship … or whatever the hell it is … is not a mess. And I'm not saying these things out of
some desire to clean you up. But don't you think we should maybe talk about …?" She sighs, frustrated that the words aren't coming to her. "I mean, isn't this stuff kind of important, if we're going to have sex?"

For a moment, he seems poised to respond like the whip he bought. Quick. Painful. Each word a swift lash that breaks skin. But she doesn't even have time to brace herself before his knee-jerk reaction is crushed by a more thoughtful one. He closes his eyes briefly as he exhales in a long sigh. His whole body seems to deflate as he pinches the bridge of his nose.

"Apologies," he says in a soft, frustrated tone, looking at his lap.

She blinks. "For what?"

"I … have difficulty … with this," he admits slowly. He shakes his head. "With speaking plainly when I'm the subject of conversation. With not assuming the presence of ulterior motives."

"I know that," she says, hackles lowering.

He takes a breath. "I don't make a habit of denying myself anything, least of all an erection," he says, point blank. "Kali's Teeth is not my idea of fun. All right?"

"O … kay," she says slowly. "And-

"I'm not a sadist," he continues. "I don't enjoy doling pain unless it's wanted. And though I can tolerate quite a lot in the name of quid pro quo, there is a vast gulf that exists between tolerance and enjoyment. I harbor no enjoyment. I'm no masochist, either." He winces as he pointedly rolls his shoulders. A reminder that he's still suffering after what she did to him last week. "I would have thought my distaste for pain were rather obvious by now."

She bites her lip. "Well, I mean, there's pain, and then there's pain." And she thinks even sadists and masochists probably have some limits.

"I assure you," he says dryly, "I enjoy neither."

"And you don't want to whip …?" She clears her throat and finishes off the rest of her wine, what little remains. "I mean you don't expect me to …?"

"Chloe, what arouses me is seeing desires fulfilled," he says. "So, unless you enjoy a good flogging - mine or yours - you can rest assured you'll never see a whip when we shag."

"I don't like being hurt," she says, "and the idea of hurting you again is …." She can't even finish the sentence as his blood paints her mind's eye, and her gorge rises. She squeezes her eyes shut, willing the memories away. "I don't think I could do it." No. She knows she couldn't do it.

He regards her as the silence stretches, and he looks for all the world like he wishes he still had his wings. Just in that moment. So, he could take her suffering away with another light show and a murmured, Be at peace. "I will never hurt you intentionally," he assures her. "And I will never ask you to hurt me in the future. I shouldn't have asked you this time, but I was desperate, and not in possession of my normal fortitude."

"You didn't ask," she replies. "I offered."

"Regardless," he says, "it will never happen again."

"Well, what happens if your fucked up family gives you another set of wings?" she blurts as thoughts of maybe-Michael interject. "What then?"
"Chloe," Lucifer says, the word soft, "I will never ask you to hurt me again. Ever. Not in the bedroom, or in any other context. You have my word."

"But-"

"I'm sure Dr. Linda would be willing help me," he says. "She's almost ready to start working again."

Chloe frowns. "You'd ask Linda to cut off your wings?"

"No," he says. "But I would ask her to help me deal with all the noise."

So, even if Chloe doesn't help, even if she can't help, he has a plan for coping that doesn't involve wallowing in a pile of liquor bottles and pills. She won't be stuck choosing between his good mental health or her own.

"Okay," she says, swallowing. She pulls her shaking fingers through her hair. "And the whip's … not for us."

"It is not," he confirms.

"Okay," she repeats. She lets loose a long sigh she didn't know she'd been holding in. Stress bleeds away as she deflates. "Okay."

"Is this why you've been intimidated?" he says softly. "Because you thought my penchant for punishment extends to the bedroom?"

"I …. Maybe, a little," she admits. "I wouldn't know the first thing about how to …." Sub. Or dominatrix. Is that a verb? "Um." She pours herself another glass of wine. She needs more wine for this. The fruity scent tickles her nose.

"Well, what do you like?" he says. He sounds so … earnest.

And she doesn't think anybody's ever even asked her that, before. Not in a bedroom sense. She's not sure she's thought about it. What does she like? She frowns.

"See, I don't even know what to say to that," she says as her face flames red. "For you, sex is like some 31 flavor Baskin Robbins trip, complete with 75 jillion toppings, and for me ….

"Vanilla," he says. "Chocolate on an exciting day?"

"Yes," she replies.

He scoots closer, wrapping his arm over her shoulder. "This is something I can help you with, if you'll permit me."

She collapses against him, pulling the afghan along with her, covering them both. He's shivering, still. Itty bitty tremors. Like he's too caffeinated or something. It's most pronounced in his limbs, but even his torso is shaking in little concentrated bursts of motion. She wraps an arm over his stomach and presses as close as she can go, and he pulls her closer still. God, she hopes maybe-Michael doesn't make all of this suffering pointless.

"You really don't mind that I'm a fixer upper?" she says, rubbing her palm up and down his side to generate some frictional warmth for him.

"I don't view you as someone who needs to be fixed," he replies.
She looks up at him. "Well, what am I, to you, then? I can't imagine I'm a catch for you." He opens his mouth, but she rushes to say, "I mean for sex," before he can speak.

He thinks for a moment, staring into space. And then he says, "If I were to ask you what your favorite parts of Los Angeles are, what would you tell me?"

She frowns. What does this have to do with sex?

"Humor me," he says.

"Well ...." She thinks. "The beach. Obviously." She can't help but smile when she recalls their beach trip two weekends ago. Aside from the rocky few minutes in the middle, she hadn't been that relaxed or happy in a long time. "The Griffith Observatory is really neat - I like to take Trixie."

He nods. "Perhaps that decadent taco shop you found with your dad on Taco Tuesday."

Her grin stretches as wide as it will go. "Yeah, that, too."

He presses his thumb to her mouth, rubbing the pad of it along her lip, like he's committing her mirth to forever memory. "You enjoy thinking about this," he says. He gives her a gentle tap with his thumb, smiling, before he moves his hand away. "You enjoy sharing your excitement."

She can't help but nod.

"Perhaps," he continues, "you want to show me these places, now, that I've asked about them?"

"Well, I kind of did already," she says. "With the beach. And the tacos."

"Right. Precisely," he says with a nod. His smile makes her heart skip. "Because it's fun to share these experiences."

"Well, yeah," she says.

"So, why is it hard to believe that, metaphorically speaking, sex would be the same for me as Los Angeles is for you?" he says.

She blinks. That's .... That's .... "Oh."

"I'd love to show you my favorite places," he says. "And perhaps we can find out where your favorite places are in the process. Isn't that what you'd call a win-win?"

It really kind of is.

*What* arouses me is *seeing desires fulfilled*, he said.

For some reason, despite the fact that he deals in desire, it never really occurred to her that he might find enjoyment in other people finding enjoyment. That his desire is desire. That's ....

She can't help it when her mind starts painting pictures for her.

Smutty, porny pictures that make her pulse pound in her ears.

Heat creeps down her throat.

"Just something for you to consider," he adds as if he's reading her mind. And then he grins.
Leans closer. Until his lips hover just by her ear. "And for what it's worth," he adds in a low, velvet purr that makes all the air go out of the room, "I can take you to quite a lot more than 31 places."

Her lower body tightens like a screw, and her breaths funnel into almost-panting.

Just thinking about it.

What sex with him might be like.

She swallows.

Maybe, "having a good shag" with him isn't so intimidating, after all.

"Darling, you're having a nightmare," he says as he sits, slumped over the table.

The two crescent-shaped wounds she scored into his back are so deep that she can see bone underneath the gore. He's bleeding. He's bleeding enough that his boxers have soaked through, and he's getting blood on the chair, now, too. It's dripping onto the floor, making bright red puddles on the drop cloth.

"Wake up," he says. He looks at her with pleading eyes, but all she sees are the crimson puddles at his feet.

She presses the hot knife to the wound, and he jerks weakly underneath her. His protests are merely sputtering noises at this point, because he can't yell anymore. The air smells like something burning. Like him. Burning. He smears the blood on the floor with his toes as he squirms in abject misery.

"All of this will be for nothing, you know," his lookalike says with a smirk, sitting across the table from the carnage, hands clasped like the Godfather. "I'll just reattach them when you're done."

There's so much blood.

"Wake up," she hears. "You're having a nightmare."

She snaps back to consciousness, half-choking on panic as the macabre swirls in her head.

"Lucifer," she bleats.

He's looking down at her with his dark eyes, his hand on her shoulder, his body framed by moonlight. He's wearing his wrinkled suit, still, and the sweatshirt she gave him earlier.

"I'm sorry to intrude," he says. "I thought you might frighten Beatrice."

But all she can do is stare at him, heart stuck in her throat.

"Are you all right?" he adds in a soft voice, and she needs that.

He's here, and he's not bleeding, and he's not dying, and for all his distress within the awful moments of what she did, he's not distressed, now, and she needs that. She needs the reminder that now is not so awful as then. That now isn't awful at all.

"Chloe?" he says.

She grabs his hand, holding it against her skin, before he can withdraw. A soft, surprised sound
falls from his lips at the contact - this isn't the sort of thing he's used to doing, consoling people, offering empathy - but then he takes a step and sits on the edge of the bed, beside her. The mattress sinks with the addition of his weight. He snakes his free arm around her and pulls her close.

He's still not warm.

But in this moment, he warms her, anyway.

"Darling, you're shaking," he says.

She sniffs, staring down at his trembling hand, still clutched between her palms. "So are you."

"But in your case, it's a mystery why," he prods, in a tone that suggests it's not a mystery to him in the slightest.

She swallows. "I'm ...." Her eyes prickle and well up. "I'm ...." Her lower lip trembles. "I'm really not fine."

His embrace tightens. "I know."

"I just want to stop seeing it," she says, gasping as she falls apart in his arms, snot and tears and all. "Why can't I stop seeing it?"

He's quiet for a long, long moment, rubbing her back. She likes that he's not the type to offer meaningless platitudes and sickening optimism. He doesn't tell her to calm down, or that it will be all right, or that she shouldn't feel this way, as if any of that would somehow make the nightmares stop.

All he says is, "Shall I stay?"

She nods.

"All right," he says, and she scoots over to make room for him.

They settle like a wave against the shore, and he drapes his arm against her hip.

"You're okay like this?" she says in a small voice.

"I'm fine on my side," he says, the words a soft murmur against her neck. "Be at peace." The words don't have the same weight anymore. They don't have the same overwhelming injection of divine will. She isn't instantly liberated from stress and woe. But as his embrace tightens, she feels safe.

Safe, and warm, and loved.

It's easy to sleep with him here.

It's easy not to dream.
Thank you, thank you, as always, to the people who take time to leave me notes and feedback. It's beyond appreciated, and I cherish each and every one. Quite a few actually helped give me motivation to keep working, even when I was getting frustrated enough to walk away for a while.

Chapter title credit goes to David Bowie & Queen.

To those of you who prefer more bite-sized chapters, I'm sorry. Because this chapter is GINORMOUS. I played around with breaking it up, but I wrote it as a cohesive unit complete with steadily rising action, and I think it works best as is. Fingers crossed you agree with me.

Anyway, I hope you all enjoy as I start to gather up my plot spaghetti and make sense of it :) And I know I said it already, but it really can't be said enough -- thank you so much for the feedback.

She wakes ten minutes before her alarm goes off, and for once, she isn't wishing an anvil would fall out of the sky, crush her clock, and stop time in its tracks. Those ten minutes aren't sleep she's lost. Just time awake that she's gained. She hasn't slept this well in days. Not since before she helped Lucifer with his wings. She almost forgot what feeling rested felt like. Note: it feels delightful.

The sound of the shower running is a distant rush behind the master bathroom door. Lucifer, she guesses, since he's not in the bed anymore. Either that, or Maze broke in again to utilize the dual shower head.

Chloe rolls out of bed, scrunching her toes into her soft area rug as she stands. And then she stretches, hands reaching up toward the ceiling as she arches her back. It feels so good, and she can't help the pleased moan that falls from her lips.

He might not have the mojo to bless her anymore, but wow.

Perhaps his companionship was just that reassuring, in a moment when she really needed reassurance.

She heads to the bathroom, stopping in front of the entryway. "Lucifer?" she says, rapping her knuckles against the door.

"Yes?" he calls back. His suggestive grin when he adds, "Care to join me?" is loud enough that she can hear it.

She swallows, and what little sleep she still has loitering in her crowded mind vacates like a neuron yelled fire. "Um." Yes. Yes, yes, yes. But .... "Um." Trixie needs breakfast. And Chloe has a shift at work that she needs to be on time for. And-

"Oh, relax, will you?" he says with an amused snort, like he can see her out here, standing wide-
eyed, waffling. "I wouldn't be me if I didn't at least ask."

Which … okay. He has a point.

She hears a squeak. The water flow shrinks from a white-noise rush to a drip, drip, drip, and then it stops. The shower curtain rustles, and she hears him pull a towel off the rack.

When he opens the bathroom door, a billowing cloud of steam thick enough to chew escapes from within, and the mirror behind him is fogged over, top to bottom. He's wearing one of her red luxury towels wrapped around his waist, but nothing else. His hair is slicked back. And he's actually a bit lobster-colored from the shower.

"Hi," she says.

A sultry smile slides across his face. "Hello, darling."

He steps close and presses his lips to hers. He smells faintly floral, a remnant of her shampoo, and he tastes like fresh mint. He's warm and solid. She reflexively wraps her arms around his waist, yanking him closer, and today, it seems, is a day he's happy to let her move him. A pleased, guttural purr loiters in his throat as he bumps into her, and she drinks the sound down like wine. When he pulls away to catch his breath, she feels like she might float away.

What was she …? She can't help but lick her lips to taste him again. Euphoria. Is that what this is? God, she feels like giggling.

"We'll save the shower for later," he says.

But all she can say in reply is a stuporous, "What?"

"Shower. Later," he repeats slowly. He grins at her. "Preferably when your reaction isn't an Oscar-winning deer-in-headlights impression." He brushes her cheek with his thumb, gaze full of affection. "You look lovely, by the way."

"I … do?" She blinks, looking down at herself. He always seems to say that when she feels least deserving of the compliment. She's wearing a wrinkled t-shirt and underwear. She has no makeup on. Based on feel, her hair is a rat's nest. And she just kissed him without brushing her teeth, first. And he thinks she looks lovely?

"Well, I don't lie," he adds, like she asked the question aloud, and he steps past her into the bedroom, where his wrinkled shirt, pants, and vest are hanging over the back of her reading chair, and his boxers and the sweatshirt are folded up, resting on the seat.

Which means … he stripped here. Before his shower. While she was sleeping, he was naked for a few minutes, and-

She swallows. Thanks to his shamelessness early in their partnership, she already knows what the full package looks like, and thanks to last week - though she hadn't been able to enjoy the view at the time - her memory of his features is revitalized. She can't help but dwell on that picture in her mind's eye. That body. This healthier, chattier, happier Lucifer.

He reaches for his clothes with one hand, the other hand dangerously close to the left of his navel, where the tomato-colored towel is cinched. Like he's going to drop his makeshift sarong right there. Right in front of her.

She slaps her hand to her mouth, not-so-surreptitiously checking for drool. Her lips are dry. Good.
And then he says over his shoulder, "You want a show, darling, or are you going to turn around?"

His idea of fair warning, she supposes.

"I want to," she blurs, heart racing.

He peers at her, not even bothering to conceal his surprise. "You want me to give you a show?"

"I want to join you in the shower," she says in a rush.

His eyebrows creep ever closer to his hairline. "Oh?"

"The deer-in-headlights thing," she says. "That was …. I mean, that was mostly about my schedule being interrupted. Not about the idea of … um." Her gaze wanders to her shower. And then back to him. And then south. And she's having absolutely no trouble pretending she has X-ray vision with respect to that towel.

He shifts. Like he's posing for her. "I feel rather like a rack of lamb this morning," he says, eyes gleaming, and she snaps her gaze away.

Fuckity fuck. Why does he bring out the shameless ogler within?

"Sorry," she says, blushing.

"Oh, don't apologize," he replies in a low, hungering tone. "I quite enjoyed it." He steps back into her orbit, clothes forgotten, so close she can feel him radiating. "Feel free to continue," he purrs next to her ear. "Any time it suits you."

Her insides tighten, and her mouth goes dry. "If I did that, I'd never look at your face."

His laugh unfurls into the space between them, and the room suddenly feels like a warm home after a walk in the cold. He says, "I never knew you to be such a voyeur."

"Neither did I," she confesses wryly.

She rests her fingers against the edge of the towel, just below his navel. Her index finger brushes the soft beginnings of his happy trail. The towel is bulging slightly over his groin, revealing his growing interest in this discussion, but he doesn't make note of it, joking or otherwise.

He looks down at her, eyes growing serious again. "I take it our little talk last night … helped you?"

"Yes," she says, swallowing. "Yes, it did. A lot."

"Splendid."

"Just … please, promise not to laugh at me," she says. "If I'm not one of the ridiculous Britney-ish porn stars you're used to, I mean."

"I wouldn't laugh at you for that," he says, no hint of humor in his eyes. His gaze narrows with a hint of fury. "Has someone laughed at you?"

She shakes her head, and the fire in his eyes wanes to embers. "No, I'm just ….

"Intimidated," he finishes for her, nodding. "Right." He looks down at her with a sigh. "Chloe, my intent is to give you pleasure. Not traumatize you."
She bites her lip. "Then … I want to."

"So, on a weekend, when you've no pressing engagements, and you've passed your miscreant off to Daniel for a few hours …?"

"Yes," she says with a nod. "Yes, I want to." She swallows, and she rushes to say, "Just a shower."

"Well, I'll definitely make up for the last one," he says. "Even without a shag."

She believes him. She takes a deep breath. "That sounds like a good place for us to start."

Once she's said the words - that they have a definitive starting line, which they're planning imminently to cross - she has a panicked moment of oh, God, oh, God, what the hell mortifying insanity did I just get myself into? but he doesn't let her dwell on it.

"Lovely," he murmurs, and she has no idea if he's talking about her, or her plan. Then he kisses her again.

Like the first kiss, it's all-encompassing, and everything in her body starts to spark. Heat ignites as blush races down her throat and chest. Her lower body throbs, and she wants more. Much more. She can't stop herself from grinding into him, which leaves absolutely nothing to the imagination about what he's got going on under that towel - it's a full-on, rock-solid salute, at this point. And he's … not small. He groans against her lips at the down-low contact, and the carnal sound of him, undone, makes her I'm-empty-please-fill-me-up feeling unbearable.

She's nanoseconds from throwing reason to the wind and telling him, "Forget plans. Fuck me, now."

But then she hears someone moving in the kitchen downstairs - Maze, from the heaviness of the footfalls - and Chloe flinches backward. She and Lucifer part. Just enough for an iota sense to return. Maze, whatever. But Trixie is in the apartment somewhere. Chloe can't bang the Devil when Trixie is in hearing range and could literally walk in any second.

All Chloe has to do is whisper, "No, no, no, this can't happen, now."

Lucifer backs off, not one complaint or indication of disappointment, despite what must be painful sexual frustration, if her whining lower body is any indication of the whining going on in his.

"Apologies," he says, looking a little discombobulated. "I'd meant to keep that G-rated."

She snorts with amusement. "My fault with the bump and grind," she says, panting.

"It happens when you deprive yourself," he replies. "Really, do you not own a vibrator, at least? I can loan-"

"No, thanks," she's quick to say. "And for your information, yes, I do have one." Two, actually. "I'm not a nun."

"Where is it?" he says. "I'll charge the batteries for you. You clearly need to have a go."

"Oh, my God, shut up," she says, grinning.

"I'm merely advocating good health," he replies with a leonine shrug. His eyes are twinkling. "You needn't bring Dad into it."
She rolls her eyes and doesn't reply.

Sweat creeps down the small of her back.

The interrupted kiss and subsequent groin-to-groin frottage has left her with a painful void, and a mind’s eye that now can't stop playing pornography starring herself, the Devil, and her favorite purple vibrator. *What setting do you like?* he's saying with a leer as he slips his hand between her legs, her vibrator cupped in his palm. *This one?* He hits a button, and the little vibrator whirs. *Or ... this one?*

Damn it.

God, *damn it.*

She can't help but shift awkwardly on her feet as the void between her legs gets *worse*, not better.

She shakes her head, trying to get some sense to fall out of the jumble. Trixie, she remembers. Trixie, Trixie, Trixie. Chloe's not in the mood to explain why she's so flushed she looks like she spilled rouge on her face. She clears her throat, brushing her lips with the back of her hands. She takes a deep breath and blows it out as she tries to cool herself down. Cold thoughts. Think cold, not-sexy, igloo thoughts.

And that's when it hits her.

"Hey," she says, looking up at him. "You're warm again."

Lucifer's grin is a sly one. " Noticed that, did you?"

She closes the gap between them once again, taking a moment to touch his arm. He's not just warm. He's radiating. She can feel him even when she's only hovering over him with her palm instead of touching him. He feels like he used to. Before she cut him up.

So … seven days on the nose for the "backup generators" Maze spoke of to kick in.

"How's your back?" Chloe says. She saw his wounds earlier, but she'd been more interested in what he was going to do with the towel, at the time. Also, he hadn't been this close. "Can I see?"

He frowns, but he turns around for her, nonetheless. The crescent-shaped wounds still look awful. The cauterized area looks melted, almost, and the unburned skin at the edges is raw and red and angry, making sense of the roughness she felt yesterday when she touched but didn't see. These are the kinds of wounds that throb with every heartbeat, and that's just the superficial. She can't imagine what his ravaged wing joints feel like underneath. She strokes his skin - the unblemished parts.

Looking at the damage makes her ache.

But, at least, she isn't looking at what she did to him.

She's looking at her best friend (soonish-lover?), who's injured, and that's the only connotation there is.

"Maybe, they'll heal faster now that you're 'coming back online,' so to speak."

"Perhaps," he replies. "But I'll take pain over freezing, any day of the millennium, so I'm glad the temperature issue fixed itself first."
She laughs. "Remind me never to suggest skiing in Aspen if we need ideas for fun outings."

"Remind you in exchange for what?" he says.

She presses her palms against the small of his back, and she kisses his shoulder, well away from the healing carnage. A gentle *quid pro quo*.

"Hmm," he says, a rumble. "Well, all right, then."

After being slept in, Lucifer's suit is an unsalvageable disaster. "This is my first walk of shame where I've actually felt shamed," he scoffs, looking at his wrinkled sport coat in disgust. "Giorgio would have a bloody *stroke* if he saw this."

"What's a walk of shame?" Trixie says as she munches on her cereal.

Lucifer opens his mouth to reply, but Chloe says, "It's nothing, Monkey," before he has a chance to "educate" Trixie on the finer arts of one-night stands. Chloe puts her palms on his hips and guides him toward the front door with a gentle push. He humors her, allowing himself to be steered.

"Giorgio?" Chloe says, frowning. She doesn't see much point in mentioning to him that sex is usually considered a prerequisite for walks of shame, and they hadn't had any.

He glances back at her as he reaches for the deadbolt. "Yes," he says absently. "Armani."

She blinks. Of *course*, Lucifer's on a first name basis with Mr. Armani, she thinks with a sigh. And she's not sure she wants to know if it's because Lucifer did Mr. Armani, or because Lucifer did Mr. Armani a favor. She doesn't ask.

Lucifer pulls open the front door and steps onto the stoop. He wants to go home and change before meeting her at the precinct. The problem is - as happy as this morning has been - his car is outside. In the real world. And as soon as she steps out onto the stoop behind him, everything wrong seems to start rushing back into her awareness, like she's participating in the Running of the Bulls.

"Look … about maybe-Michael," she says as she walks with Lucifer to his car. The cool, early-morning air is laden with dew, and the windows of the Corvette are just a little fogged.

Lucifer sighs. "Talked to Amenadiel, did you?"

"Maze."

"Ah." His keys jingle as he stuffs them into his pocket, and he directs his full attention to her. He seems about as thrilled by this line of conversation as a lobster waiting for its turn in the pot. "What about Michael?" he says with a resigned expression, folding his arms like a shield.

She licks her lips nervously as a car burning oil rumbles past on the street, filling the air with an unpleasant odor. She coughs, trying to clear her lungs. "Well, what should I do if he-"

"Nothing," Lucifer replies. Quick. Without consideration. Like a gunshot. "Do absolutely *nothing* except withdraw. I will handle it."

She folds her arms, matching his stance as she regards him dubiously. "Maze made it sound like you probably can't."
"Well, I didn't say I'd handle it well," he snarks.

She fails to see any levity, though. She doesn't smile.

He sighs and steps closer to her, resting his hands on her shoulders as he regards her with a serious look. "Putting aside the fact that I'm not yet convinced that Michael is responsible for Mr. Jones's rapid mental deterioration, there is literally nothing you can do about my brother if he is, and I would prefer you not to be involved. All right?"

"What if I want to be involved?" she says.

"Well, he won't kill you," Lucifer replies. "And to look upon him won't drive you insane."

"But that's great, isn't it?" she says, frowning. "Doesn't that make me a bombproof participant in any potential Angel Thunderdome?"

"Not in the least."

Her frown deepens. "But ….

"That still leaves 206 bones that he can break," Lucifer elaborates. "And that's not even considering the catastrophic soft tissue damage he could perpetrate, or the fact that he could still snap your mind like a twig; he just wouldn't use the sight of his wings to do it."

"Oh," she says with a gulp as her innards drop out.

"And then he could heal you and do it all over again," Lucifer continues. "Indefinitely. It wouldn't technically be killing you, after all. You'll just wish you were dead."

"An angel would really do that?" she says, eyes watering. "Aren't you supposed to protect mankind or something?"

"Yes, that is a duty we've been tasked with," Lucifer says softly. "Reality, however, can be very different, particularly when humans get in the way of an even higher purpose."

"But how in the hell is forcing wings on you a higher purpose?" she says. She sighs as frustration overwhelms her. "Lucifer, I don't get it!"

He gives her an embittered look. "Welcome to my bloody life."

Despite having to detour to Lux to pick up a suit and groom himself to his satisfaction, Lucifer actually beats Chloe to the precinct. As she trudges toward her desk with a sigh, she finds him chatting with Emily, looking like money and acting like royalty, and Emily is laughing and laughing, completely sucked into his debonair whirlwind of extroversion and charm.

He's wearing a freshly pressed, charcoal, three-piece suit, with diamond-studded cufflinks. His royal purple handkerchief matches his royal purple shirt. His cologne, with soft notes of sandalwood and vanilla, is a pleasant, familiar scent that she can't help but inhale in one long breath, because it's comforting. Like a baking pumpkin pie or something.

Clive Christian No. 1, he told her once when she asked what it was. Why? Do you fancy it?

But this had been before. Before everything. And she'd been too flustered to say yes.

"Detective," Lucifer says with a nod as she approaches.
"Hey, Decker," Emily adds with a grin. Her face is covered in natural blush, and her mocha-colored eyes sparkle behind her glasses. "Was there traffic or something?"

"No," Chloe says with a grumble. "The new cruiser's fuel light is busted, apparently."

"Oh, no," Emily says with a sinking expression, "Did you-"

"Yes," Chloe says, glowering as she recalls the sound of her engine starting to sputter and die, "but I was literally next to a gas station when it happened, so it wasn't as bad as it could have been."

Emily gives her a sympathetic look. "Well, that's a relief, at least."

"What new cruiser?" Lucifer says, frowning.

"My new cruiser," Chloe says. She picked it up after leaving Lucifer's place on Sunday evening. Dan met her at the precinct with Trixie to help Chloe juggle cars. Lucifer seems mystified, though, so she adds slowly, "You know, my new cruiser, which I was issued after I lost the old one?" Lucifer's boggled look doesn't abate. "The new car that you've ridden in?"

"Well, how was I to know that car was new?" Lucifer says, miffed. "Your vehicles are all the same bloody model, with the same nondescript boring colors - a tragedy, frankly. And how does one lose a car, anyway?"

"By getting kidnapped?" Emily says incredulously. "Hello?"

Lucifer frowns. "But they didn't kidnap the car, did they? The only cars I incinerated were the rusty fossils already at the dump."

"The problem is that we don't know where we were when we got kidnapped," Chloe explains. "And whatever else those assholes did to the car when they grabbed us, they disabled the transponder."

"Which sucks," Emily adds, "because whatever they were doing in the woods in the first place, it has to be in the vicinity of where we blew out the tires."

"You were in Angeles National Forest," Lucifer says.

"Yeah," Emily replies with a snort. "Somewhere in the middle of a thousand square miles. In the dark. On an unmarked road. And even if we somehow did manage to wander to the right place, it's not like we'd be able to recognize it. I mean, I doubt the car is still sitting there like a giant 'the drug dealers are here!' sign. They must have moved it."

"No, you misunderstand me," Lucifer replies patiently. "I mean, I know where you left the car."

"Come again?" Emily says.

Lucifer turns to Chloe. "You were kidnapped shortly after you prayed, yes? When you were stargazing?"

Lucifer, they're so worth looking at, she remembers thinking. You did a beautiful thing.

"… Yes," she says slowly. Holy shit. He can …?

Lucifer shrugs. "Well, then I know where you left the car."

"Praying is like GPS?" Chloe says. "Seriously?"
"How did you think I found you quickly enough to rescue you?"

"I … honestly hadn't even wondered." Some detective, she thinks with a sigh as she recalls that night. He had gotten there almost instantaneously. She pleaded for help, and he was there nuking the whole garbage dump seconds later. Hope burgeons. "You could take us there?" she says, peering at him. "You could take us to where we got jumped?"

"Of course, I could," he says. "It's not like cutting off my wings destroyed my sense of direction."

She scoops up her keys. "Well, let's go then." Talk about a break in the case!

But, "Wait," says Emily, holding up her hands like stop signs. "Wait, wait, wait."

"Yes?" Lucifer replies.

"This is like an hour-plus drive," Emily says. "Which means we're going to spend at least two-and-a-half hours roundtrip in the car today."

"So?" Chloe says.

"So, you're seriously going to entertain this method-acting stuff for a three-hour nonsense trip?"

"It is neither nonsense, nor method acting." Lucifer replies, ruffled. "Whether you choose to believe me or not, I am the Devil. As such, I am also an angel - a fact for which you're quite lucky, I might add, because at the time of your untimely demise, Detective Decker prayed to me for aid, and I came."

"Well, show me your wings, then," Emily counters reasonably, folding her arms.

Lucifer rolls his eyes. "Were you not bloody listening? I cut them off."

"How convenient," Emily says with a wry gaze. "Look, I can believe the mentalist stuff. And the charisma. And the favors. And the method acting is a fun way to add some flavor to the day. But-
"

"Well, why don't you go to the hospital and check on Mr. Jones, instead, then?" Chloe suggests to keep the peace. "Maybe, he's lucid, or the lab results on his tox screens are back."

"Okay, that," Emily says with a nod and a smile, "That, I can do." She gives them an apologetic look. "I'm really sorry to harsh your mellow."

"I've no stake in the location of your wayward vehicle," Lucifer says with an easy shrug. "The only 'mellow' you're 'harshing' is your own." He encapsulates the words mellow and harshing in sarcastic little air quotes.

To which Emily blushes and replies, "Touché."

Angeles Crest Highway is a lot less treacherous in sunlight. None of the road features jibe with her fuzzy memory of twisting, moonlit shadows and switchback turns. Probably because the guardrails along the road - which by night overlook a black abyss - do nothing more than separate the car from an infinite coniferous sea.

The scenery itself is also far more foreign by day. There are no palm trees or birds-of-paradise or sand, as there are at elevation zero. No hummingbirds that zip about from bloom to bloom, or the
ever ubiquitous flip-flopped human, bopping along on a beach cruiser. No manicured, irrigated lawns, filled with foliage that wouldn't ever grow without wasteful human assistance. Best of all, though, there are no eighteen-lane highways, or traffic, or hazy, smog-filled skies. And there is no noise. The troposphere is a clear window to cerulean infinity, and the fresh air carries only silence with it.

Chloe can't resist the urge to roll down the windows and fantasize about taking a day off work to go camping with Trixie. They hadn't gone camping in a while. Chloe frowns, glancing at Lucifer, who's staring into space. Would he like camping? He seems firmly in favor of living in the lap of luxury, and she finds it difficult to imagine him spending a night in a tent, of all things. Still, though, he's been alive longer than human civilization, and though he likes to play at being prim and proper, he's made of hardier building blocks than anyone she knows. Surely, he's roughed it, at times?

"Are we nearly there?" she says.

When he doesn't immediately reply, she glances at him again. He's still staring into space.

"Lucifer?" she prods, hoping his brain hasn't ricocheted somewhere off into the void.

He blinks and looks at her. "Yes?" he says, and she deflates with relief. This is already going to be a long trip without them overshooting their destination.

"Sorry," she says. "I thought you might have …." She releases the steering wheel with one hand to make a flitting motion. "You were staring at nothing again."

"Oh," he says. "No, I'm all right. We're just getting-" He pauses abruptly and leans forward against his seatbelt. "Here."

Chloe slows the car to a crawl, frowning as the tires crunch along on the asphalt. "… Here? But there's no service road here."

He points to the left. "Be that as it may," he says slowly, "yes, here." He squints at the woods. "The access road might be farther down the highway, or we may have passed it. I can only give you as-the-angel-flies sort of directions, and I assure you, we're quite close. Perhaps a mile off, if that."

"Okay," she says, trying not to sound too dubious.

She finds a pull-off covered in gravel and tire tracks, where the shoulder is wide enough to park her car. She pulls out her don't-tow-me-I'm-law-enforcement placard and places it on the dash. She radios NPS to warn them she'll be walking around armed, and where. And then, so she doesn't have to worry about losing another car, she pulls out her phone and makes a custom waypoint on the map to mark where they are. She also makes a mental note of the mile marker, this time. Just in case of armageddon or something. With her luck, armageddon is a possibility.

They climb out of the car. Her feet sink a bit into the cold gravel, and she can't help but tip her head back and inhale. A reddish-colored hawk flies overhead, lazily circling as it rides the updrafts.

"Shall we?" Lucifer says, gesturing to the woods beyond the road as she shifts her gaze back to ground level.

"Yeah," she says. "I want to catch these assholes."
Without a path or a road, the going is slow. Between rocks and loose roots, between bushes, trees, scrub, and beds of pine needles deep enough to sink into up to the ankle, the hike Lucifer takes her on is at least sixty minutes long. She loses all track of her spatial orientation - they could be going in circles for all she knows. But she trusts him not to lie about his skills, at least, and she follows his lead.

Lucifer sighs as a scraggly, low-hanging branch rips open his suit jacket, displaying the purple silk lining like guts. "Only Tuesday, and this week is already a fashion massacre," he says as he pulls the branch out of the way for her, and she struggles to scoot past.

"Which designer is having a stroke, now?" she says, panting as her shoes get tangled in long, dry grass, and she has to kick and scrape to free herself.

Lucifer glances down at his suit, sparing a long, displeased look at his dusty, scraped-up shoes. "Rolling in his grave, more like," he says. "This ensemble is Prada." He sighs. "Mario was quite the male chauvinist, you know. Not my favorite chap. His daughter Luisa was lovely, though."

Chloe wipes a sweaty, loose strand of hair from her eyes. "Okay, seriously," she says, tromping over some large rocks, "are you responsible for the entire fashion industry or something? You did that many favors?"

He snickers. "I did none of them favors," he says. "They flourished entirely on their own merits and wherewithal. I merely appreciate their art and passion. I enjoy the Italian aesthetic."

"You used to visit Earth?" she says. "Before, I mean?"

"Occasionally," he says with a nod. "A favor here. A favor there. A side trip now and then." He smirks. "Ever read Hamlet?"

"Why?"

He shrugs. "Let's just say I killed Rosencrantz and Guildenstern."

She pauses for a moment, gaping. "You wrote ...?"

"Why, yes," Lucifer says, eyes gleaming. "Yes, I did." He considers for a moment. "Well, polished it, mostly. But Will was quite blocked on the ending, so I helped."

"You wrote the ending of Hamlet," she says, disbelieving. "And William Shakespeare is just 'Will' to you?"

"Yes, darling," Lucifer says in a teasing tone. "Do keep up."

"Right," she says with a snort, adding William Shakespeare to the notches in Lucifer's bedposts, along with Giorgio Armani and maybe Mother Teresa. Chloe still hasn't worked up the nerve to ask definitively about Mother Teresa. Still, though, talk about an eclectic love life. Perhaps Chloe really doesn't have anything to worry about.

They spill out onto the barest hint of an unpaved road that cuts through the undergrowth. The tree canopy is thick, here, and only vague hints of sunshine dapple the ground. Pockmarked tire tracks, each overrun by a carpet of weeds and wildflowers, extend in both directions.

"Is this it?" she says.

"Yes," he replies with an easy shrug. "Give or take a few feet."
She frowns, not recognizing any of the land.

Her missing cruiser is nowhere to be seen, not that she expected to find it, at this point.

"Ah," Lucifer says, spotting something. He darts down the path. He flares out his suit jacket behind him as he lowers himself to his haunches to grab something. She reaches him just as he's standing up again, fingers clasped around a metal object caked with dirt and roots. He shakes off the filth, and then he offers his bounty to her. "Further proof, should you doubt me," he says.

His gift is a rusted caltrop. It's shaped like a jack, except all the ends are spiked instead of rounded. It looks exactly like the one she saw hooked into her tire before she was knocked out.

She's not even sure what drives her to do it - their relationship isn't quite the appropriate level of lived in or familiar, yet - but she collides with him, wrapping her arms around his waist. He makes a low-pitched sound of surprise, and the caltrop he found falls to the ground from his now-lax fingers.

"You are the best," she tells him, beaming.

He gives her this odd, sort-of-smiling, maybe-pleased look of befuddlement. Like he's never once in his life heard this kind of compliment to his character - unobsequious, unmotivated, genuine - and he's not at all sure how to react.

She rises onto her tiptoes.

"Thank you," she adds, and she presses her lips to his before he can think too hard about schooling himself.

He makes a soft, rumbling little half-word in the back of his throat, a nonsense syllable that speaks pleasure. Her heart starts to pound, and that sandalwood scent of his wraps around her body like a warm cloak. She nips his lower lip as she pulls away, slowing sinking to flatfooted again.

For a moment after that, all she hears is birds.

"You're … quite welcome," he says, the words low and throaty. He presses the back of his hand to his mouth like he's trying to preserve the feeling of her skin against his. And then clears his throat and looks down the road, where it disappears around a corner, into the underbrush. "Shall we … um." He clears his throat again, and she can't help but grin at how flustered she makes him. "Shall we follow the yellow brick road?"

"Which way is back to the car?" she says. "I'm completely turned around."

Lucifer jabs his thumb over his shoulder, pointing the opposite way.

"All right, then," she says. "Let's keep going."

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*Mr. Jones tested negative for everything,* Emily texts a few minutes later. *Cannabinoids, opiates, stims, hallucinogens. The whole nine yards.*

Lucifer sighs when Chloe shows him her phone. "For Dad's sake," he says, "that doesn't mean Michael is what pushed Mr. Jones off his trolley."

She kicks a rock down the path and watches it skip along in the dust. "Why don't you think
"Michael's involved?"

"Because Michael's not one to faff about," Lucifer replies. "If he wanted to send me a message of some kind, he would show up with the bloody letter and hand it to me." He considers for a moment, frowning, and then adds as he rubs his jaw, "Or possibly paste me with it, depending upon his mood."

She swallows, kicking the rock again. "I think somebody was watching me yesterday."

Lucifer stops in his tracks. Gravel and dirt churn beneath his feet as he shifts to face her. "What?"

"It was just a feeling," she rushes to assure him. "Maze looked around for me last night, but she didn't see anything to suggest someone had been snooping around."

"But you felt as though someone was watching?" he says, tone dire.

She explains what happened the night before when she'd gotten home with Trixie.

"Why did you not tell me this when it happened?" he demands, the warmth in his eyes replaced by twisting inferno.

"You were sleeping," she says. She looks up at him guiltily. "And I thought you wouldn't believe me, anyway. I thought you'd tell me I was projecting my guilt, again."

But from the turmoil in his expression, he believes her maybe-stalker is an actual stalker without question. The only uncertainty is the stalker's identity.

"This changes everything," Lucifer says, gaze glinting like cut diamonds as they resume walking.

"How?" she says, giving the rock another kick.

"Because I don't have any reason to believe my brother would avoid me and play games if he were here for me," Lucifer says, "but I have every reason to believe he'd avoid me and play games if he were here for you, given my track record."

"What track record?"

He sighs. "I wish you'd told me sooner."

"What track record, Lucifer?"

"It isn't relevant," he insists.

"God, you are just so ...." "

"So, what?" he snaps.

Her frustration is a fire-breathing monster, at this point, and she can't help but growl. The sound echoes through the forest, bouncing off trees and rocks, at first, and then all that remains is the orchestra of birds and bugs. She takes a deep breath and blows it out. The air smells earthy, faintly reminiscent of petrichor, and she can't help but relax as she soaks it in.

After a moment, she's able to say more measuredly, "So, what do we do, now?"

He folds his arms, peering down his nose at her. "We will not do anything," he says, in a prim, superior tone that threatens to light a match to her temper again.
She grinds her teeth, venting her feelings into kicking the shit out of the poor rock she's been bumping down the path with them. "Lucifer, this isn't just your problem. You can't cut me out of the solution."

"Chloe, I've no doubt of your drive and ingenuity - I admire both in ways I cannot hope to quantify - and I appreciate that you want to help, truly," he says, and it would be nice to hear if his litany of *yay you!* weren't an obvious attempt to mollify her.

"But?" she says flatly, glaring.

And, sure enough, Lucifer follows his lovely stream of compliments with a worried, "But you are *way* out of your league. He will *crush* you. Let me handle it."

"But, maybe, I can crush *him,*" she counters. "I mean, I'm like walking kryptonite for you. Couldn't I be the same for him, too? I mean, that would make sense, wouldn't it?"

"I don't know," Lucifer says. "I didn't discover that you were the cause of my mortality issues until just before Amenadiel fell. And with Mum on the loose, and everything else, I …." He stares into space with a grimace, like he's frustrated with himself that he let such an important issue fall to the wayside. "I didn't even think to test it."

And from the look in his eyes, he's not used to this. Being a step behind on the chessboard. Not already knowing all the possibilities. He's not prescient but he *is* a meticulous prognosticator. He's not prone to being surprised.

"Well, is there anything we can use against Michael that's a sure thing?" she says, thinking. "Other than Maze's knives, I mean?"

Lucifer's lips are a grim line. "Please," he says, "let me bloody handle it."

"But, maybe, I can *help!*" she insists.

He growls as he finally breaks, wheeling on his feet to snap at her, "*Why are you so bloody obstinate?!*"

"Says the flag-waving leader of the Fuck Authority Club!" she snaps back. "Seriously? What happened to letting me make my own choices?"

His expression twists like he sucked a lemon. "I've given you no commands," he says, disgusted as he turns away. "You can bloody well do what you like."

"Lucifer," she says, reaching for his sleeve.

"It's not as though I ask you for much," is all he says in reply, radiating wounded self-righteousness as he steps out of her range.

Fuck. Fuck, fuck, fuck. She takes a deep breath, trying to calm the raging fire in her veins. Fighting fire with fire just results in a bigger conflagration.

"Have you considered that my presence might mean you could take down an archangel with nothing more than a manmade gun?" she says as she trots after him to keep up. "Maybe, I'm an equalizer. Maybe, *that's* my purpose." And wouldn't that be a kicker?

But he doesn't stop. Doesn't acknowledge her idea. He just keeps striding forward like a locomotive. "Lucifer, come …." She blinks as she peers at the forest around them. "… On."
They've come upon a large clearing. Large enough for semi trucks to easily turn around in. And there are multiple fat tire tracks scored into the dirt and flattened grass. At the edge of the clearing, framed by slanting, crepuscular rays, is a dilapidated ranger shack with rotting shingles, chipping paint, and dirty, broken shutters that have fallen to the ground beside the building, forgotten. The building's front is half-choked by vines, but she can see a small porch in the tangle, along with a door.

"Well, this looks promising," Lucifer says with a predatory grin as they stand at the edge of the clearing, watching.

"Yeah," Chloe agrees. She swallows. "And we're not done, yet," she tells him. "We're talking about this Michael thing later. Don't think this is going to distract me."

Lucifer regards her with molten irritation, and he looks like he wants to say quite a lot more than a deep, dark, dangerous, "Fine."

They wait ten minutes to see if anyone will show at the cabin, but there's no sign of any human activity in the vicinity. No noise. No movement. No vehicles. No nothing.

She draws her gun, motions for him to follow, and edges around the clearing toward the station. The small porch is rotted through in places, and her weight is enough to bow the floor slats precariously. Lucifer, though, is light on his feet when he wants to be, it seems, and he's able to skirt the sides with little effort. He reaches the door of the shack first, only to freeze, and the hunting-for-prey gleam in his eyes flickers out.

He reaches for something shiny attached to the door. He takes it into his hands, pulling away a long silver chain and a dirty strip of tape with it. He looks at his bounty, unblinking, his expression getting grimmer and grimmer with each passing second. She can feel the figurative squall as it billows up around them.

"Semper inops quicumque cupit," Lucifer says, the words cold and stark.

"What does that mean?" she says.

She gets a glimpse of a circular pendant the size of a peppermint hard candy before he pockets it and the chain and the tape. "Let's catch your drug dealers, first, shall we?" he says without looking at her. His tone is void of amusement or enjoyment. His eyes are bleak and black and fathomless.

Something is wrong. Way wrong.

"No," she says, pressing. "What did you take from the door? Let me see."

She makes a grab for his pocket.

She didn't think he could move that fast. Not anymore.

But one moment, he's there, and she's reaching for his pocket. The next moment, the door of the ranger station is in splinters, the "No Trespassing" placard falls to the now-empty threshold with a thunk, and he's inside. She reaches the threshold moments later, kicking aside the placard as she watches him stalk a quick circuit around the room like a tiger.

Nothing.

There's nothing in the room but an old, rotting desk, covered in a transparent, moisture-spotted
tarp. Between the thick layer of debris on the floor, unsullied by any footprints other than Lucifer's, and the thick layer of dust on the tarp, it appears as though nothing has been touched or moved in months.

Lucifer yanks the tarp away, sending a fine cloud of detritus into the air. The desk is scarred, scratched, and stained by time and mistreatment. The brass knobs are all tarnished. The top drawer contains nothing but the telltale ring of a long-ago-removed coffee cup, and the bottom drawer sports only a wispy spiderweb and the exoskeleton husks of several dead bugs. Underneath the desk rests a threadbare area rug that may, before the sun bleached it, have been vibrant-colored. At this point, though, she can only call the hue not-quite-muck.

She frowns at the desk, and then peers around the room once more, but it's not until she steps inside the house, and she hears the hollow timbre of her footsteps, that she has an idea.

"Something on your mind?" Lucifer prods.

She nods, stepping over to the desk. She shrugs the sleeves of her windbreaker over her hands to protect them from potential splinters, and then she grips the edges of the desk. With a grimace, she shifts her weight into it, trying to move- Lucifer reaches over with one hand and yanks the whole thing to the side for her like it's tissue paper.

"Thanks," she says wryly.

"You're quite welcome," he replies.

With her toe, she nudges the not-quite-muck rug, catching the edge of it on her boot, and then she kicks it aside.

Sure enough, there's a trapdoor with a rotted, rope latch.

She bends over and yanks up on the rope.

The hinges moan, and the trapdoor opens to not darkness. She brushes disintegrated bits of rope off on her jeans, staring. There's a narrow, creaky set of wooden steps, and small LED lanterns light the way. Automatic lights, maybe? Or did someone turn them on recently?

She pauses, listening for bodies moving below. Lucifer stands beside her, still, like granite bedecked in Prada. She can't hear a thing other than her own breathing, though.

"LAPD," she shouts. "Anyone down there?"

No answer.

She points her gun down the steps, taking the descent at a crawling pace.

"Hello?" she says.

Still nothing.

At the bottom of the steps is a basement room about twice the length and width of the ranger station above. The ceiling is low - Lucifer has less than three inches of clearance - and the dark room is chilly, giving the space a cave-like feeling. Lucifer finds a pull cord for a naked lightbulb hung from the rafter at the center of the room, and with a quick tug, he illuminates their surroundings.

She gapes when she gets a good look at everything.
"Well, well, well," Lucifer says, a little smirk pulling at his lips, as the lightbulb sways back and forth by his face, sending all the shadows on walkabouts.

Two whole walls inside the basement are stacked high with brick, after brick, after sun-decal-stamped brick full of fine white powder. There have to be hundreds of them.

Chloe's never actually seen this many drugs in one spot before.

This is the kind of seizure that the feds typically pounce on, not the LAPD.

"Holy shit," she says, awed.

"I'd say there's nothing holy here," Lucifer remarks. "But I quite agree with the intended sentiment."

He steps over to one of the file cabinets in the corner, pulling it open. Inside are maps. Schedules. Even a stack of unused sun decals.

She glances once more at all the heroin bricks. A dirty stack of buckets layered in fine white dust rests in the far corner by the steps. It occurs to her that, if this is where the dealer is lacing the heroin, some of the bricks in these stacks could contain fentanyl. In which case, any particulates in this room might be lethal. Worse, she thinks they might both at risk, given that she affects Lucifer's ability to metabolize drugs.

"We should leave," she says, heart starting to pound. "We should leave, now."

She'll get a crime scene unit to deal with this in biohazard suits. The feds will help, if not outright take over, considering this is on federal parkland, and there has to be at least $2 million worth of product sitting here.

Lucifer's head snaps to the right like he heard something.

"What is it?" she says.

He peers intently at the wall opposite the steps they came down. The wall is covered by a dirty, hanging quilt that's nailed into the corner rafter. He stalks forward, past all of the heroin bricks, and tears down the quilt, filling the silence with the sound of ripping fabric. As the quilt falls into a dirty heap, a narrow set of steps that come to an abrupt stop at a slanted, slatted door - like a storm-cellar door - is revealed. But there's no way to tell for sure if the door goes directly outside without trying it.

He stands by the second exit, head cocked, eyes narrowing, listening.

"We're not alone," he says. He points to the door. "Someone just tested the lock on that."

Shit.

"How many people?" she says. "Just one?"

But then, in another movement too quick for her to see more than a blur of, Lucifer steps back to her side, grabs her arm, and drags her down into the corner with him. Just as the raucous roar of a gunshot peals through the silence, and a hole the size of a pencil eraser pokes through the ceiling where she'd been standing seconds earlier. The bullet impacts with the dirt, sending a plume of filth into the air. A small shaft of sunlight zags to the floor from the bullet hole, illuminating dust motes floating lazily in the air.
"Two," Lucifer says.

Her ears are ringing, but in the following silence, she can faintly hear the ceiling creaking as someone creeps across the floorboards above. She can't shoot through the floor without knowing for sure what she's shooting at, though. That's a surefire way to get innocent people killed.

"LAPD!" she shouts. On the off-off-off chance that whoever's upstairs is a white hat of some kind. Like, maybe, the NPS, checking things out. "Hold your fire!"

But … nope.

Another bullet blasts through the floor, a few feet to the left of the first, and smacks into the dirt, followed by another spear of sunlight. At least, with the basement being larger than the upstairs, they have a buffer area to stand in, where the overhead ceiling isn't at risk for being shot through.

Lucifer glances upward. "I think they mean to corner us," he whispers. He tilts his head, listening. "One chap is upstairs, clearly," he adds, giving the bullet holes a wry glance, "and I think the other one's waiting outside to pick us off if we somehow break out."

Chloe nods, looking around frantically. She's not worried about their ability to break the lock on the storm-cellar door. Lucifer can probably do that with nothing more than a love tap. But there's no way out of this little room that isn't covered by a hostile body.

"How fast can you move, exactly?" she says to Lucifer. She really needs to have a sit down with him to discuss what he can and can't do when he's wingless. "Can you tackle one of these guys without getting yourself shot?"

Lucifer's predatory grin is chilling, and he shrugs, long and leonine. "Which?" is all he says.

Subduing either opponent involves traversing a dangerous bottleneck. Neither option seems inherently better. In fact, both seem suicidal.

"You pick," she says with a shrug.

Lucifer nods, considering for a moment. Then he gives her a look, motioning her to stay in the corner. She does as he requests, huddling down, out of the way.

"Hello?" Lucifer calls, the word booming in the claustrophobic space. "Bad guy upstairs?"

Another gunshot claps through the floorboards and impacts with the dirt.

"Lucifer," she hisses. She thought he was going stealth, not-

"Yes, I bloody know you have a gun, you imbecile," Lucifer calls, ignoring her. His head is tilted like he's listening for something. "Do you have any idea who you're shooting at?"

Another shot. The floorboards creak.

"Ah," Lucifer says, and his grin widens into a gleaming rictus of teeth, "there you are."

And then before she can blink, Lucifer punches his arm through the low ceiling and drags the shooter down through the floor by his leg. Splinters and dust rain everywhere. The gun - a 10mm Beretta - falls to the ground, and Chloe kicks it away from the scuffle before going to pick it up and pocket it.

"Ever heard the phrase, 'You'll have the Devil to pay?"' Lucifer says cheerfully as he holds their
screaming would-be shooter by his ankle, like he's no more than an unwieldy wet towel. "Get off me, man!" Lucifer's squirming quarry snaps. "Fuck! Fuck! Let me go!"

But Lucifer only gives the man an incredulous look. "And why would I do that?" he says.

"Hey, what happened?" calls a voice from outside, distant but getting closer.

"Sounds like the other one's decided to play," Lucifer says. He steps across the floor, dragging his wriggling, shouting victim with him. He tracks something with his ears for a moment. And then, with a flat palm, he strikes the storm-cellar door, snapping the exterior lock like it's made of paper instead of solid metal. He drops his captive, but only to stand the guy up and body check him into the wall.


She thinks she sees a hint of flames in Lucifer's eyes, enough to make her gasp and her legs feel watery. His presence burgeons with menace, like a thick, palpable cloak. And with that, he turns toward the wall with his trembling human prisoner.

"I don't like when people shoot me," Lucifer says, words dark as night. "And I loathe when people shoot at her." He jabs his index finger over his shoulder, pointing in Chloe's direction. Then he leans his weight against the guy and adds, almost with a purr, "You should scream for help, don't you think?"

And the guy starts to scream and cry and sob. "Help me!" he says. "Please, help me! Please, help! He'll kill me! Please! I don't want to die!"

"Marty?" calls a voice from outside. "Marty!"

With his back facing her, Chloe has no idea what the hell Lucifer did. None. But she doesn't have time to worry about it right now. They still have a second opponent running around, probably armed, and unless she's completely misconstruing Lucifer's intent, the idea is to draw the second guy in through the front door of the house, allowing Chloe to flank him via the second exit.

Sure enough, Lucifer says, "He's out front, now."

"Hold this guy," Chloe says, and at Lucifer's nonchalant nod, she thumps up the steps and creeps out through the storm-cellar door, into lush, open air.

She tiptoes around the side of the building. Sweat creeps down the small of her back as she peeks around to the corner. A blond guy wearing fatigues is standing at the edge of the porch, partially concealed by the wall of hanging vines, but she can see his gun, pointed at the front door.

"Marty?" he's saying. "Marty, man, say something!"

Which only spurs more frantic screams for help.

"Freeze and drop your gun, or I'll shoot you," she snaps, because she can't in good conscience not give him at least a chance to surrender.

Marty's worried companion flinches, and he whips his gun around to point it in her direction. She ducks back behind the building, just in time to avoid getting shot. The bullet clips the corner of the house, sending rotted wood and siding everywhere, but she's far enough back from the debris that all of it slaps impotently against her windbreaker.
"LAPD," she repeats. "DROP YOUR WEAPON, NOW, OR I WILL SHOOT YOU."

"How did you get out?" the guy in fatigues snaps in return.

The porch creaks. He's stepping closer, and she hasn't heard the telltale sound of a gun hitting the porch floor. Nor has he said anything about surrendering.

She exhales and stares down the barrel of her Beretta, pointing it at the wall of the house. Three. Two. She darts to the side, away from her cover, and she pops off a shot the moment her sights line up with the guy's center of mass. The guy fires, too, but he's too wrecked to aim, and the bullet whizzes off into the woods. He collapses to his knees, wailing in pain. He drops his gun moments later.

"Excellent," Lucifer says by her ear.

She flinches, surprised by Lucifer's stealth, given that he opted not to use it earlier, but he catches her shoulder with a warm hand before she can trip all over herself. He has his other arm wrapped over the first attacker's chest, hugging the man to his body like a lover. The man is pale and shaking and submissive.

"You got him?" she says.

"Oh, yes," Lucifer replies with a nod and a smirk as he glances at his quarry. "In more ways than one."

Which … what the hell does that mean?

But the guy she shot is bleeding all over the porch, and she doesn't have time to wrangle Lucifer. Meanwhile, Lucifer is already wrangling Marty. So, she doesn't let herself worry about an unhinged Devil, yet.

She whips off her windbreaker, bunching it up as she darts across the porch to where the second shooter fell. Injured Guy's face is ashen gray. He's trembling, and skin feels like a cold, wet dishrag.

She applies pressure to the wound, using her windbreaker as a makeshift bandage. She aimed for center of mass, but she hit him in the shooting arm. The wound isn't spurting, which means the brachial artery is either plugged or intact. His shock must be from pain more than anything else. As long as she can keep him stable, calm, and quiet, he should be fine.

"How didjh," Injured Guy murmurs. "How didjhou get … out?"

She ignores him, looking back at Lucifer just in time to see him lift Marty by his shirt color until he makes funny choking noises, and then slam him against the wall of the dilapidated house. Lucifer reaches into his pocket and pulls out the pendant from before, letting it swing like a pendulum before Marty's eyes.

"Lucifer," she hisses, "what are you doing?"

"Investigating," is all he says in reply, and he presses closer. "Tell me, are you responsible for this little adulteration operation?"

"Yes," Marty says, almost a whine as he trembles in Lucifer's grasp. "Yes, I'm sorry."

"Well, you've been very, very naughty," Lucifer says. "Wouldn't you agree?"
Whatever he did before, in the basement, he does it again. The guy screams, hoarse and ragged and undone, but Lucifer's grip is too strong for him to struggle much. "I know," the guy wails. "I'm sorry; I'm sorry; I'm sorry." His trousers soak through at the crotch, and the stain creeps down his pant legs. Lucifer wraps the pendant's chain over his knuckles, staying its back-and-forth swing, and inches closer. He strokes the guy's cheek with his thumb, an utter perversion of seduction.

"And what is your name?" Lucifer says, smooth as syrup. "Marty, is it?"

"M-M-Martin," the guy says. "Martin C-C-Cromwell."

"Well, Martin," Lucifer purrs. "Why don't you tell me what you desire, mmm? What is your deepest, darkest, most twisted little want?" Lucifer's smile is ravenous, disturbing, gleeful. "You can tell me."

"I want ...."

Lucifer leans closer. "Yes, darling?"

"I just want to get out of here in one piece. I promise, I'll be good. Please, don't hurt me."

Whatever Lucifer expected to hear, that wasn't it. His eyebrows knit. "You ... don't desire me? You're not happy I've returned?"

"Dude," Martin says, shaking, "how fucked up in the head do you think I am?"

"That's a debate for another day," Lucifer replies, frown deepening. "You haven't met me before?"

"No," Martin says, almost hiccoughing in fear.

Lucifer holds up the pendant. "Well, what in the bloody hell possessed you to mark your little makeshift drug den with this, then?" he says in a midnight, velvet tone that makes the hairs on the back of her neck stand on end.

"I swear, I don't know what you mean!" the guy says, almost shrieking. "It isn't mine! I've never seen it before!"

"I think you're lying."

"I'm not!" Martin says. "I'm not. I swear. I wouldn't lie to you. I wouldn't. It isn't mine. I've never seen it before in my life."

Lucifer's frown deepens even further. He jiggles the pendant. "Truly, you don't recognize this?"

The guy shakes his head so fast, the motion could be construed as shivering, more than negative response. Still, Lucifer seems … dumbfounded. He looks away, and Martin sucks in gasping, gulping breaths, like he's been held underwater for too long. Lucifer drops him against the wall and pockets the pendant again.

"Don't you bloody move," Lucifer commands, "or I'll be cross."

Martin sinks to the ground, sobbing. "No. No. No, I won't move. I won't move. I promise."

Chloe's not even sure Martin needs to be cuffed, he's so thoroughly subdued by Lucifer's terrifying whatever-that-was. Still, she shifts, reaching awkwardly into her back pocket. Then she
tosses Lucifer her cuffs.

"Really, Detective," Lucifer says with a disapproving cluck of his tongue, "he's not going anywhere."

"I'm not," Martin adds. "I swear, I'm not. I would never. Please, arrest me. Arrest me. I'm guilty. I'm sorry." And the sobs renew.

Chloe sighs. "Humor me, okay?" she says to Lucifer.

Martin holds out his hands, trembling, passive.

"I believe the detective prefers to cuff her suspects from behind," Lucifer says, and Martin scrambles to turn around for him.

"Great," Chloe says as she hears the handcuffs ratchet closed. "Now, come help this guy, so I can call dispatch."

Lucifer regards her silently, eyes dark like a storm cloud. His mouth twitches at the corner, and she gets the distinct impression that she's toeing a dangerous line that few have dared to cross. He's the Devil. He'll play nice. For her. But don't presume to boss him around like some subordinate right now.

"Please," she adds, and his hackles seem to lower a bit.

It's almost like … he let something out of a cage when he questioned Martin, and now he's having trouble stuffing it back in. But then he takes a deep, cleansing breath. And all the minacious presence hanging so thick in the air melts away like heated butter. He paces away five steps and then back, like he's trying to walk off any remaining kinks in his human persona, and then he drops to his haunches beside Injured Guy.

"I've got it," Lucifer says, pressing his hands over Chloe's windbreaker.

Injured Guy moans pitifully.

"Thank you," Chloe says, and she steps away, keeping a close eye on all three of them as she calls for backup.

There's a brief pause in the aftermath. After she's called all of the appropriate authorities. Before any one of those many authorities can find her. The detriment (or benefit?) of being in the middle of nowhere, she supposes, though … she's surprised the NPS hasn't rolled up, yet, given their theoretical vicinity.

Injured Guy rests with his sweaty head cradled in her lap, while she keeps pressure on his slowly oozing wound. Martin, sitting like a broken, discarded toy at Lucifer's feet, rocks back and forth as he stares forlornly into space. And Lucifer?

An eerie silence hangs like a pall over the clearing, and all she can hear are the trees creaking in the wind. The rustle of leaves as they writhe on their stalks. The birds.

Lucifer hasn't said a word since she resumed first aid. His arms are folded across his chest, and he's staring into space, and he's still. Like the placid surface of an arctic lake. But that's all his stillness is. Surface. From the rigid tension in his posture, from his troubled gaze, he's turmoil beneath.
"We need to have a talk," she says.

He's liquid as he tips his head to look at her. "About?" he says evenly.

"What not about, at this point?" she says. "Your current abilities. That-

"You're irritated that I utilized my skill set?" he says, eyebrows knitting.

"No," she says with a frown. "It'd just be nice to know what in the hell your skill set actually is, right now."

"Ah," he says. He fidgets with his onyx ring, twisting it around his finger. "Yes, I suppose that would be wise to discuss."

"Later," she says, before he can launch into a Wingless Archangel 101 lecture. "There's also that pendant you found. And our plans on how to deal with Michael." Her eyes narrow.

"What was that pendant, anyway?"

Lucifer regards her for a long moment, calculating.

Calculating what, exactly?

"Semper inops quicumque cupit," he says, repeating the weird phrase he said before when he found the pendant. This time, though, he offers translation. "Whoever desires is always poor."

She swallows. That's … a rather pointed message, given Lucifer's credo.

Lucifer shifts on his long legs, making the porch creak beneath him as he pulls the glinting little pendant from his pocket.

He tosses it to her.

She snatches it as it arcs through the air.

The silver is warm, despite residing untouched in Lucifer's pocket. It's untarnished, too, despite its location - taped in the middle of a forest to a semi-abandoned shack. The weirdest part, though, is the odd luster. When she closes her hands over the pendant, she can see it glowing faintly in the darkness between her palms.

She stares at it, mouth dry. This … isn't silver.

"What is this material?" she says.

Lucifer shrugs. "Nothing you'd find here."

"Here as in Earth?"

"Here as in this dimension," he clarifies.

It says a lot about the state of her life, now, that when she hears this necklace isn't from the known universe, all she does is nod. Think, so it belongs to someone extraplanar. And move on.

She flips the necklace over in her hands, examining the front and back. The pendant itself is shaped a bit like Saturn, if Saturn's rings were vertical. An embossed sword bisects the circle, forming the vertical Saturn's "rings." The pendant's chain passes through a hole in the hilt of the sword, and letters grouped like words circumnavigate the pendant's edges. The lettering itself, though, is difficult to discern, because the metal is worn smooth. By time? Wear? Weird properties
not bound by the laws of reality as she knows it?

Her eyes narrow. "What you just said. *Semper .... Semper inops ....*

"*Quicumque cupit,*" Lucifer finishes for her.

"Right. That." She looks at him as she strokes the pendant. "That's what this thing says?"

He nods. "The Latin poet Claudius Claudianus, known today as Claudian, transcribed that phrase, and from there, it came into common usage, but it was never his."

"He got the adage from … Michael?" she guesses.

"Well, my brother *is* a messenger, darling." Lucifer replies, rolling his eyes. "To him, life's not worth living if he's not off dictating pointless scripture to some poor div."

"Polar opposite of you, I guess," Chloe says, unable to stop a wry grin.

Lucifer regards her placidly for a long moment, but she again gets the sense that he's hiding tumultuousness underneath. "Call it sibling rivalry, I suppose," he says with a graceful shrug. "A proper, 'Fuck you, bro,' that dismantles my entire philosophy." He directs a pointed glance at the pendant. "He clearly interrogated Mr. Jones to suss out the location of this cabin and leave the pendant for me to find." He scowls. "What I can't bloody figure out is *why.*"

She glances up at the canopy of trees. She thinks she hears a chopper approaching.

"I thought you thought he's after me," she says, frowning as she looks back to Lucifer.

"I don't bloody know *what* to think, at this point," Lucifer snaps. He rubs his eyes. Like he's tired. And frustrated. "*Why* would he leave a clue of his presence that only *I* can decipher, if he were trying to chase you and avoid me? Why is he bloody leaving clues in the first place?" He sighs. "I feel like I'm meant to be searching for some hidden immunity idol or something, like I'm on *Survivor: Heaven vs. Hell.* It's bollocks is what it is. And it isn't like Michael at all."

"Well, you know *Survivor* typically revolves around alliances, right?" she says slowly. "The players who outwit, outplay, outlast rarely do it by devaluing teamwork."

Lucifer sighs tiredly, rubbing the bridge of his nose like he has a tension headache. "*Why* must you *persist*?"

At this point, though, the chopper she thought she heard is now a sure thing, and devolving into another argument with King Stubborn of Rigidonia would be pointless.

A red helo partially blots out the sun overhead, and she squints up at it. The trees and bushes are starting to sway as the lowering chopper blades agitate the air around them. It's Medevac, she thinks, given the chopper's color and the white cross emblazoned on the side. Has to be. And the clearing is just big enough to make a safe "landing pad" for a helicopter.

"I *persist* because we need to come up with a plan for taking care of Michael, *together,*" she says. "After this drug bust is dealt with. Okay?"

Lucifer glowers. "Whatever would your life be like without your bloody plans?"

"Probably ended," she says with a wry snort, and she turns to wave at the incoming EMTs.
Law enforcement - a veritable alphabet soup of agencies and organizations - descends on the clearing like a cloud of locusts. While the drug dealers were distributing in Los Angeles, and while they kidnapped two LAPD detectives, they were also storing and adulterating their drugs on federal parkland (which also happens to be in Los Angeles County), and Chloe really has no idea how the chips are going to fall in the end in terms of what agency takes lead.

"How did you …?" Emily splutters over the phone as Chloe watches the DEA's chopper take off. "I mean how did he …?" A burst of noise fills the line as Emily jostles the phone. "I can't fucking believe …" More nondescript half-words and stutters follow. And then Emily decides on a weak, overwhelmed, "No way," in conclusion.

"I've learned, recently, to just go with it," Chloe replies, a ghost of a smile on her face as she searches the crowd for the man in question. But she doesn't see Lucifer anywhere. "Honestly. Whatever nut-bar, improbable thing he says, just go with it. It tends to pay off, in the end."

"Yeah, I'm seeing that," Emily replies, dumbfounded. "Do you need me? Should I drive up there? I missed the boat on riding up with the task force."

But Chloe doesn't even have a chance to react to that before her phone is vibrating in her hands. "One sec," she says, and she pulls the phone away from her ear to look.

So … the prints came back, reads a text from Ella.

Chloe frowns. So? she types.

So, Martin Cromwell is NPS. The guy you shot is NPS, too. Matthew Wilkerson.


She pinches the bridge of her nose.

Martin and Matthew being NPS would explain why and how they showed up exactly when she and Lucifer took their hike in the woods, to a location that clearly didn't get a lot of traffic. It would also explain why nobody from NPS had shown up, yet, despite the fact that she'd called them first after emergency services.

"Hey, Emily?" Chloe says tiredly as she slaps the receiver back against her ear. "Can you get me the number for the FBI liaison?" Corruption charges mean the FBI gets to join the alphabet party, too. What a joy.

"Detective Decker?" calls Jamal, the head DEA agent onsite, and Chloe slumps. "Detective Decker, will you come here, please?"

"Look, I gotta go," Chloe says into her phone. "Text me the number, okay?"

"Sure thing," Emily replies. "Do you need me to come up there? You never answered."

"Between EMS, LAPD, DEA, HSI, NPS, FBI, a bunch of DEA chemists, and a gaggle of forensics teams," Chloe says, "what I really need is some Excedrin."

Emily chuckles. "Okay."

They hang up.

And then Chloe wanders back into the bedlam.
After what feels like hours trapped in sheer chaos, she still can't find Lucifer anywhere.

Not in the ranger station sampling the copious evidence. Not in the clearing making a pest of himself. Not chatting up any of the female agents. Not anywhere. And not one agent swimming around in the alphabet soup can recall seeing him since …. They're not even sure when. Some of them don't even know who she's talking about.

"A British guy?" Jamal says with a blank frown.

"Tall?" Chloe says, holding up her hand above her head. "Dressed like money? Charming?"

But Jamal can only give her a helpless, blank look.

An HSI agent - Amy Nguyen - gives Chloe a ride back down the service road to where she left her cruiser parked. The sun casts long shadows, and the temperature is cooling down. The trees sway in the breeze.

"Um …," says Amy, frowning at the pull-off, where a hulking black Expedition with tinted windows now rests, idling. Unmistakably a g-ride. FBI, maybe. "Are you sure this is where you left it?"

"I'm positive," Chloe says, staring at the little waypoint marker on her phone's map. The blue you-are-here arrow is superimposed almost to the millimeter over her marker.

She reaches into her windbreaker pocket to grab her car keys, only to notice for the first time that she doesn't have them.

Oh, no.

No, no, no, no.

She feels like someone pushed her over the guardrail and into free fall.

"Can you hold on a second?" she says faintly.

Amy shrugs as Chloe tries Lucifer's phone. He doesn't pick up. She texts him. There's no read receipt.

She climbs out of the car to talk to the FBI agent sitting in the Expedition. The spot had been empty when he arrived two hours ago. Her cruiser has been gone for hours.

Her heart starts to pound as puzzle pieces snap together in a perfect fit.

Lucifer had her windbreaker in his possession for a few minutes. While she was making calls, and she left him with the task of putting pressure on Matthew's wound. Which meant Lucifer had access to her keys.

He also made it damned clear, multiple times, that he's willing to get himself killed if it will protect her. He made it damned clear that he's afraid Michael might hurt her, and that he doesn't want her involved. And he just discovered definitive proof that Michael is skulking around, somewhere, motive unknown.

She thinks back.

We need to come up with a plan for taking care of Michael, together she said. After this drug bust is dealt with. Okay?
And he answered, *Whatever would your life be like without your bloody plans?*

Except his answer hadn't been a fucking answer *at all.*

Like his utter silence after she asked, *We'll talk later, yeah?*

He did it to her again. *Again.* Fooled her. Lied without speaking a word of falsehood.

No. No. No.

She paces back and forth in the dirt, panting as she begins to hyperventilate. "God, *damn* it," she snaps at no one. "God, *damn* that man." The words bounce off the mountains, echoing, and she can hear him reply, *Already God damned, darling,* in her head. She pulls her shaking fingers through her hair. This is *not happening.*

"Are you okay?" Amy says through the window.

Chloe shakes her head. "No," she says. "No, I'm really not." She clenches her teeth so hard that her jaw hurts. "My partner is an angel-chauvinistic only-truthful-via-technicality *asshole,* and he's probably going to get himself killed again, or worse."

"Uh …." Amy frowns. "Killed *again?"

"Never mind," Chloe says. She takes a deep breath and blows it out. And again. And again. "Are you headed back to LA? I need to get back. I need to get back, *now.*"

Amy nods. "Hop back in," she says. Once Chloe is buckled in, Amy accelerates into a u-ey.

Chloe's stolen cruiser is parked in her assigned spot at the precinct, and she finds her keys resting on her desk, dead center. There's no note of apology attached to them, or anything that would indicate Lucifer's plans. Nothing. Worse, Emily didn't see Lucifer drop off the keys.

*Now, what?*

His car is parked at Lux, and Chloe has a brief swell of hope.

"Lucifer?" she calls as she dashes off his elevator, into his penthouse, but there's no answer.

In the two days since she was last here, he hasn't picked up the bloody drop cloth, which is still on the floor in his dining room. In fact, almost everything is the same. Dirty dishes are mostly absent, but that's because she'd been doing them for him until Sunday, when she left. His unmade bed, the open books and magazines tossed into a haphazardly leaning stack on the end table by his favorite chair, and the tangle of remotes and open blu-ray cases on his couch, haven't changed a bit.

The whole place feels like a tomb for the sedentary.

"Lucifer?" she calls, doing one more circuit. She checks everywhere. Every room. Even, in an attack of sheer hysteria, the closets.

But he's not here.

She tries calling him again as she dashes back to her car, but he doesn't pick up the phone. And none of her 57 billion texts have been looked at, let alone answered.
He's not at Amenadiel's place. Maze can't pick up a trail. Maze. Can't pick up a goddamned trail. How in the hell can Maze not pick up a trail?

*Michael, please, don't hurt him*, Chloe prays from the beach. She's searched every beach she's ever been on with Lucifer, but to no avail. If *you're here for me, well, here I am*, she continues. And if *you're here for him* .... Her eyes water as she listens to the waves. *Just, please, don't hurt him. Please. He doesn't want wings.*

It's a last ditch, hail Mary of a play that might result in her shooting an angel on a public beach, but … whatever.

If it works, then she's glad she did it.

But Michael doesn't show. And Lucifer doesn't, either.

She remains alone. Just she, and the sand, and the waves. Sinking into the pull of the tide.

Chloe puts out a missing-persons BOLO. Ella and Emily are both on alert and will text Chloe if Lucifer shows up at the precinct. Amenadiel's on the lookout. Maze is out searching, utilizing tracking skills that far exceed Chloe's. And Chloe doesn't know what else to do, at this point, except wait.

At least, Dan took Trixie without protest. So that's one less thing to worry about.

Chloe's trying not to fall apart as she stabs her key into her lock. She's really trying. She's not doing very well at it, though, and she pauses to blink away tears.

She gasps when her key starts turning by itself, as the deadbolt is disengaged from the other side of the door. Her heart climbs into her throat. Wouldn't that be fucking stupid, if after all this trouble and worry and panic, he'd been at her apartment this whole time?

"Lucifer?" she says.

The door creaks open, revealing him looking down at her, half concealed in shadow. His eyes are cold and glinting, like chipped obsidian. He doesn't smile. But she doesn't care if he's unhappy. She just cares that he's here.

"Oh, my God," she says, relief making her shake. "I was so worried." Without waiting for him to speak, without even getting off the threshold, she wraps her arms around his waist and presses up against him. "Oh, my God," she warbles, inhaling the scent of his shirt.

He stands there, letting her fawn.

Without saying a word.

Without returning the gesture.

Without anything.

He's nothing more than a steel pillar in her arms.

And he doesn't smell like sandalwood.
She swallows as her heart starts to pound, and logic catches up. She was too relieved to assess, before, but …. He's not wearing a suit, she realizes. He's wearing distressed, stonewashed jeans, sandals, and a royal blue t-shirt that hugs him in all the right places. Jeans with holes. Sandals. And a t-shirt. And his hair is … really curly. Like he's never even met a bottle of product, let alone used one.

Fear is a cold knife that slips between her ribs.

She'd been expecting resemblance. Like normal brothers possessing similar genes. Not resemblance like a carbon fucking copy. No one had said a fucking word about twins.

"You're not Lucifer," she snaps, scrambling backward onto her welcome mat.

"No," Michael replies, sounding vaguely Middle Eastern, "I am not."
Hello, all! I hope you had a happy holiday!

I'm sorry this chapter took a bit longer to write than usual. I got distracted working on a hopelessly fluffy oneshot Christmas fic. You can find it here, if you missed it: http://archiveofourown.org/works/13138170

Chapter title credit goes to Clan of Xymox.

If you haven't gone back to the beginning in a while, I recommend perhaps re-familiarizing yourself with chapter 6 (Apocalypse Lullaby) before continuing. There are a lot of refer-backs in this chapter.

Thank you in advance to everybody who takes the time to leave me feedback - you make posting this a joy.

And, now ... for some answers.

In one swift movement, she yanks her gun from her hip holster, flicks off the safety, and points it straight at his chest. Michael gives the gun a sleepy look. He folds his arms and leans against her doorframe, biceps bulging slightly. Unafraid. Unimpressed. Unmoved. And he looks so much like Lucifer in one of his occasional bouts of projected ennui that it's difficult to keep the gun on him.

"Get out," she snaps, fingers shaking. "Get out, now. How dare you trespass!" She backs into the opposite wall and hits it with a jarring thud. She keeps the gun trained on him. She doesn't blink.

"What-" He has a chance to say, "But my brother-"

"You can't just pop in here uninvited like you own the place," she says, trying to keep control of the conversation. "You don't." When he opens his mouth to speak, but it's clear he's not intending to move from her doorway, she adds, "I don't care what powers you have. I don't care whether you built the universe." His eye twitches. The first break in his bored expression. "I don't know you, and this is my home. My kid lives here. So, get out. Right now."

"But my brother-"


He slowly tips himself off the doorframe, back into a straight, tall posture, and she's struck at once by how large he is. He has a good nine inches on her when she's flatfooted like this. The same as Lucifer, really, but Lucifer has never once made her feel so small.

"Don't you dare make me find out if this gun works on you," she commands.

Rapid breaths sear her chest. Her legs feel watery. Her heart pounds. Her teeth chatter with stress. She swallows as sweat dots her brow. Her whole body is telling her to run. Run away - far away - and don't ever look back. But she can't. She can't let this man own their first conversation, or she'll
have an even harder time claiming the upper hand next time. If there is one.

He takes a step forward, off of her threshold. Onto her welcome mat. Out of her place.

She flinches, thinking, at first, that he means to lunge at her.

But he doesn't.

He takes a long, graceful step to the side, clearing her doorway with feet to spare.

She gazes at her living room, and the now unobstructed path between her and it.

And then she dashes past, never lowering her gun from his center of mass, and she slams the door in his face.

As barriers go, a wooden door isn't worth mentioning when it comes to keeping an archangel out of a space he or she wants to get into. Lucifer has demonstrated that fact any number of times, easily splintering any carpentry in his way. Still, twisting her deadbolt shut makes her feel better, anyway, and, back pressed to the door, she slides down to the interior welcome mat, forming a gangly heap of limbs and stress.

Everything is shaking. Her heart is threatening to pound out of her chest. She feels like she might throw up.

What in the hell did she just do?

She swallows as the rest of her body catches up with her sympathetic nervous system.

Shit. She pulls her fingers through her hair. What in the hell did she just do?

A soft knock makes her gasp and scramble away from the door. Another bathtub full of adrenaline dumps into her bloodstream, and it's hard to resist the urge to break into panicked, angry tears. The silence that follows threatens to pull a noose tight around her neck. Did she imagine-

Another soft knock.

She stumbles to her feet and presses flat against the door, peering through the peephole. Michael, distorted by the curvature of the glass, is there, staring back at her with bulbous features. Like he can see her through the lens. Can he?

"Chloe Decker," he says, muffled by the door, and she stiffens. "Will you not allow me to speak with you?"

Lucifer's voice. But not. The longer sentence reveals more of his accent. Which is not even remotely British. Israeli, maybe? Like the new Wonder Woman. The difference stirs an odd feeling of dissonance that sets her teeth on edge.

Still ….

She presses her gun against the door with a shaky hand, hesitantly at first, and then more firmly. She licks her lips. And then, after turning the deadbolt with her free hand, she opens the door again.

He stands there, arms by his sides, unmoving. His dark eyes are fathomless, and, like Lucifer's, it's easy to fall into the depths. But there's no warmth when he looks at her. No established repartee.
He's a stranger, distant and superior, and he gives no impression of friend or foe, save for the fact that she isn't a grease spot, yet.

"You have my apologies," he says, dark and rich and old. "It was remiss of me to assume welcome on the basis of your acquaintances with my brothers." He holds out a lithe hand like he means for a handshake to happen, but she doesn't budge. She keeps the gun trained on him from behind the door. "My name is Michael Demiurgos," he continues. His gaze slips beyond her shoulder, into her home. "May I … come in?"

She clenches her jaw. "So, help me, God," she says, a bare hiss, "are you the reason Lucifer's not here?"

He frowns, lowering his hand. "I am not God," he says. "I am Michael."

Oh, for the love of- "Did you hurt Lucifer?" she snaps.

Michael regards her for a long, long moment, head tilted, eyes discerning, like he's looking into her soul, not at her body. Unlike Lucifer, he gives no impression that he's human, other than the fact that he's walking around in a human-shaped body. His presence is suffocating, and her fingers grasp the gun tightly enough to hurt.

"… When?" he says, a slow, unworried syllable.

The fact that he needs a time quantifier chills her heart. "Today, asshole."

"Yes," he says, and she stills.

Sweat crawls down her spine like bugs. "Hurt how?" she says.

"We came to blows," Michael says. Which doesn't sound so bad until one takes into account that he can punch a hole through a planet. "It was necessary to put him elsewhere."

Her eyes narrow. "Elsewhere."

"Yes."

"Where, elsewhere?" she prods.

He thinks for a moment. And then he points at a diagonal. Away from her apartment, across the walk. East. Ish. "That way."

"Just … that way?" she says, nodding in the direction he pointed.

"Yes."

"Well, how far?" she snaps.

Michael shrugs.

"Is he stuck in something?" she says. "Can he come back by himself?"

"How am I to know his current state, when I am here, and he is not?"

She sighs, exasperated. This is like pulling goddamned teeth. And now she's imagining a wingless, injured Lucifer trapped in Algeria or something with no passport and no money. Not a dire situation for someone like him - invulnerable, able to speak every language, wiles that would shame even Moriarty - but still … a situation. And it would certainly explain why he hasn't called.
"Look, did you trap him somewhere, or not?" she demands.

"My brother was quite hostile," is Michael's reply. "I-"

"Well, gee, I wonder why!" she says, on the bluster of another exasperated sigh. "Now, can you answer the question I actually asked?"

His lip twitches, and he looks away for a moment as a little, irritated puff of air escapes from his lips. Another sign that he isn't as calm as he's intending to appear. Her finger wanders to the trigger of her gun. She presses her torso against the edge of the door with so much weight that it makes her ribs hurt, and the door hinges creak.

"I have done nothing but utilize distance to hinder his return," Michael says, at last, shaking his head. "I am hoping he will take this opportunity to … 'cool off,' as you say."

Hurt. With hours to work himself into a lather. While simultaneously worrying himself sick about Chloe. If anything, she thinks Lucifer will return more furious than he started. Which won't be good for anyone.

And in that moment … she realizes.

Michael Demiurgos really doesn't know his brother.

And, given that, she wonders if Lucifer has a much better clue about Michael.

Could this whole fucking thing be one giant misunderstanding?

She swallows. "What do you want?"

"A conversation," Michael says. "It is not my intent to harm you or your offspring."

"Not your intent to harm?" she replies, incredulous. "You were stalking me."

"I meant only to watch, not frighten," he says. "That is why I left when you requested it."

She frowns. "But why were you …?"

"Do you not assess a situation before acting?" he says, and it sounds so reasonable, put like that. He makes a strange gesture with his hand. Like a salute. Or something. And then he says in a gentle tone, "I swear, Chloe Decker, I will not harm you or your offspring. Truly. You have my solemn oath."

"What about Lucifer?" she says.

Michael frowns. "What about him?" he says, like his brother is barely an afterthought.

She glares. "You don't touch my family. Or Lucifer. Or Maze."

"You care about Lucifer's pet?" Michael says in a boggled tone.

"She's not a pet," Chloe says, trying to stay calm. "She's a person. And you're not gonna touch her."

Michael folds his arms, frowning so hard his forehead wrinkles and his eyebrows knit. He peers at her with that intense I'm-stripping-you-down-to-your-soul gaze. Her trigger finger tightens. She can feel the cold arch of the metal, pressing into the pad of her index finger. But whatever he's
looking for, he seems to find.

"I will not harm the demon unless she sees fit to bite," he says.

"What about Lucifer?"

Michael sighs. "It is not my desire to harm my brother. It has never been my desire to harm my brother."

"But you have," she counters. "And you would." She pauses, giving him ample chance to correct her before continuing, but he doesn't. "Hell, you just did." Worse, she still doesn't even know how badly. "Came to blows" could mean a split lip, or it could mean a head injury, internal bleeding, broken bones …. Who the hell knew?

"That I do not wish to harm him is the best promise I can offer you," Michael says, the words tight like he, too, is at the end of his rope. "Now, will you lower your weapon, and allow me to enter, or not?"

Get bent. That's how she wants to reply.

But then nothing is resolved.

And if this whole mess really is nothing more than a misunderstanding ….

She licks her lips nervously, shifting from foot to foot.

"If I say no?" she says, out of curiosity.

He replies with a graceful nod, "Then I will leave."

Michael could easily force this conversation to happen, if he wanted. Like Lucifer, he's a mountain. One who is movable only when he deigns to let her move him. He could crush her without effort or care, if he were so inclined. Somehow, he's known she's had her gun pointed at him through the door this whole time. Yet he's made no move to disarm her, despite the fact that it would only take a will-injected thought for him to grind the gun to dust in her hands.

He's … playing nice.

He's playing nice, and she can do the same.

She lowers her gun, steps back from the door, and allows Michael Demiurgos to enter.

Without even asking where to go, he sits dead center on the couch, arms stretched across the back, like a lord on his throne. His eyes are cold, and he regards her as one would regard a bug. The only thing detracting from his whole aura of command is the ensemble. Birkenstocks. Distressed jeans. A t-shirt. Which she's finally noticing sports a picture of a whale, no less, and is titled with the words, "Don't Krill My Vibe." Definitely not something that screams Sword of God. More … boardwalk bum crossed with tree hugger.

"You think because Lucifer does not lie, that he is somehow virtuous, but you are sadly mistaken," Michael says as she re-holsters her gun and slides into the chair across from him. "He may not speak false, but he never speaks the truth. He is a serpent. You should be careful about giving your heart to him. He will destroy it."

She gapes. "You're trying to stage an intervention? Are you serious right now?"
Michael shrugs. "Merely …." He pauses, and his gaze shifts to the ceiling as he thinks. "What is the colloquialism? Providing a disclaimer?"

"Riiiiight," she says, rolling her eyes. She folds her arms. "Look, if this 'conversation' is just going to be you giving me all the reasons I'm not supposed to love your evil twin, can we skip to the end, please?" It was too late, anyway.

Michael's lip twitches. Another crack in the facade. "You are quite audacious."

"Says the complete stranger who barged into my apartment uninvited, and who is now telling me how to conduct my love life."

His gaze darkens, and the air in the apartment chills like it's been plunged into the Arctic Ocean. The cushions squeak as he draws himself up. "You would call me a hypocrite?" he says.

"Yes," she says through clenched teeth, "because you are one."

His lips part, and he gives her what could best be described as an incredulous look. She trembles like a struck tuning fork. She can't not, in the chill, in the vise-like crush of his presence. But if he's expecting to intimidate her, well …. She makes it a point to match his incredulous look with an incredulous look of her own.

The stare down commences.

His eyes are traps.

It's hard to breathe under the weight of him.

He fills the whole room.

And then it all retreats like a tidal wave slipping back into the ocean. She sucks in a greedy, starved breath, watching as he sighs and shakes his head like he's disgusted with himself for letting her push his buttons. He doesn't apologize.

"I … require your assistance," he admits.

She snorts. "Oh, this just gets better and better."

"Lucifer and I are old. Older than you can conceive. And Father is even older than that."

"Okay," she says. Her eyebrows creep toward her hairline. "And?"

"And when one has the benefit of eternity, it can take an eternity to act, or to change," Michael says. "The years are all but heartbeats."

"Makes sense so far," she says with a nod.

Michael leans forward, peering at her with eyes that have seen galaxies born. "My question to you is this," he says. "When you see a particular thing happen enough that you presume it to be what will always happen, and you thus behave accordingly, with preemptive self-preservation, what might allow you to overcome this learned behavior when it is no longer necessary?"

She blinks. "You're asking … my advice?"

"Yes."

"You," she says. "You're asking my advice."
He frowns. "Apologies," he says. "I do not have my brother's gift for tongues. Have I not spoken correctly?"

She shakes her head. "Sorry," she says. "Just … disbelief." More like astonishment. "You don't even know me. How do you know my advice will be good?"

"I do not," Michael admits. "But you know my brother. And your perspective is … unique."

She stills as a thought occurs to her. This can't all be a coincidence. This vortex of sparring archangels, God, miracles, and wing drama. And here, in the presence of a being second only to God, a being who - unlike Lucifer - is not estranged, and is "in the know," so to speak, she might finally be able to get some answers of her own.

"Is that why God put me here?" she says, frowning. "To be a unique perspective in the biggest family feud to ever exist?"

"You are a catalyst," Michael replies with a shrug. "Nothing more. Nothing less." He sighs. "That I seek your advice is unrelated." And undesirable, but necessary for my purposes, he doesn't say.

"Well … a catalyst for what?" she says, baffled.

But he ignores her question. "My father's intent was not to violate," Michael says. "Lucifer is not …" A vague, cracking, not-syllable gets caught in Michael's throat. He makes an odd gesture. Like he's not sure what to say, and he thinks he call pull the words out of thin air by using muscle. He shakes his head. Just a little, at first, but then the motion widens, back and forth like a windshield wiper. And then he slumps, giving her a hopeless look that reminds her of Eeyore.

"He is not … getting the message."

"Well … what is the message?" she says. "Because, truth be told, I'm not getting it, either."

"Lucifer once asked why he was not afforded the ability to choose his own fate," Michael says. "It caused … much strife. Heaven was practically torn apart. At the time, casting him down was deemed necessary to restore order."

"Instead of just … I don't know … giving him free will like he wanted?"

Michael gives her a silly mortal, Trix are for angels look that stings. "It is not that simple."

"Why?"

"Because we are not designed to be that way."

"But can't God design you any way he wants?" she counters.

Impugning God's decision-making is apparently the wrong thing to do, and as the glinting ice in Michael's eyes chills to absolute zero, it's clear who's side of this so-called family feud Michael is on: not Lucifer's. Not even a little. "Father was going to kill him," Michael snaps. "Mother lobbied for his expulsion, instead." As if throwing a disowned Lucifer into Hell like trash was supposed to be some great, beneficent mercy.

"Your family is beyond dysfunctional," Chloe says, shaking her head.

Yet another wrong thing to say, and Michael is seething when he adds slowly through clenched, pearly teeth, "As I have said, at the time, casting Lucifer down was viewed as the necessary response. And, also, as I have said, it can take a long time for the eternal to change."
Her eyes narrow as suspicion takes root. *At the time,* he said. Implying … now is different? And he keeps talking about change. Except he's also established that he doesn't know jack about Lucifer's state of mind. So, he can't be talking about Lucifer.

"… Wait," she says slowly.

Michael frowns. "For?"

"No, I mean, you're saying *God* changed?" she says. "God as in the-omniscient-omnipotent-guy-with-the-plans God … He changed his mind? *That's* the message?"

Michael tilts his head, wincing, like it pains him to admit it, but …. "He is acknowledging that … perhaps … leaving my brother to his own devices - leaving him outside the plan - is the most beneficial solution for everyone."

But how does God pasting a new set of wings on his wayward son achieve *that*?

Chloe frowns, considering. Back. Way back. To that night on the beach. When she talked to Lucifer about why he hated his new flight-worthy predicament.

*So, to you, the wings represent service?* she said. *Service to God?*

Lucifer said, *More like they're a leash that requires it.*

And she then asked him how always doing the opposite of God's will could possibly be an example of freedom. *All your dad would have to do to get you to do what he wants is imply that he wants the opposite,* she said.

*Well, I sincerely doubt he's trying to get me to be bad,* Lucifer replied with a snort. *And wouldn't that be the opposite of angelic?*

The opposite of angelic.

She frowns at the recollection.

And then it all hits like a steroidal pugilist, and she has no idea how she didn't see it before.

"The wrong is right tantrum," Chloe says, breathless, as blood starts to rush in her ears. "You do know he'll do the opposite of what you imply you want."

"Pardon?" Michael says.

"You were telling Lucifer to be the opposite of angelic," she says. But God didn't mean for Lucifer to be bad. "You were telling him to be free."

The silence stretches. Michael's expression is unreadable. Her fingers clench, pulling small tents of denim up from her thighs.

"I mean … right?" she prods, feeling helpless.

At last, Michael gives a slow nod. "Father's thought was that Lucifer would utilize his divine will to fall," he admits.

She frowns. "But he *is* fallen."

"From a height," Michael agrees.
More and more pieces slide into place. The puzzle is almost a complete picture, now, and she feels lightheaded.

*Humans have complete autonomy, Maze* told her, weeks ago. *Free will. Choice. But angels never did.*

*I'm human, Chloe,* Amenadiel said, later. *Nothing is missing.*

"You want Lucifer to fall like Amenadiel," Chloe says. Not from a height. Not in a way that causes pain. The intent was never suffering. "You want him to fall from grace."

"Yes," Michael says. "And he cannot fall in this way - by willing it so - without wings."

"I don't think Lucifer even *wants* to be human," she says, recalling all the times he's mocked her species' many deficiencies. She supposes the question becomes … what does he value more? The ability to live free from God's influence, or the ability to live forever, with powers no human could ever hope to have?

"At this point, it matters not," Michael says in a glum tone. "My brother has burned his wings to cinder again, and he has shown no inclination in the aftermath to request their restoration, despite my encouragement."

Encouragement.

That's what Michael thinks he's been doing. Encouraging.

"Unless, perhaps, you have an idea for how to proceed that I have not yet considered," he adds.

He really does want her advice.


*Holy fuck.*

She pulls her fingers through her hair.

"Have you tried actually telling all of this to Lucifer?" she says. "Like with actual words? In Angelish, so there's no lost-in-translation issues?"

Michael regards her with an intense frown. "Angelish?"

She shrugs. "Whatever the weird language is that Lucifer defaults to when he's delirious."

"There is no human word for our language, because no humans can speak it."

"Right," she says. "Whatever." She sighs, pinching the bridge of her nose. Who knew, when she melted into a puddle at Lucifer's feet, flayed alive by his divinity, that she'd end up mediating this insanity a mere two months later? How is this her life? "Have you tried explaining this to him in your super special angels-only language?"

"No, I have not," Michael admits with a bland look. "Unfortunately, my brother does not respond well to directness. Telling him explicitly to fall is a near guarantee that he will do the opposite. He always assumes-"

"Ulterior motives."

"Yes."
"Gee," she snarks. "I wonder why _that_ might be."

Which earns her a suffocating glare. Michael's temples dance as he clenches and unclenches his jaw, much like Lucifer also does when he's irritated. But Michael is _so_ not Lucifer.

"So, tell me, what is left," Michael demands. "Father tried giving Lucifer wings with no instruction, and Lucifer has equated this with _rape_, of all things." He speaks in a deprecating tone that suggests he expects her to laugh along with him. Ha, ha. God gave Lucifer wings, and Lucifer thinks it's rape. Ha. What a ridiculous notion, am I right?

And she feels compelled to say, "You do get that it kind of was, right?"

Michael snorts with disbelief. "Restoring Lucifer's divine glory is rape?"

"Yes," she says. "Because God didn't _ask_."

"But Lucifer is an angel," Michael replies slowly.

"What does _that_ matter when it comes to consent?"

"Because angels are of God."

"That doesn't give God a blanket right-"

"But he is _God_," Michael snaps like a whip, righteous and terrible.

As if that's the beginning and the end of it. And, maybe, it is. Michael clearly doesn't like discussing fallibility when it comes to his dad.

"I can see this is going nowhere," she says through clenched teeth.

Michael sighs. A frustrated bluster of sound. "I have _tried_ subtle encouragement," he continues, fingers rasping against his stubble as he rubs his chin, "but this only seems to have incensed him further. I am-"

"In what universe is any of what you've done encouragement?" she interjects. "Stalking me? Leaving incendiary messages?"

"I _told_ you why I was watch-"

"Yes, but _Lucifer_ doesn't know that, and like it or not, he seems to have a vested interest in me living to see old age," she says, trying to stay calm. "He thinks you'll hurt me."

Michael's gaze darkens like an eclipse. "It seems Uriel has poisoned the well."

She frowns. "Who's Uriel?"

"He was my brother," Michael says coldly. "He was an arrogant fool, believing he knew God's mind even when God has not deigned to speak it. And Lucifer obliterated him for it."

She blinks. "Lucifer … killed?"

"For threatening your life, yes," Michael says, and her stomach sinks into her shoes. _I don't kill_, Lucifer said, haunted, only to amend it to, _I don't kill humans_. The "track record" he didn't want to talk to her about. He did that - sacrificed his most sacred principle - for _her_? To save _her_? "But I am _not_ Uriel," Michael continues, yanking her back into the conversation before she has a
chance to process. "And I have done nothing to indicate-

"Except stalking me," she snaps, heart pounding in her ears. She swallows thickly. "And leaving Lucifer a pendant that essentially says, 'You suck.' What was he supposed to think?"

Michael sighs. "How could a master of language so irreparably mistranslate-

"'Whoever desires is always poor' is a mistranslation?"

Michael gives her an irritated look. "If Lucifer achieves his desire for free will, then it is no longer a desire. It is a fact," he says. "Instead of wishing for something, he will have it, and be richer for it, no?" His condescension sets her teeth on edge.

"That's … not the most intuitive leap, given the eons of surrounding context," she says.

"Well, then what is?" he snaps. He rises from the couch and begins to pace, a lion. The last glimmer of afternoon sunlight slanting in from the windows sets him in sharp relief, and the tips of his many rebellious curls turn incandescent, like hot metal. He wears a ring set with an opaque gem, just as Lucifer does, but the stone is blue, like lapis lazuli, not black onyx, and the metal and the stone glint in the light as its owner prowls back and forth. "If I cannot tell him directly, and several indirect methods have failed, tell me, what is left?"

What is left?

"Here's … what I don't understand," she says slowly, resting her elbows on her knees, and her face in her hands. Her head is pounding, at this point, and watching Michael pace makes her dizzy. This is … too much.

All she can see through her fingers are his stupid Birkenstocks, a few feet to her left, as he grinds to a halt beside her. "Yes?" he says.

"If angels can fall by choice-

"Is it truly a choice if one is specifically designed not to make that choice?"

She frowns and looks up at him, squinting. He towers above her. "Wait a damned minute," she says. "You're saying Lucifer doesn't even know he can decide to fall?"

"Angels are built to serve God," Michael replies with an easy shrug. "That is our purpose. Lucifer may be uniquely rebellious, but he is not omniscient, and he is still an angel. He is still the Light Bringer - the brightest of us all. To fall goes against his deepest grain. To fall is anathema. And to fall by choice …." Michael shakes his head and regards her with a grim look. "Chloe Decker, it has never been done. He would not know to consider it. He would not want to consider it."

"Well, what about you?" she says. "You know."

"Within the context of this task, God has allowed me to know."

"So … what … if you visit for family photos in a few years, after this is resolved …?"

Michael shrugs again.

She gapes. "And that doesn't bother you? That God can just pluck knowledge right out of your head?"

"It is the will of God," Michael replies, untroubled. "His is the will that makes my own."
And, again, that's the beginning and the end of it.

She regards Michael, stunned, and the silence stretches, and stretches, and stretches. Lucifer is designed not to know he can fall. He's designed not to want to. To find it unpalatable. God built him to be what Michael is. Unwavering. Righteous. Absolute.

A true sword of God.

A weapon.

And weapons don't think.

No wonder Heaven flipped out when Lucifer began to ask for things. The very idea that Lucifer can feel desire in the first place seems to indicate a flaw in the works, somewhere, except … God cannot be flawed.

A paradox.

Lucifer was cast down to erase contradiction, she realizes. Nothing more. Nothing less.

And she gets it, now.

What it means to say angels don't have free will.

Why Lucifer can't just flip God the bird and say, "Okay, I'm free, now."

That'd be like her ficus saying, "Not green anymore! So, there!"

He's hardwired.

Except ….

"If all of this is true," she says, frowning, "why would God think Lucifer would suddenly make a choice he's had eons to make and hasn't?"

Michael tilts his head, looking down his nose at her, and for the first time since she laid eyes on him, he smiles. "As I have said, you are a catalyst," he says. "That is your purpose."

She blinks. "Wait," she says, waving her hands as she rises to her feet. "Wait, wait, wait. Stop the bus."

His lip twitches. The vague beginnings of a snort. Like he's actually amused, for once. "I am waiting, Chloe Decker," he says, in that soft Israeli lilt of his. "The bus is stopped."

"You think Lucifer would fall … for me?" she blurs. "That's why God put me here?" She can't help it when she bursts into diaphragm-wrenching guffaws. It makes some amount of sense. He's died for her. He's killed for her. Why not fall for her? And she supposes, for people who clearly have no clue how to solve the Lucifer equation, it's a reasonable 2+2=4. But …. "Are you all on drugs?"

"No," Michael replies, eyes glinting with returning irritation. "You misunderstand. Your misguided affection for each other is nothing but an unplanned aberration."

"Yeah, you've made it pretty clear that you don't ship it," she snarks.

Michael frowns. "Your vernacular baffles me."
"Whatever … just …." She takes a breath and lets it out, trying to calm down. She manages to curtail herself after a few more amused, half-aborted chuckles. "Please, continue."

"You are a catalyst," Michael says. "A catalyst makes things happen faster. It does not make things happen differently."

"But how would I-"

"Your unique perspective," Michael says. "You are human, yet immune to his wiles. You push him to question many of his entrenched viewpoints."

"But … why go to all this trouble? Why put me here, when God himself could just make Lucifer fall like he did with Amenadiel?"

Michael shrugs. "My brother desires a choice in his fate. God is giving him that choice."

"Without telling him that he has one," she says in a wry tone.

Michael gives her a helpless look. "I believe you would call this a catch-22, would you not?"

"You're really just trying to get him to ask for wings?" she says, still just a little doubting. "You're not here to force them on him again?"

"Why would I choose to repeat a course of action that has demonstrated itself to be ineffective?" Michael says.

Which, yeah, okay. He might not have any of his own opinions. But he's not stupid.

She gives him a long, considering look. "Do you like wine?" she says.

She thinks they're going to need some wine for this.

Michael, as it turns out, when he's "off duty," is a bit more companionable. Still holier-than-thou. Still unable to fathom a world where God's isn't the be all, end all opinion. But … everyone has flaws. And, unlike Lucifer, Michael doesn't bitch and moan endlessly about $6 bottles of pinot. Which is nice.

They sit side by side on her couch. His body is warm and radiating, like Lucifer's. But between his diction, his accent, his carriage, his attitude, his attire, his sense of style … she doesn't think she could ever mistake him for Lucifer again. Not without some level of intentional deception.

"Maybe, he would believe all of this if it came from me," she muses, head tilted back as she stares at the ceiling, and at the lamplight refracting through her wineglass.

Michael sighs and takes a swig straight from the lip of the bottle she gave him. "When he learns the source of your information, I sincerely doubt that he will."

The room feels a bit like it's on a turntable, at this point. She feels queasy and stressed and sick. The more she thinks about it, the more she's certain … Lucifer is not going to take this well. The idea that he's built not to think of certain things. The idea that God isn't willing to offer him a perfect solution.

But he does need to know. Both of his inherent hardwired design, and that a solution is being offered.
It's criminal that he doesn't.

"Can it hurt for me to try?" she says.

Michael is silent for a moment, thinking. "I … believe it would poison your bond irreparably," he says. He takes another swig. "My brother would cease to perceive you as someone on 'his side.' You would be lumped in with all the rest of the so-called manipulators."

She snorts. "I thought you didn't like 'our bond,'" she says, giving the words our and bond a lackadaisical pair of air quotes. "Wouldn't you prefer it poisoned?"

"I do not like it," Michael replies. "It appalls me." As blunt and absent of humor as ever. "But you cannot catalyze a reaction if you are removed from the system in which the reaction is occurring."

"Oh," she says.

That's a good point.

She swallows.

"I've got nothing, then," she confesses, taking a forlorn sip from her glass. "No ideas." The pinot noir she picked is fruity and light, with hardly any body, and she can imagine Lucifer saying, Could you not, at least, have picked a $6 cab? Perhaps a petite sirah? Anything? "I'm tapped."

"I assumed that this is what you would say," Michael says with a sigh. "But I had to try, yes?"

"I guess," she says. "Some miracle, I am."

"Miracles are miracles. They do not have a quantifier." He offers her a tiny smile that makes him seem younger by a few eons, and then he adds softly, "Everything happens or does not for a reason, Chloe Decker. I am sure that that reason will become apparent, soon enough."

"Well, in the current absence of reason," she grumbles, "what we've got is a clusterfuck." To borrow Emily's favorite word.

Michael nods slowly, conceding, "That is … a true statement."

And that's … probably the closest she'll ever get to hearing Michael Demiurgos question God's plan. She raises her glass sloppily in his direction. He clinks the wine bottle to it, a toast, and they both take a swig in tandem.

She glances at her watch. Late afternoon became early evening became night, at some point. "Seriously," she says, "how far away did you dump him?"

Michael regards her with a haughty, gleaming gaze. "I can be in another galaxy in less time than it takes you to blink, and you expect me to have an adequate concept of Earth proportions?" He frowns. "I thought the distance was negligible." Clearly, I was mistaken, he doesn't say.

Wouldn't ever say, her growing impression of him informs her.

She frowns, staring at her wineglass.

She hopes Lucifer is okay.

That his injuries are minor.
That she'll somehow figure out how to tell him what's going on without him flipping his shit.

She hopes.

The glass begins to blur, and her eyelids droop as she pictures Lucifer slogging back on foot through Death Valley. Again. At least, he's invulnerable, now. So, it wouldn't kill him.

She hopes.

At some point, Michael rescues her glass from dumping its contents into her lap, and he sets it on the coffee table with a clink. She's awake enough to mumble a small protest, to make a weak grab for his hand, but he brushes her away like she's an irritating little fly.

"I'd forgotten how poorly humans hold their liquor," Michael says.

Apparently the desire to denigrate the human species runs in the family.

And she wants to come up with a retort for that. She does.

But ….

Later.

Her head tips to the side, onto a warm shoulder.

Michael's shoulder.

Unlike Lucifer, Michael doesn't make any move to draw her closer. His arms stay at his sides, rigid. And he makes an irritated sniff, like he's calculating how long they can touch without her giving him cooties.

When she's this far gone, though, she can pretend he's Lucifer, anyway.

After all this stress and heartache, it's nice to be with him again.

She finds him reassuring.

She breathes thickly for a moment against his shirtsleeve, trying to stay afloat.

And then the alcohol drags her under, into a lake of twisted dreams.

She wakes to the raucous sound of her coffee table breaking into pieces.

"I told you she was off limits," she hears, a thunderous roar that threatens to shatter her chest.
"I told you not to come here!"

"Lucifer," says Michael, "you are not listening to me."

"Get out of this apartment," Lucifer yells, a spittle-accented snarl.

"Lucifer?" she mumbles. She's so groggy and disoriented from deep sleep and alcohol that when she tries to stand, she trips, and she slides to the floor on top of the now-empty wine bottle and the remains of her coffee table.

"I have been invited," Michael snaps.
And Lucifer replies with vitriol, "You lie."


She can barely see in the darkness, and she rubs her eyes frantically. "Lucifer, stop!" she shouts, just in time to see Lucifer body check his brother through the broken door and into the night. She lurches to her feet, head spinning. "Lucifer, I'm fine! He didn't touch me! I let him in!"

Lucifer drags Michael out into the street by his collar as Chloe trips and stumbles after them. In the pale cast of the streetlights, the hellfire in Lucifer's eyes glows like hot embers. The whole side of his face is bruised and black and puffy. His lip is split. Blood trickles out of the corner of his mouth and down his chin. His left shoulder is hanging at a funny angle, and he's not using that hand, like he can't.

Her cop instincts scream at her. She wants to dart into the street after them. To step between them and interdict the fight by force, as she's so often done for drunk-and-disorderlies. But as she watches Michael whip his brother into the eucalyptus tree, obliterating the trunk into splinters, large and small, she realizes that she can't.

She can't get anywhere near them without risking life and limb.

"STOP IT!" she bellows uselessly into the night. "LUCIFER, I'M FINE."

But they're beyond hearing.

Lucifer scrambles to his feet, charging at Michael like a battering ram. They slam into a car, shattering glass, setting off an ear-splitting alarm that threatens to melt Chloe's brain into goo.

Michael's wings unfurl. They're bright and beautiful - lustrous and warm, like Lucifer's - and they make her heart ache to look upon. Until he uses them like clubs, knocking Lucifer to the dirty pavement at his feet.

"STOP!" she repeats. She can't not.

Her eyes water as she watches them rip into each other, unrestrained.

Or … she thinks it's unrestrained.

Until Michael loses his patience.

And then the whole tide of the fight changes. From a brawl between equals to a cat slaughtering a mouse. Michael whips behind Lucifer, who doesn't even have a chance to react before Michael jams his thumbs into Lucifer's back. Into the cauterized wounds where his wings once were. Lucifer chokes on a shout and goes white - a sharp contrast to the many dark bloodstains marring his pale skin - and he drops to the ground like a sack of bricks. Then Michael steps on him, grinding him into the pavement with a glare that could light fires.

"You are unmanageable, brother," Michael announces, folding his arms as Lucifer paws helplessly at the pavement, trying to get away. "Mercurial, and vicious, and unworthy. How we are related, I will never know."

Michael's wings curl around him, two snow-capped peaks, brilliant and terrible, as he blocks Lucifer's attempts at egress with a cage of bladed white feathers. And then Michael shifts on his feet, jamming all of his weight into Lucifer's injured back. Bones snap. Lucifer vomits, and goes still.
"Better," Michael says, folding his luminous wings behind his back. He spits blood onto the road, and he shakes his head, finally turning to Chloe with a woeful look. His scalp is bleeding where Lucifer ripped away a tuft of hair. His shirt is in shreds. He cradles his hand like he has broken fingers, or a broken wrist. "As I have said, Lucifer will not listen," Michael says, "My task of message-bearing, it would seem, is hopeless."

"He's listening, now," she says, eyes watering as she rushes into the street to join them, now that the violence has ended. "He can see that I'm fine." She glances down at Lucifer, heart pounding. His eyes are glazed over with pain. His body is broken and bloody. He's gasping, and his breaths sound ... bubbly. Like he has liquid filling his chest. She's not sure he's seeing anything anymore.

"See, I'm fine," she says, anyway. "I'm fine, Lucifer. Okay? He didn't hurt me. I'm fine." In case it helps. She blinks as tears spill, and she looks back up at Michael. "Please, he's listening, now. Please, let him go. Just ... let him go."

She doesn't even care that she's begging, at this point.

Lucifer wouldn't be in this position if it weren't for her.

What must it have looked like, to walk into her apartment and find her comatose on the couch, helpless, next to his brother, who Lucifer thinks is bent on hurting her?

Particularly in this era of Rohypnol and date rape.

She was so stupid.

"Please, just let him go," she repeats, crying.

"That would be unproductive," Michael says.

"It wouldn't!" she snaps, frantic. "He's down, and he's not getting up. You won, okay?"

"I am not here to win," says Michael. "I am here to deliver a message, and Lucifer is not receiving it."

Out of options, she reaches for her gun, but it's gone. The gun is gone. As is the holster. He took her gun. Her insides feel like they're in free fall. "No," she says faintly, dizzy with panic, and the sinking realization that she can do nothing to help.

Nothing at all.

Michael gives her a sad look. "Know that I do not want this," he says gently. "But I see no other option."

"What do you mean?" she has a chance to say.

Michael's wings flare out wide.

She squints, momentarily blinded by the light.

And then he and Lucifer are gone in a rustle of feathers, leaving only bloody pavement behind.
Chapter Notes

Chapter title credit goes to David Bowie.

Thank you so much to everybody who takes the time to leave feedback! I appreciate it more than I can say.

P.S. YOU MIGHT NEED WINE FOR THIS. It's not gory like ch 13, but it's quite emotionally explicit in places. So. Yeah. Wine.

P.P.S. I promise I put my toys back on the shelf in one piece, usually in better condition than when I found them. Hang in there!

Lucifer Morningstar is gone.

The very idea doesn't feel real, at first.

What's real about two archangels getting into a fucking fistfight?

What's real about two archangels?

What's real?

She wades through a night of flashing police lights. Sirens. Questions. So many questions. Who was yelling? What smashed the car out front? And the tree? And her door? Was it an assault? Was it a robbery? Was anything taken? Is she hurt? Was anyone else hurt? Does she need a place to stay? Should they put out a BOLO? And on, and on, and on, and on, and on, and she can barely pay attention, because nothing feels real.

Maze returns well after the chaos has abated, when Chloe is alone, sitting on the floor in their broken home. Numb.

The demon sees the refuse, gets a whiff of divine blood, and demands to know, "What the fuck happened?"

And Chloe can only say, "Michael took him," in a wavering voice.

But for Maze, the context of the past two days is enough for her to glean meaning, and she storms out through the ruined door again in a whirl of fury and cursing and gleaming blades. To track him, maybe. Lucifer. Futile though it will be. How do you track a man who literally disappeared into thin air?

To where? She doesn't know.

But it occurs to her in a bout of sinking clarity that if Lucifer is anywhere other than Earth - and, considering his divine abductor, she thinks not-Earth is a given - he can't come back. He needs wings to cross dimensions or bend space, and he doesn't have those, anymore.

That's the whole reason this happened.
He doesn't have wings, and he can't come back.

He's at Michael's mercy.

A man who, as far as she can tell, has none.

And that's a terrifying thought.

But it doesn't feel real.

It doesn't feel real until she wanders, still numb, into work the next day, and Emily and Dan race up to her desk. "Guess who my new partner is!" Emily babbles, and Dan's I-got-reinstated smile is a mile wide, but all Chloe hears are the words "new partner," and she bursts into tears at her desk.

Lucifer Morningstar is gone.

And his absence is as real as any knife wound.

Hours become days.

*Please, bring him back,* she pleads, projecting with every last piece of willpower she possesses. *Michael, please. Please, I'll get him to believe you, somehow. Just bring him back, so I can try.*

Every morning when she wakes, and every night before bed. Sometimes, at lunch, just because.

But Michael doesn't answer.

Days become a week.

"Why are you sad, Mommy?" Trixie wants to know.

But Chloe doesn't have the heart to tell her, yet.

A week becomes two.

"I'm sure he'll turn up," Dan says, though from the grim look on his face, he doesn't believe what he's saying. Very few kidnappings result in a happy ending if the victim isn't found in 24 hours.

And Chloe can only stare blankly into her coffeecup, bereft.

*Please, Michael, bring him back,* she prays.

She refuses to give up.

Eighteen days.

"Mommy, look!" Trixie says, pointing at the television with her spoon. Her bowl of Cinnamon Toast Crunch sits in her lap, ignored, and the cereal is turning mushy.

Chloe squints blearily at the newscast. "Most of the Western US was treated to a brilliant light show this morning, as a large meteor streaked across the sky," the plastic-looking newscaster is
saying. A shaky video of the meteor in question - probably taken by a cell phone - plays. The video shows nothing more than a bright, saturated dot, superimposed on a bleak, black sky. "Astronomers have estimated the size of the rock to be approximately two meters in diam-
"

Chloe sighs. "That's great, Monkey," she rasps, trying not to let go of the flood of tears that's been threatening to crash down her cheeks for days. "Eat your breakfast, okay? We're gonna be late."

"Isn't it pretty?"

Chloe glances again at the television.

"The Earth is hit by thousands of meteorites a year, but relatively few of them are this large," the announcer is saying as he narrates a helpful animated infographic. "No impact site is known at this time, but-
"

"Yeah," Chloe says glumly. "Really pretty."

"Do you think Lucifer made it?" Trixie says, unaware of her unfortunate double-entendre.

Trixie still thinks Lucifer is "on vacation," and the unexpected namedrop makes a lump form in Chloe's throat. Did Lucifer make it? Shit. Shit, she's not going to- Her eyes water, and she scrubs at them furiously with her fingertips. Trixie is facing the television and doesn't see.

"Do you think Lucifer made it?" Trixie repeats.

"No, monkey," Chloe says hoarsely. "Shooting stars aren't actually stars. They're rocks."

"Oh," Trixie says, frowning. "Well, it's still really pretty."

"It is," Chloe acknowledges with a nod. "Now, finish up, okay?"

Trixie sighs. "Okay."

Chloe thinks he's Lucifer, at first. Standing in her parking spot at work, waiting for her to show up. But his hair is a mess of un-wrangled curls. He's wearing a pink t-shirt proudly emblazoned with the words, "FREE HUGS," in all caps. His jeans are indigo-colored. And reason overrides her wishful thinking in a matter of nanoseconds.

She skids to a stop and climbs out of her car so quickly the seatbelt almost gives her a black eye as it withdraws.

"Where is he?" she snaps before Michael can even speak. "What did you do to him?" She advances on him, grabbing a tuft of his stupid pink shirt, and whips him into the hood of her car. His body hits the front grill with a pleasing "whump" sound. His weight causes the hood of the car to buckle a little, adding a succession of metallic thunks. She draws her gun, jamming it brutally into his chest, and she adds, "You tell me right the hell now."

It's a satisfying moment until her gun dematerializes out of her grasp and reappears in the holster. He nudges her away, as if she were no more substantial than a blade of grass. He rises from the car and straightens to his full, imposing height. Beyond the physical, his presence unfurls like a whip. The air seems to press down on her, making it hard to breathe, and she can't help but gasp.

"I understand your wrath, and your fear, and your worry," he says in a low, dangerous voice that reminds her of Lucifer's velvet take-no-prisoners tone, "and I will allow you leeway, to a point, for this reason." His eyes are obsidian, gleaming, sharp. "But do not trifle with me, Chloe Decker."
You will regret it; I assure you."

She swallows as her heart starts to pound. She refuses to apologize. But she can't muster a glare, anymore. It almost feels like … he let her throw him to give her the opportunity to vent.

"Please, can you, at least, tell me he's okay?" she says.

Michael regards her for a long moment, silent, and she starts to feel like she's sinking. He can't even muster up a simple, "Yes," to assuage her. Not even as a fucking lie. Which means ….

He reaches into his pocket, liberating a small, folded yellow piece of notebook paper. A balmy breeze blows, making the paper flap in his hand. With a strange, hollow "thwoop" sound, though, all wind ceases, and then he drops the note. It hits the concrete, undisturbed. Michael's gaze wanders to the sky, and he whistles an aimless tune.

Chloe frowns. Is he seriously …?

She snatches the note from where it fell by his foot, and she unfolds it with shaky hands as the wind noisily resumes. A series of numbers are written on the paper in blue ink - each ornate, beautiful numeral is like calligraphy, similar to Lucifer's handwriting, but … not quite the same. Lucifer's, while still pretty, is somewhat more slipshod.

"What is-?" she has a chance to say, and then she realizes with a blink that she's looking at coordinates. She doesn't know coordinates well enough to have any idea where these are, though. She'll need to consult a map. She swallows, folding her arms. "Why?" she demands. "What's there?"

"You need to go to this place," is all Michael says in reply. He licks his lips and glances around like he's nervous about being observed. "Now. Do not wait."

"Lucifer is here?" she says, shaking the paper. "Can't you just zap me there?" She shakes her head as the blood begins to rush in her ears. "Just zap me there. I'll go, now."

But Michael shakes his head. "I … I cannot," he says, sounding pained. He backs into her car as he tries to widen the space between them. "I have been forbidden." He shifts from foot to foot, agitated. "I have not been forbidden from writing interesting coordinates down, however, or from discarding paper in your vicinity."

She blinks. Holy shit. Mr. God-Rules-and-Mortals-Drool not only found a fucking loophole, but he exploited it? He … rebelled? Even just a little?

The paper crinkles as her grasp tightens around it. "Thank you," she says, almost hiccoughing with relief. He rebelled. And given their conversation a few weeks ago, she knows this is no small thing. "Michael, thank you."

"I am sorry," he continues, staring at a fixed point on the ground. "I should not …." He makes a rough sound in his throat. "This did not turn out as I expected. The point was to release him from bondage, as he has so long desired, not …." He looks like he might be sick. "I do not like that I was made party to this."

"Party to what?" she says, frowning. "Sorry for what? What didn't turn out-"

"I do not understand him," Michael says, ignoring her. "I do not like him." He gives her a stark look that makes her stomach churn. "But I do love him. He is my brother. And I did not want this for him."
"But, Michael-"

"Go there, now," he says, looking pointedly at the notebook paper clutched in her hands. "All of God's children have been forbidden."

"But-"

"Anathema," he whispers, looking stricken.

And then he's gone.

She looks up the coordinates the second she gets to her desk. According to Google, they're in Kaniksu National Forest. Right near the border between Idaho and Montana. Barely not in Canada. The closest airport looks like it's in Spokane.

What in the hell is Lucifer doing there?

Whatever it is, it can't be good.

Michael was willing to beat Lucifer half to death, and now, he's balking enough to mini-rebel?

Anathema, Michael said.

She feels cold as she texts Maze the details, makes sure Dan can keep Trixie a little while longer, and books off work. If she and Maze hurry, they can catch a plane to Spokane today and be there tonight, instead of having to wait for tomorrow. If they hurry.

She uses her siren the whole way home, and then the whole way to the airport.

It's the only way to cut through the afternoon traffic with any amount of speed.

Using her siren for a non-emergency is an abuse of power. Parking her cruiser at the airport is a huge no-no. She could have her cruiser taken away from her for using it on personal travel beyond commuting. But in this precise moment, she doesn't give a damn.

Go there, now, Michael said.

Do not wait.

Anathema.

That sounds like a fucking emergency to her. Even if the terrestrial world wouldn't call it one.

Washington and Idaho are in an entirely different ecosystem than Southern California. The air is cold and wet at night, even in summer, and she immediately regrets not bringing a coat. Worse, though, is the darkness. When one lives in SoCal, one gets used to purple skies, and the perpetual presence of light pollution. But near Spokane, civilization ends quickly after they leave the city limits, and she can see what feels like every single one of Lucifer's stars. It's so dark, she feels the need to drive with her high beams on, which is something she can't remember ever doing back home.

"We'll try tonight," she says, shaking with nerves as she and Maze gather last minute supplies at a little convenience store they found on the road. "If he's close to a service road, we might be able to get to him without daylight." She isn't hopeful, but she can't not try. Not when she doesn't even
know if he's hurt or dying somewhere.

Maze frowns at their GPS's glowing green screen. "This thing says he's about twenty miles from here."

Chloe nods as she puts two big flashlights into their shopping cart. Batteries. Bottled water. Snacks.

They pay for their bounty and race back to the rental car.

Twenty miles might as well be 4000.

The car - a blue SUV built for off-roading, but not, it seems, for comfort - jostles them back and forth like clothes in a dryer. Conifers rise up to the stars, and they all shake hands above the road, creating vast, verdant caverns. Fat water droplets splatter onto the windshield intermittently. Not rain. Just runoff from the trees overhead. Mist coils low to the ground, dropping the visibility in front of the headlights to near zero. They spend hours driving on dark, winding, narrow roads, poking down one unmapped access road after another, just to see where they end up.

It's frustrating, because Chloe and Maze can see where the coordinates are. And they're close. Within five miles. But that's not close enough to brave a midnight trek on foot through unknown, unpopulated, unpaved territory.

"Let me go," Maze says with a frustrated sigh as they bounce along at a turtle's pace. "I have better night vision than a cat. And I'm strong enough to carry him back, if he's hurt." She glances at her watch. "I can make four miles in an hour, easy, even over terrain like this."

Chloe swallows, squinting into the darkness as a wet branch slaps the windshield and scrapes up over the roof with a high-pitched screech. "What about the wildlife?" she says. "Like bears. And mountain lions."

Maze shrugs and gestures to her knives, which are sheathed at her waist. "What about it?"

Which … okay. Fair point.

"Let's see where this road goes," Chloe says. So far, it's inching them closer, according to the GPS, and she doesn't like the idea of splitting up if they don't have to. "If we start getting farther away, we'll stop, and you can try to break through."

Maze seems to find this compromise acceptable.

The road keeps veering closer. And closer. And closer.

Chloe squints into the gloom, trying to see, only to slam on the brakes with a gasp. There's a tree down, lying across the muddy path. Fuck, fuck, fuck. They were so close.

"How far are we?" she says, heart in her throat.

"Like … a mile," Maze says, frowning at the GPS.

A mile is still a long way to go in the dark in the woods, but ….

Fuck it. "We're going," Chloe decides. She twists the key in the ignition, pulling it loose as the car's engine rumbles to a stop.
A soft ding-ding-ding sound fills the midnight silence as she pops open the door. She slides out onto spongey, damp earth, takes a quick moment to stretch out all the kinks, and then moves around to the trunk to grab one of the flashlights they bought. She starts to shiver in seconds. Fuck, why didn't she bring a coat?

_Stupid, acclimatized, Los Angeles brain_, she grumbles to herself.

An owl hoots in the distance. Crickets sing. She glances down the road, beyond the downed tree, pointing the flashlight into the darkness, and-

She frowns. "Um …," she says.

"Whoa," Maze adds, gaping.

It's not just one tree down.

They're _all_ down. All of them. From the car to the end of her flashlight beam in the distance.

Snapped in half and flattened like a bomb went off.

Not just trees, she realizes, panning the flashlight beam.

All of the vegetation is singed or shredded, too.

She looks up.

What had been thick canopy is wide open, thanks to the destruction.

The sky is an infinite dome filled to the brim with stars, like someone smashed a bottle and scattered the shards of glass across a blacktop. After miles and miles of claustrophobic roads, she feels almost naked. And suddenly … very small.

The mist billows at her feet.

_Anathema_, Michael said.

Her heart begins to pound.

What could have happened that destroys this wide of an area?

She doesn't know.

"Maze," she says, "let me see the GPS."

Maze shuffles around the car and hands her the device. Chloe peers down at it. Oriented herself.

A pit forms in her stomach.

All of the downed trees - if the ruined, branched ends are any indication - are pointing away from Lucifer's coordinates.

So, whatever happened, it happened in his direction.

---

The trek is brutal.

Maze remains uncowed. She's lithe and light on her feet, almost catlike in her acrobatics. But for
Chloe, all of the broken trees and uprooted plants turn what was already sure to be a treacherous walk into a grueling obstacle course.

"Lucifer!" they call into the night, hoping he'll answer, and help them pinpoint him.

But he doesn't.

In the meantime, all they can do is follow the trail of destruction.

At first, the vegetation is only singed at the edges. Then it's burned. Then it's black, all through. Then it's charred into twigs.

"Lucifer!" Chloe yells as she straddles the ashy skeleton of what was once a tree. The word echoes into the night. But the only answer is the creak of dry kindling in the breeze. And the hoot of another disgruntled owl.

With a grunt, she slides over the trunk. Ashes stain her jeans black at the crotch and down her legs, but she hardly notices.

"Lucifer!" she repeats, only to end in a cough as her throat begins to protest from all the abuse. Maze leaps over the trunk like it's nothing.

"You should run ahead," Chloe says, panting.

But Maze shrugs. "I don't want to carry two people back."

Chloe rolls her eyes. Sweat dots her brow and pours down her back. Her breath fogs in front of her face. She shines the flashlight ahead and stills.

A loose mound charred refuse arcs into the darkness ahead. Beyond the mound, there are no downed trees. There's nothing. Just a black, still-smoking scar, dotted with glowing embers like a sea of fireflies at dusk, marking total incineration.

Maze cups her hands to her lips. "Lucifer?" she calls into the darkness.

Nothing.

Their pace picks up into a trot. The smoke makes Chloe's eyes burn, and she coughs, covering her nose with the end of her sleeve.

Minutes pass.

There's nothing but ash and embers churning underneath their feet, now, and they cover ground much faster.

"Lucifer!" Chloe shouts, coughing.

She runs faster, still.

And then she sees the crater. An actual, honest-to-God crater. It starts as a runnel at the tip of her flashlight beam. Mere impressions disrupting the charred earth. But as she chases the runnel, she can see that it ends in a ragged hole the depth and diameter of her car, the edges of which are still on fire. The flames are shallow, though, only an inch or two high and dying slowly as she watches.

That has to be him. At the epicenter of this burning ruin.
"Lucifer!" she calls, running, tripping, heart in her throat. "Lucifer!"

"Lucifer!" Maze calls behind her, also running.

Chloe skids to a stop at the lip of the burning hole and shines her flashlight down into the pit. Lucifer. Or some other dark-haired man in peril at the exact "interesting" coordinates Michael gave. But, really, what are the odds?

"Lucifer?" Chloe says, but he doesn't respond. All she hears is the crackle of the nearby flames.

He's lying naked in the dirt, filthy and covered with soot and other detritus. Unmoving. Curled up in a fetal position, arms wrapped over his head like he was trying to protect himself from a blow to the skull.

She sets the flashlight down, pointing it into the crater. Then she jumps in and drops to her knees beside him on the cold earth. He's shivering. Or trembling. Or both. And he smells like urine. And vomit. And terror. Enough to make her lean away and gag. But if she can smell it, he can smell it, too. She swallows once. Twice. Again. Trying to get a grip on her gag reflex, because the last thing she wants to do right now is embarrass him.

"Lucifer?" she says softly.

She reaches to give him a gentle shake. Her fingertips are millimeters from his skin when Maze blurts, "Decker, wait." Maze lunges forward to pull Chloe away. "Wait, let me do it."

Chloe looks up, frowning. She didn't even hear Maze drop down. "What?" she says. "Why?"

Maze shoves Chloe away, up the slope of the crater, and then turns back to Lucifer. Maze speaks in another language. The words are sharp and loud and end with, "Lucifer," but said with a strange accent.

She inches closer.

The second her fingertips brush his dirty skin, he kicks. The motion is quick - faster than Chloe can even see - but Maze catches the arch of his bare foot with ease. Despite Maze being prepared for the impact, though, the kinetic energy of the blow still knocks her on her ass. And, foiled, Lucifer snaps away from her, sliding across the dirt until he hits the opposite wall of the crater.

"That's why," Maze says, wincing.

Chloe swallows. "Oh." She thinks Maze might have just saved her life. "Thanks."

Maze inches toward Lucifer again, speaking in the weird language. Chloe thinks Maze might be trying to narrate her actions. So Lucifer isn't surprised. But it doesn't seem to help.

The moment Maze touches him, he looses a guttural snarl. The subsequent clash of supernatural titans is a dirty pit fight with no rules. He bites, and he claws, and he kicks, and he pulls hair. Anything he can get a grip on, he tries to rip away from her, and Maze makes a point of tossing her Hell-forged blades to the ground at Chloe's feet. Well out of his reach.

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Maze wrangles him into a position where he's lying flat on his stomach in the soot while she sits on him. She traps his wrists behind his back at an angle that's almost wrenching his arms from his shoulder sockets. He kicks at the dirt, scooting uselessly forward an inch. His trembling muscles bulge with stress, but he can't muster the strength to throw Maze off of him, and the anguished, nonsensical keening noise he makes when he thinks he's pinned is heart wrenching - it's like he really does think he's defending his life.
"Lucifer, it's okay," Chloe feels compelled to say. "It's just Chloe and Maze." Not that it seems to make much difference.

His panic is so palpable in the air that it's strangulating, and she has to look away.

She hears a scuffle behind her, and then the whole cycle begins again. Lucifer scrabbling to get away. Maze struggling to subdue him.

Chloe can only listen tearfully in nauseated horror as a war of energy depletion ensues.

Lucifer wrenching free. Maze overpowering him.

Rinse. Repeat.

Until, at last, after what feels like eternity, he ceases, because he's so exhausted he can't find the will to save his own life. When Chloe turns around again, his face is a rictus of anguish as he pants noisily through his teeth into the ashes. His shoulder blades jut like knives, Maze has him so twisted up. His gaze is clouded with pain.

Maze holds him down in that horrible, unnatural position for at least ten minutes. Wearing him down even more.

As soon as Maze finds it safe enough to climb off of him, he curls into the fetal position they found him in. His arms tighten over his head, and his knees press closer to his torso.

Kneeling next to him, Maze puts one hand on his wrists, and one hand on his ankles. With another wail, he bucks, trying to get loose, but he's spent. Maze easily keeps him down. And then, with a grim look, she nods at Chloe.

"I've got him, now," Maze says.

And Chloe drops down into the dirt beside them, framed by the dim beam of the flashlight. "Lucifer," she says. "Lucifer, it's just me. Just Chloe. Chloe and Maze."

This time, when she reaches, she connects with his gelid skin. He flinches, and his breaths tighten in his chest as he tries again to struggle, but Maze holds him down, and his protests die when he exhausts himself once more. A lump forms in Chloe's throat. God, what happened to him?

His muscles are tight like a tripwire underneath her fingertips as she searches for injuries. Nothing on his left shoulder. Only dirt. She moves to his back. The ugly, cauterized wounds that mark where his wings once were are old, faded scars, at this point. Long healed. Like they were when she first met him. She checks his hip. His leg. His foot. Also nothing. All hints of his previous altercation with Michael seem to be gone. She finds no broken skin. No fractured bones.

"What's wrong with him?" demands Maze.

Chloe shakes her head. "I don't know. I can't feel anything busted." She wants to check his chest. His face. His other side. "Can you roll him onto his back?"

But Maze shakes her head. "He's too tall. I can't straighten him out and still keep him from hurting you. My arms don't reach that far."

"Oh," Chloe says, lump in her throat. She looks down at him, eyes watering.

She touches him again, stroking him slowly from shoulder to hip and back to his shoulder, in what she hopes is a soothing motion. Back and forth. Back and forth. The sound of skin rasping on
dirty skin fills the tense quiet, just loud enough to be heard over the distant flicker of dying flames.

"Lucifer?" Chloe murmurs. "Lucifer, it's just me. It's just Chloe. And Maze." She moves to his arm and strokes. Up and down and up and down. "Lucifer, Lucifer, it's Chloe. Can you understand me?"

But he won't budge.

A lump the size of a softball is stuck in her throat.

Anathema, Michael said.

"Lucifer," Chloe repeats, at a loss.

He mumbles something. A faint, shellshocked whisper of sound. The syllables are strange. Not English.

And Maze goes still beside them.

"What is it?" Chloe asks.

"I fell," Maze says.

"What?" Chloe frowns.


An icy knife of realization slips between Chloe's ribs. Anathema. "Oh, my God," she says, sinking. *To fall is anathema.* He's not lying at ground zero because a bomb went off on top of him. He is the bomb. "Oh, my God, that was him." She swallows, looking at Maze. "The shooting star on TV this morning." Which means he's been lying here, terrified and nonsensical, for almost a day.

"No," Maze says, shaking her head. "No way. Not again."

"Maze, he's lying in a fucking crater."

"This is so fucked up."

"What the hell do we do?"

"How should I know?"

The exchange is a rapid-fire escalation of panic, and Chloe catches herself, jaw hanging open, finger pointing, about to add more panic onto the already-gargantuan pile. She shakes her head, and she takes a moment to calm down, breathing in, breathing out. In. Out. In. Out. She ends the ritual with the biggest gulp of air she can manage - a gulp so huge her lungs feel like they'll burst - and then she lets herself deflate slowly, pushing the air out through her pursed lips.

Okay.

She pinches the bridge of her nose, trying to think. What's something about the situation she can fix? She thought she saw an old utility blanket in the car, but … it isn't safe for Maze to retrieve it. Not when she's the only thing stopping Lucifer from attacking.

Chloe scoots as close as she can go. "Lucifer," she says, soothing and quiet. "Lucifer, can you look at me?" She rubs his shoulder again. "It's okay. It's okay, now." She glances at Maze. "I'm
going to lift him a little."

Maze nods.

So, Chloe reaches down, underneath his body, and pulls him up from the charred earth, into her arms. He twists a bit in her grasp, and the noise he makes is terrified, but Maze has his wrists, and his ankles, and he gives up again. Every time he struggles, he gives up more quickly. He's got next to nothing left.

"Lucifer, it's Chloe," she repeats. "It's just Chloe and Maze." Over and over and over. "Can you understand me? It's Chloe and Maze." Like a mantra.

She can feel it when she gets through to him. At long last. Instead of being a rigid, sometimes twisting, unwilling participant in her embrace, the resistance drains out of him over minutes, like he's a deflating balloon.

"It's just Chloe," she keeps repeating, a murmur by his ear. "It's just Chloe. We're not trying to hurt you. I promise, it's just Chloe and Maze."

And after a long deescalation, he rests his head on her shoulder.

"Do you understand me, now?" she says.

He speaks. An anguished, quiet sentence in the weird language from before. Angelish, she supposes.

Maze replies in Angelish, too, and after a long pause, he gives a minute nod.

Cautiously, Maze releases him.

He remains pliant in Chloe's arms.

Finally.

They sit for another five minutes. Just to be sure he isn't going to regress. He doesn't.

"I thought I saw an old utility blanket in the trunk of the car," Chloe says softly, at last, looking at Maze. "Can you get it? He's ice cold."

"Yeah," the demon says. "Easy." She adds some Angelish commentary for Lucifer. Probably something along the lines of, I'll be right back. Sit tight. And then she hops to her feet and dashes across the field of ash, back in the direction that they came from, disappearing into the mist and the darkness.

An eerie silence hangs like a pall over the dead zone.

Chloe can hear only the faint lick of flames.

She pushes her fingers through Lucifer's dirty hair. "It's okay," she repeats. "It's okay, now."

His pupils are dilated, even with the flashlight beam hitting him in the face. His eyes are glassy, and he's staring at nothing. Dried vomit is crusted around his mouth and chin and all across his chest. And he sits there. Limp in her arms. Unmoving except to shake.

He mumbles again. Against her neck. The same unearthly, hollow words as before. I fell.

"I know," she replies. "I know you fell." Why? "But it's okay, now. You're okay. We found you."
Except he seems to be stuck there.

On the falling part.

So, she sits in the dark, in the cold, in the dank, soft dirt with him, shivering, whispering, "It's okay, now. We found you. Maze will be back soon, and then we'll take you home." Over and over and over again. Hoping something will sink in for him, and he'll be less scared and shellshocked.

But he exists as wind, and the net of her words can't catch him.

Maze returns with a scratchy yellow blanket. It's a meager covering, barely the size of an afghan, but it's better than nothing, and Chloe wraps it tightly over his trembling shoulders.

"We need to get him to the car," Maze says.

He speaks again, staring blankly ahead. The words are something different than, *I fell.*

Chloe peers at Maze, hoping for translation, only to find Maze frowning. The demon drops to her haunches, grabs his chin, and drags his gaze to hers by force. She replies, inches from his face. Slowly. Like she thinks he's lost his faculties. Maze points at Chloe, and then Chloe hears her own name, spoken with a bizarre accent that makes it sound more like chlaw-eh. The rest is gibberish to Chloe's ears, but she can hear uptalk at the end. Like a question.

Lucifer nods faintly, but his thousand-yard stare doesn't change.

"What was that about?" Chloe asks as Maze scoots behind Lucifer's back, reaches under his arms, and drags him upright with a grunt.

Maze's lips form a grim line. "He asked if this was Hell. I told him no. Paraphrased, obviously."

"*What?*" Chloe says.

But Maze doesn't reply as she struggles to get his limp body into a loose fireman's carry. Chloe picks up their flashlight and rushes to his other side to help.

The walk back is torture.

Lucifer is nothing but shellshocked, shaking deadweight, and while Maze has no problem lugging his heft, she has all kinds of problems with his unwieldy bulk. Between the two of them, they manage to stumble back to the car, but it takes nearly two exhausting hours.

They stuff him into the back seat, resting him against the window. Chloe turns on the heaters full blast. He stares blankly into the night as they drive back to civilization, and he doesn't say another word.

By the time they get out of the woods and find a motel, the early morning sky is turning a pale shade of pink. The air is wet, but warming up. The sun makes all the dewdrops glisten.

And she's exhausted. Everything hurts.

"We can't fly back," Chloe says as she drives through the motel parking lot at a crawl, scanning each blue door for the number 109. She glances in the rearview mirror. Lucifer hasn't spoken in hours, not even in Angelish. She's not convinced he even realizes he's been recovered. All of the
candy bars and bottled water they left by his hip remain untouched. "He doesn't have any I.D."

"Or clothes," Maze adds with a frown. "You humans are kind of picky about that."

Chloe nods. "Well, we can fix the lack-of-clothes thing pretty easily, at least."

She clenches the steering wheel. The idea of, instead of sleeping, driving to a Walmart to get him something as simple as boxers and a t-shirt makes her wilt. She's been up for over 24 hours at this point, after weeks of sleeping poorly, and she's beginning to think she's not safe behind the wheel. But the thought of making him wait for hours, distraught, scared, with nothing but a dirty, scratchy blanket to call his own … While he might not care about his lack of clothes from a modesty standpoint, he's been through the wringer, and receiving a layer of security to wrap around himself might mean the world to him. Not that he'd ever say it. Even if he were talking.

"I'll go," Maze says, as if she's read Chloe's mind. "I'm not tired." Maze folds her arms, staring grimly out the window. "You two can clean up and sleep."

"Oh, thank God," Chloe says, sighing with relief. And then she cringes. "I mean …." She glances in the rearview mirror again. Lucifer seems unaffected by the namedrop. Good. She pinches the bridge of her nose, squeezing her tired eyes shut for a moment. "I don't know what the hell I mean." She swallows. And … bingo. Room 109. She pulls into the narrow parking spot in front of their room and shuts off the car. "Was it like this before?"

Maze's eyebrows knit. "Before?"

"When he fell the first time."

"I don't know," Maze says with a shrug. "I didn't meet him until later."

"Oh."

Chloe looks at her lap. And, now, she feels worse. Thinking about him curled up in a Hell crater, terrified, like he was in the woods, except nobody ever came to rescue him.

She swallows against the lump in her throat. "Maze, is he … human? Did he fall metaphorically, too?"

"You think a human could have survived that shit or kicked that hard?"

"I don't know." She sighs. "I just …. I'm hoping this is what he wanted." Somehow. Like, maybe, Michael convinced him, after all. Despite all the indications to the contrary.

Maze takes a deep breath, like she's scenting the car. Her nose wrinkles. Lucifer dragged the foul stink from the crater along with him to the car. But …. "He's not human," Maze says. "Not even a little. All I smell is divinity and filth."

And that's the nail in the coffin. Chloe's eyes water as she slides out of the car and onto the pavement. She drags herself around to the opposite passenger door to help Lucifer out of the car. He's still just staring, though. Staring, and looking beaten.

The Light Bringer bears no light.

For some reason, the idea is so upsetting she finds herself sniffling as she reaches across his body, trying to hook her arms under his.
He sits on the edge of the left-side bed, wrapped in the pathetic yellow blanket, while she gets situated in the small room. They were able to get a room with two queen beds. When she turns on the lamp by the righthand bedside, he squeezes his eyes shut and covers them with his hand.

"I'm sorry," she says.

He inhales and exhales through the gaps in his ash-stained fingertips. Three times. Then he lowers his hand and performs a wincing, tiny sweep of the space in front of him. She watches as his pained gaze shifts to the luggage rack. The little LED flatscreen television. The bathroom door. The gaudy, floral-printed rug. And then he peers back into the void, and all focus leaves him.

His lips press together, and he swallows. He releases a shaped breath. Like he's trying to speak, but his vocal cords aren't engaging.

"Are you okay?" she says.

"What is … this … p-place?" he says, staring blankly at the wall. The words are quiet, and they're spoken slowly. His tone is flat. Like he's having trouble remembering English.

She sits beside him. "We stopped at a motel."

His gaze pinches with distress, but he doesn't stop staring at nothing.

"Do you understand me?" she says.

"I don't …." He mumbles to himself. Not in English. Like he can't figure out how to translate whatever's in his head. "I don't … … motel."

Her throat hurts, and her eyes hurt, and she's trying really hard not to cry again. This is not Lucifer. This is not even half of Lucifer. He's been hollowed out. "It's just a place to sleep," she says.

"… Where?"

"We're in Idaho. Kind of near Spokane."

His fingers clench, pulling up tents of the bedspread with them. "I … Idaho."

"Yeah," she says. She gestures to the blanket. "I'm sorry we don't have any clothes for you, yet. Maze went to the Walmart. She'll be back."

But he's still stuck on Idaho. "The … s-state."

She smiles. "Do you know another Idaho?"

He looks at her, then. Into her eyes. For the first time since they found him in the crater.

"Hi," she says softly.

For a moment, he's laid bare. The desolate wreckage underneath his placid surface is heart wrenching. He's a bitter mess of I hurt, and please, help, and why. Why did this happen, why me, why am I, why everything. The worst bit she gleans, though, is I want to lie down and not get up, and it chills her.

And then he looks away. The connection is lost.

With a grimace, he lurches to his feet. His whole body sways precariously, like he might topple,
and she rushes to offer support. But he shrugs her away and hobbles toward the bathroom door. The exhaust fan begins to hum when he flips on the light.

She has a chance to say, "Do you want-" But he closes the door behind him before she can utter, "Help?"

She doesn't know what to do except leave him be.

So, she climbs into bed, and she sleeps.

She gets a few fitful hours of bloody, feather-filled nightmares for her trouble, before their door opens and Maze stomps through like Godzilla. Chloe sighs, giving up the ghost on sleep.

"Sorry," Maze says, without sounding sorry.

Chloe squints, watching as Maze drops a pile of new clothes onto the bed. She's picked things that are soft and warm - boxers, a white t-shirt, socks, black sweatpants, and a navy blue hoodie - claiming, "I don't think a suit off the rack would do him much good, let alone an entire suit that only costs $79.99. He spends more than that on his socks."

"That's a good thought," Chloe says, frowning.

Maze looks at the still-closed bathroom door with an unreadable expression, but for a few seconds, she seems ... lost. She shifts from foot to foot. "I'll keep watch," she mutters. "Someone might come after him." And then she leaves the little motel room like her toes are on fire.

Chloe suspects Maze has reached her limit for the day on "feelings."

Staring blearily at her watch, Chloe slides out of bed with a yawn. Lucifer's been in the bathroom for more than two hours. She glances at the bathroom door, debating.

She doesn't want to invade his privacy. She really doesn't.

But he's spent two hours in there.

And he was dirty, but he wasn't dirty enough to warrant two hours of grooming.

She raps on the door and tests the knob. It isn't locked. "Lucifer?" she says. "Can I come in?"

Nothing. No reply. Only the bass hum of the exhaust fan.

"I'm coming in unless you tell me not to," she says.

Nothing. Not a word. She gives him a whole minute, and he says nothing.

"Okay, I'm coming in," she says with a nod.

She gives him another thirty seconds to protest.

And then she twists the knob.

The door creaks open on its hinges.

The air inside the bathroom is wet. But cold. And he's not visible. Which means ….

She pads across the cold tile floor, and she grasps the shower curtain, gently pulling it back.
He's curled up. By the spigot. The vomit that was crusted on his face is gone. His hair is wet but drying.

His entire side is black and blue, though, from armpit to mid-thigh. More black, really, than blue. The bruise wraps around his ribs, over his hip, and across his back, stretching as far as his sternum and his spine. She missed the damage under all the filth when she inspected him for injury. If he were human, she'd wonder if he were hit by a car. What can do that to an angel?

"Lucifer?" she whispers.

He rubs his wet eyes and looks away from her, toward the tiled wall, with a wet, bubbly sniff, as soon as she lays eyes on him.

Is he …?

Another sniff.

He is.

Shit.

And suddenly, she's angry at herself. Angry that she was sleeping (poorly) for two fucking hours while he's been like this. A lump forms in her throat as the rest of the world spills away. She doesn't care that she's still fully clothed, or that the tub is wet, or that he's naked, or anything else. She grabs a towel off the rack and climbs in with him, lowering herself onto the cold, damp fiberglass.

"Hey," she says softly as she wraps the towel over him, not sure what else there is to say.

Assuming he was in Heaven, and the junction between Heaven and Earth exists somewhere in orbit, he just fell more than fifty miles, trapped in sickening free fall. The heat was so intense, his clothes burned away. He slammed into the ground at terminal velocity. So hard he destroyed all the vegetation in more than a one mile radius, and things were still on fire almost a day later. And those are just the facts of his descent. She has no idea what preceded the fall, but … given that he fell in the first place, given that his brother beat him senseless and then kidnapped him only weeks ago, given the horrifying bruise he's sporting, now … whatever happened can't have been good. Not to mention, he must have traumatic memories of falling before.

Asking, Are you okay? in light of all that, seems stupid insensitive. Do you want to talk about it? when he hasn't spoken more than a dozen intelligible words since they found him, seems pushy. I'm sorry you're upset feels superfluous and should be self-evident in the fact that her eyes are leaking along with his.

She opts to simply be there.

A warm body next to his.

Offering solidarity.

And he's quiet about it. Subtle about it, save for the slow, wet ooze of grief he can't hope to hide from her, even when he's turned away.

Still, the Devil weeps.

When he's ready to emerge from the bathroom, he's back to staring at a fixed point somewhere in
the distance. Beyond. Into the void. His eyes are red and puffy and tired-looking, but he's clean, at least.

She draws closed the curtains, shutting out the sun.

He lets the towel fall into a crumpled heap on the floor beside the nightstand. Despite normally sleeping in the buff, he pulls on every layer Maze bought for him, from the boxers to the hoodie, and Chloe's immediately glad they prioritized clothes. Then he crawls into the left-side bed. The bed she wasn't using. She grabs the spare blanket from the closet and folds it, doubling it up on top of him, and then she slides under the covers with him, not able to fathom sleeping in the right-side bed, with a six foot gap between them.

He still doesn't speak.

But he does sleep.

His dreams aren't quiet, but they're not in English, either, and she can't glean anything more than his rage. And his terror. And his desolation.

They paint her own dreams red.

It's 3:52 p.m., according to the sharp red numbers on the alarm clock resting on the nightstand.

"I thought … I would land in … Hell," he says in the darkness.

The words are raw and quiet and traumatized, and she can barely hear them. Like he means to test this confession on a sleeping Chloe before he'll ever try it when she's awake.

She blinks and rolls to face him. He's staring blankly at the ceiling. His eyes glisten in the dim, red glow of the clock face.

"Hey," she says, and he flinches.

"I thought you were asleep," he mutters, and he begins to roll away, but she reaches for his arm and stops him.

"I wasn't," she says. She scoots closer, covers rustling as she slides across the sheets. He's pliant as she wraps her arm over his waist and settles against his unbruised side. "You're not in Hell," she says against his skin, in case he needs to hear it. She kisses the nape of his neck. "You're home." She licks her lips. "Well, not home, home. Not yet. But home enough."

"I … fell," he says, whisper quiet. Like he's still processing the very idea of it all.

_to fall is anathema_, Michael echoes in her head.

She's not sure what to say, in light of that. And she doesn't know that she's experienced anything commensurate. Perhaps her almost-death via poisoning. That had lasted long enough, and she'd been conscious long enough, that her imminent demise had rattled around in her head like like an old set of bones.

She tightens her embrace, thinking of her terror, applying it to him.

"I fell," he continues, "and I didn't know where I would land, and then I did land, and I didn't know where I was, and …" Deep in his throat, he makes a soft, sick-sounding, upset syllable that doesn't say anything, and yet it says everything all at once. "You said … Idaho?" The words are
lost and hoping.

"Yes," she says, pulling her fingers through his hair. "Idaho."

"The state."

"Right."

"Not … Hell."

"No."

"I don't want to go back. I thought he was sending me back."

"You didn't," she assures him. "He wasn't." But who's he? She kisses him. "Lucifer, what happened?" she says, curiosity getting the better of her.

Lucifer doesn't reply except for a lone syllable that doesn't make a word. Not at first. His whole body tenses in her arms, like he's expecting to get hit.

"I fell," he says.

"But why?"

"He … pushed me."

She frowns. "Michael?"

"No," Lucifer says, distant. "Dad."

"What?" she says, stomach twisting. "Your who did what?"

How in the hell does any of what Michael said about God changing his mind jibe with that? But Lucifer seems to have used up all of his coherence, and he won't answer.

He's back to wide-eyed, shellshocked silence.

He curls under the blankets like he wants to hide.

"I fell," he says.

And then he won't say another word.
Dream On

Chapter Notes

Chapter title credit goes to Aerosmith.

Thanks, as always, for taking the time to leave feedback :)

I really hope you guys like this.

The drive back to Los Angeles is long and subdued.

The first day, they swing down through Montana, and then back into Idaho. Chloe and Maze trade off driving, while Lucifer dozes in the back seat. Or he stares without seeing at the lush, rolling scenery. When they stop for lunch, he won't eat or drink. He won't even get out of the car to go into the restaurant. And he doesn't talk. Not once. Not since he told her his dad was responsible for … whatever the hell he was responsible for. Chloe can't for the life of her figure out what might have happened, and she's afraid to push too hard when Lucifer seems so ... anti-Lucifer.

They stop for the night in Pocatello, at the first place they find with a vacancy sign. Another cheap motel where the one amenity of note is free wifi. If Lucifer were in his right mind, Chloe imagines he might snark about bed bugs or the lack of an in-room bar. Or he might outright refuse to patronize the place.

But he isn't.

And he doesn't.

He doesn't even seem to notice that the car has stopped, and he stays behind in the backseat, staring into space, while Chloe and Maze head inside to get a room.

The clerk behind the desk is a muscular, black-haired, windswept man in his twenties. His features are chiseled, and he has a five-o'clock shadow that rivals Lucifer's at his scruffiest. Classic tall, dark, and handsome.

"Is that your bike out front?" Maze asks him with a purr as he passes them their key cards. She rests her elbows on the desk and leans forward, revealing her ample cleavage.

Chloe blinks. Is she seriously …?

The man - his name tag reads: Nathan - grins lasciviously and says, "That's what this job pays for." His gaze wanders south, pausing long enough for him to catalog every curve, and then roams back to Maze's face. "Why?"

Maze licks her lips. "Wanna take me for a ride?"

Chloe clears her throat, blushing. "I'll just …." She coughs. "I'll just go, now." She snatches the keycard off the counter. "Have fun see you later," she adds in a rush. And then she races back outside to the car, face flaming.
Lucifer doesn't acknowledge her return. Not even as the car rumbles to life again. And she guides the SUV into the dark parking lot in silence.

"We're here," Chloe announces as she pulls into the parking space closest to their room.

Lucifer blinks for the first time in what feels like hours. His gaze drifts to the motel room door. And then to the front passenger seat.

"Where's …?" he says, noting Maze's absence, at last. His first word since the night before.


"… Oh," he says, sounding lost.

He slides out of the car with a wince.

As soon as she opens the door for him with the keycard, he shuffles past. The room smells musty, and she wrinkles her nose, but other than that, she has no complaints. It's clean. There's a bed. And all they need is a not-horrible place to sleep for a night.

"Do you want some dinner? Water? Anything?" she says, trying not to worry. She gets the impression that eating is a pleasure for him, not something that offers sustenance. Still, she can't help but add, "I don't mind going to get something for you."

If he's listening, he doesn't make any indication of it. He doesn't even shake his head. He proceeds with singular fixation toward the bed, kicking off mid-stride the $3 flip-flops Maze bought for him. The mattress squeaks when he puts a knee on it and lets his weight succumb to gravity. Then he climbs under the covers and curls away. Away from the world. Away from … everything.

He doesn't protest, at least, when she climbs in with him.

"I'm here," she tells him.

That's really all she can do.

What surprises her, though, is when he rolls to face her, and he looks at her with his dark eyes.

"Thank you," he says, the words rough.

He wraps his arms around her, pulling her close like he needs her more than air. His nose presses into her hair, and he inhales. His fingertips skate along her side, coming to rest on her hip.

And then he sleeps.

When she wakes in the middle of the night, he's gone, but a quick, panicked assessment locates him sitting at the little table by the door, laved by a bath of silver moonlight. Maze is still gone God knows where, and Chloe and Lucifer are alone in the little hotel room.

"Lucifer?" Chloe says.

He stares out the window, blank and still. The moonlight makes him look as he was when he still had wings - faintly luminescent. Divine without question.

The covers rustle as she climbs out of bed. She pads across the carpet to join him.
"I can't have what I want," he says, distant, defeated, as she takes a seat. "It doesn't exist for me."

"What doesn't exist?" she says, frowning.

His gaze shifts to her. "Freedom." He bows his head, pinching the bridge of his nose. "He built me to desire a pipe dream and then didn't tell me of the futility, just to watch me strive and fail."

Her frown deepens. "Lucifer, I don't understand what you mean."

But he shakes his head and won't explain. And in the night-borne stillness, he grieves.

They drive through Utah. The conifers from Idaho gradually fade into scrubland. Huge mountains carve the horizon into sharp, sheer crags. They pass Salt Lake City and head down the 15. Scrubland fades into desert. The hours pass in a slow, monotonous crawl.

Until, out of the blue, Lucifer says, "Might we cut through the Grand Canyon?" He's staring out the window, expression blank. "I've not been there in epochs."

Chloe and Maze exchange a look. Maze shrugs. Chloe's the one who has to worry about work. But . . . she's more worried about Lucifer right now than about her job. She has plenty of personal leave banked, courtesy of being a workaholic. A detour wouldn't add more than a day or two to the trip, and at last check-in, Dan seemed fine with keeping Trixie for a bit longer.

So, Chloe pulls out her phone and maps a route into Arizona while Maze takes a turn at driving.

This time of year, before summer hits full swing and starts to bake the air like an oven, the Grand Canyon is at its peak, in terms of tourism. Traffic gets steadily worse as they approach, and the parking lot on the South Rim near the Visitors' Center is a madhouse of prowling vehicles, each fighting to claim the few spaces being vacated by departing tourists.

By the time Chloe pulls the SUV into a parking space, she's exhausted, pasty, and sick of driving, and she slides out of the car onto the hot pavement with a sigh. The sun hangs low in the sky. They have perhaps another ninety minutes of sunlight. Maybe, a bit more. The car's engine ticks as it settles. Chloe squints in the bright light, holding her palm flat above her brow as a makeshift sun visor.

The parking lot is far enough away from the rim itself that Chloe can't see the canyon. Only the hot blacktop and surrounding low-profile trees. Maze looks around, unimpressed, as she slams her car door behind her.

"This is it?" she says to Lucifer as he climbs out of the backseat, wincing. "What'd you wanna see this for?"

"Not this, Maze," Lucifer replies, breaking his long silence. "The canyon."

Maze gives him a bland look. "Again, I repeat. What'd you wanna see this for?"

He rubs the bridge of his nose like he has a headache. "Yes, I'd forgotten you've no appreciation for this sort of thing." He sighs, gesturing vaguely toward the punishing sun. "If you head west, I believe the humans have constructed a village."

"A village," she parrots, eyebrows narrowing.

"Yes," Lucifer says. He raises his eyebrows. "With a bar?" He glances at his wrist, only to sniff
with irritation. "Oh, bother. My Rolex was incinerated. What bloody time is it?"

Chloe glances at her phone. "5:45ish," she says.

"Right," Lucifer says, snapping his fingers as he turns back to Maze. "Prime happy hour. Two for one shots, perhaps?"

That perks Maze up, and a smile slowly stretches across her face. "Call me when you're done looking at rocks," she says. She shifts on her feet, gaining her bearings, and then heads west, boots scuffing the dusty pavement as she departs.

Lucifer watches her go, and then slowly shrugs out of his navy blue hoodie, leaving him with just the t-shirt, the sweatpants, and the flip-flops. He looks like he's getting ready for a night in, curled up on the couch with Netflix and a beer, not a hike at the Grand Canyon. He looks … not Lucifer.

"Are you sure you're good for a walk in that?" Chloe says, frowning.

"I'll be fine, darling," he says, giving her a dismissive wave. He folds the hoodie as if it were meant for an in-store display, and then puts it in the backseat. "Have you been here before?"

Chloe shakes her head. "Nope." It's been on her bucket list for a long time, though. "Why did you want to come?"

"Well, I'll show you, if you can find it within you to be patient," he says with a sharp smile that doesn't reach his eyes, which don't crinkle along with his mouth, and don't have any teasing glint in them. The forced expression makes him look tired. And old. Like weatherworn granite.

"Lucifer …," she says.

But it seems he's not in the mood for listening to any concerns she may have.

He takes a step away from the car, favoring his bruised right side. In two more steps, though, he works out the kinks, and then he's moving with his normal graceful strides. He commands his couch-surfer getup like it was made for the Paris runway. His flip-flops don't even make a telltale flop-flop-flop noise as he struts along. But whether he's faking good health, or legitimately healed, she can't discern.

"You're okay?" she says, half expecting another brushoff.

But he pauses to regard her for a moment, tilting his head as his gaze softens. "I'm … trying," he says.

Which is more honesty than she ever would have anticipated.

They share a look.

She nods. "Okay."

With that, he wraps his long arm over her shoulder, and they head toward the South Rim in companionable silence.

The colossal scale of the Grand Canyon isn't evident in pictures. Not like it is in person. And Chloe can't help but gape as she steps up to the edge of the cliff with him. A literal cliff. Not a gentle slope. A point at which she's standing on flat rock, and if it weren't for the little railing, she'd be able to take one more step and tumble into free fall.
In the valley below, the Colorado River wends like a snake, murky green and glittering in the sun. She knows, in theory, that the river is hundreds of feet across. But from this height, it seems like a mere pinstripe that she could hop across at a sprint. It almost looks fake.

The canyon itself almost looks fake, too, from this perspective. A bright, vast sprawl of red rock faces and creeping shadows, spread like an offering before an azure sky. The gap between the South Rim where she stands with Lucifer, and the cliff on the North Rim, is miles wide. She feels like someone dumped her into a painting and didn't tell her.

A dark-colored bird glides through the air on the breeze. She squints. The bird has a pinkish head, barely visible at this distance. "Is that a California Condor?"

"I believe so," Lucifer says. "Their population is slowly rebounding in this and several other areas. Or so I've read."

Chloe watches for a moment, gaping. She's seen California Condors at the zoo, but the sight of them in captivity doesn't compare to seeing one winding around in circles on the updrafts, free and searching, with the Grand Canyon as the background frame. For a scavenger, it's ... unexpectedly majestic.

She grips the black metal railing, which feels a bit rough to the touch due to chipping, sun-damaged paint. Then she leans against it, tipping her nose into the breeze to inhale. The air is crisp and unpolluted.

"Is this what you wanted to show me?" she says.

But he doesn't answer her.

He stares across the vast empty space for a long moment, unblinking, his yearning barely contained, like someone who's come home after a long absence. His eyes are smudged with dark, tired-looking, puffy circles underneath. And his expression is pinched with stress. Since his ordeal in forest, he hasn't had any access to product, and his hair is starting to look a lot like Michael's - curly and loose and unkempt. The breeze ruffles it softly, and it's hard to resist pushing it out of his eyes with her fingers.

"I made this, you know," he says, words wistful and soft, and she gapes. "Well, not this, precisely," he adds before she can think too much about it. He gestures at the canyon. "Erosion did this. But I shaped all of the building blocks."

"I thought you couldn't make something from nothing."

"I can't," he says. "Michael is the one who possesses the power of creation. But what he makes, only I have the will to shape." Lucifer scoffs. Like he thinks he told a terrible joke. But ....

"That's what Maze meant," Chloe says, wonder and realization sinking in in equal measure. "When she said you're the will of the Demiurge, and Michael is the power."

"Yes."

She frowns. "But ... what did God do, then?"

"Dad was ... more of a conductor, really," Lucifer says with a shrug as he leans into the railing. "He tends to get all the credit, but it was Michael and I who did all the bloody work."

She looks out over the endless miles of open air. At the reds and the browns, like threads in a vast tapestry. If she hadn't already had about sixteen-zillion literal come-to-God moments over the past...
few months, she thinks she'd find herself wondering, now. What's out there. What's real. She heard that seeing the Grand Canyon could be a spiritual experience, but ….

She swallows, taking in the enormity of what he's saying.

She's standing next to the guy who built her reality as she knows it. He's older than all of this. The river. The sky. These rocks, shaped over millions of years by time and wind and water.

"When I was last here, there was no such thing as Homo sapiens," Lucifer says, as if to reinforce his point. He looks down at the railing with a strange frown, stroking it with his thumb. "You came … rather late to the party." Another forced, upset smile strains across his face. "Crashers. All of you."

His demeanor and tone are glum, and she gets the distinct impression that he's trying to explain something to her. Something pivotal. Maybe, he doesn't have all the words, but ….

She steps close to him. Into his space. "Lucifer … what happened to you?" she says softly. "Why did you fall?"

She expects more prevarication. A fight. Something. Anything but the succinct truth. And, yet, that's what she gets.

"Michael took me to the Silver City," Lucifer says, shaking his head like events are replaying there, in his mind's eye. "He healed me. Then held me hostage for a while. Then brought me before Dad. And then we talked."

"You and God talked."

"Yes." A wry, unhappy laugh tumbles from his lips. "Well, Dad talked, anyway. I was mostly forced to listen."

She frowns. "To?"

Lucifer's gaze darkens. "Just more manipulative bollocks and lies and ….

Her heart sinks. "So … he told you?" she says. "About … what he wants for you? And you didn't believe him?"

Lucifer stares ahead, his bleak, black eyes like raging thunderclouds. "Oh, I believe the substance of what he told me," Lucifer says, low-pitched and dangerous and sneering. "It's his motives that I question." Lucifer's lips press into a grim line. His jaw clenches. He grips the tiny railing so hard the metal groans. And then he growls, and his anger splits open into anguish like a germinating seed. "I'm so bloody sick of his plan. I'm bloody sick and tired. Of everything."

A lump forms in her throat. "Please, don't talk like that."

He frowns. "Like what?"

"Like you're planning to jump off the ledge or something," she says, eyeing his fingers at the railing.

He looks down at her like she just suggested he invite God for tea and crumpets. "I'm not gonna jump off the bloody ledge," Lucifer says, frown deepening. "For Dad's sake, if I wanted to bloody off myself, falling would not be my method of choice, let alone falling in front of you." His eyebrows knit. "You really think I'd do that to you?"
She sighs, deflating. When he says it like that, her worries sound ludicrous, but … "No, of course, not," she says. "But you're acting like you've given up."

"Because I have," he replies with a shrug. And then his lip curls, and he snaps, "Are you bloody happy, now, you self-righteous, self-important, power-tripping BASTARD?" into the wind.

His angry words echo across the canyon, repeating. A passing tourist wearing a fanny pack and a floppy hat stops to gawk, and Lucifer glares. "What the bloody hell are you looking at?" he says, menace overflowing.

When the flash flood of bad vibes crashes into Tourist Guy, he skips backward and almost falls over. The heavy camera hanging from his neck smacks into his chest with a thud, and the sandy ground churns underneath his hiking boots in his haste to back away. Then he turns on his heels and run-walks in the opposite direction, toward the Visitors' Center. West.

"That's right!" Lucifer snaps. "Run from the big, bad, scary Devil. Just like everybody else."

Chloe watches the scene, heart constricting, until Tourist Guy is out of sight, and Lucifer settles back into his angry brooding. Over the minutes, his preternatural, strangling presence retreats like a tide.

"Lucifer …," she says, the word soft, "why did God cast you down again?"

"I said something he didn't like."

"Which was?" she prods.

"Go to Hell," Lucifer says, dark as midnight, biting off each word with a flash of teeth.

"But … why?" she says, gaping. Lucifer turns the opposite direction to prowl along the railing. He navigates the narrow path with his long strides, and she's forced to jog to keep up. "Lucifer … why would you …?"

"He told me what I am."

She blinks. "He told you about … the way he designed you?" she says, panting. After living life at sea level, the air in this place feels thin. Even stationary, breathing is work. And exertion makes her dizzy enough to see spots. "About falling?" she continues. "That he's trying … to give you … what you want?"

"Oh, is that what Michael told you Dad was doing?" Lucifer replies with an embittered laugh.

"It's not true!"

"It's nonsense," Lucifer snaps. "Dad just wants to be rid of me. I'm nothing more than a toy he's lost interest in."

"He said that?" She sucks down air by the desperate lungful. "Word for word?"

But Lucifer replies as if she hasn't even spoken. "He's spent eons. Punishing me. Ostracizing me from my family. Making me the villain of the world's narrative. For something he put into me on purpose. And here I am, feeling bad about it. Because he made me that way, too."

"Lucifer, I don't …."

He grinds to a halt and turns to face her. "Don't you bloody get it?" he snaps.
"Get what?"

He rolls his eyes. "Lucifer the Morning Star. Will of the bloody Demiurge." He gives her an expectant look, like he's waiting for her to put two and two together. Except she doesn't see where the twos are - not when she can hardly breathe. "Will," he says, thumping his chest with a splayed hand when she doesn't fill the silence. "He gave me will. Desire. Just a spark of what you have. Just to see what would happen." He gestures out at the canyon to the left. "Just so I could build all of this for him."

She frowns, panting noisily. "But-"

"I'm not an aberration," he says, seething. "I don't have a design flaw." He gives her a look, eyes roving from head to toe. For once, not a sexual appraisal, filled with his imagination of all the naughty things he'd like to do with her, but rather an envious one. "I'm the bloody rough draft of you."

She blinks, stunned.

"And now that he has his prize - humanity, by the billions - he doesn't need to poke me with a stick anymore, just to see what I'll do. He's got a whole bloody ant farm to gawk at. So, he's throwing me out with the rubbish."

And then he turns away again, stalking up the path. Her vision is spotty, and each lungful of air she inhales doesn't feel like it's even half of what she needs. Every breath is labor.

"Lucifer," she says, panting. "Lucifer … wait. I can't-"

He grinds to a halt, eyes burning with fury. And then he gets a look at her. And he pulls himself out of his own angry head long enough to realize she's in the process of collapsing. His wrath bleeds away, replaced by concern. He rushes to her side, wrapping his arms around her, keeping her from sliding to the ground. "Apologies, darling," he says, the words laden with regret, as he rubs her back. "I'd forgotten altitude affects you."

She nods, gulping down breaths.

Holy shit. She scrubs her face with her hands. The sun is bright and punishing, even as low in the sky as it is. While it's not that hot with the breeze blowing through, she's still dripping. She already felt gross from the long car ride, and this is just a double helping of yuck.

Lucifer, meanwhile, isn't even winded. Let alone sweating. Does he sweat when he's not hurt? She can't recall ever noticing.

He offers her a bottle of water she didn't even realize he was carrying. She gulps the contents down with rapacious fervor. The thin plastic collapses with a crinkle in her hands as she drains the bottle.

"Where … are we going?" she says.

"A little more to the east," he replies. "Are you all right to walk it?"

"How much is a little?"

He glances up the walk, squinting. "Half a mile, perhaps?"

She takes a deep breath and nods. "Okay. But you might have to carry me back."
"All right," he says, not even bothering with innuendo, despite the low-hanging fruit of opportunity.

This time, Lucifer walks with a much less punishing stride, and he pays attention to her, adjusting as she slows down and speeds up. It's much more pleasant, not having to chase him. She links her arm around his, and they head up the path, heading east.

"Lucifer, how much of what you just told me is what God actually said, and how much of it is what you've extrapolated?"

"He told me he gave me will on purpose."

She looks up at him. "But nothing else?"

"He told me I could fall if I wanted, and that I'm built not to want to. He told me of my design."

"And that's it?"

Lucifer stops to look out at the canyon. The sun is touching the western horizon, now, painting the cliff faces scarlet. The shadows lengthen like liquid, flowing over the rocks. He grips the railing, and he swallows. "So be it, you contemptible ingrate," he says, inflectionless. A direct quote. "Don't expect this offer again. I wash my hands of you."

"And then he pushed you?" she says softly.

Lucifer nods. His eyes are getting wet, and his lower lip trembles. Just a little bit. But then he swallows. And he swallows. And it's all gone behind a wall of rage. His teeth are a snarling rictus. This time, the railing doesn't withstand the brunt of him, and it snaps in two with a raucous groan.

What a horrible, predictable tragedy, she realizes, heart sinking.

Lucifer has been trained by rejection and neglect to expect rejection and neglect. And God has been trained by his omnipotence to expect obeisance from his children, no matter what he says. And, of course, if God tried to offer a genuine olive branch - which she supposes, now, they'll never know whether it was genuine or not - Lucifer would respond with flippancy and suspicion, and God would lose his shit all over again.

"Do you have any idea how this feels?" Lucifer says miserably.

"No, I don't," Chloe says, the words soft. "How could I?"

"He built me to serve him," Lucifer says. "But also to reject servitude." He rubs his eyes with a sniff. "I want his love by his design. But I also want more. And the more I want, the less he loves me. He made me a contradiction in terms on purpose, and then proceeded to blame me for acting exactly as he made me to be. So, yes, Chloe. I've given up. On him. But he gave up on me, first."

Lucifer starts to walk again. Down the path. And she walks beside him, feeling a bit like she's participating in a funeral procession. Maybe, she is. Maybe, that's what this canyon visit is about. Lucifer saying goodbye to the fantasy of receiving God's acceptance someday. The setting is appropriate, that's for sure, given that she feels she could reach over the railing and touch Heaven.

They traverse the lip of the canyon in silence, and she's left glancing out into the open air. She spots the condor again, and her eyes water as she watches it. That's all Lucifer wants. To be unrestricted. Free to live his life how he wants without pushback from God.

"Lucifer … do you want to be human?" she says as they walk.
"I covet what you have," he replies without hesitation. "I want to make my own bloody plan. And I want to think my own bloody thoughts. So many of you take your ability to do so for granted."

"But?"

"I abhor the thought of falling," he says. He stops, and he shakes his head. "Yet, now, I don't know if I abhor it because he's made me to abhor it, or because my abhorrence is my own, or because I just don't want to give him the bloody satisfaction of winning, and I …." He slumps. "Well, I would have liked the chance to determine … what's me." The words what's and me are small and broken, and he looks about ready to fall apart.

Her eyes water, and she brushes tears away with the backs of her fingers.

"But it doesn't matter now, anyway, does it?" Lucifer says. "It's a bloody moot point." He laughs, but it isn't a happy sound. "I'm stuck as I am, regardless."

She swallows. "Maybe, when your dad calms down-"

"Yes, and how many more eons will that take?"

She rubs her hurting eyes. "I'm sorry."

"Yes, well …." He shrugs, clearing his throat and blinking away what little of his emotions had overflowed. "Let's not dwell on pointless flights of fancy, shall we? It's a waste of energy. And we've almost missed it."

"Missed what?"

"The reason why I've brought you here," he says.

"Which is?"

But again, he doesn't answer. He merely gives her another tired smile that doesn't quite reach his eyes, and he encourages her to follow.

They walk along the ridge for another ten minutes or so, until the ridge starts to veer toward the northern cliff face. An outcropping, she realizes. A long, narrow, jutting strip of rock. Lucifer steps to the rail and then steps over it, his long legs barely hindered by the railing's height.

He leans across, offering his hand to her, giving her an expectant look. She glances down. The edge of the outcropping hangs scarily over hundreds of feet of empty air. "Um," she says, warily. "Are we allowed to-"

He raises his eyebrows as if to say, Who do you think I am, exactly?

She snorts. "Right. Not allowed, then."

She peers dubiously at the ledge. The river winds below, a distant, dark squiggle against lighter rock. A fall would kill her. A fall would kill him, given that she's here. But ….

She grabs his hand and climbs over the railing after him. Her shoes catch on rocks and dry scrub grass. He helps her down to the hot ground, where he sits, legs dangling over the side of the cliff face. After she clears away some of the sharper pebbles, she sits hip to hip with him, her legs dangling, too. He wraps his arm over her shoulder, and she rests against him, on his unbruised side.
"This is why I've brought you," he says.

And at first … she has no idea what in the hell he's talking about. Until he gently splayed his fingers against the top of her head and directed her attention to the west. Just as the sun dips below the horizon. And she can't help but gasp at the sight.

The western sky is filled with vivid notes of orange, and gold, and the wispy stratus clouds have turned a shade of scarlet to match the deep red hues of all the rocks. She looks overhead. The warm colors to the west shift into cooler tones to the east, pale blue all the way to midnight. The condor she keeps seeing glides across the eastern horizon to land on one of the northern cliffs behind them. The breeze blows, and the air is quiet, save for that. Were it not for the railing running along the edges of the cliff, it'd be difficult to remember that humanity even has the capability of touching this place.

"This is one of my favorite spots on Earth," Lucifer says. He gestures out at the sunset, making letter els with his thumbs and index fingers to form a makeshift picture frame. "Just so. Just now. And I thought …" He sighs. "Well, I thought I'd share it. Since we were passing by."

"This is why we're here?" she says. "Just so you could show me this?"

"Yes," he says. He licks his lips. "And to remind myself that, despite this horrible pit in my stomach, things turned out rather well."

She gives him an incredulous look. "You think this turned out well?"

"If I'm not to have free will, at least I'm to have my home." He looks out at the sunset, wistfulness filling his gaze to the brim. "Nothing in Hell looks like that." He leans into her, nudging her with his nose. His soft breaths buffet her skin. "And no one in Hell is like you."

He kisses her, then, gentle and searching, and for a moment, the canyon fades away.

"Mmm," he purrs against her skin, and she drinks the sound down like wine.

When they pull apart, she licks her lips, unwilling to part with the taste of him. He's smiling, now. At her. And in his eyes, she sees one star, flickering, shining, bright.

One is enough, she thinks. A start.

She presses her lips to his once more.

Quickly. Just an exclamation point.

Then she rests her head against his shoulder. And, together, they watch the horizon.

Until the last of the sunlight fades away, opening a window to his stars.

They return to Los Angeles in the early morning, after driving straight through the night, and once again, Chloe finds herself asking Lucifer if he would stay at her place. He's bounced back quite a bit since the canyon. He's much chattier, for one. But she still doesn't like the idea of leaving him alone right now. And she can't help but admit she needs him.

Somewhere along the way, the Devil himself has become a necessary component of her happiness, like Trixie, and her friendship with Dan. She has no idea what the future holds. Common sense would suggest her relationship with Lucifer is a failure waiting to happen, if only for the fact that she's going to start looking like his mother in a couple of decades, but … she can't
bring herself to care. It's working right now, and that's enough for her.

"I'll stay over on one condition," he says as they exit the 15 to merge onto the 210, toward home.

She sighs as she fights to change lanes. Nobody wants to let her out of the merge lane. She ends up nudging the tip of the SUV into a tiny gap between a gray car and a red truck, forcing the issue, only to receive a chorus of disgruntled honks and at least one middle finger for her trouble.

"What's the condition?" she replies, grimacing.

He fusses unhappily with his sweatpants as she glances at him in the rearview mirror. "I need to stop by my place for a change of clothes," he says. "I can only tolerate Fruit of the Loom for so long before it gives me hives."

She snorts with amusement. "You can't get hives."

"I beg to differ," he replies. "I can get just about anything when I'm around you."

"You poor Devil," Chloe snarks.

"Your sympathy is overwhelming."

Maze rolls her eyes as she doodles on her phone, but says nothing.

Chloe squeezes the steering wheel, debating for a moment. Should she suggest …? That would be a big deal. A big deal. But …. Oh, fuck it. "You should … bring an extra suit or two with you."

He frowns, looking at her in the rearview mirror. "Why?"

She grins. "So, you don't have to make any more wrinkled walks of shame."

He leans closer, the leather on the seat squeaking as his weight shifts. A hint of a smile pulls at his lips. His gaze in the rearview mirror is gleaming. "You anticipate future walks of shame, do you?" he says, an amused rumble.

"Yeah, I do," she replies. "So, you should hang some suits in my closet, just in case."

He folds his arms. "All right," he says, smile widening a bit. "I'll pick out a few."

Maze sighs as she shifts uncomfortably in her seat.

"What is it?" Chloe says.

"Just trying to figure out how you two haven't jumped each other, yet. I'm about ready to pop, and I've only been watching," Maze gives Chloe an incredulous look. "I mean, I'm not criticizing. Anticipation is dope. But holy fuck."

Heat creeps across Chloe's face.

"Well, I am known for my awesome willpower," Lucifer pipes in from the backseat.

"You, shut up," Chloe says. "You're not helping."

They return to Chloe's empty apartment, an exhausted trio. Even Maze looks ready to drop, after more than four days without any sleep except maybe a short, post-coital snooze. Lucifer pauses at the new door, a fully-packed leather garment bag draped over his shoulder. He strokes the intact
but unpainted frame, and then he looks into the living room with a stricken expression. All of the damage he and Michael wrought is gone, now. Dan and Maze both helped clean up the mess. But Chloe has yet to replace anything except the door, and the apartment looks weird as a result. Weird and barren.

"I'll pay for all the repairs and new furniture, of course," Lucifer says.

"I know you will," Chloe says. "I wasn't worried."

And she doesn't care about that right now, anyway. She smiles, grabbing him by the lapels of his linen suit jacket, and she pulls. With a curious look, he lets himself be dragged across the threshold, into the living room, into a warm bath of sunlight streaming in from the window.

"Welcome home," she says as Maze steps in behind him.

"Whatever," Maze says, yawning. "I'm just glad it's over." She gives Lucifer and Chloe a considering look. "Later," she adds, as she tromps off to her room. "Try not to bang the headboard into the wall too much if you finally do the deed. Makes it hard to sleep." And then she slams her bedroom door behind her.

Lucifer snorts with amusement. "Always a sensitive one, my Maze."

"Hey, you're one to talk," Chloe replies.

"Touché," he admits with a smirk, but the smirk bleeds away as quickly as it appeared. "Home, is it?"

"Home away from home, I guess," she amends with a shrug, and she doesn't miss the way his gaze softens before they break eye contact. He notes the empty space where the coffee table once was, and his eyes narrow in a way that makes her think she might have just hired the Devil as her interior decorator. She feels compelled to add, "Please, remember that I live with a child who spills things and sometimes plays on the furniture."

"And also Beatrice," he says without missing a beat.

"I heard that!" Maze snaps, muffled through the door.

He snickers and replies, "I know, darling," in a singsong, cocksure voice that Chloe hasn't heard in too long.

She can't help the lump that forms in her throat at the glimpse of him. Pre-wing-drama Lucifer. He's still in there, after all. And that's such a relief it makes her legs shake.

Her eyes water. She's too tired for any semblance of control right now. "I'm so glad we're home."

"Yes, quite," he says, shifting the garment bag on his shoulder. "Now, where would you like for me to hang these?"

It occurs to her as she's staring into the black hole that is her closet, that … this moment fits all of the criteria she and Lucifer discussed. A day off. No pressing engagements. No danger of Trixie walking in on them.

"Here," she says.

She presses her hand to the chest area of the last t-shirt on the rack, sinks her weight into her
thighs, and shoves. The hanger handles screech as they slide along the metal dowel rod. The maneuver clears a good six inches. Plenty of room for his suits. Plenty of room for his whole garment bag, if he wants to leave that, too.

He snorts with amusement. "If I'd known you were merely going to muscle the space for me into existence from nothing, I could have done it."

"I know, but …." She spares a stressed glance back at the bed. "Look, about what Maze said …." Lucifer follows her gaze, curiosity sinking into realization. "Ah."

"I … really don't want to," she says with an apologetic look. "Not right now."

"It's all right."

"You're not disappointed, are you?"

"Chloe, I'm older than time," he counters with a smile that doesn't reach his eyes. "Contrary to Daniel's rather insulting opinion of me, I am capable of waiting for things." He puts a hand on her shoulder and gives it a squeeze. "And a month is a wait that's hardly worth mentioning."

He steps away from her. Over to the bedside. "Also, I can't bloody believe I'm saying this," he says with a depressed sigh as he sinks onto the lip of her mattress, "but … I'm not in the mood just now, either."

"Oh, thank Gggh …. I mean." Fuck. She gives him a wary look.

Lucifer rolls his eyes. "You can say his name, darling. I'm not going to fall apart at the mere mention." He glowers. "And in this case, dear old Dad is legitimately the one to blame, so ...." She swallows. "It's just …." She's tired. She's emotionally bankrupt. She's done.

For now.

He rubs his eyes. "Yes," he says as if he's read her mind. "As am I." His shoulders slump as she sits beside him on the bed. He tips his body, leaning into her. He kisses the top of her head. "I'm sorry, darling. I'll make it up to you."

"There's nothing to make up," she says. "I'm really not in the mood, either."

"I more meant … the trouble I've been for you lately."

A lump forms in her throat. She can't say he hasn't been trouble, because holy shit, has he. But .... "This is how a relationship works," she says, "Sometimes, you take more than you give. Other times you give more than you take. And that's okay." She thinks of him retrieving the poison cure for her. From Hell. She thinks of him killing Uriel. Of Malcolm killing him. "Plus, it's not like you've never given me anything. It all tends to balance out in the end when the relationship is worth it."

"A bit like deal-making, I suppose."

"A bit," she agrees with a nod, leaning into him. "The difference is … you don't owe me anything for this."

"But-"

She rests her fingers on his lips, and he allows himself to be shushed. "My help was freely given,"
He kisses her fingers. "Yes."

"So, right now, I'm here for you," she adds. "And you don't get to feel bad about it."

He laughs, eyes twinkling in the soft light. The sound is infectious, and she can't help but grin.

"What's so funny?" she says.

"You … always surprise me," he replies, looking at her with a bright, warm expression. "I've given up trying to make any sense of you with respect to my jaded worldview." He laughs again, brushing a loose strand of hair away from her eyes. He searches her face like he's trying to map every feature. "It's … delightful. Really."

She blushed.

"And I love you for it."

She stills. He's gazing back at her, unblinking. He strokes her cheek with his thumb.

She didn't think she'd ever hear him say it. Not for a long while, if ever. And, yet, he says it like it's such a simple thing. Loving her. Like he doesn't have eons of experience telling him what a bad idea loving someone is. Like he didn't just gorge himself on a whole buffet of trauma. Like he doesn't have a ton of divine doggie bags he's trying to sort as a result of said buffet. Like … she's his world in this moment. Just Chloe Decker.

The idea makes her heart constrict. She closes her eyes, resting against him.

"I love you, too," she says in reply.

And they rest. For a while.

Dan brings Trixie home after dinner, just as Lucifer is bringing two freshly-poured glasses of wine back into the living room with him. The television is blaring as Netflix autoplays previews. After a long nap, they'd been watching a marathon of some silly cooking show. Just to have something to do that doesn't require thought or emotional investment.

"Lucifer!" Trixie yells with a toothy grin the second she's through the doorway. "You're back! You're back! How was your vacation?"

"Er … vacation?" he has a chance to say.

Her shoes squeak as she scrambles across the freshly polished floor. She slams into Lucifer like a fired cannonball, wrapping her arms around his legs on impact. A soft, discombobulated, "Gaghhhhgh," tumbles from Lucifer's lips, and his eyes widen. Somehow, he manages not to spill the contents of either wineglass on his pristine Egyptian-cotton shirt.

"Ah …," Lucifer says, shuffling awkwardly to the side. He gives Trixie a small pat on the head with his free hand. "Hello, child." He gives Chloe a panicked please-help-me-wrangle-it look and then says, "Wouldn't you rather say hello to your mother?"

"No. You."

Chloe snorts from her seat on the couch. "Gee, thanks, Monkey."
"Well, he's been gone longer, Mommy!"

"I know," Chloe says with a laugh. "It's okay."

"No, it is not!" Lucifer adds, trying to shoo Trixie away, but she's stuck like a burr hooked into his pant leg, even as he drags her along to the sofa's end table to set down the wineglasses.

Dan smiles from the doorway as he sets Trixie's little pink backpack by the wall near the coat hooks. He glances at Lucifer. Chloe didn't explain much about the specifics of Lucifer's disappearance. Dan just knew some shit had gone down with Lucifer's family, and she left it at that.

"I'm glad you're okay, man," Day says.

"Thank you," Lucifer replies. "As am I."

"See you at work tomorrow," Dan says with a wave.

They all exchange goodbyes.

As Dan closes the door behind him, Lucifer sinks onto the couch, only for Trixie to release his leg and crawl into his lap. "What are we watching?" she says as she settles.

Lucifer sighs. "Must you, offspring?"

Chloe takes pity on him and pats her lap. "Monkey, come sit over here."

Trixie pouts and folds her arms. "If I move, will you draw with me later?"

Lucifer's eyes narrow as he ponders this offer. "Will drawing with you involve you grabbing me or in any way touching my person with your sticky, unwashed fingers?"

She frowns. Her eyes are wide. "No."

"Call it a deal, then," he says with a voice as smooth as syrup.

Trixie perks up with a grin that could fuel a nuclear reactor. "Really?"

A brief look of oh-dear-what-have-I-done crosses his expression, but he hides it well. "Yes," he says, waving his hand dismissively at her. "Now, shoo."

With a pleased nod of triumph, Trixie slides off of him and joins Chloe.

After the next episode, Trixie drags Lucifer off to her room to color with her, much to his chagrin. Meanwhile, Chloe starts to catch up on the chores she's neglected.

She cleans the bathrooms and changes her sheets. And then she collects all her dirty clothes for the wash, since she needs something clean to wear for work tomorrow, and she's out of underwear and socks. With a laundry basket filled to the brim, she steps out into the hall and heads for Trixie's room.

"Look!" Chloe hears Trixie say.

Chloe peeks around the doorframe, only to nearly die at the sight. Lucifer and Trixie are stretched out side by side on Trixie's floor with Trixie's big bucket of crayons, markers, and colored pencils. A stack of construction paper also sits between them. The space by Trixie's bed is small enough
that Lucifer has his knees bent and his feet in the air in order to fit. Lucifer holds an orange pencil. The yellow construction paper in front of him sports a perfectly-shaded drawing of a liquor bottle. Scotch, if the orange-gold color of the liquid is any indication. And then … there's the glitter. Trixie's drawing is more of an art project than a sketch, and she's managed to get glitter everywhere. Including all over Lucifer, whose hair and suit jacket are sparkling fabulously in the dim light.

Trixie elbows him. "Lucifer, look!"

"I thought that our arrangement specified no touching," Lucifer replies with a sigh. But he humors her anyway, dropping his pencil to look at Trixie's sparkly masterpiece. His eyebrows knit as he peers at the drawing with consternation. "Ah … what is it?"

"Mommy said you were on vacation, so I drew you at the beach," Trixie replies. "Did you have fun?"

A long pause follows. "I … suppose you could say … I was in Heaven." He shifts closer. "What's this?" he says, pointing at a stick figure off to the right.

"That's me."

"Oh, you joined me on this vacation, did you?"

"No, you joined me," Trixie says. "This is a beach on Mars. I'm gonna the President there someday."

"Ah," Lucifer says with a nod. And then he sighs as he shifts back to his drawing of the scotch bottle. "You know," he says, shading in the bottle cap, "I envy you quite a lot."

Trixie frowns at him. "Why would you envy me?"

"Because you've a mother and a father who love you unconditionally," he says. "And, someday, in the not-so-distant future, when the world is colonizing Mars, and you decide you want to move there and be President, I'm sure that your parents will be the first to encourage you to go, if that is what your heart desires."

"But I'm sure your mommy and daddy love you, too," Trixie protests. "Mommmies and daddies are supposed to do that."

His pencil stops moving, and for a long moment, Chloe thinks he isn't going to reply.

"You've a gift, Beatrice," he murmurs. "Cherish it, will you?"

"I promise," Trixie solemnly swears. She looks down at her drawing. "Can you pass me the gray?" And Lucifer shifts, stretching out his long arm to the bucket to retrieve the gray pencil for her. "Thanks."

A lump forms in Chloe's throat, but she sniffs and pastes a smile on her face. She raps on Trixie's door with her knuckles. "Got any laundry, Monkey?" she says, not failing to notice that Trixie is adding a big, fluffy set of wings to her stick-figure Mars-beach-bum Lucifer. "I'm throwing in a load of whites."

And things … slowly return to normal.

The next day comes and goes. Lucifer returns home to put things back in order at Lux. No bodies
are reported, and since Chloe has no casework, she has no reason to call Lucifer to join her.

Two more days pass into memory before she finds it. Just before bedtime. When she finally gets around to putting away the laundry she washed days before.

It.

Tucked away in her sock drawer in a wrinkled paper bag meant for baguettes.

She'd been meaning to find a better place for it - a more secure place, where a nosy Trixie would never have a chance of finding it - but … considering the rapidity with which things went to hell after she cut off Lucifer's wings, well … she'd forgotten all about it.

The bag crinkles as she pulls it out of the drawer and sits on the edge of her bed. She stares at the soft light emanating from the opening at the top. The bag feels warm to the touch and makes her heart hurt, just by being near it, and she almost can't resist the urge to hug the bag to her chest. Almost.

She fumbles for her cellphone, stunned, and then she shakes her head, thinking better of it.

This isn't a cellphone kind of talk.

Swallowing, she races to find her purse, and then her shoes, and then heads to Maze's room to ask if she'd mind watching Trixie for a few minutes.

"I have somewhere to be at 11," Maze says.

"I'll be back by then."

Maze shrugs. "Sure, then. Why not?"

"I owe you," Chloe replies, wilting with relief.

And then she makes a mad dash for the door.

She finds him in his penthouse, standing barefoot on the balcony in his black silk bathrobe. He's leaning on the railing, holding a joint, staring out into space at all his beautiful stars. The lights of Los Angeles and the creeping highway traffic sprawl below him like fireflies.

She sidles up to the railing next to him as a cool zephyr ruffles her hair. The air smells like skunk weed, but the scent is muted somewhat, thanks to the open space. He looks at her out of the corner of his eye.

"I didn't expect to see you tonight," he says, taking a drag from his joint.

He blows perfect rings of smoke off the balcony, into the wind. His hair is tamed again, and the breeze hardly ruffles it. Like someone hit a reset button. But he seems older, now. Older than he felt, even before. And there's a slump in his posture that never used to be there.

She holds out the paper bag. "Here."

He snuffs out his blunt on the railing and takes the bag. "What is this?" he says, frowning at it.

"Free will."
His frown deepens. "… What?" He unfolds the lip of the bag and lets the contents slide out into his hand. A single lustrous white primary feather with a bent tip. It brightens in his hand, as if it remembers its unwilling owner. He blinks with amazement, like he didn't even remember he gave the feather to her in the first place. Maybe, he didn't. He hadn't exactly been in his right mind at the time. "This is ….

"Does it have enough divinity in it for you to will yourself to fall, if you wanted?" she says, when he fails to finish his sentence.

He tries to offer the feather back to her. "I gave this to you for-"

"For an emergency that might never happen?" she says. She pushes his hands away. "No. Lucifer, it's your feather. And I want you to have it for you."

He stares at her, lips parted. And he's still. Like sculpted stone.

"Does it have enough divinity in it for you to will yourself to fall?" she repeats.

He gives himself a shake and comes to life again. "I … don't know," he says, looking down at the feather. He shifts back and forth on his feet. His whole demeanor screams of someone who's about to burst. Like he's a bottle rocket, housed in flesh. "I … I don't … I don't know."

He shakes his head, thinking as he shifts the feather gingerly in his grasp. The bladed edge slips against his skin, drawing a tiny line of blood across his palm. He winces and glances at her with wide eyes. Like he forgot about her, briefly. He shifts the feather to his unblemished hand and wipes his bloody one absently on his bathrobe.

"It's not as if falling like Amenadiel is something I've done before," he says.

"But what do you think?" she prods, inching closer.

"I … imagine falling would be less strenuous than a resurrection."

"And this feather could resurrect someone?"

He nods. "That's why I chose it for you." For a moment, he's speechless again, and then he tries to push the feather back at her. "Chloe, I meant this for y-"

She wraps her hands around his wrists, staying his hands. "No."

"You would truly give me this?" he says. "You would give up …?"

"Lucifer, I'm not giving anything up."

"But you could heal anything with this," he says. "You could resurrect your dad, if you wanted."

And that's a thought so lovely it makes her ache. Seeing her dad again, after all this time. She could show him what she's made of her life. He could meet his granddaughter. But he's been gone for years. And thanks to the sheer fact of Lucifer's existence, she knows that he's happy. And that she'll see him again. Someday. Meanwhile, this feather is Lucifer's only chance for who knows how long.

"Or," she says softly, "I could give you free will." She looks up at him. "And that's what I choose."

"But I don't even know that I want to fall," he says. "I … don't know."
She presses her hand to his stubbly face. "Lucifer, that is so not the point."

He swallows, looking down at the feather silently. A soft sound coils in his throat. Not a word. Just a lost, aimless syllable. His fingers shake, and the feather shakes along with them.

"Use it, or don't use it," she says with a shrug as she wraps her arm low across his waist. "On your own time. You don't need for God to give you wings again. You have wings. Enough to count, anyway." She glances at the feather clutched in his hand. He has all the information, now. God made sure of that. And Lucifer can make an informed decision. For once in his eons long life. She rests her head against his shoulder. "One last act of divine will; whatever you want that act to be."

Distant traffic sounds filter up from the street. A soft breeze blows.

He doesn't speak. He just stares. At the feather. The soft, divine glow lights his face in the dark.

"Lucifer?"

He rubs his eyes with the index finger and thumb of his free hand. His fingertips come away slippery. "I'm …," he says, overwrought. He looks out at the city, the feather clutched in his hand. "I don't know what to say." The words are thick and upset. His whole body is starting to tremble. "I don't …."

"You don't have to say anything," she says, smiling through tears at him.

*You are a catalyst,* she hears Michael say in her head. *Nothing more. Nothing less.*

Lucifer's lower lip quivers, and he pulls her into his arms. She feels the warmth of the feather against her back. "I don't know what to say," he croaks against her ear. "I don't know …."

She scrunches her fingers, pulling tents of his bathrobe into her hands. "You're welcome."

"You are …." He sniffs. "You … surprised me again. How do you keep …?"

"I guess I'm just a miracle."

And he laughs. The sound is weightless and lovely, and she feels weightless hearing it.

She smiles, leaning against him, and they watch his stars together. The moments pass, and the moon climbs high in the purple sky. A honk filters up from the street. With his joint long extinguished, she can smell the faintest hint of salt on the air.

"So, what do you wanna do, now?" she says. She glances at her watch. "And, no, your answer cannot be sex," she adds just as his mouth opens to reply. "Maze only promised me another forty minutes, unfortunately, and I still have to drive home."

He laughs again and pulls her closer.

"I do have one idea in terms of the near future," he says, stroking her arm. "But not now."

"Oh?" she replies.

He turns to face her.

"Would you like to go to Vegas this weekend?" he says, eyes bright with anticipation. "We never did make that vacation, and I believe I was promised an IOU."
A New Day

Chapter Notes

YAY! IT'S DONE! Thank you so much to Pellaaearien for helping me polish this chapter. And a special shoutout to little_bean, from whom I got the idea that Lucifer likens riding in his convertible to flying.

Chapter title credit goes to Kate Havnevik.

WARNING: This chapter is not safe for work (i.e. it's way way porny in places). Proceed at your own risk.

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Friday arrives like a wide receiver sprinting for the end zone.

But then the touchdown is made, and Chloe's trapped in slow motion while the universe oohs and aahs at Friday's athletic prowess. What little work there is to do, Dan and Emily take for themselves, telling Chloe, "You should enjoy your vacation!" Which leaves Chloe playing endless rounds of solitaire as her desktop clock creeps along toward 3 p.m.

3 p.m. is the time she's negotiated for her early departure. Her early departure for a weekend in Vegas. With Lucifer. Alone. And-

She sighs, dragging herself out of her chair.

Right into Ella, nearly bowling her flat. "Sorry!" Chloe blurts as a sheaf of papers cascades to the floor. She drops to her knees to help pick up the fallen report. "I'm sorry," she repeats miserably.

But Ella only shrugs. Like it doesn't even occur to her to be mad over collisions like this. And, of course, it wouldn't occur to her. Because Ella is Ella, and-

"Nervous, huh?" Ella says.

Chloe swallows. "Nervous? I'm not nervous. Why would I be nervous?" She caps her caffeinated outburst with an awkward laugh that doesn't sound at all mirthful, and holy shit, could this be any more mortifying?

Ella pats Chloe on the shoulder as they stand up. "When I'm nervous," Ella says, folding her arms over her report, "I like to imagine them in their underwear."

Chloe's eyebrows knit. "Um …?"

"Just remember, eye contact, but not too much eye contact. And talk to them like people. It's important to win them over."

Chloe shakes her head. "Ella, what are you talking about?"

Ella frowns. "The Radcliffe trial? Testifying for a jury?" she says slowly. "What are you talking
about?"

Another awkward laugh tumbles from Chloe's lips. Ryan Radcliffe - the man who raped and killed Anita Rosario - stands trial next week. Chloe had a meeting with the DA yesterday about her testimony. "Yeah, that was totally what I was talking about." She licks her lips. "We have DNA and prints, and that's what everybody wants these days for a conviction. I'm not worried."

"Then why are you acting like you just got told you'll be walking the plank this evening?"

Chloe shrugs. "No reason."

Ella regards her for a long moment, hugging her case file, frowning. Realization sweeps in like a tide. "Oh, I know what it is!" And then a bright grin blooms across her features. She rests her case folders on Chloe's desk, and then leans close to Chloe's ear. "You and Lucifer are finally gonna ...." She makes a vague motion with her hands, somewhere between a close-fisted cheer and something lewd. "You know." She bounces, eyes alight. "Right? In Vegas?"

Chloe's face heats. "I'm not talking about this at work."

"Look, don't worry!" Ella says, ignoring her. "You two are like … peas in a pod." She frowns. "Well, you know. If one pea is a cumquat, and therefore not similar at, all except that it's a plant. But still! It'll be great."

"You think we're a pea and a cumquat?" Chloe says as a lump forms in her throat. "How in the hell can a pea and a cumquat get along? How did the cumquat even get into the pod in the first place? What if the cumquat is kind of a slut, has way too many other encounters with better-tasting fruits and veggies - like … strawberries … or twice-baked potatoes … or … maybe a kiwi - and after all this buildup, he finds that …." She coughs. "Er ….." Another cough. "Eating." Cough. "I mean … what if the pea isn't satisfying?" God, this metaphor has gone south.

Ella snorts. "Dude. I don't think it's possible for the pea to disappoint the cumquat. Cumquat is all about the pea."

"How in the hell do you know that?"

"Um. I have eyes."

Chloe pinches the bridge of her nose. Her hands are shaking. She's so stressed out, she might throw up into her trashcan. Which … wouldn't that be a great start to the weekend?

Ella's gaze softens. "Seriously, Decker. Don't worry about it. The best sex usually doesn't have much to do with the physical stuff that accompanies it. I mean, not that multiple screaming orgasms aren't great, but-
"

"That's kind of what he already said to me," Chloe admits. "But … I'm finding his assurances help less and less as we approach …." She glances at the clock. 2:17 p.m. It takes about five hours to get to Vegas. Friday rush hour might extend that considerably. She'll say seven hours to be safe. Which means … she might be in a hotel room, naked with the freaking Devil, in less than eight hours.

And, oh, God, what is she doing?

"Decker," Ella says, stepping closer. She shakes her head and amends it to, "Chloe." Then she wraps her arm over Chloe's shoulder. "By all means. If you don't feel good about this, don't do-

"I want to," Chloe says.
"Well, then, I'm telling you. Cumquat just wants to be in the pod with you. I really don't think he gives a single crap about the mechanics of how he gets there. And even if he does, mechanics are totally a fixable thing, anyway. He seems like the kind of guy who'd revel in a teaching moment."

"It's that simple to you?" Chloe says, folding her arms. "He's happy as long as he's in the pod?"

Ella grins. "I. Have. Eyes."

Lucifer arrives at the precinct at 3 sharp. Well, 3:02, by her clock. But that's close enough for a man who couldn't - in his opulent life full of want now, have now - stick to a schedule, even if it were stapled to his ass.

"Hello, darling," he says with a soft gaze as he steps up to her desk. "Are you ready to go, or shall I have a seat?"

He's wearing a crisp black three-piece suit with a black button-down shirt, and a teal handkerchief folded into his breast pocket for a pop of color. His hair is coiffed, but not shiny with product, and she's tempted to try running her fingers through it. The only thing missing from the ensemble is his-

Wait.

She reaches for his hand. His warm fingers close around hers, mashing her knuckles together, like the movement is reflex. She rubs his thumb as she pulls his palm toward her face. "I thought this got incinerated?" she says, marveling at his onyx ring.

"Oh, it did," Lucifer replies with an easy shrug. "Michael reconstituted it for me."

Chloe frowns. "I thought he wasn't allowed to talk to you anymore."

"Leaving a ring in an unmarked envelope on my nightstand while I'm downstairs is hardly talking."

She grins. "I guess he's still finding some loopholes."

"Yes," Lucifer says with an odd, wistful look. "He seems to be."

She peers at the ring. He wears it every day. It means something to him - enough for Michael also to know it means something. The opaque black stone almost seems as if it's sucking up the surrounding light. Like … maybe it's not onyx. Maybe, it's not from Earth in the first place. Maybe, it has something to do with Michael's similar "lapis lazuli."

"You're going to have to tell me this story someday, you know," she says, gazing into the fathoms of the black stone.

"Of course," Lucifer says, withdrawing his hand. "But … not just now, all right?" His gaze roves up and down. His eyes are dark and hungry. "I'd like to think of … other things … at the moment." Carnal things, he doesn't say, but she can read the words all over his face.

She swallows as her nerves come crashing back. "Yeah," she says with a wispy smile. "Right. Later."

His eyebrows creep toward his hairline. "Are you ready, darling?"
She's not ready. She's so, so, so not ready.

"Can I drive?" she blurts as she watches him transfer her overnight bag to his Corvette.

He sets her bag into the trunk and looks up with a dubious frown. "You know how to drive manual?"

"Of course, I can drive stick."

He holds up his hands. "I didn't mean the question as an insult, darling. It's just that it's not so common, anymore." He glances around at their sunny, palm-tree-filled surroundings. "Not in the States, that is."

"My dad taught me," she says. And if she's driving, it'll give her something to do that doesn't involve thinking about having sex with him. Maybe. "And your car looks fun."

"Of course, it's fun," he purrs. "That's why it's mine." His tone is possessive and throaty and it sends a shiver down her spine. He steps into the space behind her, keys jingling. The scent of his cologne hits the back of her throat. His body is warm. She can feel him hovering. Inches from her. He leans in to kiss her cheek, and then the keys dangle in front of her face. "One condition," he says. And then is quick to amend, "Well, two conditions."

She wraps her fingers around the keys, and he lets them go, into her keeping. She turns around, looking up at him. "What are the conditions?"

"First, you must take exit 246."

She frowns. That's … a weird request. But okay. "And the second?"

"Will you bloody live a little?" he says. "Speed limits are suggestions."

She snorts. "Speed limit plus four."

"Speed limit plus nine," he counters. "It's not like you'll get a ticket, even if you do get pulled over. Professional courtesy and all."

She folds her arms. "Speed limit plus six, and that's my final offer."

"You drive quite the hard bargain." A smile oozes across his face. "I approve."

"Thank you," she says, grinning. She rises onto her tiptoes to give him a peck on the cheek. And then she settles into the seat behind the wheel as she thinks about how to get them out to the 15.

She was right.

Driving his car is fucking fun.

So, she zips through traffic like a caffeinated bee, unable to wipe the twitterpated grin off her face. She doesn't even need to speed. The thrill in driving this car comes from abrupt changes in speed. In acceleration. In braking. And she almost can't help but giggle as she jams on the accelerator to fly past a slow-moving beater in the right lane. The Corvette kicks forward with a pleased give-me-more-and-I'll-do-more rumble, and inertia pastes her to the leather seat.

"Dearie me," Lucifer says gleefully over the roar of the wind. Between his dark sunglasses and his perfect smile and his wind-mussed hair, he looks like a goddamned movie star. "I'd no idea you
had such a rambunctious streak!"

And she laughs. "I'm not in a cop car right now. And I'm not a detective." She gestures to the open road. East of Los Angeles, out in the desert, the traffic drops to near zero. "Having a little fun out here is a bit different than having a little fun downtown. Plus, I'm trying to distract myself."

"Distract yourself?" he says. "From?"

Shit. She grinds her teeth. "Nothing," she says. "Never mind."

"… All right," he says cautiously.

She's doing what she always scolds him about. Prevaricating. She knows she's doing it. But ….

The sunglasses perched on his nose make him hard to read. All he does is sit in the passenger seat, head tipped back, like he can't get enough of the wind that whips his hair. A sigh heaves his frame.

"You look … peaceful," she says.

He tilts his head to face her, dragging his sunglasses down his nose. He peers over the rims at her with his dark eyes. *Get a little, give a little. Quid pro quo.* She can see his thoughts plastered all over his face when he's not concealing his eyes.

"It reminds me of flying," he confesses. "Just a bit." He stretches, folding his graceful hands behind his head. "More so when I can just sit here and imagine, without having to pay attention to the road."

Her heart constricts. "But … I thought you didn't like-"

"I didn't like being forcibly altered," he says. "I didn't like hearing the world's filth. But the capacity for flight was never something I objected to. It's … freeing."

She bites her lip and presses down on the accelerator. Inertia presses her farther into the seat. She can't help but grin. "So, this is like flying?"

"Yes," he says, smiling back at her. "A bit."

No wonder he likes convertibles. She accelerates a little more. She doesn't miss the way his smile twitches wider. He's having fun. Probably a lot more fun than he's willing to admit.

She glances at the speedometer.

The speed limit, even out in the middle of nowhere, is only 70.

California is a stick-in-the-mud about that.

But … Lucifer's not wrong about professional courtesy.

*Oh, live a little, Detective,* she can hear him say, a Devil on her shoulder. *You're driving a bloody Corvette. You're in the bloody desert. Hardly anyone's around. You might as well enjoy it. Right?*

She bites her lip and accelerates. And accelerates. And accelerates.

The engine roars.
The speedometer creeps into triple digits.

"Chloe Decker, I am scandalized by your behavior," Lucifer says, in a breathless tone that suggests he's only a teaspoon of bliss shy of ecstasy. "Scandalized!"

She laughs as they chase the horizon.

They sit in the little blacktop parking lot outside the Mad Greek. A restaurant with white walls and a blue roof. Lucifer's stop at exit 246.

Chill inundates her fingertips. She slips the straw between her lips and sucks. Pulpy bits of fresh chopped strawberries and frozen cream spill onto her tongue, and she can't help but close her eyes. When he told her these were the some of the best strawberry shakes he's ever had, and he considered them a requisite part of any weekend in Vegas, she chalked his assessment up to, perhaps, lack of experience with strawberry shakes, but … nope. She should have known better. The Devil is excellent at locating sin, whether it's in a milkshake or in a bed.

"Well?" he says.

She nods, taking another sip. "Worth the stop."

His grin is so loud she can hear it. "Splendid."

When she opens her eyes, she notices he has a little spot of pink at the corner of his mouth. She doesn't even think about what she's doing. She leans over the parking brake. She says, "You have a little bit of … um …." And then she kisses the cream off of him.

He tastes like strawberries.

A soft, pleased, "Hmm," fills his throat.

And then they're kissing. And she's not thinking about milkshakes or driving or-

"No, no, no, we are not doing this in your car," she snaps, breathless, as she pulls away.

He laughs. "What, you've never snogged in a car before?"

"I've 'snogged' plenty in a car before, I just meant-"

He raises his eyebrows. "Yes?"

She bites her lip. "Is car sex one of the many 'locations' you'd like to show me?"

"It wasn't on my list for this weekend, no," he says, a smile oozing across his face.

"You have a list?" she says, gaping. "Like bullet points we're supposed to hit, or-"

He shakes his head. "Darling, I'm joking with you," he says, rubbing her shoulder. He frowns. "Are you all right?"

"No," she says. "Yes. No. I mean …." She sighs, frustrated with herself.

He regards her for a long moment, suspicion and realization blooming in equal measure. "We'll start slow, shall we?" he says softly. He brushes a loose lock of hair out of her eyes, giving her an affectionate look. "If you desire no snogging in the car, then there shall be no snogging in the car."
They sit and enjoy their milkshakes in companionable silence.

Chloe’s been to Las Vegas before. She’s stayed on the strip, seen the sights. She’s even been inside the Bellagio itself, to look at the botanical garden. Which is why, when they skip past the winding line at check-in and are directed to a small private lounge, when the concierge addresses Lucifer by name without any prior introduction, when a bellhop whisks their luggage away before she can blink, she realizes … she’s in for a bit of a different experience, this time.

The suite Lucifer obtained for them is on one of the topmost floors, and when she steps inside, she can’t help but gape. Their hotel room has an honest-to-god foyer. A foyer that leads into a giant semi-circular-shaped living room with a sweeping view of the fountains far below, thanks to multiple bay windows. She wanders around, exploring, stunned. A fully stocked wet bar resides against one wall, along with a six-seat dining room table. Two bedrooms, each sporting a king-sized bed, are situated to the left and to the right. Each bedroom has two bathrooms, and each bathroom has a ginormous walk-in shower (only two of them have a ginormous jacuzzi).

Lucifer probably got the "room" for free, thanks to calling in one of his many IOUs, but she doesn’t even want to think about the astronomical daily rent for this place.

She watches Lucifer stuff a crisp $100 bill into the bellhop’s pocket.

And this is the point when it sinks in how differently the 1% lives.

Lucifer’s penthouse should have prepared her, she supposes, but ….

This is like … another planet.

"Will this suffice?" Lucifer says quietly as he walks up behind her.

She can’t help but laugh. "The only people this wouldn't suffice for are nuts or have 36 children to accommodate. What is this, like 3000 square feet?"

"3001."

And then she sores. "Two bedrooms?"

He shrugs. "I thought it prudent to have a space where you can be … 'away from me,' if you need. I've no desire to make you feel pressured."

She looks up at him. Prior to the wing ordeal, she'd seen glimpses of his considerate side. Enough to know that his self-orientation had malleability, if he felt motivated to bend. It's just, surrounded by cadres of people he viewed as also self-oriented, he didn't have much motivation before.

She licks her lips. His eyes are dark and unblinking and serious as he regards her, trying to gauge her reaction. She wraps her arms around his waist, stepping close. His body is warm, and the sandalwood scent of his cologne fills her lungs as she breathes.

"I'm nervous," she confesses. "Like … sick to my stomach nervous." If the butterflies doing a cha-cha in there are any indication.

His gaze softens. "I know."

"But I want this," she rushes to say. "I want you." He licks his lips like he's nervous, too, and she wonders how often he's heard those words from someone who wasn't talking exclusively about his body. "And I don't feel pressured. I promise."
He regards her for a long moment, gaze searching.

"Lucifer?"

"Let's play tonight," he says. "Tomorrow, too."

She blinks. "Play?"

He nods. "Forget about expectations. Yours or mine. We're not here for a shag. We're here for fun, and there are plenty of fun things to do here, other than shagging. Even at this hour. This is the city that never sleeps, after all."

"You … don't want to have sex?"

"Oh, I do," he says baldly. "Very much, I do. But nothing needs to happen tonight. Or any night that we're here, really. If the mood strikes you, we will, but what I want for this trip is your companionship, and I already have it." When she doesn't immediately reply, his intent look deepens. "I've no desire to do something you won't enjoy. You're clearly not enjoying yourself right now. So … let's play."

She looks up at him. "I am … kinda hungry," she admits.

"I know an excellent steakhouse close to here. Have you seen the Bellagio fountains at night before?"

She shakes her head.

He steps away from her, but only hold out his arm for her to take. "Let's go to dinner, then, shall we?" he says with a charming smile. "We can walk past the fountains on the way."

"Okay," she says, locking her arm with his. All of her nerves melt away, forgotten. "Let's play."

So, they watch the fountains. He wines and dines her.

They play.

On Saturday morning, he teaches her how to play craps.

It's early enough that the high rollers have yet to appear. Tables that become $10, $15, or $25 minimum in the late afternoon and evening are cheap at $5, which is more to the tune of her public servant salary, so she doesn't even need to borrow his money to partake.

The craps board is a long green rectangle with rounded corners, and it sits nestled between black sidewalls topped with a padded railing and inset with chip trays. The board has two distinct sides. Each side is covered with numbers and phrases like "come" and "pass line." Nine people hover around the edges of the table, resting on the padded railing. She and Lucifer squeeze in at the end of the table.

A man at the opposite end tosses a pair of dice. They fly down the board toward her and bounce against the sidewall below.

"Seven out!" the dealer announces when the red dice come to rest - on a four and a three - and everybody at the table groans.

"Fuck," the guy who rolled the dice snaps.
Three people pick up their remaining chips and walk away, thinning the crowd at the table.

"This looks like Greek to me," Chloe says.

Lucifer lights up beside her. "Well, isn't it lucky, then, that I speak Greek?" He turns to the scantily clad server as she wanders by with a little round tray and adds, "Darling, would you be so kind as to bring me a rum and Coke?" He glances at Chloe, resting his warm palm on her shoulder. "And some bottled water for my straight-laced, lovely partner, yes?"

Chloe snorts. "You know me well."

This observation pleases him, and he visibly preens.

"Shooter coming out!" Chloe hears.

She looks back at the table to see the dice bounce against the sidewall below her. A seven again. "Winner seven!" the dealer calls. This time everybody seems happy and claps. Chips are exchanged at a rapid pace.

This is … beyond Greek.

Lucifer leans into her. His body is a long, warm line, and she can't resist resting sighing at the touch. "The trick is," he murmurs by her ear, "to ignore everything on the board except for the pass line, and the boxes at the top where it says four, five, six, eight, nine, ten. The boxes - they're called place bets - are where you'll make your money back and then some. Craps is one of the easiest games to beat the house at, if you don't let yourself get wrapped up in all the extra noise, and you know when to walk away."

"So, why can a seven be good or bad?" she says.

Lucifer is right. Craps is a lot simpler than it looks. And the snowballing energy at the table whenever a shooter gets more than a few rolls in is palpable.

"I've one requirement," Lucifer announces to the table when the dealer passes him the dice. He takes a sip from his rum-filled tumbler. "No prayers to God, yes? At least, none aloud. He's a self-righteous dick, he won't help you one bit, and hearing his name bloody ruins my mood."

Everybody laughs.

She rests on her elbows, sparing a glance to her $5 chip sitting, lonely, in the pass line. He has a ritual, it seems. Kissing the dice isn't allowed for hygienic reasons, but that doesn't stop him from making lewd gestures with them, and she can't help but laugh as he hams it up for the crowd.

He tosses the dice, eyes gleaming.

"Winner seven!" the dealer announces, and the table cheers.

Chloe scoops up the instant fruits of her line bet.

And then Lucifer kisses her.

"Let's see how much money I can make you," he murmurs, "shall I?"

Lucifer is the shooter for more than three hours.
The table is a frenzy.

Her heart is pounding, and her blood races in her ears.

She leans against the railing, watching as he makes toss after toss after toss after toss. She has place bets on all six viable numbers, along with a little pass line bet, exactly as Lucifer suggested. And the money just keeps raining onto the table. She's never experienced anything like it.

He rolls a six, this time, and the table cheers again.

The dealer deposits a bunch of chips in front of her, and she gleefully scoops them up. Lucifer completes his ritual with another kiss - he's kissed her so much at this point, she's feeling almost bruised. And she gets it, now, why people like gambling so much. Why people can get addicted to it like it's a drug.

He rolls again.

"Seven out!" the dealer calls, and her high crashes to the pavement, all smoke and burning metal.

"Well, it had to happen sometime," Lucifer laments, though he's grinning, and her disappointment fades as quickly as it burgeoned.

She stretches. She feels loose and achy and sated, like she just had amazing sex. He's won the table so much fucking money that all anyone does while cashing out is cheer and clap and say, "Thanks, man!" or, "Wow!" or, "Holy shit, never seen a game go that long."

Lucifer throws the dealers several $100 chips as a tip.

He glances down at her haul. "How'd you make out?"

She shows him her overflowing pile of chips, gaping, and says, "I think you just paid me for a month."

"Excellent," he says, pulling her into his arms, and the rest of the casino falls away. "You can wine and dine me, tonight."

And she laughs.

His joie de vivre is as much a drug as any amount of gambling ever could be.

The sky is azure-colored. A balmy breeze blows, ruffling her hair. They watch the fountains outside the Bellagio again, this time in daylight. He takes her to lunch at a little bistro in the Venetian, where she eats a delicious panini. They explore the strip. The rainforest in the Mirage. The empty pirate boats outside Treasure Island where there used to be a show. They visit countless little shops and tourist traps. They walk. And talk. And walk. And talk.

And it's nice.

Just to be with him.

Until the Stratosphere towers above them.

"No," he says, staring up and up and up. "Absolutely not."

"Lucifer, it's like a ten second drop, if that."
"Any drop is not to my fancy," he replies with a shudder.

She boggles at him. She gets it in an intellectual sense. Why he has bad memory associations with free fall. But … the idea that anything manmade could unsettle him to this degree seems ludicrous to her. If it hadn't seemed ludicrous, she wouldn't have brought it up in the first place. She's not trying to make him miserable.

"There's a harness," she says slowly. "You'd be seated. I'd be there. And the view is supposed to be awesome."

"No," he says. "No, I …." He swallows, and he gives her a faint smile. "I'm happy to cheer you on."

But she shakes her head. "I don't want to do it, if you don't want to do it. This is our vacation." She grabs his hand. There's plenty of other stuff in this city to amuse. Stuff that won't scare him witless. "What else is here on the old strip?"

But Lucifer gives her a don't-you-bloody-dare look. His gaze wanders up again. He grimaces. "You really desire … that." Not … exactly a question.

"It looks fun!" she says with a shrug. "And I like thrill rides."

"Of course, you do." His tone is dry and sardonic. "Such is my luck in life."

She squeezes his palm. "Lucifer, I'm not out to torture you. If you don't want to do it, we won't do it. I wouldn't have brought it up if I'd realized you didn't like this stuff. Really, it's not a big d-"

"All right."

She frowns at him. "All right?"

"It's what you desire," he replies, as if this trumps all else.

She bites her lip. "Lucifer …."

But he doesn't engage her attempt to back down. Instead, he pulls her toward the Stratosphere's entrance. "I believe we go in this way," he says.

---

True to his word, he goes on the ride with her.

The Big Shot.

It's a bunch of chairs that ring the top part of the Stratosphere tower. The chairs are shot into the air and then allowed to fall, several times in a row. The whole ride takes less than a minute.

The view of Las Vegas from this height is spectacular, particularly as the sun is nearing the horizon, setting the sky on fire. The breeze refreshes her, and the sensation of her innards rising into her ribcage as her body plunges to the ground is thrilling. She can't help but cackle with glee, joining the ecstatic chorus of her fellow riders, as they're bounced up and down in the air. She's breathless and blissed out as the ride grinds to a stop.

Lucifer's like a nighttime graveyard beside her, though, silent and still, and he keeps his eyes squeezed shut until his feet are touching the ground again. He stumbles, getting off the ride. Like his legs are so shaky he can't walk.
As she watches him struggle, she feels a bit rotten, like she dragged him into doing this, even though he's the one who insisted.

"I really shouldn't have suggested this," she laments as he shuffle-walks back inside beside her. "I'm sorry."

It takes him a while to unkink. To find words again. But as the elevator doors trundle shut, he looks at her, musters a genuine smile, and the whole world falls away.

"I'm all right," he assures her, a soft murmur, as he wraps his arms around her. "I'm pleased that you enjoyed yourself." He kisses her. "Quite worth it, really."

"Okay," she says, deflating with relief, "but we're officially not doing the roller coaster at the New York, New York. I forbid it."

His eyes gleam with mischief. "Oh, you forbid it, do you?"

"We're sticking to terrestrial pleasures from now on," she replies with a definitive nod. "Something we both enjoy."

He barks with laughter and says, "All right, then. What mutual 'terrestrial pleasure' is next, pray tell?"

She can't help but lick her lips at the possibilities. Still, she picked this one, so she says, "Any suggestions?"

---

He takes her to the Paris Hotel, and they eat dinner in the mock Eiffel Tower as the pinks in the sky fade to midnight blues.

Then he walks with her to the Excalibur.

Past oxygen bars. Past slot machines. Past scantily clad women dancing on tables. Past restaurants, and shops, and ticket counters, and bars, and ice cream stands, and it goes on, and on, and on. The smell of smoke tickles her nose, and the rumble of revelers floods her ears. Las Vegas is a feast for the senses, and there's so much to hear, taste, smell, touch, see that she's glutted herself in a matter seconds.

Lucifer stops and pulls her into the end of a long, meandering line on plush red carpet. "Here we are," he says, with a tone that's far too cheerful.

The line is filled with mostly women, though there are a smattering of men, too. In one cluster, a bubbly blonde woman wearing a crown stands inside a ring of other chatting, laughing women. Like … this is a bachelorette party.

Wait.

Chloe's eyes wander to the marquee emblazoned over the black door at the terminus of the line, and her eyes widen. "I can't do this," she says, shaking her head. "No way."

"Why not?"

She points at the sign. A landscape photo of half-a-dozen shirtless men, each with perfect bronze tans and bulging muscles that speak of like 0% body fat. "It's a strip show!"

His eyebrows rise toward his hairline. "And?"
"A male strip show!"

His grin is sly and oozing. "So, then we'll both have something lovely to look at, yes?"

"But-"

"What better way to get in the mood?"

"This is like the opposite of getting into the mood, Lucifer," she snaps. This is mortifying!

He folds his arms. "Chloe, have you ever even been to one of these?"

"No."

"Then, how do you know it's the opposite of getting into the mood?"

Which … okay. That's … a fair point. She sighs.

At an open bar nearby, a live band is singing an out-of-tune cover of some Rolling Stones song. A woman in a business suit trundles past with her rolling suitcase, giving the line Chloe's standing in an irritated look as she works her way around it. What makes Chloe blink, though, is the next passerby. A man pushing a stroller. Inside the stroller is an oblivious, sleeping toddler. But …. She glances at her watch. 10:53 p.m. Wow. She looks back at the bachelorette party, many of whom are sipping on long plastic cylinders filled green liquid. 32 oz. margaritas. Refillable.

She can't imagine bringing Trixie to a place like this, asleep or otherwise.

"Come now, give it a try," Lucifer says, pulling her back to the dilemma at hand. "If you find that the show isn't to your taste, you can always walk out."

"You promise not to whine if I walk out?"

"I'm the Devil, darling," he says primly. "I do not whine."

"I beg to differ," she grumbles at the floor.

"I heard that, you know."

She snickers. "I wasn't trying to be sneaky about saying it."

He looks down at her, smiling, gaze soft. "If this is not what you desire, then, yes, I promise not to whine. But only if you give it a fair chance. All right?"

"Fine," she says. "What's a fair chance?"

"An hour."

She slumps. Okay. She can do this. An hour.

Frigid air blasts her in the face as they shuffle into the semi-circular theater. On the floor are about a half-dozen long tables set up with chairs. She pulls Lucifer up to the amphitheater area, and they take a seat behind the bottom railing. Close. But not … too close.

"It's freezing in here," she says, and Lucifer raises an eyebrow at her.

"It won't be, later," is his reply.
Which … what in the hell does that mean?

He's right.

It's not cold, later.

When several hundred women - each at varying degrees of drunkenness - are all crammed into a tiny space for the purposes of staring at muscle-bound men wearing only g-strings, it's like a vortex where all things cold go to die.

The bedlam is sweltering by the time an unassuming man wearing jeans and a white t-shirt swaggered onto the stage with a shit-eating grin and says, "Good evening, ladies." His purr is a lot like Lucifer's. "My name is Brandon. I'll be your host tonight."

The crowd erupts into cheers so loud it hurts Chloe's ears. Lucifer joins in, yelling beside her.

The announcer enters into a spiel about no photography. No touching except to tip. Everything that happens in Vegas stays in Vegas. Blah blah.

How in the hell is this sexy? How in the ….

And that's when the curtain rolls up, the music begins to thump, and the pirate appears to a thunderous roar of screams and whistles.

She can admit the scenery is gorgeous.

Pirates. Firemen. Construction workers. Police officers. All the male stripper stereotypes are on parade, and they all have sculpted muscles she could bounce quarters off of.

But that's where her enjoyment ends. Being surrounded by so many people, all screaming themselves hoarse, isn't quite her idea of a good time.

"Lucifer," she says as the men dance on the tables in the pit, pouring water over themselves, "this really isn't my thing."

But his reply is a dashing smile and a, "Trust me, darling!"

She's almost at the end of her required hour when Brandon appears back on the stage, looking for volunteers. "Don't be at all shy or a prude!" he warns, as he walks among the writhing, screaming audience. He picks the bachelorette wearing the jeweled crown. And he picks Lucifer. Of course, he fucking picks Lucifer, because Lucifer is a magnet for this kind of thing.

"Hold this for me, will you, darling?" Lucifer says as he shrugs off his suit jacket.

Everyone cheers and claps and screams as Lucifer and Bachelorette trot onto the stage with Brandon.

Brandon pushes the microphone into Bachelorette's face and purrs into the microphone, "So, what's your name?"

"Lindsey," she says.

"Lindsey," Brandon says, grinning. "And where are you from, Lindsey?"
Brandon shifts the microphone to Lucifer. "And what's your name?"

"Lucifer."

Brandon's face lights up with glee. "Ladies, it seems we have the Devil himself in the house, tonight. I guess we don't need to ask what brings him to the City of Sin."

Thunderous cheers erupt.

"All right ladies and gents," Brandon says happily. "This is a contest. Winner gets his or her fantasies fulfilled. I want both of you to fake an orgasm for the microphone. The audience will pick the better faker by cheering."

Lindsey laughs nervously, eyes wide, as the microphone is shoved in her face. "Makes us believe, Lindsey!" Brandon says.

Chloe wants to die of secondhand embarrassment as the poor woman moans and flails with the microphone like she's having some kind of seizure. She finishes with, "I'm sorry!" as she blushes like a beet. The crowd laughs, and Brandon shakes his head.

"I warned you!" Brandon says. "Shyness won't win you this one." He grins at Lucifer. "Please, tell me the Devil isn't shy."

"Oh, I'll strip right here, if you like," Lucifer replies with a smirk.

And the crowd goes insane.

"That's the spirit!" Brandon says, clapping Lucifer on the back. "Give us your all!"

"Right then," Lucifer says as he takes the microphone from Brandon. He scans the crowd, and then his dark gaze comes to rest on Chloe. He undoes a button on his shirt, exposing a little bit of chest, and then he pushes his free hand back through his hair, mussing it liberally. "Ready?"

The crown screams. Chloe swallows.

He drops his eyelids to half mast, giving himself a bit of a sleepy look. His hand roams sensuously down the lapel of his shirt. A soft rumble of pleasure falls from his lips, filling the room through the speakers, and then another rumble follows, slightly louder.

"Oh, yes," he purrs for the crowd. "Oh, yes."

She licks her lips, unable to tear her eyes away.

Lucifer Morningstar is sex.

That's the only explanation she can think of as she watches him unravel for the microphone, never taking his gaze from her. With every moaning exhalation, he brings more of his body into the fakery. His legs. His hips. Every muscle. Every sinew. Until, even though there's nobody standing there other than he, even though dozens of feet separate his body from hers, she could swear he's fucking her right there on the stage. His vocalizations hit a beautiful crescendo.

Her insides tighten like a screw, and she can't breathe, and she's hot, and she can't look away.

When he comes undone, the sound is so pornographic she almost blows a gasket right there in her
seat.

The crowd goes wild, and she thinks her eardrums might not work for a month.

"Wow, I think we have a winner!" Brandon says, joyous.

And Lucifer's still looking straight at Chloe when he says, "Yes, we do, if she'll claim her prize, tonight."

"You did that on purpose, didn't you?" Chloe says after the show, as the crowd spills back out into the open space beyond the entry doors.

Lucifer grins. "Brandon owed me a favor." He wraps his arms over her shoulder. "Did it work?"

"I thought you didn't lie."

He shrugs. "Darling, it isn't a lie if everybody knows it's not real." He leans closer to her. "That being said, it was an accurate performance. And you'll get that ten times over, if you'll have me."

She licks her lips. Her lower body is a frustrated ball of unsated desire, and she can't stop thinking about the sounds he made. The way he looked at her. "... Yes," she says, heart thumping in her chest.

"Yes, what?" he says.

"It worked."

"So, the mood has struck?" he says, delighted.

She nods. "I'm still nervous, Lucifer. But ...."

His widening smile makes her feel warm. "Let's head back then, shall we?"

Her heart starts to pound. This is it. Sex is going to happen. Sex with him. Soon.

"Care for a drink?" he offers, wandering behind the wet bar as she drops her purse onto the couch.

She watches him pour himself an Old Fashioned. That's the trick, she thinks. Getting hammered. Because the problem with the trip back from the Excalibur is that it gave her time to think. And all the walking straightened out the unbearable knots he'd tied her in.

"Is there any coconut rum back there?" she says as she approaches him.

He frowns, bending down to search behind the bar, and returns with a bottle of Parrot Bay.

"What shall I-" he begins, but he doesn't get a chance to finish, because she grabs the bottle, unscrews the cap, and takes several hearty swigs.

She coughs, setting the bottle down. He regards her with raised eyebrows. "Well, well, well," he says with a smirk.

"I'm nervous again," she confesses woefully, and takes another swig. And then another.

"Darling, we don't have to-"
But she shakes her head. "No. No, no, no." She swallows. "I think this is like skydiving."

His eyebrows knit. "Skydiving?"

"The buildup is terrifying, but the payoff is … perfect. And I think I need you to shove me out of the plane to enjoy it."

He blinks. "You've been skydiving?"

"I like thrill rides! Sue me!"

His grin widens. "Well, darling, I can't say I share your proclivities, but I do enjoy how you're always surprising me."

He steps around the bar and wraps his arms around her. His body is warm, and he smells like smoke and sandalwood. She rests her cheek against his chest.

"I won't shove you out of a plane," he murmurs, kissing the top of her head. "That's a tad too nonconsensual for my tastes. But I do have an idea that might get you back into the mood."

"Oh?"

"How about that shower you promised me?"

She swallows. "Okay," she says. "Okay, I can do a shower."

"Good."

She sighs. "How many times have you ever had to coax someone into getting naked with you?"

"Just this once," he admits. He kisses her. "But, darling, there's quite a lot of low-hanging fruit in this world. And this is the first time I've wanted someone on a top branch enough to bother with getting a ladder."

"Oh," she says.

He strokes her cheek with his thumb. "Shall we?"

She nods. "Give me a minute. I'll … I'll catch up."

"All right," he says. He kisses her. "And it's all right if you change your mind, darling. Truly."

Then he pulls away, leaving her alone to gather herself and follow if she wants.

Or not. If she doesn't.

The water's been running for more than ten minutes by the time she steps into the steamy master bathroom. In the dim light, she can see his flesh-toned silhouette through the frosted glass. Her hands are shaking. Her legs are shaking. Her mouth feels dry. Her heart is thundering in her chest. But ….

Rip the band-aid, she tells herself. This is only going to get more and more nerve wracking the longer she puts it off. And she wants the results. She wants them. She just needs to get over this fear that he's going to find her laughably lacking, somehow.

Rip the band-aid.
Rip the band-aid.

Just ….

With a deep breath, she takes off her clothes, piling them in the corner underneath the towel racks, and then she steps to the shower door and taps on it, just to warn him that she's there. Or, hell, he probably already knows that she's there. What with his preternatural senses and his-

JUST RIP IT, CHLOE.

She yanks open the door and steps inside before she can talk herself out of it again. Wet air envelops her skin. His big, pale body is blocking most of the water from drenching her at the outset. He's facing the wall at first, and she gets a glorious view of his ass, his quads, his back, and the marbled, horrific wing scars. He's toned, but not beefcake. He's- Turning around. Aannnnd … now she has a view all the way south, from the dark happy trail at his navel, and down. It's the first look she's gotten in years that hasn't been draped in the sepulchral pall of his suffering, and it's …. Her insides feel like they're squeezing into a tiny ball.

"Hello," he says with a delighted grin. "I was beginning to think you might opt to stay dry."

The double-entendre slides down her spine like silk. "Um …. No. No … not dry."

She wants to smack herself. She's being an inarticulate, nervous freak, but-

Water sloshes as he steps close to her. Into her space. He puts his hands on her shoulders. "Not dry at all," he murmurs by her ear, gently guiding her under the hot spray with him. Her hair mats to her scalp in seconds.

The warmth of the water and of his body makes the air rush out of her with a whoosh, and when she breathes in again, it's easier. Calmer. Until she realizes she's eye-level with his pecs, his wholly naked body is inches from hers, if that, and she's-

He kisses her. Not at all chastely. He nips her lower lip. His tongue slides into her mouth, rubbing hers. And she forgets what she was thinking. Or thinking of thinking. Or ….

He pushes his fingers through her wet hair, licking his lips as he pulls away.

She's panting.

"You're all right?" he murmurs.

"Yeah," she says. "Yeah, I'm …."

She looks up at him. His gaze is hooded. Dark. Hungry. Burning. And he looks about as far from laughing at her as California's politics are from Mississippi's. The butterflies in her stomach are starting to settle, but her limbs are still shaking, and her mouth is still dry, and her heart is still thumping in her ears like a timpani.

"Still nervous," she admits. "But ….

"I'll help with that," he says, stepping away from her, but only to grab a washcloth off the rack.

He stands in profile for her, a dark Adonis. She watches the muscles in his arms bulge as he rubs the soap into the washcloth. Lets her gaze rove up and down. She can ogle, for once, and it's not weird or out of place. He isn't circumcised. Which … well duh. Her ribs compress as the air leaves her, and she imagines him filling her to his hilt. What a ride that would be.
"Like what you see, darling?"

She blinks. "Yes. Yes, I … Yes." Fuck, yes.

"May I?" he says, holding up the lathered washcloth.

"May you … where?" she says warily.

He shrugs. "Is there anywhere you don't want me to touch?"

She swallows. Her insides are doing that squeezing thing again. She laughs nervously. "Not really, I guess."

He nods, stepping into the spray behind her. He starts in a "safe" spot. Her upper back. Her arms. Rubbing in slow, soothing circles. Her eyelids drop to half mast, and she can't help but lean back into his expert touch.

"You're a really good masseur," she mumbles, sighing.

And he laughs. "I'm a man of many talents."

"You are."

He wraps his arms around her, tipping her against him, and he starts working at her navel. Her hips. His body is a long line of warmth touching her back, skin to skin. His breaths are soft by her ear. His touch is gentle. Sure. By the time he reaches her breasts, she's putty. And she's forgotten why she was nervous in the first place.

The water rains down, filling the silence with thunder.

He does her legs. Her inner thighs. She can't help the little moan that falls from her lips as her insides tighten even more.

And then she hears a wet slap as he tosses the washcloth to the floor. She thinks, maybe, this is it. The shower is done. But then he splays his fingers just over her navel and plunges. Until he's cupping her.

Touching her.

Touching her there.

"All right?" he says.

Holy. Fuck. "Has anyone ever said no, at this point?"

And he laughs. The sound unfurls in the shower stall, rich and dark and echoing.

She tips her head back, looking up at him. His jaw is a sharp line. She presses her lips against his skin and wraps her hands over his to show him that, yes, she does indeed feel, "all right."

He experiments, at first. Trying to figure out what she likes. He tests her reaction to stroking with his thumb. A bit like one would pet a cat. Different speeds. Slow. Medium. Fast. He tries button presses. Finger flicks. And ring-around-the-rosie. He decides the last one produces his desired effect, and he settles into stroking her in circles. His other hand cups her breast, matching the motion below with the same motion around her nipple, until she's pert against his thumb.
The constricting feeling in her abdomen becomes unbearable. She starts to feel like she has a hole inside that she wants him to fill. Every exhalation pushes out a moan. Hot blush unfurls down the front of her body. Her nails dig into his wrists.

"Lucifer," she rasps.

"Come for me, darling," he tells her. The pressure of his fingers increases. "Come, now."

And then she hits her pinnacle. She can't stop herself as her neck arches backward, and her lips part, and her lungs squeeze into little pinpoints. She makes a noise that speaks of agony, but isn't. Every muscle in her abdomen contracts at once, and she can't breathe, and she can't think, and she can't do anything except hang there, in his arms, a willing prisoner. He keeps ringing the rosie, and her whole body is seized up like an engine without oil. She looks up at him, and he looks down.

"Come," he tells her in a velvet, midnight tone.

And then it all pops loose at once. Her insides flutter. She loses her footing as the shockwave floods down to her toes, but he keeps her from falling.

She sags against him, panting.

"Oh, my God," she says. "Oh, my God. Oh, my God."

"Wrong deity," he tells her, grinning lecherously. "But I'm glad for the sentiment."

"Sorry," she says.

"Feeling a bit more relaxed, now?"

"Yes," she says. "Yes."

"Good," he says.

When she can move, she turns to face him, smiling like a drunk. He's aroused and unabashed. She presses close, rises to her tiptoes, and kisses him. "What about you?" she says, reaching down between them.

She cups him gently. His skin is feather-soft. Warm. Wet.

His eyes glaze with pleasure at her touch. "Hmm," he rumbles. The sound is bliss in a syllable. "Well, I certainly wasn't expecting quid pro quo," he says, pressing into her hand, "but I'd never stop you."

Thick steam coils in the air.

She licks her lips. Her fingers are pruned. She hasn't done this in ... way too long. She only knows a few different techniques. She can't cycle through a repertoire until he's screaming, like he did for her. But ....

"What's your favorite thing?" she says as she reaches for the little travel-sized lotion bottle sitting with the hotel's soap and shampoo offerings.

"Anything where you touch me, darling," he replies. He kisses her. "In this moment, I'm quite easy to please."

So, she returns the pleasure he gave to her.
And, in the end, as he comes undone against her belly, she has no memory of nerves or shyness. The world is hot.
And small.
Comprised of just him.
Just her.

They move to the bed in a blur she can't remember, because he's kissing her.

He rises above her on all fours, dipping down to kiss her lips. The little crook where her throat meets her collarbone. Her cleavage. Her belly. Her navel. He splays his palms against her abdomen like a sculptor inspecting his art, and then sits back on his knees. His touch slides lower. To the crease where her legs meet her torso. To her inner thighs.

She bucks. "Lucifer, what-," she has a chance to say.

And then he spreads her open like she's a gift for him, and he drops his head and body like he's praying at her altar. She feels him press lips to lips. Then she feels his tongue. She arches backward until the headboard looms in front of her. Breaths rasp in her throat. Holy fuck, holy fuck, holy fuck.

He pauses, looking up at her. "Have you not done this before?"

"N-no," she manages to say, quivering.

He makes a tsk tsk tsk noise and says, "Daniel, Daniel, Daniel. Clearly, he needs some … education."

The word education unfurls down her spine, a purr that makes her shiver. Lucifer smiles, prideful, lustful, glutonous, covetous. Four deadly sins in one look. His body undulates like a wave. Then she feels his tongue again, and she forgets he ever brought Dan into the bedroom with them.

"Oh, oh, oh," she stutters as Lucifer works her into a blissful frenzy.

Their tiny world brightens as he kisses and teases and coaxes her toward the cliff. She needs to grab onto something. Anything. She finds his hair, and the pleased, guttural rumble he makes when her nails scrape his scalp is almost enough to push her into free fall.

Almost.

He brings her with a lick, and then her eyes roll back, and she's falling.

"Oh, my God. Oh, my God. OhmyGod," she chants.

She doesn't even land before he moves up again, straddles her, and kisses her on the mouth. She rakes her nails down his bulging biceps. He growls, the sound so deep it makes her toes curl.

When she can see more than spots again, he's there, inches from her face, peering into her soul.

She can feel him between her legs. Waiting. "All right?" he says before he joins them together.

She can't find words. She only nods. He kisses her. And then he jerks his hips. She's so wet, he
glides right in. She was empty, and now he's filled her up. She squeezes her pelvic floor, welcoming him, and he groans. He's not small.

"Wow," she whispers, trembling. It's the only thing she can think of to say.

He's panting now, too, just hovering there, looking at her through his dark eyelashes, eyes full of stars. "You feel so bloody good to me," he murmurs, overwrought, pushing his fingers through her hair. He kisses her once. Again.

She tips up her chin to kiss him in return. Runs her hands down his back, teasing muscles and skin. His spine is a gentle curve she can't resist stroking.

"Thank you for being patient," she says.

"Quite worth it," he replies.

She winces as a thought occurs to her. It should have occurred a lot sooner than this. "Um."

He raises his eyebrows. "Yes?"

"Condom?"

He shakes his head. "I'm a different species, darling. We're not remotely compatible in that sense. And I'm immune to disease. I imagine I'm immune, even when you've made me vulnerable, given the species barrier. Though I suppose if there's some angel flu floating about, I could, in theory, catch it, now."

"Oh," she says, swallowing. "Right."

She's fucking an angel.

An angel is fucking her.

Not just any angel, either.

She can't help but snort with amusement. "Every time I think I've got my head wrapped around this shit … ."

He laughs, and the sound is bright and beautiful.

She kisses him. "Lucifer the Morning Star." She strokes his sweaty chest. "My morning star."

His eyes narrow, and he gives her an odd look.

"What is it?" she murmurs.

He shakes his head. "Just … not something I'm used to hearing with affection."

A lump forms in her throat. "Do you like it?"

"I … ." He frowns. "I don't know."

She wonders if he means the words are bittersweet. Good but … heart-wrenching all the same. Like Trixie and her steadfast refusal to stop growing up.

"I love you," she says, looking up at him.
He presses his lips to hers, a soft sound of pleasure rasping in his throat. He loves her, too, he doesn't say. Physically speaking, he's a thunderstorm of positive feedback, happy to shower her with any and all reminders that she brings him to places that make him feel good, and that he desires. But he's not verbally demonstrative. Not yet. He's got quite a lot of ingrained habits to overcome in that arena. But … knowing how he feels is enough.

"Love me," she tells him.

And that … he knows how to do in spades, as long as he doesn't have to describe it with language.

"As you desire," he says, a purr.

He takes a deep breath and begins to move. His hips grind against her as he thrusts like a piston. And what little is left of the world falls away. He stares at her, unblinking, and she stares back as he searches for his own release. His body is a wave, crashing against her shore and receding. Crashing and receding. Like everything else, he does this with gusto. With joy. With wanton fervor.

And the Devil is beautiful when he comes.

His muscles hit gridlock in a quick cascade from curled toes to clenched jaw, expelling the air from his lungs as he stills. His lips part, showing teeth, and he stares miles deep into her soul. The sound he makes deep in his throat tightens her own body in desirous echo. Then his hips kick forward, and he spills himself into her body, warm and wet, abdomen twitching rhythmically, as the seconds crawl into memory.

He sags against her, sated and spent.

With a relaxed sigh, he slides off of her, out of her, and comes to rest along her heaving side.

He pulls her into his arms.

And they bask in a whorl of pleasant lethargy.

He shows her a lot of new places that night. So many, she loses count - "The many advantages of a celestial constitution," he says with a lecherous grin - until she's so exhausted she can't even think anymore, until she's hoarse from all her moaning, until she's had every inch of herself touched and tasted and loved, until the oxytocin and dopamine rushing through her veins are a constant, blissful delirium.

She's never been with a man who won't take more for himself than he gives. She's never been with a man who knows a woman's body as if he were woman himself. Every orgasm Lucifer receives, he gives her one in return, or more than one, or more than two, and she gets the impression that he loves experiencing her release as much if not more than his own.

He was telling her the truth, baldly, without spin.

He doesn't care about how experienced she is.

He literally gets off on desire.

And desire is skill blind.

He delights in her body.
He delights in watching her fall apart under his ministrations.
He delights in her, and so does she in him.

"So, the Devil gets sex hair," she says with a pleased sigh as he rests beside her, panting, done for the night by mutual agreement.

His gives her a lazy, wanton smile. "Unfortunately."

Curls he tamed have exploded back into existence, and not in a styled way. More ... *I-plugged-myself-into-a-light-socket* chic. She thinks she may have contributed, what with all times she's pushed her fingers through it. It's just so grab-able in the throes, and there'd been quite a few throes this night. Still ... she glances over at him, grinning, only to burst out laughing.

His eyebrows knit. "What?"

She swipes at an unruly lock that's tumbled over his forehead. It sparkles in the dim lamplight. "You've still got glitter. In your um." She snorts. "Your ... 'do."

He glowers. "I imagine I'll be finding it for eons. How do you get rid of it?"

She gives him an apologetic look. "You really don't."

"You're lucky that I find your offspring tolerable."

"Oh, I think you find her more than tolerable. I think you might even like her."

He gives her a gleaming look and winks. She laughs and presses her lips to his, and then she twists, pulling his arm over her shoulder. The covers rustle and the bed moves. The lamplight winks out. Then he curls around her like a big cat, pressing his nose against her hair, and sighs.

The early morning silence settles like a warm cloak.

"I kind of don't want to go home," she confesses, leaning against his shoulder as Lucifer settles the bill at the front desk. One smile from him, and all of the room service charges are comped, fresh strawberries and wine included. How does he do that?

She watches him sign his name with his gorgeous almost calligraphy, and then he turns to her. He looks sated. And relaxed. And happy in a way she hasn't seen him in far too long.

She gets it. Her whole body is pleasantly numb, too.

"I think Beatrice might be cross with me if I kept you away for another day," he says as he leans in to kiss her.

"I do miss Trixie," she admits as he pulls away.

"And we can have all this fun at home, too, you know. Sans the gambling, and falling from death-defying heights."

She snorts. "You promise?"

"My word is my bond," he replies with a lazy smile.
He wraps an arm over her shoulder, and they wheel their suitcases to the valet outside. Sunday morning is sunny and balmy and perfect, much as the rest of the weekend has been. A cool breeze billows down the valet line, in the shade of the Bellagio. Lucifer gives his ticket to the valet, along with a $100 bill.

"Do you want to drive again, darling?" he says.

"No, thanks," she says. "I don't have your 'celestial constitution.' I'm beat."

He laughs. "Should I apologize?"

"Never," she says, kissing him.

The Corvette rumbles to a stop in front of them, and the valet hops out. Lucifer hands him another $100. "Thank you, sir!" the young man says, and he races around to open Chloe's door for her.

Lucifer pulls his seatbelt across his lap, clicking it into place. He stares through the windshield. And he smiles like he has a secret.

"What is it?" she says as she climbs in beside him.

"Whatever I want," he replies with a laugh, and they peal out into the summer sun.

~finis~

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for coming along on this ride with me! You all have been a treat for me to interact with. You've reminded me why I enjoy writing. And thanks especially to everybody who takes the time to leave me feedback. If you've been saving up, here's your last chance :)
Dear Lucifans,

I'm so sorry to fool you with an "update." I don't normally do this. But as you have probably heard by now, Fox has cancelled Lucifer. I guess you're probably as heartbroken as I am (especially because the finale is epic!). There is still hope, though. Rumors are that Warner Brothers (who owns the show) is shopping around to find Lucifer a new home. And here is where you guys come in.

To have a shot at a Season 4, we need to take to Twitter and burn the place down tonight, starting one hour before the show airs on the East Coast, until it airs on the West Coast (so 7 p.m. EDT to 12:00 a.m. EDT, which translates to 11 p.m. UTC to 4 a.m. UTC).

I know a lot of you might think of Twitter as a cesspool of bullies and conflict, but it can also be used for good. So, if you don't have a Twitter account, I urge you to get one, even if it is just for tonight, and join the Twitter party at those scheduled times. It's easy. Just follow the actors (their official accounts will have a little blue checkmark next to their names) and take it from there. They are all joining us in this effort. Just make sure to use the hashtag #SaveLucifer every time you tweet to make sure we trend, and do not use more than two hashtags in any one tweet, or you'll be marked as spam and won't be counted toward trending topics.

Tomorrow you can shut down your account and forget Twitter even exists if you’re not into that kind of thing.

But, for tonight, please.

We need as much help as we can get.

Let’s unite and save our show! Thank you for being there. I hope, together, we can find Lucifer a new home.

Sincerely,

Aria

P.S. Coincidentally, I'm almost ready to post a novella-length sequel to this fic. Keep an eye out for Afterglow. Coming soon!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!