

STEPHANIE HUDSON

DEVI

IN

ME

BLAKE HUDSON

Devil in Me

By

Stephanie Hudson &

Blake Hudson

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This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are either a product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual people living or dead, events or locales is entirely coincidental.

Warning:

This book contains explicit sexual content, very graphic language and a highly addictive Devil.

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Dedication

Myself and my husband dedicate this book to all the self-sacrificing people in the world who work as First Responders. To all the men and women who put their lives at risk in order to save others. You are the soul protectors of this world and we thank you eternally.

Never forget your importance, for you are part of the glue that holds together our humanity and binds us as one.

And the Devil knows, that we are forever in your debt.

Other Books by Stephanie Hudson

Afterlife Saga:

Book 1 - Afterlife

Book 2 - The Two Kings

Book 3 - The Triple Goddess

Book 4 - The Quarter Moon

Book 5 - The Pentagram Child /Part 1

Book 6 - The Pentagram Child /Part 2

Book 7 - The Cult of the Hexad

Book 8 - Sacrifice of the Septimus /Part 1

Book 9 - Sacrifice of the Septimus /Part 2

Book 10 -Blood of the Infinity War

Book 11 -Happy Ever Afterlife /Part 1

Book 12 -Happy Ever Afterlife / Part 2

Afterlife Spin offs and Extras:

Afterlife's the Forbidden Chapters - Part 1

Vincent's Immortal Curse Book 1

Transfusion Book 1

King of Kings:

Draven's Afterlife Book 1

Draven's Electus Book 2

Afterlife Chronicles:

(Young Adult Series)

The Glass Dagger – Book 1

The Hells Ring – Book 2

Children's Books:

Marching to a Royal Beat.

Other books by Blake Hudson

Lucas Knox Series:

Blood Retribution- Book 1

About the Authors

Stephanie Hudson has dreamed of being a writer ever since her obsession with reading books at an early age. What first became a quest to overcome the boundaries set against her in the form of dyslexia has turned into a life's dream. She first started writing in the form of poetry and soon found a taste for horror and romance. Afterlife is her first book in the series of seven, with the story of Keira and Draven becoming ever more complicated in a world that sets them miles apart.

When not writing, Stephanie enjoys spending time with her loving family and friends, chatting for hours with her biggest fan, her sister Cathy who is utterly obsessed with one gorgeous Dominic Draven. And of course, spending as much time with her supportive partner and personal muse, Blake who is there for her no matter what.

Blake Hudson is an English action adventure writer. He was born in Birmingham England, raised in Worcestershire, and now lives in the Costa del Sol, Spain. From a humble background, he originally aspired to be a film score composer after his studies in audio engineering. After years of working in the audio world as a technician, he then joined the TA alongside his work and served one tour in Iraq.

Returning home and having a change in life's direction, Blake found himself in the highly challenging and stressful work as an HGV driver around the City of London. After this, he was soon ready for relocation to a slower and more peaceful way of life, so he moved to Spain with his beautiful family to pursue his new dream of writing the stories he wanted to read. This was made possible with the added confidence and belief from his wife, bestselling author of the

Afterlife Saga, Stephanie Hudson. She inspired him to overcome his dyslexia, as she had once done.

Blake started with his first venture into the world of action adventure novels, with Lucas Knox: Blood Retribution Book 1 of the Lucas Knox series.

Both authors words...

Our love and devotion is to all our wonderful fans that keep us going into the wee hours of the night but foremost to our wonderful daughter Ava...who yes, is named after a cool, kick ass, Demonic bird and our sons, Jack, who is a little hero and Baby Halen, who yes, keeps us up at night but it's okay because he is named after a Guitar legend!

Warning!

This book contains explicit sexual content, some graphic language and a highly additive Alpha Male.

This book has been written by an UK Author with a mad sense of humour. Which means the following story contains a mixture of Northern English slang, dialect, regional colloquialisms and other quirky spellings that have been intentionally included to make the story and dialogue more realistic for modern day characters.

Thanks for reading x

Lilly

The Devil can see me and knows when I'm watching.

The Devil can hear me, when I whisper his name,

The Devil can feel me, when I sneak in and try to touch
the sin of his world. And the Devil can taste me, when I
scream in the night.

The Devil is my stalker and I am his only weakness.

The one soul that continues to slip through his fingers, no
matter how many times he tries to conquer it.

He is the King of Hell and I am his greatest Sin.

He is the Devil waiting and I am being lured in.

Brent

My wife. As soon as I found out her soul was in Hell it's
all I can think about. A nightmare that consumes me.

So, I have no choice. I have to make a deal with the
Devil.

Six souls taken for one soul returned.

But there's a catch. There's always a catch.

The Devil wants to use my body as a host.

He wants to monitor his investment. But then there's a
complication. An internal battle begins, and I have to fight the
Devil for the rights to use my body how he pleases and the
only thing that pleases him...

Is her.

Contents

Dedication

Other Books

About the Author

Prologue

Chapter 1 - Death of a Lilly Pad Heart

Chapter 2 - By the Devil's Hand

Chapter 3 - The Bloody Word Whispered

Chapter 4 - A Devil's Blackjack Heart

Chapter 5 - A Lifetime of Crimson Sin

Chapter 6 - Eternal Pain

Chapter 7 - Choked Innocence

Chapter 8 - Blood Soaked Breadcrumbs

Chapter 9 - Bombshells and Bullets

Chapter 10 - Flashbacks and Coffee

Chapter 11 - Deal with the Devil

Chapter 12 - A Hell Above the Law

Chapter 13 - In the Devil's Shoes

Chapter 14 - What the Devil Wants

Chapter 15 - By the Devil's Hand

Chapter 16 - A Devil of an Oxymoron

Chapter 17 - Everything the Devil Wants

Chapter 18 - Story Time

Chapter 19 - What the Devil Feels

Chapter 20 - Driving Miss Lilly

Chapter 21 - Where the Devil Isn't Welcome

Chapter 22 - Catching the Holy Bullet

Chapter 23 - Breaking Me In

Chapter 24 - Devil's Flavour of Sin

Chapter 25 - Wilful Soul

Chapter 26 - Teeth in a Jar

Chapter 27 - Killer Reality

Chapter 28 - The Devil's in the Details

Chapter 29 - Back to Where God Sinned

Chapter 30 - Where is Your God Now?

Chapter 31 - Envy

Chapter 32 - Six Times

Epilogue

Brent

Prologue

I'm dog tired, wishing now I hadn't agreed to pull that double shift. But then again, it was for a buddy of mine, so I didn't see the harm. But it had been a long day and I looked forward to my wife's home cooking, even if it is on a plate in the refrigerator ready to re-heated.

But this was life as a cop and something my Marie had gotten used to a long time ago. But then again, she was also a nurse, so she understood the importance of a job you believed in and the self-sacrifice it took in helping people.

I turned off the engine to the cop car and took a moment assessing my life. My house was in a great neighborhood and was enough steps up from our first tiny apartment that I was proud of what we had achieved...the birth of our daughter Daisy being the very top of that list.

I exited my patrol car and walked to the front door, using my keys in the lock. Then I walked myself through the same motions I did at the end of every shift. I threw my keys to the bowl, bent to loosen my laces and kicked off my boots. Then I hung up my jacket in the closet, keeping on my gun belt until getting to the bedroom. But before I could do that I walked into the open plan living space ready to talk about my day with my wife, knowing at this time of night, our daughter had not long been put to bed.

This had been what had supposed to happen.

But on this night, it didn't.

And after this night, it never did again.

This was because the second I walked further into the house the first thing I saw I knew would haunt my soul for the rest of my life. Because there in front of me was my wife Marie, slumped on the floor, covered in blood.

But it didn't belong to her.

It belonged to our five year old daughter, Daisy.

Her head was completely covered, to the point where I couldn't even see her face any more for hair was plastered to her skin. Marie was crying, sobbing horrific sounds and soothing her bloody hair over her face trying to cover it completely. Clearly, she was in a state of shock, one I soon followed her in. A shock that came first from the horror at seeing my child dead in the arms of her mother. But then this wasn't the worst part, what was, was seeing the still smoking gun held in Marie's other hand.

"No!" I uttered in crazed disbelief.

Marie looked up and then raised the gun, pointing it at me a second and in response to the threat I pulled out my own and pointed it at her.

"What have you done!?" I hissed through my pain, and it sounded as if it had just been torn from a broken man...*it had been.*

Marie's hand was shaking, as she confessed...

"I'm so sorry, forgive me."

Then she shot herself and my entire world crumbled in the mere seconds it took for that gun to fire two bullets, taking the only two lives that mattered to me.

My knees crashed to the floor and it was nothing compared to the pain I felt whilst getting my heart ripped apart.

And the second I took my dead family in my arms the only thing I wanted to do get take it all back.

No matter what I had to do.

Even if meant...

Selling my soul to the Devil.

Lilly

1

Death of a Lilly Pad Heart

The Garden.

I was always in the garden. Locked there until the darkness took over and turned everything to ash...it was only then that I was allowed to escape back to reality. It was the same dream I had been having since I could remember, since what felt like the beginning of time. A vision that went far beyond my twenty nine years. A crazy thought to have I know, but logic was often lost in a realm I had no control over and no matter how much I hated the need for sleep, eventually it took hold of me.

Caffeine, pills and lots of endless hours of crappy late night TV had become an essential staple in order to live. Especially when my dreams had started to change.

When he appeared.

He was the one who brought the darkness. He was the one who turned it all to ash, burning my oasis to the dust with each step he took towards me before I was granted the power to take hold of the nightmare and run from it before he reached me. I had no idea who he was or ever saw his face, but I would hear him sometimes, whispering to me. And I would wake with the sound of his foreign words lingering in my mind, words I never understood when I woke. But now, in the dream, well that was different. In the dream my fear was real, and I understood every word he said to me. Like some dark promise that he would find me.

And he did...*every time I slept.*

It would start out the same. I would find myself sitting at the water looking at my reflection, questioning why I didn't look quite human. Oh, all my human features were there, the same as I carried with me daily in my regular life. The raven black hair, light green eyes, slim oval face that could have fooled you into believing that it was attached to a slim athletic body. One that in reality was at least ten pounds over what was deemed slim and pounds that equally spread over my belly, hips and modest C cup.

But this was the image described that I was used to facing in the mirror each morning before getting ready for work. It was not the image that ever stared back at me in that lake I seemed so fond of sitting by. The one where my hair shimmered with a blue hue like the sun's rays were kissing the soaring black feathers of its owner, one that commandeered the skies. Or the way my eyes mirrored the forest green that surrounded my private space, glowing with knowledge. The way my skin seemed luminescent, as if the morning dew clung to it like the leaves I sat upon, crumbling their perfection under my naked weight.

Because clothes didn't seem to belong in this realm and I often woke questioning what I would have seen should I have been brave enough to wait and discover who it was that had come to destroy my world. Would he too have been naked? Would he have said my name...my real name?

The one even I didn't know...that no one did. No, they all thought it was Lilly. The first word ever spoken when they found me that day. That broken small child who couldn't remember where she had come from. Who said the only thing she could remember. The sight of the first thing that died in my dreams.

My favorite Lilly Pad.

It was always the first thing to die and the second I saw the floating green heart started to brown and curl up around its edges, I knew what was coming. I would look up and see a shadow emerging from deep in the forest. It would bring with

it a wall of darkness like an unseen army following its king into battle. That was when the trees would start to die, as if being set alight but without the flames. It was as though the world was being absorbed by some rolling black fog that was the bringer of death.

And at the centre of it all was its master.

The Devil in my Dreams.

So that is who I became...a Lilly that always seemed destined to die. Why then did I still use this as my name? Well, that was anyone's guess and no doubt a psychiatrist's wet dream. It was also why I went days without sleep and could have bought shares in energy drinks...and trust me, Red Bull definitely didn't give you wings. But drink enough of it and you found yourself with a raging bull of a headache. But that was when the pills came in handy.

And that was the cocktail of my life. I didn't drink alcohol. I didn't date and I didn't smoke... but boy did I self-medicate the shit out of life! Hell, but it was the only thing that kept me functioning like a semi normal human being. This vicious nocturnal circle that had me dreading when it came to a head and sleep would eventually take me.

But I know what you're thinking. It's just a dream. So just man up and cope with it. And yes, I grant you, this was sound advice, right along with every type of sleeping pill out there, chased down by a bottle of Jack. But nothing worked. Sleep was sleep, no matter how deep human vices could send me. The Dream always found me. Death always found me. And nothing had the power against him from finding me.

My personal Devil.

So, what was it that made my dreams so much worse than everyone else's...I was actually trapped inside them! I was trapped in a place that seemed so real that by the time I came out of them I often questioned if my real life wasn't in fact the dream. But lots of people often speak about their dreams feeling real.

Well, I am telling you, *that these were real!*

I even managed to prove it, as once I purposely cut myself on a jagged rock allowing the blood to pool in my palm before letting it drip into the water. The second the first droplet made it, casting its rings around the disturbance, the miniature waves hit the earth and alerted my Devil to me. But this time when he entered the dream, he roared in anger making the trees shake and the very ground I sat on quake as if mirroring my own fear.

I still remembered the screaming, still doing so when waking, only to find my bedding was covered in blood. I then lifted my wet hand expecting to find it covered in menstrual blood from an early period, but what I found was a self-inflicted deep cut in my flesh that ended up requiring six stitches.

Since then I had tested this theory no less than twenty times, only making sure to do so with no more than bruises and scrapes, and saving myself anymore embarrassing trips to ER. But being perfectly honest, no matter how much the master of my dreams frightened me, and I mean that in a terrifying way that shook you to your core at just the sight of him...still, one fact remained constant...

He had never hurt me.

But then again, I always managed to escape just before the entire world around me could be consumed by his hellish touch. Which meant that I always woke up wondering the same thing...what would happen if he ever caught me? Would he hurt me like I feared? Or the second he made contact with my skin, would I perish and crumble away to nothing like the rest of the world he seemed to rule over?

I still didn't know, and it had been years, with the only change being the reflection I saw in the mirror of water that showed me through my aging. And stranger still was that the older I got, the more frightened I became. I think this was down to becoming more aware of the evils in the world, for at one time when I was a child, I would think of the Devil as someone there to protect me. He would whisper kind tender words to me, bringing me comfort when I was scared of the shadows that grew around him.

It was only when I got older and with it wiser, that I realised it was in fact he that brought the shadows and trust me when I say, he was no knight in the darkness that protected me against them.

He *was* the bringer of that darkness.

So, with this realization, my fear of him grew and with it, his displeasure, something that seemed as volatile and changeable as the weather. Meaning I had no choice. I fought it. Fought against the sleep and because of it barely functioned as a human being. Or at least this is what I told myself as everyone I knew was utterly oblivious to the fact.

Because no one knew me.

Not a single person.

But then again it wasn't as if I was an extrovert or enjoyed being the centre of attention. Truth be told, I kept myself to myself and silently watched the world go by unseen. Which was how I liked it. I had my safe little world. My job at the newspaper, even if I was a glorified dog's body with the title of assistant. Then there was my little apartment that was always paid up three months in advance which was the cautious way I liked it. I had no more than two good friends, that I didn't often socialize with and zero family. So, in short, there was no one to lose and there was only myself to take care of. It was the way I liked it. That way it was simple and if I were honest...

No one could break my trust.

No one could let me down.

No one would know my secrets.

And more importantly...

No one had the power to hurt me or break my heart.

So, it might have made me a loner but at least it was the safe life of a loner. And that was just fine because honestly, I had enough fear bottled up waiting for me to sleep than needing to add any more to it when I was awake.

And speaking of fear...

If only I had bought extra Red Bull on the way to work.

I don't know why it never felt cold here. I don't know why I felt the pain of scraping my hand against the coarse rocks that lined the lake, but I didn't feel the cold against my naked skin? Why I felt the cool water as I trailed fingertips across the surface but not the wind peaking my nipples as it rustled the leaves overhead. Or why I felt the damp grass against my thigh where I sat side on but was immune to the breeze that swept through my hair like gentle fingers brushing through the strands.

However, there was one chill I always felt and that was the moment *he* appeared. As now I questioned if this was the real reason I never felt the wind? Was it so as my body was attuned to him and knew when he was near? My fear was answering that question as I felt the hairs on the back of my neck tingle as if statically charged fingertips were making their way up my naked spine.

I closed my eyes like I always did, knowing that when I opened them again, I would have no choice but to look towards the tree line ready for when his shadows first appeared. It was the same every time. It never changed. That was...

Until now.

Because this time when I opened my eyes, I didn't need to turn my head to see him. No, this time my fearful reflection in the water wasn't the only one I found staring back at me. I screamed the second I saw him stood over my form like some master of the shadows that surrounded him.

The second I saw that hand reaching out towards me I scrambled away from it and having only one place left to go to get away, I ended up in the water. I quickly ducked under, now feeling the cold water as if cutting into my flesh with thousands of tiny needles, but the pain was worth it if I could continue to hide from him a little longer. But even in my

dreams there was only so long I could hold my breath, making me wonder if I held it for long enough, would this cause me to wake back into reality gasping for air where I slept?

Well, there was only one way to find out.

So, I held my breath and closed my eyes the second I saw his shadow above the water looking down at me. I think had I been wearing shoes I would have even clicked my heels together and whispered, 'there's no place like home'. But then again, Dorothy hadn't been facing the Devil at the time or about twenty seconds away from drowning!

The lucky Bitch.

Something, needless to say, I wasn't.

I knew this the second I felt the ground start to rise up and meet my bare toes. This meant that I could no longer tread water, even as I pulled my knees up to my chest trying in vain for just a moment longer in getting away from the rising soaked earth. But it was hopeless, for the bottom of the lake was rising up underneath me and soon I felt my thighs and buttocks sinking into the mound. I quickly started to panic thinking he was no longer trying to get me out of the water, but instead trying to drown me in the bottom of the lake's sludge.

I felt it push my body upwards at the same time it started to consume my body, encasing itself around my legs the second I kicked out, trying to free myself. It felt like mud hands closing in over my limbs before forming itself around my body like a living chair.

Finally, my head emerged, and I found myself gasping for air just as the sediment burst from the surface with me still in its clutches. It was comprised of a thick mud combined with a mixture of leaves, fish waste, decaying plant debris and what I could smell was dead algae. I wanted to gag as it clung to my skin, coiling around me as if it was alive, forming tentacles that curled around my breasts and shoulders, holding me immobile to the back of what I now knew was some demonic looking throne.

I managed to look over my shoulder as I felt the mud harden into some hellish black rock. I looked down over my body to see that even the mud tentacles had changed, now forming enormous inky black fingers that felt as if a giant was stood behind me and had me held captive in his enormous fist.

A Devil's fist, one that wanted me closer.

I knew this when I finally looked to the one in control of this new horror, only to find a demonic hand outstretched as if he were some puppet master controlling a larger version of himself behind me. And one look down at the water and I could see that this was exactly what he was doing. The mud had turned into a colossal hand mirroring his own and was now holding me up out of the water in what appeared to be his own throne in Hell. Then, with a few crooked fingers, he motioned me closer in the same movement, taking a step forward coming out of the shadows he commanded.

This was when I finally got my first glance at the Devil himself.

I had to admit that I hated myself the second I gasped in shock, for it wasn't in utter revulsion or disgust like I would have thought it would have been. No, instead it was one done in sight of the most handsome face I had ever seen on any living being!

He was beautiful, painfully so in fact. But not in a way you would have expected a God to be. But more in a raw, totally savage way, the way you saw beauty in the threatening roar of a male lion. It was a dangerous beauty that you couldn't trust yourself to be close to. You knew it had that instant power over you for your self-control was a thing of the past and your body started to betray your mind the second your heart no longer beat just to keep you alive.

God in Heaven but he was so terrifying, and my heart pounded in my chest for both reasons.

Both reasons being in...

'Beautiful fear.'

I quickly asked myself where that thought came from and knew instantly that it had been spoken in my mind, sounded out like a rumbling demonic purr from the Devil in front of me. One that looked like some alternative male model for some dark campaign in a soul collecting magazine. He looked somewhere in the middle of being a horned demon and an extremely large human male. I couldn't tell how tall he stood being that I was still being raised up from the water, trapped against a throne of black stone. But from the size of his shoulders and torso then I could see that it was at least seven feet tall and still growing. He was a colossal force of demonic nature and his facial features told me just how serious he was when faced with something he obviously wanted. But the question now was, what was it he wanted from me exactly?

I couldn't help but shake uncontrollably, even more so as the long black, gigantic fingers started to form into oily vines that continued to hold me captive. But even as my body convulsed, despite the hold he had on me, my breaths were still dragged through my system in order to keep me breathing in the sight of such a powerful being. He looked half consumed by the very essence of Hell as the black shadows around him clung to his body and started to harden into some sort of second skin. They clung to an abundance of solid muscle, that looked as if it had the power to stop a train and started to shift and move before settling into some sort of living suit of armour.

It then started to form deadly spikes growing in size at his shoulders and then down the backs of his forearms from the largest at his elbow. It continued to ripple down his dark grey skin like pebbles landing in the water, until it reached his hands where taloned fingers grew like claws of some wild beast. Even more shadows also started to form, interlocking plates across the abundance of muscles on his abdomen, creating an eight pack of abs over ones already there made of flesh.

The same shadows then curled up like tendrils of oil twisting in water before clinging to his massive chest, attaching itself there over each peck in a swirl of motion

before slapping to his flesh and forming an effective chest plate.

This masterful sight forced me to ask myself exactly what war he was readying himself for, as it even made its way up his neck as if getting ready to consume his brutally handsome face. But the dark force stopped for the moment and I hated my traitorous mind for being thankful as it granted me longer to witness its horrific beauty. And it truly was horrifying, especially when I had the biggest urge to reach out and touch those massive horns that started behind his ears and after branching outwards ended up curling back in on themselves until the points ran down his neck.

Each were the thickness of my calf and covered in lethal looking spikes like deadly thorns. But these weren't the only ones as there were two other sets, one of which remained mainly in shadows at his back and seemed to stem from the very back of his skull. But it was the two that came from base of his neck that weren't as thick as the others, being the same width as my arm. They came forward and were positioned at the sides of his head, curling tighter with the sinister points being level with his eyes.

And looking at him now then I had to question my sanity! As I didn't know what it was exactly about them that had me so captivated and not just in fear, one I knew he was no doubt feeding from. Was it the harsh lines of his strong jaw or the slash of dark brows over a pair of deep-set eyes? Eyes that seemed to have the power to pierce through my defences and stroke the very edges of my soul. One I knew he had plans for...*total consumption*.

He wanted it, by Gods he even craved it! He wanted not only to own it for all eternity, but he wanted it entwined with his own until the point I couldn't exist without him!

But it wasn't only his eyes, those penetrating light green eyes that had flecks of burning amber flickering around the pupil with a ring of black circling the iris. No, it was that straight line of his nose and those full lips framed by a short dark beard, one I wanted to feel against my skin as he buried his head in my neck. I even found myself questioning if his

teeth were that of a man or a demon and what they would feel like biting and nipping at my tender flesh?

I even found myself shaking my head, convinced that he was planting these sexual thoughts in my mind, for surely, I wouldn't have had the strength to think past this immense fear alone...*would I?* The near blinding fear that had me held captive just as his living throne did. But again, it was those eyes, ones that spoke to me without saying a word. By God they were trying to strip me further bare, when I was already naked.

I could barely believe this was happening. I mean I had gone years without any change and now here he was, right in front of me, raising the hand of a beast and beckoning me closer as if I had any control. But then it wasn't just me that he had under his control but the tentacles that still held me.

"No please...don't...!" I was suddenly cut off speaking when he closed his fist and the tentacles suddenly tightened their hold, squeezing me enough to cut off the air my lungs needed to keep me conscious. The second he saw me squirming and starting to panic he granted me his first sadistic grin, one I had a feeling would be the first of many.

I knew I was close to passing out as did he, and I closed my eyes more than ready to welcome it. Hell, I would have welcomed even death at this point for the closer the throne travelled towards him the shorter my time became. But then, just as I felt myself falling under, on the very cusp of losing consciousness, I felt them loosen their hold. Meaning of its own accord my body quickly dragged in the air it needed to make my lungs function again.

But my body wasn't the only one reacting. The second I opened my eyes and he saw my body struggling, his eyes flashed a crimson darkness like onyx stones dipped in blood. Oh, he liked seeing me fight for it, that was beyond clear and almost as much as he enjoyed my fear. Christ, but I suddenly felt like some type of drug to him!

I felt the throne start to tip forward slightly, making me cringe and tense so as I was pushing my body back as far as I

could go, trying to ignore the pain on my muscles as I pressed my naked body back into the rough stone of his throne. But it was useless as he stepped towards me, placing himself at the very edge of the lake, at the same time demanding his pet tentacles bring me the rest of the way.

It was like being strapped in a rollercoaster, with your feet dangling over the edge of the sheer drop and cruelly being suspended at an angle over the death that faced you should you be allowed to fall.

Well, this was how I soon found myself, only instead of being suspended headfirst over frightening heights, he was the danger I would fall into.

I was tipped at an angle where my head had no choice but to hang forward as if I was bowing in his presence. It was the ultimate sign of submission even if I myself hadn't forfeited it willingly. But my forced surrender seemed to entertain him all the more, as I jolted when I felt his first touch at my chin before raising me up to witness his amusement. His grin was prime evil, down to its very core and I wished I could have torn my gaze away from the depth of its cruelty.

But then something quickly occurred to me. Why didn't his touch hurt? Why hadn't that clawed finger sliced through me just as I knew it had the power to cut through flesh like slicing through warm butter?

Well, I soon discovered why when he took hold of my chin in a firmer grip, now using a crooked finger and thumb. A large thumb that also managed to cover my lips preventing them from opening, keeping me silenced and even capturing my frightened gasp.

His talons had gone.

Now why had he done that if he wanted to hurt me?

But then again, what good was a slave when she was...

Dead in his arms.

Lilly

2

By the Devil's Hand

Being gripped by both the thought of death and being held by his hand was not something I ever thought my dreams capable of, even if they always ended as nightmares. But this...well, this was something else entirely.

This was my mind's personal Hell coming to life. Because I knew any second, he could snap my neck which was why suddenly a flicker book of memories assaulted me all at once. But it wasn't the ones you would have expected to see in the believed last moments of your life. It wasn't excited Christmas mornings spent with family, or your first kiss at the end of an awkward first date. It wasn't learning to skip stones stood at the edge of a lake with your father by your side or giggling sleepovers with your best friend. It wasn't spilling nail polish on your mother's carpet or getting drunk for the first time on cheap booze at a family barbeque. Because none of these memories belonged to me. And even if they had and this had been my life, it wasn't what the Devil wanted me to see.

It wasn't the lie you wished to see.

It was the truth you wished to hide. The one that faced me now. It was a flickering of all the times I had purposely hurt myself in my dreams, playing out like some old black and white horror movie. It was the memory of each time I proved that whatever happened to me now wasn't just a dream...*it was a nightmare with the power to kill me.* The power to take

my uneventful life, one which not a single person would miss. For I was a living ghost and the Devil knew it.

Proof of which was in his first words said to me.

“I remember you,” he told me, speaking aloud for the first time and letting me hear the deep and gravelly timbre to his voice. It matched the rugged and frightening beauty my eyes disturbingly beheld. Eyes that soon widened in question seeing as he still wouldn’t let me speak. Then in a flash of movement I found my neck encircled in his hand as he pulled me the last inch closer and this time when he spoke, he did so in a venomous tone over my lips, snarling once he had finished,

“I remember you, little human.” At this I sucked in a startled breath and he felt my frightened lump squeeze past his hand as I struggled to swallow. An action he felt pass beneath the tender flesh he still held in his tight grip. Then he spoke again and this time it was straight from the depths of Hell and from a King that ruled it. It was nothing short of undiluted hatred coming from a raw and dangerous place,

“I remember what you did... Lilith” The snarl felt like a lashing across my skin, as his words were somehow branded on me like the most grievous of insults. As if I had wronged him beyond all comprehension because of course, I had no clue as to what he meant. Which is why the second his deadly frown deepened I decided it was time to try and speak.

“I...I am...Lilly.” The last of this sentence ended in a barely heard whisper as he started to squeeze, making it harder to breathe let alone speak. Then he got closer to my face and snarled like a wild animal making me flinch and close my eyes tight the second he snapped his teeth at me, answering my earlier question...

This demon most certainly had fangs.

“I know what you are, *Igibala.*” Once again this last word was snarled at me as an insult, something that hadn’t needed to have been spoken in my language for me to be certain of it.

I continued to keep my eyes closed tight in fear of seeing his rage morph into something even more threatening than it already was. But then I felt something skim the side of my breast and my eyes flashed open of their own accord.

I tried to look down but was prevented from doing so due to his hand still holding my neck and essentially keeping my head held to the level of his face. I then watched as his eyes became hooded as he looked down at my nakedness for himself, watching as his free hand now changed course and scraped a deadly talon down the centre of my breast, one that was still held imprisoned in the circle of a tentacle's hold. I shuddered at the feel of that sharp sting as it grazed the sensitive skin around my areola, a single ounce of pressure away from breaking the surface and spilling my blood.

I hissed in a breath the moment he finally hooked the tip of his claw on my hardened nipple holding it still, his sharp hold challenging me to take a deep breath, something that would have ended with me doing damage. It was the ultimate test of bravery. On one hand I wanted to squirm away in fear. On another I wanted to gasp in pain as the tip dug in. And then there was his hand, whereas an uncontrollable reaction was the need to pant from the sexual touch that was morphing that pain into a pleasurable need. It was sick. It was irrational. It was mortifying. And most of all, it was a dangerous game my body was playing with my mind. The two were at war, with my mind screaming from the terrifying fear he caused me and my body crying out at the intense pleasure I knew he *could* give me.

But why? Why was my body betraying me this way? Why did it feel as though I knew him?

That I knew his touch?

But surely that was impossible. After all, this had been the first time he had made it this close to me in all the years of having these nightmares. Which in itself begged another question...why now?

What had changed?

“Mmm, now I can smell your fear and I can smell your dripping sex, and both are...” He paused, taking in a deep breath and closing his eyes making a show of it before suddenly he captured my neck in both hands, leaving my breast and growling his deadly promise into my cheek,

“...*Fucking mine to consume!*” Then he promptly let go of my neck and grabbed the tops of my arms at the same time yanking me hard to him the moment the tentacles released me, making me fall forward into his hold. I screamed as I fell into his impossibly hard frame and heard the throne behind me as it crumbled away into nothing. Then I felt his arms wrap around me, anchoring me to him at the same time his face was in my neck.

Once there he took in a deep breath as if trying to inhale my very essence, so as to lock away the memory of me forever. A scent that no doubt smelled of nothing more than lake water. Although his response told me something different as he gripped me tighter, and the feel of my naked skin against his hardened skin made me suck in another breath of discomfort.

But then I felt his mouth open against my neck and soon sharp fangs replaced soft lips. I froze in his hold, too scared to move in fear of what his next move would be.

“*Please...please don't hurt me.*” At the very least my whispered plea didn't go unheard as I felt him smile against my over sensitised skin making me shudder in his hold.

“Say it again.” Again, his demand followed his grin, one that was said against my neck.

“I...I...”

“Say. It. Again.” Was his firm command making me quickly do his bidding for the deep grate of each word spoke only of his unbending control.

“Please don't hurt me,” I said again, and his grin grew in size before I felt him start to kiss his way up my neck before he paused and ordered,

“Again.” I closed my eyes this time as his kiss continued and I was forced to beg as his grip on me tightened.

“Please.” This time his lips paused at my jawline and just before he spoke one hand left my waist, leaving now only one arm banded around me, easily keeping me anchored to him. He then gripped my jaw before jerking my head to the side and forcing me to face him.

“*Again!*” he snarled barely an inch from my lips, lips that had fell open on a gasp and lips he now seemed fascinated with.

“Plea...” I never got to finish before he crushed those satisfied lips to ones still quivering, doing so on an angry growl. Yet his kiss spoke only of a near blinding passion, one that quickly started to build from both sides. I swear my body felt as if it had found equal sides of home and Hell all in one moment, for the second his tongue demanded entrance I was powerless to stop the onslaught of sensations. I felt myself mould against him, freely giving myself and submitting this time, for it was a kiss not only from a master I called my own but mainly,

From the Devil who *owned me*.

But there was something more. It wasn't just lust that drove him to his seemingly desperate actions. Like when his hand left my jaw to fist in my hair so as he could tug at it making my head fall back. An action that gave him more of me. But he also seemed torn in his need. One moment he would nip at my lips, biting them to create a brief sting of pain before then sucking them to soothe the hurt. Then he would once again duel with my tongue, dominating the action before slowing himself and proving that this beast could be tender when he chose to be.

But the war that waged inside of him was clear, as I don't think even he knew which side of himself to give me. It was almost as if on some level he hated me just as much as he wanted me, and because of it he was clearly angry with himself for giving in to his weakness. I knew this when his tender moment ended abruptly on a growl of annoyance.

All the while my feet hadn't once touched the ground, for if they had, then he would never have reached my lips...lips he didn't seem to ever want to free from his own, despite these conflicting feelings. As the second he left them, he was right back there demanding them once more.

I felt as if he was trying to claim me but the outcome of doing so was yet to be decided as to what he intended to do with me. Did he want to hurt me or simply make me beg him not to? Did he want to make me his plaything, kept forever or thrown away and cast to the shadows that surrounded us.

But wait...those weren't just shadows.

No.

It was a Demonic army.

Suddenly the armour he wore started to make sense. Had he come here to keep me safe from the shadows that followed behind him? Or brought them with him to consume what was left of me once he was done? As they were the shadows he controlled. Shadows belonging to demonic beings that had come with him on the hunt.

And I was certain of one thing...

I was the prey.

The difference was that he had never caught me before. Not until now. Suddenly I broke away from his kiss, making him snarl at me, snapping his fangs and making me cry out in fear. But then he saw where my gaze had turned to and he quickly stopped snarling like a wild creature. No, now he was grinning down at me, telling me that he liked the sight of my fear as I tracked the monsters from over his shoulder.

Because now I could see them coming closer. Stepping from behind the trees and making the earth shudder and quake with each demonic foot stomp they took. Massive hooves that held a single and deadly talon in the front that cut into the ground, rooting themselves with each step taken. Skinless legs that looked like black muscle tissue twisted and stretched around overly large limbs and at the centre between their legs looked to be a tortured reason to be fighting, for their

engorged members were nailed painfully to the inside of their thighs, with only their massive testicles allowed to hang free.

Their upper bodies were gaunt and painfully thin, with broken bits of armour strapped to bare black charred flesh like missing puzzle pieces of a demon warrior. But it was their heads that terrified me the most. Oversized bull's heads with lips nailed back, showing every double row of teeth that were dripping with saliva in anticipation of their next meal...

Me.

Well, that was if their master allowed them to have me! For one moment he was tightening his hold and the next he looked close to dropping me on the ground. Something they seemed to be waiting for as in their excitement they tilted their heads and rammed each other with their huge horns. Horns that rippled with what looked more like bone and each set thick enough that they covered the sides of their heads. They twisted like crooked tree branches trying to reach the sky and splitting off at the gnarled knuckles into three thinner sections each side. Two small yellow pupils glowed in the darkness of eyeless sockets and a rippling skin covered a wide flat nose with two rusted nails hammered into each nostril and pierced through the top lip.

Each set of eyes seemed to burn bright in sight of me and I couldn't help it, I soon found myself clinging to the one being that I knew controlled them all, praying that he would keep me safe. I grabbed hold of his massive shoulders, hooking my hands around the hardened spikes I found there and making sure not to cut myself on the razor tips. They made my hands look so small and the sight just reminded me of the fact of how breakable my mortal body was in front of these deadly beasts. The Devil in front of me being the strongest and most evil of all.

Then why was I clinging to him so hard?

The question barely registered and not enough for me to let go, a fact that seemed to amuse him, as he cocked his head to the side and looked at me as if the sight of someone seeking safety in his arms was an utterly foreign one. This was when

his black eyes seeped back into those more human, even if they seemed too striking to belong to a mere mortal. Even his fangs started to shrink back to those of a man and it was this slight glimpse back into his humanity that made me do something foolish, believing I was safe to do so.

Safe to try and tame the beast.

I swallowed hard and let one hand leave his shoulder before I held it suspended closer to his face, trying to gauge whether or not to chance it. But then I saw the monsters getting closer behind him and I knew he was my only chance. Because as much as half of me believed this to be just a dream, the other half of me believed it to be something much, much more.

I believed this to be my destiny.

It was as though I knew this was already something written in my future and there were two paths to choose. It was being thrown to the wolves of Hell behind him or finding myself a willing slave in the arms of their master. And one look at those snapping jaws and back at the handsome face of the Devil in front of me, and well...it was no contest.

But it was also something more.

Something more profound.

As if I was trying to run from myself. Run from something ingrained in the very depths of my soul. As if I was somehow connected to this nightmare life much more than the reality life I was trying to wake up to. It was as if this muscled cage was my freedom and waking in my apartment was the real prison. And it was with these confusing thoughts that made my decision to eliminate the space between my palm and his cheek.

The decision to trust not only myself but the Devil himself.

Something that turned out to be,

The wrong decision.

I knew this shortly after he closed his eyes as if first trying to absorb my touch like I was trying to brand myself to his soul. But then I made my second mistake as the moment I touched him I saw myself in another past doing the same thing. I saw myself standing there by this pool of water, embracing him like a lover would. I saw myself raise my hand to his cheek and whisper his name, one I let slip past my lips now...

“Iblis.” This was when something in him must have switched because his lids snapped open and his eyes flashed the amber pits of Hell before he suddenly released me. I fell to the ground with my hand being the last part of me to leave his body. I even felt my nails graze his cheek as my fingers curled in a hopeless attempt to prevent myself from falling and trying to cling on for just a second longer. An action that caused him to jerk his head to the side and close his eyes as if he was caught somewhere in between tortured and furious.

I didn't understand why...was it the safety he had provided me in his arms? Safety from the monsters that were closing in around us and one he himself had brought here? *Or was it something more?*

Well, as soon as my legs crumbled underneath me as I hit the unforgiving ground, I didn't have long to question why. Because the second I looked back up at him in question, now doing so on my knees he crossed his arms and looked down at me with utter indifference. I couldn't help it when a shudder rippled up my spine for it now looked as if I was sitting at the feet of a God and his wrath or forgiveness were the only two things away from living a mortal life or being granted an immortal death.

I watched as my fate flickered behind his eyes and my chest ached from where I held my breath as to what his verdict would be. But then it became clear as to which decision he had made when he first looked over his shoulder back at his army of beasts that were coming closer before granting me his eyes.

“Time to run, my little human,” he said in that deep and all-consuming voice of his, making my eyes widen as I asked him silently if he were serious. Then he moved, lowering

himself so as to be closer to my level and holding himself on bent knees. But giving his gargantuan size in comparison to mine, I still had to look up at him. Then with an elbow resting against one bent knee, he reached out and ran the back of his claw down my cheek. And this time when he spoke, he did so in a softer tone despite the single word uttered in warning,

“*Now.*” This was when I heard the monstrous battle cries behind him and knew that his warning rang true.

His army had arrived to take me.

So, without another second of hesitation, I got up and started to run in the opposite direction his army was closing in from. I looked down first at the forest floor seeing the thick fog that clung to the ground and barely even noticing now that I was no longer naked. Now wearing what I had passed out in did make it slightly better. But then a pair of fitted suit trousers and silk blouse wasn't exactly a match for those claws, ones that I knew could shred my flesh to ribbons! Reason enough to push me forward, running as fast as I had ever done before in my life!

I glanced back over my shoulder to see how far behind me they were when I saw the Devil straightening from his knees, never taking his eyes off my retreating form. However, I couldn't take my eyes from the army of beasts that were now parting around their master as they continued on past him to get to me.

Meaning I powered through the screaming of my muscles and ran as fast as I could, because it was clear... *I was running as if my life depended on it.* So, I ran and ran until I could start to feel the first wave of them reaching out, being now only an elongated arm's length away. I knew this as I felt the vibrations in the air shift as they swiped out dangerously close. One even managed to tag the back of my shirt and I screamed as I felt the tip of his clawed hand curl back a layer of my skin.

“AHHH!” I screamed in pain and knew that this was it...

I was dead.

I just wasn't fast enough to outrun them. Sweat soaked my clothes and clung to my skin, now merging with the blood I could feel trickling down my back, pooling at the base of my spine where my shirt was tucked into my trousers. And I couldn't help but tense as I heard the howl of rage right behind me and I turned to look over my shoulder, expecting the last thing my eyes to see was as the beast lunged for me.

However, this didn't happen.

No, instead his howl of rage was cried out into the night because he was burning alive! I didn't know how or why but I looked down at his hooved feet to see them now charred and pieces of flesh now turned to ash were peeling away. Then pieces of him started to burst as if someone had magically lit a fire inside of him and the flames were finding organs flammable enough to feed from.

Unfortunately, this shock caused me to lose my focus and I tripped over a fallen branch as thick as one of the younger trees I had been running past. I landed hard on my thigh before twisting quickly so as I could see how close the rest of the beasts were, screaming in fright the second I saw the burning beast reaching out to me in one last desperate attempt at catching me.

But then the second his clawed hand grabbed my ankle it too burst into an explosion of ash, vaporising into the air and leaving behind a blackened handprint burnt into the material. The sight of him exploding created a cloud of ash that soon floated away and gave way to the sight of the next wave of monsters about to reach me.

I screamed once more, scrambling backwards like some panicked crab and I didn't know why, but I looked directly to the only one who could both save me and destroy me. This was when I saw him, as he was hard to miss, even in the horde of demons that surrounded him in this one-sided battle.

He motioned a hand up and clicked his fingers creating an almighty boom to crack through the air like thunder. I had barely a second of time to wonder what command he had issued this time when a great demonic steed galloped towards

him. It split the thick fog, making each side fold back like waves crashing against the jagged rocks, creating a dramatic entrance and one perfect for such a fearsome creature.

It had barely stopped beside him before he was swinging his massive frame up onto the back of a colossal black horse that was at least double that of earth's biggest shires. It pawed at the ground restlessly, with oversized hooves that looked deadly enough to crush the horned army to dust. It had a demonic beauty and regal stance like its master. And also like its master, it had an overabundance of muscle covered in a strange black armour coated in what looked like thick oil. But this wasn't where the similarities ended as his steed also had a pair of mighty horns that curled around its ears and back towards its rider. Two heavy golden rings were clamped through each horn at its thickest point after the curl and attached to this was a thick chain of iron and leather that was used to control the beast, something the Devil did onehanded.

As for its face, it was as majestic looking as it was frightening, with what looked like steam coming from its nostrils and burning red fire in its thin oval eyes, a pair that stretched back towards its ears. Even its short black fur had been branded by what looked like glowing embers for a strange mix of symbols and ancient text glowed like lava against the midnight hair on its legs and underbelly. But it was a simple and single symbol that blazed with fire in its flesh at the centre of its head between its eyes and muzzle.

I don't know how I managed to take in all these small factors from as far away as I was, but I seemed to do more so from memory than sight.

One thing was for sure and that was it was a magnificent beast and one best suited to the terrifying magnificence that sat upon its back, now charging towards me. My eyes widened in horror as I watched him lower his body to his steed as he pushed it hard, kicking in his heels and ordering his horse to silently join the pursuit.

But why? Why chase me when he himself was the one who let me go and ordered me to run? Was it some kind of

test? If so, then I was not foolish enough to try and figure out how to pass it, when all I needed to do was try and survive it!

So, with this in mind, I scrambled back to my feet just as the next wave of beasts were closing in, and I was back to running for my life! And now, with each new step I took, the forest around me literally started to crumble. Trees suddenly started shaking before shifting the very earth beneath them then uprooting and falling down like wounded soldiers. I screamed as one after another they fell like dominos, giving me a new fear to run from. And run I did. I ran for all the things I was yet to achieve in my life. I ran for the lover I hadn't yet found. I ran for the years of breath I still wanted to take.

I ran for my life, *one not yet lived.*

I knew this. I knew how I was in the mortal realm, that I was living only a half-life, a shell of a life each morning I wasted. I knew of the potential that I was throwing away each day like a back handed gift slapped from the hand of God with each mistake I made. And now running from the Devil and his army, well... *he knew it too.* As running now was obviously my test. Was I going to just stop and let him have me, to take my soul and destroy it for his pleasure? To watch me as his beasts ripped me to pieces or was I going to run towards what was mine to claim?

"AHHH!" I screamed the second another hand grabbed me, only like the last, it burst into a cloud of ash the moment it touched me, as if something had declared doing so as a forbidden law not to break. Then I looked behind me and saw the Devil had just cast out an arm making the closest wave of monsters all slam sideways into one another like some giant invisible arm had just swept them all to the side away from reaching me.

I couldn't help but grant him a fleeting look of confusion before turning back to face the way I was running, seeing now a massive clearing ahead. The trees continued to fall but soon there were no more to drop because right in front of me there was nowhere else to go.

Not unless you had wings.

I ended up skidding to a stop just before I could go running off the edge of the endless cliff face that fanned out ahead of me, turning my odds at survival to sheer impossible! It looked like an almighty meteor, the size of a town, had crash landed and ripped its way through the barren looking earth, for all that faced me now was the jagged edges of a rust coloured wasteland scattered with pale stone.

But I looked down and realised that it wasn't stone I was looking at mottling the red earth, but something far worse.

For there was no life here as all life had suddenly become extinct.

As this wasn't a cliff face just showcasing off a desert of sun-baked earth but instead something much more sinister.

It was death.

It was *a canyon of bones*.

I cried out in shock the second my foot kicked over what I had first thought was a long, odd shaped rock, seeing now the sun-bleached femur, long since the required use of life. I stumbled back as the horror of realisation struck me. This wasn't any garden paradise that my dreams had always shown me. No, instead it had been a pretty, green prison surrounded by nothing but death. Surrounded by the proof of what happened to those who ever tried to escape.

Tried to escape the Devil.

And speaking of the Devil...I turned back to face my fate as it raced towards me and like before the next wave of monsters made it within reaching distance of me before, like those before them, they suddenly burst into flames consumed from within. It was as though each of them had swallowed a small sun that couldn't be contained for long, exploding from their chests with beams of light breaking free, first from the weakest points of flesh. It was so bright that I found myself closing my eyes and shielding myself with an arm thrown over my face. Then, by the time I blinked away my brief blindness,

a mighty shadowed figure could be seen emerging through the wake of destruction.

I knew then that their death had been of his doing, making me question why? Why would he set his army on me only to destroy those that made it close enough to hurt me?

Was this a game to him or as I thought earlier...

A test?

I didn't have long to question this but instead tore my eyes from his approach and looked back at my last and final option. For it was either die by the hands of the Devil who hated me or take my death into my own hands, hoping my final resting place wouldn't be the Hell that surrounded my Heaven.

So, I took a deep breath and at the same time granting the King of Hell on horseback a parting goodbye, seeing his eyes burning into mine the second he realised I had made my decision. He abruptly yanked hard on the chain that acted as reins on his demonic steed, making him skid his hooves in the cracked earth, creating a cloud of red sand to billow around his commanding presence. One that was now in front of the rest of his army, making me wonder what his next play would be?

I wasn't left wondering for long as he lifted a massive hand up towards the stormy sky, doing so with his palm facing upwards. This caused the clouds to darken and crack with lightening just before thunder boomed across the canyon, echoing as it rippled through the torn earth. Then, before I had time to question his actions any further, the lightening overhead struck the line of fallen trees, now creating a wall of fire to blaze behind him and creating an effective barrier between us and his army.

It was then that I realised it was as I thought,

This had all been a test.

Now it was just time to find out if it was one I could ever hope to pass. An answer, I realised, I would only discover with my last breath taken. I knew that the second I looked back down the mighty depths of my fate. Because it was my life in

his hands or a death in my own. And one look back at him and he knew, as he held out a hand towards me, giving me my choice.

So, I walked closer towards him, counting my steps and shaking with each one taken. Then just as his grin started to form, I whispered something to him, speaking in a foreign language even I didn't understand, even though it was one that had come from my own lips. I saw his eyes seep back into that of a man in a tender way that I wasn't yet allowed to understand before I turned and ran back towards the edge. I did this seeing the world around me blur as if time was slowing down for everything but me. Then the world was truly lost to me as I pushed my foot off the edge after my feet had nowhere else to go. Then I closed my eyes as I awaited my death, keeping with me the sight of the Devil as he roared in anger.

That was when I knew deep down in my bones, ones that hadn't yet joined the others below...

That I had failed.

But the dream didn't end there.

Because suddenly I was back on that cliff face but this time as a ghost of myself. Now I was watching the Devil from the shadows as he tore his face from the sight of my death with his features twisted in pain. Then he lifted his hand again and whispered in an aching sort of way,

"Time to fly away again, my Igibala." Then he twisted his cupped fingers before they spanned out as if he was mimicking the feathers on a bird's wing and just like that...

I turned into a glowing white owl and flew away...

Finally, free of my nightmare.

Lilly

3

The Bloody Word Whispered

'Time to fly away again, my Igibala.'

“Ah!” I woke with start the second I heard a bang next to my head, with those pained words of his still echoing through my mind. I looked up from my desk where I had obviously passed out to see Stewart, another office ‘dogbody’ only one without an owner like me. In fact, I didn’t know which was worse, being the office lacky everyone could use or one belonging to the biggest son of a bitch on the sixth floor!

Well yes, after doing this job for four years and getting nowhere, then I knew which was worse. At least Stewart had most people’s respect here, whereas I was more like a slave than assistant to the paper’s highest paid journalist and in short...he was a bigoted, sexist pig! He also thought that woman were only good for one thing and he didn’t even try to hide it. But then again, when your friend was chief editor then being an asshole wasn’t something he would ever get fired for.

So, I put up with it for one reason and one reason only... it would look damn good on my resume. I could see it now, Lilly Knight, reporter at the Chicago Tribune and only the 3rd biggest newspaper in the USA, with just shy of 440k readers a day! Then yeah, I would say that would get me a damn good job at any paper in the country I wanted to work for. Which was why I was still holding out for a promotion, writing stories on the side and hoping one day for my boss to follow

through with his word and pass one on up the chain of command, like he kept telling me he would.

But once again, he was an asshole, so the likelihood of this happening was the same as one day falling asleep and finding myself in Disneyworld instead of the Devil's playground. So, in other words, pigs wouldn't just fly, no, they would be up there like little demons, with flaming wings and an automatic weapon ready to shoot gullible little hopefuls like me, putting me out of my daily misery!

Even so, I still held on to the hope that it may happen. Which was reason enough why I would more often than not, find myself still sat at my desk in the Tribune Tower, one situated on the Magnificent Mile, long after sunset. And to be honest, it wasn't exactly the worst place a person could work in. Not seeing as it was one of Chicago's most spectacular buildings the city had to offer.

The tower was the home of the Chicago Tribune, Tribune Media, and Tribune Publishing, with the ground level housing the large restaurant Howells & Hood (named after the building's architects). One whose patio overlooked nearby Pioneer Court and Michigan Avenue.

Not that I could afford to ever eat there but still, it was nice to pretend as if I belonged there every time I stepped foot inside the building.

I remember when I had my interview, something that only happened through my caseworker knowing someone who owed her a favour. I had bumped into her after my tenth failed attempt at getting a better job and one that didn't include flipping pancakes or serving them for a living. She had found me slumped in defeat on some park bench after yet another failed interview, dressed in cheap slacks and a second-hand shirt.

She had been good to me when I had still been in the system, trying repeatedly to get me adopted without much success. Which often made me wonder if the reason she had made a call to a friend of hers and got me an impossible interview, was down to a sense of obligation and a chance at

eradicating the guilt she really shouldn't have felt...*after all, it wasn't her fault that no one had wanted me.*

Well, whatever the reason, it had worked and landed me the beginnings of my dream job. Which was also why with part of my first paycheck I found out her address and sent her the biggest bunch of flowers I could afford, costing me a small fortune and meant eating canned food for the next two weeks.

But even after four years of working here, I still look up at the imposing building in awe every time before I step inside, secretly feeling like a fraud until I leave again. And this isn't surprising considering the gothic beauty of the place.

In fact, if I was ever feeling self-torturous enough to think of the Devil outside of my dreams then I always pictured him owning a place like this. Sat at the very top of his modern-day castle with all 38 levels full of his minions beneath him. Especially with the ornate buttresses surrounding the peak of the tower that made the whole building look as though it was topped with a mighty crown. One that was eternally visible being that the tower was always lit at night casting an eerie glow, like it was the torch of the city, trying to catch the attention of God himself.

But being listed as a Chicago Landmark, then its grandeur wasn't exactly surprising. However, the original Tribune Tower that had been built in 1868 was destroyed in the Great Chicago Fire in 1871. The fire killed approximately 300 people and destroyed roughly 3.3 square miles of the city, leaving more than 100,000 residents homeless. A fire that spread fast thanks to a particular long period of hot, dry, windy conditions, and essentially turning the centre of Chicago into Hell on Earth.

However, the Tribune would not be stopped and eventually rose from the ashes upon its completion in 1925. It started with the paper hosting an international interior and exterior design competition for its new headquarters. Something to mark its 75th anniversary. The owners offered \$100,000 in prize money for designing, and I quote, 'the most beautiful and distinctive office building in the world'. Of course, the competition worked brilliantly for months as a

publicity stunt, and the resulting entries still reveal a unique turning point in American architectural history with more than 260 entries being received.

But then the 1920s were long gone. As this was 2016, where now there were whispers of the building being converted into condominiums for the city's elite to buy for what was no doubt going to be a small fortune.

Oh, but the paper would live on. No doubt moving us poor shmucks to some modern building with state-of-the-art electronics, and probably one made of shiny chrome and frosted glass. And if I were honest, I was dreading the day, as I would miss working in this little slice of history. The place where the walls still echoed with the sound of old typewriters tapping out front page news and city editors screaming 'Copy!' from behind real mahogany desks and winged backed leather chairs.

It truly would be the end of an era and one I had learned all about due to (according to my boss) some 'bullshit piece' he had to write about the building's history. Of course, his 'bullshit piece' had ended up *my 'bullshit piece'* and one I considered a touching story of nostalgia and a treasured bygone era. One the bastard actually received a god damn award for, I might add with a bitterness that two years later still hadn't gone away!

"Sorry Lil, didn't mean to wake you," Stewart said with a wince before nodding down at the manila folder now sitting on top of a stack of papers I was yet to file. It was the noise that had woken me up and if I hadn't been dead tired (no pun intended) I would have jumped up and kissed him. But instead of shocking a gay man into possibly becoming even more gay, I looked back up at him and rubbed the sleep out of my eyes knowing that coffee was a definite must.

"That's okay Stew, I needed waking," I said which, after that dream, was the understatement of the damn year!

"Erm..." Stewart mumbled this after first coughing and nodding back at my face, telling me something was wrong. The second I felt the sting in my eyes I knew what it was, and

this was confirmed when I looked down at my hand and saw it smudged with a streak of black. Great, just great! I released a deep sigh before letting my head fall back to the desk and wishing I had the power of invisibility.

“Okay, well, I will just leave you to it...later, Lil,” he said trying to contain his chuckle as I just raised a hand and waved without lifting my head. To be honest, I didn’t know why I bothered as it wasn’t as though Stewart would give two hoots what I looked like, for I could have come into the office with week old panties on my head with angry faces drawn over arguing naked breasts and he wouldn’t have cared.

Now, if it had been Hunter from accounting, then he would have noticed even if the guy had switched his hair products, as his crush on the guy was borderline obsession. Meaning two things, one, Stewart was obviously not impressed by a woman’s extended lash length and two, he had more female friends in this office than I did. Which wasn’t exactly hard, as the guy who delivered fresh muffins and Danish pastries was more popular than I was. No, most of the time I just received pitying glances whenever I walked past thanks to who I had no choice but to work for.

I yawned and stretched out, pausing mid-stretch the second I felt pain, and this was when the dream hurtled its way from my memory bank to my very conscious and awake mind. This was also when his handsome face assaulted my thoughts before the most important part of the dream should have taken precedence, *which of course, was the pain*. Something that made me grab my bag and rush my way to the toilets.

Thankfully, the working day had long ago ended, well, at least for those who hadn’t foolishly fallen asleep at their desk after yet another failed espresso consumed.

I pushed open the doors and did a quick assessment of the grey and white sterile space seeing that I was, as I knew I would be...*alone*. After this I yanked my blouse out of my trousers and lifted it up, twisting at the same time trying to see in the mirror the horror I knew I would find...

The evidence of my nightmare left like a silent promise on my skin.

And there it was, this time in the form of a long claw mark and for the first time ever, not one that had been self-inflicted. Although strangely it wasn't bleeding and looked more like a few days old than the fresh wound it should have been.

I reached down and checked my ankles as I remembered where the demons had reached out and grabbed me before they had self-combusted. And like my back, there was the proof marred against my skin in the form of a burnt angry red handprint circled around both ankles.

Which now meant one horrifying truth...

The Devil and his minions could hurt me.

But then I had to wonder why there was no rip in my blouse or even blood on my shirt. There weren't even scorch marks on my trousers. None of it made sense! And even as my neck continued to snap back and forth between my back and my ankles, I started to feel myself losing a deeper sense of reality.

In fact, I felt like I was losing my damn mind!

I hated this feeling. No, hate wasn't a strong enough word, for I utterly *loathed* it! The feeling of self-doubt and a deep level of insecurity making me question if what I saw now was really there? Christ, but I was even tempted to find Stewart, drag him in here and ask him if he wouldn't mind confirming my injuries as being real or not. But then the major flaw in this plan prevented me from even taking a step towards the door. Because the biggest problems I faced were simply the same. Because how would I explain if he saw the injuries or my behaviour when he didn't...both of which would make me seem like a crazy person.

Which meant that once again I felt completely and utterly alone. In fact, right now I felt the crushing weight of it as though it was trying to drown me in my own self-pity, if such a thing were possible. Because really, who was there in my life

to turn to? Who was there that I could trust enough to even confide in, without them trying to convince me to admit myself into the nearest nuthouse?

No, the sad truth was that I had not a single person in my life who could help soothe even a fraction of my soul with comfort, as I myself had prevented anyone from getting close enough to care. And the very reason for this was currently staring me in the mirror in the face of *the very real hold the Devil had on me*. Which wasn't what I would exactly call a bonus to being my friend, not unless they wanted a discount with a Devil worshipping voodoo priest, I thought with sarcasm.

But loneliness was the least of my problems, along with smudged makeup and messy hair, even if the last two I could do something about. So, after wetting my fingers and trying my best to rid myself of the raccoon look, I tucked my shirt back in my waistband and left the bathroom, before I lost it completely. Something I vowed not to ever do until I was in the safety of my own apartment. Because out here, in the real world, my secret was as vulnerable as my sanity was.

Which was why I refused to allow myself to think about what just happened in my nightmare and worse still... *what could potentially happen in the next!*

So, I left the office bathroom in a frustrated haze, watching as Stewart rubbed his eyes as sleep was trying to claim it's next victim. The two of us usually being the only two shmucks left working overtime and I momentarily wondered who had him doing their research this time?

Stewart had always been nice to me and as pathetic as it sounded was the only friend I had at work. But then we both had something in common, we were both trying to work our way up in the paper to something more than 'copy boy' and 'coffee girl'. Although the second I noticed the folder on my desk and opened it, I saw it obviously had been meant for someone else. Meaning that I was probably in the running for that promotion long before he would be. For as much as I loved Stewart, he was what you would call...*slightly hopeless at his job*.

In fact, knowing just how important it looked I was about to take it back to him when I noticed something that had me sucking in a startled breath.

Was I reading this right?

I suddenly was up and out of my chair, scratching it on the cheap grey carpet that ran throughout the whole office, knowing that if it hadn't been after work hours then I would have received a few questioning glances. But it was dark outside, past eight o'clock, and the only ones working late yet again were me, Stewart and the cleaning crew. Something I was more than a little glad for as I was in the middle of my inner freak out. So, when I snatched up the folder and quickly stuffed it into my large shoulder bag, no one saw me, or the panic written freely on my face. Or the fact that I left all my work still scattered on my desk (something that was unlike me) and soon rushed past a now sleeping Stewart, heading for the bank of elevators.

Once inside I reached out pressing the button for the ground floor, seeing for the first time the way my hand shook. I just didn't understand how it could have been possible?

How could the two be connected?

Not long after this I found myself sat on a late bus heading towards the outskirts of town. A place that was cheaper in rent and the reasons why soon started to make themselves known in the form of graffitied walls, burnt out cars missing their wheels and overflowing shopping carts being pushed by the less fortunate. And all the while I sat clutching my bag to my chest as if any minute a morally impaired person would spring out of nowhere and snatch it from me.

Welcome to the dregs of Chicago, I thought knowing that by living here I was also one of them.

Well, as I watched the amber lull of street lighting flashing past, I knew that to steal from me would have been a joke on them. As all they would have found was an old phone with a crack in the screen, an empty purse that held nothing more than a few coupons, one for 25 cents off Gatorade, one

cup stamp short of a free coffee and a free appetiser at Applebees. One that I was pretty sure had expired over a year ago seeing as I had nabbed it from a magazine at the dentist for my yearly check-up. Not that I could afford to eat there, as the most I could stretch for was a weekly coffee and the occasional sprinkled doughnut.

This wasn't because I got paid an awful wage or anything. It was because I had a life plan. It meant I saved every cent I earned so as I could one day move out of the shithole apartment I lived in, one I not long after found myself entering after a depressing bus ride.

But, like most people, living this way hadn't exactly been my plan in life. No, once I had turned eighteen, left the system and found the freedom to make my own choices I found them unsurprisingly leading me to poverty. Oh, I would have liked to have said I started living the American dream. But as it turns out trying to find that dream with no family support, no boyfriend helping with the bills and not even a close enough friend to call roomie, well it wasn't easy. And let's just say that a job at McDonalds wasn't ever going to cut it!

So, I did what most people did. I worked my ass off and tried to build a life. Which was why I knew how precious holding on to this job was, despite spending half my time daydreaming of stapling pictures of pigs' testicles to my boss's head. But it also meant that I knew how risky it was to do what I was doing now, which was pulling the folder out of my bag and laying it down on my wonky second-hand coffee table. One that was free because I was ashamed to say was dragged out of a dumpster at the back of a thrift store due to the swastikas carved into the corners.

But after four glued coasters to the corners and eureka, fascism problem solved. Well, it had been that or trying to convince people it was actually a symbol of divinity and spirituality in Indian religions, which it was. Then again, it wasn't as though I had many guests as I don't think other than the odd pizza delivery guy getting the wrong number, no one had even come close to invading my personal space. However,

just in case, the flower coasters from a dollar store had been a better personal choice.

In fact, looking around my tiny apartment now I didn't think a single thing in it had been bought brand new at a store. But there would be time for that, I convinced myself on a daily basis, as surely my douche bag boss wouldn't be in charge of me forever. See, I wasn't dumb, in fact, my teachers at school had been ready to class me as a child genius...*well, that was if they'd have found a relation close enough to tell this to.*

But I was one of the unfortunates. And not many people wanted to adopt the 'weird kid'. The one so shy she barely spoke and instead of making eye contact preferred to hide from the disappointing world with her head in a book. Well, at some point those words weren't just something to hide behind, but instead started to make sense and before I knew it I was alone in a room and was reaching the last page.

This was how I had become smart. I spent my life silently living through someone else's words. Which was how my secret goal in life was finally being the one whose words were read by others. I wanted to write about other people. I wanted to write real life. I wanted to use my silent gift of observation and help become a voice for the people who needed it. Because no matter what I was reading at the time, one thing remained constant...

Sometimes there were the stories out there that just had to be told.

And this was only one of the reasons why I had stolen this folder. As this was one of those times and I was the one going to do it. Because if there was one thing I'd learned in the years I had been working at the paper, it was that the people who got promoted to reporter were the people that weren't afraid to take the bull by the horns. To storm into the Chief Editor's office, slap down a fantastic story on his desk, and demand a better job.

Because in this game it was all about that one great story. The one that sold more papers than the rest. And looking down

at the folder on my sad, defiled little coffee table now and I knew, that's exactly what I had.

My golden egg and my ticket out of this shell of a life.

But these thoughts instantly took me back to my dream and I shivered at the thought. Because the other reason I had taken the folder was one less morally wrong and one far more ominous. It was also one written in blood and connected to me in a way that seemed utterly impossible.

You would have thought the lack of a body would have made this image easier to digest. But the unmistakable scorch marks on the floor in the very distinct shape of a body left little to imagine the fate of the poor soul. The rooftop scene also showcased the Las Vegas strip in the distance, telling me the crime had most likely taken place inside the casino. The only two things left in the image that seemed to provide any evidence was the butt of a cigarette sat next to a folded yellow evidence marker and a bloody word positioned in an impossible place.

It looked to have been written there, like some sinister kid's finger painting in the shape of a halo above where the head should have been.

But more disturbing still...

It was a word I had heard before.

A word that had been whispered in anger.

A Devil's word and one *reserved just for me...*

"Igibala."

Brent

4

A Devil's Blackjack Heart

Three years...

Fuck, but where had it all gone...to Hell that's where, I thought gritting my teeth as the golden doors of the elevator closed in front of me. I looked at my reflection, one I hardly recognised anymore, but one people were drawn to all the same.

Was it the tailored cut of my expensive suit or the tall, muscular frame which filled it that gave people the urge to look my way? The way their eyes drank me in and decided to stay a while longer than common decorum dictated they should. Or could it have been the handsome face that once upon a time showed signs of age and the extra weight too many donuts could pile on. But even as I questioned this, in the same instance my image betrayed me, now winking back as a form of an answer. That's when I knew what it was about me...

It was the Devil in me.

"*Showtime,*" he said the second the doors opened, and I pulled my shirt cuffs down from under the sleeve of our ten-thousand-dollar jacket as I stepped out into the Las Vegas casino. The black onyx skull cufflinks caught the light in an unearthly way as was *his* intention, for the moment a passing waitress caught sight she winked at me before taking a glass of whiskey from her own tray and shooting it back in one. A move that I knew was out of character and would no doubt get

her fired, but hey, it made the Devil chuckle, so that's all that counted I thought with disdain. So, fighting against him, I tugged down the jacket sleeves covering the silver 'sin' etched into the forehead of each skull, trying to hide the lure to do wrong.

Once again, *the bastard chuckled.*

I then made my way in between the blackjack tables, as usual wanting to get this shit over with. However, the other half of me, the part I had no control over, watched, openly smirking as each person was now dealt six after six after six, meaning some people lost and some people won. I knew exactly who the ones were that had won, and my guess was that they all lived in Sin City.

"Call it a reward for bad service rendered," he said as we passed, using my lips to do so but not my mind, as that was one battle I had lost long ago and *not to the Devil.* But that was what happened when a broken man signed over his cursed and damaged soul...and boy hadn't I just been ripe for the fucking taking!

And speaking about taking...that was precisely why I was here.

This was my job.

The Devil's Hunter.

So, I looked around for what I knew he was interested in, to see a young woman sat at a table alone, twisting the olive in her martini as though she was bored with life.

"Be careful what you wish for, darlin," I whispered to myself making him grin. Yes, yes, funny fucker aren't I, I thought with a grimace as I sat down next to her. She was petite in stature and wore a classy black, designer dress that left little to the imagination. She also had expensive accessories dripping off her as if she had something to prove in life and decorating herself like a fucking Tiffany's display case equaled happiness.

A small sign on the table indicated that there was a five-hundred-dollar minimum bet to play at the table, which

explained why, in a place like this, there was a beautiful woman sat alone.

Her dark hair looked like gloss under the bright lights Vegas casinos forced you to endure as a way to keep gamblers awake for longer. After all, you couldn't bet in your sleep, but you can bet your ass they will be all over that one when they figured it out.

But her tanned skin told me that gambling wasn't all she did these days and she turned in her seat, giving me an approving scan of the body, flashing a set of white teeth between a pair of bright red lips. Oh yeah, you have this one in the bag, buddy boy, I thought resisting the urge to roll my eyes.

I also couldn't help but notice that she had the lightest blue eyes I had ever seen, wondering just how many men she had flashed them at in order to get what she wanted? She reminded me of some living doll and it was one the King of Demons inside of me wanted to see broken.

Well, let's get this shit over with I thought as I pulled a \$100,000 chip from my jacket and slid it over towards the dealer, making sure the girl got a good glimpse of it. Then I nodded down to it and asked for the dealer to cut it. The dealer automatically looked up to the hidden cameras a place like this was riddled with and as someone spoke in her ear from the control room, she gave them a slight nod. The dealer asked me what I wanted back and instead of telling them I didn't fucking care either way, I replied,

"Ten," telling her I was most likely going to make ten high bets, their favorite kind. Lose a lot and lose it fast, what a great motto to have, I thought dryly. But what did I care, as it wasn't my money and considering the way I had burnt my way through millions these last few years at the Devil's expense, then it looked as though the church wasn't the only ones cashing in on religion. But then again, it wasn't exactly surprising to find out just how many corrupt and wealthy businessmen who were willing to sell their soul to the Devil for just a slice of billion dollar pie there were. And where exactly did that money go when their luck ran out and it was

time to collect, well I think looking down at the five figure chips in front of me it was obvious.

But I wasn't a fucking debt collector for the Devil...no, I was something far worse...

I was their fate worse than death.

I got back to the reason I was here and nodded to the lady's drink. She silently accepted what I was asking, and I motioned for the cocktail waitress, who was already on her way...but of course she was, I thought with a knowing grin.

"I'll have a scotch on the rocks, and it looks like the lady's running dry too..." I looked her way for her to give the waitress her order, annoyed when she didn't say please. However, playing this game that I was, I didn't scowl at her like I wanted to. No, instead I turned back to the waitress, gave her a smile in thanks, one I could sense made her heart flutter as was one of my 'Gifts'...or should I say, one of *his*.

I looked back to my new table partner and gave her the same smile I had 'gifted' the waitress, knowing the strength of its power. This prompted her to turn in her seat to face me, now becoming very friendly if her body language could be read correctly. Oh, who was I kidding, she was practically one basic instinct move away from keeping her thighs open for me. I knew this as she continued to make a show of re-crossing her legs and in doing so, flashing me more than a show of panties, the girl was showing me the damn welcome mat!

"And your bet, Sir?" the dealer, who was a pretty black lady with big brown eyes that smiled as she spoke, asked. I pushed a ten her way and said,

"I am feeling lucky." She grinned back and said,

"Happy to hear that, Sir, good days all round then," she said, referring to the girl next to me who looked to be on a winning streak. Well, all good things must come to an end, I thought darkly, knowing what was stashed away in my room.

"Red Sox are 7-2, bottom of the sixth, so I'm taking it as a good omen for me," I said noticing the woman next to me taking a keen interest in my conversation with the dealer. Once

bets were placed and cards were dealt, the drinks arrived. I gave the waitress my thanks and felt a hand on mine as if to get my gaze away from the other woman, one I would have much preferred speaking to considering my job in all this. But the woman next to me spoke with what I guess she assumed was an alluring tone,

“You’re a Red Sox fan?” she asked, and I took a sip of my scotch before looking at my cards, purposely taking my time before answering her. Then, once I stuck to my cards, knowing I had already beaten the dealer as I usually did, I gave the girl my attention.

Or should I say, *he did*.

‘*Time to get this done, puppet,*’ I heard being growled at me inside my mind and I tasted blood as I bit down on the inside of my cheek the second I felt him appear, tensing at the table and feeling my glass crack slightly under the pressure of my grip. However, my other hand calmly reached across the small space between us and against my will ran the back of two fingers up her thigh, gaining a heated look from the girl and a questioning one from the dealer.

“Yes, I’m from Boston. Born and raised,” I replied in a smooth tone that wasn’t my own and with a Boston twang coming out a little bit thicker with each word.

“Me too, my name’s Bianca,” she said as she extended her hand as if it was an offering for so much more. Her skin was soft, and her nails perfectly manicured as if they had never seen a hard day’s work in her life.

“Small world, Bianca. I’m Martin, it’s nice to meet you, but I do hope you tell me that you’re a Red Sox fan, otherwise this conversation is over,” I said with a knowing grin and a wink. Bianca let out a flirtatious laugh that a keen ear would know was as fake as the names we exchanged.

“Yes, of course, I grew up on the game seeing as my father loved the Red Sox. But then he got stuck with two girls and no sons... that didn’t stop him though as he was always a determined man.” The way this was said was as though it had been practiced in front of a damn mirror, that or she was

starting to believe in her own lies. However, I nodded my head, playing along and asking myself how much longer until I could get this fucking over with!

“Is that right, well the heart wants what the heart desires.” The second I heard the words coming out of my mouth I knew they weren’t my own and I wanted to growl every time I felt like the fucking puppet he took great joy in calling me!

For a second she looked as though she took *his* words and made them her own, but I knew their hidden meaning and soon so would she. She giggled somewhat nervously before agreeing,

“That’s true, he used to take me and my sister to the games,” she explained before taking a long sip of her drink, locking her gaze with mine, trying to draw me in with those eyes.

“So, what brings you to Sin City, Martin?” she asked unable to resist glancing over at my stack of chips, a pile that was quickly mounting.

“Business, Bianca,” I answered for myself this time, making sure to practically purr her name whilst I was busy trying to ignore her inquisitive looks.

‘You’re laying it on a little thick, aren’t you?’ I asked the other part of myself, asking him why.

‘Just getting it done, Brent, so relax...and enjoy the view.’ This was his reply, forcing me to look down at what he thought of as that sweet creamy junction he always wanted me to travel to.

‘Well, not today, pal,’ I thought, this time smirking when making him growl.

“What kind of work are you in?” she asked bringing me back to the room, only giving her my reply after I had won another hand.

“Acquisitions,” I replied non-committally and her eyes widened for she was obviously liking what she heard, no doubt the ringing of money bags playing a merry tune in her gold-digging ear. Because she became more playful and flirtatious

telling me it was all an act, for this woman only had one addiction and it certainly wasn't getting laid...*No, it was stealing other people's money.*

“And what do you like to acquire?” she replied finishing the rest of her drink and taking the time to slowly suck the olive into her mouth. I heard the Devil in me groan before laughing when he hummed out the two words...*Dark Souls.*

Then he took the opportunity to tell her exactly what he liked to acquire and I had no choice but to lean in close, motioning with the flick of two fingers for her to do the same. The second she was within distance, we hooked her around the neck, keeping her contained so that *he* could deliver his point, driving it home,

“I acquire many beautiful things, but find very few I wish to keep...then again, it's hard to find a good soul these days... so, tell me Bianca... *are you a good girl?*” Then he released both his hold on her and his hold on me. However, by the time I gave her space only one of us was left smiling and it sure as shit wasn't me.

Oh yeah, he had this in the bag alright!

We continued to gamble, each winning our fair share of hands. Then there was the idle chit chat, and even more drinks to add to the mix that were ordered, delivered, and consumed in the space of thirty minutes. And by this time, she was well and truly hooked, so it was time to reel her in.

‘*Let's get this done,*’ I told him and for once we were in agreement. So, I stood, much to Bianca's surprise. Then I collected my winnings, generously tipping the dealer and only wishing that was where the story ended.

But it never did.

So, with conviction, I turned and whispered in Bianca's ear and walked away directly to the bank of elevators without looking back. I then made my way up to the luxury penthouse I was staying in, that was situated on the top floor. As I

entered, I purposely left the door open behind me for I knew who would shortly follow.

Then I walked to my balcony and the second I did, I could feel him breathe deep as he always did and now an unwanted habit I too had acquired. I stood in front of the large panoramic window looking out into the night to the city that never slept, wondering if I ever would again...

Fucking nightmare.

Time here was an enigma and the second you entered a Las Vegas casino the world you knew stopped. For there were no clocks and no windows, so unless you had a watch you would have no idea what time of day it was. Hell, I was surprised you weren't frisked at the door and had them confiscated before you took a step inside.

I watched the lights of a car drive by and still marveled that I could make out people inside, even from the height I was looking down from. Would I ever get used to it? A bird of prey had nothing on him. But that was only one of many things he 'gifted' me with as he continued to tell me.

And speaking of which, my excellent sight then focused its attention on the windows of the neighboring hotel. They displayed a microbubble of humanity, a couple arguing, a large naked man dancing in his wife's heels as she lay on the bed and watched, a fat man eating pizza and crying at what looked like the movie 'Sleepless in Seattle' on the screen. There was even a woman giving her partner a striptease... or was he a punter and was the woman even...well, a woman? Her Adam's apple suggested not and the level of details I could see seemed utterly boundless and my power forever growing. I felt myself looking down at my hands as they flexed into fists, feeding from the power I felt building, should I just let it? By God, but the feeling was fucking addictive as much as I loathed its strength over me. I remembered back to the day I first discovered the true meaning of power when I was dragging my drunken ass off the midnight bus and found myself in the wrong part of town.

They had emerged from the gutters of society like the true demons of the world, in search of weak prey. But then they had found something more...something much more.

They found the Devil in Me.

'Taking a trip down memory lane, are we Puppet?' he asked making me growl this time and tell him for what felt like the millionth time,

'I have a name, dickhead!' But even after I said it, I knew what was coming, as an image flashed in my mind of my wife mouthing a single word just before she blew her own brains out...*Sorry*. Fucking sorry! Christ, I hated that fucking empty word nearly as much as I hated the bastard who I had sold my dark and damaged soul to! But this was my punishment, to relive the worst moment in my life over and over should I disobey him. After all, it's not like he could hurt me, as he needed my vessel to be here for long periods of time and he needed it intact. It was true that he could just heal me as he had done many times in the past but as it turned out, the Devil wasn't fond of pain and it was one he shared should I decide to take it upon myself to slit my damn wrists and be done with it!

Been there, done that, I thought with a grimace.

'Okay, I get the fucking point!' I told him telling him he'd won as usual, for if I didn't, I knew I would be committing murder for him with my worst nightmare being played in my mind like some macabre re-run.

'But of course, you do...Brent,' he replied purring my name like I was some damn pet of his! Well, at least this time he got the hint.

I looked back to the Vegas sky, a glowing fog looming over the strip as was the price the city paid, that and a starless sky. All the millions of lights polluting the city's skyline and all it had to show for it was a sin this Devil was addicted to. As now I couldn't help my eyes being drawn to the moon, tonight one that was soon to find its rays cast down over the blood that would spill. Blood under the moonlight, I don't know why but the image always stuck with me. Like a black lagoon that looked to have endless depths ready to drag you

under and drown your ass for your sins. That was what blood under the moonlight looked like.

The sign of a demonic death.

I retrieved a pack of cigarettes and lighter from inside my jacket pocket and lit one up, making us both inhale the poison as though it was a sinful life's sweet ambrosia. Smoking was the only time we both felt at peace with each other, like two friends having a beer, comfortable in the silence of the other's company.

Needless to say, I now smoked like a fucking chimney!

By the time we'd finished I rolled my eyes as he flicked it over the railing, feeling sorry for the poor bastard that it fell on. But then, as if unable to help myself, I let my senses reach out further than before, surprising even myself this time at just the speed in which my eyesight would follow. For I watched the cigarette butt as though I was riding its back, with it twisting and flipping over through the air. With sparks of lit tobacco fluttering away like fireflies before it came to land in the swimming pool below, extinguishing the burn before it could scorch innocent skin. The Devil groaned at me, as I grinned.

Bianca finally arrived almost on cue and we turned to watch her with a predatory gaze as she sauntered up to us. I didn't notice her perfume while at the table thanks to the casino's musk of sweat and stale alcohol, but now it was almost intoxicating.

Neither of us liked it.

I could tell that she was slightly drunk, but not overwhelmingly so, which I gathered added to the allure when attracting her next paycheck.

She leaned in and kissed me briefly on the lips.

"Sorry to keep you waiting," she said with a slight giggle and a bite of her bottom lip.

"I was riding a hot streak," she continued as she ran a finger down my arm seductively. It was bullshit of course,

after all, I knew her MO. Shame then, that she didn't yet know mine.

"Bianca," I whispered her name and knew the second I did it drew her even closer.

"Have you ever had sex on the balcony of a hotel under the moonlight?" I asked, to which she let out another one of those breathy giggles.

"Pretty direct aren't you, Martin?" She didn't answer us, and I felt him grit his teeth, making us both give her a pointed look, as the Devil always expected an answer. Thankfully, she got the hint before she found my hand encasing her slender throat and preventing breath.

"No, I have not, but I have a feeling I'm about to," she replied as she slipped her dress off and stepped out of it, revealing a tanned, slender body and a bare shaved sex covered in what appeared to be a pink pair of lace panties. Her nipples were almost as pink, pebbling from the slight chill in the brisk night air. However, her breasts were too large for her frame to be natural but they were perfectly done, as it was obvious they weren't cheap. She reached for me, but I held her wrists at bay.

Things were about to turn serious.

"First, I wish to ask you something?" I said as our eyes locked. She looked a little confused but smiled all the same, unable to refuse me much at this point in the game. Not if she wanted to win that was. Well, unfortunately for her, there would be no winning this night for her streak had come to a swift end.

"Do you think it's wise to gamble with money that does not belong to you...*Leonie*?" I asked taking a firmer grip of the girl's wrists and giving the game away by speaking her given name.

But then an image assaulted me and for once it had nothing to do with our chosen victim...

“Do you think it wise to run from me when I own your soul and gamble it to no man...for you are mine...Lilly.” The second I heard the sound of the Devil’s voice being spoken I knew this time it was different. As for once he wasn’t speaking to me or using me as his puppet, no... instead it was directly into someone else’s mind.

For he had found her.

I felt my hand reach out to the railing behind me to steady myself. Asking now only one question,

Who was this Lilly, and more importantly...

Who was she to the Devil in me?

Brent

5

A Lifetime of Crimson Sin

“Lilly?” I spoke her name aloud and the Devil growled in anger making our current prisoner flinch back, trying in vain to tug her wrist free from my bruising grip.

“You’ve got the wrong girl, I’m not Lilly!” she implored, and the high pitch of her plea grated on both of us, yet this time it was the Devil himself that answered her with a sneer,

“*No. You. Are. Not.*” And the way he said it resonated something within me, as it was the first time I had heard such a heightened emotion coming from him. Of course, this told me something instantly...Whoever this Lilly was, he actually cared for her.

The Devil fucking cared!

Well, wasn’t that like some big fucking cosmic joke! Hell, it was near fucking unbelievable, and you bet your ass, pun intended! In fact, I found it so ironically funny that I couldn’t help but allow a sniggered laugh to escape my lips, making him growl once more at me. But come on, as if I was going pass up an opportunity for payback and in this case, it seemed as if it was a bitch named Lilly.

‘*Careful, Brent... and remember where your wife is currently vacationing.*’ The second I heard the threat I sobered enough to growl back at him with a jaw so tense it felt close to breaking,

“Yes, I know.”

“Then you will let me go?” The sound of pitiful hope and premature relief brought me back to the gruesome task at hand. She had thought I had been speaking to her...ha, if only she knew the horrors that awaited her and the Hell on Earth her sin had now brought her...*to her fucking knees that's where!*

And with this single thought I knew the second light flooded my vision what would happen next.

It always did.

After all...

The sin always followed me.

But it was no matter that it was my third killing for the bastard who ran Hell, for the moment their whole fucked up, evil lives started to play out in my head it felt as though someone had shot out my knees and forced me to the ground, which was exactly what happened the first time...*bullets included.*

I had questioned him straight after, asking him why he forced me to see the despicable things they did and to this very day, his answer still stunned me,

‘To save your soul the burden.’

After he said this I don't think I had it in me to speak to the bastard that hounded me for a whole week after! For starters, I didn't think the Devil had it in him to give a shit about any soul, other than the dark and sinful ones he had me collecting. Shit, but I felt like a damn debt collector for the Grim Reaper! And despite what the Devil thought, my soul was lost long before he decided to come and claim it as his fucking property, making me his demonic puppet errand boy! A vessel on this Earth for him to use as he saw fit, and right now he could see only one thing...

A life of Sin.

It started with a little girl listening to the abuse no child should ever witness, that of a worthless father as he beat her

mother and raped her sister. And there she sat, twisting the heads off her dolls as the roots of hatred twisted tightly around her darkening soul. After that, there was the sight of her helping her own father in the dead of night as he buried them both, after going too far in a drunken rage. But his little Leonie he would never harm, for she was daddy's little helper.

Then there was both of them in the car as he drove her to school, pointing out his next victim for her to lure back to their house in the guise of play. Oh, but he played alright. But more disturbing still was the sight of the evil smile on that little girl as she closed the door behind her, cutting out the screams of a friend who was nothing more than a tool to save herself the same fate.

Even these haunting images should have been enough to have pity on such a horrific upbringing. Especially after seeing a bloody butcher's knife in her hand when in her early teens, sporting a bloodied face from the beating no amount of sacrificial lambs she had walked through her front door to the slaughter could prevent. Brent even felt himself nodding in acceptance as the sight of the bastard bleeding out on the kitchen floor, believing it was one worthy of sin in committing murder. But unfortunately, the montage of her sad and wicked life didn't just end there.

"Now it's your time to scream." These were the last words said to her father before she lit the match after dousing his still living body in lighter fluid. Then she walked away to the sound of her father's screams, smiling that same evil grin as she closed the door behind her. Then she kissed the head of her doll she always carried in her pocket as a safety blanket and left her on the front steps of her hellish home, knowing that she no longer needed her...she had slain the dragon.

And this should have been the end of her murdering days.

But it wasn't. It was far from over. For her father may have been dead, but Leonie's black heart still beat. For her soul was as twisted as the man who raised her and with his death, it only taught her one thing...

How to get away with murder.

After this it was a sinister movie reel of first using her young body to lure perverted dirty old men into a false sense of innocence before the glint of a blade was the last thing they saw before she slit their throats whilst still riding their cocks, robbing them of more than just their money but their lives as well. Shit, there were dozens of them, sometimes she would just disappear or just for kicks she would play the victim, saying the murder happened during the rape by an unknown man who made off into the shadows. For who would ever suspect a fifteen-year-old girl of doing such a thing.

But as time went on, she grew up and perfected her dark craft. She would target richer victims, stalk them, date them and then the second she got what she wanted, death would swiftly follow. Only this time she would replace a blade with one less messy, making me knowingly smirk down at her. Then I tugged her wrist, propelling her towards me so as I could yank the unassuming clip from her hair.

It was one I hadn't noticed until now and had been well hidden for a reason. I snarled down at her weapon of choice, gripping the tail end of the metal scorpion in between my teeth before yanking off the cap that concealed the needle I knew was hidden there.

Her eyes went wide with both panic and astonishment, no doubt asking herself how I could possibly know. There had been so many victims and not just men looking for a sexy woman to fuck, but there had even been women. People that just wanted an innocent relationship or trusting friendship. Fuck me, but there had even been a rich widower or two that she pretended to care for.

Yeah, her soul was black alright, it was a fucking bottomless pit of evil!

But then, weren't they all?

I grimaced and mentally tried to shake off the cold-blooded visions of a murder that clung to my mind like thirty-year-old cobwebs. Soon the look of shock wisely morphed into a look of fear just as a snarling anger built in my own eyes. Hell, but I felt like giving her a taste of her own poison

and stabbing the bitch in the eye with it for the lives she'd destroyed. Because it wasn't just the lives she had taken, it had been the families and friends she had forced to suffer through grief. The sick bitch had even attended some of the funerals and watched as her dark macabre acted out in front of her as though she was the producer of some sick and twisted, reality TV show!

The sight of her wishing loved ones her dearest condolences had me forcing the bile that threatened back down my throat, burning my insides like the Devil's acid. This was when I growled menacingly before crushing the metal death clip in my hands as though it had been an origami figure made of paper. Her eyes grew wider with her own disbelief as I opened my palm and let the metal dust that was once her weapon get swept away in the light breeze that circled us.

Oh yeah bitch, now take my threat more seriously I thought as her eyes widened once more in shock before she tried to back away. But my grip on her tightened and she stupidly lashed out at me with her free hand to no avail.

I decided enough was enough. It was time to show this waste of human life just what she was dealing with. Which was why I only had to open my jacket to reveal the holstered gun I kept there, having now mastered my skill since the first soul I collected. Christ, but I almost shuddered thinking back to that colossal fuck up, the vomit that had retched from my mouth in revulsion at the time nearly assaulting me again.

No, now it was all about the clean kill. As I may not have liked my victims or believed they deserved my mercy but I sure as Hell did, and the memory of a gruesome death by my hands wasn't exactly something I wanted haunting my dreams for the next millennia. Or however long it took this asshole demon to get the hell out of Dodge...*a lonely ass town named Dodge, that was me alright!*

"Put that back on. You're not getting fucked tonight. At least not the way you expected," I tell her casually even as I give her a forceful shove, putting her ass down on the cold marble floor next to her dress.

“Please, Martin, I’m sure we could work something out,” she pleaded before lifting her breasts with shaky hands trying to entice me even through her fear. Like she was offering me a piece of forbidden fruit from God’s garden she’d just stolen it from. But she didn’t know what I knew. She didn’t know all I had just seen.

“Not interested,” I told her through gritted teeth, my lip curling in revulsion. But I don’t know whether it was because the girl was stupid, couldn’t get the hint or just desperate but her hand snaked down the length of her belly before her fingers dipped inside the front of her tiny panties. Then she let out a fake, over exaggerated moan as if she thought me stupid enough to believe that any person alive was capable of getting their rocks off at a time like this.

Dumb Bitch. The Devil chuckled.

I rolled my eyes as she really started to make a show of it by lifting a *dry finger* to her lips and pretending to suck it in, moaning as if it was fucking ambrosia she was tasting. This was where I hit the limit of my patience. I crouched lower and saw her eyes gleam for a second as though she had just won her life back. So, I quickly crushed those deluded thoughts before they could fully bloom, by telling her,

“Sorry Darlin’, but I already made a deal with the Devil,” I told her in a cold, hard tone I had come to recognize as my own. It was one without emotion and void of feeling anything but disdain. I then watched as disbelief washed over her, no doubt utterly shocked and outraged that anyone could ever deny her. I knew this the second those eyes sparked with hatred before she snatched up her dress.

But her bravery only lasted so long, as when she glared back up at me as I rose back to standing, her eyes homed in on the gun I had holstered under my jacket. This time she started to fumble with the straps of the slip of a dress, trying in vain to get her hands to stop shaking in fear.

Finally, she got the near pointless item over her head and covered a body I wouldn’t have touched with anything but a cattle prod, knowing it was nothing more than a weapon

against mankind. A tool in which she used to lure the unsuspecting souls to their deaths, like a siren of the sea, enchanting sailors from fairy tales to an early and watery grave, with the empty promise of so much more.

Oh yeah, this one would do well in Hell, I thought with a shake of my head.

Fuck, if anything it felt as though I was simply about to deliver her home, as she was as much demon as the asshole that controlled my body was.

“I wouldn’t go that far, Hawkins.” The Devil said on a snigger, back to referring to me by my last name as he usually did. I would have commented but it was time to get this shit done, so I motioned for her to stand. She did so like a newborn doe on shaky legs, needing the railings to steady her. I almost snarled down at the length of her as she leant back against the rails, with that feigned look of innocence she was giving me, knowing that if she had half the chance she would slit my throat with nothing but a knowing wink and a twisted grin.

Time for some home truths, I think.

“You know, I’ve never even been to Boston,” I tell her, taking my time to pull down my cuff as I did when I first entered the casino floor.

“But I like the choice of names, *Leonie*,” I tell her, as I casually take out my gun. The second she sets eyes on the Remington 1911 R1, with its enhanced threaded barrel I can see her panic wisely set in, knowing her time left to act was limited. But I keep talking because years ago and back when this all began, I found it helped when committing the act.

It was almost as if by setting the scene it somehow wasn’t real. As though this was just an act, and a game me and my sinful victims played. So, instead of letting my mind fully engage in the murder I was about to commit, I would replace my shaking hand with one that was controlled by the Devil, letting him take the lead. It was the only way I could justify this partnership and he knew it. And surprisingly, instead of

mocking my weakness, he simply allowed me to talk through it like I always did.

Ironic then that what appeared to be done so out of cold hard confidence to my victims, was actually a coping mechanism this murderer needed. And right now, was just like any other working day.

“When you introduced yourself back in the casino as Bianca, it reminded me of a British journalist named Bianca Fuller, a feminist. Her father’s name was Martin,” I told her as my hands located the silencer from my other pocket.

“Both writers, but he was also an anarchist and an atheist. And you won’t know this yet, Leonie, but that last part is fucking ironic, just like what he once wrote...” I said stepping a little closer and making her flinch back before I told her at the same time spinning my silencer in quick and well-practiced motion to the end of my gun.

“...*All of us will die, and most of us will suffer. Raging against the dying of the light may be good art but is bad advice.*” Her breath caught on a shaking inhale of breath knowing that talk of death probably wasn’t a good sign.

“What do you want from me! Why me!?” she shouted suddenly, so I decided to tell her.

“Why me? Maybe a natural question, but it prompts a natural and simple answer: *Why not?* Religion may promise life everlasting, but we should grow up and accept that life has an end as well as a beginning and well, I wouldn’t exactly call you a believer now, would you?” This time she showed some spirit and spit at the floor by my feet, shouting,

“Fuck you! What the Hell do you know about me!?” This was the point that the Devil and I usually agreed and grinned in unison, using only one set of lips.

“I know that like Martin Fuller, *you’re fucked, Leonie.*”

“No...No, no...” She started shaking her head, so I decided to remind her that this was a little more than just karma coming to claim her. After all...

I was the fucking Devil!

“Just like you fucked your victims out of their money and their lives, well I am going to do the same to you,” I told her ignoring the way her eyes started to tear up and I could tell that she was about to plead with me, so he beat her to the mark.

“Don’t beg. I’m immune to it,” I barked without patience...Christ, but I hated it when they begged.

“And that’s the difference between you and Martin Fuller, Leonie, he was diagnosed with testicular cancer, stuck in a wheelchair, and died. But you...well the Devil has plans for you,” I said clocking a round in the chamber, the knowing sound of death still managing to echo in the open space. She looked down, too afraid to face me as one delicate soft hand went up in the air almost in denial of the situation, she now found herself in. She was probably trying to convince herself that this wasn’t yet the end. It just couldn’t be.

“Most of us will suffer,” I couldn’t help but tell her, knowing the truth of these words sat inside of me like hot lava just waiting to burn me from within. This was why I was unable to hold back my anger, fuelled in part by the scotch but mostly by the visions I extracted from her, that felt more like an infection. A sickness that clung to my soul like rot.

“But you haven’t suffered, have you, Leonie? You bought yourself time by lying, cheating and cold blooded killin’ and all in the name of money. That’s what you did with life. Those were the choices *you made*, no one else. You’re thirty years old and very beautiful. Why did you make such terrible decisions?” I ask her, truly wanting to know. What exactly drove her to continue her evil existence? Was it truly her fucked up childhood or was she just born that way, inheriting that infected DNA from her father?

“Your father wasn’t a baseball fan, he didn’t even like sports. *But he did love his little girls.*” Her eyes suddenly widened as I continued punishing her with what I knew.

“He knew there was a darkness in you that he dared not get too close to and for good reason as he died the first day he did. But until then he fucked your little sister constantly

instead. Your mother was punch drunk and lifeless inside with no light in her eyes. You turned a blind eye to it all, walking away each time, even when the police turned up.” She started shaking her head over and over whispering,

“*Stop it, stop it.*”

“You could have spoken out, saved your family the tortured life. But instead you fucking buried them! And why, is it because you hated them...? You did, didn’t you, hated even your little sister for the attention she received from the *Devil in your life.*” I told her with no emotion in my tone other than when the Devil spoke the last four words making her flinch again in fear.

But then finally, the strongest emotion she had inside her opened up like an abyss of doomed fate swallowing her whole and her anger at the world erupted.

“Fuck you, Martin, or whatever your name is!” Leonie screamed out as the tears mixed with black mascara streamed down her cheeks. It looked as though her soul was leaking and the Devil in me scoffed at the pathetic display before him. Meanwhile, I’d had enough and aimed my gun at her forehead, which prompted a panicked moment of silence before she quickly pleaded,

“Wait...I didn’t mean to kill his brother...I... I will pay him back, all of it...I didn’t know who he was, I swear it! Please!” I smirked down at her, noticing now how small she looked with slumped shoulders as if her body had accepted her fate long before her mind had. Of course, I knew who she was talking about, as I had seen it. One of her latest victims. And for once she hadn’t been lying, never expecting to have picked a mob boss’ brother as a target. A family member who remained under the radar, setting himself apart from his family connections and making his fortune on his own.

The man deserved respect for that. And love and respect from his whole family had been what he got. But then this money grabbing whore had taken that all away, snatching one second longer spent with their loved one. She had taken what she didn’t deserve. Hell, even if I hadn’t come alone then I

would have given her a day, maybe two if that. But that was where this hit had become urgent, as the Devil needed this particular soul and just like all the others, it had been taken on the 6th day of the 6th month. Meaning that I had no choice but to dispatch each of the paid assassins and men hunting her ass down for their extremely pissed off boss. A brother in mourning and with only one thing on his mind...

Revenge.

Not that I blamed the guy, but his vendetta just made this particular kill all the harder, especially when I refused to kill any man that stood in our way like the Devil pushed at me to do. No, instead I would literally just scare the shit out of each one, so they either ran from me utterly terrified or actually passed out in fear.

But why I had to collect these souls for him every year was a reason still unknown. Even after three years since the Devil first took me, I still had no idea why he was making me do this. Why he needed these souls the way he did. Oh, don't get me wrong, I asked. Shit me, but it felt like I asked every God damn day!

"It is my will, for I deem it so." This had been the only answer I ever received...well that and, *'Shut the fuck up Hawkins and just get it done!'*

So, I did as he asked. I got shit done. And in the last three years the only thing I'd learned was that whatever the reason, it was something important enough that only the Devil himself could fix. It was something that meant a great deal to him and it didn't take an old washed out cop to know that the Devil didn't just come up here for nothing. He didn't leave his kingdom just for some fucking vacation, picking out random sickos to add to his collection.

And speaking of sickos,

"I don't work for him," I informed her as I placed the butt of my gun to her forehead making her breath catch on a sob,

"Ww...who do...you work... for?" Leonie unknowingly cried out the last words she would ever say, as one thing was

for damn sure... she didn't deserve the chance at one last prayer.

God couldn't save her now.

"Let me introduce you..." I tell her letting the last thing she ever saw was the Devil's true form as I welcomed him to take over my body completely. Something he always did after the first time, knowing now what she saw was nothing short of terrifying. Hell, but staring down the barrel of a gun had nothing on the horned demon of the Devil himself holding that gun.

And this was always the last thing they saw before I let us both pull the trigger, watching with satisfaction what my actions caused. But it wasn't the sight of her forehead caving in on itself with a crimson mist spraying out from behind her. Or the way her arms fell to her sides as the single brass 9mm casing bounced on the floor.

It was the fact that it was over, another one done...well, that was until I watched as if in slow motion as the casing rolled under the railing, falling off the building, just as her limp, dead body started to follow it.

"Fuck!" I swore just as I reached out to catch her, cursing as the pointless dress ripped from my grasp as the weight of her rolled back over the railing. I then watched in annoyance as her body bounced off the edge of two balconies below before falling onto the third.

Muttering obscenities as I unscrewed the silencer before I re-holstered my gun, doing so now so as I could dive over the railing. Then in the second it took to free fall, I landed beside her broken, lifeless form. I gathered up her still dead corpse in my arms and looked up eyeing the distance. I had never made it so high before but thought now was as good a time as any to once again push the gifts the Devil had given me.

They had started shortly after my first murder and one I was forced to do by my own hand as, and I quote, 'Think of it as the Devil's test' he had told me.

Well, what came next was an increase in power, changing my mortal body into one trapped halfway in between worlds. I could heal my body with a simple thought to do so. I could run faster than anything this world had to offer, be it on two legs or four. And I could punch my way out of a concrete cell with little effort. But each time I killed, my powers increased, so after looking down at this broken crimson doll in my arms, I knew it was time to push my limits once again.

So, I bent my knees, looked up at the rooftop where I wanted to be and went for it! After all, I was only seconds away from the room's resident opening the curtains to see what the thud was and getting more than a shock at what they would soon find.

I quickly felt the rush of power reinforce my muscle strength and shit me, but it felt as if I had all but sprouted wings, as it felt like I was momentarily flying. To the point that when I actually landed in my desired destination, I simply dropped Leonie's body so as I could clutch at my abdomen and bend at the waist to get control of my hit of adrenaline. That and the queasy feeling in my stomach as the organ was forced to bounce in my belly with the force of my jump.

"Holy shit!" I shouted on a shocked laugh when I looked back over the edge of the casino I'd just vaulted up.

"Shame you missed that darlin', it was impressive," I told the dead woman at my feet and I could feel the Devil in me roll his eyes in disdain.

"Time to get it done, Hawkins, you know what to do... now finish it," he told me on a growl making me roll my eyes this time.

"Yeah, yeah, hold your fucking horses there, buddy, I just jumped up half the god damn building, so I think I deserve a little pat on the back for that one!"

"Feel free to damn God all you want, but you will kneel when I tell you to fucking kneel...now finish this!" he barked at me forcing me to my knees beside her and making me curse his ass for my enforced submission. Then I snarled like a whipped dog in a cage as I had no choice but to do his bidding.

It was also the part I hated the most and hard to believe that it came second to actually killing someone.

But this was the part that didn't just mean taking a life but taking a person's soul. I don't know why but it felt like the greatest of sins a being could commit and I often wondered what special depth of Hell awaited me for the act? Well, as long as I saved my Marie, then I would willingly sign my name in blood to spending an eternity rotting there if that was what it would take.

Reason enough why I did as was commanded of me, starting by tilting her head back, pressing my mouth firmly to hers and taking a deep, unforgiving breath. The sickening sensation is always the same, a direct assault to my brain and senses. It felt as though I was sucking out a poison, and drawing it into my own body, where the second it entered my system it turned into thousands of tiny spiders crawling under my skin. The intense pain rippling under my flesh and seemingly carving deep gouges into my bones making me shake and tense at the same time. It was as if my whole fucking body was in a vice that was being squeezed by a giant hand that shook with the force it took to crack my joints.

It was a drug I didn't want and an addiction only one of us got high from. But still I drank in my fill, feeding off the very essence that made each of us who we were. Snatching her soul and bleeding her dry of the very last of her dark existence, no longer questioning what happened after this point. There was only one God to worship and bow down to in her future and it wouldn't begin with any welcome at the pearly gates.

I tore my lips from hers and sat back on my knees gasping for air as the next stage hit me...

The choking.

It was the worst part, knowing I was actually choking on someone's fucking soul! I swear if my body hadn't been already struggling to breathe then I would have been choking on my own vomit!

I swear he made me wait longer each time before he finally relieved me of this shit! It got to the point that when I

felt the demonic hand claw itself out of my back, I actually welcomed the agony of it, just because I knew that with the pain also came the relief.

So, I remained still as I felt the Devil's hand creeping up my spine before reaching the top of my head. Then he grabbed a handful of my hair and used it to snap my head back, so I ended up looking like some wild beast howling at the moon. Especially when I opened my mouth, feeling the unnatural click in my jaw as it was stretched beyond what it should for a human.

After this, I felt the Devil drag the rest of himself out of me, being the only time he ever left me completely. I would have liked to have said it was the only time I felt whole again.

Felt myself.

But it would have been a lie because unfortunately at the time I was also being held prisoner by another dark soul and the only way to get it out of me was by the Devil dragging it out himself.

So, I felt him force me to my feet using a fisted hand in my hair as leverage. Then I felt his mammoth height invade my space behind me as he leant down closer, placing his head next to my own. God, but I fucking hated this part. The feeling of the Devil at my back, holding my head in his hands like I was his fucking puppet!

However, as my desperation for air increased I knew it was a hatred I welcomed as it meant keeping my own life and one day a hope at saving my wife from his Hellish fate.

Which is why I just let it happen. Watching with wide eyes as his hand suspended over my mouth before he started to twist one clawed finger, as if winding a thin line of black cotton around the digit.

Then he whispered the prayer needed to draw out the soul collected,

“Anunnaki...to become my, lunamtagga.” The words of the Devil worked and soon I was regurgitating the darkness,

watching as he hooked it out of me as though it was a black web trying it's best to cling to a new host.

Finally, though, the last of it was out and he closed his hand around it before setting it alight, and with that, what I assumed was sending it to Hell. I instantly fell forward back to my knees with one hand reaching out ahead of me to prevent me from landing on my face. My lungs burned as I dragged desperate breaths, noting how my vision blurred and knowing I was about five seconds from passing out.

Hell, I was five seconds from dying and the Devil knew it.

I heard him tut behind me before feeling him step right back into my body, making me surge forward the second he did. The impact was what I could only imagine was like being shocked back to life by a defibrillator, as the second he took back hold of me I was on my feet and breathing with little trouble.

“*So, should I start calling you Martin now?*” he asked me with humour lacing his tone as though we hadn't just murdered someone and devoured their soul before setting it alight.

I ignored his mocking tone and readied myself to finish what we started. So, I got out the ancient looking metal hipflask that I woke up and seemed to inherit one day, taking a moment to look down at it. It was the colour of burnt blood, if such a thing could exist. It was covered in etched symbols that looked as if they had been crudely carved out by the tip of someone's claw. In truth, I didn't really give a shit what it was or what those markings meant, the only important thing to me was that it held the expensive whiskey the Devil had easily gotten me addicted too.

That and, *it made great fuel.*

So, I took a long gulp, welcoming the smooth burn before I regrettably poured the rest over one dead Leonie Tesloch. I then pocketed the now empty flask before pulling out a much-needed cigarette. With a click of my fingers, I produced the

blue spark at the tips of my fingers, forgoing the lighter this time.

Then, after taking a deep and calming lungful of poison, I released the smoke on a sigh before finally asking,

“What is it you say to them?” I felt the Devil smile after taking a drag himself, using my body to do so. When he was ready, burning half of the white stick in between my fingers with one breath, he flicked it down on the line of whiskey.

I didn’t watch as it ignited. In fact, I never watched, knowing where the flames were always headed. No, instead I turned my back on the crimson covered sin that should have been made to burn years ago.

“A soul can’t resist my prayer, at least not one as sinful as hers,” he tells me, and I feel him casting my hand behind me, doing something to the body I cannot see and quite frankly, I never want to. It’s the same every time, a message he leaves and one I can’t ever bring myself to read. So instead I focus on getting the answer to my question, one that has plagued me since the last time but one at the time I was too stubborn to ask. But now I don’t care, for swallowing my pride seems more important. So, I repeat the single word, knowing this would be enough,

“Prayer?” I feel the knowing smile and shudder before he tells me,

“Those who from Heaven came to Earth...

“...*To become my sinner.*”

Lilly

6

Eternal Pain

Three years.

Just two days shy of three years after that file was practically dropped in my lap. I had been so nervous for weeks later, sure that each day I went into work someone would come looking for that file, but no-one ever did. Even Stewart hadn't remembered dropping it at my desk. Not that I ever asked him outright, but I had needed to know just in case there was a chance of him getting into trouble for it. However, nearly three years had gone by and not one word had ever been said about it.

And what had I been doing in all that time...*playing detective.*

Since that very night I had made the case my whole life, obsessing about it to the point where it nearly consumed me as much as my dreams did. And since then I'd had two more dreams like the first one I'd had the night Stewart brought me the file. But of course, I had slept more than that during these years. After all, I wasn't some fictitious vampire or the chosen mate in some cheesy paranormal romance novel who discovers she's immortal! And well, I was clearly still alive, *if not barely, like it felt most days.* Which meant I still needed the little things in life to survive, sleep being one of them.

No, it just meant that my dreams of the Devil watching me from afar had returned to what they always had been,

minus those three occasions. But stranger still, I didn't even need to wonder at the cause. Something that became clear the deeper into this case I delved. It was always on the nights the deaths occurred. I discovered this after believing the two could be linked and having the foresight to document the dates of my dreams, something I discovered corresponded with the next murder committed in what I was now calling 'The 666 Club'.

I named it this because all of the deaths I had found not only linked by association with previous murders, but also by their date of death. A date that was the same day each year. It was the June the 6th and each victim so far had a six in their date of birth. Which meant only one thing,

There was a serial killer on the loose and he had a plan only two people seemed to know about...him *and me*.

So, this was it, my big break was so close I could almost taste it! I had worked tirelessly on this case for years now and with each passing June I only ended up with one more victim to add to the list. Why the authorities hadn't picked up on this yet, I didn't know but I could imagine it didn't help that each murder had happened in a different state. Meaning a different police department worked each case and other than the crime scenes looking similar, then there was literally very little evidence to go on. I mean for starters, there wasn't even a body, only a charred silhouette of one, which as it turned out wasn't enough to even class it as a murder.

At first, I had found this hard to believe but after speaking directly to one town's coroner he simply called my theory impossible. See, I believed that this was some sort of ritual killing. Maybe some over-religious nut believing himself to be doing God's work by trying to get rid of the wicked and sinful. Some sort of witch hunt or personal slight against who he thought were unclean souls or just someone not as righteous as he liked to believe himself to be. Who knows, maybe he thought these people had been Devil worshippers in their free time and the dates of their births linked them to Hell in some way.

Whatever the motive I believed that he had burnt these bodies until nothing remained and once all the ash had gone he

had written a message of some kind...like a calling card to God.

However, this theory was soon blown out of the shallow water as the coroner went on to explain that in all his years, he had never heard of a body being burnt up completely, especially not given the circumstances surrounding each crime scene.

For starters, for there to be not a single piece of the victim left, then the immense heat needed to do so sounded impossible. Especially when he pointed out that it would likely have needed to be burnt in a furnace similar to ones used in cremation. And well, seeing as not a single bit of fire damage had been done to the surrounding space, then it just wouldn't have been hot enough. Hell, there hadn't even been smoke damage surrounding the bodies other than the space directly beneath where the body was assumed (by me) to have lain.

So, other than a few missing person reports, some blood evidence, a cigarette butt and some strange writing in a language no-one understood, then there was very little go on. Which was why it hadn't made big news and with no pressure from the media to solve the case, it meant there were no big bosses getting that same pressure by people at the very top of the lawful food chain. So, in short, no-one was demanding that their best detectives be on the job in hopes of finding answers. No, instead there was just some lonely ambitious, wannabe journalist working the case and trying to join the dots, if not the bodies.

But there had been five crime scenes in total, dating back just shy of five years. Meaning that if the killer was going to strike again it would be in two days' time. Which also meant I had to act fast if I was hoping for my story to make it big as a new murder story would only add to it...oh and of course the potential chance of stopping a serial killer. Although after my research into the alleged victims, then I couldn't exactly say that stopping the guy would have been a bad thing. Not when it looked as though some real-life vigilante was doing the world a favour by taking out these low life scumbags. People

that were in a cesspool of sin trying to drag the rest of society into their sinkhole of evil.

Needless to say, they weren't the type of people anyone would have missed, which is why there had only been two reports filed out of the five victims. And this real-life Batman figure travelling the length of America taking out the worst of the worst was any newspaper's wet dream of a story! Now, all I needed was to become the name behind that story and any paper in the country would employ me to write any damn story I wanted! But then this was something that was easier said than done because no surprises, I still worked for an asshole boss who, years later, still hadn't yet given me a shot.

Well, this time he would have no choice in the matter. As I had the right story and if need be, I would simply go over his head, as I didn't trust him enough not to screw me over, claiming this as his own. Thankfully, I had been smart, documenting years of research so as I could sue his ass should he even try.

Everything was backed up on my computer at home, as well as on an external hard drive I even kept under a loose floorboard in my apartment, making me feel like some kind of spy every time I put it back there. I didn't know why, but I guess working on the case had just made me slightly paranoid, as if someone had been watching me this entire time and monitoring my progress.

Fears I would always put down to being irrational thanks to my continued dreams and being watched in them. However, I couldn't yet explain my personal link to them. Like how my subconscious would know when a murder was happening, manifested by having the Devil reach out to me in these dreams.

Dreams that always ended in a nightmare of his choice.

I thought back to that first one. The one that was linked to the church killing. It started off the same as all the others. Those burning eyes watching me from the darkness that moved like smoke around him. Well, since the first time he

actually reached me, I knew better now. I knew the feeling of his army closing in around me and simply waiting for his command to order them to descend on me like a pack of wild dogs, to chase me down and take me.

It was terrifying.

But since that night, the one that started it all, I had to ask myself if I was so scared then why did I make sure I slept the following June the 6th? And in that dream, why did it start out as if I was waiting for him.

I thought back to that night. I had been so nervous about sleeping, I had drunk a whole bottle of wine and half a bottle of Honey Jack. I had ended up passing out face first on my bed and woke to the feeling of being strangled to death, having to unwrap the covers from my throat.

It had begun like every other dream, with me peacefully sitting by the lake trailing my fingers in the cool water, innocently creating ripples and watching how far they would travel. But then it quickly shifted into something foolish as I realised it felt more like I was waiting for someone instead of what I had always assumed before was simply enjoying the solitude.

Because the reality was, I was waiting for someone...*I was waiting for the Devil.*

I knew it was wrong.

I knew it was dangerous.

And what this knowledge made me as a person, I didn't know. Hell, I could think of a few words to describe my actions, ones like suicidal, unhinged, even *disturbed*. But these were states of mind and what I wanted to know was what the Devil was doing to my humanity.

An answer I just didn't know. And if I were being truthful, then my need to see him again made me not just question my sanity but I was starting to actually scare myself.

Which was why this time in the dream, the moment when he appeared by my side, I didn't run in fear. I didn't scabble backwards into the lake just to get away from him. No, instead

I simply kept my body turned towards the water, closed my eyes and told him...

"I knew you would come."

Words I still whispered now when facing myself in the mirror as I thought back to that very dream, like needing my next fix to function in my world.

A world, neither of us were starting to believe I belonged in...

"I knew you would come," I said before I braved a look, turning to face him and at the same time opening my eyes. The only thing I found, was no-one there. I stood quickly, thankful that this time the moment I did clothes appeared over my body, telling me that the lake had something to do with my nakedness. Almost like an ancient memory of myself was connected to it and one step away was what shattered the myth of my other self.

However, this time I didn't need to look down at myself to know what I would be wearing, knowing already what I had gone to bed in. I remember, before the drinking had begun, telling myself that I would wear something sexy before bed. A revealing little silk camisole set I had shamelessly bought for the occasion, telling myself the whole time that it wasn't.

But really, just how much could a person lie to themselves before the lie turned to truth in their own minds? I didn't know the answer, I just knew that it hadn't worked.

For I had spent years lying to myself and not once did I go to sleep believing my own bullshit. Because the truth was that the first dream, the night of the file, had changed me beyond the point of no return. Oh, I still feared him, more than I would even fear the wrath of God! But now there was something to add to that fear, something I couldn't control...

Desire.

Lust.

Obsession.

*Consumption...*The fantasy that utterly consumed me, clinging to me like a poisonous bite, one infecting my blood and turning my whole body against me. I just wanted him to take me, to make me his prisoner, to use and abuse me. I wanted him to want me like no other. To shackle me to him and make me his willing slave. I wanted his obsession to burn with the fire of my very own!

I wanted to be his enslaved queen.

But that was just fantasy and fantasies were harmless... *weren't they?* Because surely, I couldn't possibly want all those things if I were actually faced with the real Devil...*could I?*

These doubts had plagued my drunken mind for the whisky portion of the night, meaning that by the time I dragged myself across my bed I was still wearing what I had put on the second I got in from work. A pair of tight black yoga pants, thick pink slipper socks and a baggy, oversized knitted sweater in a soft dove grey and one that frequently fell off the shoulder. Which meant that when I stood up in my dream to frantically look around for him, I felt the chill run across my bare collarbone like demonic fingertips were dancing along my skin.

So, I wrapped my arms around myself, wondering why the Devil had abandoned me this time? I started to feel very alone and even more so, I felt foolish for believing he would come to me again. But then I looked towards the surrounding forest and could still see the shadows of his army there, just waiting for their orders.

But then...*where was their commander?*

"Looking for someone?" The voice behind me startled me enough to flinch but as I tried to turn around to face him, I felt hands clamp down on my shoulders stopping me.

"I...I...well I..." I tried to get out an answer for him, I really did, but now I could feel him touching me it was as though all the strength evaporated from even my most basic functions...speech and breathing being the top two on the list.

I swear I felt him smiling behind me, but I couldn't be sure without being allowed to look at him. Instead, all I was sure of was the way his hands caressed inwards closer to my neck, before both framed the collar of my throat, interlinking his fingers. I swallowed hard, letting him feel my fear for himself as the hard lump was forced down my throat.

He wasn't restricting my breathing, but I knew with only the slightest pressure that he could if he wanted to. Hell, he could no doubt snap my spine with barely a minuscule of effort! I knew this when I felt him bending his head to get closer to my neck, so he could whisper his reply to my babbled words, mocking me with the first,

“Well... *You.*”

The demonic purr rasped against my pulse point making me shiver. Then I felt him moving, circling my body so as to face me but without letting go of my neck. No, instead he just twisted his hands so he now held my throat from the front. I gasped in fear against what was my living collar, one made by the Devil's hands. But what added to this desperate sound I made, was when I lifted my fearful gaze up to his to see the raw, demonic beauty staring back down at me.

I couldn't help but stare, starting at the intimidating horns, *all six of them.*

Each set was different, curling inwards, backwards and twisting upwards. I didn't know why but I longed to reach out and touch them but with him being what must be over seven feet tall, then there was no way I could reach them.

He didn't just tower over me. No, he consumed the entirety of my personal space so I could see nothing but him. But it wasn't just his intimidating size, one like before with an overabundance of muscle clad in demonic armour. Nor was it the deadly hold he still had on me... one he didn't seem in a hurry to lose.

It was none of these things.

It was his face.

That brutal untamed beauty that would have anyone questioning their sanity for daring to stare at it for too long. And just because I was that foolish by daring to, I could see the tense grit of his teeth in the perfect contour of his strong jawline. One that matched the deep frown as dark brows knitted together in annoyance. A hard, unyielding feature that framed a pair of deep-set eyes that didn't look accepting of my blatant appraisal of him. Not with the amber flecks that circled the pupil burning brighter as they invaded the unusual light green colour. Eyes, that if I saw them in the sun, I would have said they were the colour of mint.

But it was also the perfect shape of his full lips framed by a short dark beard that had me wondering what a kiss from the Devil would taste like for a second time.

"My Igibala," he growled low and deep making me try and drag in a deeper breath this time. Only with his hands still around my throat it wasn't easy. Just like I knew speaking wouldn't be. But I also knew I had to try, as I had been trying to discover what that word meant all this time.

"Wh...wh...at..." I had to stop as it was too difficult. Thankfully, he must have got the hint as he eased his hold and nodded for me to continue.

"Uh...What does that mean?" I asked after first clearing my throat. He raised a brow at me before his harsh expression turned even colder. Which was why at first, I didn't think he was going to answer me but instead opting to make me squirm in his hands as he continued to silently stare at me.

Then finally, he spoke.

"It is you. It is what you are. What you became and what you will always become." He said this with an even rougher edge to his voice that should have warned me not to push the matter, but I foolishly did so anyway.

"I...I don't know what you mean." At this he growled, a sound so terrifying it felt as if any louder and it had the power to rattle my bones. I closed my eyes and tried to turn my head away from the snarl that followed, one that was done with snapped jaws at my cheek. A scared whimper left me,

resulting in him rethinking his actions, for he then started cooing against my skin,

“Sssh, calm now my little human, it is good that you fear my wrath,” he told me making me gulp before I braved the question,

“Why do you want to hurt me?” I felt his smile against my cheek where his lips had remained, and my face was held still to the side thanks to a thumb held against the side of my chin. He tapped his extended forefinger on the side of the opposite cheek, as if taking his time to contemplate his answer.

“Pain comes in many forms. Of which pain do you speak?”

“*Physical,*” I whispered again almost whimpering the word and feeling ever more helpless when doing so.

“Ah, but physical pain can be controlled and differs in how long it can last but no amount of pain can be ever-lasting, not like the bittersweet, emotional kind...now that...” He paused to take in a deep breath, sucking in air like a man starved of freedom to do so before he whispered fervently back against my cheek,

“*That pain can be fucking eternal.*” I didn’t know how to respond to this but couldn’t help feel as though his words weren’t just said to tease me but more to test me. To entice a response from me so each of us ended up holding a breath waiting for what came next. I didn’t say anything to this and couldn’t help but feel like once again,

I had failed him.

I knew this when the next words out of his mouth were both cruel and threatening

“But then I like pain. I like inflicting it, delivering it, I like how it feels in my hand...” he said, pausing a moment so he could squeeze my throat that little bit tighter, proving his words.

“I like the power it gives me. I like feeding from its delicate nature. The way that just the most minor of actions can tip the deadly scale, going beyond the point of no return.

But you know of the point of no return don't you, Lilly...? To know that what stands between life and death can sometimes be a single *squeeze away*..." Once again, his grip tightened, and my fingers automatically started clawing at his own. However, my struggles were simply ignored and instead of recognising the panic in my eyes he began to feed from it. Then he started to walk me backwards, keeping me steady with only his two hands still on my neck. I tried to speak, opening my mouth but nothing would come out. I felt my fingernails embed themselves into the flesh on the back of his hands but when that didn't work, I reached out and clawed at his chest frantically.

I could feel my air supply running dry and knew I was only seconds away from passing out or worse... *dying*. But it was as if he didn't even feel it or if he did, it certainly didn't affect him. His eyes however told a different story. They stayed glued to the sight of my panic and at first, I thought it was an action to back up his earlier words. But then something significant passed in them. A fleeting moment of concern maybe. It was such an intense look that I soon realised what it was. It was a level of concentration intent on reading something more than just my fear and discomfort.

He was reading my body looking for any signs of physical stress.

And that's when it hit me.

The only explanation and truth he no doubt tried to hide...

The Devil cared.

Lilly

7

Choked Innocence

The Devil actually cared!

Such a thought almost seemed impossible. But I knew I was right the moment I started to see black spots appear in my eyes, telling me unconsciousness was next. So, what did the Devil do, he eased his hold on my throat and leaned in closer, telling me on a demanding whisper,

“Breathe, Lilly.” I did as I was told but it hurt too much, meaning I was gasping for breath with not enough of it filling my lungs. This was when he frowned, growled once and uncurled one hand from my neck so as to place it over my chest. Then he commanded again,

“I said breathe.”

When he made this demand, my body did what he asked as if it belonged more to him than it did to me and because of it the next breath I took didn't hurt. My chest expanded under his hand and only when he seemed happy with the sight of my body returning back to normal, did his hand leave my chest. I didn't have long to question what games he would play next with my body as he was soothing back my hair from my forehead and telling me,

“Good little Lilly, my obedient little pet.” Hearing this and I wanted to scream at him, hurling abuse back like a back handed slap! But the other insane part of me also relished in

the praise he gave and soon I was focused more on wanting to hurl abuse at myself for being so stupid!

Because now here I was leaning into his touch and before I could stop myself my hands found their way to his chest. The second I made contact with the solid black plating that covered his skin, his armour started to seep away, peeling back and floating away in a wave of smoke, now allowing me access. I swallowed hard as soon as my fingertips finally met the soft skin over solid muscle and when he sucked in a sharp breath through his teeth, well it told me that I wasn't the only one being affected by my actions. He lifted his head back to look up to the sky and closed his eyes.

By these actions alone I couldn't tell you whether or not my touch was a pleasurable one for him as he looked too torn between craving and loathing. But it was when my hand reached up to his face that he finally made his move and like most times, it didn't mean good things for me.

Because without warning, he snatched my hand in his to prevent my fingers from touching his lips and pulled it away, holding it at arm's length. Then he opened his eyes and slowly looked down at me before declaring,

"Now I know what it is you need... what any pleasing pet needs..." He paused before a sadistic grin appeared, giving me my second warning...one, as always, *that was too late*.

"*A good collar,*" he said and suddenly I was pushed back against something I couldn't see but it felt like a moving wall. It rippled against my back and I cried out the second I felt something start winding around my limbs, thinking they were snakes. I tried to move away, shrieking out and trying to twist my body in an attempt to dislodge their hold but it was no use. He still had hold of my wrist and with that single grip it was all it took to keep me from running from him.

I looked off to the side the second I felt them start to slither along my arms before they shackled my wrists, meaning now it was safe for him to let me go. I screamed the second I saw what they were, as they weren't snakes at all. They looked more like dead vines joined at the ends,

branching out to create long fingers that moved independently. They were all twisted and knotted together creating a thick, brown rope of roots that looked to have dried up and died long ago before being drawn up from the ground.

They tightened their hold on my arms before yanking them upwards, meaning I had no choice but to lift my arms above my head before they were yanked out of their sockets. After this, the remaining vines left my legs and torso alone, slithering back down into the earth...that was, all but one.

The Devil nodded towards my neck the second he let go of it with his other hand and I wasn't left questioning why for long. The last vine and one I couldn't see for obvious reasons snaked its way up my spine making me try and jerk my body away as its elongated fingers clawed up my sweater, like some giant spider. However, the second I tried to escape it I felt the Devil's hand span my belly before he pushed me back against what now felt like a large tree, holding me immobile.

I was just about to open my mouth in protest when the plea was cut short thanks to the length of rope doing exactly what he had said would happen.

It formed a collar around my neck.

I felt like some claimed slave girl being collared by her new master and the thought both terrified and excited me at the same time...

I was sick.

After this he oddly seemed to relax, and it was as if he could finally be assured I wasn't able to escape like last time. But then, last time he had let me go and told me to run, so it didn't really make sense.

All I knew was that his hands were now down by his sides flexing in and out of fists as if silently fighting with himself. But a few seconds later and he must have won some internal battle as he took a few steps back and started to look me up and down as if appraising his new prize. His reaction to my new position made me try to look down at myself and I suddenly found my anger, hating how weak I appeared. This

mixed with how vulnerable I felt thanks to being bound and also how his intense gaze and obvious scrutiny was making me feel.

Which was why I snapped,

“Why! Why are you doing this to me?!” This time he was the one to jerk a little, obviously shocked that I would address him so. Then his demeanour changed and instead of looking so harsh his features softened, if such a thing was possible for the Devil.

“Because I can,” was his deep, raspy reply.

“But why, I haven’t ever done anything to you!” I argued as I tugged at my bonds at the same time, only neither captor nor his method of capture made a move to free me. I knew I had said the wrong thing the second he took a threatening step towards me before snarling,

“Haven’t you?!”

So that was it, the reason he haunted my dreams since before I could remember was all because he thought I had done him wrong in some way! If I could have, I would have shaken my head in confusion but as it stood, the vine around my throat would have made doing so more suicidal than I liked to believe my mental issues capable of.

“You foolishly believe in your own innocence enough to come here night after night, infiltrating the boundaries of my realm, of *my kingdom* and you expect me then to believe of your innocence too and why, just because now you are human?” I frowned at this before my confusion morphed into a hundred questions, the main one being what on Earth he was talking about...

Exactly who did he think I was?

Well, whoever it was, one thing was becoming increasingly obvious...it was clear he loathed this person!

“I...but I haven’t been coming here through choice,” I told him deciding this was most likely the safest place to start. This time it was his turn to frown before something in my expression, or even in my voice told him that I wasn’t lying.

Hell, for all I knew he had the power to detect lies. Either way he finally started to believe in my words. I knew this when his expression lost that edge of hardness and the pale green in his eyes brightened, losing the flaming amber so it was a soft honey burn around his pupil.

He took a step closer to me and as he raised a hand to my face, I flinched back making him tilt his head at me expectantly, raising a defined brow. I couldn't be sure, but he almost looked frustrated that I feared him. Meaning that now I had to ask myself if the reason for this was he was starting to see that whoever he thought I was, he had been wrong.

"Then you really do believe in your innocence," he stated running the back of two deadly fingers down my cheek, curling his razor tipped talons so that they tapped against his palm instead of tearing my cheek to shreds.

"I am innocent," I hissed through clenched teeth, this time making him smile and I swear the sight made my heart skip a beat. Christ he was handsome, it was almost to the point of being cruel. As if looking this way was one of his greatest weapons against humanity. Against the humans he tortured. To be mesmerised by the beauty as it betrayed its very meaning for existing. To crave the soft touch such a being was supposed to be incapable of delivering.

Yet here he was, caressing my cheek as if I were made from thin ice, that at any moment I knew he could step on, cracking my fragile mind. But I knew it was too hot in the Hell he ruled to repair such damage and from the looks of things, he seemed to realise this too.

"Perhaps," he told me, looking down my body and I shivered at the heat in his gaze, one that now spoke more of lust than revenge. In fact, the sudden change in his demeanor towards me had me coughing when I choked on a shuddered breath. His eyes shot to mine and the flash of concern I saw there was gone in a heartbeat and had me questioning if it had ever been there to begin with. However, his next actions only reinforced what I thought I had seen, as with a flick of his hand the vine around my neck disappeared.

I coughed again and would have rubbed my neck had I had my hands free. But with them still tied above my head there was no hope of that. The look he gave me was as if he was trying to read my mind and I had to question if he had achieved it when I felt his hand start gently rubbing my abused throat.

“Take a breath,” he told me, and I did as I was told because really, I didn’t think it wise to piss him off when he was being like this.

“*Thank you,*” I whispered shyly looking down before braving my eyes reaching his own, too afraid to find the harsh reaction to my words. But in the end, I had little choice as his hold shifted from my neck to under my chin where he took hold and forced my head up to look at him.

“Don’t ever thank me again,” he warned making me frown in question before asking him,

“Why not?”

“Because a prisoner should never thank their captor for stealing them from their world,” he told me in a way that looked tense, as if he were holding back a bitter bite from lacing those words.

“I thought you said that I was the one infiltrating your world?” I challenged.

“And I thought you said you were innocent,” he threw back at me making me roll my lips inwards to prevent a smile from breaking free. I didn’t know why but it felt natural sparring with him this way. Almost as if it was something that drew us together an eternal lifetime ago and became the foundations laid in the far reaches of the past.

“I am,” I told him, this time with strength in my tone and he took my resolve as an even bigger challenge. I knew this when he hooked a piece of my sweater at the hem and plucked a strand of the wool free.

“Is that right?” he mused then slowly he started to pull on it, tugging it first around the hook of his curled talon before

winding it around his large finger. He did this until it started to grow and in turn my sweater started to shrink.

I quickly looked down the second I started to feel the cold air hit my belly, seeing now that he was unravelling my sweater. My eyes widened with new knowledge now telling me exactly what new game he wanted to play.

“Yes,” I whispered in a breathy reply as I suddenly felt like the fly in this new scenario and of course, *he was the spider*. And this innocent fly was now caught in his demonic web, completely at his mercy.

I knew this when he leaned into me and whispered in my ear...

“Time to prove it.”

I frowned not knowing what it was he wanted from me or if there was anything at all and his only gain right now was a gentle and unassuming torturing. The type that’s only purpose was to lure you in and silently take what he wanted without you even realising it...before it was too late. Before he left you hollow and empty inside.

“And how do I do that?” I asked knowing I had no other option here than to play the victim in his game. I watched as he let the wool gathered spiral free from his fingers he had been still winding the length around, making it trickle to the ground like thin ribbon. Then his eyes flashed molten lava at the challenge before he leaned in close and told me,

“Give yourself to me...*to the Devil in your soul.*” He almost purred the words and I could almost taste his lips he was so close. Then he grabbed my now bare waist with his hands, his grip near bruising to my sides, as he yanked me hard to his chest before he whispered venomously,

“Only then can you truly be free!”

Then he kissed me.

And it was a kiss that nearly killed me for I was gasping for breath, nearly choking from the strength of it all. It felt as if he had been trying to consume me, for one second I was kissing him with a desperate fever that matched his own and

the next...I was fighting for release. It was all too much! As if I was burning up from the inside, needing to find sexual release just as much as my lungs needed the air. I didn't know how he was doing it, preventing me from being able to breathe through my nose as his lips devoured my own in a dominating kiss, but he was. As if kissing the Devil was deadly for that very reason...*He was the Devil.*

I had scratched and clawed at his face, knowing then that he was trying to take my life, expecting me to simply let him. That was what he had meant. He wanted me to die, to kill myself so I could remain there with him forever.

So he could truly own me or more like...

Own my soul.

Because that was what he did. The Devil. He collected souls and the second I realised I would simply be just that, just another soul for his collection, was when I had started to fight even harder. His hands left my waist and circled my throat before he ripped the demanding kiss away from me. Then he squeezed my neck harder before snarling...

"So, you made your decision, you choose to leave me!" I knew just from the demonic growl of his voice that he was beyond furious, he was utterly livid at the thought. I also now knew that he may be able to hurt me but that didn't mean he had the power to take my life. For I was right...

I was innocent. I was clean and without sin.

But mainly that meant...

I was out of the Devil's reach.

Lilly

8

Blood Soaked Breadcrumbs

My Death was of my own choosing.

'So, you made your decision, you choose to leave me!'
His question echoed in my mind again and made me quickly realise, this was why he wanted me to choose death. This was why, as he didn't have the power to make that decision for me and that...well, that infuriated him!

"Well, speak!" he demanded getting impatient and I flinched in fear at the sight of his wrath, as it was as always... *terrifying*. But now with this new knowledge I had gained some power. The power to choose.

"I...I...choose life," I told him with barely a whisper, but it was one he heard all the same. His features suddenly morphed fully into his demon and he quickly became the stuff of nightmares. His eyes turned into burning hot coals, fangs grew into lethal points as he snarled in rage and his skin started to change. It turned into harder, rougher skin the colour of dark burnt red and was framed with black scales dusting the edges of his face along the hairline. These dark scales also rippled up his horns and down his neck, merging into his demonic armour.

He growled down at me, then let go of me and turned away so now I was faced with the Hellish armour on his back. This is where I discovered all the spiked black horns that ran

up his spine, each one curled like giant replicas of his fingertipped talons.

Like this he looked even less like a man and more like some demonic dragon. A beast that wanted my life so he could claim my soul and own me forever, stripping me of my humanity.

But I'd said no.

Another test of his I had failed.

I knew this when without looking at me he warned,

“Then if I were you, I'd better start running.” Then he looked down over his shoulder at me and pointed towards the shadows hidden back in the treeline. Then he raised his hand above his head and told me,

“Before I release my horde.” Then his arm came crashing down, signalling out to them and I looked on in horror as just like the first dream...

His monsters started coming for me.

I turned and ran, this time doing so in between the denser part of the forest, hoping this would slow them down and it did but unfortunately...it just slowed me down right along with them!

The branches reached out and grabbed me, scratching my back and tugging at what was left of my sweater. It was as if the fingertipped roots were back and making one last desperate attempt to keep me held here, trapping me in this realm for their master.

I would cry out in pain as my skin was caught on deadly tips and curled back, leaving raw lines and gouging in my flesh. I could feel the tears of my blood trickling down my back from where one branch had caught me at the shoulder, and I had no choice but to yank away hard.

“No, no, no! Why are you doing this to me!” I screamed when looking back over my now bleeding shoulder and seeing them gaining on me. Although the Devil was no longer there as he had been the first time. He was no longer there, the head

of his army, driving them forward only to destroy them as he had done at the cliff face.

And I soon knew why.

“AHHH!” I screamed the second I ran into something solid and I started to fight the moment strong arms encircled me, thinking at first that one of his monsters had ambushed me.

“Because I can,” the Devil said sternly, looking down at me and before I could fully register what he was doing, he wrapped a hand around my neck and spun me so I had no choice but to face his army as they came closer.

“No!” I screamed and tried to twist myself free, feeling now as if this dream had come full circle. However, his grip tightened, and he pulled me backwards against his hard, unforgiving muscle so now my back was anchored to his chest.

“Are you ready to change your fate and be mine yet?” he asked as he too watched his horde getting closer from over my head where he towered above me.

“Please...don’t do this!” I implored, tensing in his hold and bracing for the slaughter I could feel was coming closer by the second. But surely he wouldn’t let them kill me...*would he?* I knew now that he couldn’t do the deathly deed himself, but I wasn’t sure that his minions were restricted by the same rules. Oh, I knew they could hurt me, as being faced with the evidence the last time I woke, told me this was a fact.

But death?

“Then submit your soul to me and I will end their lives in an instant,” he said, giving me insight to the immense power he held, if he could destroy the entirety of his own army in mere seconds.

I couldn’t answer him with words but with his hand around my throat he could feel me as I tried to shake my head, telling him no. I felt his growl of displeasure vibrating against me as it built in his large chest, making my own shudder in fear.

“Then so be it!” he snarled before extending his arm out and me with it. His grip on my neck could have been made from iron for how unforgiving the strength of it was and I suddenly felt like food on the end of a large stick, held out ready to be devoured by a pack of ravenous beasts.

“Please...please don't...” I begged, this time feeling the tears running down my cheeks and spilling from my chin onto his hand. He could feel my fear, feel the weight of it with every shaky breath I took. With every fat heavy tear that fell. And with every tensed muscle in my body as I awaited the impact of death to hit me like a wave. Would he just watch as they ripped me to pieces this time? Would I wake up soaked in my own blood, on the brink of death and needing immediate medical attention.

Or was it much worse. Like... *I wouldn't wake at all.*

“Then say the word, say that you're mine, submit your life to my hands and *gift me with your soul, Lilly.*” The way he said this last part felt like a soothing hand stroking that very soul he wanted so badly. Even the way he said my name felt like a promise that he would care for me, if only I agreed to be his willing slave. But then I knew what that would mean...

Choosing to die by his hands.

And now I knew why. For if his horde killed me now, I would wake just long enough to take my last dying breath before my soul found its way to Heaven. Because where else would it go? After all, I wasn't a sinner. I hadn't committed any crimes against humanity and if there really was a Hell, then that meant there must have been a Heaven. And in it, he would have no control. Which was why for him to claim me I had to willingly give myself over to death. I had to choose it above life, just as a lost soul would choose suicide.

After all, it was believed by some that those who willingly forfeited their lives only ended up in one place...

The Devil's Hell.

So now the only question left was who would break first? Would he really be willing to risk my death where I would end

up in a place he couldn't touch me, a place he had no control over? That's when I knew what all of this was, why he was always trying to scare me. He was hoping my fear would be enough to make me choose him.

The ultimate test and one I elected every time to fail. And now was no different as I closed my eyes, turned my head away from the sight of them closing in, being barely a leap away from reaching me. Then I whispered,

“*No.*”

This time I didn't hear him growl or get angry, but instead he released a deep sigh before he pulled me back into his embrace. Then he circled his arms around me, engulfing my entire body in his hold, that was done so now in a tender way. These new actions actually stole my breath away and for new reasons, none of which were to do with fear.

Then he casually bent his head and lifted me up so he could easily reach my neck. I froze in his hold as I first saw the reflection in his eyes as the first wave of the beasts had arrived and just as the first one lunged for us, he licked the blood from my shoulder and whispered,

“Then it's time to wake, *My everlasting, Igibala.*”

This time when I woke, I did so gasping for air and clutching at my neck as though I could still feel a pair of hands there. But then when I felt my shoulder where my only other injury should have been, I was shocked to find, *it was gone.*

So, it left me asking myself when he had licked my wound before I woke, did that mean he had healed me this time? I didn't know but at least I had a few more answers than before I fell asleep.

But still I had to question, had I really been waiting for him?

Had I really been waiting for the Devil to do those things to me, falling asleep purposely?

The thought had me questioning my sanity once more if the answer to that was yes. But if I was being honest with myself then since that first dream my obsession hadn't just been about the case but about the Devil that somehow felt connected to them all.

Now I know that it was the craziest theory yet and not one I would ever include in my story for the paper and write about for obvious reasons. But there were certain factors I couldn't ignore. Like the way I found the same name written in blood in the centre of where the bodies would have been burnt. The name he called me in all my dreams where he spoke to me, calling out to me like some secret message and using each death to do so.

It started that night I first saw that crime scene photograph. Just like the others there had been no body found or any charred remains of one ever being there. All there had been was some blood evidence found on the balcony in one of the penthouse rooms, that was high velocity, likely from a gunshot wound to the head. However, due to the potential positioning of the body, then most of the blood evidence was lost due to being sprayed over the balcony, where it was assumed the victim was standing at the time someone pulled the trigger.

Unfortunately, this meant that due to a very small amount of blood spray found it meant it couldn't be determined whether or not they had a homicide on their hands. Even I had scoffed at this, thinking the puzzle pieces screamed that it must be. But when doing my research, it turned out that there had to be a significant amount of blood found at a scene before they could class it as a potential homicide. In other words, an amount of blood loss that no-one could ever survive without. Which meant that with no body and little blood then the detective's hands were tied.

I remember speaking to the detective in charge, telling me those very words. As no matter what his personal feelings were, unless someone was going to come forward claiming there had been foul play or believed someone they knew had

been the victim or even the killer, then they had no one pressuring them to solve the case.

I remember being slightly outraged at this and also slightly worried considering I had no such person in my own life. So, did that mean that if the same fate happened to me, then no-one would investigate, or pressure them to do so, just because I was a loner without family?

I had even asked him the same thing, which was when his frustrated tone eased, and pity had replaced his annoyance. I couldn't say I exactly welcomed the switch but then when that pity led to my first big lead, well it certainly managed to cushion my ego. Especially when he politely informed me that with over 150 homicides to investigate a year in Vegas alone, well then one that didn't include an actual body or evidence of one wasn't exactly going to be high on their priority list.

But he had offered an important bit of information. He told me that there had been only two people who didn't check out during that time frame. One was a woman by the name of Bianca Reese who, according to the hotel staff, had left a substantial amount of cash and jewellery in her room, along with two suitcases full of designer clothes. The second had been a guy with the name Mr Adram Melech. It was an odd name with a strange way of spelling Adam, using a silent R but what wasn't surprising was that his room was the one with the blood found on the balcony. Which meant that I think it was safe to assume who out of the two had been our victim.

So, thankfully this had given me a starting point to work from, as this information was strangely left out of the case file. In fact, the 'file' had only held a handful of crime scene photographs with the name of the casino written on the back and a handwritten note saying...

'Follow the bloodcrumbs.'

Of course, I should also mention that it took me nearly a full year of digging before I was finally able to get any real names, as it became obvious quite quickly that the victim's name wasn't Bianca. But then the man who had been staying in the penthouse hadn't been an Adram Melech either, as there

was no record of him ever existing. And I didn't just mean like a quick search on google, which admittedly had been my first thing to cross off the list.

But it quickly became apparent that these were pros I was dealing with and were far better at hiding fake lives than I was at finding them. Hence why it had taken me nearly a year.

In the end it had taken some pretty big bribes and knowing the right hands willing to take those bribes in the first place. That was where Stewart had come into it or should I say the new love of his life. A guy named Mark, who just so happened to have access to police records being that he worked in Chicago's forensics lab. I think I nearly wept with joy the day he told me what he did for a living, knowing this was my big chance.

Because the note had been right, all I had to do was follow the blood. The Vegas crime lab had eventually gotten around to testing the sample they found on the balcony before running the DNA through their system. It turned out that the name had come up through a few unsolved murders and one Leonie Tesloch was a person of interest they believed could be linked to them.

It was the reason her blood was on file after she was an alleged victim of rape when one high paid banker was supposedly killed by some drug dealing scumbag friend of hers. In fact, the evidence had led detectives to believe it was actually her that had done the killing, but some shithead lawyer had gotten her off on bail, despite the evidence stacked up against her. Oh, and not surprisingly, bail was exactly what had been awarded to her, especially since shortly after requesting it she claimed that one of the cops who arrested her, touched her sexually.

Apparently, there had been proof and after some more digging it sound suspiciously more like entrapment. However, it was something the Vegas police department didn't exactly want the press getting wind of, so naturally bail was granted. Meaning that her and her lawyer had played the system like fine-tuned fiddles, coated in another man's blood.

But this all led me to look further into her background and it was sketchy at best. There were long gaps in her history where it was clear she hadn't just dropped off the face of the earth but instead, most likely just claimed a new name. It was even debatable whether her real name was actually Leonie at all. But in the end it didn't really matter because it led me to my most important discovery...

The scumbag lawyer.

This new lead was found when I had taken my first research trip, using some of my savings to do so. The first place I had gone to had been the casino in Vegas, needing to see the crime scene for myself. Of course, I hadn't been allowed access into the penthouse, and there was no way I could afford to spend the ridiculous amount needed for one night's stay. But I had at least managed to sneak my way up onto the rooftop, especially after I had bribed one busboy in the restaurant to talk about the murder. To be honest, it hadn't taken more than thirty bucks for him to be singing like a canary, as he had been all too eager to tell an outsider all the gory details.

Not that there had been any real 'gory details' to speak of but he didn't know what I already knew about the crime. So, by the end of this conversation, it was easy to discard all the 'exaggerated' details he gave me. Like rumours that included your typical Vegas murder stories which mainly included, mob boss hits. Meaning that I already knew the cops didn't find any chopped off body parts next to bloody pliers, axes or handsaws.

But then he had told me something that did interest me, mentioning the bloody and scorched word found there. In fact, I had been amazed to hear that it had still been there, no matter how many times the hotel staff had tried to get rid of it. Needless to say, I had thought this to be just another exaggeration but then he showed me how to get to the rooftop so I could check it out for myself. Something he himself had done once after losing a bet.

So naturally I had gone up there but what I had found hadn't been something I had been expecting. Oh, I had been

expecting the sweaty palms, tight chested shallow breaths, goose bumps on my skin and the hairs of the back of my neck to rise as if the Devil himself were running his fingers there. But of course, I had, after all, this was my first crime scene.

But the one thing I hadn't been expecting had been the word written on the floor or should I say, the Sanskrit. I just couldn't understand why it showed me something different than what it had in the pictures I had in that file. I had even yanked the picture out of my bag at the time, so I could compare the two, just to make sure I wasn't temporarily insane. But there was no denying it, the two were different.

And why, I didn't know. I had no answers. Well, that wasn't strictly true as at least I'd had the foresight to snap a picture of the area with my phone before security had found me, demanding that I leave.

Heck, but I would have been embarrassed at the time had I not been too occupied by my inner freak out, asking myself all the way back to my cheap hotel room, what the Hell it all meant!

Well, that night I had spent all my time researching on my laptop what it *could* mean, even going as far as contacting ancient language specialists and lecturers throughout different forums trying to get answers. In the end, one guy, a professor who like me obviously didn't sleep, recognised it as being ancient Sanskrit. He explained it as an ancient language of India with a 3,500-year history. Or more specifically, was the predominant language of Hindu philosophy as well as some of the principal texts of Buddhism and Jainism. But for me, it just meant that this case was getting stranger and more intense by the day!

The professor had given me his details and told me to contact him if I had any more questions, which turned out to be a good thing as it turned out that each murder I was led to, held a different Sanskrit word.

Starting with the first...

The Scumbag Lawyer.

Brent

9

Bombshells and Bullets

I was so close. So very close to finally finishing this godforsaken sentence and done with being the Devil's murdering lacky! Even now I thought back to the very beginning and where this all started, hating myself for nearly a full year spent feeling a bitter hatred towards the wrong person.

No now, I just fucking loathed the right person,

Me.

I mean yeah, sure, it would have been easier to blame the bastard that had taken over my body and played me like his damn puppet with his demonic hand up my ass, but no amount of wishing something would make it true. I had chosen this, as I had been the cause. So, I accepted it. Accepted my fate and my welcomed punishment even if all the people left to judge me were already dead.

Which meant that even as I stared at myself in the mirror now and saw a very different face looking back at me, one the Devil preferred, I still saw the raw pain in my eyes from that night. I still looked down at hands I didn't recognize as being my own and saw the familiar blood on them belonging to that of my family...my whole fucking world!

Gone in an instant.

But like I said, all that was left to recognize was the pain. Even as I looked down at the toned, hard body, one I never once came close to owning before that night, when I saw the lack of scars that should have been there I did as I always did. If only he could have left me with that visual reminder but even those, the bastard had taken from me!

Now many people would have thought this last one as not a bad thing, but for me, those scars only reminded me of one thing...the night an angel saved my life.

My Marie.

I ran the tips of my fingers over where I knew they should have been and closed my eyes, imagining just for a second they were her fingers again. Then, when I had finished torturing myself, I did up my shirt, now turning away from the mirror angry at myself for letting my mind find its way back to that place again. I grabbed my suit jacket off the back of the chair where I had left it, purely because the habit annoyed the Devil. And in turn, I had made annoying the Devil my favourite hobby, one that started about three days after we first met.

Fuck me, but I couldn't believe it had been nearly six years ago that the heartbreak that had been my life turned into a shitstorm and walked through my door! Christ, but I couldn't tell right then whether it had felt like only weeks or decades! All I knew was that when the Devil was inside you, well then time past by very, very differently.

Starting from that very first night.

The night I met...

The Devil in Me.

Six Years Earlier...

It had been one year, one long godforsaken year after the murder of my sweet and innocent daughter Daisy. Still to this day I didn't know why...Christ but there was still so many

‘whys’. Questions like, why did Marie do it, why would she kill our daughter? Why would God punish me this way? Why me? Why Daisy?

Why Marie?!

Even now, as I sat slumped on the floor of my tiny, shitty apartment in a kitchen that hadn’t seen real food since I had rented the place, a year fucking later and I was still asking myself why! But these days and admittedly many before them, sitting here had been my favourite place to be. This was simply because it afforded me easy access to the beers in the fridge that I was currently leaning against. Beers that had become a necessity and staple in my life just to make it through another pointless and worthless day. But the beers were needed between the many shots of Jim Bean I was also consuming, just to speed up the process of getting shitfaced!

You see, being shitfaced meant at some point the likelihood of passing out was high on the list of probabilities and that meant I might actually be awarded some dreamless sleep. The kind of sleep where I didn’t just see my dead child on the floor of our once nice family home, along with my wife moments before she blew her own brains out with the gun she had first used on our child. So yeah, shitfaced drunk served me well I thought, taking another shot straight from the bottle that was resting between my thighs.

But then, if I didn’t want my dreams to torture me as they did, why was I already doing that to myself by having photographs of my dead family scattered before me, like dead leaves on the ground telling me summer was long gone and in my case, never coming back.

Had she been depressed, and I had been too blind to see it? Had she had some kind of mental illness and managed to hide it from me all those years? Nothing made any fucking sense! I had replayed that scene over and over in my mind but each time it only ever ended with me cursing her fucking name!

“My Marie... my fucking Marie!” I shouted, taking another swig and welcoming the burn, wishing it could reach

my fucking toes! Then I lowered the bottle, wiped the amber droplets that clung to my lips and chin before eyeing my way out. God, it would be so fucking easy! Just one little bullet, just a small amount of pressure and bam, my misery would be over!

I swear having that gun sat next to me each night was like being comforted by an old friend, one that kept whispering to me that it knew what to do to stop the pain. And like all those nights, I watched my shaky hand reach out towards it, only for it to form a fist in anger at my weakness, preventing me from ever going through with it.

However, this night was different.

Whether it was that little extra alcohol in my system that had usually put me to sleep by now and hadn't...I didn't know. But what I did know was that this time there was no fisting my hand in anger and there was no weakness in sight. There was only an absolute certainty. I'd had enough. There was nothing left for me here. There was nothing without them.

So, this time I picked up the gun. The weight of it in my hand was like a reminder of who I used to be. A cop. A person whose job it had been to protect people. Well, I gave that up after I wasn't even capable of protecting my own family from themselves. Couldn't even protect my little girl from a sick mother who thought taking her daughter's life was the only way out.

"I should have been there!" I shouted on a broken sob before grasping the gun tighter, this time before placing the barrel to my temple and knowing it was a sign when for once, my hand didn't even shake.

Like I said, this was how I knew it was time. Time I was finally ready to let go of life and embrace death. Oh, I had done this countless times before, but the difference had been I knew I hadn't really been ready to die. My hands had shook, my forehead had beaded with sweat, even my lips had fucking trembled. But right now...*there was nothing*.

Absolute zero fucking response.

Which meant there would have been no reason why I hadn't heard the front door open or a window smash as someone broke in. Someone who suddenly appeared in front of me.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you, Brent," said the man still lost to the shadows of my dark, dingy apartment.

"Oh, you picked the wrong apartment to break into tonight, buddy!" I said now turning my gun on him and feeling a small slice of my former self coming back to me for the first time in almost a year. Because it was right what they said, once you were a cop, you were always a cop. Same went for a soldier or anyone in the forces. It was as though it became part of your DNA the first second you donned that uniform. It ingrained itself into your soul and soon the first thing that described you was, 'he's a cop' or in my case, 'he was a cop'.

It simply became who you were, and this scumbag only re-enforced that statement.

"Oh, I don't know Brent, there can't be that many guys out there wallowing in self-pity and about to blow a hole in their head," he said casually pulling out one of the paint chipped dining chairs that came with this shithole apartment, before lowering himself down like a graceful jungle cat, reserving its deadly intent for later when you least expected it.

"Unless of course I have the wrong guy and you're actually a very butch woman named Betty who had no fucking clue on how to clean her gun and whisky isn't really the best stuff to use," he said, this time making my jaw go slack and stare at him in that typical, 'What the fuck' kinda way. For starters, how did this guy even know my name?

"Nope, didn't think so."

"Who the fuck are you!?" I shouted as soon as anger replaced my shock, although I still had to ask myself why this guy didn't seem to be affected by the fact I had a gun pointed at his head and even being shitfaced, even a monkey could have made the shot.

“We will soon get to that, but first, why don’t you put down the gun, after all we don’t want you to accidentally get hurt now do we, not before you have heard what I am about to offer you.”

“Yeah well, whatever the fuck it is, I ain’t buying, so leave now before I shoot your ass and get my buddies down at the precinct to come scrape your bloody carcass off my damn floor!” I warned, letting him also know that he was dealing with a cop. However, his response was the last one I expected, *he laughed,*

“Oh, but I think we both know that boat load of buddies of yours sailed a long time ago, right after you handed in your badge and told the captain he could go fuck his job.”

“How the hell do you know that!? Are you some kind of whack job, stalker...you been following me, Asshole?!” I asked gripping the handle of the gun a little tighter in my anger because he was right...now I just needed to know how the hell that was possible!?

“Well now, it’s funny that you mention Hell...”

“It’s funny I mention Hell?!” I asked interrupting him and wondering if I should or shouldn’t just shoot him now.

“Always,” was his one-word reply.

“Alright, I am done with this bullshit, you picked the wrong fucking year to mess with me...!”

“No, I picked the right year...exactly the right year in fact, I mean I have been waiting a long time for you to be five seconds away from pulling that trigger and all the other times held such potential...” he said releasing a sigh and slapping his hands to his knees before standing back up and continuing,

“...but then, there you would go again, cock teasing me with your suicide, before breaking down and asking God why he did this to you, but you see, here’s the thing Brent, God didn’t do this to you, not even *I* did this to you... but do you want to know who *did* do this to you?” he said coming closer and I steadied my hand and told him,

“Back off, asshole or I swear I am going to shoot you!”

“...Humanity Brent, humanity did this to you. Fucking free will your precious God gave you!”

“He’s no God of mine!” I roared back at him in anger.

“Oh sure, you pray to him when life is good or you want something, guidance or some other bullshit like that, squandering your fucking time in some waste of good real estate with a gold plated cross in it and you think it makes you a believer. But then shit goes bad, and all of a sudden God has forsaken you! God doesn’t care and God can go to Hell... whine, whine, whine.”

“God *can* go to Hell!” I shouted back at him knowing now he must be some religious nut!

“God already is in Hell, Brent, just not the sanctimonious prick *you’re* referring to, however the true ruler of Hell, well now... *he is very interested in you.*” The way he said this last part felt as though insects were suddenly biting their way up my spine.

“Yeah well, you can tell him to go and fuck himself too and why you’re at it, get the hell outta my apartment!” I told him getting to my feet this time and not taking my eyes off my target, not that I could see him all that well, as I swear it was as though he had sucked all the shadows out of the room and cloaked himself with them.

“Tut, tut, Brent, that’s not very nice of you.”

“Last chance, asshole.” I warned, now with the distinct sound echoing in the room as I loaded one in the chamber and raised my weapon in line with his head. His eyes seemed to glow in excitement.

“Very well, I see you leave me no choice,” he said and the second I saw him reaching inside his jacket, instinct took over and I fired my gun. I barely saw his hand go up he moved so fast, but it didn’t matter, his motion for me to stop was lost to the six bullets I had just fired into the guy.

“What... The... Fuck?” I asked after the smoke had cleared, in utter astonishment as the guy was still standing. But then he actually started walking towards me and in my shock,

I stumbled back against the fridge door before sliding down it back onto my ass.

“Hh...how?” I mumbled as he walked over to me without a bloody mark in sight. Then with the hand he had held out in front of him, he opened his palm and all six bullets rained down on me, landing in my lap.

“Here, just in case by the end of this conversation you still want to blow your fucking brains out, although...” he paused and bent one knee so he could whisper in my ear,

“...by the end of what I have to say, I have a feeling putting a bullet in your heart would be more fitting.” Then he chuckled once before rising to his full height again, snatching my half empty bottle of Jim Bean with him, muttering,

“Time for another drink, I think.” I then watched in a kind of disbelieving numb state before I stumbled back to my feet, ignoring the bullets that rolled off my lap and danced on the tiled floor.

“Who...who the fuck are you?” I asked in whispered disbelief watching as he retook his seat, folded a leg over the other and swigged the bottle before saying,

“Isn’t it obvious...I’m the Devil, Brent.” Then he tipped the neck of the bottle towards me with a wink that made his eyes suddenly glow red and as I staggered back slamming my back to the fridge door, he casually grinned and took another swig.

“That’s...but that’s impossible!” I shouted making him laugh once before asking me a very valid question,

“What, just like catching six bullets in one hand...come on Brent, use that cop brain of yours before I decide what my next parlour trick should be...and here’s a heads-up Brent, you won’t like what I can pull out of my sleeves.”

“Alright, say that I play your game, or my own damn game, if this is nothing but a bloody dream, nightmare or hallucination...but whatever it is, then what is it you want with me?” He looked me up and down and I saw the flash of white teeth in the dark before he said in some sadistic purr,

“Oh so many things.”

“You want my soul, is that it! Because if you’re here to kill me and then take me to Hell, then just get it over with, will you?” I shouted letting my anger override my fear.

“Do I look like a Grim Reaper’s lacky to you Brent, you think I came all the way up topside for something as trivial as one sad, pitiful soul who’s decided life’s too hard because boohoo, he thinks little wifey went and got batshit, trigger happy on his little girl...give me a fucking break, I am the God of Hell and have better shit to do than drag your pathetic ass back to my realm...besides, I stopped you from killing yourself remember, so unless you have gone on a self-righteous murdering spree this last year without my knowledge, then you wouldn’t be fucking welcome there anyway!”

“Oh and coming all this way just to insult me and drink my whisky is so much more worth your time is it, oh great one?!” I snapped back making him reply,

“Oh, great one...umm, I like that.” Then he raised the bottle again and took another swig before taking out a cigarette case and plucking one from the line. Then he snapped the case closed and tapped the end of the cigarette against it three times before saying,

“Well, as fun as this has been so far, no Brent I didn’t come here just to insult you...although I will certainly be classing it as a bonus,” he added with a smirk making me grind my teeth before any of my own insults came spewing out of my mouth.

“No, the reason I came here was to stop you before you did something stupid and I don’t just mean with that gun.”

“Ha, then you came here to help me... What kind of Devil are you?!” I said starting with a scoff of disbelief.

“The kind that makes deals,” he told me before placing the white stick in his mouth and lifting his palm to the end, looking at me over it and pausing to say,

“So, let’s make a deal.” Then with a heavy blink, he ignited his hands so the two were on fire, completely engulfed in blue flames.

“Holy shit!” I shouted in shock, realising that the longer I spent with this guy the less and less I would have anything rational left to deny his claims. He lit his cigarette from the overkill flame in his hands and took a deep breath before exhaling the smoke in a long stream above his head.

“I see that I will make a believer out of you yet...now sit your ass down and listen up, buddy boy,” he said kicking out the opposite chair and just before it tipped over from the force, it balanced on its two back legs before landing right in front of me back on all four.

“*My name is Brent,*” I gritted out as I took my seat.

“Then kudos to you for only having the one, I have over a hundred so get back to me when I give a shit...*Brent.*”

“*So, I take it one of them is ‘asshole’ then,*” I muttered making him wag his finger at me and even in the shadows I could see the long deadly nail at the end that glinted as the moonlight caught it as though it was made from polished metal.

“Careful now, remember there are many, far more painful ways to die than a bullet to the brain and all it would take is a few whispered words of encouragement in your ear and I will have you ripping off your own fingernails and choking on them in no time at all...so if I were you, I would shut up and listen to what I came all this way to say...*for Marie’s sake.*” The second he said my wife’s name my whole body tensed like a damn bow about to fire an arrow, one that was aimed at someone’s heart. For it felt like the power of that name had the strength to rip my own apart! What was I talking about...*it already had!*

“Ah now, I see that got your attention.” So I growled back at him,

“I don’t want to talk about that bitch!”

“No, that’s surprising seeing as it’s your dead wife... what’s the matter Brent, fallen out of love with your precious Marie that quickly?” He mocked and I sneered back at him feeling my lip curl in disgust.

“Well, she killed our daughter, so yeah, what do you think!” I snapped making him relax back into his chair with a smirk before he took a drag of his cigarette. Then he dropped a bombshell on me,

“No, she didn’t Brent...”

“You did.”

Brent

10

Flashbacks and Coffee

I thought back to that night often and have been caught between two minds since then. For starters, had he not turned up in my life I would have pulled the trigger and me and my wife would both currently be spending an eternity in Hell under the rule of this bastard. However, since then he had made me his murdering lacky, so who the hell knew what was in store for me when this was all over, (As always, pun intended)

Either way, that night I had made a deal with the Devil and he had signed it in his blood and me, well I had signed it in someone else's. Something I discovered after the first time I killed for him. But even now, as I made my way down the private elevator from the Devil's multimillion-dollar apartment, one I had no choice but to share, I asked myself what exactly would happen when this was all over?

But of course, this wasn't the first time I questioned this over the last six years that this partnership had lasted. However, the difference now was that I was coming up to the last name on the list...

My last kill.

See, I was no fool, never had been, which was one of the reasons the Devil had wanted me. I knew how to find people, knew what made people tick...well the 'sane' ones anyway. Which meant I also knew that the chances of making it out of

these last few days alive were slim at best, because the Devil couldn't stay with me forever. Once these last souls had been collected then it was back to Hell for him and for me, it was either I was following him with a one way ticket I didn't buy or it was the rest of my life forced to live in my own version of Hell on Earth until the day I did die...*naturally*.

Because making this deal with the Devil had taught me one thing, that if I ever wanted to be with my family again in the afterlife, then committing suicide wasn't going to get me to them any quicker, but in fact, as far away as I could get from them and *for a burning eternity!*

A reality I was forced to live with the second after he told me that it wasn't my wife who had killed our daughter like I had cruelly thought...

But it had been me.

"NO! No, that's...that's not true!" I shouted as the chair I had been sitting in crashed to the floor in my haste to get away from what I couldn't bear might be the truth!

"You sick bastard, why would you say that...why would you fucking say that to me!?" I roared but the Devil in front of me or whoever the fuck he was, simply shrugged his shoulders after casually brushing something from his suit trousers.

"I'm the Devil, Brent, do you think being called sick is going to insult me?"

"Well, being told I murdered my own child when I saw my wife do it, certainly insults me!" I snapped back after first tearing my gaze from him and raking a hand through my hair.

"Did you though...? Think back now, Brent, did you actually see your wife pull the trigger?" I frowned at his question, hating that he was forcing me to think back to that night and replay every detail...did he not think that I had tortured myself enough! But of course not, not if he was in fact...*The Devil*.

"Well no, but I know it was her! She had our little girl dead in her arms for fuck sake! The gun was in her hand...I

even saw the guilt in her eyes!”

“It wasn’t her own guilt you saw, Brent, it was the guilt she had for you,” he told me in a firm voice and one unsurprisingly void of any emotion.

“No! I don’t believe it, and nothing you do or say will make me think otherwise.” At this the Devil grinned before saying,

“Be careful what you wish for.”

“But I didn’t wish for any...” I started to argue when suddenly the whole world seemed to tilt on its axis, and I was suddenly falling but without the rest of world to follow. It was the strangest sensation until seconds later everything that had once surrounded me went black.

And my life began again.

It was thirteen years earlier, when I had first met my wife. She had been walking home from her nightshift at the hospital nearby where she worked as a trauma nurse in the ER. But as far as I had been concerned, as I lay on the ground bleeding to death in some shithole alleyway, it felt more like she had dropped straight from Heaven like some guardian Angel. Hell, about the only thing I remembered about the attack was thinking that she was an angel, as she certainly looked like one, even if I had been fading in and out of consciousness at the time due to extreme blood loss.

She had quickly called for help before dressing my wounds and managing to slow the bleeding herself just in time before the paramedics arrived. Her face was the last thing I saw before I finally lost consciousness for good and it was the first thing I remembered when I came around in a hospital bed three days later. And that was when we officially met.

I opened my eyes and the moment I saw her standing by my bed, I said the first thing that came to my mind,

“My Angel.” The second I saw that blush, combined with the bleeping of machines I knew I wasn’t in Heaven as I’d first thought. But there was no doubt that my Angel was right there

smiling down at me. She was the most beautiful woman I had ever seen. With her shy smile and the way she slowly tucked her blonde, shoulder length waves behind her ear. Those blue eyes that would wrinkle just slightly when she smiled. She was beautiful. She was my Angel.

She was soon to be...

My Marie.

“Welcome back to the world,” she said, as she helped me swallow some water from a glass she was holding.

“I’m the one who found you,” she told me, as if I could forget. But instead of saying this I took a sip before the pain in my chest made me grit my teeth, trying to hide it.

“I know... thank... you,” I said, my voice hoarse.

“My name is Marie. You had no identification on you. What’s your name?” she asked me softly.

“My name is...” I paused as if I really had to think about it for a moment.

“Brent.” Eventually it came to me and did so on a breathy exhale as I tried to shift my broken body further up the bed to get a better view of the woman in front of me. However, doing so made her look concerned, which wasn’t really surprising, as it was clear she was a nurse.

“Please, let me help you.” Marie leaned over, adjusted my pillow so I could sit up a little and I marvelled at the brief touch.

“It’s nice to meet you, Brent. We are lucky you are still with us. Do you remember what happened to you?” she went on to ask with a real sense of empathy. I thought for a moment then shook my head not yet willing to admit that all I remembered was her. She put her hand on mine, in a way that someone does when they are about to deliver bad news, something that in her profession was a usual occurrence no doubt. But her touch was soft and warm and above all, instantly soothing.

“You were stabbed repeatedly. You lost a lot of blood and the operation to save your life lasted over six hours.” My eyes widened but not for the reasons she thought, so to make myself clearer, I asked,

“And you stayed here, waiting for me that whole time?” My question made her blush again and tuck her hair back, which I quickly read as being a habit of hers.

“Of course I did, you almost died, and no one knew who to call. I didn’t want you waking up and finding yourself alone.”

“Does this mean I get to ask you out on a date?” I asked brazenly, knowing that I wouldn’t take no for an answer, as I had already scanned her finger for signs of a husband, thankful when there was none. This time she really blushed and before she said no, I quickly added,

“You saved my life, Marie, I think the least you can let me do is buy you dinner...as soon as I find my wallet that is.” At this she laughed and in the end, there hadn’t been any need for that wallet. Not seeing that she stayed with me in that hospital room long enough that we ended up sharing three meals together. Then she came back the next day and then the time after her next shift. Then pretty soon, she was the one walking me out the hospital front doors, into her car and driving me to her apartment to take care of me herself.

It turned out that getting nearly stabbed to death for one hundred and fifty-three bucks in my wallet had been the best thing that had happened to me, as it brought me my soulmate. It also had been what had made me decide to become a cop and work towards keeping scumbags off the street.

Suddenly the memory started to fade, even if it had felt like some kind of real time flashback, where I got to relive it all over again. Well, now I was about to relive another moment in my life as a radiant smile welcomed me.

My Marie was looking down at me as she sat straddling my lap. A crisp white bed sheet was half over us, and I could

feel the heavy weight of my cock still nestled deep in her body, our mingled release dripping down my shaft and coating the lips of her sex.

Of course, I remembered this moment, as not many would ever forget the first time they made love to the woman of their dreams. It had been perfect...*she had been perfect.*

The bright beams of sunlight cascaded through the gaps in the curtains and caressed her pale skin, giving her an almost heavenly appearance.

“Angel.” I whispered my nickname for her, one that always made her shy. So, she rested her head on my chest to avoid my eyes and my arms instantly wrapped around her.

“*I love you, Brent,*” Marie whispered as if needing to say it but was still afraid of what my response may be. We had spent over a month together in her apartment but hadn’t allowed our relationship to get to this point due to the time it took for me to heal. Oh, make no mistake I had kissed her so much I had felt like a damn teenager again! I had also made her cum at every opportunity but making love, well that had been something else.

Fucking Heaven, that’s what!

“But I understand if it’s too...”

“I love you, Marie, in fact, I think I have loved you since I first opened my eyes to an angel sat at my bedside.”

“Oh, Brent!”

After this we made love again, and this time it was slow and sensual and no longer in a frenzied need like the first time had been.

The next time the world faded to darkness I knew why and was ready for it. Now bracing myself for the horror I knew would be waiting for me at the end. I breathed a sigh of relief before I was once again thrown into a reanimation of the past, living it exactly the same as I had done the first time.

I found myself in another hospital room, but this time it was Marie on the bed and she was no longer just a girl I met but she was my wife. The obvious smile on both our faces as we readied ourselves for the next stage in our lives together. Our daughter was about to be born.

It was so surreal, but I could feel all the emotions fresh as if it was happening for the first time all over again. The terrified fear merging with the excitement that had built up for the last nine months, there was just no other feeling like it in the world.

I gripped my wife's hand, and Marie started squeezing the hell out of mine. I knew she was scared, and I put on a brave act to help keep her strong. But it was bullshit, as I had never been more terrified in my whole life.

I told her to breathe while the real experts told her to push. I stared down at my wife as she fought the pain and never had my love for her been so strong. Then suddenly our child was being born and I could see her head making its way into the world. This caused me to cry out,

"I can see our baby, Marie, not much longer, you are doing so well!" My emotions overflowed with my words. Marie did so amazingly well, despite what I can only imagine was the mother of all pains. Reason why I offered what felt like pitiful words of encouragement to help her. But then the second she made eye contact with me and smiled once before hunkering down, I knew then in that moment she wasn't just my angel any longer... she was our daughter's as well.

Then she let out the biggest scream yet, and I felt tears form in my eyes as I shouted,

"Marie, here she is, she's coming!" The next few moments then became a blur as the baby was born and quickly placed onto Marie's chest, with that comforting sound of a baby screaming.

The sound of new life.

I kissed her forehead letting her feel my tears of joy for herself as I wrapped an arm around her shoulders.

“I’m so proud of you, sweetheart, you did so well.”

Then a flash of light later and the scene switched. I was now holding my daughter, who was wrapped up all snug in a hospital blanket. I was still smiling from ear to ear and doubted that I would be able to wipe it off my face for some time after.

“Welcome to the world, Daisy,” I whispered as I handed her back to her mother for a feed. Marie took hold of Daisy as her face beamed with love for our little girl.

“Look, isn’t she just the most beautiful thing you ever saw?”

“That she is, Love.” I told her, knowing that I was going treasure this moment for as long as I had life.

“I love you, Brent,” Marie told me, over tears of joy.

And then the vision ended and I realised I was back in my shitty apartment, bent over the table sobbing into my hands. I wanted it back! I would have done anything to have it back!

“Why would you show me this, you sadistic fuck!?” I screamed at him but even as I asked this, I already knew why. It was because I wanted it back. It was to remind me exactly what I would do to get it back. Because those old feelings of love and happiness hit me like a damn freight train.

“Here, I made coffee...I think you may need it,” was the Devil’s only reply. I shot a look to the coffee maker to see it hadn’t been used and the Devil chuckled before telling me,

“Not that way... besides, the stuff you have I wouldn’t let my hounds in Hell drink!” I then flinched as the black mug slid towards me without being touched and I had to wonder if I was actually manifesting this whole fucking thing. Had I taken drugs, was that it? Had I moved from the bottle to one of a different kind?

Next to the cup I was soon holding was my firearm and out of curiosity, I checked the revolver, soon realising that like before, it was back to being fully loaded. Something which

only managed to reinforce the delusion, that the first half of all this clearly didn't happen.

"Brent," Lucifer said in an obvious way that he was growing tired of my lack of belief.

"Don't doubt yourself. You were naughty and you did try to kill me, meaning your next thought will be, 'why didn't anyone hear' or 'why haven't the neighbours called the police after hearing gunfire?' Simple, I stopped them with a thought...it's what I do. Now drink..." I did as he said just because if anything, I think my fucked-up mind needed it right now! But he was right, there was no way this was my coffee, it was too damn nice.

"You're not real, this isn't real...this can't be real."

"I'll tell you what, let's move on to the next part of the night and if you still don't think it's real, then I was nice enough to reload your gun for you and you can go back to what you were doing right before I arrived. Hell, I will even make sure a neighbour you don't like is the one who finds you and your pretty, blown out skull and brain matter decorated walls."

"Gee thanks, you're all heart," I said sarcastically, making him wink at me and say,

"I'm nice like that." Then he took another swig out of the nearly empty bottle, seeing now that he wasn't drinking coffee, making me question where he even got it from?

"I killed a Barista in 13 A," he said, telling me he could read my mind and my eyes went wide for both reasons.

"Relax, I'm the Devil, Brent, you think I can't joke about death." I frowned but wisely decided not to say anything.

"And speaking of jokes, now it's time to talk about the one on you," he said after slamming down the bottle making me jump and slapping his hands together once, which apparently was all it took before my vision turned to black.

The Heavens opened to the crack of thunder and the sky represented the broken hearts of so many people. The group of sombre souls all smartly dressed in black, opened their umbrellas in unison... all except me.

Because I was burying my family.

It was only two weeks after the heart destroying event. It was an open and shut case, they called it a murder/suicide in police lingo. There were people all around me, dressed so nicely, so respectful, full of empathy. But really, I knew they were just glad it wasn't them burying their loved ones.

There was a priest who said all the words that he had been trained to say. There were the flowers someone else had ordered and later there would be food laid out on someone else's table. Because I hadn't done a damn thing but got up that morning, got dressed into a black suit and numbly made my way to the funeral home having no idea who it was that had arranged all of this.

Because I was that numb.

Even when it came to saying a few words, I was still numb. To the point that when the priest looked to me with hope in his eyes and all it took was a small shake of my head for him to get the message. I then ignored the wave of disbelieving gasps from the crowd as the priest thankfully gave up trying.

Didn't they understand yet that saying a few words goodbye wasn't going to soothe my fucking soul! Because there were no words for something like this. There was only rage and anger and desperation. There were only questions of why to plague this husband until the day I joined them.

There were no words for finding out your wife just killed your daughter.

No fucking words!

Which was why I wasn't really there, mentally or emotionally. Even as the coffins were lowered, an adult sized one, and a small one, a size that made it all the more painful to

watch. My amazing child that was going to grow up to make a difference in the world, now lost...no, not lost...*but taken*.

Whatever happened to a mother's unconditional love? Where the fuck had that been when holding my gun?! A crow crying out above my head was my only answer and it felt like one that came directly from Hell itself.

After they were laid to rest, those nicely dressed people walked up to me, each waiting their turn to do what was deemed the right thing and shook my hand, offering their condolences. I made very little eye contact with them, if any at all. One person even left a small note in my hand as I shook it.

The last person lingered longer, and a brief look told me it was my commanding officer. He was saying something about taking all the time I needed, but I simply put a hand inside my jacket and handed him my badge before I walked away.

Walked away from my former life.

And I did so with thoughts over the years of the happiness and pure family bliss I had just lost, doing so as I turned my back on my dead family. Then, with the crows still circling ahead, I looked down at the paper in my hand. Great big fat rain droplets started to fall with the second crack of thunder, and I opened the thick folded parchment before it got too damaged.

I frowned as I watched the black ink start to blur as the first of the rain hit each word, making it bleed black tears down the paper. I looked around in anger, now wondering who would write such a thing.

Who would write these words to a devastated man...

'All of us will die, and most of us will suffer.'

Brent

11

Deal with the Devil

Well, now I knew.

“You left me that note,” I accused the second I faced the Devil once more and was back from the vision of that cruel day. He raised his hands up and said,

“Guilty.”

“Yeah, something tells me you always are,” I commented drily making the bastard chuckle. Then he nodded down at the coffee and said,

“I am afraid I will need you sober for this next part.”

“No,” I said firmly, as getting sober was the very last thing I needed right now.

“I’m sorry, come again?” the Devil asked at the sight of my defiance and holding a hand to his ear as though he was hard of hearing.

“I said no, no more fucking flashbacks!” I saw his eyes flash brighter and before he could react, I said,

“Look, I get it, my life used to be great and now it sucks, so just tell me what you came here to say and get on with it!”

“Oh, but Brent, you mistake me. I didn’t come here to remind you of how much your life sucks.”

“No?” I questioned with a sneer.

“No, I came here to show you just how much *it should suck.*” And with that suddenly my body was thrown backwards, and I yelled in shock as my back hit the unforgiving tiled floor.

“What the fuck!?” I roared as I tried to move but quickly found that was glued to the upturned chair on the floor. Then I watched with my chin to my chest to see the Devil rise from his seat and become a looming shadowed figure stood above me. Then he raised his hand and held it above my body with his palm facing down.

“Like I said, I am afraid I really will need you sober for this next part, Brent and well clearly...the coffee just isn’t going to cut it.” Then I watched as his eyes started to glow like burning pits of Hell before my back bowed as if my spine was doubling back in on itself with a Devil’s hand grasping both ends!

Suddenly I started sweating, no not just sweating but liquid was pouring out of me from every pore! I shamefully felt my jeans get damp as the bastard even made me piss myself! I also started retching and it was no surprise when vomit spewed from my mouth, raining back over me.

It quickly became clear that the Devil’s idea of sobering me up meant expelling all of the alcohol from my system in seconds and I soon felt blood trickling from my nose at what must have been from the pressure of it all, as what he was doing to my body, Christ only knew...

Well, him *and the Devil.*

After this I must have passed out because the next time I opened my eyes I was back in my vision, only this time, I was not alone. The other difference was that instead of being a part of the past, I was now only there to observe it. I knew this the second I saw myself lying in the bed next to my still breathing wife.

“Do you recall this night?” the Devil asked as he stepped up next to me, nodding down at the scene of my past life. It

was the middle of the night and my other self was suddenly startled awake by a noise. I watched as he looked around to see what could have caused the noise, but nothing was there.

“I remember this, it turned out to be a neighbour’s cat that got stuck in our trash can,” I told him but I was unable to keep the question as to why he was showing me this out of my tone. But then I continued to watch as he reached for the lockbox inside what was once my nightstand. He unlocked it, using the combination that only myself and my wife knew and as silently as he could, he retrieved the gun as I knew he would. He then checked to make sure it was loaded and we both watched as he left the room to investigate the disturbance.

“Oh, but it turned out to be much more important than that...*watch*,” the Devil told me, nodding towards my other self as he came back into the room. He told Marie it was nothing when she asked the question half in her sleep and obviously not worried as she slept next to a cop who knew how to handle himself. Then he placed the gun back in the box with a yawn and saw his phone light up telling him he had a message asking him to come in to work early. I remembered back to this moment and knew what he was thinking and how he knew that he had better get his ass back to sleep or he would be like the walking dead tomorrow as he was now doing double shifts.

So, I watched as he set his alarm, put down his phone, kissed his wife and went back to sleep. These were the things he did do. But none of that was what was important here.

It was what he didn’t do that was.

Like relocking his gun box.

After this and with my mind still reeling from that piece of disturbing information, the Devil clicked his fingers and the vision blurred and twisted into another.

The light returned and now we were standing in the living room of my old family home in the suburbs. Marie was in the kitchen, making what looked like hot chocolate before Daisy’s

bedtime, in fact she was just reaching for the bag of mini marshmallows out of the cupboard, cursing Brent under her breath for putting it out of reach again. As soon as I saw this, I knew.

I fucking knew and my blood ran cold.

“*Stop this,*” I whispered in horror.

“But this is why we are here, Brent.”

“No! Stop this!” I shouted this time as I heard my daughter’s voice playfully singing in the background...it was her favourite tune. Just then, Daisy walked out of the bedroom and skipped into the living room, wearing a dress-up outfit she’d got for her last birthday. She looked adorable in it and pictures of the first time she wore it were framed on the wall in the hallway. Cowgirl hat, boots and even a little sheriff’s badge pinned onto the pink dress, it was a character from her favourite show.

Suddenly, I turned to the Devil and pleaded with him, trying to reach out and grab him by the lapels, but my hands went through him just like they would the shadows that surrounded him.

“Please! Please don’t fucking do this...don’t make me watch!” The Devil grinned down at me, ignoring my pitiful begging, telling me,

“But it looks like dear Daisy found a new toy to play with, Brent.” Then he nodded behind me and I swore for a moment I couldn’t look. I didn’t want to look. I really didn’t! I wanted to sink to the floor, curl up and die right alongside them, for I knew what was coming and I already started to hate myself for it.

But then I heard her voice and my will broke, snapping like the Devil just stepped on my bones.

“Mommy, mommy,” Daisy called out to Marie and as she turned the horror on her face was soon mirrored on my own.

“I’m a cowgirl, look!” Daisy’s voice sang happily, gaining pitch in the height of her excitement. My wife’s beautiful face drained of colour and terror was all there was to

see...sheer, undiluted terror. I then tried to do what Marie was momentarily paralyzed to do. I tried to run to my daughter, but I couldn't fucking move!

"Brent, these events are in the past and cannot be altered," the Devil stated in a matter of fact way, as if this wasn't the end of my life I was about to witness for the first time. But I ignored him and screamed at my wife to move, to do something. Only it was as if time has stood still for her and slowly the bag of marshmallows tipped from her hand, scattering tiny cubes all over the floor.

"Daisy, baby..." Marie said, the fear evident in her voice in a way I had never heard it tremble before.

"That's daddy's gun, Sweetheart, it's not a toy. Please put it down slowly." Marie continued hesitantly towards Daisy who looked confused, but she started to obey. And I knew what was coming, even as I foolishly prayed for the safety to be clicked on...*but it wasn't.*

"Okay, mommy," Daisy's sweet voice replied as she saw the fear in her mother's face, wanting to do the right thing. She was always a good kid...she just didn't understand. She was too young to understand.

I watched now as Marie got closer to our child, our sweet innocent Daisy. She was almost in reach of the gun but then Daisy leant forward to place the dangerous weapon on the ground and soundless screams started coming from my mouth, the word 'no' repeatedly screamed inside my brain. Because the barrel of the gun was facing their daughter's face, and her little thumbs were on the trigger as she was setting it on the floor. Marie saw this too, and in a last ditch attempt to avert the tragedy she jumped forward. But her fingers met the gun too late as it went off. And with the sound, that horrifying sound, as it echoed through their once beautiful home, my knees gave out and I was soon on the floor sobbing right along with Marie.

My dear, sweet Marie. My Angel. The woman I loved most in the world and the very one I had blamed all this time for killing our daughter!

“It was me...it was my fault all this time! I forgot to lock it away...I forgot and now...my family...my babies, my girls...*gone*,” I was sobbing now and suddenly I was alone. I let out a long, pained moan, like one from a mortally wounded animal that is emitting its final breath before life is ripped from it. Only for me it was the wrong life, as it should have been me. It should have been my life taken as it was my fault. Oh, if only there had have been an intruder that night. If only someone had shot me dead and then ran off. Yes, Marie would be without a husband and Daisy without a father, but they would have lived!

They would have lived a full life, not the miserable half-life I had been living this last year.

A year blaming the wrong person for my foolish mistake.

Fuck, I couldn't hate myself anymore than I did then, and waking up to find water pounding on my huddled form just made me want to drown myself. But then I remembered my loaded gun on the table. So, I got out of the shower, having no clue how long I had been in there but knowing it had something to do with the Devil.

No doubt he wanted his new minion clean and vomit free, I thought with a hate fill sneer. Hatred for what he forced me to see and forced me to learn about the past, even though I knew it was something I should have known right from the start.

By the time I walked back into the small living space wearing just a towel I only had eyes for one thing, not giving two shits about being found naked with half my head missing. Just knowing that I needed that bullet in my mouth right now as much as I needed my next breath. But then the second my hand reached for it, it vanished.

“What the...”

“Let's not get too hasty there, Brent,” the Devil said, sitting in his usual space next to the kitchen table. But this was when I lost it and picked up the closest thing and threw it at him shouting,

“FUCK YOU!”

However, he just grabbed what turned out to be a lamp and crushed it to dust, with the shade setting alight instantly. Then he growled once, showed a snap of his teeth and flung his arm out.

I was suddenly flung across the room and landed hard enough to snap bones against the fridge, knowing that he had hit me even without touching me. I coughed through the agony, smiling the second blood came spewing out my mouth. I slid to the floor as the internal bleeding started shutting down my organs due to lack of blood being able to reach the right places. I knew most my ribs were cracked and one arm was broken at the elbow and the other arm was out of its socket, now hanging limp and useless down by my side.

It felt as if I had been hit by a fucking truck, but right then I could do no more than welcome the pain. I would also welcome the death that was what felt like seconds away from taking me. But then the Devil stood, pulled down his cuffs and walked over to me. Then he looked down at me and for a second I saw a glimpse of the real him, fucking horns and all! Jesus H Christ but if I thought I knew what real fear was before this moment, then I couldn't have been more wrong... *as this was real fucking fear!* Even in the shadows he would terrify the shit out of anyone!

“Now you have that out of your system, let's move on, should we?” In that moment I would have liked to have pointed out the obvious but instead of saying, ‘little problem here, asshole, as I am dying,’ all I managed to do was cough up more blood. But that's when I realised he must have had the power to read my mind, because he simply said,

“Yes, but not for long.” Then he clicked his fingers and suddenly every single injury was gone. I was still frowning down at myself, feeling my ribs and wondering why I couldn't see any of them protruding up through my skin anymore. However, the Devil simply ignored me and reached for the last bottle of Jim Bean out of my kitchen cupboard before settling himself by the table once more. Then he kicked out the chair opposite and told me,

“Take a seat.” I got to my feet, steadying myself on the fridge and noting the now huge man-sized dent in the door, thinking that yep, that would do it.

“Why, what else could we have to discuss?” I asked, surprised at how even and calm my voice sounded, especially after the last five minutes let alone the last blood curdling hour!

“Just sit the fuck down and listen,” he demanded in an exasperated tone, so I did as I was told.

“Listen to what?” I asked as he magically produced two crystal cut whisky glasses on the table.

“Well, now we have the memory lane part of the evening out of the way, we have business to discuss.” I sneered at his comment and snapped,

“I fucking doubt that, what is it you could possibly want from me anyway, cause I don’t know if you’ve noticed, but I have nothing left.”

“You have a wife in Hell, so I would say that’s something,” he commented dryly unscrewing the cap and pouring out two drinks. Meanwhile, my body had gone ramrod straight and my jaw tensed enough I was surprised my teeth didn’t shatter.

“*Say that again,*” I snarled.

“Now, now, Brent, I think we both know what happened the last time you let your anger get the better of you and just for reference here, I could literally break every bone in your body and continue to heal you over and over again with very little effort.”

“Then why don’t you!?” I shouted pushing him to do just that. He released a sigh and told me,

“Because it is a waste of my fucking time but more importantly...

It’s a waste of your wife’s.”

Two days later...

Phoenix, Arizona and anywhere other than passed out on my kitchen floor is pretty much the last place I ever expected to be. But here I was, stood outside the law offices of one Jacob Wholeheart. Because seeing the visions the Devil forced me to see and hitting me with the gut bleeding truth wasn't the end of my story. No, because as it turned out, it was only the beginning.

Which meant the rest of that night consisted of me making a deal with the Devil. But I know what you're thinking, why would the Devil even bother taking the time showing me all those flashbacks, something that had been my own question asked at the time.

"Because, Brent, I needed to remind you that you still loved your wife and the very last place you would have wanted her was rotting in Hell, where I am sorry to have to tell you this..."

"No, you're not," I interrupted because, let's face it, he was the Devil, he wasn't sorry for anything.

"No, I'm not, but it doesn't change the fact that she is currently in Hell." Now this got him his reaction. As in the type of reaction where I furiously denied it being possible for the next twenty minutes. Because my Marie hadn't just been *my* angel, she had been an angel to everyone who met her. It was what had made her such a good nurse. She took being kind and considerate to a whole other level, so thinking of her ever being in Hell wasn't an option I would believe, at least not until the Devil explained why.

"I don't believe it, not my Marie, she would never..."

"What, kill herself? I'm sorry, Brent did I get it wrong and she just tripped and fell on a bullet or is it another trip down memory lane you need, just to be sure."

"What the fuck are you talking about?!" I snapped shaking my head and getting angry with the casual way he was talking about my wife's death.

“I hate dealing with idiotic atheist mortals, at least the church nuts don’t take much convincing,” he muttered to himself rolling his eyes.

“Hey, I went to Sunday school, alright!”

“For what, the free orange juice and a better chance to look down Sindy Weather’s shirt?” he asked, making my mouth drop before saying,

“How did you know...?”

“Hello, Devil remember, or did you think it was just the big prick upstairs with that masterful, all seeing eye...anyway, time to focus here and get back to your wife’s Hell damnation and all that.” I actually growled at this, as in like a wild dog backed into a corner and I was quite sure it was the first time the noise had ever been made.

“So, if you will kindly shut up for half a minute then I will explain to you that the rule states, quitters go straight to Hell. That’s what the old man wanted. They do not pass ‘go’ and they do not collect \$200. No judgment at the gates of Heaven, they are dammed to the inferno I call home...I am guessing with that murderous glint in your eye that you also now get my point.”

“Let me get this straight, you’re saying that my Marie is in Hell because she couldn’t live without our daughter and killed herself.”

“Technically she is *my Marie* now, you know, on account of being ruler of Hell and all... and yes, that is exactly what I am saying.”

“Oh God! Please don’t tell me...what about my daughter? What about Daisy?!”

“Of course not, she was a child, she wasn’t consciously trying to kill herself, it was an accident and he may be an asswipe, but God still recognises those.” The relief that washed over me made my shoulders slump.

“But wait, if you’re the King of Hell and almighty then you can just free her, let her go up to...” He held a hand up to stop me and said,

“Let’s not get ahead of ourselves quite just yet.”

“But you said...”

“I know what I said, Brent, but let’s not mistake why I am here and here’s a clue in case you’re confused, I am not a charity and I don’t give a shit about you or your family, as far as I am concerned all three of you could be the next set of chew toys for my pet, Cerberus.”

“Then why the fuck *are* you here, asshole?!” I shouted, wishing I could throttle the bastard for speaking that way about my family. At this he smirked before leaning casually back in the chair. Then he told me the reason and it was one that would end by changing my life forever.

“Why the reason the Devil always appears, Brent...”

I am here to bargain.”

Brent

12

A Hell above the Law

Six Souls.

Just six souls he said. That was his bargain. So, when he went on to ask me what I would be willing to do to get Marie out of Hell, my reply had been,

“Anything.”

“Even kill?” had been his next question. Hence, exactly how my pathetic life had started to get even more complicated. Because this was all my fault. If I had just locked that fucking lockbox back up after that damn cat, then none of this would have happened! I was a damn cop for Christ sake! I preached to the fucking public about gun safety! God, but if I thought about putting a bullet in my head before, then now I wanted to carve my damn name on one and carry it with me. Because once this was all over then that was my end. Hell would be my punishment and that bullet was my fate.

Because I had caused this and now, if there was even a small way for me to fix it then I would spend the rest of my worthless life setting it right, even if I couldn't bring them back to life and erase the past...something the evil in a suit assured me wasn't possible.

However, Marie was in Hell because of me, my daughter was in Heaven alone, so the least I could do was grant them

both an eternity of peace together. Which meant there was only one thing left for me to say,

“Tell me more about these souls.”

This led me to find myself in Arizona only two days later after ‘getting my ass in a suit’ and on a first-class flight, both courtesy of the Devil. Who knew, but apparently he was one rich bastard and spared no expense for one of his soon to be murdering lackies. A mortal lacky that he kindly informed me was currently his only one.

Of course, I had asked him all the obvious questions, like why he couldn’t have just killed them and why did he need me. But he explained that he was the Devil and despite popular, paranoid church beliefs, he couldn’t take life. Oh, he could manipulate the Hell out of a situation and hope for the best (that being the most evil of outcomes) but in this instance, he was dealing with some different ‘untouchable’ souls, he called them.

Then I asked him why and that’s when things got testy, mainly because he refused to tell me why and secondly because I wanted something else in return.

“I thought this was a bargain.,” I told him making him growl before he scraped a talon along my kitchen tabletop and gouged a long thin line in the wood an inch deep.

“You want your wife somewhere she will be safe...you do understand the concept of Hell...*right?*”

“You must have somewhere, surely it can’t all be fucking fire and brimstone,” I said watching as he rolled his eyes at me in exasperation, as though he were dealing with a child believing in fairy tales.

“Fine, let’s consider her my guest and off limits...so, do we have a deal or not?” After this I had no choice but to shake hands and literally make a deal with the Devil.

Of course, what people who do such things tell you, is that the small print is a bitch named eternity! That and the second you do make the deal the power of it is so great that it

knocks you on your ass and ends up giving you a splitting headache when you wake up a full day later.

Shit, what was I saying, I still had a bloody headache and knowing I was about to put a bullet in some guy was the least of my reasons. Which was why I was now checking my piece for what felt like the tenth time before checking my surroundings, feeling as if I was being watched. But then again, I was, just not by anyone living.

It was a modest, blue fronted building that sat in the middle of a strip mall. The area looked to have seen better days judging by the empty store fronts each side of the law office. I was sweating, with cold beads running down my back despite the humidity and warm Arizona breeze. I reached inside my jacket, this time to remove the silver flask that contained my liquid crutch I felt I needed just as much as I did my gun. I chugged it down, every last drop.

Cheap bourbon was my choice for the day. One strong enough that you didn't need much to feel its effect seep into your consciousness, relaxing even the most tense situation... and fuck me if this shit wasn't about to get tense!

My days of a cop were long gone and over. Because this was what it had come to, I had gone from a cop to assassin in just days. But then I knew that for me there was no greater cause. I had to save my Marie from the fate I had forced her to endure and all thanks to one mindless, unforgivable moment.

If only I had locked that fucking box!

I shook my head to rid myself of the cobwebs of my guilt just long enough to step through the door and get this job done. Christ though, I was so nervous as I walked inside, it was as if I had forgotten what it was like to be a cop. I even flinched when an electronic bell chimed as the spring-loaded door shut behind me as if sealing my fate.

The receptionist didn't even look up from filing her nails and couldn't have looked more uninterested if she tried. She was sickly thin, red haired and probably in her late thirties. Her completion was so white the woman's skin looked the greyer side of dead and fit for haunting houses. I wondered if

there was a giant hat or parasol under her desk that served to shield herself from the rays of the Arizona sun.

“Good day,” I said thinking it was anything but. Well, that was unless she hated her boss, as then I was about fifteen minutes away from making at least one person’s day. I tried to make eye contact with her, something she refused to do in return.

“I have an appointment with Mr Wholeheart,” I informed her hoping this would jolt a response.

“Your name?” she asked momentarily recognising that she had a job to do, meaning she had no choice but to tear her gaze from her fingertips for a moment. I was not prepared for the piercing green eyes nor her deep voice that certainly did not match her breakable looking frame.

“Dan Black,” I replied, having already rehearsed this part back in my hotel room like a shmuck in front of the mirror that morning. She looked over her appointment book before speaking.

“Yes, there you are, take a seat over there, Mr Black as Mr Wholeheart will see you shortly,” she said to me, finally deciding I was worthy enough to be obliged to do a more decent attempt at her job. But then when I saw that wrinkling in her nose, I couldn’t help but feel a little paranoid that she could now smell the liquor on my breath.

I nodded with a smile and folded myself into the nearest seat, doing so in a way I knew would hide my piece. She pressed an intercom button and announced my presence to her employer, doing so in a tone that didn’t exactly scream respect for either of us. My guess was she didn’t like her boss as I’d suspected.

A man’s voice responded almost immediately, asking her to show me in. I thought perhaps he was hard up for clients, as I swear I had never been seen so fast, especially not with someone in his profession. The receptionist got up and waved me towards another door, begrudgingly asking if I would like anything to drink, coffee or water, which I declined, on account of not wanting to throw up again.

Oh, and I was about to shoot her boss, so there was that, I thought with sarcasm.

Wholeheart's office screamed cheap and tacky, as if the guy had decorated it based on some legal movie from the eighties. It had an old green carpet, chipped dark wood panelling, a bookshelf holding a set of untouched leather-bound law books and a few shitty attempts at artwork on the walls. A framed law degree took centre stage above where he sat at his desk next to a tasteless bar mirror that advertised some old bourbon. An oversized partner desk dominated the room and I couldn't help but wonder if perhaps the little man sitting behind it thought himself to be Johnnie Cochran, the high-profile lawyer who represented OJ. Well, if the glove fits, I thought with a smirk.

There were two small, leather chairs in front of his desk that I made my way towards. The receptionist introduced me then promptly left us alone, no doubt in a rush to continue her all-important manicure. She closed the door behind her, leaving me now standing in the shabby office, one I knew was just a front for the more illegal business he was interested in.

But hey, of course no guy in a suit, flashing a badge would believe this guy to be a millionaire, I thought with a roll of my eyes, wondering if he thought investigators dumb enough to believe that every guy wearing a red suit could be Santa Clause.

Wholeheart got up and walked around his desk, his hand extended to greet me, along with an easy smile he no doubt used as a weapon on a daily basis. One that would assure folk he would do right by them.

"Mr Black, I'm Jacob Wholeheart." I shook his hand firmly and I couldn't help the jolt to my system, as a flood of emotions assaulted my mind. Along with a flash of imagery that almost overloaded my optics as a head splitting pain cut through my head like a mill saw through rough timber.

"Are you alright, Mr Black?" he asked as I let go of his hand and felt for the chair behind me before almost falling into

it. I nodded that I was fine as I steadied myself, hating in this moment to show weakness.

“Are you sure I can’t get my receptionist to get you some water or a hot drink?” I shook my head and composed myself.

“No, it’s okay, I just got a little lightheaded for a second there,” I said trying to hold back the grimace of what I had just been forced to see. Thankfully, the Devil had warned me it may happen, along with a few other things I wasn’t exactly looking forward to. So, I shook it off and refocused my attention on the man in front of me...

The Devil’s first victim.

Mr Wholeheart was a short man, at least a foot below my height, with a receding hairline, and thin gold framed glasses. His gaudy well-worn, cheap suit actually matched the colours of his office and I had to wonder if this was all part of the act...Just another scumbag in sheep’s clothing.

He motioned for me to sit in one of the fake leather chairs and returned to his side of the desk, one that was far too large and wide for a man of his limited size. I took a seat and waited for him to start the conversation.

“Okay, well as long as you are alright, Dan... May I call you Dan?” he asked and I nodded in reply.

“So, you’re here seeking legal advice. How can I help you?” At this point I almost felt like saying I’m here to introduce you to the Devil but wisely refrained.

“Well, Jacob. Can I call you Jacob?” I ask without waiting for his consent and doing so in the same condescending way he had asked. Then I dove right into my rehearsed lie.

“I think my wife is having an affair, and I believe she has been for some time.”

“I’m certainly sorry to hear that, Dan. Let’s start with the minor details before we get to the meat of your concerns. What’s your wife’s name?” he asked whilst getting out a pad of paper with his legal practice name printed at the top and a

pen with matching printing on the side, as if the irony in his name could ever be forgotten, I thought with disdain.

“Bella,” I remarked with a straight face.

“And do you know the name of the person she’s having an affair with?” he asked.

“Edward...something.” He jotted this down on the notepad, oblivious to the facade I was creating thanks to the appalling teen movie that was playing in the background in my hotel room last night.

“How long have you been married?” he asked.

“Six years,” I replied thinking why not, after all, six seemed to be my new magic number, one forced upon me.

“And how long have you suspected the affair?” he asked not wasting anytime getting into the bones of the matter.

“A little over a year.” He looked up from his notes and gave me a serious look. For a second I thought he had twigged I was bullshitting him, but no.

“I apologize in advance for this next line of questioning, but was there ever any domestic violence? Did you ever strike Bella?”

“Well,” I answered, pausing a little too long before saying.

“There was this one time, I did try to kill her. Only the once mind you but obviously I was unsuccessful.” He looked at me dumbfounded, but I started to laugh, unable to help myself.

“I’m kidding, Jacob. No, I never raised a hand to her.” He let out a sigh of relief, one I almost warned him against doing so soon.

“You know what else I just realized is pretty funny,” I continued, with a smirk,

“Have you ever watched the movie, ‘Twilight’?” I asked making him frown at the question before telling me with a nonchalant wave of his hand,

“I’ve heard of it, but never watched it.”

“Really?” I overacted my surprise and a look told me he was looking now to press on and get off the strange subject.

“You are not missing much, not unless you’re an angsty teenager wanting to date a stalker who sparkles in the sunlight...” He huffed in a way that told me he didn’t know any other way to respond, so I continued with feigned growing annoyance,

“Then have you ever watched a TV show called ‘Lost Man,’ it was set right here in Phoenix. I imagine they would have created a law in this state that would have made it a requirement for its residents to watch.” Wholeheart lets out a fake chuckle this time, combined with a puzzled look.

“Anyway,” I continue,

“The main character is named Dan Black, just like my name, you see. I despised that character and it got to the point where the only reason I continued watching the show was a desire to see something bad happen to him in the end.”

“Did it?” he asked with his curiosity obviously getting the better of him.

“Tut, tut now Jacob, you don’t want me to ruin it for you, now do you?” At this point he could obviously tell something was amiss with me and my strange behaviour, which was why he put down his pen and leant back in his chair, creating a steeple with his fingers.

“I don’t watch television, except for the news, so you won’t be ruining anything,” Jacob said with a tone that was starting to show his annoyance.

“Let’s just say, that he gets what’s coming to him, but it wasn’t satisfactory enough for my liking.”

“Sorry to hear that...But now let’s get back to your...” I cut him off immediately,

“But here’s where it gets funny, Jacob. There is another character on the show, a lawyer, whose last name is Wholeheart. It would be really weird if his first name was

Jacob, but it wasn't, I forget what it was," I tell him, finding all this information out thanks to the few days of research I'd had time to do on the man and finding the guy on the show as the first name on the Google search.

"Small world," he said, clearly uninterested in my story and I swear I would have smiled if this whole thing wasn't just being said as a coping mechanism to get my head past the gruesome task I knew was coming and speaking of which...

"You and the guy on the show have a lot in common," I told him, as I reached into my jacket and removed my gun before boldly pointing it at him. Oh yeah, now I had his attention.

"You're both seedy, immoral, ambulance chasers with no taste in clothing or interior decorating," I told him, making his body jerk back in his chair and I watched as a million questions fluttered past in his mind like some black demonic butterfly's wings about to come battering down on him.

"Co...come now Dan, wh...what is this all about?" he asked stuttering his words, clearly terrified.

"I think it's time you go back to calling me Mr Black, don't you Jacob?" I told him in a cold, serious tone that did wonders in hiding the fact that I was just as terrified as him. But thankfully, he couldn't hear my heartbeat like the hundred-year-old boy could in that stupid Vampire movie.

"What's this about?"

"I'm getting there, Jacob, so please don't fucking interrupt me," I told him, gritting my teeth and scratching my forehead with the barrel of my gun the second I felt the presence of the Devil start to seep into the room. I swear if your teeth could itch then that was what it would have felt like. But the twisted, immoral bastard in front of me had no clue what fucking fear was. Because if he was this afraid of me with a gun in my hand, then Christ only knew what he would have done if he knew who else was now in the room with us.

"Now, like I said, the two of you have a lot in common, including questionable off-shore accounts. But there are two

distinct differences. First, as much as a lowlife the lawyer on the show was, he was still a likeable guy, *you're not*. And do you know why, Jacob, because he would never get involved with *child prostitution and sex trafficking*." I growled out these last few words and instantly the beads of sweat appeared on his forehead screaming out his guilt, even if his next set of words were a long string of denials.

"Look you have the wrong guy, Black, I swear to God that I would never..." I started laughing and he stopped quickly,

"Oh please... I think we both know that God has fuck all to do with people like you, so if you are going to swear your life away, then let's do it right, *yeah?*" He shook his head a little in a way that people do when they aren't sure if the psycho in front of them is actually asking them to do something or not.

"Do it right?" he asked on a fearful stammer.

I grinned once before quickly cutting through my amusement in a heartbeat.

"That life, the one you deem so worthy of me letting you live, then swear to me you're not a bad guy, swear it to me, only this time don't swear on God, because he doesn't care about you. So, do it right, Wholeheart...this time,

"Swear on the Devil."

Brent

13

In the Devil's Shoes

“Swear on the Devil.”

“What?”

“You heard me, swear your life to the Devil,” I told him, making him shake his head at me in short erratic movements that screamed he now thought he was dealing with a crazy person...*fuck me, but he really had no idea.*

“But...but I...”

“Come now, Jacob, if you’re so sure I have the wrong guy, then swearing your pitiful soul to the Devil won’t be a problem now, will it?” I pointed out, now making the Devil chuckle behind me at the game I was playing. After this he shifted from looking worried to all out panicked, as though he could feel it but still, he remained in the dark to what was truly coming to him from the bastard at my back.

“I...I...”

“What’s wrong, Jacob, not so sure which side of your soul you should be betting on?” I asked making him quickly change his tactics and I had to say I would have been disappointed if he hadn’t...after all, they always do in the movies.

“I have money, Dan, like you said, in off-shore accounts. I’ll make you rich. I have millions! But it’s all gone the second

you pull that trigger!” I smirked again then *clocked back the hammer*.

“Please! Jesus Christ, please don’t hurt me!” he yelled, holding out a hand as if this could help him.

“I’m not going to hurt you, Jacob...” I said and allowed him to take a premature sigh of relief, letting him foolishly think that this was just an empty threat.

I gave him only three seconds.

“No...*I’m going to kill you.*” This time he took my words seriously and something changed in him as I delivered the line. One I had gone over a thousand times beforehand in the mirror. But then the reality of the situation fully hit my mind and my hand started to shake. Because, even though I may have been a cop and discharged my weapon many times before, the rock-hard truth remained. I had never shot anyone in cold blood before and this was as far from ‘in the line of duty’ my moral mind could get!

Which meant I hesitated...*my first mistake.*

“*He has a gun, Brent and is about to shoot you.*” The Devil calmly informed me, and he was right. But I was too slow to notice as his right hand reached under the desk where he kept a Smith & Wesson affixed to the underside of the furniture. Then the sound of gunfire hit my ears before the pain ripped through me with each bullet that pierced through my groin and abdomen under the desk.

I instinctively fired my own weapon, killing Jacob Wholeheart instantly, as one bullet went clean through his sweaty, fat forehead. But it was too late as his shots caused me to fall backwards off the chair, and I lay on the floor, dyeing the green carpet crimson.

I looked around in a state of shock before seeing the swirling shadows surrounding the figure of the Devil as he emerged right in front of me, now looking down over my dying form.

“*Well, that could have gone better,*” he commented dryly as I started coughing.

“No shit, asshole,” I stated after spitting out blood to one side. Then the door to the office was thrown open and the receptionist stood frozen in the door frame. I expected the screams of a frantic terrified woman to erupt any second, but she was oddly cold as she scanned over the carnage. I pointed my gun at her trying not to let her see how my finger slipped on the trigger thanks to being too soaked in blood to grip anything.

The Devil appeared in the edge of my peripheral vision, bending on a knee to get closer to me as he ordered calmly,

“Kill her,”

“No!” I cried out, making the skinny woman before me jump as if I was speaking to her, as it was clear she couldn’t see what I saw. I really didn’t want to kill her too, so instead I spoke in as menacing a tone as I could possibly manage, despite the pain and the blood flooding out of me.

“Iris, take the rest of the day off. You have two girls, Kelly and Maddison. Pick them up early from school and take them back to your house, 66 Park Avenue,” I told her letting her know the depth of the threat I was making, without needing to say the words. Telling her that I knew about her life thanks to my research and would hunt her down, something that would put her family at risk should she go to the cops.

“Enjoy the rest of the afternoon with your girls and live... *Do I make myself clear, Iris?*” She nodded repeatedly in an animated, frantic fashion.

“Good. Now get the fuck outta here.” She nodded again and quickly turned on her heels before running out of the building. She had probably never run into the sun so fast in her entire life.

“Nicely done, Brent,” the Devil praised making me scoff.

“Thanks, but I think the pissing blood part of the plan negates the pat on the back...don’t you.” I said sarcastically, coughing up more blood and this time not having the strength left to spit it to the side thanks to the pain that was cutting me up inside. In fact, the only reason I wasn’t screaming was

because I was determined not to give the bastard the satisfaction. Something I knew his sick ass would likely get a high from.

“Not at all, it just so happens to be my favourite colour on you...now go get my fucking soul, Brent, just the way I showed you.” I actually laughed at that before deciding to point out the obvious,

“Look buddy, I’m not sure if you have noticed but I’m kinda busy dying here.”

“Would you like me to take it away, Brent?” The Devil whispered and it echoed around the room.

“Honestly, no I would rather die.” I said and it was true, *I would.*

But then the bastard reminded me.

“If that’s your wish Brent, please give your lovely wife my regards...After all, Hell does make for such an idyllic reunion spot.” The Devil said winking down at me.

“Fuck! Fine okay, heal me!” I said, hating myself.

“I will, Brent, but after you acquire my soul.”

“Not sure you have noticed here, but I can’t stand...you know, on account of currently bleeding to death!” I shouted in agony.

“Then crawl,” he said in a chilling tone.

“You’re fucking joking!” I roared coughing again.

“I never joke about the impending death at my feet...now crawl for your family, your wife and daughter who needs her mummy in Heaven. Crawl or it will be your wife that will suffer my wrath if you do not.” It was all the motivation I needed, as I knew it was no idle threat.

Because I knew what this was. This was a test of will. The will of my soul I was about to sign over the second I took my first soul for him. Suddenly crawling over the hot coals of Hell was barely a metaphor as I started to move my broken body over the now blood-stained carpet.

It was a slow process as I used my elbows to help drag myself forward and my legs lay limp behind me, just dead weights leaving a trail of blood as I progressed. It felt like the room was four times longer before I finally reached the dead body of Jacob Wholeheart.

I was so tired, I just wanted to stop and die. To end not just my current agony, but the pain of even waking up in the morning. But then all I had to do was think of my Marie, my Angel of light and the Hell that she was forced to reside in. This was enough to dig deep in one last effort to drag myself up, resting over the corpse.

I didn't have much time left, I knew this the moment black spots start to blur my vision. So, just as I was about to do as I had been taught, pressing my bloodied lips to his and taking a breath using what little strength I had left, something happened. I was suddenly forced backwards before I had chance to do anything to the guy, falling to my knees and crying out in silent agony.

No, this wasn't about me taking the guy's soul,

This was something so much more.

Suddenly and impossibly, my body was lifted to my feet just as the room started to spin and not in the way it does when you're feeling nauseous, but in a way where the room was actually spinning!

I looked at the walls, my vision blurring but not enough that I couldn't see the walls starting to split as though there was a fucking earthquake happening behind them. Then everything around me started vibrating, pulsating like some Hellish giant had the whole room in the palm of his hand and was shaking the Hell out of it!

I looked around frantically, trying to find the source of this madness when I saw it! The mass of shadows stepping closer and closer. It was the only thing not moving with the rest of the room and it was only when it got close enough that I realised it was the Devil himself!

I flinched back, knowing in the depths of my damaged soul that something bad was about to happen but I was powerless to stop it. I cried out, yelled, screamed, shouted but nothing stopped him. No, instead I heard a voice echoing through the room even as it started to crumble around me, the view of a red, burning Hell peeking through the cracks. The sound rumbled and growled in a demonic way as if we had momentarily been transported into Hell and right here, this was what he sounded like.

The Devil himself.

The Devil who now stood right before me and was no longer clouded by the shadows of my world. No, he was simply the master of his own world, standing at the doorway of Hell with nothing but me by his side...his willing slave.

A sacrificial lamb, but one six souls from the slaughter.

And that was when I first realised, I hadn't just signed up to take six souls for the Devil. After all, I wasn't him and I certainly hadn't become the grim reaper overnight, if such a being even existed. Oh sure, I had the power to take a life, just like every other human being on the planet, but to actually take a soul?

No. I. Did. Not.

But I knew one being that did have that power, he had just been lacking a way to get it sooner. And this was when I knew I had been played. He hadn't just wanted me to try and do his job for him. No, he needed me as a host so that he could do it himself, only in a place he shouldn't be allowed to!

I knew all this the second the Devil didn't just start to invade my personal space, he took it completely. He accomplished this by literally stepping into my body and taking possession of it. And that feeling of being watched or expression used to describe someone walking over your grave, well I could multiply it by a hundred and it quickly became more like my sudden reality.

His shadows started to swirl around me until pretty soon they engulfed my entire body as if aiding the Devil in sealing

him inside me. I sucked in a harsh breath, one that felt as if I were filling two pairs of lungs as the Devil also took his first breath inside a mortal host. Then he stretched out my limbs and I was surprised when I didn't feel any pain from the action, something that prompted me to look down at myself.

I was fully healed.

I didn't know why this surprised me considering this was the Devil I was talking about. After all, it wasn't as if a broken host would serve him well, I thought with a grimace. But then I never expected any of this to happen because when I had made this deal with the Devil, he hadn't mentioned anything about taking over my body. But then, like I thought before, how else would I have had the power to extract a soul?

Well, now I knew how. There was only one way.

With...*the Devil inside me.*

I didn't know how long we stood there, testing out this new connection and trying to get ourselves used to it, but I knew he got there well before I did. This was because it still felt as though I had consciously been taken over by alien body snatchers and Stephen King's, *The Tommyknockers* quickly came to mind. It felt as though my body had been split in two and I was now only in control of half of it and that was with the Devil's permission. It made my skin crawl and the Devil felt it too but whereas it made me want to vomit, it made him want to laugh.

"Time to get this done."

"Jesus Christ!" I shouted the second I heard his voice in my head as clear as I would hear my own, making me wonder if I had actually opened my mouth and said the words?

"Wrong, son...now if you wouldn't mind, we have a soul to collect," he told me making me freak out again.

"Yeah, I do fucking mind, you never said that you would be taking over my fucking body!" I shouted, really hoping that this was a temporary thing and he would be gone as soon as I got the job done!

“Well, unless being shot in the dick suddenly made you a deity with mortal means, then how else did you expect to have the power to acquire a soul?” he asked me, making his annoying point and proving what I had come to realise too late.

“Fine, but I really don’t understand this, wouldn’t his soul just go straight to Hell anyway, you know, on account of being evil and all?” I asked with sarcasm weighted heavy in my tone.

“It’s complicated and I do not have time to explain it to you, now get me my fucking soul!” he all but roared at me making me grasp my head in pain for a moment. Well, I hoped it hurt the asshole too, I thought with spite, enjoying the growl I heard rumbling after, telling me that he did. Maybe now he would think twice and I wouldn’t feel so much like his bloody murdering, soul collecting puppet!

I would have said all this but seeing as he was in my head anyway, I thought, what was the point. Reason being why I saved my breath and turned to the dead man slumped back in his chair. It was as if I was moving in slow motion, knowing that after this there was no turning back. Because I hadn’t just killed a man, I was about to go a step further. One that no one ever gets to go...

I was about to condemn a man’s soul to the Devil only knew where.

So, I leant in closer, about to try and take the guy’s soul for a second time, only now when I did it a bright and immense white light emitted from our forced connection and my brain suddenly felt as though it was about to explode!

It was truly sickening.

It felt more like an infection my conscious mind could see coming but was unable to stop as I fully experience all the sick, depraved shit that Wholeheart had done in his lifetime.

Young girls and boys, every last one of them forced to be a sex slave, drugged and abused till death was all that saved them. I retch, covering Wholeheart in a mixture of bourbon,

blood and bile. Hatred consumes me and I wished in that moment I could bring him back again only to take his life once more but in a slower and more painful way.

But it was more than that.

It was the other sickos walking around free in this world thanks to him representing them. Back handers and bribery, corruption, extortion and deal making with a different type of Devil...*the humankind*. It was all there for me to read like a map, ink blotted on a tainted soul.

In fact, it stuck to me, climbing up my insides like a rotting soul trying to find a new host to consume, a new life to waste and squander, to manipulate and destroy. But I wouldn't let it or more like, *we wouldn't let it*.

I tore myself away from him, wiping my mouth with the back of my hand and thinking that it was all over, when for me and my body it had simply just begun. Because now I had Wholeheart's sinful soul stuck inside me, like a sickness and soon, I was choking on it! It was as if it was trying to take over my basic functions and use my body for its own gain, that gain being one last life to steal.

I was only thankful that the Devil had decided to heal me of my suffering as I fell to my knees, clutching desperately at my throat, clawing at it as if trying to tear a hole there just to grant my lungs the much needed air. But then I felt something crawling up my spine and as I twisted my torso trying to rid myself of the feeling, I caught the sight of what it was in the reflection of the window. A strange darkness had suddenly taken over the sky like an impending storm was on the horizon, cutting through the Arizona sun and allowing me to see for myself as the Devil's hand was creeping up my body.

My eyes widened and I didn't recognize the horrified face staring back at me. In fact, it took me a moment to realise that it was because *it wasn't me*.

The Devil had changed me.

I had no time at all to accept that this stranger looking back at me was not a stranger at all, before the other half of

this nightmare came to fruition. It did this the moment the Devil's hand reached the top of my head and forcefully grabbed a fistful of my hair. My head was quickly yanked back and now I was howling at the ceiling in unbearable agony as my neck was held taut and felt close to snapping.

But then something else began. A feeling that strangely was no longer foreign. A feeling of when the Devil first entered my body started to happen again, only this time, in reverse. I looked to the side as much as my eyes would allow me, seeing that I was still being held prisoner by the Devil's grip on my hair. I saw once more as the twisted shadows emerged again, as he stepped from my body.

I held myself immobile just silently praying for it all to end, almost wishing for the bullets to be back and my insides back to being shredded just so as I could experience that pain instead of the one I was forced to endure now.

Then I felt him. The Devil at my back. He started whispering something, almost like a demonic prayer in an ancient language and I felt it drawing the soul out of me, like luring a creature from the depths of the Hell it wanted to create inside me.

Thankfully though, the Devil wouldn't let it and soon the long black tentacle of smoke, one that I assumed was the soul he was collecting, was out of me in its entirety. I saw it now in his hand and with a nod of his head, the thing burst into flames before it was gone completely.

The second it was, I gasped the air I need to survive this, feeling as though I was about to fall. But before that could happen the Devil stepped back into my body and just like that, I was breathing and feeling oddly whole again. This time it was both of us that was taking breath and the metallic taste in my mouth I knew wasn't from blood or vomit, it was because of him. It was the taste of the Devil inside me.

"That...that was..."

"*The end of one Jacob Wholeheart,*" he interjected in my bewildered stammering. Then he made me take out my dented, old flask that was now empty and I was about to ask why

when he kicked at the desk, making the body slump forward over the top just as the drawer sprang free. Then a bottle rolled into view and I reached inside and quickly grabbed it.

“Ah and finally, we find the only thing in this place that isn’t tasteless.” And he was right. I had no choice but to agree with him as he unscrewed the expensive whiskey and took a long swig, making us both groan as the smooth taste coated our tongue and washed over our senses. We then took another and once we’d had enough, he then made me haphazardly pour it over my flask, spilling half of the bottle over Jacob’s dead body. I almost started complaining about what a waste of good whiskey it was before he got to voice his reason,

“Relax, Brent, now that I’m here there will be no more cheap whiskey in your future and besides...” he paused a second so he could light a cigarette as he walked away from the body towards the door, then he looked back over his shoulder and finished his sentence,

“...who says I am wasting it.” A second later he took one more deep inhale and flicked it to the body, igniting it instantly.

“So that’s it... that means it’s done...it’s finished?” I asked, now only seeing my other self for the second time. A face I still didn’t recognize staring back at me in that gaudy mirror above his desk, seeing my new form flickering through the flames.

I watched as it frowned when I saw my lips moving. It was the Devil’s doing, as I mouthed the foreign word, one I strangely knew meant ‘sloth’ in ancient Sumerian. At the same time, he waved his hand out, doing something I didn’t understand. But I didn’t have time to ask, because after this he spoke, pausing to wink at me after first speaking my name,

“No, Brent...”

“...That was only the beginning.”

Lilly

14

What The Devil Wants

This was it. This was the day.

This was finally the day that I had a meeting with my boss to show him all I had learned about connecting these murders. The 666 club. The last piece of the puzzle had come last night when I finally got my hands on the few murder scene photographs I was missing. This was thanks to Stewart and his partner Mark.

Stewart had knocked on my door the night before and the first thing I noticed had been that folder tucked under his arm.

Of course, I let him in.

“Is that what I think it is?” I had asked with a big smile on my face.

“That depends, am I talking to Lilly Knight, the ‘soon to be’ new journalist at the Chicago Tribune?” My grin grew before I grabbed his arm and dragged him the rest of the way inside of my apartment.

“With any luck, yes! Of course it would help massively if it turned out that our boss ran away last night to Vegas to join a drag act.” Stew laughed at this and said,

“I wouldn’t hold your breath with that one, Lil.” I gave him a smirk before offering him a drink, noting that he was the only one who ever called me Lil, something that strangely

suiting me. Who knows, maybe when I finally get this promotion, then with it would come the confidence to make more friends and when I did, I could introduce myself as Lil. Something that sounded casual and familiar to people.

“So come on, don’t keep me hanging, what have you got for me?” I asked after he declined the drink, so I nodded to my tatty sofa for him to sit. This was something he also declined. No, instead he walked towards ‘The wall’.

The wall was my obsession and one that I had spent endless hours staring at whilst trying to link all the puzzle pieces I had collected over the years. Well, now it finally made sense, and all that was missing were two more words painted in blood and the name of my killer.

“Club 666?” He questioned the name printed in the centre of all the organised chaos. Red string lines went off from the club name in five different directions, making it look like a giant crimson cobweb. Then from each victim it branched off, spanning out like fingers to information on the murders and then again to the snippets I had found on their seedy, sinful lives. This of course, included known affiliations. I used red string for each victim, naturally representing their bloody murders. I used white for everything else that was known about them, but it was the black string that I was most interested in and what had taken me the longest time to link together.

I shrugged my shoulders.

“I thought it had a nice ring to it,” I told him, making him raise a brow at me, no doubt thinking right about now that I needed to get a life...or maybe just Chinese food, I thought as my stomach rumbled.

“Why is there black string connecting them all like that?” he asked, and I smirked, before telling him,

“Because that is what connects them all.”

“You mean because of when they were born?” he asked scratching the side of his head, as was his habit when thinking. I had already started to tell Stewart elements about the case

throughout the years since receiving that file, something he still didn't recall doing. But even so, he had proven that he could be trusted, having only ever discussed it with Mark, his partner. Of course, there had been that one night that they invited me round to their apartment for drinks, where I got the blurry side of tipsy and told them pretty much everything I knew at that point.

That had been over a year ago and since then, thankfully, I had tried to keep my mouth shut. Not because I couldn't trust him, as like I said, he hadn't said a word about what I was secretly working on. But by not saying anything also meant neither myself or Stewart could be overheard and therefore no-one could discover what I had been up to all these years.

Stewart was a good guy and had been my only friend since the first day I started working there. In fact, he had started just days before me, which had no doubt been the reason we had hit it off so well. That and the fact he was a guy and not sexually attracted to me in the slightest, which helped get past the awkward boyfriend/girlfriend thing.

Don't get me wrong, it wasn't as if Stewart wasn't a good-looking guy or anything. In fact, he was extremely handsome, especially with his Brad Pitt the 'younger days' look going on, all floppy blonde hair and startling blue eyes. Which was why it made it easier to be around him, knowing that he wasn't interested in me, so I didn't have to be self-conscious of how to act, what to say or how to look, that type of thing. Like now, seeing me stood here in my yoga pants (that definitely had never been used for yoga) and an oversized hooded sweatshirt that had the Dallas Cowboys logo over the chest, because yes, I was a fan. And yes, because games were long and sometimes played into the early hours of the night, something that managed to keep me awake. And if I was awake, then I wasn't sleeping. And if I wasn't sleeping then I wasn't sitting next to a lake looking towards the tree line waiting for him to appear.

Why, oh why couldn't he have just stayed as that shadow I feared. Why did he have to break away the chains that had

kept him from me and what had happened to him three years ago giving him the power to do so, I just didn't know.

But mainly...

Why had the Devil kissed me?

Because now I knew his touch. That dangerous way he handled me, like he wanted to break me just so as he could fix me again. A toy of his to do this to over and over again. A plaything I was waiting for him to throw aside and leave me alone. To leave me more broken than before and with no-one then left to fix me for good.

More importantly, why did I want him to do all these things *but walk away?* Why was I sick enough to be looking forward to seeing him again in two days' time, knowing there would be another murder. I still didn't understand what the connection was between him, the murders and me. The only thing I did know was that the night of my next dream I wasn't leaving without getting some answers...

Even if I had to bargain with the Devil to get them.

A bargain I wish I had made the *last time*.

A year ago...

I opened my eyes but instead of seeing my bedroom as I thought I would, I saw the lake. I shouldn't have been surprised I had fallen asleep on this night. Not seeing that I had purposely gone into my room to lie down. However, for once sleep hadn't come easily and I ended up tossing and turning before deciding to give up entirely. Or so I thought because now I wasn't on my bed but on someone else's instead. I knew this the second I felt the comfort beneath me, knowing it wasn't from sitting on the grass in my garden this time or back home on my lumpy old mattress.

I sat up slowly, half expecting something to quickly reach out and stop me. What was I saying, it wasn't merely something I was expecting but more like, *someone*. But when

this didn't happen, I couldn't tell whether I was relieved or not.

It was starting to look as though with each passing year my dreams were definitely changing. An example of this was this dream and something that was beginning to look more like the makings of a fantasy than one of the nightmares I was used to. Like the bed I was now lay in, one that would have only been created with the Devil in mind...well, that and... *sin*.

It looked as if it had been made from a solid piece of polished ebony, only one as black and smooth as onyx. I even found myself reaching out to touch the frame just to check that it wasn't wet, as it almost looked as if it had been bathed in ink. It was heavily decorated and carved, making it look more like some gothic sculpture or smaller representation of a cathedral, one like the very gothic Notre Dame.

It had two half pillars at the bottom that looked more like the square newels found in between balustrades. The two ornamental posts with base mouldings were also decorated in a beading and barrel design, one that mirrored the top and the bottom. They were both topped with a crown of thorns twisted up to deadly fine points.

The length of them were also decorated and held square frames at the centres on all three sides. Inside each of these borders showcased a raised fleur de lis and one that morphed the usual classic design into something new and more demonic. It still held the three petals of the fleur de lis, only instead of being held together by the usual band, it was instead held tightly bound in what I assumed was the Devil's fist.

The design made me shudder, just knowing what those hands were capable of.

I turned to face the other way, looking behind me and gasping at the dark beauty I found there. The bed was incredible and just kept getting more spectacular the more of it I took in. It was the remarkable craftsmanship in each exquisite carving that had me soon reaching out to trace the raised, dark wood scene.

The whole of the headboard was a huge arch at least seven feet tall, with a keystone decorating its very centre. This large wedge shaped stone held a demonic symbol entwined with yet another fleur de lis, only this time it was a sharper, thornier design. This was then topped with three gargoyle figures grouped close together. Each were holding spikes out in front of them with severed heads held embedded on the tips.

One head had his eyes cut out, one his ears removed and the last his mouth sewn shut and each of the gargoyles that held them mocked their positions, telling the world they should have heeded their warning.

See no evil.

Hear no evil.

Speak no evil.

I shuddered at the thought and moved on with my exploration of the rest of the huge bed. The sides that were positioned at the top half of the bed were also huge, like pillars cutout at the sides in a half moon shape. Each side then held a flat plinth on the bottom where cloaked phantoms holding lanterns sat bent over in the cutout halves. They were lit by flickering flames and cast eerie shadows across the scenes depicted in the elaborately framed half circle taking up most of the headboard.

It was a sordid sex scene of lust and debauchery in all its naked glory and all there to see in a carved orgy. Bodies were everywhere and all locked together by much more than just twisted limbs and hand holding. Engorged genitals hung freely, some hidden between a woman's legs or between a man's behind. Breasts of all sizes were being gorged on as well as whatever liquid treasures were found in between both genders' legs.

There were groups of them, all taking what they could of the nearest bodies closest to them. And the more I looked at it, the more the people all started to blur before my refocusing on them showed more than lifeless black figures carved from wood. They started to come alive, moving and writhing against each other in ecstasy. I swear I could almost hear the

distant echoes of pleasure as if this garden had been hidden here in the centre of it all. As if I were in this bed, surrounded by a giant ballroom full of people all having sex, yet here I sat, deemed untouchable in this world by one man.

No, not a man.

But by its King. By its Devil.

Even the thought made the lanterns shake in their phantoms' hold, causing the flames to flicker as if close to being extinguished. I didn't know why, but it told me I was no longer alone. My head snapped around, trying to find him and the second I heard the tapping behind me I knew I was right.

I quickly looked over my shoulder, seeing the hint of him there. He was so tall that he could even be seen at the back of the headboard, with the tips of his twisted horns reaching above the seven foot back. Then I shuddered as a scraping sound grated along my nerves like fingernails on a chalkboard would. More like a warning that something dangerous was near and my body responded by becoming alert to this fact. It sounded as though he was now gouging lines in the back of the headboard, making me twist one way before I then followed the sound by twisting another. I knew then that he was toying with me and the second he started to come into view from around the back of the enormous bed, I scrambled backwards, putting greater distance between us.

But then, the moment I saw him, a soundless gasp escaped. Because this time he looked different and less like a demon, even though his horns were still there. I didn't know whether it was just because I was finally getting used to seeing him, even though like this, it had been nearly a year ago. Or was it because he was no longer wearing what appeared to be demonic armour at the ready to do battle. Because this was just me and clearly, I held no threat to him...

Or did I?

Either way this was the most causal I had seen him appear, if such a thing were possible on the Devil himself. He was wearing some kind of clothing unlike anything I had ever seen before. He wore a long dark red jacket, similar to rough

worn leather that reached the floor and around his shoulders was some kind of black animal hide draped across his massive shoulders. But then he moved and that was when I could see it was some kind of cloak, bordered with dirty gold markings that looked burned into the material.

Under these layers I couldn't really see what he wore covering his torso only that it was tight enough for me to see the outlines of his abundance of muscle. Dark grey trousers not made from any material I recognised but the closest thing I would have said was soft leather or black suede that looked cracked and burnt over the knees and down the thighs.

I swear just the sight of him had me both chilled to the bone and a fire burning in my belly. That raw masculinity that screamed power and dominance was near too overwhelming for me to breathe through. My heart rate seemed to spike every step he made closer to me until finally he stopped, and his eyes burned brighter at the sight of me. And what he found in my gaze became obvious when he spoke,

"You fear me still?" he asked, tilting his head slightly as if trying to read me. I swallowed hard and licked my dry lips, an action he didn't miss. His lips curled slightly, and he licked a fang as if tasting me for himself and I couldn't tell from his reaction whether the memory was a good or bad one.

"I...I..."

"*You* may speak, when spoken to," he said firmly when I started stuttering.

"I would be a fool *not* to fear you," I told him after taking a deep breath, deciding it was probably wise not to piss him off by giving him that sass I would have liked to have delivered his way.

But then my reply made him smile and the sight was damn near breath-taking. However, his reply to this caused my irrational mind to finally snap back into processing sensible thoughts.

Like my need to flee. Something I wanted to do the moment he growled,

“Then lucky for you...”

“I want you here.”

Lilly

15

By The Devil's Hand

“Then lucky for you...*I want you here.*”

He told me with a grin, one that grew as he took a long leisurely look down my body and for a minute I frowned, not remembering what I had fallen asleep wearing. So, I too looked down at myself to see what it was he was looking at and flinched, emitting a small yelp the second I realised it wasn't what I had been expecting. Because it wasn't the usual comfy, oversized sweater and yoga pants I had been hoping for. No, this time I had foolishly worn the sexy silk camisole set I had stupidly bought years ago and one with him in mind. Of course, in my very lame and weak defence I hadn't expected to find myself in the Devil's bed. Or now barely covered up in virginal white lingerie like some innocent victim already gift wrapped in silk and lace.

It was little wonder then that he now eyed me up as if I was some demonic candy and I found myself fisting my hands in the black sheets seconds away from yanking them up to cover myself.

“And it looks like I'm not the only one,” he commented making me blush scarlet after calling my bluff. Because, thanks to what I was wearing, it was proof enough that I wanted to be here, just like he claimed I did.

Of course, I still tried to deny it.

“I...I don’t want...” He quickly cut me off making a tutting sound and shaking his talon tipped finger at me.

“Lying is a sin you know.” Oh yeah, I knew it was, but I also knew that lying in the Devil’s bed wearing nothing but a sheer bit of material that barely covered my breasts, belly and tops of my thighs was also considered a sin. So, instead of focusing on this very obvious truth, I decided to try and sway the conversation elsewhere, starting with gaining answers.

“Why is my dream different this time?”

“Because once a mortal year I get to command them and this time I wanted something more from you than just your fear,” he told me, making me gulp the second his gaze burned with unconcealed lust. After this was said, I was quickly crying out the second I felt the bed beneath me start to sink and rise like something moving beneath was causing ripples in the sheets.

“What’s happening!?” I shouted making him smirk at my obvious distress. But he didn’t answer me. No, instead he simply watched the panic increase on my face as suddenly hands started to rise up and the leather like material that made up his bedding, started to mould itself, forming demonic obsidian black hands. I jolted from one side to the other every time I felt one reach out and stroke me. I shot a panicked look at the Devil to see his own hands mirroring their movements, quickly telling me that he was the one doing this.

“Stop! Stop this!” I shouted the second they started to grab me, their touch becoming firmer and after scanning my body, seeing that there must have been at least twenty or so of them.

“Why would I do such a thing, not when there is so much of you I wish to touch all at once,” he said walking his fingers along my imaginary skin in the air and making his puppet hands do the same up my legs. I started to squirm, trying to dislodge their hold but before long the Devil thrust his hands forward and the hands on the bed shot up, rising further out of the bed, and those hands were suddenly attached to leather covered arms.

“No!” I screamed the moment their reach became long enough to take hold of my torso, forcing me to lie back on the bed, so as I could now be pinned there against my will. The arms then sank back down when the Devil commanded them to, so now the hands could continue to take over with ease, once force had been applied.

They were soon everywhere, holding my arms and wrists down, snaking up my legs whilst others shackled my ankles. I tried twisting free, but it was no use and I growled in frustration as the Devil started to circle the bed, never once taking his eyes off me writhing like a fish on the end of his sadistic hook.

“What is it you want!” I screamed at him, biting my lip in the height of my anger and tasting blood the second I licked the sting. Again, he smirked down at me and it was purely demonic, speaking only of the bad things he wanted to do to me now I was bound by flesh and bone. Now, of course, I was just waiting for him to make his move, something that happened sooner than I was expecting.

Suddenly he jumped, landing with a thud on the end of the bed’s extra wide frame making the whole thing vibrate beneath me. Then I was left with no other option but to watch helplessly, still pinned to the bed, as he stepped onto the sheets. And with each masterful step he took, the many hands waiting for their turn at me, now shrank back to get away from him. Heavy boots that looked like a combination of thick worn leather and metal plating were strapped to his legs with chains, spiked studs and hammered metal buckles, creating an echo with each footstep he took.

I swear I stopped breathing entirely as I looked up at the massive and imposing figure stood over me and I screamed when he suddenly let himself drop to his knees. My body would have bounced with the impact had I not still been pinned there like some unwilling sacrifice awaiting the appetite of the beast that locals needed to sate.

I also had to wonder how long it would be until my heart also stopped as he started to crawl up my body, never taking his eyes from mine as his huge frame created a prison of

muscle and hard flesh above me. But even then, with him holding himself over me, the many hands remained, keeping me captive so I had no chance to escape his looming figure.

“Wh...wh...what do...do you want?” I asked again and this time it came out in a breathy, whispered plea. His face lingered just over mine, with his horns casting my entire face in shadow. Whereas, on the other hand, I could see the flickering light dancing across his skin, illuminating his rugged features and casting a warm glow from the lanterns each side of the bed.

His gaze became a creature of the night scanning his prey for signs of weakness to exploit and he found it when his eyes dipped to the rise and fall of my chest. I watched as he licked his lips, gratified to see evidence of my laboured breathing before he then lowered his face closer to mine. Soon his lips were inches from my own when he finally spoke, meaning that I could nearly taste his answer,

“I want you...” he told me, pausing to place his lips to mine so he could whisper the rest over them,

“...To be my slave.” Then he licked the seam, tasting the blood for himself and a growl was my only warning before he started to try and devour me whole...*and I fucking let him!*

I opened up to him as though I was starved of my next breath when in reality I was simply starved of him. The moment his taste burst across my tongue followed by the feeling of his own duelling against mine, I was lost to an ocean of sensation. It was almost like a memory in the dark and with his touch came the key to lighting the way for me to follow it. It was like retracing my steps on a treasure map, one written so far into the past that it was almost impossible to imagine. But then, with the many hands of the Devil tracing every line, every curve of my body, I knew in that moment I wasn't the only one who felt this way. I couldn't understand how such a thing was possible, but all I knew was that like this, there was no more fear. There was only lust and one I could feel quickly burning to dangerous levels. It felt as if he was trying to consume me, and I was happily dying with every second he took from me.

I felt the tugging at the small amount of silk covering my body, hearing it tearing at different points as impatient hands tried to get at my skin underneath. But it was only two hands I was most focused on and those belonged to only one being. The only one that mattered and shamefully, the only one I wanted to call master. For that was exactly what he felt like right now as he commanded more and more from my body.

The split on my lip widened and he sucked at it, growling at the taste of my blood and feeding from the miniscule amount it was granting him. His hands were everywhere but nothing was rushed. Nothing but the kiss that felt desperate. Even as his hands told a different story. They told of one that dominated my body, possessing it, owning it as if I were his to do with as he pleased. But kissing me, well that was something different to him.

It was something more.

I knew this when one hand framed the side of my face and he brushed a hand back through my hair in a tender way before he fisted his fingers between the strands at the base of my neck. Then he pulled down, forcing my chin up and he snarled once when ripping his lips from mine before stooping down to my neck, ready to kiss, suck and bite his way down the column of my throat.

I released a deep and resounding moan as I felt my impending orgasm getting closer, like a wave that would soon come crashing in. He continued travelling lower, licking across my collarbone before reaching down to my breasts. The hands he controlled suddenly grabbed fistfuls of silk either side of my camisole before tugging it hard enough that it tore right between my breasts, giving way quickly and exposing me to him.

He paused long enough to look up at me and I whispered my one request, unsure if he would grant it to me or not. But my pride wasn't beyond my need to beg.

"Please...please let me touch you." I took note of the brief look of surprise before he masked his features and instead of wording his answer, it was granted when six hands

released my wrists and arms. Then he lowered his head and took possession of my nipple into his mouth, biting down hard enough to make my back arch and cry out as pain morphed into pleasure. His own hand then quickly shackled my neck, holding me down as he continued his onslaught on the sensitive bud, seemingly fearing my attempt at escape.

I moaned again which ended on another cry of pleasure when his other hand snaked its way down my belly and ripped away the matching silk that covered my dripping wet core. I yelped in shock at the rough manhandling before a switch was flipped and his touch became gentle when dipping in between my legs. The hands that held me started to pry my legs to open wider for their master's exploration of me and I sucked in a stuttered breath the second he made contact.

The dangerous tapping on my clit with his talon was nearly enough to make me go over the edge. But then he must have retracted it with a mere thought just before he thrust two thick fingers inside me, this time making me scream out at the same time I reached up and grabbed at his horns, so as to anchor him to my breast. He snarled around my nipple like some wild beast and for a minute I feared he didn't like my touch.

But then I knew this reaction was in response to his own pleasure as his hand left my neck to lift my torso up, closer to his own, now holding me locked in his embrace. This was at the same time he pumped his fingers mercilessly in my channel, and I could feel my insides gripping him tighter as if fearing them leaving me, before my orgasm was complete, something that happened only seconds later, making me scream out until my lungs hurt and my chest ached.

It hit me like an ocean wave had crashed into me, trying to drown me in the most powerful array of sensations a person could handle. Like a trauma to the body, but one it craved all the same and one powerful enough to have me near losing consciousness. In the end I was left only clinging on for the ride, wishing now it was the hardened length of his impressive cock I could feel pressing against my belly, plundering me

below. Something I had a feeling he was getting me ready for taking.

At the sight of my release something snapped in him and suddenly my wrists were ripped from his horns and captured in both his hands to be held over my head.

“*Mine!*” he snarled over my lips before taking them once more in a frenzied kiss. Then the Devil’s many hands replaced his lips at my breasts, and started tugging and pinching my nipples, something that had me writhing against him. But then I felt something new and far too foreign to hold back a reaction, which was why I jolted in his hold the second I felt it. The feeling of fingers probing at my untouched back entrance, now coating it in my own juices making me try and jerk away.

“Sssh, relax little mortal of mine,” he told me and suddenly I didn’t know what was more surprising, the new sensations or the new soothing tone coating his words of encouragement. I nodded once telling him that I was alright and finding myself without the words to do more.

He smirked down at me before I felt him shift his weight and on my own accord, my legs fell to the sides, more than ready to accommodate him there and close once again to begging him for it. I could feel the weight of his length slide down the centre, coating the velvet soft skin in my release. I jerked as the head of his cock then grazed my over sensitised bud before sliding down further parting my soaked lips. Just a small amount of pressure would be all it would take for him to impale me on his length and I felt myself holding my breath waiting for his hips to suddenly thrust forward.

But it never came.

Not until he gave me his price...

“*Gift me your soul,*” he told me, making me flinch in his hold as realisation hit me, now knowing what this was. Because the window of reality had suddenly lost its fog and become clear. He had tried fear. He had given me the ultimatum of death and now, well this was him bargaining with his body. Bargaining with lust. But unbeknown to him, he was actually bargaining with so much more.

He was bargaining with my heart.

The thought suddenly tore through me as though one of the hands was holding a knife and had started cutting into me. I wanted to cry out, scream at him, and call him a bastard for using my body this way. But this was the Devil I faced and using my weakness against me was what he did best. So yeah, I could scream at him, hurl my hatred in his face like the lie that he knew would never stick. I could try hitting him, fighting him, even running from him, but at heart I knew none of these things would get through to him. As it hadn't ever before. For this was just a game to him.

Which meant I only had one thing left. To deny him the one thing he wanted and could never have. So, resigned to my fate, I tore my lips from his and looked to the side refusing to look at him as I denied him.

“No,” I whispered making him growl down at me and this time it was done in anger. Then he transferred both my hands into one massive palm, still holding me there with ease so his other hand was free to explore down my body.

“You are mine, whether you like it or not! This heart...” his hand travelled from my chest, to then pause at my belly,

“...This body...” then it went lower still until he cupped in between my thighs, so he could snarl down at me...

“...*This cunt! All fucking mine!*” I swallowed hard and closed my eyes before telling him,

“*You don't own my mind.*” This time he lowered his head so as his lips were at my cheek, pressing there as he spoke,

“That's where you're wrong, little Lilly...I own your fucking dreams...I own your destiny, your fucking fate is always in my hands...*Now give me your fucking soul!*” he demanded, grasping my chin and forcing my head back to face him, before snapping his jaw and teeth at me making me flinch back in fear.

I was so close to caving in. So close to giving him what he wanted. But then I knew it was the only power that I possessed. The only power I held over him. Which was why I

knew it was the one thing left I had to cling on to, doing so for as long as I could. Because I wasn't entirely sure what would become of me if I gave him what he wanted. If I let him own my soul, *what would he do with it?* I had no idea, but I had a feeling it wasn't good.

So, I narrowed my eyes at him, and this time, gave him my answer with more strength in my tone.

"I said no!" At this I was half expecting his anger to turn violent, wondering if I had finally pushed him too far. But then he released a deep sigh and tilted his head forward, placing his forehead to mine so that his horns ended up locking my head in place as the tips pierced the bed beneath me. Then with another tender tone I didn't know the Devil could possess right then, he whispered down at me,

"So be it." Then he kissed me again, only this time it was soft and gentle. And there was only one thing to call it...

It was his goodbye.

I knew I was right when the second I opened my eyes again he was gone. But then if that were truly the case, how come I hadn't woken up yet? Unfortunately, the answer came to me only one way and one I should have been used to...*in the form of my earlier dreams...fear.*

I knew this the moment I felt the hands against me change their sensual touch and it morphed into the hands of desperate men. Suddenly they were clawing at me and I screamed when I realised the many hands of the Devil were now those belonging to desperate souls trying to grasp their way out of his Hell.

Skeletal hands void of flesh and life but now charred ash on flaked bone were reaching up all around me, making me fight for freedom. A fight I was almost close to giving up on just to end this new horror. I could feel my desperate plea on the tip of my tongue, seconds away from begging the shadows for him to help me. Just to make it all stop and in return he could have whatever was left of me, *my soul included.*

But then I knew I would only be signing myself over to becoming just like one of these poor desperate souls trying to reach their past life, one long gone as well as the sweet taste of freedom.

Because I was just another soul for the Devil to collect. For how could I be anything more? The Devil didn't care, *how could he?* How could I be that something special to him? I was just a nobody, a lonely orphaned girl barely on the cusp of becoming something more in my own world. What did I have to offer him?

How could he want what no one else in my world did?

But I had life and one I wanted to keep. Meaning that I had reason to fight for it. I had to push myself through this. I would not become just another one of his condemned souls lost to his idea of damnation.

So, I twisted and turned, gaining leverage now I was no longer fighting against the many hands of the Devil, but instead the broken fragile bones of the long ago dead. Which was why I broke free, turned and grabbed for the headboard behind me, putting me face to face with a new scene to deal with.

The once erotic images of a mass orgy were long gone and instead it was a mass of souls burning and trying to crawl their way up from the flames and back to the surface. Climbing up the side of a smoking mountainside like desperate creatures running scared and frantically trying to survive the forest fire.

But they were all reaching out to the keystone, the one with the fleur de lis, only this time instead of being held in a fist, it was now being crushed by the hand of the Devil. Which was precisely what I ended up doing as suddenly the bed beneath me disappeared and I became just another one of those abandoned souls hanging off a rock face. Holding on with barely enough strength to keep me there and now with the figure of the Devil replacing the headboard that had seconds ago been there.

I looked behind me to see the very scene that had been carved into the wood was now real life beneath me. Soul after soul trying to reach the cliff's edge where the Devil stood like the master of his domain. They were like ants, crawling over themselves trying to survive the flood the rain of fire brought.

"Take my hand, Lilly," he told me, sweeping out the side of his long jacket before bending a knee and reaching out to me. But I shook my head, even as my hands started to slip.

"But at what cost?" I asked, the strain and fear in my tone making it sound frantic.

"You know the cost," he told me calmly.

"What, so I can just become like one of them!" I say looking back over my shoulder.

"You will never be one of them!" he informed me on a rumbled growl.

"Then what am I?!" I screamed and just as he reached for me, my hand slipped completely and the last thing I heard as I started to plummet to the Hell below was three pained, whispered words...

"You're my Queen."

After this dream I was jolted awake just like all the rest of the others. Only this time, I felt for the first time as though I had just made a huge mistake. As if this had been the biggest test yet and yet again it had been one that I had failed. Meaning I had to wait a whole year before I got one more shot at it.

But that was then, and this was now. Which meant all I had to do now was wait two more days.

"Lil?" Stewart spoke my name and reminded me that I hadn't been alone when reminiscing my dream and that he had asked me a question. One I had explained just in the exact same way the night before as I was five minutes away from explaining to my boss.

Because I was currently waiting for his meeting to finish and the second I saw his door opening, I stood up, grabbing my things before taking the five steps it would take me to get to his door.

However, I never got there.

Because instead I bumped right into someone else. I bumped right into my fate and the destiny he had told me a year ago he owned.

Into the very hands of...

My Devil.

Lilly

16

A Devil of an Oxymoron

I didn't know what had happened for the world to get so dark. Had I fallen asleep and got caught somewhere between two worlds? Between his and mine? Or had the two somehow collided and merged, becoming one. Because I was sure I had seen him. Seen him not as a demon but this time as a man. So, what had happened? Had I fallen asleep at my desk and this time met him in a dream he no longer had the power to control? I had so many questions, ones I would have liked to have answered had I now not been caught in this darkness. This void.

This...this...

"Her name is Lilly." I heard a voice say but it wasn't his, it belonged to someone I didn't like.

"*I know her name.*" This was said by another voice and one that made me want to release a relieved sigh and sink back into the comforting embrace of who owned it, even if it was said through gritted teeth.

"Jenny call the..."

"Hang up the phone and leave, *do it now.*" The other voice said, the one I wanted to hear more of. The one I wanted to hear calling my name. The one leading me home, out of the darkness. He sounded so stern, so confident, so masterful that he reminded me of someone. I never heard a reply from the

voice I didn't like. My boss, Andy Carter, yes that was it. But wait, that wasn't like him. He would have never allowed anyone to tell him to leave...wait, was I in his office? Yes, I remembered now, I had a meeting with him.

I heard footsteps moving on carpet.

I had been on my way there when it happened.

I heard the faint click of the door opening and closing.

Which meant I hadn't fallen asleep at my desk like I thought.

I heard a lock click.

Which also meant that I must have fainted but why, what would have made me...

"Lilly." The moment I heard his voice again, only this time with him saying my name, I couldn't help but release a breathy sigh, barely whispering only one name in return...

"My Devil." A startled sound told me whoever it was with me now heard it and it shocked them enough to react.

"But that's... how can she...?" I frowned when I heard the broken question, one that sounded like the voice but then again, it didn't. This was because it was a question and one not aimed at me but at another.

"Wait, what did you say her name was?" Again, the voice asked another question and like the one before it, there was no reply.

"This is her...this is your Lilly!?" he said and even though I couldn't see him, I could tell he was enjoying this, even mockingly so. Then came a growl and I shuddered the moment I heard a whispered plea,

"No, wait you can't do this...it's my...my body...no, not again..." A gargling sound ended what sounded like a one side argument before I felt a hand touching me first on the shoulder, then cupping the side of my neck. I spun around, looking behind me seeing only darkness but knowing I was no longer here alone. Then I felt another touch but this time one

on my forehead as if someone was brushing my hair back in a tender way.

“Lilly, wake now...*I command it*” The whispered demand suddenly made light erupt all around me and that was when I realised, I must have opened my eyes, as the world around me was slowly coming into focus. No, not the world...*just him.*

Those eyes. Eyes of forest green and burning amber.

I would know those eyes anywhere.

Anywhere but here.

This became reason enough why I scrambled back only to find myself captured by the top of my arm in a vice like grip.

“*Easy,*” he cooed in that rough voice of his, one that had sounded different when I had been unconscious. No, like this he sounded more like he always did in my dreams. The eyes of a man. The voice of the Devil and a body somewhere in between...*A body made for sin.*

Even in his suit, I could see the broad lines of his massive shoulders underneath and the raw strength in those muscles that no amount of expensive fabric could hide. Granted, he wasn't as big as he was in my dreams but even as a mortal man, he was still bigger than most. Which meant he was also the most intimidating man I had encountered. Especially when he thought himself free to manhandle me into staying close. So, I looked to his large hand, one that completely circled the top of my arm with finger length to spare.

“*You can't...*” I started to state that he couldn't touch me this way when he quickly interrupted me, pulling me forward so his face was inches away from me, meaning his words were felt against my trembling skin.

“*Yes, I can.*” My eyes widened and I shook my head a little as if trying to wake myself from a dream that shouldn't be happening. But then something snapped inside of him. It was as if unexpectedly something else was trying to break through. Something deep inside of him trying to reach the surface.

His hand left me abruptly and in a heartbeat his body, that had once been far too close, was now on the other side of the room. He dragged both hands through his hair and literally growled making me flinch back. I decided to use this opportunity to get up from the sofa I must have been placed on when I passed out. Meaning at least for one moment in time I had been in his arms.

I got to my feet quickly and he looked down his side and over his shoulder the moment he felt my movements.

“*Lilly.*” He growled my name in nothing short of a warning for me to remain where I was.

“I...I’m sorry, but I don’t know you,” I told him as I quickly made my way to the door and just as I was flipping the lock and opening the door, I jumped when it suddenly slammed shut. A hand had shot out from behind me preventing me from escaping. The breath fled me on a whispered gasp the second I felt him take the last step needed before this placed his chest to my back.

I held myself totally immobile, like a statue that feared the wrath of its owner should I end up being the object he chose to break. I knew that if I didn’t breathe soon, I would only end up passing out again and I found my inner self asking if that would be such a bad thing to happen, considering where it meant me landing once more. But then how could I want to be in his arms just as much as I wanted to escape them? Why was I running, when his next actions made my heart pound in my chest, fuelling my need to stay?

Why was I secretly celebrating when his hand slowly lowered from the panel of wood by my head to the lock, one he clicked back into place. I swear the only sounds heard were metal sliding into metal and my sharp intake of breath. Then I felt his head lowering to mine and I trembled the second his free hand gathered some of the hair off my shoulder pulling it away from my ear so he was free to whisper down at me,

“*You know me...*” He paused to stroke a large hand down the side of my head, continuing down my back before he spoke again.

*“It’s why you tremble so...you’ve always known me...
Lilli...”*

“Excuse me, Mr Carter, are you in there?!” A woman’s voice I recognised as being my boss’ secretary asked through the door, breaking the spell. I knew that when as quickly as before, his body was torn from mine as if he had suddenly been hauled away by another force. Then after another growl, he snarled at me...

“Leave...leave now woman, whilst you still can!” I swallowed the hard lump of disappointment and without looking back, I opened the door, nearly wrenching it off its damn hinges just to get away quicker as I fled the office. Doing so now leaving a shocked woman only to stare at my back. Then I all but ran into the only place I could be alone in an office full of people.

The second I turned around and locked the toilet’s cubicle door behind me I sank to the floor. I cradled my head in both hands and decided that right now, an oxymoron was the best way to describe how I was feeling...

“What the Devil is wrong with me?”

Brent

17

Everything the Devil Wants

“Fuck...FUCK!” I roared...or should I say the Devil roared, at the same time as making me pick up a dagger shaped letter opener which was swiftly thrown like a dart into the wall. It hit dead centre on a black and white photograph that was ironically of a frozen lake that now looked cracked, thanks to the shattered glass.

“Ex-girlfriend?” I asked making him growl in my head and tell me,

“Careful Brent, unless you wish me to use that letter opener somewhere you will feel it every time you sit your ass down!” This time it was said in my head as I knew it took less energy for the Devil to use my body against my will. Something he had decided to do the second he saw that woman when we opened the door to find her falling into our arms unconscious.

Just from that one moment alone, I found myself with more questions and curiosity than I had done in years.

“Alright, so come on, out with it,” I told him, knowing that after being stuck sharing the same body for the last six years we had strangely grown on each other. Okay, so if I actually managed to survive this, then let’s just say I doubted we would become drinking buddies when this was all over, even though admittedly we had certainly shared our fair share of drinks over the years.

That and cigarettes... oh yeah, and lest we forget, the murders galore. Well, if a murder or two wasn't strong enough to bring two people together, then I didn't know what was. Mind you, the amount I had been forced to smoke these last years, then I wouldn't have been surprised when the second he left my body I wouldn't just drop dead from lung cancer and meet him back in Hell anyway. Christ, but would I ever be rid of this guy?

"I wouldn't count your dead chickens," he said in response to hearing my thoughts, making me smirk and comment back,

"And there's my funny fucker," I commented with a laugh. To be honest, I had given up trying to hide my thoughts from him years ago as really, it was too exhausting. Besides, the Devil knew every single thing there was to know about me, so what was the damn point.

"So come on, who is she?" I asked throwing a hand to the door and using our joint power to send a wave of unease towards it, so no-one would want to come near it, even if they didn't understand why. We had already gotten rid of that cretin Carter, a person I was itching to break after only spending five minutes with the man.

"It is not your concern," he told me, and his agitated tone wasn't missed even when it was in being said in my head.

"I disagree."

"Brent." He said my name in warning just as he had said hers, making me shake my head.

"Look, you just fucking took over my body completely just to use it to freak some poor girl, who you successfully terrified, into running out the room...congrats by way." Another pissed off growl was my only reply, so I continued, pushing him harder,

"So, I can only assume her running in fear for once wasn't your main goal here, not considering you tried to stop her from leaving...which can only mean one thing."

“*Yeah, and what’s that, Doctor Phil?*” he snarled sarcastically, learning the skill over the years spent with me.

“She’s the only human being on the planet that I have come across who means something to you,” I deduced and for once there was no reply. No growl, no snarling beast, not even a fuck off or a swift heel kick by my own foot to my shin. Which meant I was right.

“*And like I said, it is no business of yours,*” was eventually his only reaction to this.

“Uh, I don’t know whether you have forgotten this or not, but it is *my business* when you are using *my body* for *that business*.” He didn’t reply but a hand raked through my hair and yanked hard at the strands in frustration, one that wasn’t of my own doing.

“I mean, Christ only knows what you would have had me doing to her had she not left when she did.”

“*And whose fault was that!?*” he snarled and he was right, I had been the one to tell her to leave, fearing for the girl if she hadn’t. But to be honest, she hadn’t been the only one freaked out by the Devil’s behaviour. Because I wasn’t exaggerating when I said she was the only one I had ever seen him react this way towards.

The Devil hadn’t shown one ounce of care or thought over human life before in this entire six years. But then this one girl falls into our arms and suddenly he is fighting to take over my body completely, like he had never fought before. And more startling yet, he had actually won for a short time!

So yeah, that fucking terrified the shit out of me and reason enough why I was pushing for answers now. Because I would rather help the Devil get what he wanted from her, than have him using me, taking over my body completely and risk going way past the point of me ever making my way back to control. Despite the fact that this body hadn’t looked like my own for so long now, I had lost track of when I had started to recognize it *as my own*.

But after that first killing, after we had dispatched one Jacob Wholeheart for good, then there had been no going back for me or for my mortal body. I had changed into what he had wanted me to change into.

‘He had standards to uphold’ he had told me. Well, obviously his standards had included me needing to look like a bodybuilder. One that was, thankfully, the rougher side of pretty boy, who’s permanently pissed off look was one to be taken seriously as a man not to be fucked with, even with my new ‘*pretty eyes*’.

But new good looks and a body made for killing, gladiator style in some fucked up historical arena, hadn’t been the only ‘bonus’ thrust upon me that day. Because with each new killing I acquired a new skill. A power granted to this mortal body turning it into something more and after Jacob, ‘the trafficking soul seller’, my first power gained was the ability to heal myself.

“Yeah, well consider it me doing you a favour buddy, unless of course your plan was to scare her into liking you!” I snapped back making him growl once more,

“*Fuck!*” this was as close to ‘you’re right, Brent’ as I was ever going to get.

“*She shouldn’t even be here!*” The Devil told me which was when the name finally clicked in my mind as to when I had heard it.

“Oh shit, that’s her isn’t it...that’s *the Lilly*...fuck, how could I have forgotten that memory?” I said referring to the first time I heard the name three years ago, back to the Vegas killing. After that it was as if something had clicked with the Devil inside me. As if I could feel him obsessing over something other than the souls he wanted me to take. Well, now I knew, all this time it had been her...it had been this Lilly. Which still begged the biggest question just as it had that night,

Who was she to him?

“Leave it!” he demanded making me grin because in all honesty, I just couldn’t help myself. Not when this had been the first thing I had known would rile up the Devil, since I had entered into this bargain with him. Which was precisely why I couldn’t leave it, well that and she had been the only other person I had come across to know who I was, or should I say, *who I was now*.

“How did she know?” I asked but he ignored me and tried to take control once again, making me storm towards the door before I put up enough of a fight to hold us back. I then winced already anticipating the roar that would follow my defiance.

“That isn’t going to make me do shit, as I think we already established that years ago when I killed that asshole politician...perks of the job remember?” I reminded him as with that soul taken, it had given me greater strength in all aspects. Much to the Devil’s annoyance this also meant strength of will, so his fight for dominance over my body had shifted and was now made for a more even battle. Meaning he could no longer intimidate me as he once had.

“Yes, and you will remember who it is I hold ...”

“Yeah, yeah, my wife, did you think for even a second I would forget why the fuck I gave up my soul to do this, besides it’s the same shit you have been threatening me with for years...” I felt him grinning but knew it wouldn’t be for long,

“...but now it’s your turn, so listen up asshole, as I finally have something over you! So, unless you want me to walk out there now waving this big cock you gave me around like a damn helicopter party trick, whilst reciting Little Bo Peep, wearing my underwear on my head like a damn bonnet, then I think you will find us stood on an even playing field... because news flash, buddy, there ain’t no coming back from creepy shit like that! So, if you like this chick, then you have no choice, *you* will need *my* help.” I told him and this time I knew there was no need for me to tense waiting for his reaction to cause me a headache or some other shit. No,

because it was like I said, I held the power to fuck this up for him and for the first time, he was worried that I would do it.

“Fine! Then what do you suggest, Casanova?” he snarled again making me grin before telling him,

“Well, for starters, not locking the poor girl in a room with us when she is trying to leave after we just manhandled her the second she wakes from fainting.”

“Fair point,” he admitted begrudgingly.

“Look, she’s human, right.”

“For now, yes,” he replied making me frown because it hadn’t actually been a question.

“Erm, so what does that mean...exactly just what do you have planned for this chick, because I am telling you now, I am not going to...?”

“No harm will come to her by our hand or any other,” he said interrupting me and with the added venom lacing his tone it told me that there would be the price of someone’s life if anyone was stupid enough to try. Oh yeah, the Devil liked this girl.

“Then I am glad we are in agreement. But you still have to tell me who she is and how the Hell she knows us?” I heard the Devil sigh before telling me,

“All you need to know is that she is important to me and she subconsciously knows who we are, because she is important to me. This is all you’re getting and nothing more,” he said in a way that I knew there was no point pushing for more right now, so I decided to move on.

“Alright, then back to my earlier question...what is it you want from her?” I asked looking back to the door and thanks to my gifts knew she was still inside the building. But then the Devil turned my head towards the broken picture on the wall and in that I could see more his reflection than my own. Meaning I could see the demonic grin grace my features.

Only then did he give me his answer...

“It’s simple...”

“I want everything.”

Lilly

18

Story Time

I didn't know how long I ended up sat on the floor of that cubicle, hiding like a scared little girl from a bully at school. But in the end a text message came through and it turned out to be my boss reminding me I was late for our meeting. Which totally confused me considering I'd woken up in his office. Had that man done something to him? Or had he actually been who I thought he'd been? Was I really going that crazy?

Jesus, but I couldn't think straight other than I had been working my ass for this story for the last three years, and was I really prepared to blow it now, just because of what I might have seen in that office? For starters, I was nearly always sleep deprived and really, could I be surprised that the effects of that had finally caught up with me?

Hell, I could have dreamt the whole thing and actually fell asleep in the damn toilet for all I knew. After all, in every one of my dreams of him it had felt real...real enough to actually wake with the evidence left on my body to find. What if all this time I had subconsciously been hurting myself in my sleep and in fact, all I had needed was to be put on the right medication but was always too afraid to see someone for fear they would just call me crazy.

But even I knew that was just an excuse as I was pretty sure calling a patient crazy was considered bad practice for a doctor in any profession. And I was pretty sure people like that

got paid by the hour, so was it really in their best interests to insult the patient so they never came back?

I didn't think so.

But I knew that deep down there was that small part of me, the part in the shadows that didn't want to admit that none of it was real. That it was all just some psychological problem, something like a chemical imbalance in my mind making me see these things. Making me dream the way I did. Not enough of something in my diet, or too much. Hell, watching one episode of House and I could pretty much call it myself and put it down to something neurological, like picking a diagnosis out of a hat and rolling with it!

Because if I admitted this, even for a second, then it didn't just mean that it wasn't real... it meant something more, or more like, something less... *it meant that he wasn't real*. And that foolish part of me, the one that was obviously unbalanced, didn't want that to happen. I didn't want to wake up to that reality. To ever admit that there would be a time in my life where he wouldn't continue to haunt it. Because that would be like taking away an addiction. One I knew wasn't healthy for me. But like most addicts, they knew what they took could kill them. They weren't stupid, even if denial could be classed as a stupidity. Deep down when they looked at themselves in the mirror, they knew what they saw. They knew what they were doing. They knew who they had become.

But an addiction was hard to stop. That's why they called it an addiction. And as ashamed as I was to admit it...

The Devil *was my addiction*.

"You're late!" my boss snapped as I stepped inside, cautiously looking around as if waiting to find him still in here. But then one look at my boss and it was as if the whole thing had never happened.

"Erm, your meeting, the man that was here earlier...has he...?"

“You mean Mr Armad? Where have you been Lilly? That meeting was hours ago, now can we please get on with why you requested this meeting, kinda busy here,” he said making me frown in question. So, did that mean I had imagined the whole thing?

He cleared his throat and nodded expectantly to the door that I was still stood by and holding open.

“Right, yes of course,” I said shaking myself back into action. Because despite my moment of madness this was still my big shot. The one I had been working at what felt like most of my life. That one moment that could finally make a difference to my future.

But first, a few things to know about the man I was now stood opposite, my boss, Andy Carter. The best way to describe him would have been if there was ever a cartoon cut out of a typical sleazy boss, then Andy Carter would have been it.

He was the seedy, shady stereotype that screamed corrupt and dishonest, with the added (not so bonus) creepy perverted stare, inappropriate lingering touch and a guy who used his position to intimidate women. He also had a receding hairline no product could hide, a potbelly no girdle would hide and bad breath no amount of mints did *ever* hide. So, in short, he was repulsive not because of his appearance but because this was combined with being a class A sexist pig. One I had the unfortunate task of dealing with on a daily basis.

“Not got all day here Miss Knight,” he said with a curl of his top lip as he openly scanned what I was wearing, which was never something fancy and didn’t differ much from the plain black pantsuit combined with white shirt I was wearing now.

“Right, yes, sorry...” At this he raised his eyebrows and I wanted to roll my eyes but instead gave him what he wanted and doing so quickly,

“Sir.”

“Better, now you have something to show me?”

“Yes, as I said, I have been working on this story for a while now and I really do think it’s...”

“You have been working on a story...why in God’s name would you be wasting your time doing that?” he asked with a snort of laughter that grated on my every nerve and was something he did and often. However, I pressed on.

“You know why,” I said through gritted teeth.

“Yes, yes, you want to be a journalist, so you have said... well, that may be all well and good but I am not the only one who doesn’t think you have what it...”

“I have a story about a serial killer!” I shouted out quickly, cutting him off from that same old spiel I had been hearing for years. His eyes suddenly widened as he knew that if it were true, then this was media gold, as in worldwide coverage. And he also knew what it would mean to be the only paper with the story, as in no time at all other papers would be all over it. But in this business, what usually happened was regular readers of the paper reported it first. It was just human nature, to stick with what was familiar. We were, after all, creatures of habit.

We were also predictable, right along with one Andy ‘pervert’ Carter. Meaning I wasn’t surprised when he changed his tune and said,

“Alright Lilly, I’m listening.”

For the next hour I told him everything I knew and just as I knew he would, when he started to doubt my theories, I hit him with the evidence. I explained all five murders, but it was when I got to the last one that he didn’t just look shocked, he looked completely dumbfounded. This was with good reason as victim number five was a politician by the name of Daniel Allen who was still deemed a missing person, just like the others, seeing as no body had been found. What had been found however was signs of a struggle. The last place he had been seen had been at his favourite a la carte restaurant in a private room he always hired. It was rumoured that he used it

to not only entertain guests and close friends, but for more, should we say, ‘sordid reasons.’

Apparently, he had an unusual kink, and liked to watch girls strip and dance whilst smothering themselves in food whilst he ate his meal. Of course, this had only come out after his disappearance and the media ate it up and distributed it like candy to kids on Halloween!

Had it been some disgruntled boyfriend of one of the girls he paid? Had it been a pimp or even a mob hit? The media had gone around in circles with it all this time and it had been little old me who had managed to link it to the other killings the second I saw the crime scene photograph on the news.

Like the others, there had been no body but a burn mark in the carpet with a word found in the centre. One I had read as all the others. The name the Devil called me. And like all the others it had been a name that had changed into something else. I knew this because, as I had when doing my own investigating, they found a specialist in ancient languages to help them and discovered that the word written had been ‘Gluttony’.

Which meant I now had Sloth, Pride, Greed, Wrath and Gluttony, meaning that I truly believed there was at least two more killings still to come. Now which would come next, Lust or Envy, I didn’t know. But unfortunately Daniel Allen had also been an investor in the deal to build luxury apartments in our old building the Tribune Tower, as the rumours had been true. Which meant back in 2018 it had been one sad Friday in June that we had to say goodbye to an era and leave our beloved building forever. A building, admittedly, I had fallen in love with the very first day I had stepped foot inside.

Nevertheless, we had moved to 1, Prudential Plaza, a prominent but architecturally undistinguished mid-20th-century high-rise just north of Millennium Park.

It was no shock that I missed my old building, but one thing I wouldn’t miss would be working under this chauvinistic asshole who spent more time openly adjusting his genitals than he did actual work. Something he got everyone

else to do for him instead. But one look at his face now and even I knew my story couldn't be denied. Hell, he even looked pale and slightly worried, making me question why? Did this mean he was worried about his own job or just losing his favourite lacky?

“And who else knows about this?” he asked making me frown for a second at the odd question, especially as he was picking up the phone, calling someone.

“No one, just me,” I said not wanting to include Stewart in this in case it would implicate him in some way for not being the one to bring this to the boss' attention. But then something in his gaze disturbed me, making me worry. Would he try and steal this from me in some way, and make a claim to it, passing it off as his own as he had done once before.

I quickly and wisely decided to add,

“But not to worry, everything was documented as I worked on it, so I can prove I wrote it...you know, so no other papers can dispute the source of where it came from,” I told him making him sneer before schooling his features.

“Yes Cynthia, can you ask Donald to come down to my office as soon as he can, tell him it's a story he will be most interested in and has something to do with Daniel Allen,” he said making me gulp as now I knew he was actually speaking to the chief editor, *his boss*. I hadn't had much opportunity to deal with him myself over the years, however, he had always seemed nice enough to me. Definitely not as sleazy as my own boss, but then again, he was a personal friend of Andy, so who really knew.

I was actually surprised when only minutes later Donald was striding into the office with purpose.

“Andy, and Miss Knight, a pleasure to meet you again,” he said, his voice smooth like whipped butter and charming as he took my hand and shook it. Of course, his ‘meeting me again’ was in reference to barely a head nod in acknowledgement at last year's office Christmas party. One where even my name hadn't been spoken aloud. But I appreciated the effort to appear that he knew me all the same.

Something Andy wouldn't have even attempted seeing as I was merely a woman and therefore not worth wasting sentiments on.

But this wasn't the only thing that set him apart, as Donald was tall, well presented in a designer suit and even in his fifties, he was an attractive man. He also had a masterful air to him that meant when he spoke, others listened. He also lured you in with his easy manner and when he spoke to you, he made you feel as though what you had to say mattered to him.

And this was precisely how he made me feel only ten minutes into the conversation, one that started after he turned to me, and said,

“I hear you have a story for me.”

Lilly

19

What the Devil Feels

Another hour later and I had repeated the whole story, which at the end Donald gave Andy a head nod, as if giving him the go ahead to something.

“Well, that’s quite a story you have, and I congratulate you on your level of commitment...it’s well, it’s most certainly impressive, Miss Knight,” he said making me blush.

“Thank you, Sir, and please, call me Lilly,” I said with a smile, thinking that this was it, I had finally done it!

“And you say only you know about this...even after all this time, you haven’t confided in anyone?” he asked.

“No, like I said to Andy, I didn’t want to chance anyone else getting hold of it before we were the ones to print first.” At this he smiled and patted my leg twice, telling me,

“Good girl.” I didn’t exactly like the contact as it felt strange, as if I got a bad vibe from it but wisely I refrained from reacting to it.

“Now, obviously Daniel was an investor as well as a friend of mine, so this part is...well, delicate to say the least. Especially after the media shitstorm surrounding his somewhat, questionable personal life,” he said, once more giving Andy a knowing look I couldn’t get my head around.

“So, I think you will agree we need to be utterly positive where he is concerned and as there was no body, then there are too many theories out there. So, what I would like you to do is work with Andy on this.” I swear I nearly groaned out loud and was about interject when he said,

“Andy, do we still have that friend at the club, as he might know some more details.”

“The club?” I asked. Andy smiled and then nodded before telling me,

“A sort of gentleman’s club we were members of.”

“Like a country club?” I asked making Andy grin.

“Oh, you know, one of those places businessmen get together to play tennis, drink brandy and complain about our wives,” Donald said with laughter in his voice and Andy joined him.

“So, you think he will talk to me about Daniel Allen?” I asked thinking this was a promising lead, even if he did want me to work with Andy on this case. However, I did need to be clear on something first,

“I do if Andy is there to introduce you, in fact, I think tomorrow night should be perfect, don’t you Andy?” Donald said, making Andy perk up and agree. But then I thought of the date and knew what tomorrow night meant. Because not only was it the night of the next murder, it was also my next shot at seeing...*him*.

“Tomorrow night?”

“There is a sort of gala being held, you know, black dress, black tie event,” Andy informed me, making me want to shiver at the idea of going anywhere like that with him. Especially with the extra creepy way he described what was required of me to wear. I wondered if I could get away with a burlap dyed black for something like that.

“Don’t worry, I am sure Andy will have you home and back to your boyfriend in good time,” Donald said as obviously something in my expression must have spoken of my trepidation.

“Oh, I don’t have a boyfriend,” I said without thinking and I didn’t miss the sideways glance Donald gave Andy before saying,

“Well, I am surprised, a pretty girl like you being single, although good news for us, eh Andy?” I frowned at this odd comment but before I could ask he continued, thankfully putting me at ease,

“Because when you’re promoted you will find yourself pretty busy around here, all those late nights and such.” My eyes widened and my heart raced as I started to smile.

“You mean...?”

“That congratulations will soon be in order, yes and well done my girl, this is going to be a huge story and will have your name written all over it, you have my word,” he said getting up and holding out a hand for me to shake and I swear I nearly hugged the man.

“Thank you, I...well, I can’t thank you enough, Sir!” I said making him grin down at me. He covered my hand that was still held in his and patted it twice, telling me,

“We are lucky to have you, isn’t that right, Andy?” he said granting him a look and making Andy openly scan down my body before smirking.

“We sure are.” I thankfully repressed the urge to curl my lip in disgust at this and tried not to let it ruin my moment, especially knowing that I had no choice but to meet with him tomorrow night.

Shortly after this, I retrieved my file and said goodbye to both of them, keeping it together long enough to get to my desk before I allowed myself a little victory fist pump.

“I take it this means it went well?” Stewart whispered behind my back. I turned around and threw my arms around him and gave him a hug, then kissed him on the cheek, telling him,

“It did indeed and I couldn’t have done it without you!” He then pulled back and asked with wide eyes,

“Do this mean, what I think it means?”

“That depends, if you think you are talking to the soon to be newest journalist for the Chicago Tribunal,” I told him, just glad that I had at least one person to enjoy this moment with.

“Wow, oh Lil, that’s huge! I am so happy for you...but we should celebrate, tomorrow night there is this...”

“I can’t tomorrow, I have to work on the story, apparently the only downside to this promotion is I have to work with Andy on it as he has a potential contact at some club Daniel Allen used to go to,” I told him making him pull a face and look back warily over his shoulder towards Andy’s office.

“I don’t know about this Lil, I remember the last story you ‘both’ worked on,” he said making quotation marks with his fingers at the word both, knowing full well the last of my stories he stole.

“It won’t happen this time, Donald was in there and pretty much told me that it would be published under my name and Andy is only to help me get more info...besides, I kept all the evidence, remember,” I said nudging him as it had been Stewart’s idea to cover myself that way.

“Alright, but I want you to call me if anything goes wrong, you have my number...promise me, okay?” I gave him a thankful smile and made my promise. Then I packed up my things for the day and went home, still smiling as I stepped into the elevators.

But that was when my day went from weird, to great and then right back to weird again. Because as I was on my way down, the elevator stopped one floor below mine and opened its doors to no-one.

I frowned, waiting for someone to appear but then the doors started to close again and I thought nothing of it...well, that was until a hand suddenly appeared and prevented the doors from closing. I jumped at the sound but soon I was adding a startled gasp to that reaction because that hand was attached to what I had deemed couldn’t be real. Someone who must have been a dream. But then if that were the case, how

come he was suddenly right there in front of me, now stepping into the elevator.

I swear the moment he appeared as the door slowly moved back to allow him entrance, it was as if time had slowed down. Each step he took forward, I took one back, and the way he looked at me now told me one thing...he didn't like my fearful reaction to him.

"Bbbut you're...you're not...you weren't," I started to say, shaking my head from side to side but no matter my claims, he continued to come closer and the door soon closed, sealing us both inside.

"*Lilly.*" The way he said my name was almost like some prayer escaping from his lips.

"In the office...I...was it...?"

"You fainted and I caught you," he stated stopping the moment I put my hand out silently begging him to give me space. He looked at my hand as if the action was a complete foreign one, even going so far as to tilt his head slightly in question.

"*It was real?*" I whispered the question, making his eyes widen a moment as if surprised I could think of it to be anything but real.

"I'm sorry if I scared you," he said making me frown, because it didn't quite sound like something he would say naturally. But then again, it's not like I knew this man. No, I just knew the Devil that looked like him. Which now begged the question...

Just how sick was I?

"You grabbed me and then wouldn't let me leave," I stated making him release a resounding sigh before telling me,

"I apologise for my earlier behaviour." His eyes also told me he was remorseful but even so, I couldn't help but push,

"Why did you behave like that?"

"You...you reminded me of someone," he said after first taking pause to do so.

“Who?” I asked, unable to let it go, even though something in his gaze told me I would have been safer to.

“Someone I cared for, but... *but she betrayed me,*” he said in such a way as though the words had the power to cause the same pain this other woman obviously had. Which had me now desperate to know, who was she?

“So that’s why you kept me from leaving?” To this he nodded, unwilling to give me anything more as I had hoped for. Because for the most irrational reason, to hear about there being another woman, someone who he cared deeply for, well, it felt like someone was trying to carve his name into my chest, a name I didn’t truly know yet. But instead of asking this I nodded to the door behind him as it opened on the ground floor. However, I still couldn’t pass him as he hadn’t yet moved out of my way, giving me the room for me to do so.

“Are you going to do the same now?” He looked over his shoulder as if he was taking the time to think about that question and in turn, making me also wonder which answer I would want to hear the most. Did I want him to let me go, or deep down did I want him to force me to stay.

Finally, long seconds ticked by before he moved to the side and said,

“No, I am not going to force you to do anything.” This statement didn’t sound right coming from him, as if it had needed to be dragged out of him by some other ruling part. Whether it was the part that engages when it’s time to lie, I didn’t know. But weirdly, he just seemed in two minds about the answer. The one he wanted to give me and the one he knew he should.

So, I decided to test this theory by walking past him and even though he did as he said and didn’t prevent me from leaving, I still noticed his hands fisted by his sides, as if he were holding himself back from grabbing me.

However, despite this, I made it to the lobby, barely hearing him speaking to himself behind me just as the doors were closing in on him.

“Relax would ya, I’m not done yet.” As far as inner pep talks go, it wasn’t the best. But then, I wasn’t surprised when I felt him jog back up to me and say,

“But I would like to drive you home, that is, if you’ll let me?” he asked making me frown before replying with a one worded question,

“Why?”

“Because it’s the least I can do,” he said holding his hands out like it was obvious.

“So, you’re doing it to ease your own conscience and because you feel obligated to do so?” At this he frowned as if he didn’t like the sound of my doubting him. Or stranger still, it was almost as if he refused to admit to feeling obligated to do anything unless it was something he chose to do willingly and not because convention deemed it socially acceptable.

“I am doing this because I would like to, and I don’t see anything wrong in wishing for the excuse to spend more time in your company,” he told me boldly, making me raise a brow at him, deciding to be bold myself by asking him,

“With a woman that reminds you of someone who betrayed you?” I could tell by his face that my question had caught him off guard.

“I’m Alec Armand,” he said making me smirk before telling him,

“And you’re deflecting.”

“So are you,” he argued with a grin.

“How am I deflecting?”

“By not answering me and letting me give you a ride.” Okay, so he had a point, but I decided right about now lying was the best course of action”

“I have a car,” I told him and started to walk away but he was persistent, something I had secretly been hoping for.

“No, you don’t,” he said with confidence, making me suddenly nervous that he had been watching me. Which was

why I folded my arms, not needing to ask him how he knew that with words as my actions made it clear. Naturally, he soon got the hint.

“If you *did* have a car, then you would have said so the first time I asked.” Okay, so he had another good point, but it was still a small one at best.

“If that’s all you’ve got then...”

“You are wearing different shoes than you had on earlier, my guess is that your heels are in a drawer in your desk and the ones you have on now are still black so people won’t notice that they are clearly more comfortable, which tells me you have a walk ahead of you at the end of each working day and I am guessing it’s to a bus stop.” I frowned, not knowing whether to be freaked out or complimented that he had taken that much interest.

“Maybe I just parked my car somewhere else,” I challenged.

“Around this part of the city, you’re talking thirty bucks a day.”

“So?”

“A girl who brings her own lunch to work each day, instead of partaking in the convenience of ordering out or going to the cafeteria means they are either watching their weight or watching what they spend and seeing as your body is perfect the way it is, I am going to go with number two” he said granting me an appreciative look up and down my body to make his point, a look that unfortunately worked in making me blush an unattractive shade of strawberry.

“Which means I also doubt you are going to waste your money on driving a car into the city each day, ergo, the need for a ride home,” he finished making me release a sigh because everything he had said had been right, apart from the perfect body bit. Well, unless you liked flared hips on a girl and more than a little extra meat on the belly.

“Why do you want to drive me home so badly?” I asked, giving him a sceptical look in return for his thorough

assessment. However, this time when he gave me his answer it was once more as though it had come from an entirely different person. And it started when he suddenly invaded my space by stepping into me before he placed a hand on the small of my back to whisper down at me,

“Because, Lilly...

“You feel like you should be mine.”

Brent

20

Driving Miss Lilly

I wish I could have said that I knew what I was doing here but it would have been a lie. To be honest, I was just surprised the girl had ended up taking us up on our offer...or should I say, *the Devil's offer*. Because I sure as shit wasn't doing this for me, and I couldn't say that I felt solely comfortable with bringing this girl closer to the Devil, no matter what fixation he had on her.

But then again, if I was going to choose a person to owe me a favour, and considering the circumstances surrounding my fucked-up life, then the Devil was my best choice. Many would have said God, but well, so far that guy had done shit for me, so in this case, it was better the Devil I knew, *pun always intended*.

So, here I was now, sat in what the Devil would deem another bonus about being his lucky, the Dodge ACR Viper. I could have any car I wanted he had told me, the cost didn't matter. But instead of going for the usual suspects like a Ferrari or Lamborghini, I went with my boyhood dream of one day owning a Dodge Viper. And well, this one was completely badass. Black, with one thin racing stripe off to one side that matched up with the small red stripe on the steering wheel. Inside was a mix of supreme luxury and racing practicality. All black leather, suede and red stitching. To the ground bucket seats and latest tech, it was like a fucking wet dream and one I

would trade in a heartbeat just for a single moment of my old life back.

But yet here I was, driving this girl home and still asking myself why she had agreed. Especially after the Devil had taken over towards the end and decided that dashing and witty weren't cutting it, so creepy and honest was back in. Doing so by whispering in her ear that she felt like she belonged to him.

But then, whereas most people would have let their instincts do the decision making, I was getting the impression that there was something about this girl that was drawn to the Devil. And I didn't just mean in a way that other people were, but something more was drawing her in, as if strangely, she was more used to the Devil than even I was!

I smirked to myself as both myself and the Devil had admired her sass in the lobby, questioning me the way she had, even when I knew how much we intimidated her. But it wasn't just our size difference, as she was over a foot shorter than me and well, looked like an overzealous hug away from being crushed. However, despite our obvious differences, she was cute, there was no denying that or her sexual appeal, even for me who hadn't been intimate with another woman since my wife. And surprisingly, now I thought about it, it hadn't been something the Devil had ever made me do.

But Lilly Knight was definitely a woman I would have wanted to date, had I not been madly in love with my wife. Now, did I think of her to be a match for the Devil? Then that would have been a resounding Hell no! Oh, she was beautiful, but not exactly in the 'sinful' way I would have expected the Devil to have gone for. No, she was the complete opposite.

She looked as pure as the fucking snow and as innocent as they came! Christ, but I wouldn't have been surprised had she said her hobbies included knitting winter hats for the homeless and working at an animal shelter on the weekends. That was if I hadn't already discovered she was clearly a workaholic, as even if the Devil didn't know how to make conversation with her, then I most certainly did, which was why I spoke to her. And like I knew it would, I managed to put

her at ease, unlike when the Devil would force his way through and take control.

In those moments she would tense, and her heart rate would damn near go through the roof and weirdly, I didn't think this was entirely down to fear but more down to... *lust*.

I had just been surprised that the Devil had actually let me take the lead here, almost as if he agreed out of fear of fucking it up like he had done in the office. Something that was proven when she looked beyond fucking terrified the second we stepped in that elevator.

"She doesn't exactly look terrified now."

"My case in point asshole," I replied, this time in my mind. Not like when she had practically run from us, after testing whether or not we were going to stop her from leaving the elevator. Something, I should add, the Devil wanted to do. Hell, but he had wanted to throw her over our shoulder and take her out the doors screaming, public witnesses be damned. Now where he had planned to take her from there on was anyone's guess. It could have been up the tallest damn skyscraper King Kong style for all I knew. But one thing was for sure, this chick was making him crazy and that I gathered was an eternal first for him. And I would be a liar if I didn't claim that thought made me want to celebrate with a bottle of Jim Bean, packet of cigarettes and pull up a chair to sit back and watch the show.

"Yes, yes that would be fucking amusing, wouldn't it?"

"Most definitely," I replied in my mind but before this turned into a headache, I decided to cut us both some slack and give him what he really wanted.

"So, Lilly, tell me about yourself," I asked, shifting gear and putting my foot down to make the green light. She suddenly grabbed onto her seatbelt as if now fearing for her life for other reasons.

"Fucking slow down!" The Devil growled at me and I swear if I hadn't looked like an idiot, I would have let my mouth drop in shock.

“Christ, it must be love,” I thought making him growl again but come on, what did he expect. The Devil was asking me to slow down because I was scaring his girlfriend. The irony in that would have even blown Sigmund Freud’s head apart! My only response was a growl but amazingly he didn’t deny it and again, I nearly let my shock show.

“So, you were about to tell me about yourself.”

“Was I, only I thought I was about to list off all the common injuries received after a car crash,” she replied making me grin and for one painful moment she reminded me of my wife, Marie. She was always trying to get me to drive slower and if we ever argued, this was one of the reasons why. Which was precisely why I eased off the gas and turned to her to say,

“I’ll slow down, should I?”

“Please,” she replied granting me a small, shy smile and the moment I did, she eased up her death grip on the strap across her chest.

“So, I take it a day at the track isn’t one of your hobbies?” I joked.

“Well, I don’t know how to drive, so me in a car would be about as exciting as watching snails’ race,” she said making me chuckle.

“You never learned?” I was surprised, well that was until she explained why.

“It’s kind of what happens when you don’t have parents to teach you or are lucky enough that they buy you a car.” I gave her a look of surprise trying to mask my pity, knowing it was the last thing people like her needed from me. Even if it was there, stuck in my gut like I had known her all my life and hated that she was alone in the world.

“Did they die when you were young?” I asked because I was curious, strangely not because the Devil was. In fact, it was as though he already knew.

“I have no idea. I was orphaned as a baby,” she said in a matter of fact way that I knew must have been masking real

pain because it's not like you ever get over shit like that. The knowing, the not knowing...the pain was the same.

"I'm sorry to hear that, Lilly," I told her making her look my way.

"Why...why would you be sorry?" she asked genuinely curious.

"Because nobody should be alone."

"And you, are you including yourself in that statement?" she asked without malice but like me, genuinely curious.

"Yes."

"So, which is it, scared of commitment or just not found anyone worthy?" she asked now in a playful tone, but her question threw me off guard and before I could stop myself, I told her,

"My wife died seven years ago." I glanced her way when I heard her gasp of shock and for a moment, she looked close to crying. Jesus, but just seeing those big green eyes welling up and I felt like kicking myself and as it turned out, I wasn't the only one.

"Oh God, I am so sorry, Alec, I didn't know." This made the Devil roar in anger and to the point, that I had to take one hand off the wheel to put to the side of my head.

"Hey, are you okay?" I swallowed hard and said through gritted teeth,

"Yeah, I just get this asshole pain in my head sometimes, that doesn't know when to *back off!*" I said knowing he would get the point and if he didn't, I decided to *drive* my point home,

"...*Then I might end up crashing this fucking car after all and guess what buddy, I think only one of us would survive!*" I reminded him in my head and the pain eased instantly.

"*Then enough of your past life, Lilly is mine, so try and remember that the next time you want a pity fuck!*" he snarled back and I swear had he been a person in front of me now then I would have punched the bastard! But instead of arguing

back, I decided to forgo looking like a crazy person and eased up on grinding my teeth like a psychopath.

“So, what do you do, in your spare time?” I asked getting back on track to our earlier conversation. At this she laughed nervously and tucked a piece of her ebony black hair behind her ear, making her reaction an endearing one.

“I work a lot, in fact, when you met me, you know, when I...”

“Fainted in our arms,” I said only realising my slip up when she raised a brow and enquired,

“Our?”

“*Mine*”

“My arms,” I corrected ignoring the possessive growl from the Devil.

“I was about to have a meeting with my boss, I’m actually getting promoted,” she said with a beaming smile and if it hadn’t been one associated with that scum bag, I would have smiled with her.

“Well, congratulations are in order then...how about we get a drink to celebrate?” I told her and weirdly Lilly’s and the Devil’s reaction were the same, even if only one was voiced aloud,

“*We have work to do.*”

“I have work to do.”

“But, maybe some other time?” she quickly added making me grant her a grin, even though I was now questioning the Devil and his motives.

“Sure,” I told her and after that a comfortable silence filled the car but every time I gave into the Devil, letting him look his fill of her I could feel her unease.

“*Hey, Horny, do you wanna cool it down on the creepy lingering stare thing?*” I told him and felt my control slip back through so I could get back to concentrating on driving.

“*She is mine to do as I please.*”

“Yeah, well she doesn’t know that yet, so unless you want your first date to be at court when she’s filing a restraining order against you, then rain it in would ya!” I warned, making him grumble in annoyance something about ‘*fucking humans*’ and I couldn’t help but say,

“*I think you mean women in general with that one, buddy.*” This time I was ignored and I went back to driving, now taking in my surroundings.

“You live quite far out,” I commented, taking note that we were now heading into the shittier side of Chicago. Let’s put it this way, I was glad I wasn’t entirely human and had the strength of twenty men, seeing as I was driving a 150,000-dollar car. I felt bad for her, as she shifted uncomfortably in her seat now looking embarrassed. Of course, what didn’t help her unease was the Devil suddenly taking over and acting like an asshole about it.

“You shouldn’t be living here, Lilly... *I don’t like it.*” She shot us a look that said she was half a second away from telling us to mind our own damn business but then something stopped her. No, it was something, *it was someone.* I didn’t know why but this was when I noticed how she responded to the Devil in me. As if he were simply clicking his fingers and she was doing as he wished. It was the same back at her place of work, the way she responded to his dominance by letting us drive her home. When I had been in control, she had shown reluctance. However, the second the Devil took over, she found herself unable to say no.

Now why was that?

I knew it wasn’t because he was using any manipulation over her, because strangely enough, I knew he had tried already but it hadn’t worked. *She was strangely immune.*

“It’s fine and looks worse than it is,” she said, trying to pacify us.

“It’s not fine. Having your safety at risk is never *fine*,” he said now making her nervous once more.

“Alright buddy, time to ease up now, you have made your point,” I told him but then something caught my eye and I knew why he was suddenly so agitated.

“She shouldn’t be here,” he told me making me take another good look around and the second I saw it there, lit up in the distance, I swear it felt like God himself had dosed my nerve endings in ice.

“No... she shouldn’t,” I told him as I drove past, wishing I could have put my foot down, saying to Hell with her fear. But the traffic in front of me prevented me from doing so, meaning I had no choice but to adhere to the law.

“I take it by that look on your face you must have heard what happened there?” Lilly’s question brought me crashing back to reality and I tore my eyes from the haunting sight of the church, one that had seen a very different kind of praying inside its haunted walls. Haunted with the sounds of their victims, the ones tortured for being what some sick group believed wasn’t deemed worthy enough for living.

Oh, but from the outside it still looked like a thousand other churches would. Stone walls, an impressive bell tower and decorative arched windows. You couldn’t see it from the road, but I knew what I would find had I walked to the other side. An array of bullet holes chipped and still embedded in the walls and a large stained-glass window still in pieces. I even wondered if my blood still stained the floors?

Because really, I may have only been here to take six souls for the Devil, but in reality, that day, we both knew I had taken so much more.

The day I no choice but to cross a line.

The day I took the Devil to church.

And died...*Again.*

Brent

21

Where the Devil isn't Welcome

Two Years Ago

“What the fuck is taking so long?” I bellowed and started pacing back and forth in yet another luxurious hotel room. Then I turned to the mirrored back on the minibar that was more than just a small fridge packed with tiny bottles which for this job, just wouldn't cut it. But then the Devil is one rich bastard, so each room was a penthouse suite with full bottles, sporting premium names and was exactly what it sounds like it should be...a miniature bar. And thank fuck for that, I thought as I knocked back another glass before I addressed the Devil again.

“How much longer?” It's been years since I signed my soul over to him, but all I can think about is how long it must have felt like for my Marie? Her being locked in that place continually plagued me and was foremost in my thoughts, especially when I was just about to tick off the next soul on the list.

“*Calm down, Brent,*” he said, virtually ignoring my outburst.

“Calm down, our next target is today and for once I don't know a fucking thing about him or what I am walking into!” And it was true, for once I had been left in the dark on knowing the details about this soul and I only discovered why when the Devil told me,

“In the desk, the first drawer, take out the folder and find out.” I frowned in question but did as was instructed. Meanwhile, I could feel him grinning in an almost lustful way, as I wasn't the only one who was so close to their goal that it was something we could almost touch. A victory we could almost smell, with each new year that brought us one less soul to collect. But then, the second I flipped open the folder and saw a picture of a church, I slammed it shut and said what he knew I would say,

“No fucking way! I am not going to kill a priest!”

“Yes Brent, that is precisely what you are going to do.”

“You're insane! Don't you think I have done enough against God already. Now what, you want me to wave a fucking red flag in front of the guy and murder one of his own and in his own fucking house!?” Needless to say, I was a little pissed off that he had kept this from me.

“Come, come Brent, it's time to once again engage that cop brain of yours and take a closer look...after all, you should know more than most, that not everything is as it seems.”

I took a deep breath and did what he said, swiping the bottle and forgoing the glass this time as I sat down at a dining table, one big enough for ten, ready to delve into another person's life. And for once, I could only hope it was as dark and sinful as the rest had been. Thankfully, after all of five minutes, it turned out that by killing this guy, I would be doing God a favour. This guy was evil on a whole other level.

“Benedick Fennel.” I repeated his name, now doing so with a sneer of hatred coating my tone. He was a Neo-Nazi and came here with his band of merry fucking skinhead thugs from the deep south, after leaving a trail of dead people behind him. And not surprisingly, all had been black African Americans. Hell, the KKK wouldn't even have him in their clan! The likes of him you would not believe, and unbelievably, he was a reverend to boot. To look at him you would never have known the power and grip he held on his 'followers'.

“They call him, The Father.” The Devil told me, and the irony wasn’t lost on us both.

“How the Hell did you find this guy?” I asked knowing that with each new kill, it ended up connecting us to the next soul on the list. Because it wasn’t just their birth date that connected them, all of which had a six in the date. But each had, at one time, dealt with the other. The shithead lawyer had led us to soul number two, by representing Damian Waters, aka *Death Shower*.

Another sick bastard I had also taken great pleasure in killing due to being a serial murdering rapist and someone, if it hadn’t been for Jacob Wholeheart, then he would have been rotting in a state prison years ago and a whole lot more innocent girls would be still be making stupid mistakes. The difference was, they would be the kind that never got them tortured and murdered but of the more innocent variety, like sneaking back in the house drunk or in trouble for pickpocketing at their local mall.

But Jacob had also represented one Leonie Tesloch, also better known as who I’d named ‘The Whore’. Who, according to the Devil, now appeared to also have been hired by this ‘Father’ by acting as a decoy into luring poor innocent black men to their deaths. Seriously, I was starting to hope that there was a special place in Hell for these assholes!

“So, Brent, will killing this one still be a problem for you?” The Devil asked me, and I shot back my last drink, grabbed my jacket and told him,

“You should have trusted me.”

“Why is that?”

“Because reading that file, just makes me want to kill him even more.” I heard myself say this, and I had to wonder when it was that I’d become so bloodthirsty and savage.

Oh yeah, *it was when I met the Devil.*

We shortly arrived at the church, which was situated in a shitty end of Chicago and not one many would venture into

without either being on the cautious side of a loaded gun or just plain stupid and suicidal.

“Mark Morse is a known member but is currently doing time. Drop his name and tell Fennel that he’s the one who helped set you on this path to righteous purity.” The Devil told me making me scoff,

“Righteous purity?”

“Yes Brent, and very similar to the one you are currently on right now...only instead of punishing who you deem as innocent, you are punishing who I deem as sinful,” he told me and I wasn’t sure whether this was to mock me or actually help ease my already condemned soul. Because no matter that I had become some crime fighting vigilante, one ridding the streets of the worst of the worst, in the end, murder was still murder. And if I wasn’t mistaken, still a sin frowned upon by God. A being whose existence was no longer in question thanks to my forced bunk buddy, the Devil in me.

“He’s classed as a high-ranking lieutenant for the Father’s preferred church, Brothers of the South, they call themselves and seeing as he is currently behind bars you won’t have to worry about him corroborating your story.” The Devil said with an ominous tone.

“Mark Morse sent me, got it,” I said stepping around the corner and about to take the steps when the Devil said my name again, only this time it was in warning,

“Brent, there is something else you need to know.”

“Let me guess, I have to pretend to hate women as well as hating anyone that’s not considered ‘white’, whatever the fuck that means these days,” I said hating anyone who was racist for having a different shade of skin. The way I looked at it, we all bled crimson and that meant we were all made of the same stuff. So, however we looked on the outside, it was no excuse to do bad shit to each other.

Every person had a choice to do good in this world and that included doing so towards your fellow man. Because if you wanted to base your racism on our stupid, often fucked up

history, then if you went back far enough, every poor person in every nation was repressed by those in power at one time or another.

After all, history taught us that slavery had come in many forms and happened throughout history's many empires. And the people sold had been both black and white, for the price of flesh hadn't been based solely on the colour of your skin, but more on which side of the soil you lived and which out of both had been the conquering kind. And yes, along with being a non-racist, I was also a history buff...or at least had been at one time. But let's just say I didn't have much time for the history channel these days.

"I won't be able to protect you on this one," he told me, and one long look up the length of the church and I knew I didn't need to ask why.

"You have no power inside there do you?" I stated, thinking that this killing just got a whole lot more complicated.

"No, which means that neither do you." Great, just dandy... I thought, wondering why it had to be the one murder with a small army at the guy's back.

"So why don't we just wait for the guy to leave..." I asked realising the answer at the same time the Devil said it.

"Because of time."

"Because of timing, yeah, yeah I get it...today's the day. Better get my ass in there then and get this shit over with," I said checking my piece but then a couple of tuts from the Devil and I knew there was another shit sandwich coming my way, only the kind with extra filling and no bread.

"No weapons."

"And I suppose this is the part where you tell me why."

"Because what do you think is going to happen when you go in there, telling them you want to be a part of their sinful little games and carrying a gun that says otherwise, like say, my name is Brent and I used to be a cop but I'm not anymore, so please let me play," he said really getting the hang of sarcasm these days.

“Okay, so you might have a point, but I can’t go in there unarmed, I’d be a fucking dead man in seconds if they saw past my bullshit.”

“Then may I suggest two things?”

“Yeah, and what’s that?”

“Don’t suck at lying and learn how to be resourceful.”

“Great...just great.” I said just before stepping inside and for the first time in a long time, crossing myself the moment I did. And what did the Devil do...

He laughed.

I soon found myself sitting in a pew inside a church I was about to commit murder in and had to wonder, if I wasn’t to be the first one. I had already scanned the space for exits should this go how I half expected it to go.

The Reverend Benedick Fennel was currently up at the altar, performing a sermon to a packed-out audience of mindless drones. This consisted mostly of men and a few women I wouldn’t say looked very feminine. But as for God’s good graces, thankfully there was not one child in sight.

Fennel was a tall man with hands like shovels, making the small bible in his hands almost look comical. A big bald head and a glutenous gut made him look like the shape of a bell with a volleyball on top. But I didn’t believe that hair loss was what drove him to shave his head. He wore robes of his own design, that were black with a red shield that represented the ‘Brothers of the South’, an emblem of connecting gold fists holding a holy spear.

He spoke with a passionate tone and surprisingly, he didn’t speak or shout with hatred in his words as I had been expecting. Meaning this guy was even more dangerous than I first thought, as he spoke with eloquence and charm.

I subtly looked down both sides of where I sat and saw that his followers seemed to hang on to his every word. Oh yeah, this guy was dangerous all right. I, on the other hand,

wanted this hit to be done with, as I swear, I could even feel the statues casting judgement on me. It just felt wrong being here, even though I knew this place wasn't exactly being used as a house of worship in God's name but more like a vestibule for feeding Fennel's God complex alter ego.

Thankfully, it wasn't long until the church cleared, and the opportunity to do what I was here to do opened up. I was acutely aware with every step I took closer to him that this would be my first solo kill. It's odd to think of myself as doing this alone, after the Devil having my back for so long. Who would have ever thought that my mentality would change so much since that first kill.

I had to accept it as being a soldier at war, the killing had become my way of life. But in this killing, I was not at all concerned in the slightest that the Devil didn't have my back. I didn't need his help, not to rid the world of one bigoted man who preached hatred for the sole gain of acquiring a blind army to do his bidding. To make him feel powerful and equal to the warped version of God he led people to foolishly believe in.

There were far too many people in the world that took the Bible's words and put their own spin on them for no other gain but their own political views and beliefs. For their own financial gain, as I didn't miss the men by the door holding out their buckets, silently threatening cash with a single menacing look. I honestly didn't know what was worse, robbing someone with a gun pointed at them against their own free will or robbing them blind, as they willingly handed over their cash with the gun they couldn't see at their backs.

But they would go home and raise their children from birth to hate, convincing innocent minds that God himself hates African Americans, homosexuals, transgender and the list goes on and on. Which unfortunately meant that by ridding the world of Fennel, it would only mean there would be ten others to take his place and no doubt before the rain had even been given the chance to cleanse this place of its bloody sin.

And speaking of bloody sin...

With the sermon concluded, Fennel was already at the church entrance, shaking hands and talking to his congregation as they exited single file...after first parting with their money, of course. So, I held back, waiting to be sure I was the last to depart.

“That was an interesting sermon,” I began, reaching out to shake his hand and not giving into the temptation to break bones.

“Thank you, young man,” he responded with some kind of regal looking bow of his head like he was the fucking Pope or something. I swear if he wanted me to kiss the rings on his fat fingers, then I was done.

“Was this your first time? I don’t recall seeing you here before?” he asked already eyeing up my frame and seeing that I was potential to add more muscle to his army. Jesus, but I felt like I was about to be fucking groomed for something.

“Yes, sir. I just moved here and have been looking for a church to call home.”

“Then we welcome you, son and happy to have you here in our thriving city streets. Where do you hail from?” Fennel talked with a confidence and arrogance as if he owned the damn city and if he thought that rape, robbery and murder was the makings for a thriving place to live, then this guy was more fucked up than I originally thought!

“Detroit, sir,” I replied, going straight into what had been rehearsed.

“Lost my job to someone less educated and less skilled, but as I’m sure you’ve heard many a time, the company was suddenly all for equal opportunity and all that BS,” I said, inwardly cringing but also wondering if he bought it or not. But then he gave me a false look of concern and resentment before a slimy grin took over his expression.

“That is terrible son, and something we won’t have to stand for in the future as the day is coming, you mark my words. Now, if there is anything I can do, you just let me know.” Fennel’s thick southern Tennessee accent rung out and

I almost felt like asking if he would kindly follow me outside to where the Devil and me could kick his ass.

Thankfully, I squashed the urge.

“Well, there is something, sir. I came here thanks to an old friend. We grew up together. I’m certain you know him. His name is Mark Morse.” My words make Fennel show his less than perfect teeth that told me it was likely he’d either smoked forty a day for twenty years plus or he used to chew tobacco.

“Yes, son, I know Mark, old friends did you say?” Fennel nodded to his bodyguard who nodded back before leaving us. Fennel put his hand on my shoulder, and it made my skin crawl.

“He sent me a letter and told me all about your other church, Father. Taught me about my true calling and set me on a path for the righteous purity...That’s what I want to be a part of.” At first his scepticism was easy to see until I mentioned the Devil’s words, then his smile grew.

“What’s your name, son?”

“Braun,” I say quickly.

“That’s a good name, not very biblical but a strong name.”

“Its German,” I told him, wondering if he would link the name to who it was famous for. He didn’t, which told me he wasn’t an educated man like he pretended to be.

“Follow me, my office is down here, we can talk privately there.” He then started walking to the back of the church and like a good disciple, I followed. I started to think that this might be easier than either of us thought it would be. But then I got a bite of reality when we entered the office to three armed men there waiting. All of whom instantly got twitchy as they saw me, making me wonder if the cops actually knew some of what went on here and were investigating the place.

“Gentlemen, young Braun here wants to be a part of our sacred flock. He says Brother Mark Morse recruited him via a

letter.” Fennel looked at all three of his men.

“Father?” One of his men questioned, his tone clearly confused and that’s when I knew something was amiss with my story.

“Everyone knows Brother Mark can’t read or write,” he informed him of what I gathered he already knew, if Fennel’s big, shit eating yellow grin was anything to go by. He then looked at the gold rings on his fingers and twisted them around as he said,

“Yes, Brother Adam. Everyone in this room, except for one. What do you have to say for yourself, Braun? Lying *is* a sin you know.” Yeah, and I am pretty sure so is murder, dickhead! Thankfully, I didn’t choose this as my reply and just as the three were about to get trigger happy, I forged on with my lie, acting ignorance to the heavies in the room.

“I said he sent me a letter, Father. I never claimed that he wrote it. I believe I have his wife to thank for that. Even if that son of a bitch could write, there’s no way his penmanship would be so pretty,” I said with a confident laugh.

“And what is his wife’s name?” Fennel asked mockingly. Thank fuck for that file, that’s all I can say as I wisely didn’t just scan over it but pretty much memorised it on the way here and for this very reason. Which meant I knew all about Mark Morse.

“Lisa. He also has two boys, Caleb and Jackson,” I told him and for a few long seconds, you could have cut the tension in the room with a knife. I watched as his men were just waiting for the order and the odds of my survival against all three with guns, would be slim at best. I look only at Fennel, willing him to believe my story. I can’t read his expression but after a few moments, he finally spoke.

“Put your guns down, boys. Brother Braun is a good Christian, and we should begin his initiation right away. But just in case I’ve misread his character, you boys should come with us.” The three men line up behind me. I have to be patient; wait for an opportunity when their guards are down and be...what was it the Devil said, *resourceful*.

“Where to, Father?” I asked trying to mask the fact this asshole nearly just gave the order to have me blown away.

“To the basement, of course,” he acknowledged before we made our way through a wooden door in the office and down a flight of stairs before finally through a humid hallway. Fennel led the way, followed by myself and the three men behind me. I didn’t have to look to know that all three had a hand on their pistols, just looking for an excuse to shoot my ass. With any luck at least one of the inbred idiots would trip and shoot themselves instead.

Damn it but if only I still had the Devil’s powers, as I foresee the ability to heal would end up coming in handy with these meathead lackies around. What had I been saying, that I didn’t need him...well isn’t that just the mother kicker of mistakes!

We arrived at another wooden door and Fennel removed a ring of keys from his pocket and unlocked the door. He held it open for me and beckoned me to enter first.

It took a second for my eyes to adjust to the darkness, but when they did, I was mentally horror-struck to see a young African American man in chains. It took everything in me not to show any emotion, even as I felt my lungs struggle to breathe at the sight. He was upright, a chain hanging from the ceiling that his wrists were bound to. Dangling beside him was another chain, and I assumed he *used to* have a cellmate. Emphasis on the ‘used to’ as that was a hell of a lot of blood on the floor.

The young man’s face showed signs of having been beaten recently. He was shirtless, wearing a pair of ripped dirty jeans and was gagged. He was conscious, and the only eye that could still open, clearly looking at me, utterly terrified. The other men entered the room behind me, and I turned to face them and forced a smile on my face.

“Want me to kill this scum for you, Father?” I asked, faking every word but knowing it was exactly what he wanted to hear.

“No, no, Braun. That comes much later. But take a look at him. Doesn’t he look a lot like the rat who stole your job?” Fennel asked, seriously making me want to roll my eyes and call him a dumb fuck! Christ, but I hated racist pricks!

“I don’t know how you can tell, they all look the same to me.” ‘Brother Adam’ answered for me. I looked at the young, sorry looking man who had been trapped in this dungeon for God knows how long. I tried to show no emotion other than hate in order to appease Fennel.

“Yeah,” I remark spitting on the floor by his feet just for effect before saying,

“He looks just like him.”

“I’m sure in Detroit, they frown upon whipping a black leach. But here in my city, my church, every white God fearing Christian male has a right to pass judgment upon these here negro parasites.” Fuck me but I was going to enjoy killing this guy!

Fennel nodded to one of his men who promptly grabbed a bullwhip that was hanging on the wall and threw it at my feet. Goddamn him, so this was my fucking initiation! The time was not right for me to engage these men. At best, I would be able to take two of them down, Fennel then Adam, but the second and third guard would pop me off. Which meant that I didn’t have a choice, I had to do this vile thing and this time, I couldn’t even claim it was the hand of the Devil pushing me forward.

So, I picked up the whip and stood before the prisoner. The others couldn’t see my face, meaning they missed the apologetic look I gave the guy. I wished there was some other option, but I couldn’t think of one and time had run out. Meaning that I repositioned my hand high above my head ready to flog him.

I imagined that I was about to whip the Devil instead, not this innocent human being whose only crime was the colour of his skin.

The Devil's image was clear in my mind's eye as I flung my hand forward and just as I did, Fennel caught my wrist. I ended up jerking him with the momentum and thankfully this slowed down the whip enough so, as it hit the flinching man, it was only a light strike.

"That's enough, Braun, I don't need to see anymore," Fennel told me, then went on to explain,

"I'm not ready for him to die yet and judging by your strength it wouldn't take you long." I dropped the whip to the ground and sneered at the poor guy hung there, wishing I could offer him more than the act of hatred. Like some reassurance that I was going to get him out of this alive, whether it fucking killed me!

After this we returned to Fennel's office and by then his guards had relaxed. I was about to make my move, excusing myself to use the restroom to plan my next move, when suddenly the office door opened, and another man walked in. And this was where my story started to unravel and suddenly there was no getting out of this. I knew that the second Fennel addressed the man as someone who should have still been in prison.

"Ah, Brother Mark, I knew they would grant your parole," he said and I seriously could not believe my luck, because wouldn't you know it,

The Devil had been...

Dead wrong.

Brent

22

Catching the Holy Bullet

“Ah, Brother Mark,” Fennel greeted the man with a cheerful tone and my breath was stolen, along with the urge to follow it with a whispered curse through my teeth.

“Father,” Mark respectfully responded with a head nod.

“I’ve heard you have been recruiting, even from your cell,” Fennel commented and Mark looked to each of us, but I was the only one he granted with a blank, puzzled look on his face. Then Fennel pointed his fat meat hook finger at me and said,

“What’s the matter Mark, don’t you recognise your old childhood friend.”

“Father?” This was Mark’s first response as he paused to look me over once more before continuing with venom,

“I’ve never seen this motherfucker before in my life.” And with that damning comment, you could forget *motherfucker*, I was just plain, old *fucked*.

After this the shit hit the fan and it started with me grabbing the guy who had just pissed all over my plan. Mark didn’t know what hit him before I had grabbed him by the shirt, then threw him into the two standing next to each other as they still fumbled with their guns. Well, lucky for them this wasn’t the wild west or those two wouldn’t have made it past puberty! The other guy however, had his gun out and was

firing it at me as I ran out the door to the sound of Fennel barking orders.

I felt a bullet tear through me as it hit my shoulder and I was thankful that's all it hit as I made my way back into the church with Fennel's assholes chasing me like the hounds of Hell were on my tail! Ungracefully I bashed into the walls, smearing my blood along the whitewashed stone as I ducked and shifted from one side to the other. I did this the moment I heard the gunfire and bullets as they ricocheted off the stone all around me.

I saw, peeking through the wooden doors, light at the end of the tunnel and would have laughed at the real-life metaphor for my current situation right now. Emphasis on 'would have' had I not been too busy being chased and about four feet from making it. But then I felt another bullet tear through the side of my thigh. The impact dropped me to my knees and just as I tried to get back to my feet, the bastards were on me.

I braced for impact, even though doing so was utterly useless against a bullet to the brain, which was precisely where the end of one guy's gun was pointed.

"Don't kill him yet!" I heard coming from Fennel as his fat ass joined us.

"Take him into the chapel and let's show him what we do to a black loving Judas like him!" Christ but even with two bullets in me I still wanted to roll my eyes at the guy! My torso was hauled up to the height of their hips so they could drag me into the hall, throwing me through the doors at the end and making me roll to my side with a howl of pain.

"Get his ass up!" Fennel ordered and I was pulled up, this time to standing. The second I was, I suddenly took one meathead off guard by kicking out using my good leg. I hit my mark, making his kneecap pop out of the groove from the side on kick I delivered and pretty soon his howl of pain put mine to shame. He crashed to the floor and before I could be stopped, I stomped a boot down hard on his face, breaking his jaw and making a mess of his face, knocking him unconscious.

Then pain exploded behind my head and I went down landing right next to the bloody mess of the man I made. It just felt like someone had clocked me in the back of my head with the butt of their gun.

After this I was rained with kicks by Mark and the other one whilst Fennel stood there and watched with a smirk. I covered my head the best I could, but this left me open for my ribs to break and the second I felt extreme pain in one side of my chest I knew why. I struggled to take breath and knew my left lung had just been punctured by the cracked rib bone.

I was once again hauled up, only this time they knew to be cautious and now held me from each side. Then I was held up in front of Fennel who was winding a thick chain around his fist and I knew one thing for certain... *that shit was going to hurt.*

“Who do you work for?” he asked, obvious now that he thought I was a cop and the irony of my situation wasn’t lost on me, just like all the others.

“The Devil, and he says hi.” I told him grinning before it was punched off my face in the form of a great gash I could now feel cut down my bottom lip.

“Yeah, is that right!?” Fennel asked thinking he had broken me. But he was dead wrong. Because if the Devil couldn’t break me, then neither could this piece of shit. I spat out a mouthful of blood and started laughing,

“Yeah, and he lets me kill assholes like you!” I snarled back at him.

“Not learnt your lesson eh...guess you need it harder.” After this Fennel hit me again, this time I felt my nose explode as he broke the bridge. Blood was soon pouring down my lips and chin, dripping to the floor and yet again I still managed to grit through the pain and say,

“That’s what the Devil said to your momma last night.” Then I started laughing, only harder this time and one of the guys next to me whispered,

“*Jesus, he’s fucking insane.*” I then turn to him and said,

“You’ve no fucking idea!” Then I used the last of my strength and dropped to the floor. I slipped through their hold due to my weight falling and quickly rolled away from them. Then, the second my head ended up close to Fennel’s ankles, I did something totally insane.

I grabbed him by the leg and bit into the back of his Achilles tendon, clamping down and shaking my head like I was some wild fucking dog trying to rip meat from the bone. My mouth was already filled with my own blood, so I just let his flow out of my lips, without trying to swallow this scumbag’s blood.

But then I felt his flesh start to come away in my mouth and the screaming I could hear was like music to my ears. Because one way or another I was going to kill this fucker!

“GET HIM OFF ME!” Fennel screamed and I felt myself being dragged away. But my hold on him was so strong, that the moment I was pulled back, I finally tore a piece of him from the bone, taking it with me. He howled in agony and I couldn’t help but grin the second I saw all the blood pouring from the wound I’d just made. I ended up rolling the second they let go and leant my body on my arm, before I started to press myself up.

“Fuck me! This guy *is* insane!” I heard Mark say in horror and I looked to the three of them and made a show of spitting out the piece of Fennel I still had in my mouth. I had long ago steeled myself to guts, blood and gore, no longer needing to fight the bile from spewing out. Unlike Mark who spat his out after retching at the sight of what I’d just done. What they saw next was a crimson grin with blood pooling down my chin like I was some wild beast hungry for more. I then rose up to my full height ignoring the pain completely and letting my adrenaline fuel my rage.

It was time for my version of Wrath.

I watched as the other meathead started to raise his gun, and the second I saw it start to shake, I knew he feared me. He feared the madness he saw in my eyes. So, I used this to my advantage and told them,

“I’m not insane...*I’m the Devil.*” Then I started running, and like some all-American football star, I took the guy clean off his feet. His gun flew out of his hand and landed hard somewhere in the row of pews with a bang. The guy tried to escape my hold by pounding on my back as I continued running us both towards the wall. We both landed hard into an old antique looking radiator that burnt the both of us the second it touched our skin.

It was now hanging off to one side, as the impact caused the old brackets to break and loosen from the stone. The guy was moaning in pain and hunched over as if I’d just caused internal damage to his kidneys. But then he looked back up at me and when his gaze shifted to behind me, I followed his gaze just in time to see Mark lifting his gun. He quickly aimed it at me and was walking long steady strides my way as he started shooting. One bullet hit my side and threw my body back side on. So, I quickly grabbed the radiator and roared in anger as I ripped the heavy bastard from the wall, making hot water spew from the pipe.

I then held it up to protect myself against the onslaught of bullets, and the second I knew he was close enough I lashed out with it, hitting Mark in his face hard enough that it was the end of him. He was on the floor, his body twitching as he died with half his head caved in on itself and brain matter on show. Fennel looked on in horror knowing that he was next, so I whispered his name like a dark declaration claiming my next victim before I dropped the radiator on the still dying Mark. This ended him for good, along with the twitching, telling me all I needed to know...The Devil just gained a bonus soul to add to his collection.

Fennel looked like he couldn’t believe that I had just killed a man using a fucking radiator and I inwardly smirked, thinking back to the Devil’s earlier words.

Well, the Devil told me to be resourceful I thought with a roll of my shoulders. I watched as Fennel tried to limp away and I was about to go after him when I saw movement in my peripheral vision. The guy I’d dropped to the floor was pulling a knife from a strap on his leg and before he could lunge for

me, I kicked the weapon out of his hand, nearly falling to my knees as the pain finally hit me.

How I managed to stay on my feet was beyond me, but before the guy could try anything else I delivered a downward punch, which was like bringing down a hammer on his face. Then I grabbed his shirt and dragged him towards the burst pipe. He started squirming, trying to free himself when he could see where we are headed. I paused just before issuing my torture.

Then I called back to Fennel and said,

“Hey Asshole, this one of your boyfriends?” Then I forced his head under the scalding water, burning his face without mercy. Fennel visibly paled when he saw merely a glimpse of the sick bastard he was now dealing with. But this was what I wanted. I wanted him to see what awaited him. I wanted him to see the fucked-up fate I had in store for him!

Finally, the guy passed out from pain, or just died, but the moment he went limp I dropped him like a sack of wet shit. Then I started walking back towards Fennel, picking up Mark’s gun as I went.

“Now, now, Braun, let’s...let’s just talk about this...I have money, a shit load of money!” I laughed and muttered to myself,

“They always offer money.” I shook my head and continued to limp closer, telling him,

“But I am already rich, so what else are you going to offer me, Fennel?” I asked in a serious tone.

“Then why...why are you fucking doing this!?” he shouted, and I could see him now trying to rationalise my actions. Was this revenge for someone he’d killed or was this a paid hit?

“I told you, Fennel, I work for the Devil,” I told him, calmly making him sneer back at me.

“Fuck you, Braun!” he shouted making me laugh once before I looked down at my gun. I then slipped the clip from

the chamber, checking the bullet count. Five left, that should do it. One for every limb and last one for the head.

“Just tell me what it is you want!?” he shouted in panic knowing what my next move was.

“Isn’t it obvious yet...*he* wants your *sinful, fucking soul?*” I growled and I was just about to shoot the bastard, when suddenly the doors at the end of the church burst open and at least ten armed men rushed inside. They took one look at our situation and then started shooting the second they saw me with a gun pointed at their leader. That’s when I noticed the lit phone in Fennel’s hand and his panicked features turned back into a knowing grin.

“Ah shit!” I said before I shot off my five rounds making the most of the new thugs going for cover, giving me enough time to do something genius or something incredibly stupid. I ran back to Mark’s broken body and picked up the now bloody radiator once again before throwing it as hard as I could through the nearest stained-glass window. The glass exploded outwards along with the image of Jesus and his would-be judgement on me. It looked like someone had just scattered a rainbow and even as I still felt the rain of bullets tearing through my body, hitting my back like the fucking Devil himself were pounding his talons into my flesh, I still kept going. I jumped, half falling through the window and landed in a broken heap on the grass, barely able to do much more than spit up the blood I was choking on.

I didn’t know how long it was before I heard them coming. They were all outside now, crowding around me, guns pointed at the ready even though it was obvious I only had seconds left.

“Come on you fucker!” I shouted even though it was gargled, and Fennel limped up to me. Then he pointed his gun down at my head and chambered a round.

“Here I am, asshole!” he said but I started laughing, the agony long ago lost to my madness. Then I raised my head as much as I could and told him,

“I wasn’t talking to you, dickhead.”

Then Fennel pulled the trigger.

And I should have died. That should have been the end of me. but it wasn't. Because just as I was about to discover what a bullet to the head felt like, my hand suddenly snapped up. But incredibly, I caught it before it could make it to my head... or should I say, the *Devil caught it*.

"*About fucking time!*" I growled in my mind at him the second I felt him back with me.

"*I missed you too, Brent,*" he sniggered back.

"What the Hell!" Fennel shouted first looking down at me and then to the end of his gun, as if checking it didn't misfire. So, I opened the palm of my hand and asked

"Looking for this?" The second the men saw it, they all looked completely freaked out and they should be. Because it's not just down to the fact I was clearly still not dead, but that I actually managed to catch a bullet as if I was some fucking Superman.

"No...no that's, that's..." Fennel stuttered.

"That's the Devil in me, here...*let me introduce you.*" Then I winked at him, feeling the Devil taking over and finally getting to show them all the true meaning of Hell.

And I did this,

By killing them all...*painfully*.

I had to admit, that even for the Devil, burning them all alive had been massive overkill. But then, finding his favourite soul collecting lucky, bloody, broken and pretty much three breaths away from being beaten to death, would put any overlord in Hell in a foul mood. Of course, as gratifying as it was, even I thought that ripping a gravestone from the ground and beating Fennel to death with it was a tad too much. Even if the Devil had quickly read the name on the stone and informed me,

"*Righteous purity indeed.*"

“What do you mean?” I asked after he dropped his unconventional weapon back to the ground.

I felt the Devil grin as he said,

“The corpse was a black man.”

I had chuckled, doing so with the ease now I didn't have a broken rib bone sticking in my lung. It hadn't taken me long to heal, doing so almost instantly. Which also meant that it might have been my hardest kill to date but damn, it was probably the most satisfying too. Of course, the second I had found myself surrounded by the carnage myself and the Devil had caused, I didn't think twice about it. No, instead the first thing I did was to go back down into the basement to let the guy they had been torturing go.

He had taken one look at me and he just knew what I had done. The sad part was that he thought I had done it solely for him, now looking at me like some damn Messiah and thanking God, praising him for bringing me there to rescue them. When the reality was, I wasn't there for God, I was there to do the Devil's work.

But I hadn't said this. Hell, I hadn't even spoken a word until we were upstairs back in the church and he could see for himself the punishment these men had endured for their sins. This was along with seven other people who had been found down there in these people's Hell on earth. Five men, one woman and one teenage boy had been imprisoned down there for God only knew how long.

I walked to the front doors and I knelt down to one of the bodies I had managed to shoot before throwing myself through a window. I had then retrieved his phone before throwing it to the first guy I saved.

“Call the police and tell them what went on here.”

“Wait! Who are you, what is your name?” he asked making me pause with my hand on the door. I looked over my shoulder and told him,

“Well, it sure as shit isn’t Eva Braun,” I told him, knowing he would have no idea why I said this, and I didn’t wait around to explain it to him. No, instead I had walked out the fucking door and vowed never to walk into another church as long as this bastard inside me allowed me to live.

And talk about still living...

“It’s this next apartment building on the left,” Lilly told me, pointing to the near dilapidated building that some piece of shit landlord obviously didn’t give a crap about and boy was the Devil pissed about it!

“*You live here?*” I foolishly hissed without masking my disgust. But seriously, could she blame me, there was a fucking guy selling drugs in the alley for fuck sake, and I didn’t have to be a cop to recognise it. Hell, my ninety year old grandmother with Alzheimer’s could have called it!

“Yes, well not all of us has the luxury of choice or the money to pay for it but hey, you’ve eased your conscience and done your bit for charity now, so thanks for the ride in your nice shiny car, I’ll treasure the memory forever,” she said sarcastically, now reaching for the handle after first unbuckling her seatbelt and opening the door.

But suddenly the Devil took over my body and put his foot down making the car jerk forward. This quick and sudden action made the door slam shut and Lilly fall back in her seat. Then he spun the car around, doing an illegal U turn, in the middle of traffic making Lilly scream out in fear as it looked as though the oncoming traffic would hit us.

Thankfully, this didn’t happen due to the skills of manipulation the Devil had, sending a wave of thought to everyone close enough to slam on their brakes, meaning everyone stopped at the right time and prevented even one single person from crashing. Anyone watching this would think it was a well-choreographed movie stunt.

Then he took us speeding down the opposite direction, now heading back to the city. Finally, minutes had ticked by

and Lilly was finally coming back around to being able to speak past her terror and shock.

“What the Hell do you think you are doing!?” she screeched making us both shoot her a look. However, with the Devil being in control, the look wasn’t one of sympathy or guilt that I would have granted her.

“That’s a good question Lilly, *what in Hell am I doing.*” The Devil asked and she knew instantly with the sound of his voice that he or should I say *I*, had changed.

“Seriously, are you like bipolar or just a schizophrenic with an added multiple personalities disorder?!” she asked getting high pitched and I couldn’t help myself,

“Well done, you have officially made her believe we are batshit crazy, that just added kidnapping to the list of a hundred reasons why she shouldn’t ever date us!” I told him making him grip the steering wheel hard enough until the leather groaned.

“Relax, she will be tamed,” he told me making me snort, yes actually snort at him in my mind.

“She’s not a damn horse to break in and unless she suddenly develops Stockholm syndrome then I doubt this is going to end the way you want it to,” I told him making the bastard even smirk.

“You will see.” I frowned mirroring Lilly’s expression as she was currently sat there silently fuming with her arms across her chest, looking as though she was trying to force a mutation that would allow her to set us alight with her retinas.

“So, are you going to tell me where you are taking me?” she asked unable to stand it any longer.

“Yeah I also wanted to know what’s the plan here and exactly which cave are we going to drag her back to after we have clubbed her over the head with our charm and wit,” I asked making him growl back at me.

“I am taking you somewhere suitable,” he told her, making me want to smack our forehead straight after. Christ,

but for the Devil he was surprisingly shit with women...or should I say, *with this woman*.

“Somewhere suitable?” she repeated in astonishment, making the Devil groan aloud before suddenly he was pulling the car over, making her once again jerk in her seat. Then, before she could react, the Devil had his belt unbuckled and was invading her space, by leaning over the centre. Then he told her in a stern tone,

“Yes Lilly, somewhere I deem suitable for the woman whom I wish to claim as my own and therefore care for her safety and wellbeing. So, you can be pissed at me all you want, the decision has been made, now all there is left is for you to accept it,” he told her and I swear our mouth would have dropped had he not currently been in control of our facial features.

“*You want to claim me as your own?*” She wisely picked this part to focus on and asked this in utter astonishment.

“Why exactly did you think I was driving you home?” he asked her and this time I didn’t just want to smack our forehead but hit it with a damn pipe, pain be damned!

“Erm, to be nice!?” she said incredulously. This was when he moved even closer to her and held himself barely an inch away from her lips. Then I watched as we both homed in on her swallowing hard and again, amazingly it wasn’t done out of fear.

Not even when he decided to drop a Hell sized bombshell in her by confessing,

“Sorry, sweetheart, but I’m the Devil...

“I don’t do nice.”

Lilly

23

Breaking Me In

It was now official. It wasn't just me that was crazy, but I also thought he was too. Because if someone had told me that my day would have consisted of me being caught in the arms of my dream Devil, I would have fainted (which I did do). Then to get offered a promotion only for it to end with some rich guy giving me a ride home, then I would have questioned why (which I also did) to his face. But then for him to tell me himself that he was the Devil, then it was no wonder what had come next,

"I beg your pardon?" I asked after shaking my head in little jerks.

"No need to beg for that, beautiful, you're pardoned. Now sit back and relax," he said and in a few swift moves, he was back on his side and putting the car into first gear before speeding off, still in the opposite direction to where I lived.

I also noticed that this time he didn't bother buckling up, but then again, if he really did believe he was the Devil, then I guessed a little thing like car safety wasn't big on his list of concerns. But me, well apparently, *I was*.

I had to admit that when he had said it, I couldn't say it was the worst thing to have said to you. That someone like him admitted to wanting you. I mean the guy was a walking sexy dream for Christ sake!

Now, if I could just figure out how on earth he looked exactly like a mortal version of the Devil from my dreams, then maybe I could do as he recommended I do and relax. But that was easier said than done, especially when he hadn't yet told me where he was taking me.

“Are you not worried about car safety?” I asked because really the silence was driving me nearly mad, or at least crazier than I was starting to believe myself to be.

He looked at me and smiled and I swear just the sight of it had me taking a deep breath hoping it was one he didn't hear.

“Fear for my safety, do you?” he questioned as if he was catching me out for caring or something, so I decided it was safer not to answer and he chuckled because of it. The smug bastard. After this I decided silence was golden and exercised my right to use it so as not to divulge any more about how I might have felt about him.

Because I really didn't think the guy needed anymore encouragement to do whatever the Hell he felt like doing where I was concerned. You know, little things like keeping me locked in an office when I was trying to leave or keeping me in his car and driving me away from my home because he didn't like the look of my apartment building. Although he hadn't been wrong, not when my neighbours included an assortment of pimps, crack whores and one woman who I swore collected stray cats just to shave them so she could make sweaters with the fur. It was that or she had extremely bad taste in clothes that she purchased from black markets in China.

A little time later and my mouth gaped open as I looked out the window to see where we were.

“Why are we here?!” I asked, the panic in my voice crystal clear.

“Don't you like this hotel?” he asked, and I snorted my disbelief which was a very unattractive sound but one that couldn't be helped in that moment.

“Are you serious?”

“Deadly, usually,” was his odd reply.

“It’s the Waldorf Astoria,” I stated as if this would help clarify.

“And?”

“And well of course I have never stayed here,” I said in a tone as if it was obvious.

“Well, you are now,” he stated and was getting out the car as I was still doing a fish impression,

“I...I...but...” I said this to no-one as he was already making his way around the car to my side but amazingly, he still replied making me question how the hell had he heard me?

“*But* nothing.” Then he held out a hand for me to take so he could help me from the car. I didn’t know what else to do, especially when he said my name in warning,

“*Lilly.*”

So, I responded to the dominance in his tone, still asking myself where had his earlier, easy-going manner gone to the second he turned that car around. However, I didn’t ask this but instead put my hand in his and let him pull me from the car, muttering,

“*Bossy...ah!*” This ended on a yelp of surprise when he yanked hard, making me suddenly fall into him. My hands went to his hard chest and his large hands went to my hips to steady me and for a moment the entire world around us slipped away.

It was as if we had suddenly been transported into another world and it wasn’t Heaven, it wasn’t Hell and it was no way somewhere in between.

No, instead it was as if we had slipped into a piece of the past, one that spanned an entirety of time. It was the beginning, it was the end and for us, it was a now that had never been allowed to start.

We were both breathing heavy as if we felt the exact same thing. Stood here now, in each other's arms it felt, well, insanely it felt like *home*. It felt like stepping into my sacred place, my garden by the lake. But this time, instead of scaring me into running, testing my loyalty to the Devil in those dreams, he was simply with me there, holding me close.

No more tests. No more fear. There was only hope. A hope that it would never end, this Cinderella moment.

And instead of the prince kissing me awake, it was the Devil I wanted to kiss me asleep.

Suddenly I started to feel myself falling under his spell and as his head dipped closer to mine, I gripped onto him tighter, making him tell me,

“Don't worry Lilly, this time I am not going to let you fall.”

Then, he granted my wish,

He kissed me asleep.

The next day I found myself unable to concentrate on much and it was no wonder considering the night I'd had. I didn't know what Alec had done to me but the next time I woke, I had been in a bed that wasn't my own. It had felt strange, because for the first time I had slept without dreaming. Well, that wasn't entirely true, as I had dreamt but for once I hadn't been in my garden.

No, instead it had been in the same place I had found myself sleeping in, only instead of it being morning, it was the dead of night. I had seen a large figure stood by the wall of windows and had instantly known it was him. Not Alec, *but my Devil in human form.*

Of course, they looked the same and sometimes even acted the same. But then there were the other times that he seemed like someone else entirely. I hadn't been joking when I had asked him if he had some psychological disorder, as he seemed like two people imprisoned in the same body. And it was no guessing which of the two I was more drawn to.

Because no matter how nice the easy going side to him could be, it was the domineering side that made my heart pound and my pulse race.

It was the Devil in him.

He had even admitted it and part of me even wondered if I hadn't imagined that part, as it was impossible...*wasn't it?*

But then there was my dream. Seeing him there as if standing guard, watching over me like some dark, other worldly sentinel. I even remember sitting up, propped on my elbows and asking him,

"Why am I here?" His answer had been instant and simple...

"Because you're mine and you will be where I want you to be." After this he had clicked his fingers and the next time I felt myself wake, it was morning and he was gone.

And the 'here' in that sentence turned out to be the Presidential Suite on the 26th floor at the Waldorf Astoria in the heart of the city. I swear I nearly had a stroke the second I saw the place, being twice the size of most people's four-bedroom homes!

Floor to ceiling windows and Juliette terraces flooded the suite with natural light and showcased panoramic views of Chicago's cityscape. It also featured two massive bedrooms, each with their own terrace, a grand living area with a fireplace and a powder room. It had a fully-equipped kitchen with butler's pantry, a six-person dining table, and private media room and what it needed three private entrances for, I had no idea! It must have cost a small fortune for one night alone and had me questioning the entire day why he would want me here?

I mean I knew he was rich, but I was starting to think he was sultan rich, for him to spend this amount of money on someone he'd just met! I must have spent a full hour looking around the place with my mouth hanging open. It had only been when a butler had politely made his entrance that he managed to shed some light on my current situation.

He had told me that Mr Armand had demanded the best suite be made available to him last night so he could carry his sick wife upstairs to rest. And if I had thought my mouth had dropped before, then now I was flabbergasted. Of course, I also hadn't wanted to make him look like an idiot or a liar for that matter, so had said nothing to correct him. No, instead I had picked something off the posh menu he handed me for breakfast and then went and had the best shower of my life before it arrived.

I also found a damn near shop full of designer clothes in bags waiting for me. They had been put in the other vacant bedroom and nearly covered the whole floor space with boxes and bags. At the time a housekeeper had been placing them into the walk-in closet and for a moment I thought someone else had been given the room and it was past my check out time. But then she kindly informed me that the concierge had been given orders to send them up after 'my husband' had a personal shopper go on a spending spree with nothing but knowledge of my dress size and his obviously limitless credit card.

And this, along with being driven to work in a limo, and now being sat here in a new designer suit that probably cost more than my whole apartment building, was why I was in a sort of numb state. The fact that I was unable to concentrate on anything past my astonishment and wonder wasn't surprising really. As in the space of one day I had experienced so many 'life bests' I didn't know where to begin. The best car ride, the best bed, the best breakfast, the best shower, the best journey into work, but most of all...*the best kiss.*

Christ, but he hadn't even bought me flowers yet or taken me on a date and yet he had managed to just skip right past these things and gone straight to settling me in a hotel suite, calling me his wife and buying me a whole new wardrobe! Jesus, what was next, a new makeover?

I swear it was all too much and on top of it all, my handbag was missing, which meant so were my house keys, my wallet and my phone, meaning I couldn't go home yet

until I had seen him. But even overlooking all of these things, my biggest concern was what was also missing...

My case file.

So, naturally, this had me questioning, had this been his plan all along? Did he need that file for something? Was he hiding some kind of involvement in the case and had this been the reason he had wooed me with his good looks and an almost desperate need to drive me home last night? God, if it was then I was such a fool! Meaning that by the time the end of the workday had come and gone I was convinced this *was* the reason.

In fact, the only other part of the day that had granted me anything more than a zombie like state of self-loathing was when my boss handed me an envelope. He did so, telling me my invite was inside and the address I would find on the back. He also gave me a creepy lingering look up and down my body and told me,

“And don’t forget to wear a dress.” And that had been it. Oh, and the stack of paperwork he had added to the pile on my desk, telling me to have it done before I went. I was sure the reason being was so as to still assert his dominant position over me, reminding me I was still beneath him.

Well, not for long buddy, I thought with a hidden grin. Now my only problem was trying to get back into my apartment, hoping that my alcoholic landlord still had a spare key.

Well, at least with this promotion it meant I would soon be out of that crappy apartment, not needing to feel embarrassed anymore should another incident like last night ever happen. Oh, who was I kidding, nothing like that would ever happen to me again and I would even be surprised if I ever saw Alec after last night. But then if that were the case, the only part I couldn’t explain was the new clothes?

Oh, and the butler who had wished me a good day after first asking if there was anything I would require from him whilst I was at work, informing me that indeed the suite had been paid upfront for longer than just a night.

Hence the confused, foggy mind and whole day spent arguing with myself back and forth on whether I had meant anything to Alec. On another note, I had to say the name sounded strange. And not just in a way where it didn't suit him but more like, *it didn't belong to him*.

One by one I watched the office empty until soon I was the only one left as even Stewart wasn't working late tonight. I had only just finished myself, fearing that the pile on my desk would have prevented me from having enough time to get ready. But then, when I had opened that envelope it wasn't any type of invitation I would have expected. It must be a themed party as why else would the invite be an engraved gold coin with some sort of ancient looking sigil on one side. On the other was a number and what I gathered was a zip code.

The only other thing I found in there was a business card from my boss that had a time I needed to be there, which was 11.00pm. I thought this was a bit late for a party. Unless it meant that his contact had only finished with whatever business he was involved by then. Well, either way it was fine with me as the less time I spent with my boss the better, as I didn't exactly feel like being there the whole evening with him. Hell, even an hour would be too long and not one I was looking forward to.

I grabbed my jacket, one that also must have cost a small fortune. Admittedly it was one of the nicest things I had ever owned, and I secretly hoped that out of everything, it was the one thing I got to keep. It was blood red with a large roll neck when buttoned up, one that was lovely and warm against the wind. It also flared out at the cuffs and around the hips, tying around the waist with a belt of leather that had a hidden hook under a pretty big bow.

Underneath this I had actually worn a skirt for once but then this was because my options had been pretty limited in the new clothes to choose from. As, unless I wanted to wear jeans, there were no other trousers to choose from. Looked like Alec had a thing for skirts, or maybe it was just curvy women wearing them.

Meaning there had been plenty of skirts and dresses to choose from, which was why I was now wearing a tight, black pencil skirt I would never have worn with my hip size. But if I were honest, I thought it looked pretty good on me, giving me a sexy curve and a natural sway to my backside when I walked.

I ended up matching it with a flattering black halter neck top that thankfully was the respectable side of a sheer material. It also tied around the neck with a red length of thick satin ribbon, that made a floppy bow at the side of my throat. A thin red belt broke up all the black and matched the colour of the bow at my neck.

Added to this were some sexy black heels with red stitching that surprisingly had to have been created by the Gods as they seemed to be made with comfort in mind. Which meant even if I'd had the means to swap them, I wouldn't have.

Overall, it was hands down the sexiest outfit I had ever worn, in turn making me be a little braver with my style. Like when I had decided to twist my hair around into a bun, pinning it at the base of my neck for a more sophisticated look. I had even found a bag of makeup the personal shopper must have bought, along with amazing scented products that I also treated myself to using.

I had never been one to indulge in expensive beauty products only ever buying the essentials. But this morning had been like some wild beast being set free from its cage and going rampant at a cosmetic counter in a department store. Which was why, even if I had been torturing myself all day with questioning his motives, I had at least done it feeling like a whole new woman and one that smelled utterly fantastic.

The added admiring stares in the office had also given me confidence and had me wondering if people had even recognised me.

But then, new clothes, new shoes and a new style hadn't been the only firsts, as it was what I had no choice but to wear under it all that really had me blushing this morning. Every

single piece of underwear I found in those bags had been the sexy kind. There hadn't been a plain cotton bra or a pair of full brief panties in sight.

No, there had only been lace, satin and silk. And in red, black and every other colour but plain white. The bras had been made with only one thing in mind, accentuating the breasts and making them look as high and full as they could. The panties, however, were there for little reason but to look sexy as they didn't exactly cover much. G strings, Brazilians, hipsters, cute little boy shorts, and even crotchless...every sexy style imaginable. And then to accessorise these there had been the thigh top stockings, and several matching sets that all included suspender belts.

But it didn't end there as corsets, slips, lace bodysuits and baby doll dresses added to the insane collection. In short, it looked like someone had robbed Victoria Secrets, or at least had stock in the company. Which meant that the only option for me that morning had been a sexy black lace set. This consisted of a push-up bra with a cute scalloped edge and cups that were fine lace gathered to create a fan effect. The G string panties mimicked the bra, with the fan of material at the front that barely covered my newly bare mound, one that felt silky smooth and very naughty having been shaved that day.

Added to the look were a pair of thigh highs that didn't need a suspender belt, as I tried for far too long to attach them to one, and in the end gave up, opting for these instead.

I would have gone with a more practical pair of pantyhose but couldn't find a single pair, meaning if I was wearing a skirt, which I had no choice to do, stockings it was. But I had to confess, as sexy as I did feel, I also felt strange wearing an outfit bought for me by a man I'd just met. And one I wasn't entirely sure how I felt about.

Oh, I knew he was the sexiest man I had ever seen, but I also knew he scared the shit out of me one minute and then was putting me at ease the next. And I wasn't so sure that my deep attraction to him wasn't down to how much he looked like my dream Devil. Making me question myself, did that mean my feelings for him were biased?

Either way, I had found out very quickly this morning that I had little option in the clothes department as the moment I got out of the shower I found my own clothes had been taken away by housekeeping. The butler had kindly informed me that it was at the request of Mr Armand, who obviously knew me well enough to know that unless I had no choice, I wouldn't have helped myself to this new wardrobe. Which begged the question, *how exactly did he know me?*

I left the office still questioning everything that was him, when the minute I got to the lobby I realised my mistake, as I had forgotten the coin in my desk. I closed my eyes and groaned, asking myself where was my head at? Because I needed to get it into gear that was for sure, because tonight was my first real step in making this story a life changer for me and I couldn't mess it up now...not when I was so close.

I got to my floor once again, hurried to my desk to retrieve the coin when the second I had it in my pocket, I noticed Andy's office door was open and a light was on. I frowned, asking myself why this was, seeing as he had left hours ago. I looked around to see that no-one else was here, including the cleaning crew that strangely should have been starting their shift by now. I should know, I was here often enough when they did.

I shrugged my shoulders and walked towards his office wondering if this was wise, seeing as being anywhere alone with that man just screamed trouble. But then, if that was the case why had I agreed to meet him later?

I shook the doubts from my mind and pushed open his door further, seeing him behind his desk crouched over as if looking for something.

"Did you forget something Andy...uh... oh." I finished on a startled noise the second a man stood up, looking even taller now than the first time I had seen him in this office. However, unlike the first time I saw him, he had been invited. This time he had not, which begged the only question that made it past my lips...

"What the Hell are you doing here?!"

For some reason hearing this made his lips twitch in amusement before he took in my appearance. The slow and predatory scan he did to my body left me near panting, as I swear it was as if he had been slowly undressing me with his eyes.

“Lilly.” He hummed my name like a gentle kiss to my jawline. It was strangely familiar and comforting. But despite how it actually made me feel, I put up my defences and folded my arms over my chest and asked him,

“Did you break into Andy’s office?” Again, for some reason I was amusing him as I could see the grin there in his eyes trying to break out on his lips, one he was holding back for my expense no doubt.

“I did,” he stated boldly and I was surprised thinking that he would have at least first tried to deny it. He then walked around to the other side of Andy’s desk so he now put himself opposite me. Then he placed his palms on the desk either side of his strong looking thighs and leant back against the edge in a casual way. How was it he seemed to own every space he graced with his presence?

“But why?” I asked needing to get past how sexy he looked in that dark, masterful suit.

“Because he has something I need,” he told me, being slightly cryptic with his answers and I could instantly tell which part of him I was now talking to. It was the same side of him that hadn’t driven me home but instead did a U turn and driven me straight back to the city. Back to a lavish hotel before showering me with gifts and only after a single kiss goodnight.

“And are you going to tell me what that is?” I asked but again he smirked before answering with a firm,

“No.”

“Fine, then I guess I will be calling security then,” I informed him, knowing that I was about to push his buttons, forcing him to react this time. Of course, I wouldn’t have, but he didn’t need to know that. So, I turned on my heel and was

just about to walk out the door when I was suddenly pulled back with an arm banded across my chest. The door then abruptly slammed shut and we were quickly back to where we started.

And I wasn't the only one who noticed.

"Looks like we have been here before," he whispered down at me from behind, making me shiver against him. I swallowed hard trying to control my erratic heartbeat, one he could no doubt feel beating against the arm that still held me prisoner. I told myself that I needed to speak, to say anything just so I could be sure this dream was real. But before I could get a single word out, he suddenly spun me around and pushed me up against the door. Then he told me on a lustful growl,

"And it's time to make a new memory!" Then he captured my face with both hands and this time when he kissed me, he didn't make me want to dream,

He made me want to live.

Lilly

24

Devil's Flavour of Sin

The second I felt the strength of his kiss all doubts of how he felt about me evaporated into nothing. Because the sheer power of it, of our connection, wasn't something a person could fake. It was pure and real and raw, just as it had been in my dreams. I swear but the intensity of it nearly had me passing out on him. I felt lightheaded and dizzy as if he had some sort of spell cast over me.

And his erratic actions only strengthened the claim, as one moment he was holding me as if I was some breakable china doll of his. One that needed protecting against the world that threatened to fracture this moment with their interference. And then in the next moment it was as if some wild beast had snapped inside of him and he was already fighting against what hadn't yet happened.

He was holding me so tight, it stole my breath, one that belonged to him and his kiss alone. His tongue duelled with my own for supremacy, tasting me as though he couldn't get enough. And his hands, well it was as if he didn't know where he wanted them first, because unlike in my dream, he only had the two and couldn't touch me everywhere and all at once, not now he was no longer in his own realm.

But they certainly managed to arouse my sexual high to fever point and evoked a Devil's insanity within me, just as they intended. As they were in my hair, holding my lips to his,

one minute in the form of a fist and then stroking back the strands from my forehead as if trying to soothe the sting his rough hand had momentarily caused. I didn't know what had happened to my hair or when it had unravelled but now it was loose and wild around my shoulders and down my back.

Unexpectedly he tore his lips from mine and before I could help it, a protested moan escaped my abused lips at the loss. The grin he granted me, told me that he liked the sound of my neediness even if I blushed because of it.

I didn't know who was breathing heavier, him or me as his hand went on a gentle road of discovery, starting with my neck. He ran a fingertip down over the edge of my collar, tugging at the end in a playful manner, making me question his actions with an inquisitive look.

But he gave nothing away, only that he wanted to enjoy this and decided to slow it down and tease me. I was left with no power over the moment other than to just wait and watch as he slowly started to rid me of my jacket, doing so by first suddenly tugging at my belt. It was done hard enough that I jerked against him and I yelped in surprise at the abrupt and demanding action, getting more turned on by the second.

The belt soon hung loose at my sides, still caught in the loops by my hips before he started to slip the buttons through the holes, doing so as though it was some sensual ritual. All the while he never took his eyes off me and I found myself only able to stand his gaze for a few seconds at a time. It was too intense, too powerful, as if from a look alone he had the strength to consume me, leaving a mere shell of myself behind.

I sucked in a sharp breath, granting him the reaction he wanted the moment he was free to brush back the sides of my jacket with his hands now spanning my stomach. Finally, when he did eventually lower his gaze to take in the sight of my body, his eyes widened in surprise and undiluted lust. And now, finding myself at his mercy and dressed up in the clothes he bought, I quickly held my breath and waited for the outcome I hoped for. As I couldn't help but feel vulnerable, knowing just how much I wanted to please him.

I didn't know how long it was before he finally formed the words, putting me out of my misery, but it felt like a fucking eternity!

"Your body was made for my flavour of sin..." he told me before suddenly his hand was around my throat in a possessive hold and I was held against the door. Then he stepped right into me and was forced to look down at me due to the difference in our height. It made me feel small and weak in his hold, which I knew I was, but his words soon contradicted this feeling as soon as he told me,

"My perfect little Lilly...*always*." He added this last word on a growl and it was not the warning it should have been, because just as I was still processing his appraisal of me, he banded an arm around my waist. Then I was swiftly picked up off my feet, as if I weighed nothing at all and the strength of his arm was endless.

He walked with me, holding me a foot above the ground to Andy's desk, with my waist caught in the crook of his arm and his other hand still possessively at my neck. I felt as if I was being collared by the Devil, because the mortal part of him felt shut out and lost to the depth of his lust.

The moment we reached the desk his hand released possession of my throat so he could swipe the entire contents of Andy's desk to the floor. This abrupt action ended up smashing everything to pieces as it crashed into the wall with the force of his strength. I jumped in his hold, if such a reaction was even possible with how tight he held me. Then, with more care than I believed him capable of, he sat me down on the edge as if once again he feared breaking me.

After setting me down, he was free to run both hands up my legs, slowly taking the hem of my skirt with him. It felt so good that I let my head roll back on my shoulders, feeling my hair now trailing down my back as I let free an unashamed moan of pleasure.

I soon felt the air hit my bare thighs as he pushed my skirt past the lace tops of my stockings and finally made contact with my bare skin. I couldn't help but flinch and it wasn't for

any other reason but the intensity in his touch. But then the time for being gentle was over once more as he gripped my knees and suddenly parted them, making me cry out in surprise as the rest of my skirt had nowhere else to go but to bunch at the top of my legs. Then he stepped into the opening he created, running his large hands up my thighs until he was resting them at my hips.

“I will claim you, Lilly, do you understand?” he said and when I didn’t reply quickly enough his hands left my hips and were once again framing my face. Then he crouched down to my level so he could catch my eyes, before he demanded,

“Say it...say you understand what this means.”

“I...I...” I started to say, I didn’t know what it meant but he suddenly snapped and said,

“That’s good enough!” Then he pulled my face to his and was crushing his lips to mine sealing whatever pledge I had unknowingly just made. He did this with a bruising kiss that soon had me clawing at his clothes, trying to remove them. He decided to help me, removing his jacket without breaking the kiss, discarding it behind him as if a suit costing thousands meant nothing to him but scrap material. His shirt was next and was actually being torn from his body in his haste to be free of it.

I knew why the second my hands met his perfect sculptured body, making me question if there was some god of perfection out there and my Devil had been carved from their image. He was incredible, all satin soft skin over solid muscle that was an endless discovery of them. They were everywhere. Not an ounce of fat was to be found. But shockingly he actually shuddered as my hands explored his body, running my fingertips gently down his pronounced abdominal muscles before using my nails in between what I counted as an eight pack.

He hissed through his teeth and at first, I thought I had done wrong, so started to pull my hand away. But this made him react, and his own hand snapped out faster than a striking

snake, capturing my wrist in his hold and preventing me from withdrawing.

“There is only one way to hurt me, Lilly, and it would never be by your touch,” he told me softly, making me give him questioning wide eyes, silently asking him what he meant by that. But he didn’t divulge, and I was too afraid to ask. My hand was swiftly placed back on his stomach where I continued in my discovery, one he let me do with silent patience.

“You’re...you’re beautiful,” I told him, too embarrassed to say it with confidence but too lost in the moment not to say it at all. Because he was beautiful, and I wanted him not only to know it, as he most likely already did, but I wanted him to know it by my words. The soft, tender look he gave me had me looking down, trying to escape the way it made me feel. However, he wasn’t going to allow this and gripped my chin, before forcing my head up as if annoyed I would hide myself from him.

“You will look at me,” he commanded and when I did, I expected harsh eyes to match the hardened tone he’d used. But I didn’t find this.

“Your kind words are noted, little one, and I am thankful for them, however, the beauty is all yours for me to own,” he said and before I could say anything in return, he was kissing me once again. Only this time it may have started off in sweet soft thanks, but it quickly grew in its passion. One near burning out of control the moment he wrapped his arms around me and held me to the length of his torso, letting me marvel at the strength of him. I felt so utterly safe and cherished, it was what I imagined being worshipped was like. It was as if in that moment I meant everything to him.

I had become...

His entire world.

“Enough waiting, say you’re mine...!” he said fervently and to the point that it came out as a near growled demand. I knew he had more to say but something in me was too scared to speak, so I kissed him instead and he let me. I framed his

face and held him to me as I felt his hands tugging at my clothes to get to my skin. But then he pulled his lips away and this time when he spoke, I swear my heart stopped beating,

“You know what I want...” He paused and then demanded on a fiery whisper,

“...*Give me your soul, Lilly.*” The second the words were free and had been heard, I suddenly tore myself from his arms, and somehow managed to escape him, scrambling back over the desk to the other side. He growled in annoyance but remained on his side, panting through his anger so as not to scare me beyond repair.

“*You...you couldn't...couldn't have known, it's impossible!*” I told him on a broken whisper, and I watched as he took a deep breath, trying to calm himself in sight of my distress.

“Who are you?” I asked, my voice breaking and I was barely able to keep it together long enough to withstand the truth I was hoping to find. His gaze intensified and for a moment I swear I saw his eyes glow.

“You know who I am,” he told me and I shook my head at him.

“No, I don't know you,” I replied and each word hurt me just as it did him.

“Yes, Lilly, *you do.*” In that moment I was so torn. I wanted to be back in his arms so badly, just so I didn't fall to pieces without them to hold me together. But then, like this desk, there was a river of lies between us and I knew that I wasn't the one who welcomed the water. But I was the one who felt as though I was drowning in it, trying to make my way through to the other side. Trying to cut through the current that he encouraged to remain. To keep me at arm's length until I agreed to give him a piece of myself without any promise of the same in return.

“Tell me what you want, Lilly, tell me and it will be yours,” he said as if it was that simple, but what I wanted could never be bought just as it felt as if it could never be

mine. Because it barely existed beyond my dreams. I knew that. I just wish I knew how he did as well.

“I want what you can’t give me,” I told him knowing it would never make sense to him or maybe it would, and it just never made sense to me how it did.

“You don’t know that,” he told me and the way his hands fisted by his sides looked as if he was close to uprooting the desk just so there was nothing between us. But something was holding him back and that’s when I realised what this was. It wasn’t something...*it was someone.*

So, I decided to test my theory. I demanded the one thing I doubted he would ever give me and if he did, then I would have my answer. I would have my promise in return.

“Alright, then I will tell you.” The look he gave me burned brighter and I told myself it was a trick of the light. That it was impossible for someone’s eyes to change colour like that. He nodded for me to continue, so I took a deep breath before doing so,

“Someone is holding you back,” I said, making him snarl in anger but I knew it wasn’t aimed at me.

“Go on,” he demanded with gritted teeth.

“It’s like a shadow that stands between us,” I told him and his anger started to grow, ready to unleash any minute, making me question my sanity as to why I didn’t stop.

“*Go on.*” The demand got more serious.

“I would like, I mean if it is possible...

“*Lilly!*” He said my name, warning me he was close to the edge. So, another deep breath and I closed my eyes as if I was about to open the gates and release a force I or no other had any control over. Something was telling me no, not to do it. But then every other part of me was screaming for me to release what bound him to being mortal. To see once and for all if he *was* the something more, I hoped he was.

To see if he was the Devil, *I wanted inside me.*

The Devil that wants my soul.

So, this time it was my test to give, starting with three little words,

“Let him go.”

For a few heart stopping seconds, the stillness was almost something you could taste in the air, as if a storm was coming. He even closed his eyes as if needing the time to fully absorb my words or maybe he was just fighting with himself. Whichever it was, I found myself regretting it, now doubting he had the power to do anything. What was this game we were playing...*was it all just pretend?*

“Never mind, forget I said...” I was cut off when suddenly his eyes flashed open and now there was no mistaking who was looking back at me. *I would know those eyes anywhere.*

“*Too late,*” he warned on a raspy growl and a second later the desk that was between us was gone and being flung aside crashing into the wall, making me scream as it smashed into kindling. But my scream died in his mouth as in a gasp of breath he was on me, walking me backwards!

Before I knew what to do my wrists were shackled, preventing me from running and I was confused as to if I even wanted to, not with the way he kissed me now as there was only one way to describe it...

Raw possession.

My arms were raised above my head and held there by his big hands that were now entwining themselves with my fingers. He held them against the wall of glass he had pushed me up against. I felt my body bow, trying to get to his of its own accord and soon I was confused as to where I was, caught somewhere between reality and my dreams.

But somewhere in the back of my mind I was acutely aware that it was all the same. His kiss. His scent. His possessive touch. Even the taste of him, it was all the things my body knew, like a lifelong lover your body marks as being its mate. You became ingrained and tied to each other's soul, becoming one essence. One entity. One soul. And making love

was like a dance both your bodies were born to know, each move isn't practiced, yet they flow in perfect sync and it becomes as natural as breathing.

My body was drawn to him in such a way that I was now the one growling at him to release my hands, just so I could touch him. I wanted my hands everywhere and when I started to fight, he snarled down at me like the beast was back and my Devil had fully crossed over. And I had been the one to push him.

Suddenly his grip tightened on my hands before I was spun around, now facing the full window and looking down at the world beneath us. His hands that had held mine in his unyielding grasp, slowly started to move them apart, spreading them above my head like I was a prisoner being searched. Then I felt his head dip lower so he could whisper his command against the sensitive skin on my neck.

"Keep them there." I nodded telling him that I would do as he wished of me and he hummed, a sound telling me that I had pleased him. This was confirmed when he spoke,

"My good little mortal, you're mine now...and it's time to give me what I am owed... *time to give me what I want!*" he demanded, his voice now totally losing the edge of reason or even that of a mortal man. So, I decided to push him completely and I did this by looking back at him over my shoulder, telling him,

"You first!" His demonic grin was my only warning.

A second later and one hand was tearing my skirt back up over my hips where it had fallen. The other hand tugged at the length of ribbon that held my top in place over my breasts. It floated down revealing my near naked torso and his large hand started at my neck before sensually moving lower. But it was a maddening contrast between gentleness and the rough almost desperate actions below. I felt him fist the material of my underwear and with what seemed like such ease, he snapped it with a sharp tug. I yelped at the harsh treatment that only managed to increase my need for him to be inside me. And I

felt that need dripping down my inner thighs ready for him to invade that deeper part of me, the place he had yet to claim.

I didn't know when it had happened, but I felt him naked behind me and his hands gripped my hips in a bruising hold before he yanked hard, putting my behind closer to him in preparation. I could feel the heavy weight of his erection just there waiting for him to use it against me like a weapon of seduction. But then a hand left my hip and fisted in my hair, yanking my head back so my neck was taut. Then he growled possessively in my ear,

“What do you want, my cock teasing beauty?”

“And you know what I want,” I replied, only this wasn't good enough for him.

“Say it!” he snarled, his hand on my hair uncompromising, yet his stroking at my hip was feather light and soothing.

“I want you to...to...” my voice trailed off the second I felt his fingers leave my hip and trail his touch across my belly, dipping lower to my bare mound. I swear the feel of his fingers going deeper south made it impossible to form words.

“To?” he hummed knowingly, and a shuddered breath escaped me the second his fingers parted my folds and coated his skin with the evidence of my need for him. Then a small meow of protest left my lips the same time his fingers left me after being there only a short time. But he wasn't finished with me yet. No, in fact, he was just getting started. He placed his fingers to my lips and coaxed them open,

“Come now, my little Lilly, you know what you want... *what you need*...now taste it for yourself...*taste your need for me.*” Then his thick digits invaded my mouth and the unique flavour that was me burst across my tongue, as I swirled it around his dripping fingers. He placed his forehead to the back of my head and groaned, as if anticipating what that action would feel like against the head of his cock. I hummed around them until he pulled them free, having made his point.

“Now tell me, what is it you want from me, Lilly?” he asked again and this time it couldn’t be denied any longer.

“I want you to make me yours. *I want you to claim me,*” I told him, whispering the confession. This made him growl in pleasure before he trailed his now wet finger down the centre of my chest, pausing in between my breasts, and tapping against where my heart was, just before telling me,

“I already I own this...” I shamefully closed my eyes as it was that obvious, I had given him my heart before we even met in my world. His hand then cupped my breast, gripping it tight in his large hand making me groan at the bite of pain.

“I own this,” he said continuing down until he was cupping me once more and the second two fingers entered me my back bowed making me cry out.

“*I most definitely own this,*” he whispered with a knowing grin I didn’t need to see, as I could hear it in his voice.

“I own all of this body... but you know this, *don’t you, my Lilly?*” He whispered his question and a breathy ‘yes’ escaped me as his fingers continued their delicious torture.

“But what I don’t yet own is the last thing I need from you, before I can have you the way I want you...” he said pausing before dragging his fingers against the bundle of nerves he knew exactly where to find.

Another moan in pleasure...

“Before making you mine...”

And another...

“Before I can fully claim you...”

And just one more...

“*Before I can own you completely,*” he whispered before cruelly pulling away just before I was allowed my release. I cried out my loss and wanted to scream at him. But then I knew why, along with knowing what it was he wanted me to say. It was the same thing he always wanted from me in my dreams. *But this wasn’t a dream.* This was real life and we

were in my world, one where I was safe from becoming a prisoner in his own. So, digging deep into my heart, I asked myself what it was I wanted, something deep down I knew to the very core of me.

I wanted to belong to him...*entirely*.

Meaning that after a deep breath I did something I promised myself I would never do. I turned to look at him so he could see my eyes and I said the words he wanted to hear. The words I finally allowed myself to say.

I passed his test.

"I gift you my soul."

I sucked in a sharp breath in fear the moment his eyes turned to molten lava and after first placing his lips to my cheek, he whispered only three words,

"At long last." Then a single second after, he claimed me. At the same time, he threw his head back and roared in victory and suddenly my fear was being overridden. Doing so the moment he suddenly impaled me on his length, making me cry out to join his animalistic call of triumph. Screaming in acceptance the moment he took away the last of my barriers and with it, my protected virginity.

Something that he wasn't surprised to find, as if he already knew that I belonged to him. As the Devil wouldn't have allowed another to touch me and live long enough to claim as much. My virginity had always been his to take but even so, he lowered his lips to my ear and told me ardently,

"Thank you for keeping it for me."

I swear my legs nearly gave way but before they could, his hands spanned my hips and took control of my body. He started to hammer into my core with consistent hard strokes that were maddening and made me powerless to do anything but trust him to take care of me. And take care of me he did. As soon I was screaming out my first release, a feeling that no amount of self-gratification had ever prepared me for. But he held me through it, not slowing for even a second and dragging out my orgasm until it was soon rolling into another.

I felt his hand held at the base of my neck, holding me still as he had his way with me, making the possessive hold feel as though I was being ravished by a wild beast and that thought alone was enough to have me screaming once more.

“Look down at them, Lilly, take a look at your world as I take you, as *I claim you*, tying you to me...you don't belong down there with them...*you never did. You only ever belonged to me,*” he told me, and I did as he said. I saw the life below and in that moment, I had never felt so disconnected from my own world and so close to his own.

“But no-one has the right to see you this way...it is mine...and Lilly...” he paused so he could growl the next part against my cheek,

“...*I don't fucking share!*” Then, amazingly, the whole city below, block by block started to go dark. Every streetlight, every building there was to see, everything that lit up my world suddenly was plunged into the darkness of the night. It was now a mass of shadows barely lit by the slither of the moon. And I gasped at the impossible power being displayed and it terrified me that it all came from behind me.

The master of that darkness.

The Devil at my back.

After this one hand left my hip to free my breasts. He did this by tearing the lace cups down in his haste to get to them where, once free, he gripped on to them, still powering into me from behind. But this wasn't enough for him as suddenly his cock was slipping from me but before I even had chance to complain at the loss, he spun me back to facing him.

Suddenly he lifted my body, yanking me up his frame only to lower me down at the same time surging back up inside me, connecting us once more. Then he dipped his head and started to feast on my breast like a starved demonic being.

My nipples soon became a thing to be sexually tortured making me cry out at the barrage of confusing sensations. Pain merged into pleasure and that in turn drove my next orgasm

forward and I found with each sharp pull, each sharp tug and bite I was surged even closer to chasing its end.

But then the second it was about to erupt, I wasn't the only one there, as the Devil was too. And in that moment, I came screaming just as he threw his head back and roared out his own release. The completion of his claiming me seemed too powerful for even Heaven to witness, as all of a sudden, the skies suddenly cracked open with a boom of thunder. Then lightening forked the sky, illuminating up our naked forms entwined with each other, making his claiming me look nothing short of biblical.

But this wasn't the only thing to happen as his form started to change and this time when I opened my eyes, I was no longer looking at the mortal version of him...

But his true form. The form of the Devil.

And now one...

Who owned my soul.

Brent

25

Wilful Soul

“What the fuck did you do to her!” I yelled at him the second I woke and was transported back into my body, only to find Lilly passed out in our arms. I had no knowledge of what just happened. It was the strangest feeling, like the moment you get so drunk you have absolutely no recollection of the night before. Only this time I wasn’t drunk, and I was standing in the aftermath of the metaphorical ‘night before’.

I had no idea how he’d done it, but he had. He had somehow taken over my mind sending me to an unconscious state and for the first time in six years, he then took over my body completely.

All that I remembered was Lilly walking in on us as we looked for clues in Andy’s office and the Devil took one look at her and shut me out instantly, despite my warnings.

But then he wasn’t the only one who’d ignored being cautious as she had started pushing him from the start. Doing so further and further, until she begged him to let me go.

I didn’t know what it was about this woman, but she wasn’t like the rest. It was almost as if she was torn between two worlds, his and ours, not really understanding where it was she belonged.

Well, I might not have understood her, but one thing I did know, somehow, she knew the Devil and even after all this

time, she knew him better than even I did. It was as if they were each other's only weakness, for it was obvious she had no-one in her life. And as for the Devil, as far as I knew, *he only had me.*

So, she had pushed. And in turn, the Devil had pushed back, sending me into a forced state of dreamless sleep. Now what had happened in between the two points, I didn't know but it looked like a fucking battle! The office was completely trashed, and one look out of the window and it didn't look as if this room had been the only place affected by the Devil's power.

It looked as if the power had been cut to the whole damn city and I knew it wasn't from the thundering storm overhead.

"She is unharmed and merely sleeping," he told me as he made me place her naked form down on the sofa, doing so as gently as if she had been made from glass. I then picked up my discarded jacket from the floor, giving it a shake from the bits of debris and placed it over her.

"Did you get attacked whilst using my body against my will?" I asked, taking in the room and ignoring the obvious, seeing as we were both naked, Lilly and I... and well, that kind of already explained the highlight of his evening.

If anything, I had been happy that Lilly *had* pushed him, as I wouldn't have wanted to be a part of whatever it was the Devil and she had together. Christ, but I already felt like a fucking intruder around them or some fucking pervert being forced to watch through a damn window in his eyes every time he kissed her.

"No," he said as if through gritted teeth.

"Jesus, you mean this is just from having sex?! What the Hell did you do to her, fucking wrestle her to the ground first!?" I shouted making him roar in anger and snarl,

"Does she look fucking hurt to you!?" I winced hating it when he did that, making me feel as if the bastard was trying to split my damn head open. But I did what he asked and looked towards her sleeping form, now taking a closer look.

And he was right, if anything she just looked like a peacefully sleeping porcelain doll.

“Alright, fine, I get it, she clearly had a good time...so now what?” I asked thinking I was the last fucking person going to be any good getting an unconscious woman redressed and out of the building without it looking like...well, *like it looked*.

Instead, I concentrated on getting dressed myself, not forgetting what the Devil had taken from her pocket when he started undressing her. I had just zipped up my trousers when his plan came to light.

“Time to hold on to your stomach, Brent,” he said and suddenly the whole room started to shake and vibrate around me, as if I was now tripping on acid or something! Like someone was shaking the room, making the edges of my vision blur with the speed it moved. Then the Devil raised my hand and clicked my fingers.

The second my thumb made it past my other fingers we were no longer in the destroyed office but instead back in the Presidential suite. I stumbled backwards as if just now stepping off some fucked-up rollercoaster I had been forced to ride a hundred times. Then with a quick look around I saw that Lilly was still perfectly fine and sleeping soundly, now on the bed, making me wonder why it had only affected me?

“Because I only cared about making it comfortable enough for one of you,” he told me reading my thoughts and making his choice...*the right one*.

“But how the Hell did you do that!?” I ask wincing myself when it was said in an astonished, high-pitched tone.

“You just answered your own question.”

“Hell...Hell helped you do that?”

“Well, I am the Devil, Brent, where did you think my powers came from?”

“Yes, but we are here remember, you know, the place you don’t have that sort of...wait...unless, there is something you aren’t telling me here?” I said breaking into my own question

and suddenly fearing the worst. I knew I was right when he said,

“I think it’s time to sit down now, Brent, I have a story to tell.”

And I could only think one thing... if the Devil was trying to prepare me for the worst,

Then just how bad would it have to be?

An hour later and I was fucking fuming beyond all reasoning.

“Stop sulking,” he told me and now I was the one growling.

“All this time...all these fucking years together and you didn’t think it might be worth telling me about the real reason I was collecting these souls for you!” I hissed, still in a state of complete shock at the reality I was now faced with. Jesus, talk about adding the fucking pressure on!

“And you wonder why I didn’t tell you?” was his reply.

“Stop reading my fucking thoughts, and while I am at it, yeah I do wonder! For starters, I would have gone into that church with a fucking AK-47 and taken them all out just to be sure!” Christ, just thinking about what could have happened had I missed even one of the souls, was like having my veins dosed in ice! Talk about the expression ‘end of the world’, well in this case it was as literal as it came.

When the Devil told me to sit down, the very last thing I had expected him to admit was the real reason he had come here and had bargained with me. But when it turned out that the Devil wasn’t the one trying to bring the end of days and win some war over who gets control of Earth, Heaven or Hell. No, it turned out he was more than happy with Hell staying exactly where it was with him down there ruling it.

However, not every one of his ‘not so devoted’ followers felt this way.

Apparently, an old envious buddy of his decided it was his time to take the demonic reins and rule Hell for a bit. But there was a catch to achieving this, as the only way it was possible was to literally unleash Hell on to Earth and control it topside.

Of course, now if you were mortal and didn't know shit about Hell's politics, then your first question would have been the same as mine, screeched in an incredulous tone,

“He can do that!?”

Which as it turned out, that yes, *he could*. All he needed was six corrupt, sinful souls all born at the right time on the right date and he would be powerful enough to beat the Devil. Which was where I had come in. The good news was that I had succeeded in preventing him from gaining enough strength to achieve this, the bad news was that we had no idea which mortal host was the one who had been consumed completely by who the Devil called Mastema.

According to the Devil's account of past dealings, this was not a Demon we ever wanted taking over Hell. As he kindly informed me, there were worse choices than himself. The long and short of it was, Mastema was once an angel who persecuted evil and used to carry out punishments for God. On top of this however, he also tempted humans and tested their faith.

But as his power increased, he was then later known as the Angel of disaster, the father of all evil, and a flatterer of God. Naturally, as soon as God became aware of his evil ways, he became a fallen Angel and was basically given to the Devil to deal with. For a time he had been entrusted with the position as chief of the 'Watchers'. These were a group of 200 fallen Angels that in the end banded together to try and overthrow Hell, *without the Devil's knowledge*. As in his words, 'ruling Hell takes up a lot of time'.

But then the Devil was topside, so I guessed pretty quickly that this Mastema must have been a considerable threat for him to take time out of all that 'busy ruling'. He also classed him as being his only adversary and one in desperate

need of power and dominance over Hell and all the Devil's demons.

Which also meant that if we didn't find him in time before the last killing, then he would take our last sinful soul on the list as a new host, and in all likelihood, he would simply disappear again. I asked why he would have needed a new host and discovered that a host which was taken over completely only lasted seven years. Unlike the Devil who shared my body and made me his errand killing boy.

I had then asked the obvious question as to why him disappearing again would be a bad thing, considering it meant he hadn't been able to gather up enough power to take over. The bad news had been that the Devil was using me to hunt him down to prevent him from simply trying again. Something I found out, hadn't been the first time and like before, each new soul taken had ended up leading us on to the next. Meaning now that with only this last soul to be taken, it would finally lead us to who was behind it all.

Which was why I was now slipping the gold coin under the warehouse door and the very same one the Devil had stolen from Lilly when removing her jacket.

The large metal door opened, and I stepped inside, ignoring the cloaked figure bowing in sight of who he assumed was another club member. I didn't say a word as I entered the sordid world of the rich and filthy, walking into the underground sex club. One that wasn't supposed to exist past those who were paid a fortune to keep its secrets safe.

Which was one of the reasons it was never held at the same venue twice. It was harder to trace that way. Not that the authorities knew, or at least the ones run by honest and noble public servants. Because of course some authorities knew about it, as this club had more people in high places than those at the fucking White House!

Police commissioners, senators, judges, billionaires and every rich lowlife in between. Because this wasn't just a sex club. That I didn't have a problem with. A place to blow off steam and enjoy the kinky side of sex, yeah, sounded fun. But

like I said, this wasn't just a sex club. It was also a secret elite and only club in the world that allowed its members to do whatever they fucking wished. It was a place where no questions were asked, fantasies were simply granted, through any means possible. Girls, boys, virgins...Hell, even bestiality, it went on here. Wanna see a girl getting fucked to death by a horse, then some sick fuck would get his wish if he paid enough!

It was beyond sickening!

Hell, but this place made sex trafficking seem like a simple misdemeanour compared to the sick shit this place allowed. Of course, walking through now and it didn't look like it did from the front. A rundown brick warehouse on the same side of town that Lilly's shitty apartment building was.

This made the Devil think back to Lilly and the sleeping form we had tucked up in bed before leaving, knowing now that at least she was safe and far away from a place like this. Because what she didn't know was that our next target, the next sinful soul for me to collect was her boss, *Andy Carter*.

He was our next sin... *Lust*.

Lilly may have just thought he was a leering sexist pig all these years, but she would have had no idea just the levels of evil this guy was in to and kinky rough sex barely even scratched the surface. In fact, when the Devil had discovered her working for our next target, he had lost his shit, nearly outright killing the guy just after catching her the second she fainted. But of course, I had only been privy to this information just before breaking into Carter's office earlier this evening.

I mean, I was the one doing the actual killing, so you would have thought I would have been the first to know these things. Rather than just being the fucking dog that wished to know how high his master wished him to jump!

I walked around the place and the main hall was set up just like any other high class sex club you would have imagined to look, only instead all non-members and the people who had been paid to be there, were all wearing full masks

covering their identities. It made for an eerie scene as each mask was in the style of porcelain dolls, with sweet innocent painted faces.

The lips were in the form of a small parted heart, painted red around an O shaped opening, leaving the 'slave' free to accept things in their mouths. It also made the dolls' faces look surprised in a creepy, innocent way and even more so with the roundish rosy tints that were added to the cheeks. Thin black lines were above the eyes, creating a stark contrast to the white glossy faces. But it was the eyes that were the most disturbing. As each person had obviously been made to black out their eyes with makeup underneath the mask, as it made them look more like hollow, soulless dolls there to do one thing and one thing only...*be used and abused.*

But the members were allowed to roam freely, unmasked and unashamed. That's how powerful the members of this club were, for they didn't even fear that a single person there was capable of exposing them. Not when the members included the most powerful men in the world, that were all banded together by their sins.

If anything, it would have been better for the rest of humanity if almost all members here ended up in Hell sooner rather than later. But unfortunately, this vigilante had rules. And up until two hours ago, I had no clue that the main rule to follow had always been to prevent the end of days by any means necessary.

Because, if this Mastema had even the slightest chance at getting one soul, then on this night, it meant he might not have been powerful enough on his own to beat the Devil, but he would have enough power to at least bring some of his followers from Hell to aid him in his quest. Now, I didn't know the level of power the Devil held, but I did know the odds wouldn't have been great at two hundred to one! Or two if you were counting his mortal partner with nothing but a washed-out prayer and a gun. Because beating the Devil, someone who had only a fraction of the power he did when in his own realm in Hell, wasn't a guy I would have bet on.

In fact, the only reason he had been getting stronger lately was that apparently the barrier between Hell and Earth was getting weaker the closer we got to the seven years the Devil had been hunting him. Downside was that what was good for the Devil, meant it was also good for the other guy.

It had been why the Devil had enough power to cut the lights to the whole city or how with a click of his fingers he had transported us to the hotel suite. It also explained why the Devil had the sudden power to take over my body completely when getting his demonic rocks off with his new girlfriend.

“Easy dickhead, she’s safe,” I told him under my breath the moment he started growling at me in my mind, before we ordered a much need whiskey at the temporary free-standing bar.

I had scanned the space, noting the extreme expense that must have gone into one of these parties. Ironic that the name of the place was ‘Club Sin’ but then, if the shoe fit.

The whole place had been kitted out to look as sinful as possible, with accent colours of reds, golds and of course, lots and lots of black. The walls had been covered in swathes of luxurious thick material and fake partitioned walls had been erected to create separate spaces which also had been covered in expensive gothic wallpaper.

But it was what was happening within these spaces that was the real reason people were here and must have forked out obscene amounts of money into maintaining life as a member. This was obvious seeing as there were hundreds of paid ‘beautiful people’ all at the ready to provide a service of any kind. These kind of people didn’t come cheap as we weren’t talking about your typical hopeless prostitutes or crack whores willing to do anything out of sheer desperation to pay for their next fix. These were high class players, and I didn’t need to see their faces to know it.

Simple beauty just didn’t cut it in this room, being around all these people was like being at the damn Oscars! Everyone wore black or white, so that the only colour in the room was gold or blood red. The room was framed by temporary rooms

sectioned off and the open entranceways were crowded with spectators all taking in the different scenes, men and women, all strapped to different pieces of equipment. Giant X's, benches with chains and cuffs, thrones with metal restraints and swings that hung from the ceiling. The whole room was filled by the screams and grunts of people being whipped or fucked by as many cocks a woman could fit inside them without needing to be admitted to hospital.

No, those bloody events were saved for the back rooms. One of which was always reserved for Mr Sicko himself, Andy Carter and his rich friends. The Devil was convinced that Andy was the key to finding Mastema's host, being that it must have been a close associate of his and someone we were hoping to find tonight.

But being here, surrounded by all these people, these sick sex crazed people was starting to send me back down memory lane. The ones that just view a person in those masks as nothing more than some living doll, just a body for them to use in whichever way they wished. Well it only made me think of one person.

One dark and twisted soul.

The one who took 'Pride' in his work and the one who was my second kill.

My second soul to take.

But the first time, I acted like...

The Devil himself.

Brent

26

Teeth in a Jar

Four years ago...

This was to be my 2nd kill and unlike my first I wasn't dreading this one. No, this one I felt good about and dare I say it, was going to enjoy. It was because my next victim was to be a man by the name of Damian Waters, although his actual name triggered no memory or meaning with me. But when the Devil revealed to me his nickname, Death Shower, that's when the lightbulb in my head flickered on.

Death Shower was an unsolved case that ran between three police state lines. Nevada, Arizona and Utah. When I was a cop, I had known the case well. Hell, we all did, everyone wanted to nail the bastard! He had been given the nickname Death Shower, because he would always urinate on the bodies of the women he raped and killed. But the twisted side of it was not the act of urination itself, it was the fact it wasn't the killer's urine.

The DNA testing of the urine on each victim revealed a list of missing young girls, that soon turned out to be the serial killers' victims. Each sample found had belonged to his previous victim. That's right, this sick fuck would somehow gain his victims' urine before he brutally raped and murdered them. His preferred method of intercourse was anal, this along with the other horrific details meant Police and FBI's

Behavioural Sciences Unit had a field day coming up with his profiling.

That led me to where I found myself now, Utah, propping up a bar on the outskirts of Salt Lake City. I knew the area well as I grew up no more than ten miles from where I sat. I had popped in a few times with friends on the force. We'd have a couple of beers and shoot a few games of pool or throw darts. This is where I cut my teeth as a cop before me and Marie had moved to the suburbs in preparation to start a family. It was good times before the day that life went to shit.

I sat with a drink I had hardly touched when Waters walked into the bar. The son of a bitch just walked in, plain as day, right under our noses as if his shit didn't stink. It had to be said, that he was certainly a ballsy bastard, to pick his victims in a bar that often found a bunch of cops as its patrons.

I looked at my reflection in the bar's mirror in front of me and I could feel the rage begin to boil. All the photos of the poor girls flashed before my mind's eye. I slammed my fist down on the bar and as I was about to stand up, the Devil caught my gaze in the mirror. My eyes become his for a split second, before he spoke to me in my mind.

"All in good time, Brent... so do me a favour and sit your ass down like a good dog." He was always in my head, which meant he would hear my reply regardless.

"Suck my dick, asshole" I thought to myself with a smile.

"Cute, Brent. Very cute." Needless to say, even after a year together, we still barely tolerated each other.

Waters wasted no time in hassling two young girls across the bar, a pretty blond and a brunette. Both of whom couldn't have been much over twenty-one if that. They were wearing denim shorts that were far too short. In fact, they looked like jeans that had been hand cut as they showed the white cotton pocket liners, no doubt done on purpose. Low cut tops also showcased everything God had generously given them.

Waters' victims have always been found in their homes, usually small apartments, which meant that I would have to be ready to follow this guy like a tick on a dog's ass.

I watched the girls wave off Waters' advances, with the blonde then leaving for the restroom as the brunette got in another round of drinks. She clearly had a thing for the barman as she started doing that thing girls do, flicking her hair, making little giggles as she tried her best to show off her assets. I swear it's sometimes like watching mating birds dancing on the animal channel!

Waters watches like the leach he is and waits a minute before he follows the blonde. I, too, rise to follow, convinced that the assault will occur in the restroom. I feel a hand on my arm holding me back but when I look to where I feel it, I see nothing.

"He won't do it here. You know that." I froze, as the Devil's words filled my mind.

"Maybe he changed his MO" I offer back mentally.

"I'm going to check it out." This time I say this under my breath, as honestly, it's fucking exhausting talking to a voice in my head all the time.

"Welcome to my world," was the Devil's curt reply. But then as I go to make my move again his warning continues,

"You can't kill him here, Brent. Surely, I don't have to point out all the many ways that will go wrong, let alone the witnesses."

The annoying thing is that I know he was right, but I still shook his imaginary hand off my sleeve and started heading towards the restrooms. In the hallway, I see Waters and the girl crouched on the floor, picking up items that fell out of her purse. He is profusely apologizing for being so clumsy, and that's when I notice him pocketing her driver's license.

So, that's how the sneaky bastard gets their address. The blonde looked awkward and creped out and it's no wonder. They both look up at me, she smiles with an open look of relief and he excuses himself, getting up to enter the men's

room. I offer a hand she gratefully takes as I help her to her feet.

“Is everything alright, Miss?” She nodded and thanked me, giving me a coy look of appreciation. I gave the girl a smile in return.

“Really no trouble, have a nice evening,” I said passing by her and following Waters into the restroom. Inside I see him standing at a urinal, looking at the license in one hand, holding his filthy rape tool in the other. I imagine he will return it to her, once he is done here, no doubt claiming they missed it earlier. This of course, after he had memorised it.

She will be grateful and maybe think he wasn't such a creep after all. I wanted to kill him right there and then! I could, it would be quick, but as much as it pained me to admit, the Devil was right, *again*. I strolled to the urinal to his right and he pocketed the ID quickly before granting me a smirk.

A young guy walked in and stood behind us, waiting for a space to open up.

“That blonde is smoking hot,” I whisper. Waters' smirk turns to a witless grin.

“I would love to get a taste of that ass,” I add trying to get him to incriminate himself.

“I will be getting me some before the nights out,” was his reply as he zipped up and hit the flush. Our eyes meet again in the mirror over the wash bowls.

“Didn't she blow you off?” I couldn't help myself, I wanted him to give me a reason to kill him right now.

“Girls like that like to play hard to get, but they always give up the goods,” Waters said as he laughed, and the sound of him made my skin itch.

I returned to the bar to find the Devil looking back at me in the mirror in his self-assured way as always. I swear I still hadn't fully got used to this new form, even though I'd now had it for the past year.

“I am assuming you know where she lives?” I ask him, as the barman gives me a funny look.

“Of course, Brent. And feel free to keep talking to yourself, I would say I’m in for a good show if you do.” The Devil’s tone was as flippant as ever.

“Good, let’s go. I want to get there first,” I said again out loud, the Devil just rolled my own eyes at me.

“Fine, the whiskey is shit in here anyway.” This was his arrogant reply because of course, the Devil liked only the best.

As I walked outside, I take note that the young girls have settled their bill. It looked like the barman was getting off his shift and had made plans with the brunette. Poor blondie would be making her own way home, I swear but it was just too bloody easy for Waters.

From the shadows outside I watched the bar’s entrance, to see Waters as he leaves first, the blonde two maybe three minutes after.

“Let’s go, I want to stay close to them.”

“Relax, Brent,” the Devil tells me but then again, he is not exactly worried about collateral damage here.

We soon find ourselves at her apartment and I am made to wait longer than I’d like, after a party of eight girls exits her building and were obviously not in a hurry.

“Where?” I snap impatiently.

“She’s in 8B.” I curse under my breath, the second I see the fucking elevator’s out of service so have no choice but to burst into a sprint as I attack the stairs and motor unnaturally fast up them. I get to the 8th floor, and stop only for a second, just long enough to realise that I’m not out of breath. I place my hands on my chest and there’s not even a raised heartbeat.

“Feels good doesn’t it,” the Devil says on a whisper. Hell yeah, it feels good, but I don’t say this, not wanting to give him the satisfaction.

Instead I focus on the apartment door and burst into action, kicking the door in and barging my way through. It

takes me only a second to grasp the scene,

NO! The girl's body was just at the moment of life leaving it, her face with a cold reality taking hold as she resigns herself to her fate. Her soul a few seconds away from being choked from her and her glazed eyes stare back at me knowing this.

Waters was kneeling over her with his spade like hands around her throat waiting for her life to end so he was startled by my entrance. I aim my gun, yelling,

"Freeze, you fuck!" He looked at me with a toothless grin, his false teeth in an empty jar beside him.

"What the fuck?" I said under my breath.

"See, they always give up the goods," he tells me before doing something that I least expect. He suddenly jumped up letting go of the girl with a thud, as her head hit the floor. He sprints towards the window and then just when I think he's got nowhere else to go, he goes and jumps through the fucking glass. I let off two shots, but it's pointless as I miss.

"*Losing your touch?*" the Devil asks with the sound of a smirk in his tone. I ignore him and make a run for the guy, passing the victim just as she lets in a big gasp of air. I can smell the urine she is covered in. I want to stop but the Devil quickly reminds me,

"*No time to think, Brent, toothless is getting away,*" the Devil said on a chuckle and I looked out the window to see he had jumped onto a fire escape and was now scaling down the ladders.

"Fuck, he's getting away!" I shout, furious that this hasn't gone as planned.

"*I suggest jumping,*" the Devil tells me, and I curse God under my breath.

"Then you must be sick of me already because there is no way I am surviving that!"

"*But of course you can't Brent, but we can. Trust me.*" The Devil's sinister voice consumes me as I look out the

window to see Waters has made it to the bottom and is now running down the alley towards a main street.

“We are wasting time! Jump Brent, he’s getting away.” The Devil’s voice booms as now he is also concerned about us missing our chance. So, I holster my gun, I grab the window frame, and hiss,

“I hope this fucking works or we’re about to get a lot thinner!” Then with all my strength I launch myself out the window. Insanely, I must have cleared fifty feet or more, as I suddenly land and the impact cracks the ground around me.

I find myself only metres away from our target. Although I am right behind him, I realise that he will get out into the main street before I can stop him. Which means there will be cars and pedestrians that would prevent me from killing him. This is when I hear the Devil’s voice infect my thoughts once again, encouraging me to do more.

“Jump, at him, Brent,” he commands, and I feel immense strength coursing through my legs, so I jump. This time not soaring high into the air like some sort of fucking superhero. No, I shoot forward and smash into Waters, taking hold of him in my arms. We hit the deck hard and I hear the wind being knocked out of him. But we don’t stop. My momentum shoots us right across the main street, we missed cars by inches as we fall into a roll.

We come to an abrupt stop as we slam into a dumpster, the force of it putting a man-sized dint, caved into the side.

I stand up and grab him by the neck with both hands effortlessly hoisting him up. Then, before he has fully recovered, I head butt him square in the nose. If he couldn’t breathe before, then now he was going to find it a lot harder.

I followed this up with repeated knee to his gut and he soon bulked over and fell to his knees. My rage is like a beast being let loose from a lifetime being caged. It’s one I never knew I had.

Was it even mine?

Whoever's it was, I couldn't stop, my fingers took hold of his greasy hair and drove his face into my knee. Blow after blow, soon I couldn't even feel where his nose was. A loud crack made me pause, it was his jaw breaking. I let him go and took a few steps back and watched him fall backwards onto the ally wall. I then try to compose myself as I'm in utter shock. I even look down at my hands, maybe hoping to see that they belonged to someone else. But they are not and my shame makes me turn my back on the brutality. All I can hear is my own heavy breathing. I start to feel sick, not because I got lost in an uncontrollable rage, but worse...

It's because I enjoyed it.

"*Yes, now that's what I like to hear.*" The Devil's words couldn't have sounded any more pleased.

"Fuck off out my head!" I roar back at him, blaming him for all of this.

I was losing it and what I was turning into, well, it scared the shit out of me! I looked back at Waters and how he was still conscious, I didn't fucking know, let alone still moving? His hand was hopelessly fumbling down his leg as he coughed, blood spraying in a fine mist as he tried to breathe. He pulled out a knife from his boot, his eyes were so swollen they looked ready to burst. I stare at him as he swings his feeble arm erratically. Jesus, but this guy just didn't quit!

I stand there for a moment, before saying,

"Time to put you down like the dog you are... *See you in Hell asshole.*" The rage washes over me once more and even though I wasn't fully in control of it, at the very least, it's slightly more measured. I kick Waters' wrist to the wall, holding it there pinned under my boot. I then yanked the blade out of his hand, doing so with ease as he had very little strength left.

I then offer him my thoughts in the form of a grin I knew looked sadistic and I also knew was one that had nothing to do with the Devil. I did it because I hate the man, I hate everything about his sick and twisted life, which was why I

didn't have any problems when plunging the knife into his groin with one hand, covering his mouth with the other.

His muffled screams are held at bay by my tight bloodied fingers, digging painfully in his cheeks. I am sure that bastard Devil would be preventing his cries from being heard, but I did it anyway because it gave me a sick sort of pleasure. Because this was who I had become now. The raw emotions of losing my family swim to the surface at times like this like an ugly serpent wrapping around anything worth breaking and choking the life from this world. Because they didn't deserve to live, and my family did! And every time I took a soul, this was how I viewed them, as just another reminder that evil remained yet the good were far too often taken.

So, I twisted the knife in further, grunting not with the effort but more with the satisfaction it gave me. In fact, I twisted it so much, that it caused the blade to break within the weapon he used to rape. Blood poured out of him, an unnatural flow that just wouldn't stop. I figured it would be a matter of minutes before he bled out. Which is why I pull his face closer to mine and whisper,

“That's for all the girls you took, you sick fuck!” Then I simply waited for him to die.

The moment becomes almost peaceful, which shocked me as I waited patiently at the scene and proof of my ruthless savagery. All I could hear was a racing heartbeat. At first, I thought it was my own, but it wasn't. No, it was still Waters. I only realised it was his when it finally started to slow, as he had almost run out of blood to pump.

When it does, I wait as a moment of stillness falls over him. I close my eyes and pull my blood-soaked hand off his mouth. I retch at the thought of what I must do next, my stomach turns. I remembered what it felt like with Jacob Wholeheart and I don't relish a repeat. I fight the feeling and take a deep breath out before I press my mouth to his and breathe in. The shock to my system causes me to reel backwards, falling against the opposite wall as I am assaulted by their memories.

It's like their last attack on me before there is nothing left of them to give. And in doing so, I see Waters in a young girl's apartment, going through her underwear drawer, smelling at the fabric as he rubs them between his fingers. He selects a pair and places them in his jacket pocket. My mind reels in sharp pain as I flash forward to a different girl, she's coming home as Waters waits behind the front door. He grabs her from behind as she walks through the door and is spun around to face him, her attacker just before he holds a knife to her throat.

I try to break free as I don't want to see anymore. It's like a torture without the pain but to me it is so much worse. The pain I welcome, it's how I know I am still alive and, on this mission, to save Marie. But a sick mind's memories playing out a flipper book of death and torturing the innocent, then no...I don't ever want it!

But the madness continues whether I like it or not. A different girl is now face down on the floor, her right arm pulled so hard it breaks. Waters stuffs her own panties from his pocket into her mouth to dampen her screams.

Waters is behind yet another broken girl, one lay on the floor, with his big hands bruising her hips as he pulls her buttocks roughly back onto him. I call out a soundless cry for mercy as I start to feel the emotions and thoughts of so many girls. I feel myself closing my eyes as tightly as I possibly can, but the images do not go away because in reality, I have no eyes...I only have his memories.

Waters takes a fist full of golden blond hair, he yanks her back over and over. How her neck doesn't snap like a twig I don't know, he carries on until he climaxes.

Waters gets up and stands over his sodomized and broken victim. He carefully pulls off his rubber, zips up then oddly pulls up his shirt. There is a clear plastic pouch of urine strapped to his stomach, it has a small hose and a valve. And I know what is coming next.

He mimics the act of urination, humming a child's nursery rhyme in a sickening unnerving way, until the pouch is

empty. What happens next surprises me, as he kneels down next to the girl and strokes her hair back from her dead face. He then apologizes profusely and wishes her well in the next life, saying he hopes that he will meet her again. That she was fun. Then as he wraps his hands around her throat, reliving the moment again, even though she is already dead.

I being to fall into darkness then I am slowly released from the clutches of my mind fuck. I wake in the ally and it seems that no time has passed. I haul myself up and dust myself down, just trying to stop my hands from shaking as I do. Then I pick up the murdering rapist like a rag doll and throw him into the dumpster like the trash he is.

“Finish it and burn the body,” the Devil tells me, but I frown knowing that he is missing something.

“But what about you? Don’t you need to take it from me, like you did with Jacob Wholeheart?” I asked having been preparing myself for the fucking year for what I knew I had to endure.

“I took the liberty whilst you were sleeping...I didn’t think you would mind,” he said sarcastically. I don’t reply as I don’t want him to think I am thankful, even though in truth I am. And why wouldn’t I be, now if he could just spare me their fucking memories as well, then this job wouldn’t have been so bad.

I take out a hip flask that I look over as it’s dented. After I take a deep and long drink, one that is most definitely needed, I walk away to the sound of flames consuming the trash and Waters like a furnace.

Finally, I grin and just like Waters,

I had found Pride in my work.

I shook this memory from my mind, knowing now just how far I had come from that day. The day I acted no better than the soul I was taking. But since then I had come to control my rage. And which each new soul taken, I seemed to understand them more for their sins. Sloth, my first, *The*

Lawyer. I had been lazy and unprepared. Thinking I could just shoot the guy and it would be over in a heartbeat. Well I had nearly died from my mistake. Pride had been my second and after the beating I had given him, then I had walked away proud of what I had done. What I had rid the world of *Death Shower*.

My third had been my Greed. *The Whore*. Greedy for another soul to take, to use to reach my personal goal, just like she was. And with her death marked one less year of my sentence served. Then there had been the '*Man of God*', my fourth killing and when I found my Wrath. The undiluted rage I let loose had left nothing behind me but utter carnage.

My Fifth and last one to date had been an indulged kill. One I had taken my time with and learned true meaning of Gluttony. *The Politician* and one of the prime members of this sick, fucked up club I stood in now. I had enjoyed taking my time making that guy choke on his own food, taking my time to do so, just like he did with his victims. The ones he force feeds whilst at the same time forcing them to take his cock.

And now I was here and ready to take my sixth and final kill. Lust, who I'd had no choice but to name *The Boss*, due to my personal connection when finding who worked for him. A realisation that had chilled even the Devil's blood. A true parasite, who's crimes were video recorded and became snuff movies the moment his victim's lives were severed from this world and their murders caught on film.

A soul I very much looked forward to taking.

We were both so close to this being finished I swear my palms were burning and I couldn't help but hold the large crystal glass with both hands just to try and cool them down. This was it. One last soul and the Devil could then take this Mastema asshole back to Hell with him and I was free to finally find some peace. To try and decide what was next for me, but either way just happy knowing that my wife was no longer being punished for my sins.

That our little girl would no longer be alone.

Now all I needed to do was not fuck it up.

But then, this was easier said than done. Especially when trouble walked through the door, making the Devil hiss...

“Fucking wilful woman!”

Lilly

27

Killer Reality

For the second time on the same day I woke in the same bed, but once again, it wasn't mine. It took me a while to process where I was and more importantly, how I got there. I only had one answer to those questions as I realised that I was in the same hotel suite Alec obviously insisted I stay in.

But how did I get here? And why was I still naked?

My head felt foggy, as if the past few hours were a blur. I remembered being in the office, I even remembered catching Alec there looking for something. But that was it. Had I somehow let him convince me to come back here again? But even if this were the case, that still didn't explain why I was lying in bed naked and at...I leaned over to look at the fancy clock on the bedside table to see that it was 10.15pm which meant only one thing...I was going to be late!

I suddenly jumped from the bed and raced against time to get myself ready to meet my boss at some posh, snooty party full of rich people who no doubt thought themselves better than the rest. Okay, so I didn't know this for certain, but I could easily guess.

I decided that once again, while I wasn't in my own apartment, I had no choice but to raid the new clothes Alec had bought for me, wondering when we would finally get a chance to have a real conversation. Although something was nagging at me in the back of my mind. Maybe we had already

spoken and for some reason I wasn't remembering it right. He must have said something back at the office...hadn't he?

These questions continued to plague me, even if I was amazed at myself that in twenty minutes, I was ready. I had redone my hair in a twisted updo, applied make-up, which included a deep red lipstick that practically stained my lips, and smoky shades to my eyes. I was also wearing a long black chiffon formal dress with a plunging V neckline with another deep V cut at the back. It also had a long and daring slit up one side all the way to mid-thigh. I matched this with a pair of silver strappy heels that weren't too high. Then I grabbed a black cashmere wrap and a small clutch that matched the shoes.

I still wondered where my handbag was but more than that, wondered how I was even going to make this party, seeing as I was going to end up being ten minutes late after the journey there and also without the gold coin invitation Andy had given me. I just hoped that they had my name on the invitation list or this was going to be a waste of a good dress.

My plan had been to hail a cab and see if they could take the payment out of my Paypal account because until I found my purse, it was the only way I was paying for things right now. But all cabbies had phones and all phones these days had the internet, so it stood to reason that providing I offered a healthy tip I couldn't afford, then surely at least one of them would give me a ride.

In the end, none of this mattered as the doorman apparently knew who I was and had Mr Armand's personal driver bring the limo around for me. I nodded in thanks when the guy wished me a good evening and opened the door for me. It turned out to be the same driver I'd had that morning and I couldn't help but ask,

"Hey, I don't suppose you drove me home...I mean, back to the hotel after work about two, maybe three hours ago...did you?" I didn't take his immediate answer as a good sign.

"No Miss, I am sorry to say it wasn't me." I frowned and gave him a silent nod, thankful he didn't ask me anymore on

the subject. I then gave him the address that, thankfully, I'd remembered, being that it was so close to my own apartment block. I spent the time trying to access my short-term memories and the last three hours I had obviously lost. But there was one thing I was certain about, it definitely had something to do with one Mr Alec Armand.

“Oh, I almost forgot, but I found your handbag on the back seat earlier as I think Mr Armand was on his way over to your office to give it back to you,” the driver said making me swallow down a shriek of joy. I pulled it out of a compartment at the side where there was also a lit-up minibar. This also made me almost tempted to pour myself a drink to relieve my nerves. I had never been to anything like this before, never even been to a family wedding, on account of, well, not having any family. And unless Stewart decided to get married to Mark at some point, then I couldn't exactly see another party like this in my immediate future.

And speaking about Stewart the second I turned my phone back on after first plugging in my charge bank, I saw that there was a load of missed calls and a dozen messages. So, I tapped on his name and called him.

“Lilly, thank God! Where are you?” He sounded panicked which instantly made me tense.

“I'm on my way to meet Andy at that party his club is throwing, why?”

“Because some info came in on the Vegas murder. Mark knows a guy that was put on the missing person case and they ended up getting a photo off the security footage in the lobby of the hotel.”

“And?”

“And it's him, it's the guy who stayed in the suite, Adram Melech.” I gasped thinking that this was huge!

“Oh my God, Stewart, this is great! Wow, this is amazing as we might actually have our first big lead in who the killer might be,” I told him making him chuckle,

“Or he could just be a serial kidnapper who just has all these people collected in his basement.” I groaned and rolled my eyes,

“Yeah, yeah, I know ‘cause they never found the bodies...well, either way, well done. Do you think you can send me over the picture to my email?”

“Sure, just as soon as this laptop from the Jurassic age finally finishes with its updates.” I laughed and then noticed we were slowing down. I frowned before muttering,

“This can’t be right.”

“What’s wrong?” Stewart asked obviously aware of my tension through the phone.

“The address, it looks like some run down old warehouse.”

“You mean the ones near to your apartment?”

“Yeah, but that’s odd.” I told him dipping my head lower to look up at the building through the window now that we were parked.

“Maybe it’s like some strange industrial theme, I hear they have some gallery exhibits in the weirdest of places these days.”

“Yeah, I guess. Hey, I’d better go but don’t forget to send me that email, after all, Andy will probably want to know too.”

“Sure thing, and Lilly...”

“Yeah?”

“Have a killer night.” I laughed at the pun in that and hung up the phone. I got out of the car after the driver opened the door for me.

“Would you like me to wait?” I looked up and down the building once more and said,

“Just until I get inside, thank you.” Then I walked up to the only door and knocked. There was no answer at first but then someone called my name from behind me and I saw

Donald, Andy's boss, getting out of his own chauffeur driven car.

"Lilly?"

"Oh, Mr..."

"Please, call me Donald. What are you still doing out here?" he asked striding up to me and looking dashing in his all black designer tux.

"I'm sorry Sir, but I forgot my coin back at the office, I don't suppose..." I let the question hang and he granted me a knowing grin,

"But of course, I would be happy to escort you inside." Then he held out the crook of his arm for me hold and walked us both to the door. He then bent slightly and slid his own coin under the door.

"Erm...is this all part of the theme?" I asked totally confused and making him laugh.

"Oh, Lilly, you have no idea," he said with a wink as the door was opened for us. We stepped inside and instantly I was in complete and utter shock at what I was now seeing. The party was being held in a huge open space that had been transformed from its once dingy, old warehouse décor. But with nothing but walls and a ceiling and a whole lot of nothing in between, I was astonished to find it transformed into a dark and sensual space.

Oh, and there was a theme alright, one that took me only seconds to figure out. I gave a horrified gasp and turned, ready to ask Donald just what this place was, as if I couldn't already have guessed, but he was gone. I frowned as I started to scan the area around me to see if I could see him, but he was soon lost in the sea of men and few women all wearing black suits or a few white dresses.

For at least five minutes I seriously didn't know what to do as I just seemed to stand there at a total loss. I was standing in a freakin' sex club for Christ sake! What the Hell was I supposed to do!?

In the end, the decision was taken out of my hands as I was suddenly grabbed by the arm and spun around, seeing now only one face staring back at me.

“Alec!” I shouted his name and just like my earlier thoughts, it didn’t sound like it belonged to him. But then, the moment this thought seeped into my state of conscious mind, so did the damn of memories crack. Meaning that what had been withheld from me started trickling in. I suddenly saw pieces of it, playing out in front of me like roots trying to take hold, and shake the truth into me.

“What the fuck are you doing here!?” he hissed gripping me tighter but thankfully, before the point of pain. I frowned back up at him but the moment I saw his eyes, I realised they held only worry in their depths. Something was happening here that I didn’t know about, and he didn’t want me here to witness it. Was it the fact that it was obviously a sex club and he didn’t want my innocent mind corrupted by it? Ha, I wanted to laugh at the idea seeing as the memories that were infiltrating my mind at the moment were of him with his hands all over me. Him stopping me from leaving, like the first time. Him ridding me of my jacket, playing with my collar and then running his hands down...wait,

“You took my coin!” I accused, knowing now that was how he knew about this place. How he got inside what was obviously a lot more than some country club party. This was when things started to click together, and I suddenly yanked myself out of his hold and planted a palm to my forehead as I twisted away from him.

“God, I am so stupid!” I said feeling sickened by my own stupidity.

“Now is not the time, you have to...”

“I knew it! I fucking knew it, why else would a man like you take interest in someone like me...God, so, so stupid.”

“Someone like you? What the Hell is that supposed to mean?” he asked on a growl of words his anger had coated thick and hoarse.

“Well, just look at you, Jesus but you look like sex on a stick and I have fallen for it hook line and...” At this he growled low and stepped into me, gripping the tops of my arms and warned,

“I suggest you think twice about finishing that sentence because if you do...I warn you Lilly, it will piss me off,” he said making me frown at him before I rose on my tiptoes and met his challenge head on.

“...Sinker.” I hissed back making him first look incredulous before he actually grinned.

“You asked for it sweetheart.” Then before I could brace myself, he bent his body and put a shoulder to my belly before I was hauled up, quickly hanging over his large frame. I was utterly mortified, and shame flooded my cheeks, having nothing to do with being upside down over his shoulder and blood now rushing to my head.

“Put me down right now!” I hissed, squirming in his hold even if it was pointless to do so. Especially since he had banded an arm across the back of my legs anchoring them to his chest.

“Not a chance,” he told me sternly.

“I am five seconds away from screaming my lungs out unless you put me down right now!”

“Go right ahead, beautiful.”

“Are you serious!?” I shrieked.

“Deadly, usually,” he said being cryptic again.

“You want me to scream?”

“Look around you Lilly pad, do you think if you started screaming right now it would be out of place or a sound anyone here would be concerned about?” I was about to open my mouth, ready to give him more Hell, when something he just said stopped me.

“Wait, what did you just call me?” He didn’t reply but instead continued to walk us through the club as if he owned the damn place. People stopped and stared, but of course they

did. But he was right, it wasn't anything people looked concerned about, but more on the curious side.

"Mmm, that looks like fun, can I join?" One guy asked as Alec walked us past,

"Fuck off before I snap your neck!" Alec threatened, ending it with a deadly snarl like some possessed jungle cat that was a tail twitch away from ripping the guy's face off. The guy visibly paled and started backing away, not that I could blame him. Alec looked more likely to be there to assassinate someone than there to have a good time, even if he looked damn hot in his usual attire of a black suit, with matching shirt and tie.

I didn't know where he was headed but the second we came to a locked door, Alec took a moment as if trying to sense if anyone was inside or not. I guess he got his answer as he reared back slightly before kicking the door open, breaking the deadlock as if it hadn't been there. Jesus, but who was this guy?

Once inside he turned and shut the door before dragging me down the front of his body, making me grab onto his shoulders the second I thought he would just drop me. *He didn't.*

No, instead he just held onto my hips and again a memory of him doing that earlier hit me. Then one hand left my side and tenderly brushed back my hair from my face whilst watching himself doing it.

"Why couldn't you have just stayed asleep, my Lilly?" he asked me softly and I knew then that something had happened between us.

"Did you...do something to me last night?" I asked making him grin down at me before telling me in a seductive tone,

"Oh yes."

"I don't...well, I don't remember."

"Give it time, it will come back to you," he assured me, now planting the idea that he must have drugged me and

suddenly I was outraged at the thought!

“Oh my God, you did it, didn’t you?!”

“I did what?”

“You drugged me and then you stole that coin just so you could come here and...and, well I don’t know what but it’s so obvious now.”

“What’s obvious?!” he snapped out the question.

“The reason you pretended to like me, all this attention you’ve given me, I knew I should have been wary, I mean why would a guy like you be interested in someone like me and...” He growled and once more invaded my space in the time it took for me to gasp, telling me now to take heed of his words and take his actions even more seriously.

“And I am warning you, now would be a good time to shut that pretty little mouth of yours before I...oh fuck it!” he added and suddenly he banded an arm around my waist and hauled me to him, kissing me the second I collided with his chest.

I automatically slanted my head, giving him as much access as he wanted and the moment his tongue tasted me, I moaned, losing myself as I had done before. And just like that I suddenly remembered everything, especially the part where I gifted him not only my virginity but also, I gifted the Devil my soul.

The moment he felt me tense in his hold he released my lips but barely allowed me enough space to breathe without him so close he would feel it.

“I didn’t drug you Lilly, and I most certainly didn’t fucking pretend anything with you. Last night meant something to me, something words wouldn’t even be able to describe for a being like me. But pretty soon, I will explain everything to you but until then, I need you to trust me and stay here. I need you to wait for me...can you do that?” he asked doing so now in a way where it was impossible to deny him, so I nodded my head.

He gave me a thankful smile in return and then framed my face before tilting my head back so he could kiss me again, only this time it was a soft and gentle kiss that spoke only of many more to come...*like a silent promise.*

“You don’t leave this room and if anyone enters you tell them that you are owned and your master doesn’t share... exactly those words, you understand?” I swallowed hard at the thought of what those words actually did to me, ignoring the fact they were only said because of where we were. As I might have been a virgin, but I wasn’t that sexually naive. I knew all about Submissives and their Doms. Wondering now what exactly he was doing here, and I found myself unable to just let him go without knowing. So just before he walked from the room, I asked him,

“Alec...what are you doing here?” He paused with his body half out the door before telling me,

“Righteous Purity,” he said cryptically and just before he left, he said,

“And Lilly... you can call me, Iblis.” And then, with that bombshell he was gone, and I was left bewildered and feeling lost. I thought about the name he had just given me, thinking that it sounded biblical in origin and was just about to get out my phone to google it when I heard it beep in my bag. So, I fished it out of my clutch when I suddenly heard a noise coming from next door. Only it sounded as if there was some kind of direct link between the two rooms, as it wasn’t just a sound you would have heard muffled through a wall.

But without him here, the one now called Iblis, I had time to look at the room. It looked like some kind of small cinema, as it had two rows of recliner chairs all facing a wall covered by a large red velvet curtain. Was it some kind of screen and someone had accidentally turned it on, meaning I could hear a movie playing?

I looked around for a cord to pull or something when I spotted a control panel at the side. I flipped open the little door and pressed a button that suddenly made the curtain slide back on its rails. Then I watched as it revealed a window and what

was on the other side made my blood run cold. My boss, Andy, was stood there staring directly at me with his arms folded behind his back, only now he didn't look like my boss. No, now he looked like he was about to start work in a bloody slaughterhouse!

He wore a white coat, like a doctor out of an old black and white movie and he was just missing the large round mirror attached to a leather strap around his head. He also wore thick black rubber gloves that went halfway up his arms, making me question why the hell anyone would need to be wearing anything like this in a sex club.

I didn't know what to do, I was like a deer in headlights! Should I duck out of the way or try to explain myself through the glass? Although what I would have said, I didn't know.

I swallowed hard and was about to speak when I quickly realised that he wasn't looking directly at me after all, no if anything it looked as though he was staring straight through me.

This was when I realised this was a two-way mirror and he was actually looking at himself. And one thing soon became obvious, he was clearly waiting for something.

No, not something, more like...

Someone.

Lilly

28

The Devil's in the Details

When I was assured Andy couldn't see me, I scanned the rest of the room and my breath caught on a horror filled gasp. In the centre of the room behind him was a metal chair that looked like something you would have found in a doctor's surgery, with stirrups that separated the legs. But the difference was sickening as there were buckled straps for the ankles and wrists, telling me that whoever that chair was meant for, then they weren't escaping it any time soon.

Opposite this, was a video camera set up on a tripod and ready to film the whole thing, making me hope that at its worst, this was only going to be some weird doctor kink made into porn.

I convinced myself this must have been it but that was until I noticed what else the room held. It was glinting off the lamps that faced the intended 'patient'. Shiny and deadly, were rows of implements, none of which looked as if they were of the pleasuring kind. No, there were scalpels in different sizes, hooks, needles, pliers, medical tubes, a small metal hammer and curled up rubber hose, along with an array of surgical equipment I couldn't name.

I swear, just looking at it all and I wanted to throw up, but then my phone vibrated in my hand and I looked down to see the email icon showed that I had mail. I clicked on it, seeing it was from Stewart telling me to open the attachment. I did, but

looked back up the second I heard someone was entering the room where Andy stood waiting,

“About time, is that bitch here yet, she’s fucking late... wait, who are you, I didn’t order you?” Andy said to the masked figure of a large man who had just entered the room. The mask sent shivers down my spine as it looked like a pretty male doll in shock with its mouth open in a perfect O shape. But the eyes looked almost as if missing, and void of life.

“No Andy Carter...you didn’t.” A voice said and the second I heard it I swear my heart stopped beating. And just as I looked down at my phone to see his image, I looked back up again to see the same man now pulling down the mask. I gasped, dropping my phone on the floor so I had both hands to cover my mouth. The shock was too much to bear!

Because there he was.

Adram Melech, also known as Alec H Armand, and now known to me as...

Iblis.

“No,” I whispered like a prayer that went by unheard or just unanswered. I didn’t know which, only that I was frozen and unable to move away from the sight now playing out in front of me, like some sick, cosmic joke.

“Who the fuck are you!?” Andy asked eyeing the man up and down, a man whose name I didn’t truly know...there were now too many choices.

“That’s not important right now but what is important is who you think you have planned for that chair,” he said and even I could hear the menace in his words, even if Andy’s arrogance totally missed it.

“Look asshole, if you want to enjoy the show then my office bitch will be here in a second, so I suggest you go wait ne...” He never got chance to finish as suddenly his throat was caught in Iblis’s large hand. Then, in an incredible show of strength, he lifted him clean off his feet, holding all his massive weight with just one hand.

Meanwhile, I was only just realising who it was that chair had been meant for and suddenly I turned my head to the side, and threw up all over the carpet, unable to help myself. The thought of what could have happened to me by Andy's hands was too sickening to hold down food, making me want to retch again.

But then I heard a cry of pain and a slam of a body as it was thrown up against the glass, making me jump back in fright. The glass cracked but thankfully didn't break, because I had no idea what Iblis would do to me once he knew what I had just discovered. Would I be next? Was I someone on his list, and he was toying with me until what was deemed the end? I couldn't help it but a strangled cry at the thought escaped and again I quickly covered my mouth with shaky hands. Iblis looked to the glass as if he had heard it but then Andy let out a moan and he mistook it as coming from him.

I felt the tears streaming down my face and rolling over and under my hands as I couldn't chance letting them from my face. I even shook my head as if this would help. *It didn't.*

"What the fuck do you want?!" Andy screamed at him and I wondered how long Iblis would have gotten away with doing this to him, had we just been at a normal party like I had foolishly believed myself coming to. But with all the screams of pleasure and pain echoing around the large open space outside these doors, then I doubted Andy had much chance right now at being saved. And Iblis knew it too, if his sadistic grin was anything to go by.

"Oh, that's easy Andy, I don't just want your life, or even just your fucking sinful soul...oh, but this time, for once... *I want so much more!*" This was all said as Iblis walked closer to him, before suddenly he grabbed him by the scruff of the jacket, and literally threw him towards the chair, making Andy fall sideways into it. He didn't even have time to straighten himself before Iblis was on him breaking back one arm just to get it in the strap on the armrest. He howled in pain at the snap of bone and decided against fighting with the other, in fear of the same treatment.

“You see, you shouldn’t have tried to fuck with what’s mine,” he told him as he yanked hard enough on each strap that the leather groaned and cut into Andy’s flesh, making it pool with blood around the edges.

“And that little office bitch you were referring to...well, she’s mine!” he snarled making me stammer for another breath just so I wouldn’t pass out.

“Ppplease, I will...will give you anything you want!” Andy stuttered as he begged for mercy.

“I know you will, Andy, that’s what makes pain so refreshing, the truth that comes from it is something you can always rely on,” Iblis said as he now made a show of running his fingertips down the implements on the tray.

“I want to know his name,” Iblis asked making even me frown in question before I then started to recognise exactly what this was. It wasn’t just his need for revenge, it was also an interrogation.

“Wwho?” Iblis suddenly got close to Andy and spoke next to his head,

“The one who whispers in your ear, telling you to do all these despicable things to the women you lure here,” he said, whispering it for added effect and I had to say it worked as I would have broken down and told him everything by now!

“He is someone close to you, pulling at your strings, encouraging you do these things,” Iblis told him as he picked up a scalpel and sickeningly ran the pad of his thumb down the blade, cutting himself without even flinching. Andy’s eyes widened in pure fear, watching as the blood dripped down to the floor. Because now he could see the true madness in this man, and he was afraid.

He should be.

“I...I don’t.” Iblis interrupted Andy’s pointless excuses saying,

“Tut, tut...” then he shook the scalpel in between his fingers like it was ticking on a clock, telling him that his time was running out.

“I don’t know, I swear it...I...arrrg.” Andy’s plea was swiftly cut off the second Iblis grabbed his throat once more, making the room fill with garbled choking noises. Then Iblis got closer and whispered something in his ear I couldn’t hear. Andy in turn started to speak but it looked too pained to make it past his swelling lips. So, Iblis released his throat and got even closer so as not to miss the information he needed.

I knew the moment he had what he wanted when Iblis nodded his head once before stepping back and giving Andy some space.

“You see, that wasn’t so hard now, was it?” Iblis declared pausing to stop and look down at his expensive watch.

“Sso, does this...mean you will...will let me go?” Andy stammered and Iblis released a sigh before tugging down his cuffs, offering me a quick view of the skull cufflinks there. Then Iblis scanned the room again and sneered when he saw the camera.

“I think not,” he said before swinging his gaze back to his struggling victim.

“But I told you everything I know!”

“Not everything, no.” Iblis informed him and the eerie calm in his voice was terrifying.

“But I did, please, please you have to let me go!” Andy started to cry and I couldn’t find it in myself to feel sorry for the bastard, wondering how many women he had forced into the chair and heard beg for the same thing just before he raped and tortured them.

“That’s where you’re wrong Andy, I don’t have to do anything but exactly what *I want to do*,” Iblis told him, with his tone changing at the end into a warped, rougher edge to his voice.

“But I told you...”

“You told me what I asked for yes, but there is also a price for your sins, sins of your past and of your intended future,” Iblis said, letting him know that it was far from over.

“So, you see Andy, we have a problem here, because not only were you planning on hurting my woman but that camera over there suggests you were planning so much more.”

“No, no I was just going to fuck her...I swear!” he begged on a cry making me feel sick again at the thought of him raping me and filming every screaming thrust.

“You swear, do you?” Iblis asked, luring him in and I shook my head again silently, as if I was the one in that room with him being interrogated.

“Yes fuck! Yes, I will swear on my own fucking mother if you let me go!” Iblis laughed and leant in closer, telling him in a dangerous tone,

“But you don’t have a mother, Andy, and you know what...lying is a sin, but even more so *to the Devil!*” Then I never even saw his next move coming as he suddenly slashed out with the scalpel still in his hand and at the same time, covering Andy’s mouth to contain the screams. The first few slices were across his chest and blood seeped through the white jacket so quickly, it drenched crimson in seconds.

“Now are you going to tell me the truth?” he asked and Andy nodded, with tears streaming down his face as his pain was no doubt excruciating. Iblis removed his hand and nodded down at him, saying,

“Right, now let’s try that again, what exactly was it you were planning to do to my girl?”

I gasped at this, now asking myself if his next victim was Andy solely because he was trying to get to me before Iblis had a chance to have his fun? I didn’t understand. I didn’t understand the possessiveness behind his motives, even now, when he couldn’t possibly know that I was watching. Why was the idea of Andy hurting me so maddening to him?

Andy gave the camera a shaky nod and Iblis got up and walked over to it. Then he looked back to Andy for instructions, making him splutter one word,

“*Play.*” Iblis released a growl, but pressed play, almost as if he knew what he would find. The sound of sexual grunts and

screams of agony fill the room and again I was spitting up bile off to one side because of it. It was a truly sickening sound that I don't think I would ever be able to eradicate from my nightmares. Thankfully, Iblis can't seem to stand it either, as he stops the playback and shakes his head.

“A snuff movie... you were going to make a fucking snuff movie with my Lilly, you were going to rape her whilst...” he paused for a second tearing his eyes from the sickening sight of his next victim, as if he can't get past the horrifying thought of this murdering pig in front of him hurting me. Then with a raw emotion of pure undiluted rage, he roared,

“Whilst...*YOU FUCKING KILLED HER!*” And that was when I knew that I was an intended victim but never by him.

Not by the Devil in him.

The second I saw him lunge I quickly turned around and didn't look back, even as I heard the screams of agony and haunting song of death as he started making my boss pay for his sins. Andy's sins of murdering lust.

No, instead of looking back, I couldn't stand it any longer and I ran quickly from the room, my promise long gone dead in sight of a serial killer taking his next victim. And no matter that he was doing a justice for the world, I was still heartbroken that he wasn't who I thought he was.

So, I ran from him. From this nightmare. From everything that was my life. I ran and ran until I didn't know how but I was finally outside free of the Hell behind those closed doors. I coughed and spluttered as I tried to catch the breath that was stolen from me.

I bent slightly trying once again to fill my lungs as I was on the verge of passing out. When suddenly my name was being said and I froze for a moment thinking that it could be him.

It wasn't

It was Andy's boss, *Donald*.

Suddenly I didn't feel safe, not now knowing what went on in there. And now I remembered that look he gave Andy back in the office. That knowing look that told him so many things without words. Donald had known my fate and was just as evil as Andy was, if not even more so, as for all I knew he had been on his way to enjoy the show!

“Lilly, are you al ...”

“Get away from me! Don't fucking touch me!” I screamed at him making him frown before he finally figured it out. Suddenly he rushed at me and just as I managed to turn around to run, he caught me!

“Now it's time to finish the fucking job, like I came here to do!” he said with venom, all acting now disappeared. Then I saw the flash of a dagger and he started to drag me backwards, no doubt into the alley at the side of the building. I was about to struggle when I felt the sharp sting as the blade he held to my throat had nicked my skin. Then I was suddenly pushed forward, hard enough that I landed on my knees. But not wanting my back to him for long, I turned quickly, scrambling back on my hands and heels, trying to put distance between us.

He held out the blade as if he was ready to slash it at me.

“You won't get away with this!” I shouted and I didn't know what was wrong with me, but I quickly wished for Iblis to find me, knowing that he was a murderer but at least he was one that wanted to protect me. Which was when I started to replay his earlier words back. Iblis was looking for someone. A person that was pulling all the strings.

A person that connected all the murders or at least the reason for them. Could it be possible that Iblis was the good guy in all this, and I'd got it wrong all these years?

And one look back up at Donald, and I suddenly realised I was now faced with the real monster.

The one Iblis was hunting.

“Oh please, I have been getting away with this for years and fucking enjoying it too. This little game we play, this cat and mouse, its fucking addictive! And this place, it's like

Hell's playground! And Lilly, it's like I always say, when you're going to kill, you have to commit, because really...

"The Devil's in the details."

Brent

29

Back to Where God Sinned

The second I knew he was dead I had no choice but to drag his soul from his bloody, broken and tortured body and my punishment for taking his life was having no choice but to relive it. I tensed, my body turning tight as a fucking bow as I was forced to endure all the sick and twisted things this fucker had done in his past, as his memories invaded me like a parasite.

But this time, the Devil in me wasted not a second longer than he has to when freeing me of that dark sickness and retrieving his last soul.

We did it. *We finally did it.*

We just managed to get our last soul before midnight, and I swear the knowledge nearly brought me to my fucking knees! Well, that was until the Devil informed me,

“It isn’t over yet, Brent.” I took a deep breath and I knew he was right. Not after that asshole had whispered that name and given us the last piece of the puzzle. Because this was it, our main bad guy to hunt down and one last soul for the Devil to take back to Hell with him. It was time to get this shit finished.

But first, we had our Lilly to deal with.

I knew the Devil was itching to get back to her and I was bracing myself, at the ready for him to take over once more,

just like he had done the second we had stormed across this fucked up club to get her. But then the Devil's anger at hearing the way she doubted his feelings for her, well, no wonder he had enjoyed killing Andy so much as for once...

It had been fucking personal!

This time I didn't stick around to watch the body burn, knowing that one last name had been added to the imprint of yet another sinful life now in ashes. We had just taken our *Lust*, adding it to the list of other sins. Now it was just time to take their marker and burn him to the fucking ground with the others.

We nearly ended up ripping the door from its hinges in our haste to get back to Lilly and get her somewhere safe. So, I walked with purpose back to the door I had kicked in and I frowned the second I saw it hanging open. He had told her not to leave, so I knew it was bad, even before I stepped foot inside. Call it a feeling, call it my gut. He knew it too as he growled the second we saw the room was empty, and a quick scan told us why.

"FUCK!" We both roared as realisation hit us like a fucking train!

"Christ, she saw everything!" I hissed seeing the evidence still burning in his seat. But then, when I tore my gaze away in disgust at what she must now think of us, I heard the growl of the Devil once more before he told me,

"No, she ran before the end," he said with eerie calm.

"And how do you know that?!" I snapped and felt myself being taken over by the Devil when he started bending on one knee, doing so now so he could pick up her phone.

"Because of this," the Devil said aloud, now having the control. And after touching the black screen it illuminated showing the face of a serial killer... *it was ours.*

I knew that Lilly had been investigating us after finding that file in her bag. We had both been impressed by her level of commitment but more so on how much she had actually

found out. She had even managed to link all the deaths but until this point she was only missing one piece.

The killer's picture.

The Devil growled low, dropping the phone and stepping on our image as he swiftly left the room. Then, not a second later and he was running through the club, leaving the debauchery behind us. He burst through the doors and after realising his Lilly was long gone, he just started running. He ran my body faster than it had ever run before. Doing so now knowing that her apartment wasn't far from here as to be honest, even he didn't know where else to look. Hell, we both knew she wouldn't have gone back to the hotel, seeing that we were both pissed that she bloody left it in the first place!

It started to hammer it down with rain and soon the black suit we wore was soaked through to skin, leaving a trail of watery crimson behind us as it washed away the blood of sin from a body that no longer felt like it ever really belonged to me.

By the time we reached her building the anger was burning in our chest and I knew that panic was slowly setting in the Devil. He snarled in disgust at one guy that was passed out drunk on the staircase and I knew he wanted to howl in anger at knowing she lived there. Deciding patience wasn't on his side, he took one look up the middle of the staircase and wasted no time. So, he jumped, launching our body straight up the centre and grasping the railings when he knew it was the right floor. This quick action meant our body swung over the side and landed with a thud on the creaky landing, making a dust cloud around our feet.

"That one," I told him now being the one forced to speak in my mind.

He located her door, one I knew after my background check on her. But then the second we saw it I knew it was bad when he faltered our step and I heard the Devil suck in a sharp intake of breath.

Because there, running nearly the full length of her door were words carved into it with what looked like a knife's edge.

And there it was, proof that she had not only run from us, but we had been too late to save her from being taken.

Our failure easy to read thanks to the message dragged through the wood. One telling us to come for her.

One that read,

‘Go back to the sins of God and
You will find your Angel of mercy.’

“He has her,” I told him making the Devil growl.

“Yes, and he intends to use her against me,” he said making me inwardly frown in question,

“How do you know this?”

“Because he has done it before,” he said with a poisonous edge to his voice that spoke only of revenge and pain.

“I don’t understand, how would he know...who is she that makes her life so important to you...important enough to use her soul against you?” I asked him and he released a sigh, turned us away from the door and said the very last thing I ever expected him to say...

“She’s my wife.”

Lilly

30

Where is your God now?

I was just about to scream for my life the second Donald stepped closer to me but something about his expression stopped me. His eyes widened for a moment, looking down at me with shock and astonishment, as if he couldn't believe what was happening. Then he turned away from me to look back in a bewildered state before falling to the floor like a sack of bricks. And in doing so showed me the reason why.

“Stewart!” I shouted, as there he was, with his arm still raised above his head and a bloody length of pipe in his hand. His gaze morphed from anger into shock then into horror. He looked at me as if asking me for confirmation that he'd really just done that. I let my eyes focus on the pipe making him do the same and that was when he found his answer. Which was why he quickly opened his palm as if it was a snake that would lash out and bite him if he didn't, making the pipe land on the floor with a clatter.

I quickly scrambled to my feet and threw myself at him.

“Oh my God, Stewart, you saved me!” I shouted and he finally came out of his shell shocked state before he was wrapping his arms around me.

“Jesus Lil, why on earth was Donald trying to kill you!?” he asked turning high pitched, but there was no time to answer his questions, not before we got the hell out of there. Because I knew that with a club like this, with that amount of big players

all in there as members, they would kill in a heartbeat to keep this place a secret. Christ, but they killed for fun for fuck sake, of course they would have no problem adding one more to their sick and twisted list!

“Come on, we have to get out of here!” I told him in a rush. I didn’t know exactly what part Donald played in all this, but I was certain of one thing, Iblis wanted him as his next victim. And I really didn’t want to be around when that happened!

“Yeah, good plan, as I am way too pretty to go to jail, they would eat me alive!” he said making me shake my head at his use of humour to defuse the situation.

“Where is your car?” I asked and he nodded for me to follow him. He had parked out of sight but told me once we reached the car that when he had seen me bursting through the doors, he knew something had happened. Hence my unexpected but very welcome rescue. After that I got in his little three door car, having to move his laptop off the passenger seat first.

I also asked him how he knew to come find me and his answer had been simple, he didn’t like the sound of my voice on the phone when I had first arrived. So, he did some digging and tried to find any evidence of a party, club or gala being held in this part of town. He got suspicious when he couldn’t find anything. And thank God he did, otherwise there would have been nothing but pieces of my body to find in a back alley.

I finally took a deep breath after I had finished telling him about what the club really was and worse still, what Andy’s invitation had really been. He swore under his breath and shook his head, no doubt trying to get his head around it. Meanwhile, as Stewart worked on making sense of all I had just told him, I was left asking myself why I hadn’t mentioned a word to him about Iblis.

Because I was protecting him, that’s why.

But then, I suddenly had a thought. Those two names he had given, the letters were all similar, all but the last name he

asked me to call him. But Alec H Armand and Adram Melech, now that was worth another look.

“Hey, can I use your laptop?” I asked already reaching in the back to grab it.

“Yeah sure, you think of something?” I nodded and opened it up, going straight to google and trying each of the names first. When I got nothing, I decided to look for a website I used to use when I went through my solving puzzles phase. This was long before the ‘who is the serial killer’ phase that had taken over my life. Now being said more in the literal sense.

“Is that an anagram creator?” he asked glancing at the screen and taking his eyes from the road for a second.

“I have a hunch.” So, I typed in Alec H Armand first and got a list the length of my arm, but the name Adam stood out. After this I decided to put the second name into google and felt like smacking myself on the head the second I did. This time I had forgotten to add the Mr in front of Adram Melech, unlike I had done in the past. Which made Google ask me if I meant Adrammalech.

And suddenly there it was. But it wasn’t a name.

It was a being,

“Adrammalech means the Devil,” I said aloud making Stewart frown but then instead of asking me about it he looked back at the road and made a turning.

“Where are we going?”

“I know a place to get you your answers,” he told me and I went back to my research.

It turned out that Adrammelech was translated as a magnificent king in Sumerian and was known as the Devil. I swear just reading those words had me thinking back to only hours before. Could it be possible? I thought about the way he had demanded my soul, just like the Devil always did in my dreams. I thought back to the immense strength he showed when picking up that desk as though it was made from cardboard. Then I remembered the way he had plunged the

city into darkness, just so he didn't have to share the sight of me as he took me from behind, pressing my naked body up against the glass. Why had I blanked it all out?

He had claimed himself as being the Devil then and really, evidence was overriding every reason not to believe him. It was insane to think about but even so, that insanity spoke of nothing but the truth.

However, after this my research started to lead me to another Sumerian word...A word only spoken in my dreams.

Igibala

It had been what he had called me, hissing it at me one minute and whispering it over my skin the next. But that's the thing that confused me the most, as its meaning only had me questioning why.

It meant traitor.

"Why are we here?" I asked when he stopped the car on the sidewalk and before I got my answer, he was outside and walking up the steps. It had started raining on the drive here so getting out wearing nothing but a black dress wasn't an option I liked but then again, it looked as if I had little choice.

I got out the car to follow him, shivering as I looked up at the big brick building that looked as if it hadn't seen a believer in years. Then I mounted the steps, putting me just behind where Stewart was waiting for me. Then, just as he reached for the door, one that looked as though it should have been locked, I grabbed his arm, holding him back.

"Stewart, why are we here?" I asked again and he grinned down at me before saying,

"Well, if you want to find out about the Devil, then I can't think of a better place." Then he stepped inside and with one look behind me to check we hadn't been followed, I too stepped inside the broken church.

Stewart had gone in first and I followed, stepping into the darkness and trying to get my eyes to adjust. It smelled old and musty as if these doors hadn't been opened in years, making

me question exactly what there was that we could possibly hope to find in a place like this.

“Stewart? Where are you, I can’t see a...*thing*.” I finished on a word that wasn’t needed as light flooded the large space, showing me now the inside of a rundown broken church that looked as if a war had happened inside.

“Found the lights!” Stewart said shouting from a small room off from the side before emerging from it.

“What are we doing here, Stewart, there’s no-one here that can help us,” I told him, finding just being here was raising the hairs on the back of my neck. It was as if something bad happened here and spirits still lingered.

But that’s when it hit me, this was the church we passed when Alec, as I knew him then, had been driving me home. The way he had stared at the place had been as if he was replaying a memory, one I wasn’t privy to. Of course, everyone from the city knew the story and the horrors that once went on here.

The church massacre.

People who had been rescued from some crazed racist gang dead set on trying to rid the world of anyone who differed from what they classed as the ‘perfect race’. Of course I knew it for very different reasons and almost discarded it entirely from ‘club 666’ thinking like everyone else, that it had been gang related. However, it was when I noticed the dark burn stain on the grass, along with a new word, one that like the others had only appeared when seeing it in the flesh. First it was a message leading me to the crimes with a word I now knew meant ‘Traitor’

The only person not found dead among the piles of bodies had been their club leader and this church’s priest.

He had been Wrath.

But then now I knew that it hadn’t been gang related at all, and the accounts of the ‘confused’ prisoners at the time had actually been right. But the police hadn’t wanted a story of some murdering vigilante on the streets cleaning up the mess

the cops had missed. So it had been covered up. But I had known better and now, well I knew even more as I had the name of my vigilante.

“Don’t worry, I know a guy, he’s on his way,” he told me with a shrug of his shoulders before rubbing them, now looking towards the massive space a stained glass window used to be, but now instead plastic sheeting was there to try and keep out the elements. It was June, but even the summer nights could get chilly.

“What guy?”

“Do you think God was angry when this happened?” Stewart asked me randomly, making me frown at the odd tone in his voice as he totally ignored my question. So, I asked him again.

“Stewart, what guy?”

I started walking down the aisle of broken, tipped up pews to where Stewart was stood looking at the side where the broken window was.

“Do you know, I heard he killed someone with a radiator, before throwing it through this window,” he said talking to himself and then adding,

“Ripped it off the fucking wall, how insane is that?!” His voice pitched in wonder then he whistled through his teeth and shook his head as if he was seeing it all playing out like a movie scene he liked.

“Yeah...crazy,” I said, agreeing in a placating tone. But then whilst still looking at the plastic now banging and flapping with the rain battering against it, he said,

“What did you find when you googled the name Iblis?” Then he looked at me and when he did, I no longer knew who it was I was seeing behind those crazed eyes.

“I...I never told you that name,” I said now walking backwards, slowing putting space between us. He grinned and tipped his head to the side before saying in a childlike manner,

“Oops.” I frowned back at him and started to shake my head a little before speaking my thoughts,

“It was never Donald he was after, the name that Andy gave him...it was you! All this time, it’s been you!”

“Busted! Oh Lil, but I can’t tell you the fun I’ve had, all these years, just waiting for this moment to arrive and now... HA, its finally here!” he said clapping with joy and those eyes I used to trust in were no longer ones that belonged to my friend.

“But...but why, all these years and you...you were just using me?” I said unable to keep the betrayal from my voice.

“Of course, I fucking used you and do you know how easy this all was! Oh, by God’s name it was all planned to fucking perfection!”

“What do you mean?!” I shouted, this time letting my anger flow.

“I have been watching you a long, long time...watching the *Devil’s Lilly Pad*.” He snarled the same name that Iblis had said earlier tonight. The reason I had picked my name. The Lily Pads in my dreams. But how...?

“Oh, but it was so beautiful and so fucking easy. A few whispered words was all it took. ‘You don’t want that baby’ and ‘No, that child won’t ever love you’ and poof, before you know you’re an adult without a friend or family in the world and all thanks to my helpful little warnings,” he said with glee and his words penetrated me like a fucking wound to the chest.

“You’re why I don’t have friends! Why I never had anyone adopt me!” I shouted hating the way it all started to suddenly make sense. My whole fucking lonely sad life had been written and I had not one hope of ever changing the story.

“Well, I couldn’t have anyone interfering with my plans now, I needed to keep you close, needed you in the exact place I wanted you. Just on the very cusp of desperation all those years...oh but Lil, it makes people so fucking predictable.”

“No, no, you fucking liar! No one could...could...”

“Could what, get you a job at the paper? Who do you think it was pulling those puppet strings? Tell me Lil, how was it you got that file again...? Oh yeah, the unassuming friend always having to work late right alongside you!” I heard his damning words even though I tried to block them out. But putting my hands over my ears and shaking my head wasn’t working! I was beyond shocked and didn’t want to believe even a single word.

But it was too hard not to when it all started to make perfect sense in my mind. Every major lead I’d had on the case had come from him in one way or another. He had even fucking started the job the same time as me. No wonder he had become my only friend!

“Ah yes, I can see you now piecing it all together. Mark sends his regards by the way, or at least he would have done had I not killed him,” he said laughing and just before I turned and started running, I shouted back over my shoulder,

“You’re fucking sick!” But after this I didn’t make it even halfway back down the aisle. Not before I heard the familiar sound echoing through the large vaulted ceiling faltering my next step.

I turned around slowly, seeing now the loaded gun pointing directly at me and he made a tutting sound, telling me,

“We can’t have our main heroine running off now, not before the hero comes to save her, that wouldn’t be a very good story at all, now would it?”

“And I take it you’re the villain in all this?!” I snapped making him bow dramatically, still keeping the gun on me.

“Why naturally. Besides, I haven’t finished telling you my story and we have oh, all of about three minutes left before he comes barrelling through those doors,” he said and I inhaled sharply, wondering if what he said now was true...was Iblis coming for me? I decided to test it,

“No, he won’t come, he doesn’t even know where we are!”

“Oh, but he does, I made sure of that and by now he should have found my little message.”

“I don’t get it, why are you even doing this...I’m a nobody, just a penniless, friendless orphan with no-one thanks to you, why are you even bothering with me?” I asked because honestly, I didn’t get it.

“You really still don’t have a fucking clue who it is you are, do you?!” he asked, his tone incredulous, then he shook his head as if he couldn’t believe how stupid I was before he started unravelling the story of insanity, starting with his first bombshell,

“You’re the Devil’s wife, you dumb whore!”

I jerked back, unable to hide my reaction.

“You are Lilith.”

“Lilith?” I questioned wondering if that was the reason he always insisted on calling me Lil.

“You’re basically the first woman of creation who fucked over God’s first man...nice huh?” Again, the look I gave him told him that his story was too insane for me to grasp.

“Christ, but for a child of God you really don’t know shit about anything do you! Then let me enlighten you with a little story. Iblis and I actually started out as friends. But that was such a long time ago,” he said walking closer and closer to me but the second I started backing up he shook the gun at me.

“We were known as the Watchers and well, our assignment from God meant we were sent to the Garden of Eden to guard over God’s first creations in humanity. The beings that would end up saving us all, God said. The new era of free will to worship the Gods and grant them eternal power. But it came at a cost, as free will is unpunished for those that are granted it. But for Iblis and I, well, such things don’t go unpunished,” he told me with a snarl.

“That’s the funny thing about sin you know. Yours was choosing another over Adam and basically telling him no. The first woman in history not to bow down to man, it’s what you’re most famous for, you know.” I frowned at this, trying to follow all he was telling me, now I had no choice but to believe in his words.

“But sin is so complex, along with the lines between Heaven and Hell. Take Iblis for example, did you know that he has spent what must feel like an eternity trying to get you into Hell. But would you sin, oh no, apparently your only committed sin was choosing him the one time. And bless him, he has tried so hard,” he said in a condescending tone that mocked him.

“For with your death he would only end up losing you to Heaven, but your soul never stayed for long. And bam the whole fucking cycle of forbidden love would start all over again. It’s ironic, don’t you think, that the only way to be together is to sell your soul to the Devil and sin for him?” he told me and this above all else started to make sense. Every dream, the way he tested me. The reason he called me a traitor and was so angry with me. An eternity of running from him would do that and until this enemy had started wreaking havoc on Earth, he had never been able to reach me other than in my dreams.

“But do you want to know how Iblis became the Devil. Why the sacrifice was made...” I couldn’t help it as I knew I was only feeding his little game but I needed to know. So, I nodded, hating my weakness.

“Iblis’ only sin was falling in love with you and his punishment was being cast down to Hell to rule his own kind, all of the fallen. You were punished by being cast from the Garden down to Earth only to spend an eternity being reincarnated, never to find the love you once had, the one he thinks you ran from.”

“But why would he think that...unless...”

“I was the traitor, not you,” he said and for some reason this was said with sadness.

“And you, was this your sin, why were you cast down there...what was your sin?!” I shouted at him and he granted me a grin before lunging for me, grabbing my arm and twisting my body round so now my back was locked to his front facing the front doors. Doors that suddenly burst open, as Iblis walked through the doors with the Wrath of the Devil.

But then a gun was put to the side of my head and he whispered his answer in my ear...

“My sin, was...

“Envy”

Brent

31

Envy

“Ah at last, our hero arrives!” Mastema said the second the Devil had taken his first steps inside the church. A place I once vowed never to step foot inside again. However, I faltered in my steps the second I was thrust quickly into taking control again.

But of course I was, the Devil had no power in God’s house.

“*Fuck!*” The Devil’s curse rang out in my mind as it soon became obvious why Mastema had come here. It was because he knew it was the only way for us to do this as equals.

“*Don’t worry buddy, I’ve got this,*” I told him, communicating so no-one else could hear us, knowing now that I wasn’t the only one fighting to save the soul of the women we loved. Of course, seeing that he now held a gun to her head wasn’t exactly comforting.

“Let her go, she isn’t a part of this,” I shouted walking further up the centre.

“Oh, but of course she is! This right here is the famous Lilith, deceiver of all men, but then again, she’s the Devil’s wife, so naturally, she would learn only from the best.”

I would have just said the guy was talking shit. Well, that was until the Devil quickly said,

“*Don’t listen to what he has to say, Brent. He will deceive you.*” I frowned inwardly, because now it wasn’t what he said

that had me on edge but more the way he had said it. As if he now he feared for Lilly's life for another reason. Like what I might find out.

"He's talking to you, isn't he...whispering in your ear, telling you not to listen perhaps...ask yourself Brent, why would he do that?" Mastema asked and one look at Lilly told me she was just as confused. He looked down at her side on, now trying to see what I was looking at and then said,

"Oh, I am sorry, my dear, I forgot to introduce you, see this isn't the Devil, but this here is Brent, the Devil's lackey. I know, I know, so many fucking names! It's hard to keep up, but see that's what happens when you have to murder so many of my disciples and don't want to get caught, you have to get creative...don't you, Brent or is Braun whilst we are back here... *Oh, I did like that one,*" he said and I couldn't help but roll my eyes, not wanting to give this asshole the satisfaction of getting a rise out of me. Instead I gained the attention of the terrified eyes of Lilly and asked,

"You okay, did he hurt you?" Now this got a reaction, as Mastema lost his cool façade and tugged her harder to his chest,

"She's fucking fine, but should you be more concerned with your own wife!" Now this time, he was the one to get my eyes and they were fucking furious.

"Don't you fucking dare speak her name," I warned on a growl.

"Ah, but I see I hit a nerve and it's no wonder...terrible business that and poor little Daisy, so sad what happened." At this I couldn't help but react, doing so by taking a threatening step closer, making him react in return,

"Ah, ah, I don't think so...you do know what the Devil would do if you are ever the cause of Lilly being taken from him...don't you?"

"What the fuck are you saying?!" I barked.

"Oh Brent, who do you think he will take it out on, because news flash buddy, a bargain with the Devil really isn't

what it's all cracked up to be, trust me." Unfortunately, his words hit their mark and I stopped dead, knowing he was right. If she got shot, then there was only one place an innocent like her was heading and it wasn't where the Devil wanted her.

"*Brent.*" The Devil warned.

"*Then fucking deny it!*" I snapped in my mind and when it went quiet, I had my answer.

"*Yeah, that's what I thought,*" I snarled back at him before addressing the cause of all of this shit and this time speaking aloud.

"Alright, but help me out here, I mean, what's your end game because the way I see it, there is nothing left for you. All your sinners are dead and last I heard was that you didn't have much longer in that host of yours," I told him, trying to draw his anger long enough that he might let his guard down.

"Is that right?" he said with a knowing grin that I felt like ice in my gut.

"Oh Brent, you're such a fool, no wonder the Devil likes using you."

"*Don't listen Brent. No matter what he says, don't fucking listen to him!*" The Devil told me and the panic in his tone did little to convince me not to.

"Didn't you ever stop to ask yourself why the Devil picked you or even if *he* picked you at all?" he said emphasising the word 'he' and implying that the Devil hadn't picked me at all.

"What the fuck are you talking about!?" I yelled.

"Oh God, but it's so beautiful, should we tell him, I think we should." he said shaking Lilly as if trying to include her in this new twisted situation. A situation that unbelievably just got a lot more fucked up the moment he said,

"You're one of *my* sinners, Brent. You're the last one!" Hearing this I sucked in a sharp breath, unwilling to believe it.

“What! No! No...I’m, there...The Devil said six souls, that...”

“*Brent.*” The Devil tried to speak to me, but I slashed an angry hand down and shook my head,

“I am sorry, Brent, but you really need to touch up on your religion, there are seven sins my friend and ding, ding, ding, you are lucky number seven...you’re my Envy!” he told me and I staggered back, finding the end of a pew was the only thing my hand found to hold me upright. Could it be true, is what he was saying...?

“*Brent, I told you not to listen.*”

“IS IT FUCKING TRUE!” I roared this time, not bothering to do so in my head.

“Oh dear, looks like I caused a rift between the two, you see that’s him arguing with himself right now, asking the Devil why he betrayed him.” Suddenly my gun was out and I was pointing straight at him, telling him,

“Shut up motherfucker!” My gun was shaking as I felt myself losing it to this guy’s madness.

“Now there is no need for that, you’re envy remember, not wrath or one of the other assholes that can’t control themselves...you’re the good guy, that simply lost his way. Are you really going to shoot innocent little Lilly here?” I tried to take in a deep breath to calm myself, but I was too pent up in my anger.

“Tell me!”

“*Brent, no.*” I ignored the Devil in me.

“With pleasure. He chose you, knowing that if he failed, then at the end he still had one sin left to kill, but here’s the genius part, he had no idea that all this time I had his Lilly.” I saw her flinch in his hold, and I knew I wasn’t the only one fuelled by anger and the desperate need to kill this guy!

“She was my back up plan just as you were his. Because we were always meant to end up here, you and I, the Devil and his Lilith. Because now he can’t kill you to stop me, not

without killing her too and sending her to the one place he can't follow." I had gathered as much and it cemented the fact that I was stuck between this old feud, just pawns to be used.

"And you think that I am just going to let you step right in and take the Devil's place." I argued.

"Well, no," he said with a grimace before telling me,

"I never was very good at sharing. No, what I want is to kill you and then take over your body, win, win."

"Doesn't sound like a win to me, dickhead," I scoffed.

"Well no, not for you exactly, but for someone close to you it does," he said, letting me dangle like a worm on a fucking hook!

"Umm, alright then let me sweeten it for you. Lilly lives, the Devil fucks off and for you, well you may be rotting in Hell, but the second I step into your shoes then I will be powerful enough to take over Hell...and tell me again Brent, who is it in Hell you want out of there?" He said raising the gun slightly to his head and scratching it with the end making a show of thinking. I knew what he wanted from me. He wanted me to say my wife's name.

"He is lying to you Brent, only I have that power." The Devil forced me to listen this time and I winced at the pain in my head from him doing so.

"And how do you think that by stepping into my body, one sinner, is going to make you powerful enough to beat the Devil, uh?" I challenged but he started laughing.

"Oh Brent, have you learned nothing? Why do you think that the Devil made you take those souls for him?"

"Because he couldn't." At this he threw his head back and laughed louder this time.

"Don't be so fucking naive Brent, he's the fucking Devil, of course he can take souls! But something he can't do is keep them or send them back to Hell without being there. But what he can do is store them in you," he said and I hated that this was starting to sound like the truth.

“Go on.” I urged wanting it all.

“That way when he finally gets to me, all he has left to do is get rid of the last sinner, the one that holds them all. Guarded nice and safe inside a body he can control. Why do you think you have been granted all these powers every time Brent, it was the souls inside you...the power he knows I needed to beat him...the one you thought he took out of you, when all he was doing was taking control and hiding them.”

Hearing this and even Lilly gasped as I suddenly slumped to the floor as the pain of reality lanced through me like a fucking knife to the gut!

“Oh Brent, just give me what I want. Hand yourself over to me and I will make all this go away. I will put your wife where she finally belongs,” he told me and before I could choose, Lilly suddenly decided all our fate. She suddenly stomped down hard on his foot, spun around to face him and then kneed him in the crotch, making him howl in pain. But before she could make it far, he back handed her with the gun, tearing a gash in her cheek, making it bloody. Her body was knocked so hard, she was flung near to the side of the broken window and ended up sliding through the broken glass shards that still remained scattered on the floor since the day I first did it.

“Bitch!” Mastema snarled down at her, cupping his balls like any mortal would.

“No! I will fucking kill him!” The Devil roared in pure rage at seeing her getting hurt.

“Wait!” I shouted the second he pointed his gun at her, as at the same time I point my own at him.

“Which is it Brent, it’s time to make your choice?” I looked to Lilly, seeing it in her eyes. She doesn’t trust him, and I know that I shouldn’t either. But how can I trust the Devil when he’d lied to me all this time.

“I didn’t lie. But he is right, you are the seventh sin. Envy. Envious of anyone that got to keep their loved ones, the day you lost your own. He too was Envy, it’s why that sin is the

most powerful to him. He loved her too, but she chose me. That was her only sin, so please, don't make it in vain, Brent... don't let him take her from me." The Devil pleaded and it was the first time I'd heard him sounding human.

"Then what do I do here, let him take over the world by releasing Hell's Demons here to conquer it?" I heard him sigh in relief as he had protected her. Then I felt the smirk in his tone when he told me,

"What you're good at Brent, be resourceful." Great, that was very fucking helpful. What did he want me to do, rip another fucking radiator off the wall and hope he didn't notice before throwing it at him! But then I remembered back to that day and soon asked,

"I can still heal right...all I got to do is get my ass outside?" I felt the Devil grin, before telling me,

"Yes, my friend, you can."

"Alright, I have made my decision, let the girl go," I said lowering my weapon to my side and hoping like Hell this insane plan worked. Christ, I really hated getting shot!

"Excellent choice, however, there will be no letting her go until I have your body and soul, now get on up here Brent and join the party," he said now turning back to Lilly,

"You too sweetheart, time for the fun part," he told her and she did, but I could see the look in her eye. She was planning something. I tried not to look at her so as not to draw attention to whatever it was that she also had planned, just in case it worked. But instead drew Mastema's attention back to me as I walked slowly up the centre.

"Now, now, Brent, you think I am stupid, lose the gun," he said and I stopped before throwing it his way, doing so in a way that it landed just where I wanted it to, making it skid by his feet. Meanwhile, Lilly was back on her feet and limping towards him, seeing as she had no other choice, as the gun was trailing her movements.

Then, the second she was within reach, he grabbed her and she was quickly back in the same position she was before,

only this time his hand was wrapped tightly around her throat taking no more chances.

I continued on, getting closer and asked him,

“So, what is it I have to do?”

“Easy, you have to let me kill you and steal your last breath...that shouldn't be hard for you, not considering you wanted to kill yourself before the Devil showed up...that's a sin you know and lands your ass in only one place...but you know that already, on account of your wife,” he said leaning forward and telling me this with a sneer that made me want to pound his face into the floor with my boot.

“Okay, kind of running out of opportunities to be resourceful here,” I told the Devil, but his attention was elsewhere and I soon knew why when I was only a few feet away from them both.

“Why Envy?” I then questioned.

“What?!” he snapped again losing his cool.

“Why Envy, why would I be the one you want the most?”
It was Lilly who answered,

“Because that was his sin.”

“Enough talking now!” he barked but I carried on, needing the gun away from her head and focused on me. And there was only one way to do that, piss him off the same way I spent six years pissing off the Devil.

“Ah I get it, so you wanted a piece of her, a piece of what the Devil had... nah, I see it man, she's got a fine ass, so I'm not surprised you wanna get yourself...”

“I said enough!” he shouted and then his hand started to shake with his mounting rage,

“So, it was all for a bit of mortal pussy then, well, from what the Devil told me, she's totally worth it” Yep and this did it!

“I fucking loved her!” he roared and then quickly pointed the gun at me, and the second he did, I raised my hands. Lilly

then took her opportunity by raising her own so she could attack with the weapon he couldn't see and ironically... *with a piece of God's image.*

She hammered the shard of stained glass she had in her hand, down into his shoulder, crying out in pain herself as it cut deep into her palm. But his roar of pain was louder and just as he was about to shoot me, Lilly grabbed his arm, trying now to get the gun from him.

A scream rang out the second it fired and no one expected it. Lilly's eyes went wide as realisation set in and then she staggered back at the same time the Devil roared in utter rage, now clawing at me to be set free, damning God's house to Hell.

But I was reacting too. As everyone else was in shock, I kicked out making him drop the gun and then punched him across his face, dropping the bastard to the floor. Then I picked up the gun and aimed it right where it needed to be... at his head.

The second he started laughing I clocked back the hammer.

"Something funny about death, dickhead?"

"You tell me, after all it was the Devil that whispered in your ear and made you forget about locking that safe with your gun inside and just think, if you kill me now, you will never get your revenge." Hearing this I too froze, my blood running cold but before the Devil could say anything. I spoke,

"And my daughter, did he whisper in her fucking ear too, told her to go play with daddy's toys?" I snapped making Lilly suck air through her teeth as she struggled to shift herself backwards, so she was now resting against the altar. But her eyes said it all, as she pieced it together for herself what happened to me.

"He is the Devil after all, what do you expect...think of poor little Daisy, she didn't even get to have her hot chocolate before bedtime." And there it was, what I had been looking for...

The right person to blame.

“And how would you know that, asshole, when even the Devil didn’t.” I asked looking down at him and the second he said,

“Oops.” I shot him dead.

“*Lilly!*” was the Devil’s only reaction and I rushed over to her and placed the gun down by her hip so I could assess her wounds.

“So, what’s the verdict?” she asked moaning in pain and I released a sigh before telling her,

“Well, we need to get you to a hospital but it’s just a bullet to the leg, doesn’t look like it nicked an artery or anything serious.”

“So, does this mean I’m not going to die?” she asked half joking.

“Not today, sweetheart.” I told her with a smile after taking off my belt and creating a tourniquet to help with preventing too much blood loss.

“Then this is probably a good time to introduce yourself, handsome,” she said now slumped up against the wood at her back. I granted her a grin, ignoring the growl of jealousy from the Devil and said,

“Yeah, probably...but careful, or you’re going to make your boyfriend jealous,” she laughed once and winced with pain.

“So, what happens now, does he just go back?” I took in the pain in her eyes knowing that she cared for him. Cared for the Devil in me.

“I think so, but don’t worry, as soon as we get out of here he can come back, that way it gives you a bit of time to say goodbye,” I told her not knowing if this was what she wanted to hear right then. She swallowed hard and nodded, as if resigning herself to the fact. A single tear fell, and she held out her hand and said,

“Lilly,” she introduced herself, making me take her hand and say,

“It’s nice to meet you, Lilly. I’m Brent.” She took a deeper breath this time and replied,

“It was nice to meet you too, Brent...*Goodbye*” Then before I could react as my hand was still held in hers, she gripped it tighter just as I heard the hammer of my gun being clocked. Then, before I could stop her, she raised the gun up and shot herself under the chin.

Then her hand slipped out of mine as she fell slowly to the side.

And this was all to the sound of...

The Devil’s heart breaking.

Brent

32

Six Times

I made my way outside the church and fell to my knees. Rain.

It was like a metaphor for my life so far. Spending all this time trying to wash away the blood on my hands that until this moment, with the Heavens now opened up above me, I finally felt like I was getting clean.

I had done it. Done my time. But at what cost? I shook my head before lowering it to my hands, fisting my wet hair to the point of pain as I couldn't get the image out of my head. Lilly was gone, shot herself in the head for reasons I didn't fully understand. Was it to end up in Hell, was it to be with the Devil? It was the only reason I could think of. But she didn't know that her act was a selfless one, done for someone else along with sacrificing her life for love and therefore the uncertainty that she would end up in Hell was the root of the Devil's pain.

But I could no longer hear him or his raw agony. A pain that had sliced through him the moment her body hit the floor. I felt his desperation. Him reaching for her soul, but even I could feel it rising.

So, the question remained, did he get to it in time?

I didn't know, but for the first time since I can remember my mind was silent. No thoughts to share, no words to mull

over. Just deafening silence. There had been so many things I wanted to ask when this was all over. The main one being how would I know for sure that my Marie was safe in Heaven. How would I know for sure that all of it hadn't been in vain?

"Don't worry Brent, a bargain with the Devil is soul binding." The second I heard him speak and I don't know why but I sucked in a deep, shuddered breath, ashamed to say that I was relieved I wasn't still alone and the reason I couldn't help the lone tear from escaping.

"I will miss you too, Brent," the Devil said as a way of goodbye and before I could say another word, suddenly I felt the Devil stepping out of my body.

I was quickly thrown forward into the grass in sheer agony! This was because every single injury I'd ever sustained over the last six years all came back to me all at once. I cried out but it came out gargled! I struggled to breathe and the last sight I knew I would see was the figure of the Devil as he cut through the sight of the night sky above me, with the rain now lashing down over my broken body.

He became a looming shadow, a massive figure with horns, glowing eyes and a body coated in demonic armour. He cocked his head to the side and grinned down at me and I felt the betrayal cut through me as though he 'd just signed my death warrant in his own blood. And speaking of blood, I was choking on my own but still managed to push one word from my cracked, split lips,

"Why?"

He grinned again and told me,

"Because I can't bring you back unless you're dead first." And then with that, he reached down and touched my chest with a single finger, his talon started to grow long and sliced through my flesh as he tried to dig his way to my heart. I was screaming in sheer agony of the likes I had never known before...and I have known a lot since meeting the Devil.

Then the second he touched my beating heart it stopped and the last thing I heard him say before he killed me,

“Goodbye Brent, it’s been fun.”

Seven Years Ago...

I wake with a start the second I hear a noise. My cop instincts quickly kick in and I reach for my gun. Marie, my wife next to me, stirs with the sound of the code beeping as I enter my birthday. I always used to get laughed at, at school, called the Devil’s child because my birthday had three sixes in it.

“Is everything alright, don’t tell me it’s that damn cat again?” she murmurs half asleep and I lean over, put a palm to her shoulder and tell her,

“Probably, but if you hear a gunshot, then yeah, it is,” I tease, and I could tell she’s tired as she doesn’t take the bait. I go downstairs and as predicted it’s the damn neighbour’s cat in the trash again, knocking over the bins as it scrambles desperately to get out, just as it does every night that Marie decides to make fish pie.

I release a sigh and decide I’m too tired to deal with it right now, figuring it will still be all there in the morning. I then quietly make my way back upstairs, checking on my little girl as I pass her room.

Daisy is sleeping soundly with her arms out to the sides, her favourite bear is on the floor and her legs look like a pretzel is trying to eat her bed covers. I smirk and with a shake of my head, go in there and reposition her the best I can without waking her. I tuck her bear under her arm when she murmurs,

“Can I have ice cream for breakfast, daddy?” I chuckle, kiss her forehead and tell her,

“Sure thing, sweetheart.” Hoping then like Hell she doesn’t remember or that one would wind me up in trouble with my wife. Speaking of which...

Once in the bedroom I decide to take a piss, knowing if I don't, the second I lie back down it will be the first thing to keep me awake. I go inside, closing the door to our en suite before putting on the light so as not to disturb Marie. Then I do my business and as I am washing my hands over the sink, I glance up and it's strange as there is steam now covering the mirror.

I look down and it's only then that I realise my hands are red and the water is scalding hot. I frown, about to start complaining about needing to ring a plumber first thing when something in the mirror catches my eye.

"What the fuck?!" I shout in alarm the second writing starts to appear. It looks as if someone is using their finger from the other side of the mirror. That's when I know I must be dreaming! Time to get off the early shifts I think to myself with a shake of my head.

But then just before I give in to the urge to pinch myself, I'm finally able to read what's on the glass.

It reads...

'Don't forget to lock away your gun this time.'

And this is when it hits me, forcing me to grip onto the sides of the sink as I am overwhelmed by seven long years of Hellish memories. It's all there. The horrifying moment my family is taken from me. The deal with the Devil, the murders...and then there is her.

"Lilly"

"Who's Lilly?" my wife questions as she pushes open the door, no doubt wanting to know what my shout was all about. But then the second I see her I can't help it, I am so overcome by joy that I sweep her up in my arms and kiss her breathless.

"Holy smokes, that cat can come more often!" she replies with a big smile on her face. Then without a word, I carry her

into the bedroom and lower her to the bed, hoping this wasn't a dream or vision or any other warped sense of my reality. But then my wife cradles my face and says,

“But seriously, who's Lilly.” I close my eyes, lower my lips to hers and say,

“It's the cats.” Then I make love to my wife for the first time in what seems like forever. Then after I have exhausted her, and she is sleeping, I go and kiss my daughter again, tucking her in and whispering that I love her.

My heart is so full and now it's time I keep it that way.

So, I go back into the bedroom, lock away my gun.

And then before the night is through, check its locked...

Six more times.

Lilly

Epilogue

I trailed my fingertips through the water just like I did every time I was here but this time when I saw the looming shadow behind me, I didn't even flinch. No, this time I do nothing but grin.

"I know you feel me my, Sarrat Irkalli" he tells me, humming what I soon discovered means 'Queen of the Netherworld'. As I guess that's what I am now, being his queen and one he ended up fighting for until the very end.

You see, by me killing myself I had thought that meant a one-way ticket into Hell, seeing as I knew this was my only chance at being with him once and for all.

My final test.

However, it hadn't happened that way. Because it turned out that if you saved a man's life and was willing to sacrifice yourself and your chance at eternity with your soulmate so as to prevent Hell taking over God's Earth...well, then that kind of counteracts then shooting yourself in the head part. And the Devil knew this. Which was why the moment my soul left my body, he was at the gates of Heaven, atop his hellish steed, in full battle gear making his claim and declaring if the soul he owned wasn't returned back to him immediately, then he would declare war.

This had been the reason that he had demanded me gift him my soul. Because it meant that if there was ever a way to stake his claim and get me back, it would be by these means. Apparently owning a soul that had been gifted to the Devil

was a pretty big deal. However, with that being said, it was still touch and go for a moment there.

But then I had woken up back in my garden, which I now knew represented where this had all started. He had told me that by this lake had been where he first saw me. Telling me that my beauty captured him the second he laid his eyes upon me and fell lost under the spell a mortal soulmate could yield.

After this moment, it had continued to be the place we always meet in secret and was even where we had married. Even if such a union at the time was recognised by the only two souls that mattered. That was when we had planned to leave together.

But then, *envy had gotten in the way.*

And after that, the rest was a long and lonely eternity of ancient history that thankfully only one of us had to endure.

But not anymore.

Now I was his queen.

“I always feel you, my Adrammelech,” I replied with a cocky wink, using the same name, meaning my ‘magnificent Devil king’.

“Then maybe it is time to put that into practice...*and feel a particularly hard part of me,*” he whispered on a growl and I turned suddenly taking him off guard as I usually did by playfully throwing myself into his massive arms. He caught me with ease and laughed when I used a set of his horns to pull myself up to his lips. Then before I kissed him, I said,

“*You first, my Anunnaki...to become my, lunamtagga*” I told him, knowing now he had called me in my dream and why.

It meant,

‘Those who from Heaven came to Earth...to become my,
sinner’

After this our kiss ended the way it usually did, with him walking us both into our lake, and fucking me in the water until all of Hell heard their king's roars of pleasure.

But then again, little had I known at the time that this garden he'd had made long ago and was situated within the centre of his castle. Surrounded by fleur de lis, the French lily flower, that was carved within the stone that encased our small slice of Heaven. The same one the Devil also had carved into our bed. A symbol of his love for me that mirrored words spoken by lips at my ear. Words I heard each time he took my body, joining it with his own and using me as he pleased. His queen to love, to cherish, to worship and to freely bestow at least four of the seven sins on me...

The good ones.

Meaning that every night in my dreams and since the beginning of mankind, I had always been...

The Devil's Lilly.

The End.

Future Books...

Afterlife Spin-off series

The Kings of Afterlife Book 1 – Vincent’s Curse.

Sigurd

Jared

Seth

Lucius series:

Transfusion Book 2 – Due October 2019

The Beasts of Afterlife:

Adam (and Pip)

Leivic

Orthrus

Ragnar

Afterlife’s Masters of Hell:

Lucifer

Asmodeus

Afterlife's Young Adult Series

The Afterlife Chronicles:

The Glass Dagger- book 1 (Available on Kindle and Paperback)

The Hells Ring – Coming soon.

The Transfusion Chronicles and Hell Beast Chronicles also coming soon.

Other Afterlife Books

The Forbidden Chapters - Book/Part 2

Afterlife's Short Stories

Other

'Devil in Me'

By

Stephanie Hudson and Blake Hudson.

(Coming Soon)

Keep updated with all Afterlife News...

Check out my ALL NEW website for everything Afterlife Saga at... www.afterlifesaga.com

(Including exciting Official Afterlife Merchandise!)

And for keeping updated on all Afterlife related news and upcoming events, please join my mailing list on the website to receive regular Newsletters.

Or you can follow me on Afterlife saga on

Twitter: [@afterlifesaga](https://twitter.com/afterlifesaga)

Facebook: [Afterlife saga page](#)

Also, please feel free to join myself and other Dravenites on any of the groups below...

The Official private fan groups (Afterlife's Crave the Drave & Afterlife Saga Official Fan page) on Facebook to interact with me and other fans. Can't wait to see you there!

Or feel free to email me with any questions or comments you may have about the Afterlife saga at stephanieHUDSON@afterlifesaga.com

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As before, a big shout has to go to all my wonderful fans who make it their mission to spread the Afterlife word and always go the extra mile. I love you all x