

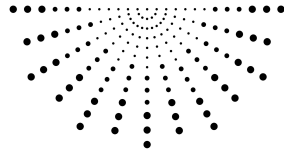
D. J. RUSSO

NO

Sugar  
Coating  
IT

A FEMME FATALE  
MONSTER ROMANCE

NO SUGAR COATING IT  
A FEMME FATALE  
MONSTER ROMANCE



**D.J. RUSSO**

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# AUTHOR'S NOTE

Hi! Thank you for picking up *No Sugar Coating It: A Femme Fatale Monster Romance*. I want to make sure it's fun for you, so please read the content warnings thoroughly. I wrote them for you!

Also, I know this should go without saying, but... there's a lot of kinky shit in this book. Softer kink. This is still a cozy monster romance, after all. But there's stuff here that I wouldn't recommend trying at home without proper safety measures and adequate research. In short, this is not how I would personally do kink in my real life, nor do I suggest you follow in Faith and Byron's footsteps. This story is purely for entertainment purposes only and should not be considered a manual on BDSM. There are plenty of resources available, so if anything in here piques your curiosity... definitely do your homework. (And please do not stick candy canes in your holes!)

Content warnings: morally gray leads, age gap (she's an immortal demon), parental abandonment as a child, alphahole, *lots* of bodily fluids, rimming, pegging, rope play, food as sex toys, flogging, impact play, temperature play, oral sex (both male and female), a handbag made out of human skin, torture (off page, mentioned), depictions of Heaven and Hell, demon

smut, Dom/sub relationship, fisting, womanizing asshole of a man. Please note: Byron talks about his body in a way that may make some readers uncomfortable. If you're recovering from, or have an ED, please take care.

# ALSO BY D.J. RUSSO

## CITY ALIENS

[Abduction Seduction](#)

[Stroopwafels & Starlight](#)

## LYRICA'S MERFOLK

[Scales Like Stars](#)

Hearts Like Sea Glass (coming soon)

## STANDALONE TITLES

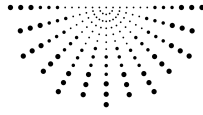
[We Own the Stars](#)

*For Alistair*

*Thank you for being you and for always believing in me.*



## BYRON



I step into the packed elevator and adjust my tie one last time before the meeting, and notice it's mostly filled with the guys from the accounting department. Great. Every time I run into one of these nerds, they want to discuss my travel allowances. Considering I'm two seconds from stepping into a quarterly meeting and anticipate tensions to be running high, I'm really not in the mood to talk about any of this right now.

I smooth my chestnut brown hair before wedging myself between two accountants clad in tweed vests and thick-rimmed glasses, hoping like hell that they don't notice me. But of course they do. Because I'm Byron Waits, chief analytics officer for Fletcher & Sons, the most prestigious financial firm in North America. Everyone notices me. Especially the female employees, who I notice right back before taking them home with me every night.

The accountant standing beside me raises his fist to his mouth and clears his throat.

“Oh, Mr. Waits. I'm glad to run into you. I have some questions about your last trip down to Cabo?”

I let out a strangled groan and stare up at the ceiling. Come on, elevator, let's hurry the fuck up, please. Then I look down at the accountant, who barely comes up to my shoulder. I'm 6'4" and broad chested, making me a fairly large and intimidating-looking guy. No one makes eye contact with me on the street. I'm notoriously unapproachable, I guess. Just the way I like it. Except when it comes to the damned accounting

department. They're completely undeterred and have the best work ethic in the entire company, which is commendable when they aren't up my ass.

"What about?" I sigh as I stare down the man whose name I don't know and don't care enough to learn.

The mousy accountant lets out a squeak as I loom over him. The elevator glides up past another floor to let some people off and on. Only thirteen more floors to go until I'm home free.

"You see..." He rubs the back of his neck as a tendril of sweat glistens at his brow. "There were some receipts I don't think we can put through as business expenses. You spent fifteen thousand dollars at a local strip club, for example," he says a little too loudly, and some of the other employees crammed up against my sides stare up at me, their eyes wide. But I'm not ashamed of my extracurricular activities. Never have been, and never will be. What else am I supposed to do with my free time? Golf?

I straighten and don my friendliest smile. "I see. Unfortunately, the CEO of Luminous Solutions needed extra grease in his wheels. The club was a part of our negotiations, which meant opening our wallets for him. It worked out in the end, but I understand it was a little more than we had intended. I do apologize for that."

The accountant stares up at me, blinking with wide, brown eyes. "So... you're saying that you had a meeting with the CEO at a... strip... club?"

Of course, this guy wouldn't get it. He's probably never even walked past a strip club in his entire life. Has he even touched a woman before? Doubtful.

"Yeah. That's exactly what I'm saying," I reply.

The accountant nods slowly. "I... I see. All right. I'll, um, get to processing the request immediately, then. But, uh, in the future, it would be prudent if you could—"

The elevator dings, opening up to my floor. I flash the accountant a grin and lift two fingers up in a farewell. "This is

my floor. Good talk, and keep up the excellent work.”

When I step off into the hallway, I turn and notice the accountant’s expression crumple, and I almost feel a pang of regret as he looks down at his feet, defeated. The other accountants huddle around their friend and pat him on the shoulders, and some even glare at me. I roll my eyes before turning back to launch down the hallway at a brisk pace. Whatever. He’ll get over it.



THE MEETING, at least, goes blissfully smooth over the next two hours. No one asks questions at the end, for once, which means I can actually leave at five on the dot. When was the last time that’s happened? I decide it’s a good time to run to the gym, since the place I visit is usually quiet at this time of day. But because of my long, obnoxious hours, I never get to step foot in the place until well after eight in the evening. And by that point, it’s filled to the brim with scrawny twenty-year-olds with terrible form stinking up the place and forgetting to rerack their weights when they’re done.

As I step into the gym, several women at the front counter immediately look up from their conversation and smile at me. Their cheeks flush when I give them a flirtatious smile back, flash my gym tag, and step through the turnstile. The ladies love it when I wear my suit and tie to the gym. When I was younger, when he was still alive, my father once told me that a well-tailored suit was like lingerie to a woman; you find yourself one of those, and it didn’t matter if you hadn’t shaved in a month or went out with bed head. Women would flock to you in droves. And he was right. I run my fingers across my obvious five o’clock shadow and one of the ladies, a gorgeous blonde, sighs at me.

Ever since first stepping foot on my university’s campus, I’ve never had to go to bed alone, and I’d like to keep it that way. Before heading up the stairs, I turn back towards the reception desk. The three women, all dangerous curves and gorgeous smiles, are still staring at me.

“Hey,” I say as I saunter over, then lean across the desk. “Would one of you mind showing me where the sauna is?”

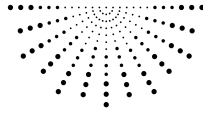
I’m not new. I’ve been going to this gym for the past five years. But I don’t recognize any of these women, and I know for a fact there’s a high turnover rate with the front desk employees, seeing as how I never recognize them week to week. So they wouldn’t know if I’m a newbie or not.

The three women look at each other, sizing one another up. Then the one in the middle with soft, wavy hair that falls past her shoulders and bright, blue eyes as round as dinner plates rushes around the desk, leaving her co-workers in her dust. Their bright smiles fade into disappointed frowns. *Don’t worry, ladies, I think to myself. I’ll be back for you two later.*

My new conquest for the night touches my arm gently and says, “Oh, sure! Right this way, sir.”

“Please,” I say. “Call me Byron.” When I wink at her, she lets out a melodic little giggle that makes my pants feel two sizes too small in the front.

## FAITH



Hell would be a whole lot more fun if I had a penthouse. Every morning on my way to work on the other side of town, I stroll past the Second Layer Lake of Fire. And every morning I stop at the edge of the sidewalk, peer up at the ruby-red sky, and say a silent prayer to Lucifer he'll finally notice my talents for torture and promote me to a proper succubus. Because as a succubus working in the office's Lust and Punishment department, I'll be blessed with... yeah, you guessed it: My very own penthouse on the Lake of Fire.

We lesser demons get to live in hovels of dirt and ash carved out in underground caves and volcanos. It's corporate's way of incentivizing us to do our very best at work. If we're suffering, then our human marks aren't suffering nearly enough and we need to step up our game. That's what they tell us in the staff meetings, at any rate.

I want that penthouse. No, I *need* it. It's fire in my veins and what keeps me motivated on my very worst days. And lately, I've had a lot of worst days. Brushing my dark, wavy locks back behind my shoulders, I make my way past the penthouse's front entrance and sniffle when I spot several gorgeous succubi saunter past wearing tight leather skirts and corsets. Their wings clasp between their shoulder blades, and I'm hit with a pang of envy. Wings. Another thing you get if you get promoted to succubus. The absence of anything between my own shoulders is suddenly obvious to me, and I grind my molars into dust.

They're coming back from another successful day of work, no doubt, and now they get to lounge on the beach and submerge themselves in molten lava while they sip on blood wine coolers. I'm so jealous, my crimson skin is turning green.

When I finally reach my place of employment, the Lust & Torment Center 451, which is nothing more than a black brick building that overlooks a shitty little alleyway filled with dumpsters containing severed heads and limbs, I already want to leave. To be honest with myself for once, I really hate this job. I wasn't given a choice of career, though, since all lesser demons are given an assignment the second we pop out of the mounds of ash that birth us. Ready to work before we even know how to walk.

I know what everyone is going to say. "Faith, how come you've only tortured two damned souls this month? Isn't the average thirty?"

Yes. The average total is, in fact, thirty. And the ones who get promoted to succubi usually take on fifty or more. And here I am with my pitiful two souls condemned to the third layer of Hell. My job as a torturer means I go to Earth to sift through the dregs of humanity and punish them. But lately, I've been coming up short in my talents. And my department manager has definitely noticed.

I slink past his office, clutching my human-skin briefcase to my chest, and silently pray once again that this dolt of a goblin doesn't notice me. As I creep past his open doorway, I cast a nervous glance towards his chair. Which he isn't currently in. Fuck. The fucker is right behind me, isn't he?

"Faith," my boss's voice grinds out from behind me. I wince. My tail twitches, and I slowly turn around to face the hobgoblin, Lucardio, who is the size of an Earth raccoon but twenty times meaner, if you can even believe that. His amber eyes lock onto mine and I gulp. "Arriving to the office a little late this morning, aren't you?" he asks as he brings his mug to his lips. It's steaming full of something tar-like and nasty. I don't know what goblins eat and drink, and judging from the musky, putrid scent emanating from his cup, I don't think I want to know, either.

Combing my fingers through my hair, I try my best to smile sweetly and say, “My five alarms failed to wake me up, I’m afraid. I had a rough night.”

If I thought my boss would be understanding, I’m sorely mistaken.

“Faith. You do realize it’s the end of the month, right?”

I nod, my smile fading. Yeah. It’s kind of hard not to notice it’s the end of the month when I’ve missed my quota by twenty-eight souls and everyone keeps reminding me of that fact every second I’m awake.

“And what are you going to do about that?” he growls. My manager is a dick, but he’s at least a reasonable dick. I might be able to negotiate with him. Maybe pop him a little titty, give him the best hour of his life to buy myself some time. But when I start to unbutton my tight-fitting work shirt, he shakes his head.

“No, Faith. That’s not going to work on me. You have two days left to bag yourself a high-value soul, or that pert ass of yours is going straight to the Pit,” he says so forcefully, some of his spit lands on my face and burns my cheek like an errant cinder. Ew. I wipe his saliva away and shoot him a withering look.

“Two days? That’s impossible,” I say, planting a hand on my hip. “At least give me a fucking week.”

“You’ve had thousands of years, and what have you done with them? Squandered ’em. Look around you, honey.” Lucardio gestures with a wave of his hand. We’re in a gods damned alabaster hallway with wall-to-wall gray carpeting. What am I supposed to be looking at? The blank wall? “You’re working in the highest paying, most competitive corporation in the Second Layer of Hell! And the only reason you got this job to begin with was because you blew the CEO at his bachelor party.”

Ah, yes. I smile fondly at the memory as I’m taken back to that hazy, drunken afternoon. What a wonderful weekend that was. Full of blood wine and the screaming souls of murderers.

“Faith,” my boss snaps, bringing me out of my reverie. “Get with the program. You’re not cut out for this lifestyle, honey.”

How many times has someone told me that in the past thousand years? The past month? Hell, even the past hour? Too many to count, I’m sure, but never once did I believe them. Just because I hate my job doesn’t mean I’m terrible at it. Sure, I might not be the cream of the crop like Mordecai and Malakai, the succubus and incubus tag team who make mortal wishes come true before plunging their souls into a fiery inferno. But I have promise, dammit! I have potential! Human men love me! I am adored!

“I can do it,” I hiss, and turn on my heel to leave. I’m not going to let some scrawny hobgoblin ruin my day, manager or not.

“Two days, Faith. And then after that? You know what that means,” he threatens, his voice husky like tobacco smoke.

“Yeah, yeah,” I drawl, and wave my hand dismissively overhead without looking back. “You’ll have your stupid high-value soul. And then you’ll eat your words.”

My boss lets out a deep cackle. “Hah! It’ll be a cold day in Hell indeed when that happens, Faith. A cold day, indeed.”



LOOK, I know I’m hot stuff. Every man I meet on Earth can barely keep their tongues in their mouths when they see me walk past. There are a few demons working at the office who have the unique ability to drive a man insane simply from looking at them, but that wouldn’t be very fun. I pride myself in being a little more hands-on with my craft, and I can’t have their brains dribbling out of their ears every time they look at me, so I’m thankful I’m only a moderately hot lesser demon. To keep things fair, you know? I’m sure I can figure something out. I’m an intelligent woman, after all.



Once I'm back in my cubicle, I collect the equipment from within my desk and prepare for my assignment. Rather, challenge. Because the goblin is right. If I can't make these next two days work, I'm finished. Everyone in the building knows it, judging from the way they look at me as they go past my cubicle.

Sondra, my cubicle neighbor, flashes me a wary smile as she approaches me, holding a cup of coffee in her purple claws.

"Hey. Heard what happened. I am so, so sorry, girl," she says.

I scoff as I shove my favorite flogger into my briefcase. "Sorry for what? You're talking like it's a done deal already. I'm not going to the Pit, Sondra."

Her lashes flutter prettily as she takes a timid swig of her drink. "Mm. Just... be careful up there, okay? I don't want to lose you. You're the only person I can tolerate sitting next to me, and I really don't want to risk some wraith or goblin moving in next to me."

Good old Sondra. She's the best when it comes to pep talks. I flash her my pearly white fangs and grab my bright pink velvet vibrator—the one with the quadruple prongs—and wave it in her face. "Not gonna happen, babe. I'll be back here before the end of the second day with the biggest, baddest soul anyone has ever seen."

Sondra says nothing as she continues to stare at me. Yeah. She doesn't believe me. It's cool, though. I believe in me. And confidence is half the battle, right? Or was that showing up? Fuck it, doesn't matter. I'm bagging myself a juicy soul so big I'm going to need a behemoth to help me carry it back down.

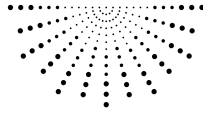
I just need to find the perfect place to hunt first, and I'll be off to the races. Most of the souls I've tortured in the past have been happy accidents. I'd run into them at concerts, parks, even on the street. I have no idea how the top performers do it, and I've been too embarrassed to ask for help. But the stakes are too high to play it fast and loose. This time, I need a plan.

“But, uh, just to refresh my memory... where do the biggest, baddest souls hang out, anyway? Prisons, right?” I ask shyly. Sondra rolls her eyes.

“No, you dummy. The top floors of companies. The billionaires,” she says in a voice that suggests I am as dim as a botfly. “Try a tech company or something.” Then she rolls her eyes again. “You’re acting like you’re new to this.”

“Billionaires. Riiiiight,” I say, my voice a silken purr, and purse my lips. Okay, that might be a tall order. But I can probably make it work. I need to nab myself the meanest, most evil CEO I can find and bring his ass down here. This is going to be so easy, an imp could do it. All I need to do is create a trap so tempting it can’t fail. After all, how does that human saying go? You attract more flies with a jar of honey than vinegar? And I know just the thing that will attract all the flies. Humans are simple creatures, after all.

## BYRON



The next morning, after my beautiful guest has left my apartment showered and sated, it's my turn to wash up.

Technically, I have work, but there's not a lot for me to do this week outside of meetings since we just finished the quarter. The next meeting isn't until noon, so I have some time before I have to be in. Heading out of my apartment fresh and smelling good in a crisp white T-shirt and jeans, I don't look like I work for a financial firm. But I hate wearing the suit all the damn time, so sometimes I like to bring it in with me to change in the employee bathrooms.

Heading down the street, I can't help but notice every woman between the ages of twenty and seventy-five crane their necks to gawk at me. Yeah, I know I look good, especially after a shower when my hair is still damp and behaving. But after making that receptionist come three times last night, I'm exhausted and not interested in hunting for another hook up just yet. I could eat, though. When I turn the corner to head up the street where Fletcher & Sons is, I stop dead in my tracks.

Something is different.

When I look toward the firm, its grand architecture reaching up to the sky, I take in the impressive green awning and narrow my eyes. No. That's still the same. Maybe the department store next door got a new window display or something? But when I check the enormous glass windows for anything out of the ordinary, I shake my head. It's still the same Valentine's Day display they've had up for the past two

weeks. Nothing is out of place about the department store, but something on this street isn't right. Pedestrians run past me to catch a bus that rolls up to the curb, and I look to the other side of the street and squint.

A bright pink-and-purple awning demands my attention, drawing my eyes to the words emblazoned across the cheap plastic: No Sugar Coating It. Baked goods and candy. My feet are already headed in the bakery's direction, and before I realize it, I'm peering through the large glass windows into the shop.

Huh. When did this move in? Considering how little attention I pay to the stores in the area, they could have either moved in yesterday or three years ago. I watch with lifted brows as a mother and her child walk through the front doors and a little tinkle from a bell rings from inside. It's almost cute. But I don't like kids. And I rarely eat sugar because my nutritionist would have an aneurysm if I strayed too far from my meal plans.

Which is great, fitness wise. I'm at the peak of my health and have around 6-7% body fat. Let's just say my personal trainer loves me because I make him look good. Despite feeling nauseous by the smell of cupcakes baking within, I push open the door and step inside. My heart immediately flies into my throat as all the blood rushes straight into my pants.

Behind the Pepto-Bismol pink bakery case is the hottest fucking woman I've ever seen in my life. A buxom woman in a tight-fitting pink dress and a cute, frilly white apron that stretches across her chest. The company's logo is embroidered across her chest, and her dark black hair is pulled up into a sleek ponytail. She's got a smoky eye going on, which I am ravenous for, and her sensual, pouty lips made me wonder what they'd look like wrapped around my dick.

Holy shit, I've finally found an emo chick older than twenty-five. An emo chick working in a cutesy bakery full of pink unicorns, cupcakes, and candy. Where the fuck has she been hiding my whole life? When her bright violet eyes flit from the mother and child to mine, my throat tightens. It's not every day I'm stunned by a beauty like her, because... well,

let's be real. I never encounter beauties like her. All the women I fuck are gorgeous, of course. But none of them look quite so... unique. Even this woman's face isn't quite symmetrical, with her cute, upturned nose and crooked smile that shows just a touch too much teeth. I'm about to go feral.

"I'll be with you in just a moment, sir," she says in a husky, deep voice I wasn't expecting. Oh my God. That settles it. I might've just gotten laid this morning, but I need this woman. And I need her right. *Now*. My pants tighten, and I turn around to face the many plastic tubs filled to the brim with candy in an effort to hide my erection. A new sensation courses through my body at lightning speed: shame. I'm never ashamed of my desires or my erections, because most of the time, women flock to me. They want to see my cock. They like to know what they're getting into.

But when this woman's eyes found me, there was a faint glimmer of something in them I couldn't quite place. A warning. This is her domain, and I'm simply a guest within it. That terrifies me, yes, but I'm also intrigued.

"Thank you again," I hear the mother say, and she walks past me briskly with her son in tow. Then the tinkle of the bell sounds again, and it's just me and the emo woman in the shop. Alone. My heart hammers in my chest as I slowly turn around and shove my hands into my front pockets in an attempt to look as casual as possible. There's something about her that's throwing off my usual confidence. I'm just going to chalk it up to her makeup.

"Nice place," I say, rousing my assertiveness once more. "Been here long?"

The woman smiles at me from behind the counter, but it doesn't reach her eyes. A strong desire to see her smile for real overrides all rational thought, and I take another step forward.

"No," she says. "We just opened, in fact. I'm giving away free samples today. Would you like to try one?" The way she leans across the counter, giving me a wonderful flash of cleavage in the process, is almost too much for me to handle.

Biting my bottom lip, I take a few more steps towards the counter. My erection is so intense it feels like it's going to rip a hole in my pants, but I don't care. "That depends on what the free sample is," I say, trying to sound flirtatious. The woman's lashes flutter.

"We have cupcakes, Red Vines, gummies, cinnamon blasts, caramels..." she rattles off. None of them sound appealing to me, of course, and my heart begins to lower into my stomach as I realize she didn't pick up on my obvious attempts to flirt. I've never had to use more than one line on a woman, but for her, I'm willing to give it another shot.

"No, thanks. I'm not a big sweets person," I say.

Her eyes find mine again, and the corner of her mouth curls into a smirk. "Then... what are you doing in here?"

She's been lured into my trap, and now all I have to do is snare her. Easy.

"I saw you through the window and couldn't pass up the opportunity to come in and say hello to you," I say, flashing her my most winsome smile. The same smile that melts panties and lowers inhibitions. "I work across the street at Fletcher and Sons."

Maybe it's just my imagination, but I swear I see her push her arms together, mashing her breasts together briefly. I'm going to go insane if I don't get inside of her soon.

"Oh?" Her gaze skirts over my frame, up and down, appraising me. "And what is it that you do over there, then? Work at the reception desk?" The playful lilt in her voice tells me she's joking, and I force myself to chuckle for her benefit before combing my fingers through my damp hair.

"Nah, sweetheart. I'm on the top floors. I'm the Chief Analytics Officer."

That gets her attention, and she bolts upright, jiggling her breasts in the process. "Oh, a CAO, then? Impressive. I've never had a CAO or CEO or anything like that in my store."

"Yeah, but you just opened, right? So... you probably will," I murmur, casting a quick glance towards my firm's

building. “I mean, once they hear that such a gorgeous woman is working across the street, they’ll flock to your shop.”

Her pretty eyes narrow for half a second, and she licks her bottom lip. Oh, God. Someone please put me out of my misery. I can’t take it anymore.

“Oh, I hope so. Because I do so *adore* men in suits,” she purrs.

A chill runs up the nape of my neck, like she’s cast some sort of spell on me, and I’m completely entranced, ready to do anything for this woman I don’t even know. What the fuck has gotten into me? Yeah. I need to get her out of my system, fast, before she makes me lose sleep and distracts me during my back-to-back meetings.

“I’m sorry I’m not wearing mine right now, then,” I add.

She walks around the counter, and it’s then that I finally get to see her from the waist down. Her tight dress hugs her upper thighs like a dream, and then I see them: her fishnets and bright pink stiletto heels. Visions of her fishnet-clad thighs wrapped around my head like earmuffs flash before my eyes. Her heels bouncing on my shoulders as I fuck her wet pussy until she’s gasping and moaning my name for everyone on the street to hear.

The woman brushes her hand across my chest, and my throat hitches.

“Why don’t you step into my back office?” she says in a low voice, almost a whisper. “If you’re into analytics, I wouldn’t mind showing you some of mine.”

Oh, I am definitely picking up what she’s throwing down. It doesn’t even matter that her line was terrible and didn’t even make sense. She glides to the front door, flips the “open” sign to “closed,” and then takes my hand into hers to guide me behind the counter. This is happening. This is finally happening. I can almost taste her cunt already. I bet she tastes as delicious as she looks.

She leads me into her back office, which is so tiny it’s barely big enough to count as a closet. And there’s a rickety

old beige box sitting on a desk in the back. Her computer. It looks ancient, though. Is it even real? Does it even turn on? Whatever. After this encounter, I probably won't be back here again or anywhere near her bakery, no matter how many complex feelings she's giving me. My heart leaps into my throat as she drops to her knees in front of me.

“Do you want me to unbuckle my pants, or—” I start, but she looks up at me with a feral, almost predatory grin before shaking her head.

“That won't be necessary,” she hisses, and then the entire room goes black.

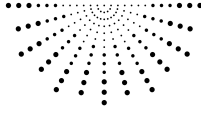
“Hey—did you just turn off the lights?” I ask as I spin around. I didn't see her flip a light switch, but maybe it's automatic? A sudden WHOOSH interrupts my confusion, and below me, a swirling, red vortex appears beneath my feet. Fucking hell, what is going on? I let out a panicked yell, and the woman's cackling booms through the room as though it's being piped in through a stereo system.

“What is going on?!” I cry out.

Her cackling stops, and after an excruciatingly long moment where I wonder if I'm actually dead, she yells, “Welcome to Hell, mortal! I've been expecting you.”



## FAITH



From the moment the human male stepped into my shop, I could smell it: a dirty, disgusting soul rotting within his muscular meat vessel. Waiting to be plucked out, perhaps through his nostrils or maybe even his navel if I'm feeling so inclined. The warm, viscous fires of the Lake of Fire envelope the two of us completely. His delightful screams of terror carry throughout the air before we're submerged. And then, with a snap of my finger, it's all gone. Only pitch-black emptiness surrounds the two of us.

In my true form, I'm even more gorgeous than before. With velvety ruby skin, piercing violet eyes, and a pair of pointy horns on the top of my head, I know I look good. I'm still wearing the dress and the fishnets, of course, but they're now a deep purple to mimic the night sky of Hell, devoid of the stars and moon humans are so accustomed to. Down here, there are no stars and certainly no moon. Only the deepness of the void.

My crimson tail, pronged thrice on the end, curls around his quaking form as he curls into the fetal position before me. He's petrified. I love it when men like him get their just desserts. And they always do, in the end.

"Stand," I demand, my voice deep and husky like before, only now more visceral and dangerous. He removes his trembling hands from his face and looks up at me, tears streaking his cheeks. Oh, poor baby. He's so scared he's crying. "Now. I will not tell you a second time."

Finally, he does what I say and pushes himself to stand, his entire body shaking like a dying leaf on a branch in fall. He lets out a hoarse whimper as I walk around him slowly. My heel clicks echo in the nothingness, and when I pace around to his back, I lean in to whisper in his ear, “What’s your name, human?”

He swallows, then says, “B-Byron. I’m Byron Waits.”

“Byron,” I try the name out for myself and sneer. “What sort of name is that?”

Byron’s lips tremble before his words tumble out of them. “I... I don’t know. My mother gave me it to me.”

Right. Humans have parents and families and other folks who probably love them. People who care enough to name them. Even someone with a stained soul such as his has a mother who probably loves him. Demons name themselves when they come into existence, and I chose Faith the second I opened my eyes, cementing myself as a woman with a cruel sense of humor.

“Tell me, Byron,” I say as I pace around him again, then run my claws along his chest, relishing in the fact that his skin is growing paler and paler by the second. “Are you kind to your mother? Do you visit her regularly?”

Byron falls silent for a long, long moment. Until he finally hangs his head and lets out another sob. “N-No. I do not.”

Of course he doesn’t. Men like him don’t respect their mothers. And then they go on to disrespecting all women in a degrading cycle that never ends. It’s pathetic, really. But they do make such fun little playthings. I’m going to enjoy this, I decide.

I shoot him a malicious frown and say, “Come, little pet. I’m taking you home with me. I’m Faith, by the way, and I’ll be your demon for this outing.”

He blinks, then looks around. “But... but there’s nothing around. What are you going to do to me?”

The blackness fades into deep, sanguine rivers beneath our feet. The sky above returns to its hazy sienna and mustard

yellow. Cloudless, of course, but more beautiful than any Earth sky I've ever seen.

“What am I going to do to you, you ask? Punish you for being such a bad, bad boy, of course,” I say, then stick my forked tongue out at him. He gasps when he catches sight of it. “And you've been so very bad, Byron.”



I SPIRIT Byron and I away to my apartment, which is a literal hovel dug out in the side of an active volcano. It's served me well for a millennium or more. Hell if I know how much time has passed, but it's no penthouse. And the ash that's constantly billowing in through the cavern entrance from all the frequent eruptions is a huge pain in the ass. I'm constantly snapping my fingers to magic it all away. My fingers are exhausted.

My bed, which is the only comfy thing in the entire place, sits in the middle of the dark room. Stalactites hang over the bed, which is an enormous round red cushion with blankets strewn across it. It's nothing fancy, but I like it. The rest is your basic cave, no more, no less. There's no need for me to eat, so there's no kitchen. And I don't need a bathroom in Hell because I don't have any of *those* bodily functions. When on Earth, I love to take as many baths and showers as possible. A luxury of sorts, I guess.

The human, Bryan or Baron or whatever the fuck his name is, I've already forgotten, immediately throws up all over the floor. The splatter just misses my shoes.

“Looks like someone's getting extra punishment,” I mutter. Then I snap my fingers and the puddle of waste disappears into thin air, like it never even happened. The human looks up at me, his skin turning sickly green.

“P-Please... whatever you want. I'll give it to you. I have money,” he groans as he staggers toward my bed. Oh, no. No, no, no. He's not going to get any stains on my comforter. It's literally the only nice thing I own.

“Step away from the bed,” I say, pointing a claw at his back. “Or I will remove that handsome head from your shoulders, and you won’t be allowed to redeem yourself for that pitiful display. Seriously. Are you prone to motion sickness or something?”

He sways back and forth and runs the back of his hand across his clammy forehead. It’s a million degrees in here and yet he looks... wet. Oh. Wait. Sweating. He’s sweating. Something humans do when they’re too hot or ill or overexerted, right? And I guess we could check all three of those things off on his list right now.

I let out a sigh as I approach him. He flinches and takes a step back.

“Ugh. Look. You can sit down on the ground and put your head between your knees if you need to,” I say. The guy’s name finally comes back to me, so I say, “Byron, right? You’re no use to me if you’re already acting like a sad little worm, so just sit down and chill, please.”

“Chill?” Byron’s fierce blue eyes snap open as he glares at me, but he sits down anyway. “Really, lady? Or whatever the fuck you are. That’s rich, considering you just kidnapped me. And now you want me to chill?”

I press my palms together in a praying gesture and press them against my forehead. “Kay. Look. I get it. This is scary for you. And it’s kind of scary for me, too, since you’re literally my last assignment before I’m thrown into the bowels of Hell with no hope of escape.”

Byron looks around, his eye twitching slightly. “This isn’t already Hell? Where are we now, then?”

I sigh. Right. He doesn’t understand because he’s a human mortal.

“There’s... layers to Hell. So, yes. This is Hell. It’s the Second Layer. Lust. But the place where I’m going to be sent to, unless I somehow extract an extra juicy soul from your walking pile of meat, is the Pit. I’ll waste away for the rest of eternity, only without the pay and benefits. It’s a huge

demotion. I'll get to suffer while buried up to my neck in brimstone and mud and watch as bigger, better demons pass through, ignoring my existence while using my skull as a steppingstone."

Byron sits down on the edge of my bed. Without permission. But this time, and only this time, I'll allow it. Because he looks so gosh-darn cute with that confused look on his face. Like one of those Earth puppies humans go mad for.

"None of that made sense to me, but I think I heard the word 'demotion,' and I'm really sorry. That's what it is, right?"

I nod. Okay, normally I wouldn't have a conversation with the very souls I'm supposed to torment, but it's been ages since anyone's actually listened to me. I sit down next to him and sigh. "Yes. You could call it that, I suppose. I'm a lesser demon of Hell working in one of the most competitive soul-extracting agencies in the Second Layer, and it's exhausting. And it doesn't pay well. I mean, look around you." I gesture to the room and wince.

"I get it. Really, I do. I know it might not seem like I do, but I can understand the pressure," he says, and places his hand on my knee. Is he serious right now? When I scowl at his hand, he quickly removes it. "Sorry, sorry. Forgot myself for a second. Usually when I try to woo a woman, it's to sleep with her, not to save my own neck."

"Yeah. I know. I know a lot about you and your womanizing ways," I say, my voice dripping with contempt.

His brow shoots up. "Um, how do you do that, exactly? Can you read my mind or something?"

I shake my head. "No. Nothing so lucid as that. I see your soul as a sort of painter's canvas. Babies have blank canvases, obviously. But as you go through life, your canvas either gets color thrown onto it like a painting, or it gets stained from misdeeds. And yours looks like someone mud-wrestled across it."

Byron's shoulders slump forward. "I see."

That's it? Just, "I see?" I was prepared for him to get down on his hands and knees and beg me for forgiveness like they usually do, or give me a litany of excuses or tell me why they're not so bad after all, really. I've heard every excuse in the book. It's never changed my mind about punishing them and extracting their souls, of course, because I never make a mistake. I've never taken an innocent. Every single soul I've taken over my millennium of service has deserved it, tenfold.

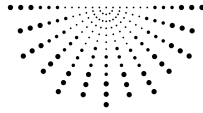
"You're right. My soul is pretty tarnished at this point. I'm not even thirty and I can't seem to get my shit together," he says with a slow shake of his head. He lets out a huff that sounds suspiciously like disappointment. Then, when he lifts his head to meet my gaze, he murmurs, "And if you showed up to take my soul, it must mean I deserve to be punished, right?"

I nod, blinking. What the heck is happening right now? This guy is a weirdo, and I'm not sure I want to deal with that right now. Not as my last mark. Maybe I grabbed a dud and I should return him before I waste even more time.

"Then..." He drops down to his hands and knees. Ah, yes. Here it comes. The crying, the begging, the desperation to save his own skin. I'm honestly kind of disappointed. I was hoping Byron would surprise me, but it turns out he's the same as the rest. "Please, Mistress. Please, punish me as you see fit."

I choke on my own saliva mid-swallow and my eyes fly open. "I'm—I'm sorry, what?"

## BYRON



When I first saw Faith, I thought she was an angel on Earth in her fishnets and cleavage-popping dress. All I wanted to do was bury myself in between her thighs, come on her tits, and then head into work, satisfied. By five o'clock, I'd probably have found myself another pretty little thing to take home with me for the night. Go a few rounds, come on her tits, shower, and then go to sleep. Rinse, repeat.

Deep down, somewhere inside this blackened soul of mine, I knew what I was doing wasn't right. I mean, the women never complained. Not really. Yeah, some of them would get attached. At least in the beginning, until I figured out which ones were going to cling to me like toilet paper on the bottom of my shoe. But once I started choosing better, it seemed like things were fine. They knew the name of the game, because they were playing it, too. But messing around, while fun, is probably what's contributed to me being picked up by a literal demon.

A hot demon, no less, but still a demon.

Faith stares down at me like I just suggested we run off, get married, and have five kids. Of course she is, because she's probably used to taking her victims kicking and screaming. But I want this. No, I *need* this. Clearly, my lifestyle isn't working out for me, and I've been a huge dick to my colleagues, too. Fuck it, maybe this is my Charles Dickens moment, and I finally got food poisoning before falling asleep and now I'm being given the opportunity to turn my life

around or something. If that's the case, then I'd be a fool to squander this moment. I need to play my cards right. If she's my last stop before eternal damnation, I better start convincing her to help me out.

"Please," I murmur again, and lift my hands, clasped tightly together, and shake them. "Please help me."

Finally, after eons of waiting for her to reply, she says, "I'm not in the business of reforming souls, my guy. I'm supposed to break and extract them. What you're asking for, I can't give you. You should have asked for forgiveness while you were still on Earth."

My heart sinks. Yeah, I figured it was too late to save my soul. But I'm not about to give up. Maybe I can use reverse psychology on her? She's a demon, so she probably enjoys more submissive prey, right? It's worth a shot. I've never once submitted to a woman, but fake it till you make it, I guess. I lower my head down to her boots, sharp black heels that shine like an oil spill. "I'm sorry," I rasp. "Do what you must, then."

She lets out another squeak of surprise, which... honestly sounds adorable coming from her. "It's no fun if you're legitimately repentant. I'm going to have to take you back to Earth and try again while I still have time."

I could kiss her for that, but I keep my elation to myself. Raising my gaze to meet hers, I grind out, "Thank you, mistress. And... and I hope you find a truly deserving soul so you can get your, er, promotion." Okay, now I'm laying it on a little thick. Judging from the way she snuffles and glares down at me, it's pretty much confirmed.

Faith's throat bobs up and down as her face twists into a sour expression. How is it that she's both the most gorgeous creature I've ever seen in my life and also the most terrifying? Beauty, true beauty, is harrowing, evidently.

"Get up. Now," she barks. Immediately, I'm on my feet. She's shorter than I am, but not by much. It takes effort not to meet her eyes. I'm too afraid to look directly at her, like I'd be challenging a wild animal to a fight I know I couldn't win.



“Thank you,” I mutter. “Thank you.”

“Oh, shush, will you? I’m not doing you any favors, trust me.”

I blink. “Y-You’re not?”

She smooths the wrinkles in her dress and scoffs. “No. At your rate, you’re just going to wind up back down here anyway. And you won’t get lucky a second time, either. You’ll probably land your ass down in layer eight.”

Furrowing my brow, I ask, “What’s layer eight?”

“The Fraud department.”

Is that really going to be my fate? I mean, I know I can be a jerk, but I didn’t think... shit, she’s probably right. My hands ball into fists at my sides. “How can I avoid that?”

“Seriously?” She runs her claws through her glossy hair. “You avoid it by being good. Whatever that means to you.”

She’s definitely not an angel, I know that, but better to deal with the devil you know than the one you don’t, right? I clear my throat and lift my chin. “C-Could you help me? Figure out how? Because if I know the rules, then I’ll be able to follow them. Please, mistress.”

I can’t wind up back down here. I need my Scrooge moment.

She strides around her bed and pulls out a leather bag that looks suspiciously like human skin. I’m not sure what kind of skin it is, but I really hope it’s some sort of animal hide and not something else. When she rummages through the bag, she pulls out a few tools I’ve seen before on earth. A cane, a flogger, some nipple clamps. Your typical BDSM gear they sell in every store throughout the city. Nothing alarming. Nothing I’ve had used on me before, either, but I’m fascinated by it all.

I watch in silence as she sets everything out on her bed in an orderly fashion, my hands clasped behind my back.

“Were you a submissive back on Earth or something...?” she finally asks, not bothering to look my way as she arranges

everything.

“No, actually. I’ve never been into kink before,” I say. Sure, I’ve walked past some clubs during late-night drinking with the boys, but I never went inside. “But I suppose I could be a... What’s the term for the people who go back and forth?”

She looks up at me and raises an incredulous brow. “You’re such a dumbass, you know that?”

“Yeah. Yeah, I am. I think being a dumbass is the reason why I’m here though, right?” I ask. “It’s just that I’m a little more self-aware than some of your other garden-variety souls.”

The demon chuckles—actually chuckles—and my chest tightens at the sound. God, she’s so gorgeous. Even with that malicious snarl on her face, she’s still the most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen in my life. But no longer do I want to bury myself between her thighs and make her mine. I want her to make me *hers*. For my soul, of course. And maybe I’ll even get to enjoy the experience a little. My eyes drink her all in again, and I home in on her horns. Damn, they look grabbable.

“You say that now,” she says with a snort. “But fine. I’ll help you through a system of techniques I know.”

My mouth widens into a broad smile. “Really? What’s the system?”

“Beating the bad out of you, of course,” she says flatly. I open my mouth to say something, but she shakes her head. “And we’re not doing it here. I can’t have you throwing up all over my apartment again. I can magic away the mess but not the smell. And I want something in return for this, Byron Waits.”

My entire body tenses. “Okay... what do you want?”

Bargaining with a demon sounds like an incredibly bad idea, but what choice do I have? I’m already pushing my luck far enough as it is.

“I want you to help me get the souls I need before the end of tomorrow.”

Before I can say anything, she raises her hand in the air and snaps her finger. The cavern walls around us drip away, like someone tossed alcohol onto a painting. We're suddenly plunged back into dark nothingness, and I whirl around, trying to make out even just a tendril of light. Anything to help me center myself.

"Relax, please. I don't want you vomiting on my shoes. They're Jimmy Choos," she hisses.

"You have expensive taste," I say, mildly impressed. If she likes Jimmy Choos, I could provide her with as many pairs as she'd like. I'm not even sure why I'm entertaining that thought, considering she's about to beat the shit out of me. Plus, I've never bought a woman anything other than dinner before.

A burst of light explodes around us, so harsh I have to raise my arms to block it out. My head throbs for half a second until Faith places her hand on my wrist and guides my arms back down. "We're here," she murmurs.

When my eyes refocus to the light, I notice we're... right back in her candy shop? Squinting, I stare at the case of baked goods. Muffins and cupcakes are piled high on top of one another, and bowls of candy sit on top of the countertop, undisturbed. Colorful advertisements depicting vintage drawings decorate the walls, and glass jars filled with candies line the shelves.

"Why?" is the only word I can utter.

She shrugs. "Because I don't have time or energy to conjure an entirely new venue, Byron. Time is of the essence here. What? You don't like it? Not fun enough for you?"

Fun? This demon has a sick sense of humor, which only makes my balls tighten. Fuck, this chick is hot. She pulls a chair out from behind the bakery case and points at it with a perfectly manicured claw. Her tail writhes behind her, and I have a sudden desire to know what it would feel like to have it wrapped around my throat.

"Strip. Then sit," she commands.

Without hesitation, I unbutton my Oxford shirt and toss it onto the floor. I don't miss the small hitch in her throat when her hungry gaze roves over my flat stomach. All the hours spent in the gym honing my body and pushing it past its limits have made me somewhat vain. Okay, a *lot* vain. I know I look good, but when Faith looks at me like I'm something to be devoured, a swell of pride rises in my chest. I'm happy she likes looking at me. Next, I unbutton my pants and roll them over my hip bones. Another happy sound tears through her throat, followed by an indignant huff. She's trying not to show her pleasure, but I know a happy woman when I hear one.

"Like what you see?" I can't help but ask. It's the wrong thing to say, because her tail snaps forward and streaks across my chest. It stings, and I expect to see a smear of red where her tail was. But instead, there's nothing there. No marks. No cut. Wincing, I bow my head. "I'm sorry," I say quickly.

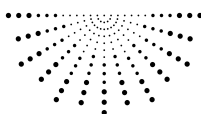
"You don't speak unless I tell you to. You don't do anything unless I tell you to," she snaps.

I nod. "I understand, mistress."

"And don't call me that, either. Call me Faith. And only Faith. My name on your lips is the only thing I want to hear. Got it?"

When I finally look up to meet her gaze, I notice a flicker of something in those big, beautiful purple eyes of hers. Not hate. Not exactly. But something else. A promise of my soul's salvation.

## FAITH



This human has been surprising so far, but I'm sure that's about to end once I start flogging him. They always end up screaming and crying for their mothers once the real pain begins, and Byron will be no different. Even if he lowers his gaze to the floor and calls me mistress, it won't change the fact that he's going to fall apart and crumble like the Roman Empire the second he tastes the lash.

He bore my tail well, though. There's no denying that. I'd love to curl it around his throat, squeeze, and watch the light leave his eyes. But that's for later. Much later. I want to savor this. Byron, now fully naked and surprisingly erect, stands before me with his hands behind his back. Staring down at his cock, I'm kind of impressed that despite the big game he talks, he can actually back some of it up with his dick.

Huh. Bigger than I'm used to, in fact. Another demon would probably want to squash his cock beneath her heel or poke it with iron nails fresh from the forge. But all I want to do is suck it, tease it, lap up the precious beads of precum that spill from his pinkish head. I slap my cheek, freeing myself of the wayward thought, and watch with some satisfaction as he sits obediently on the chair.

"Good. You can listen," I say, rolling my eyes, but deep down I want to run my fingers through his thick, soft-looking hair. It's crap like that, though, that's kept me a lesser demon for these past hundred or so centuries. Time in Hell has little meaning when you're immortal, but it feels like I've been stuck in my current position forever. Because in the end,

despite my best intentions, I'm always too damn nice to these idiots. I wind up taking it easy on them and letting their souls pass from this realm into the next with relative ease and not in the painful torment they're supposed to leave the world in.

Some of his brown hair falls over his face, making his strong, masculine features appear suddenly so boyish. My heart clenches for half a second, and before I can think better of it, I blurt out, "Your safe word. What is it?"

Wait. Why did I just say that? I'm a literal demon from Hell, destined to become a powerful succubus with a penthouse on the Lake of Fire. I don't let my victims pick safe words because there is no safety here. Yet, when I look upon his face, the way his bottom lip trembles with reverence and the way his eyes look at me as though I'm the most beautiful thing he's ever seen... I can't help but want to protect him. Hold him. This mortal is dangerous.

"Buttery biscuit," he mutters under his breath. I blink rapidly and swat his thigh gently with the end of my tail.

"I'm sorry, what?"

He lifts his chin and repeats, "Buttery biscuit. It was... a safe word I used before. During light contact play. It didn't last long, though."

"Because you're a little buttery biscuit bitch, or because you and your girlfriend realized, *oh, no!*" I adopt a cutesy, patronizing tone in my voice before continuing my mockery. "*Hitting is so vewy scawy!* and then went back to your boring vanilla sex?" I admonish.

He doesn't so much as smirk when he shrugs. "Yeah. Something like that, I guess."

I huff and tap my foot. "We're giving you a different safe word because I'm not about to have you scream that at the top of your lungs, which you are definitely going to do."

"May I ask a question first?" he asks, and I raise a brow.

"Um, yeah. What is it?"

He fidgets in his seat and then says, “You said you can see my soul, how black it is. Can you see the origin of the... er, stains?”

I nod. “Snippets. Like, if I’m dealing with a murderer, then I usually get flashes of what they did.” I grimace at the memory of some the shittier mortals I’ve punished. Yes, it was the job I was literally created for, but I couldn’t scrub the visions of their past from my brain. Wish I could. Humans were absolutely vile.

He nods. “What do you see in me, then?”

Squinting, I inch closer to him. This might be a trick. Humans are crafty little bastards if you aren’t careful, but I didn’t get a good, hard look at his stains earlier. Because if I look too long, too hard at them, I might see something I don’t want to see. Yeah, I might be a demon, but I still have feelings, dammit.

“I see...” I find a brownish smudge located somewhere between his ribcage and his sternum. “You pushed a girl off the swing set in the sixth grade because she said she didn’t like you. What the fuck?”

He chuckles sadly at the memory and shakes his head. “Poor Charolette. Yeah. I remember that. I was such a little asshole.”

But there’s got to be more to it than that. After all, this guy works on the top floor of a major corporation! He goes through women like Kleenex! Squinting harder, I find another smudge, a blacker one, over his heart. Ah, here’s the good stuff. I’m about to see something truly terrible that will make me want to shatter this guy into a thousand pieces.

A woman, standing in the rain, looking down at a child. The child is weeping, no, sobbing into his little dirty hands. She barely gives him a secondary glance before boarding a bus and then riding away, leaving the child behind.

“What is this?” I wonder out loud. “How is this here? It doesn’t even feature you, just a little kid in the rain and a woman on a bus.”

His eyes meet mine, and then I see it: genuine sadness. Pain, and not the fun kind. His heart breaks in front of me all over again, and before I know it, he's weeping into his hands like that little boy.

"That was you," I murmur. "That little boy was you, wasn't it?"

"Yes," he chokes out. "That was my mother."

"And she left you," I whisper, and without thinking, place my claws on top of his head. "She left you in the rain. Her son." Was I punishing the wrong person? I should probably go find that woman, the one who thought it was acceptable to leave a small child behind. I'd love to tie her up over a fire pit and watch her sweat as her insides cook. Then another realization hits me: I really did screw this up. Instead of finding a tarnished soul created through a lifetime of misdeeds, I found a wounded one. Sometimes, it was difficult to distinguish wounded souls from damned souls because their colors were so strikingly alike. I really am an imposter, after all.

The implications scare me. Could I have sent wounded souls to hell instead of damned ones? No, no, I can't think about that right now. It's too alarming and there's too little time.

"Please," he groans. I let out a sharp gasp when he grabs my hands and squeezes them. "You have to help me forget."

This might be above my pay grade and totally not what I'm supposed to be doing right now, but it would also be the right thing to do. To help this man, whose soul and entire trajectory of life has been blackened because of the actions of another. It's not fair. It's not right. But what else can we do? It happens to a lot of people. The vast majority of people aren't born bad. Evil is created. Some decide that the pain that was inflicted on them needs to be paid back tenfold, while others manage to devote their lives to ensuring the shit they endured doesn't happen to anyone else. I don't know why humans are like that. I don't make the rules. I just work here.



“Sure,” I say, running my fingers through his hair. “But you still have to pick a safe word. One that doesn’t make me want to scratch my eyeballs out.”

He grins up at me and says, “Angel.”

“Angel? Those smug winged assholes who toot on little horns and act like they’re so much better than the rest of us?” I ask. He shakes his head. “Then why would you pick that? To taunt me?” I nudge him in the chest with my stiletto and he lets out a groan. “Answer me.”

“Ugh. Fine. It’s... it’s what I think of when I look at you. Angel. I want that to be my safe word, please.”

My chest tightens, and I can’t believe I’m doing this, but I say, “Ugh, fine. Your safe word is angel. But I really, really hope you don’t have to use it.”

Byron chuckles, and heat radiates between my legs. Holy shit. His laughter is throaty, like a growl, and it sends a tingle of lightning straight into my clits. Yes, clits, plural. I need to make him laugh again, because that felt almost... divine. “Since I’m doing you an epic favor, I expect one in turn.”

“Of course, Faith. Anything,” he says, his voice breathy and delicious.

I clench my jaw. His submission is delicious. Too delicious, as it’s making me swoon so hard I’m starting to see hearts in my eyes. Get it together, girl.

“You’re going to let me into your little company so I can find a truly reprehensible soul to torment,” I say, keeping my voice as even as possible.

Byron laughs again, and I squeeze my thighs tight together. “Sure. I can do that, beautiful.”

“Stop trying to sweet-talk me.”

“Stop making it so easy, then,” he snipes back. Ugh. Banter. I loathe banter. Without thinking, I snap my fingers and dark, sweet-smelling vines rush forward from behind the bakery case and wind themselves around Byron and the chair, pinning him in place. They wrap tight across his abs, his chest,

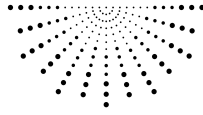
his thighs, and firmly plant his cock up straight across his navel. At first, he struggles against the confectionary ropes, wincing as they tighten across his skin. His complexion pales, and I frown.

“Vines. Loosen,” I command them, and they relax ever so slightly. Color returns to Byron’s skin, and I nod. “Is that more comfortable? How do they feel?”

Byron lets out a low grunt as he strains against the vines. “Perfect. But, uh... are you seriously tying me up with candy right now?”

“You bet your sweet cheeks I am,” I say with a wink. “You have to work with what you’ve got, after all.”

## BYRON



I'm as hard as freshly forged steel, and the blood pumping in my veins is just as hot when Faith looms over me, her heel on the edge of my chair. She grabs hold of my hair and yanks it. Hard. I let out a grunt as she jerks my head to the side. I know I practically begged for this, but I'm beginning to have regrets.

"This is going to be fun," she purrs. Precum runs down my length. Such a traitor my dick turned out to be. She hasn't even done anything to me, and already I'm weak for her. I want her. Need her. And I'd be willing to do just about anything to get her.

"I can already smell your arousal, too," she murmurs into my ear, and before I can answer, her tongue darts across my earlobe, sending a chill down my spine. And then I feel them—the forks on her slender tongue running down my lobe, exploring the warm skin of my neck. "Your sweat tastes of fear and obedience. I crave more of it."

"You'll have it, then, Faith," I answer her hoarsely. "Anything you need."

It's the correct answer, because a small smirk graces her plush lips. Lips I desperately crave on my cock as soon as possible. But there was no way she's going to give me what I want. After all, this is about what I need. And I need to get the shit kicked out of me if there's going to be any hope of changing myself. The licorice rope keeping me tied to the chair slowly unfurls, leaving me naked and free... and feeling bereft, for some reason. As though sensing my

disappointment, Faith smiles at me, showing off a bit of fang. Adorable, in a wild sort of way.

“Don’t worry,” she coos, and then the same vines that retreated seconds ago wrap around my wrists and pull my forearms together. “All part of the game.”

The vines crack like leather whips as they shoot up to the ceiling, taking me along with them. In one sudden, terrifying movement, I’m hanging from the ceiling, spread eagle in the air. Faith walks around me slowly and runs two of her claws along my backside. Goosebumps emerge on my skin, and she swats my leg playfully.

“Comfortable? Feel any loss of circulation in any of your body parts?” she asks. Despite being a literal Hell demon, she’s considerate. It doesn’t seem like she wants to actually wreck my shit. Not in any sort of permanent way, at least, though that remains to be seen. Who knows? Maybe after having her way with me, she’ll throw me into a vortex or feed me to a hellbeast. I should be out of my mind scared right now, yet being tied up like this is oddly... freeing. It feels good. Feels right.

“Very,” I answer, and Faith smiles. This time, it’s genuine and reaches her eyes. She’s so lovely when she smiles, but I know better than to tell her that because I like my balls attached to my body. “Thank you.”

“It’s no fun if your arms and legs fall off because I didn’t take proper care of you before tearing you apart,” she says, and I smirk at the flatness in her voice. I know deep down somewhere, she’s enjoying herself, too. “Have you ever taken it from a woman before?”

I blink as she walks underneath my muscular frame and runs her palm across the length of my cock, still erect and hanging down towards the floor. Shuddering, I mutter, “N-No. You mean, have I ever let a woman top me before?”

“That’s exactly what I mean, yes,” she lilts. “I will have you submit completely to me, Byron. Otherwise, none of this will work as intended.”

“How does this work, even?” I rasp. For all I know, she could just be beating me for her own sadistic pleasure.

“The more you submit and orgasm, the better my magic can weave into your body and coax your troubled soul,” she says as she slaps me on the ass.

My eyes light up. “So, there will be orgasms, then?”

“I love that’s what you took away from that,” she mutters, followed by a sigh. “Yes. Sexual energy will help me unfuck your soul like a tangled mess of Christmas lights. Or... that’s my theory, anyway.”

My brows slam together. “Your theory.”

“Yeah, I told you back in the apartment. I don’t do this sort of thing. I’m not in the soul reformation department! That’s a totally different thing! Just let me work,” she hisses.

“Okay, okay... sorry,” I mutter.

The ropes lower themselves a few inches so that I now hover at Faith’s waist. She slips her claws over her apron and begins to untie it from the neck. The display is agonizing as she teases the apron open, then wriggles the dress lower, threatening to spill her breasts free. I’ve been fantasizing about her naked ever since I laid eyes on her, and now it seems I’ll finally be able to put my curiosity to rest. When she finally shimmies the dress down to her waist, she lets it fall to the floor.

Her large breasts spring free, and I suck in an aroused gasp. Faith’s dark red nipples, so round and inviting, look perfect. I imagine myself pinching them, sucking on them until she comes undone underneath me. But again, I remind myself, that’s not going to happen because I’m hers. Hers to do whatever she wants with, to torment. Her little fuck toy. The prospect sends a sharp thrill straight into my cock.

When she steps in front of me, her long, delicate tail dragging behind her, she runs her claws through my hair again. “What would you do to these if you had a choice, I wonder?”

I gnaw on my bottom lip as I try not to stare at her tits. They’re mesmerizing and so, so round... but I jerk my gaze

away. I'm already brutally hard enough as it is. I don't need to bust my load before we've even truly started. Besides, I'm pretty sure she'd remove something vital from my body if I did.

"Answer me," she hisses, snapping my chin between her claws and lifting my gaze to her chest. "What. Would. You. Do?"

"I... I would suck on them," I say, then flick my tongue over my bottom lip as she presses her breasts together. She squishes and plays with them, letting them drop several times before ruffling my hair like I'm a little boy. It's humiliating. But I suppose that's the point.

"That's it? You vanilla Earth mortals are so unimaginative," she says, then tuts gently. "There are so many more things you can do than suck on a tit." She snaps her fingers again, and a silver pair of nipple clamps appear in her hands. Judging from the make and quality of the toy, they look pretty expensive. Except she just magicked them into thin air, so I suppose that's a moot point. "Would you like me to try them on you?"

I know she wants me to say yes, even though I'm not so sure I'm keen on the idea of having my nipples smashed between metal. "I...I don't..."

Sensing my apprehension, she runs a single claw down my cheek and nods. "It's okay. Look, these are pretty tame as far as pain goes. Let me show you, but on myself." Faith holds up the clamps and squeezes one open to demonstrate, then closes it over one of her hardened nipples. She lets out a soft gasp, and my cock throbs. More precum spills from my head and falls to the floor in droplets, pattering against the tiles. Then she places the other onto the other nipple and the chain hangs between her breasts like a low-hanging necklace. The chain twinkles in the sliver of sunlight that trickles in through the blinds, and I'm momentarily stunned. Goddamn, she is a sight to behold like that. So pretty and dressed up.

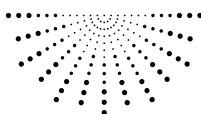
"Ta da. Simple," she says, and gives a little twirl. I can't help but chuckle. For a Hell demon, she's fun, unlike most

people I meet these days, who are primarily focused on how much money they can make. A little demonic ball of sunshine. The desire to please her overwhelms my apprehension, canceling it out. What's the harm in a little experimentation? They're just nipple clamps, after all.

“Okay, I’m game,” I say.

Faith flashes me her fangs again and steps towards me, the silver chain tinkling with every movement.

## FAITH



**M**y new sub squirms in the air as I fasten each nipple clamp to his soft, malleable flesh. The whimpers he makes are music to my ears, of course, but I want him screaming. Call it instinct if you want, but I believe it's the passion for my craft. Once I'm satisfied with the way the silver dangles, the light reflecting off it and glinting with mesmerizing magic, I walk behind him where he can't see me. He lets out a strangled, almost panicked gasp. I smack him on the ass and tut.

"Relax. I'm not leaving you there to rot," I say, then snap my fingers. An enormous purple and pink swirl lollipop appears in my hand. I give it a lick and hum. Oh. Lemon flavor. Disgusting.

Then I run my fingers over the sugary treat until they're covered in the candy. Rubbing my fingers together, I position myself directly behind my sub. "I'm going to touch you again," I say. "Just relax."

He lets out another moan as his entire body clenches in anticipation. This won't do. He won't enjoy any of it or submit well if he's this tight. I run my fingers along his spine in a petting motion until his skin pebbles and all his delicate little hairs stand on end.

"Trust me," I coo. Rich, coming from a demon straight out of Hell, but this guy is a special case. I slide my lollipop-coated finger around the outside of his ass, just around his tight hole. "How does this feel?"



“Sticky,” he says. “What is that?”

I let out a soft chuckle. “A lollipop made of lemon-flavored lube.”

“What?”

I snort. “I know. I tried to summon one that tasted like strawberry, but I guess my even magic has its limits outside of Hell.”

He wriggles, and I dig my claws into his ass to stop him.

“But what about—”

This time, I lower myself and sink my fangs into his ass and bite it like it’s a juicy red apple. Not hard enough to break the skin, of course, just enough to get him to stop his yammering. “That’s enough out of you. Unless you need to safe out, I want you quiet for this next part.”

“Yes, Faith,” he whispers hoarsely. Good. That’s what I like to hear. I insert one of my lubed fingers into his ass and relish the soft grunts he makes as he wriggles back and forth. Those vines, despite being made of candy, are holding him well. I draw my finger in and out of him, delighting in how tight he is. This ass? All mine. This human? Also mine.

At least for now.

I lick his entrance, taking my sweet time, letting my forked tongue run up and down his crevice. Sometimes the intrusive thoughts win. Sometimes it’s just fun to do something new. When you get to be my age, you’ve seen and done it all. But I’ve never put my mouth on a damned soul before. There’s a first time for everything, or so they say, and this might be my last day on the job. I’m going to make every second count.

“Mm, your sweat tastes so sweet,” I murmur as I bury my nose in his ass. My tongue darts in and out of his hole, and he lets out a deep, guttural moan that sends heat straight into my two clits. “Yes, you like that, don’t you? My sweet little plaything enjoys having his ass eaten. Filthy boy.” I slap his ass again for good measure and find myself moaning right along with him. This is getting exciting, apparently for both of us.

I can't just eat his ass all day, though. That's fun for me, but it's hardly a punishment for him. And he needs to be punished. Thoroughly. I stand back up and wipe my mouth clean. Byron lets out a soft sigh, sounding just as disappointed as I am that we need to move on. When I snap my fingers again, a rainbow-colored candy cane appears in my hand. Okay. I think I'm getting the hang of this. Normally, I'd move straight to knives, whips, and other instruments of torture. But this is play time with Byron, and I need to think outside of the box if I'm going to warm him up properly.

Licking the straight end of the candy cane, I then gradually insert it into his hole. Not all at once, of course. I'm a demon, not a monster. Inch by inch, the candy cane slips into him, and Byron lets loose a gentle hiss like he's a teapot ready to boil. I rub his backside with my free hand in what I hope is a soothing gesture and look up to search for any sign of pain on his face. I wind up staring at the stubble that's beginning to appear on his cheeks and flick my tongue across my lips, moistening them.

"Are you okay?" I murmur.

"Perfect," he replies. "Do I even want to know what you're putting into me now?"

I smirk and rake my claws against the soft skin of his ass again. "Candy cane. This one tastes like every single fruit on your miserable little planet, so it's revolting, of course."

"Of course," he agrees, then lets out a throaty chuckle. "At least it isn't one of those Oreo flavored candy canes, though. Now those are practically a criminal offense."

I tap my cheek with my claws as an idea comes to me. "Hm, maybe I should hunt down the inventor of those, then. Take their soul down to Hell."

Beads of sweat drip down his back. His ass stretches like an elastic band, until the candy cane finally comes to a stop where the curved tip begins. I admire my handiwork for half a second, then walk back around so I can finally see the look of bliss that's etched across his handsome features. Sweat drips from his brow, and he lets out another contented sigh.

“I feel... full,” he murmurs. “I’ve never had anything in there before.”

“I’m your first anal,” I say with a smile, and cross my arms in front of my breasts. “Well, don’t I feel special?”

He chuckles again, and I notice his cock twitch. “Trust me, beautiful. You are.”

Being called beautiful normally wouldn’t affect me in the least, so I’m surprised when heat creeps into my cheeks. I’m... I’m blushing? Why the fuck am I blushing over a simple compliment from a gods-damned human? One of the corners of my mouth twitches involuntarily, and I stare up at the ceiling to avert my gaze. “Don’t get too attached, now,” I warn.

He doesn’t respond, to my surprise. Instead, he lowers his head and lets out a sound I can only describe as choking. I raise my brows and kneel in front of him, then wipe the back of my hand across his forehead. “Hey. You okay?”

“Yeah, I’m great,” he says. But he’s sweating a lot, and it’s getting really warm inside this faux candy shop.

“You’re not. We’re going to stop for now,” I say.

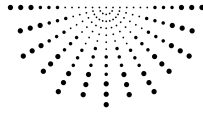
Byron’s throat bobs up and down. “N-No! I’m good. I can keep going, I swear!”

“And I’m telling you no.” I snatch his pretty face in my claws and lift his chin. His eyes are glassy and don’t seem to focus like they should. “Remember who is in charge, Byron.”

“Yes, Faith,” he rasps.

I smirk, flashing him a grin as I stroke his cheek with the back of my hand. For a human male, his skin is surprisingly soft, with just the perfect amount of stubble. I could get used to it, if given the opportunity. “You took it all so well for me. You’re a good boy, but I’m afraid I’m going to have to save you out for your own sake. We can play again later.”

## BYRON



I'm on my third bottle of water by the time I'm finally feeling like myself again. Faith stares at me from across the café table, her eyes sharp and appraising, like she's expecting me to keel over at a moment's notice.

"Better?" she asks for the fourth time since sitting down at the local Au Bon Pain. "Make sure you eat, too. I didn't order you that monstrosity of a sandwich just for you to gawk at it."

My ham and cheese croissant smells greasy and delicious, but my first order of business was hydration. Now that I'm not feeling so woozy, I pick up the sandwich and take a small bite. Mostly for her sake. I'm not really that hungry. But when the salty ham and cheese hits my tongue, I let out a deep moan of pleasure. God, what's gotten into me? One day I'm fucking every woman in sight in between business meetings, and now I'm out on a lunch date with a literal demon who just stretched my asshole within an inch of my life. And I *enjoyed* it. Submitting to her is as effortless as breathing, apparently, and I'm eager to get back into the candy shop so I can show her just how okay I really am.

Her sharp gaze dissolves into something dangerously close to concern as she watches me eat.

"Do you want a bite of this?" I ask, holding up the sandwich. "It's really good. You didn't get yourself anything."

She lifts a single shoulder in a shrug. Faith magicked some clothing for herself before we left the shop. Instead of her tight pink dress, which was hot as fuck and I miss it already, she's

wearing a simple black dress that hangs off her shoulders. Her hair is also twisted up in a neat bun on her head, and her makeup is done in a simplistic way that accentuates her natural beauty, of which there is plenty to go around. No more smoky eye. But even though the look is totally at odds with her personality, somehow it suits her. It's a classy look, and I can't keep my eyes off of her.

"I don't have a need for food," she says.

"Not even for pleasure?" I ask.

Her violet eyes home in on my half-eaten sandwich, and she sighs. "Okay. I can try a bite. Just one, if it'll stop your poking and prodding.

I roll my eyes and lift the sandwich to her pink lips. "I hardly had to twist your arm."

She takes a tentative bite, like she's afraid it might actually bite back, and then chews for half a second before swallowing. The way her eyelashes flutter makes my heart melt... and my pants tighten. "Good, right?"

Faith takes her napkin and delicately dabs at the corners of her mouth. "Yes. It's... not bad."

I lean back in my chair with my arms folded in front of my chest as I grin at her. "Wow, Faith. Your enthusiasm is contagious."

"I know, I'm a veritable disco of unicorns and rainbows," she says before letting out a small, irritated snort. Then she looks around the café and spots the menu hanging above the counter.

"I'll get you something," I say, and push my chair out to make my way to the cashier. Faith sputters and protests, but I ignore her as I lean over the counter at the pretty woman at the register. "Hi. I'd like a ham and cheese croissant and a chocolate muffin, please."

The woman rings me up, and within moments I'm back at the table with the goods. I put them down in front of Faith and grin as I slide back into my seat. "Ever have chocolate before? Or is that forbidden in Hell?"

“No,” she says, staring down at the muffin like they’re in a stand-off. “I have not. And it’s not forbidden. I mean, the prisoners aren’t eating it, that’s for sure. But none of the demons partake. We have other means of pleasing ourselves.”

I don’t think I want to know what Faith and the other demons do to “please themselves,” so I ignore that part of her statement and point at the muffin.

“You’re in for a real treat, then. You said you hated lemon, so I figured maybe something a bit sweeter would be more to your liking. And you seem to like cheese.”

Faith purses her lips as she peers at me. “I’m not one of your conquests that you can wine and dine, you know. I’m still going to flog you until you can’t remember your own name later.”

Oh, God. This woman. Why can’t all the women I meet be half as interesting as her? As bossy as she is?

“Is that a promise?” I ask, lowering my gaze.

When Faith finally picks up the muffin and bites into it, my heart leaps into my throat when she makes the sexiest little groan I’ve ever heard in my life. Food can be just as good as sex, they say, but until this moment I hadn’t experienced it firsthand. Now I know; yes, food is just as good, if not better, than sex.

“Summoned an insane candy shop with licorice used as rope but didn’t think to test any of the chocolate,” I chide, shaking my head. “Tsk, tsk.”

Faith’s gaze sharpens, but I see the hint of a smile taking form on her lips. She’s trying so hard to pretend she isn’t amused by me, but I know better. She wants to laugh, and I want nothing more than to hear her laugh. It’s just going to take a little more pushing to get her over that edge, but we’ll get there, eventually.

“Do all the women you’ve seduced find you this charming?” she asks, setting the muffin down on the plate. Judging from her tone and the way her eyes sharpen, I know she’s trying to take a shot at my ego. Make me feel like an ass

for all the playful teasing we probably shouldn't be engaging in. But while I might let her take me down several pegs in the bedroom, there's no way she's getting the upper hand here.

I shrug and lean back against my chair. "Not really, but only because I hardly ever talk to them. They're not dates. Not really. The women who come out with me know what they're getting into."

"Which is?" She quirks a brow.

"Good, hard fucking, of course."

Her mouth draws back into a thin line, and then her expression goes completely unreadable. "Mm. I see. So, you just blast through a bunch of women... just because?"

I scoff. "Why does anyone? Because it's fun. Because it feels good."

"And you're satisfied with that kind of lifestyle, then?" she asks. I don't love where this line of questioning is going. I've never eaten lunch with a woman and talked about my life to this degree before. Hell, I've never actually talked with anyone about my life this much before. I have friends. Of course, I do. Buddies from work who like to hit up strip clubs on the weekends and drink a shit ton of beer with me while we pretend to watch a football game. But we don't actually discuss our lives. What's the point? What would we even say?

"I want you to think long and hard about these questions when we get back to the shop," she says, her voice flat and disinterested. "Because if I'm going through the effort of dry-cleaning your soul, it would behoove you to understand why it was so black in the first place, so you don't wind up right back at square one."

I let out a groan and look back towards the cutie behind the register. She flashes me a shy smile and waves.

"Byron," Faith's voice snaps. "This is serious."

Looking back at Faith, I sigh. "Why? What's so serious about sex? It is what it is. I like to fuck women. Some people like to bet on horses or play basketball. This is my thing."

“Your soul is wounded, and it isn’t going to be cured with more cunt on your face.”

Leaning forward, I ask, “Yeah? Maybe not for you, but it sure does feel like it helps.”

She gnaws on her bottom lip, then reaches for the sandwich to tear off another bite. Something about my situation has her worked up, which now has me worked up. And the only time I like being worked up like this is either in a board meeting or the gym.

“You’re such an asshole,” she mutters with another shrug. “And that’s rich coming from me, because I’m an expert on bad. It’s my job to sift through the deplorables of the Earth and squeeze their souls out of their eyeballs like jelly. But you have a rare opportunity to turn this all around. Please just work with me, here.”

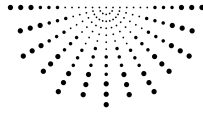
Faith is clearly passionate about her work, otherwise she wouldn’t be giving me such a hard time about this. “Fine. I’ll do my best to behave after you’ve gone.” Sighing, I look down at her half-eaten muffin and point at it. “You should finish that.”

Faith grabs the rest of her muffin and ham and cheese croissant and gets up from the table. “I’ll eat it on the way back. Come on. We have more work to do.”

She says work, but to me, this is all play. Every single second I’ve spent with her so far, while intense, has been the most fun I’ve ever had. And my cock hasn’t even been involved yet.



## FAITH



Back at the candy shop, I have the Red Vines tie Byron up again, but not from the ceiling this time. Instead, he's restrained to a chair, his thighs pried apart wide open for me. Precum slides down his shaft and over the places where the intricate licorice vines have affixed themselves along his length. The rope work is exquisite. Perfect, even. I don't do anything by half measures, of course, but I've truly outdone myself this time. And the look on my sub's face? Adorable, with his lower lip quivering in a mixture of arousal and anticipation.

"Again, I must ask. Does anything feel uncomfortable or like your extremities are going to go numb?" I ask. The second I stepped into the shop, I ditched the dress for a mesh black bikini and tape covering my nipples in crosses. Byron seemed to approve of my attire, judging from the grunts and soft gasps he made the second he laid eyes on me.

Having someone at your mercy is always a pleasurable experience, but having someone submit to you because they want to? It's as close to divinity I'll ever get, and I don't want this feeling to ever go away.

"No, everything feels good," he says, flashing me one of those cheeky grins I've come to adore. He's back to his playful, boyish self again. I'm going to have to ruin that. Poor bastard.

"You're used to getting your way," I say as I walk slow circles around him. It's not a question. I know Byron has been given everything he's ever wanted in life, save for the love of a

mother who abandoned him long ago. The crux of all his issues, no doubt, but I'm no therapist. "What will happen to you, I wonder, if you are denied the very thing you want more than anything?"

Byron's mouth draws back in a tight line. Then he scoffs. "There isn't much I want, believe me. And if there is, I just buy it."

"Oh, but I don't think that's true," I purr. "Time to experiment, then. See if my hypothesis holds any water."

When I pace around his chair a second time, I drop between his knees. Byron's eyes fly open, and my tail slithers around his leg like a sentient vine and wraps around his taut calf muscles. The barbed, venomous tips on the end of my tail leaks a pinkish, thick liquid. He squirms and lets out a sharp gasp, suddenly alarmed. The Red Vines hold him fast.

"W-What is that? What are you going to do to me?"

I trail my claws down his hardened length until I reach his balls. One little prick with this venom into his testicles is all it would take to cause them permanent damage and send him careening into indescribable agony. If he were any other human, a murderer, perhaps I would have done it without remorse. Without hesitation. Would have delighted in watching his face screw up in delirious pain until death claimed him. But with Byron, all I want to see is how he holds up when he's denied sweet release.

Without answering him, I send my tail around his shaft and hold him snugly. He works his jaw in both pain and fear, and the slick liquid dribbling from my tail coats his head. I brush the tip of my tail across a thick vein protruding from his shaft and flick my forked tongue across my bottom lip and say, "It's fine. It won't hurt you, promise. I'm only secreting a bit of toxin to keep you from orgasming."

Byron's mouth falls open. "Wait. What?"

"Do you trust me to take care of you, Byron? You asked me to punish you. But I want to hear it from your lips. Do you wish to continue?" I ask, my eyes flashing greedily. I hope he

says yes. *Pray* he says yes. He's not only been a blast to be with so far, but he's also remarkably durable. A rare trait in a human these days.

After hesitation flickers across his handsome features, he finally grinds out, "Y-Yes. I trust you. Please punish me, Faith."

"There's my good boy," I say, my voice smooth as satin. Then I slide my tail, slick with the toxin that will prevent him from coming, up and down his cock. Slowly at first, taking care not to pull too hard at the Red Vines holding him in place. Byron lets out a deep moan and tosses his head back. Lust clouds his eyes, and his forearms strain against his bonds as his skin flushes scarlet. There's my good boy, indeed.

"God, that feels amazing," he chokes out.

I say nothing as I watch my tail bob up and down on his cock from my kneeling position. Then I untie my mesh bikini top and let it fall the floor. His throat hitches. My tail bobs up and down, faster, faster, until he's straining against his bonds and gritting his teeth. Sweat causes his hair to stick to his forehead as small beads drip down his neck and pecs in rivulets.

"Please, I need to touch you," he pleads. Like that's going to work on me.

Seriously? It's only been thirty seconds, and he's already begging. How pathetic.

"No," I say, my voice deep and firm. His eyes find mine and flash with disappointment, then widen with feral desperation that makes my heart leap with joy. "No touching."

"Please," he begs again. "I just... I can't do this if I can't touch you. Even just a little."

Warmth radiates in my core and slithers its way down into my cunt until it settles within my twin clits. They throb in a way that makes me want to throw the entire scene out the door and straddle him to take my own pleasure. But that will have to wait, if it happens at all. I've already lost half a day with Byron just fooling around. I need to get serious about his

punishment if I'm going to have any time left over to destroy actual deserving souls. My penthouse, and my future, depends on it.

*You shouldn't be doing this at all, a little voice nags me. What are you doing, wasting your time with a human? He's beneath you. Excrement on the bottom of your heel. Get with the program, Faith, and break him already! A meager, slightly tarnished soul is better than no soul at all. Take it!*

But I ignore the rational side of my brain in favor of slapping my sub's inner thigh with my tail. I've never had a submissive before, and I will never have the opportunity to take one again. I'm going to squeeze out every last drop of happiness before I get on with things.

"Beg all you like, but it's not going to change anything for you. This is your fate," I tease, my voice teetering toward maliciousness. Precum mixes with my toxin until the Red Vines coiled around his shaft begin to melt away and fall apart. Stupid candy. Of course this would happen. The vines tear away in bits and pieces until his cock springs free of the bonds. I don't bother to re-set them. His voice contorts from pain, to pleasure, then back to pain again.

"I need release," he whispers, his voice cracked and hoarse. "I need it. Oh, God. Faith, please!"

I cackle, because... well, this shit is funny. "No," I say again simply. "You knew what you were getting into. Of course, you can always safe out if you need to, but—"

Byron's fierce blue eyes find mine, and determination flashes across his face. Ah, there he is. There's my little champ. "Not," he grinds out, and his tight chest rises and falls with each labored breath. "Safeing... out."

Pride swells in my chest. My first submissive, and he's already bringing a tear to my eye from how well behaved he's being. "Good to hear. I'd be sorely disappointed in you if you did."

My tail twists around his shaft and squeezes like a python crushing its prey, and he lets out another hoarse cry. "God!

Faith!”

“God can’t come to the phone right now, sweetie,” I admonish him. “So please don’t invoke his name here.”

“Goddess, then. That’s...” His breathing turns into pants as sweat slides down his pectorals in rivulets. “That’s what you are. A goddess.”

Placing my claws under his chin, I lift his gaze to meet mine as another tendril of sweat rolls down his temple. “My dearest Byron, I’m not a goddess. I’m a monster,” I whisper and slap his cheek with my palm. Lightly, this time, because I’d hate to bruise his gorgeous face.

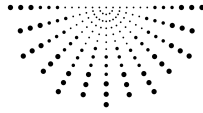
He smiles at me then, stabbing me straight in my heart. “No, you’re not. A monster wouldn’t feel nearly as good as you do right now.”

“You don’t know much about monsters, then, do you?” I sneer at him, but the way he’s staring at me has me feeling so... naked. Vulnerable. Like he’s peeled away several layers of my thick, protective carapace and now he sees me for what I really am: a fake. I’m not a real torture expert. I can’t even bring myself to take out my cane for fear of truly harming him. See, this is why I don’t like to feel things when I’m with my marks. Because feeling things inevitably makes me feel small, and I don’t deserve to feel small. What I do deserve to feel, however, is his cock inside of me.

I stand up, but don’t uncoil my tail from around his length. Instead, I yank my panties to the side and straddle him without a moment’s hesitation. His throat hitches as I lower myself on top of him and drag my claws through his thick head of hair, which smells like sweat, musk, and a hint of cinnamon. A mouth-watering combination if there ever was one, in my opinion.

“No,” he breathes, then buries his nose between my breasts. This is a terrible idea. One I shouldn’t be entertaining. But once I commit to something, I’m all in, baby. There’s no getting me off his lap until I come on his dick at least twice. “You’re right, I don’t. But I would love to find out.”

## BYRON



Faith holds her panties to the side as she slides down onto my cock, taking me inch by ever-loving inch. I want nothing more than to dig my fingernails into her ass and show her what I'm made of, really impress her, but she's still got me tied to this damn chair. Frustration comes in the form of another groan, and I tilt my head back against the headrest. Fuck, she feels too good. If it weren't for that damned toxin she secreted all over my dick, I'd probably be finished by now.

She steadies herself by planting one of her hands on my shoulders, then slides down to the hilt until she's sitting on my pelvis. I look her up and down, licking my lips, and let out a throaty groan of approval. This view? Immaculate, with her round tits in my face and her bright, violet eyes covered in thick curtains of lashes that flutter like butterfly wings. And the sounds she makes as she starts to grind against me? There are no words to describe that sweet sound, because my brain is about to implode from how awesome this whole thing is. Her cunt is a vice grip on my shaft, strangling it until my eyes water. Already, Faith is drenched for me, and every time she lifts from my cock, it slides right back in. No resistance to speak of.

"You feel..." she starts in that husky voice of hers that makes me think of aged whisky, then her brain fizzles out mid-thought and her expression goes blank. She blinks several times, and I can't help but emit a throaty chuckle before placing a few tender kisses along her jawline. Her skin tastes so sweet, like honey mixed with red hot candies that make my

lips tingle. How utterly sweet this big, bad demon turned out to be. My Domme. All *mine*.

I tilt my pelvis up as my cock twitches inside of her, giving her a taste of a better angle that sends a shiver running through her tiny frame. Then I waggle my eyebrows and say, “I feel... what? Enormous? Bigger than you’ve ever experienced before? Best you’ve ever had?”

She glares down at me, but I know it isn’t genuine. Not when I catch her little grin that’s fighting to make its way across her pretty, plush lips. “You’re such an ass.”

I jerk my hips with sharp, upward movements, thrusting into her as deep as I can get and chuckle. “Yeah, I know. That’s why you’re here, right? Because I’m an asshole who needs his Domme to punish him. Real bang-up job you’re doing, by the way.”

She moans as she slides her palms down my chest, and her fingernails dig into my skin, leaving angry red streaks behind in their wake. I let out a soft hiss as some of her claws threaten to break the skin, but I don’t care. She could flay me alive right now, and I’d die a happy man. So long as my cock gets to stay where it is, I’m good. The vines, now mostly disintegrated thanks to our sweat, finally free up my hands and arms. She doesn’t say anything about them, so I assume this is all part of the little game we’re playing.

“Shut up,” she mutters, then grinds her hips back and forth in a slow rocking motion. Like she’s trying to get used to my girth. Most women take a while to warm up before I can get inside of them, and even then, there’s usually a little discomfort involved. Not Faith, though. She’s taking my cock like it was made especially for her. Faith tilts her head back, exposing her throat, and my hand develops a mind of its own as it snakes its way up to clasp around it. That soft, crimson skin of hers brightens as her heartbeat pulses in my grip, and I give her throat a tender squeeze.

“There you go, baby, take as much as me as you want,” I encourage her in hoarse whispers. I’ve fucked up, though,

because one of her hands snatches a fistful of my hair and yanks my head back.

“Let’s get one thing straight, sweetie. I’m not your baby, and you’re not fucking me. I’m fucking you,” she hisses.

Our bodies meld together in sweat and other bodily fluids as my hand squeezes around her throat again. Surprisingly, she didn’t make me let go when she reprimanded me, and it feels like all coherent thought is dribbling out of my ears. With each bounce, her breasts jiggle, utterly mesmerizing me as I grip onto her small waist and dig my fingernails into her backside, urging her toward her climax. Nothing, not a single hookup I’ve ever had in my life, could ever compare to Faith as she smashes her breasts against my chest and takes what she needs from me.

“Yes! Yes!” she cries out. I really can’t take much more of this. Shouldn’t be able to. “Yes, Byron!”

All that time spent in missionary and doggy position before is now ruined for me. How am I supposed to come back from this? Function without her in my life, calling the shots and barking in my ear? Faith doesn’t release my hair, which is fine, and she occasionally yanks my head this way and that as she bounces on my length until wet slaps fill the room. Her breathing becomes more ragged, more frantic, until she’s whispering words in a language I don’t understand.

I snort as I bury my nose in her vanilla-and-cinnamon scented hair and murmur, “Are you seriously speaking in tongues right now?”

Faith answers by biting my earlobe, and I let out a sharp gasp. My cock twitches again inside of her, and dammit to hell, this toxin still won’t let up. Not that I want it to, at this point, but I wish I wasn’t so fucking numb while buried in her cunt. Faith lets out a deep, husky moan that makes me drive into her harder, harder, harder...

Then her thick, black lashes quiver as her eyes roll back. Her cunt, so tight and soaked for me, clenches around my cock harder than before, and my eyes fly open. This feels different. Feels... wrong, somehow. Panic starts to settle into the place



where my arousal used to be, and I watch as her entire body stiffens and grinds to a shuddering halt. What the fuck...? Faith tosses her head back as a cry rips through her throat, causing the very chair we're fucking on to tremble. In fact, everything in the room is vibrating right now. My cock strains again as she comes undone on top of me in a torrent of banshee wails, and I'm actually getting a little concerned. The room rattles so hard cracks streak across the windows in spidery veins, threatening to shatter the glass. Am I about to die? Oh, fuck... of course this is how I'd die. With the sexiest woman I've ever had the pleasure of being in killing me with her chaotic demon pussy.

Fitting.

"F-Faith?" I shout as jars of candy jump from their shelves and shatter across the floor. Suddenly, the shop is covered in M&Ms, sour ribbon rainbows, and jawbreakers. They rattle across the floor, rolling in our direction until finally, her mouth snaps shut and her eyes roll back a second time. As she snaps her head back to look down at me, her once vibrant violet eyes morph into twin black swirling vortexes.

We stare at one another deliriously for a long moment until she lunges forward and buries her fangs into my neck. I scream, convinced she's about to rip out my throat and leave me a bloody heap in this chair. And then, without warning or permission, my erection unloads the biggest orgasm I've ever experienced. My heart threatens to rip a hole in my chest as I fill her pussy with cum, and for a second I worry I'm about to black out as each pulse overwhelms my senses. Pulse, heavy breath, pulse, another heavy breath, pulse, until I'm finally empty. I can't breathe. It's like all the air in the room has been sucked out by a giant vacuum, like the one in *Spaceballs*, leaving me a gasping mess of a man in my chair.

Okay, scratch that earlier thought. I wasn't dying then, but I'm definitely dying now.



ONCE THE DUST has settled in the shop—literally—and my erection has finally gone flaccid—for now—I run my palm down the back of Faith’s head, stroking her hair. “Hey.”

She hasn’t moved in a while, and I’m starting to get concerned my demon Domme might’ve actually killed herself. I mean, that wouldn’t necessarily be a bad thing, right? Because then we’d be done and I could carry on my life as usual. At least until I died of old age or something. But, and I know she said I shouldn’t because this is her job... but I’m a little attached to this crazy chick. I’d be sad if she keeled over.

“You good? Do you, uh... need anything? Some water? CPR?”

Faith lets out a groan and stirs to life. Oh, thank God for that. She’s not dead.

Then she lifts her head and scowls at me, her black hair now matted against her forehead with sweat. “You are such an asshole,” she mutters.

I let out a startled laugh. “I guess you can’t be all that bad off, then. You okay, sweetheart?”

Faith wriggles off my lap and slinks onto the floor like a de-boned cat trying to avoid affection.

Then, a black vortex appears beneath her body and sucks her up. Just like that. Huh. That was... unexpected, to say the least. Seconds later, she re-emerges, scowling as usual and looking fresh again. Wish I could do that. Instead of her mesh black bikini that will be permanently burned into my brain, she’s wearing her simple dress from earlier and her hair is back up in the casual bun.

“Let’s get one thing straight,” she snaps as she points a black claw at me. “That? That can’t happen again.”

I give her a crooked grin. “What? Great sex can’t happen again?”

“You know what I mean. You seduced me!”

I know I shouldn’t laugh, because I do have some self-preservation instincts left, but I can’t help but chuckle a little.

“I *what* now? Beautiful, you were practically begging for my dick and I didn’t have to do anything! I *couldn’t* do anything, because I was strapped to the chair with CANDY.”

She slumps down onto the floor and sighs. That’s not good.

“What’s wrong? Hey.” This is the part where I’d normally get out of this chair and plop down on the floor with her, but she made it perfectly clear that she doesn’t want me touching her without permission first. But when she doesn’t so much as lift her head to glare at me, I drop down onto the ground on my knees and wrap an arm around her shoulder.

Wincing, I say, “I know you probably don’t like this, but... I think you might need a hug or something?” She goes limp in my arms, and I pull her tight against my chest. “For what it’s worth, I think you’re a damn fine succubus.”

Faith pulls back from my chest and looks up at me, her bottom lip trembling. “I... I’m not a succubus. Do you see any wings on my back?”

Blinking, I say, “Uh, no? Is that some kind of requirement or something?”

Faith lets out another strangled sound from her lovely throat and shifts in my arms. “Again, I am a *lesser* demon. I haven’t had a promotion in at least a thousand years, and I’m about to get fired. Do you not recall a single thing I told you in my apartment?”

I nod slowly, recalling what she said earlier about her workplace. “Right. I sort of remember. To be fair, I was scared shitless, so my memory isn’t the greatest. But... I mean, you’re really good at your work. So how come you’re about to get fired? I mean, you work for layer two of Hell, right? Lust?”

She nods again.

“Yeah. So, you got the lust part down perfect. What’s the problem? If you were one of my employees, you’d be getting a juicy bonus on top of a promotion.”

Faith's lashes bat again as she sighs, which I'm starting to realize is bashfulness. It makes my heart melt whenever she does it, but I'm not stupid enough to ruin the moment we're having by pointing it out.

"I... thank you, Byron. That means a lot. But lust is not a requirement for a job well done, I'm afraid. We're supposed to punish misaligned souls through acts of cruelty and malice. And during my performance reviews, I have come up woefully short."

I raise a brow. That doesn't sound right. "Woefully short how?"

Faith sighs, and I'll admit that my heart breaks a little from the sound. She's so upset, but until I listen—*really* listen—to this woman, I won't know how to help her. Demon or not, she's still a person with thoughts and feelings. I could even see myself being friends with someone like her.

She dabs at her eyes and snuffles. Oh, shit. Is she crying? Well, that's not okay. I hug her tighter against my chest and press my nose into her hair.

"I can never hit my quotas," she mutters. "I'm supposed to bring back at least thirty souls a month."

"Okay, so how many do you usually bring back, then?"

She stiffens in my arms. "Two this month."

Ouch. I let out a long sigh. Yeah. No wonder she's on the firing line. Unfortunately, at the office, it's not about how hard someone works but their output. Even if she's putting in the time and the hours, it doesn't mean much if she's not delivering. I don't have the heart to tell her any of this, though, because I'm sure she already knows that.

"I'm doomed," she laments, hanging her head.

"Hey," I whisper, and now it's my turn to grab her chin and tilt her gaze up to mine. She looks into my eyes with such tenderness it's like a kick to the gut. "You're not doomed. This is fixable, Faith. You said you needed truly black souls, right? The worst of the worst?"

She nods.

“Then you need to stop fucking around with me and buckle down. I told you that I’d help you out if you helped me.”

“But I haven’t,” she says, her voice trembling. “I haven’t helped you at all. Your soul is still wounded.”

My brows slam together, but I don’t release her chin. All I want to do is kiss her and take her pain away, but that’s not going to help her. “That’s not true. You’ve helped more than you know. You made me think about things. Things I’d rather leave buried in the past. That’s worth plenty. Just because my soul is still wounded doesn’t mean I’m hopeless.”

She says nothing in response to any of this, so I continue.

“You asked me why I sleep with women, why I treat them the way I do. You goaded me into thinking about it, so I’m going to give you the same treatment.”

Faith raises a confused eyebrow.

“Why do you want a penthouse so badly? Why do you want to be a succubus?”

Faith lets out a soft squeak as she pulls away from my chest and hugs her knees. Placing her chin on top of them, she says, “I... I’ve always wanted it, I think.”

“Okay, that’s a solid start. But *why*?” I ask.

She goes quiet then, and I’m worried maybe I’ve broken her brain again. But she just regards me sadly and shrugs. “I don’t know. I’ve never actually questioned it. It’s what lesser demons do. We work hard, we get promoted, we get a penthouse.”

“But do you actually... want a penthouse on the... what was it?”

“Lake of Fire,” she replies flatly.

“Lake of Fire, right.” That doesn’t sound pleasant to me, but I’m also not a demon. “I think that might be something worth exploring, don’t you think?”

She shrugs again. This chaotic, crazy woman who was destroying my cock just a few minutes ago suddenly looks so small. Like a normal woman, with rose-tinged cheeks and sweet-smelling hair with a hint of spice. Unlike any woman I've ever met before. Her strength so far has been inspiring. But her vulnerability in the face of failure is probably even better. It shows me more about her character than I think she realizes, and I think now I know what the actual problem is.

“Faith... is there a possibility this job isn't right for you?”

The pit viper I've come to know is back, and she shoots me a dangerous glare. I put my palms up in surrender and shake my head. “No, I don't mean you aren't right for it. I'm asking if the job isn't a right fit for *you*.”

Faith puts her fangs away and blinks. “I... I don't know. I've never thought about it that way before. I always just assumed that I'd end up with my wings one day and keep going like this.”

“Okay. Say you do get your wings. What then? What's the end goal?” I ask as I re-position myself by crossing my legs. We've been on the floor talking it out for so long my legs have started to cramp.

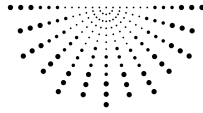
“I don't... I don't know! Oh, gods,” she wails, then buries her face in her palms.

My heart lurches, and I put my arm around her again. “Faith. Sweetheart, look at me. We're going to call a time out, because just like earlier, when I didn't realize my limits, you stepped in to protect me, right?”

Faith looks up at me and nods as her eyes well with more unshed tears. I wipe her cheeks with my thumbs and press my lips to the top of her head.

“Okay, it's my turn. C'mon. Get up and snap your fingers to make a jacket or something. We're going out.”

## FAITH



I should have resisted more. Should have done anything other than allow Byron to take me out to the park in the middle of the day. The sunshine beams down on us, but even though the warmth is much needed, it's not enough to chase away the goosebumps on my arms. It's cold outside, and all the tree branches reach for the sky like skeletal fingers. This is what humans must know as wintertime, but there's no snow on the ground to at least make everything look more aesthetically pleasing. Disappointing, like most things that come from Earth. Except for Byron, who's turned out to be a surprisingly bright spot in the city.

Byron clasps my hand in his as we walk along the path while people go about their business. Some bicycle past us while others simply jog, white puffs of breath billowing from their mouths. When I look up at Byron, I catch him staring at me with a crooked smile. Some of his hair falls in his azure eyes, and I have the asinine desire to push it away with my fingers, if only to have a reason to touch more of his face.

"What's the point of this walk?" I ask. We come to a bench surrounded by gray birds whose heads bob clumsily while they walk. As I sit down, I say, "I thought you said we can't afford to screw around anymore. Not when I only have twenty-four hours left to find a suitable soul in order to keep my job."

Byron sighs, and his own breath puffs in front of his face. But when I breathe, nothing appears.

"No, I said we were taking a time out. A time out is a pause, Faith. It means we're going to relax for a bit because I

think you're spread too thin right now. You can't work like that. You'll burn out."

I chuckle darkly. "I could never burn out. I was literally created for the sole purpose of soul extraction and enacting torture on the damned. Never once has a demon been too exhausted to do her job and I won't be the first—"

Byron places his finger on my lips and grins. "Shh. That's not what I meant. You *are* exhausted. How long have you been working for that company, anyway?"

I think back to when I first opened my eyes in Hell and hum softly. Hmm... three hundred thousand years? Four? It's hard to tell anymore since time is a human-made construct.

"It's been a while, I think," I say.

He nods. "Have you taken any holidays? Gone on any dates with other demons? You know, lived a little?"

"No, no, no, no. Demons don't date. We fuck if we ever feel the urge, but it's rare between our own kind. Not when we're having so much sex with damned souls."

His brows raise, and I know exactly what he's thinking.

"Consenting souls, By. We're not... we're not *that* awful."

Byron shakes his head again and reaches around the back of my shoulders to squeeze them gently. "You just gave me a pet name, I think."

I blink. Did I? "That's not likely. What did I say?"

"You called me By," he says, then presses the tip of his finger to my nose. "It's fine. You can call me that. I prefer it to all the other things you've called me, anyway. So long as I can keep calling you sweetheart."

"Absolutely not. I'm not sweet, and I eat hearts for breakfast. And by the way, they taste like metal and shit," I say, huffing indignantly.

Instead of teasing me like I expect him to, Byron leans forward and brushes a tendril of loose hair that escaped my bun and fell into my eyes. Outside, in this form, I look like any



normal woman on the street, with dark eyes and sun-kissed cheeks. No horns to speak of on my head, no tail to frighten children as they pass by. It's a freeing feeling, to be inside a human vessel and to appear so... normal. In this form, I'm simply a woman like any other. Down in Hell, when people see the horns and tails, they know what I am and what I'm supposed to be. Up here, I can see an infinite number of directions my life could go in.

I could push him away, tell him to eat shit and remember his place, but I don't. Because I want to know where this is going. Byron leans in, then, and presses his lips against mine. *So soft. So warm.* The movement of his mouth is chaste at first, like he's testing the water to see how I'll react. My heart thrums in my chest.

No one has ever kissed me before.

I've never let them.

And now with Byron kissing me, it's suddenly all I want to do for the rest of my life. My very first submissive human, kissing me. *Me.* Unconsciously, my fingers find their way through his hair as I deepen the kiss, allowing my tongue to mingle with his in an exploratory fashion. We kiss, and kiss, and kiss until my lips start to feel chapped, and even then, I want to keep going. But he's the first to pull back and inhale deeply and murmur, "Wow. You kiss just like I thought you would."

I tilt my head and blink. "What does that mean?"

He cups my cheeks in his hands and smiles, his bright blue eyes twinkling in the sunlight. "It means you lived up to the fantasies I've been playing inside of my head ever since I first saw you."

Ever since he first saw me? He's been envisioning his mouth on mine ever since then? It hardly seems real, but then again, maybe he's telling the truth. He hasn't given me any reason to not believe him so far.

Then he's on his feet and offering me his hands. "Come on, let's get you someplace warmer."

He leads me down the path, past a frozen lake where human children ice skate and play a strange game where they try to steal a black rock from one another. When one of the children manage to take it from another and smack it into a net, some of the children cheer while others whine. It's a lot more wholesome than the fun we get up to down in Hell, where we like to play games, too... but usually with severed heads, skulls... that sort of thing.

Even after telling him several times that no, I'm not cold, Byron still feels the need to take me into a... what is this place? We stop on the street corner and when I look up at the gray brick building, I notice the large flags that cover the entrance with promises of art inside. We have art in Hell, of course. But it's mostly sculptures depicting Lucifer's impressive visage or monsters inflicting torture on humans. Nothing to get excited over, and certainly nothing worthy of buying a ticket to go see.

"It's a museum," he explains, unprompted. "It's quiet, warm, and it's a great place to walk and talk."

I don't see why we need to be here in the first place. I'm more than happy to get back to the candy shop to get down to business and finish my work.

"Are there any damned souls in here?" I ask as we ascend the stone steps towards the entrance.

He snorts. "Uh, probably not? A museum is usually fairly tame by those standards. But you never know."

The museum is, as Byron promised, quiet. So quiet it could pass as a crypt, save for the tinkling of dishes being moved around in the café we pass. The scintillating scent of coffee beans being roasted has me sniffing the air, and Byron chuckles when he notices I'm drifting towards the café.

Without saying anything, he steps up to the counter, orders a small coffee, and hands it to me. I'm actually starting to get annoyed by how nice of a guy he's turning out to be. I mean, at first everything started off as transactional. An "I'll help you if you help me" sort of situation. But the more time I spend with him, just acting like two normal people, the more I find

myself enjoying myself and... and not wanting to go back to Hell.

*Penthouse, Faith. The very thing you have always wanted. Eyes on the prize.* But it feels like the goal posts are moving, and I'm powerless to stop it.

"You really shouldn't have," I say, feigning reluctance as I accept the cup from him. I love coffee without cream and sugar. Reminds me of a drink I love back home with similar acidic qualities. Only the Earth-based drink doesn't smell like brimstone, which is a vast improvement.

"I know, but you looked like you wanted one." He rubs the back of his neck and smirks. "Come on, there's an exhibit here I've been meaning to check out."

So, we stroll. We meander past paintings and sculptures made by artists whose names I don't recognize because I never took care to learn anything about Earth outside of what was necessary to get my jobs done. We stop in front of a painting of a meadow. It's pretty, but also pretty damn boring. A half hour of gawking at art has passed when I realize that this is feeling like a date. A real date between two people for the sole purpose of getting to know one another.

"So, what's life like back home? Do you, uh... enjoy living in Hell?" he asks, peering down at me from his own drink.

I look down at my feet, then worry my lip when I think about his question. "That's irrelevant."

"What? Why?" he asks, then takes another sip of his coffee as he feigns interest in the painting. "It's where you live, right? So, why would that be irrelevant?"

I look up at him and shake my head. *Resist, Faith, resist. Just because he's the first man to ever submit to you doesn't mean he's your one true love or anything. It doesn't make him any more than a mark. Time to lie out of your ass if you need to.*

"Because we're not friends, Byron. We're not supposed to be here, doing any of this. I made a grave mistake in picking

you, and now I'm wasting time when I should be out there gleaning damned souls. Instead, we're in..." I gesture broadly. "Here."

He winces like I've just struck him. I might as well have with the way he takes a step back and averts his gaze to another painting on the other side of the room. "Right. You're right. I'm sorry. We shouldn't be doing this. You have a job to do, and I'm keeping you from it," he murmurs. "Come on. I'll take you to my office to find you something better."

I never said I wanted something better. Just something that would land me a promotion. Byron is, unfortunately, too good for someone like me. Deep down, he isn't a terrible person. He might react poorly to everything and everyone because of his trauma, but he's only human, after all. Given enough time—and a significant amount of therapy—I'm certain he would work it all out. Maybe even finally heal long enough to get married or something, if that's what he wanted.

Byron leads me out of the museum, our coffees still warm, and we take a quick bus over to Fletcher & Sons. The street isn't very busy, but then again, it's noon on a Wednesday. Most people are at work. My shop still has the "be back in five!" sign hanging on the door that I forgot to swap for "closed." Not like it matters, anyway. It's not a real business. My heart clenches at the thought.

We step inside, then proceed past security and get into the elevator with a few other men in suits. They all stare at my cleavage, of course. No one aside from Byron looks at my face. When we reach the top floor, he lets me step out first and then escorts me down the hallway. A few of his colleagues, all men, nod and say hello as they pass him.

"And in here is where I work," he says as he pushes open the door to his office. It's a clean but boring room with white walls, gray carpeting, and a desk in front of an enormous window that overlooks the river. It's a gorgeous view, but it's so... sterile. So unlike him. The Byron I know should have some wooden furniture, some art, heck, even some tchotchkes at the very least. "When I actually do bother coming in to the

office, that is. Most of the time, I just get stuff done at home on my laptop.”

I nod as I walk around the room, trailing my fingers across the desk. Now I’m wondering what his apartment looks like. How many women he’s brought back there. How many have slept in his bed. It’s enough to make me tense up, my blood roiling in my veins. Thinking about him with another woman is enough to make me gnash my teeth.

“It’s nice,” I lie through a bitter smile.

Byron shoots me a knowing grin and says, “C’mon. It’s awful. The view is the only good thing about it.”

“I wasn’t going to say anything,” I say, smiling back at him. “But it doesn’t really suit you.”

“And what would suit me, then?” he says as he steps toward me, closing the gap between us. The gap I purposely put there to keep him from trying to seduce me with his pretty words, his soft caresses, and his tender kisses that leave me breathless. I can’t do this with him. Not when I’m so close to finally getting what I’ve always wanted. Not when I only have a day left before I’ll be summoned back down to Hell for my final performance review. I have to make it count.

“Byron...” I say, putting my hands up. “We need to focus.”

He nods, then turns back towards the door. “Right. Come on, I can at least take you down the hall and introduce you to some folks I have suspicions about.”

We meander down the hallway slowly, lingering in doorways while Byron pretends to make small talk with his co-workers so I can peer into their souls. Most of the men who work here aren’t the nicest bunch of people, but they’re hardly the scum of society that I was told to expect. I was promised truly vile creatures in a corporation such as this, and so far, all I’ve got is a guy cheating on his wife with the nanny. It’s bad, but not nearly enough.

When we get to the last doorway in the hall, Byron pauses to brush my forearm with his fingers and asks, “Anything yet?”

I shake my head. “No. They’re all your garden variety morally gray or wounded, like you.”

“Really? Not even Cooper?” He crosses his arms in front of his chest and sighs. “I thought for sure Coop would have tipped the scales in your favor.”

“He’s more or less clean. I mean, he forgets his mother’s birthday every year, and he got kicked out of a strip club once for getting too handsy. But that’s it. The guy is boring. He naps most of the weekend or drinks until he’s too shit faced to do anything else. He watches a lot of vanilla porn.”

Byron barks out a laugh, startling me, and I flinch.

“I’m sorry. Didn’t mean to scare you. It’s just... Coop is always bragging about all the women he’s sleeping with. I kind of figured something was up with him, but I didn’t realize he was just a sad porn addict.”

I shrug. “It’s always the noisiest ones who have the most to hide.”

Byron lets go of a deep exhale as he rakes his fingers through his hair. Suddenly, I’m envious of those fingers and wish I could be the one to touch him. To make him feel good. To bring him comfort. Which is a dangerous line of thinking, considering who and what I am and where I am going after tomorrow.

“I’m so sorry, Faith. I thought for sure we’d find you something to chew on in here, and I’ve let you down,” he says. His remorse is evident in those deep blue eyes of his. It’s like someone flicked a light switch on behind them.

I hate that he feels that way. That somehow my poor decision-making skills these past several thousand years is his fault. No, he didn’t fuck up my career. I did that all on my own, and it’s time to face the consequences, I guess, even if they’re totally bullshit. But I can’t go back down to Hell leaving him feeling the slightest bit responsible for my misery, so I smile sadly and shrug. “Don’t say that. You didn’t. You did your best, and for that, I’ll always be grateful. I’m just... not very good at this, I’m afraid.”

“Where do other demons hunt, usually?” he asks.

“Corporations such as this one, I think? Maybe political rallies. Tech bro headquarters. Lockheed Martin, especially,” I say.

He laughs again, shaking his head. “Fletcher & Sons can’t hang with the big bads, I guess. Again, I’m really sorry. But, hey. Maybe this is a good opportunity for you to reinvent yourself. If you lose your job, you can get another one.”

Oh, it’s adorable how he thinks it’s that easy. Sadly, my future is looking downright bleak right now. Byron has been the highlight of my abysmally long existence, and I’ll always be grateful I spent these last moments on Earth with him. But I shudder to think of what awaits me back in Hell once my boss learns I failed. Again.

“Unfortunately, I’m not going to be getting a new job,” I say.

Byron lifts his brow. “What do you mean? You said you’d get demoted, right? So quit. Go to another company where they’ll appreciate you.”

I lean against the wall and bury my face in my hands. “It’s not that simple.”

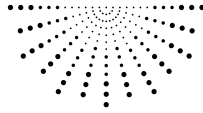
“Sure it is. Why wouldn’t—”

Dropping my hands, I bare my fangs at Byron and let loose a frustrated snarl. “No! You don’t. Understand. Byron. I’m not simply being fired because I’m a fuckup. I’m being punished. I’m being sent to the worst place for failed demons such as myself. I’m being cast into the Pit.”

Byron’s throat bobs as he stares at me, his hands trembling before clenching into fists at his side. “What... does that mean, exactly?”

I steady my breathing and say, “It means a fate worse than death for someone like me.”

## BYRON



Ever since my mother left me in the pouring rain to hop on a bus and never come back, I've known that life is unfair. For some people, life will always be a struggle, no matter what they do. For others, sometimes a little hard work can get them out of the hole they're in. And then there are the privileged folks who were born with silver spoons in their mouths, like most of the people I work with here at Fletcher & Sons.

I was tossed into the foster care system and spit back out once I turned eighteen with the biggest chip on my shoulder and a bag with only a few of my belongings. But instead of wanting to ensure no one else ever felt the way I did, like a discarded piece of trash, I decided to go in the opposite direction and treat everyone like crap.

That ends today.

Faith was born a demon. She didn't ask to live in Hell, punishing damned souls for the rest of her life. This woman has thoughts and ambitions of her own, even if she can't always admit them to herself. I barely know her, but in the short time we've spent together, I've been floored by how utterly full of life she is. Admiration. I think that's the word I'm looking for. I *admire* this woman. This go-getter who put a fucking candy shop across the street in hopes of catching a CEO on his way to lunch. Yeah. So, she also might be a little delusional, but she aimed high, and that should be commended.



My hands ball into fists at my side as I work my jaw. “That’s not going to happen,” I growl.

Faith looks up at me with such intense longing that it takes every bit of self-control not to sweep her up into my arms and kiss her.

“Byron... please. Let’s not make this more difficult than it already is,” she says. “I’ll just have to deal with it. I’m terrible at my job. This is how it is. I’ve always known, I think, deep down, that one day this would happen.”

She might have always known what was at stake, but I only just learned all of this thirty seconds ago.

“Being bad at your job shouldn’t mean losing your life,” I say, my voice trembling.

“On Earth, maybe. But in Hell, the rules are different,” she whispers. Then she turns to head back down the hallway in the direction we came. “Come on. I want to go back to the shop.”

“And do what? Shouldn’t we try to figure this out?” I ask, trying to keep in step with her. Several of my co-workers crane their necks to gawk at her as she passes. I want to punch every single one of them. Faith might not be mine, not really, but I still feel oddly territorial over her. She’s my demon. *Mine*.

She jabs the button to call the elevator and sighs. “No. I’m not spending my final hours on Earth running around trying to stave off the inevitable. I want to do something else. Something fun. Please, Byron. Just let me do something fun. And in the meantime, I can get back to cleaning up your soul.”

When her eyes meet mine, they’re pleading. Desperate. She needs this. And I need to push my pride and fear away long enough to give her exactly what she wants. I nod.

“What did you have in mind?” I ask.

Her lips curl into a soft smile, then she steps into the elevator. I follow her. “Oh, I have a few ideas.”



I SHOULD HAVE SUSPECTED what Faith's idea of "fun" would be. Once again, I'm tied up to the damn chair with Red Vines candy, only this time, she's left my hands free.

"What's the deal?" I ask, wiggling my fingers. "Going to let me touch you this time? Want another hand necklace?"

"I just needed to be sure you wouldn't get distracted while I explain this next part to you," Faith says as she bends over to rummage through her creepy leather bag. I still haven't asked about it, and I'm not going to. The less I know, the better.

"Since when do I not listen to you?" I tease, and then my throat hitches when I catch sight of her dress hiking up her pert, round ass, giving me a glorious view of the teeny, tiny black thong shimmying between her slit. "I-I listen."

Faith straightens and smooths the wrinkles of her dress, and while I'm disappointed to see her perfect ass disappear, I'm just as happy to look at her face. Even though we're back in the shop, she hasn't bothered with the intense makeup, allowing me to take in her natural demonic features. I grin. Yup. Still beautiful, horns and all. Her tail swishes playfully back and forth as she holds up what I can only describe as a mini blow torch. In her other hand, she's holding an iron bar.

My brows lift. "Uh. Are you branding me or something?"

"Close," she chirps. "We're going to explore temperature play!"

I blink, thinking about that one scene in *Top Gun* where an ice cube was used. Sure. I guess that's fine. It's not like she's going to actually blow torch me, right? Faith hasn't done anything I haven't enjoyed yet, so I shrug and say, "Okay. I'm game. Let's get to it."

Faith stares at me like I just suggested we go rob a liquor store and rolls her eyes. "No, honey. We can't just 'get to it.' I need to explain things to you first, so you know what to expect, and then we need to go over safety."

I place my arms behind my head and grin. "What's there to talk about? It's just hot and cold, right? I had a girl use hot wax on me once. It was fine."

Faith presses the button on her mini blow torch and a streak of orange fire bursts from the tip. “Does this look like fucking hot wax to you, Byron?”

Faith snaps her fingers, and suddenly I’m being hoisted up from the chair and hanging from the ceiling by the candy vines. Again. Look, I’m not about to tell my demonic mistress that we’ve already done this and that I’m craving something a little different, but...

Then she strides toward me and pulls out a satin blindfold. “We are going to slip this on,” she murmurs, and then pulls the blindfold down snugly over my eyes until everything goes completely dark. Boring. I can’t stare at her tits like this, so what’s even the point?

“It’s no fun if I can’t see you,” I whine, slightly perturbed.

Her tail cracks down on my ass. Hard. I flinch, because I wasn’t expecting pain yet, especially not in that area of my body.

“Trust me, it’s loads of fun when you can’t see what’s coming,” she promises. Fucking touché, then. “Now, listen carefully, because I’m going to run down the rules of safety when it comes to temperature play, okay?” For the next ten minutes, she goes over safety with me and explains everything carefully like I’m five. Then she clicks the button on her blow torch again, and I writhe against my bonds purely by instinct. Fire. Fire hurts. And it hurts in a not-so-fun way.

“Hey, wait a sec,” I say. “What are you going to do?”

I hear her steps on the left side of my body, and then she stops. She runs her nails across my back until my skin pebbles in goosebumps. Ah, God. That actually feels... a lot better than before, because I can’t see it coming. Okay, so I can admit when I’m wrong. And I was definitely wrong about this.

“Nothing you won’t enjoy. I’m only going to touch the soles of your feet with it. Do you remember your safe word?”

I nod. “Yeah. Of course.”

“Then let’s begin,” she says as she drags one of her nails into my lower back, so hard my eyes water. Damn, it hurts, but

I also don't want her to stop. Faith goes eerily silent for a minute, and for a moment I'm worried she's left me hanging—literally—in the shop. But then I feel it. Scorching heat on the back of my foot's heel for half a second. I yelp, and Faith laughs.

“Did you just burn me?”

“No. Your feet are fine, don't you worry,” she says with a dark chuckle. “I grazed you. But if you need to stop, you can —”

No. No way am I ruining our remaining time together by turning tail at the first sign of discomfort. Besides, the sensation was oddly addicting. I've never thought to incorporate this sort of thing into the bedroom before. I burn myself from time to time just lighting candles. But being a torture demon from Hell comes with a few perks, such as knowing how to actually wield fire without maiming your target with third-degree burns. Still, my baser instincts beg me to pull away from a flame, not allow it to touch me, but in this case, I'm willing to experiment. For her. And for myself, of course. Pushing my boundaries has been strangely cathartic.

“Keep going,” I say. “And don't tell me when you're going to do it again.”

“I won't,” she says. Faith, true to her word, surprises me by pressing the scorching hot iron to my heels, catching me off guard. I flinch and grit my teeth in pain, but I never tell her to stop as she runs the metal against my skin again and again. She then rolls it briskly down my back, so fleeting I barely feel it, and I let out a deep moan of frustration.

“Please... that felt like a tickle,” I complain. Faith's tail coils around my erection and squeezes.

“Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't realize you wanted me to unload new sensations on you all at once. Who is in charge here, again? Me, or you?” Faith's voice has a slight edge to it, and my eyes roll into the back of my head as her tail slides up and down my shaft like she's trying to milk an orgasm out of me. Her tail pulses with pressure as precum spills from my tip, coating my length until her tail is completely covered in my

cum. Unable to help myself, I toss my head back and moan again.

“Yes, baby, right there—”

A painful crack slaps against my backside, rendering me speechless.

“W-What was that?” I rasp. “That didn’t feel like your hand and your tail is wrapped around my cock.”

“My flogger. Now, what did I tell you about calling me anything other than Faith?”

I lick my bottom lip and let my head drop in shame. “Don’t.”

“Exactly, dear one,” she says, affection dripping from every word. Then she dots light kisses on my skin in the same place she just hit. My skin screams in agony from her feather-light touch, but I know I earned that bruise. One hundred percent. My ragged breaths turn into full-on panting as my orgasm builds and builds within my core as her tail works my tip hard. Sweat drips down my brow until it reaches the apex of my chin and I shake my head free of the droplets.

“Faith... please,” I whimper. “I’m going to explode.”

“I know. I’m going to use this on your cock now, but I won’t burn you,” she purrs, and just as I’m about to reach my climax, her tail slips away. Gnashing my teeth together, I let out a deep moan as she replaces her tail with the hot iron rod and slides it up and down my shaft.

“Oh, fuck!” I writhe in place and strain against my bonds. Just when I think I can’t possibly take any more of the torture, she removes the hot iron rod and sets it down on the ground. Then I feel her soft lips wrap around my cock. Her forked tongue flicks up and down my shaft, and I gasp. “I’m going to come,” I warn her. “Faith, I can’t hold it back anymore.”

“Yes, you can,” she coos. “Because I put enough venom in you to keep you from coming for at least another hour.”

My eyes fly open, even though I can’t see anything aside from the blindfold. “An, an hour? You’re going to torture me

for an hour?”

“Unless you safe out, then yes, that was my plan,” she says.

Holy hell. This woman is a menace, and I think I’m falling for her.

My cock is enveloped in the wet heat of her mouth again and again, and I allow my hips to rock in tandem with her motions. Faith grunts and slurps as she devours me, taking so much of my cock that I can feel the back of her throat. All head and no orgasm would probably ruin anyone else’s day, but for me, this is my version of Heaven. Funny to think that a literal demon would be the one to give it to me, in the end.

Her mouth is a vice grip around my shaft as she sucks me mercilessly, so hard at times I swear she’s trying to make good on her earlier promise to extract my soul after all. But every time I think the pain is going to actually kill me, she lets up to allow me enough time to recover before gulping me down again.

“Faith,” I murmur after what feels like ten minutes of torture. She releases my cock with a wet pop.

“Yes, dear?” She gently swats my balls, and I gulp down a deep breath.

“May I... May I give you pleasure?” I ask, knowing what she’ll probably say. The answer is going to be no, because for whatever reason, she won’t let me treat her the way she deserves. Like the goddess that she is. The woman of my dreams.

She’s silent for a long moment. So quiet I’m afraid that maybe she’s left me to my own devices again, but then she murmurs, “Why would you want to do such a thing? This scene is about you. To help you work through... whatever it is you need to work through so I can steam clean your soul, remember?”

Letting out a contented sigh, I say, “Yeah. I know. And you’ve been perfect, and it’s everything I could have ever wanted and then some. You said you wanted to have fun these

last few hours on Earth. I can give that to you, if you'll let me."

I'd give her my heart, but we both know that's out of the question. Eating her out will have to suffice.

"How would you do this?" she finally asks.

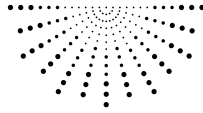
Realizing I might be breaking her down, I quickly say, "My tongue inside of you. Have you ever been eaten out before, Faith?"

I hear her stand up and move, so she's standing in front of me as I continue to hang from the vines. Then she rips the blindfold off. My vision is hazy for a while, but eventually she comes into focus, and when she steps closer to me, her nipples graze against my lips. I don't lick them, despite wanting to. Badly.

"Why, it's just my favorite thing about Earth," she chirps.

I meet her salacious grin with one of my own. "Then let me give you the best you've ever had."

## FAITH



Though I agreed to having my sub pleasure me, I still made sure to put some ground rules in place before beginning. For one thing, we must do this on a comfortable bed. There's no way my ass was getting chapped sitting in that chair. It might have been part of his punishment, but it doesn't have to be mine. I snap my fingers and watch his eyes bulge out of his head when an enormous, circular bed appears in the middle of the floor. The chair poofs out of existence.

The cashmere blankets and deep rose sheets practically beg me to sweep across them with my naked body, and I fully intend on doing so, but there's still a little setup required. When I snap my fingers again, all the candies strewn across the floor are suddenly back inside their jars and on the shelves. It's like they never fell in the first place.

"There. A little cleaner," I say, brushing my hands together. "Hmm. What else?"

"Candles?" Byron suggests. "If... if you want them, that is." He wisely averts his eyes down to the floor. "Sorry."

"No, that's a lovely idea," I purr, and then snap my fingers to create dozens of tea lights all over the room. The soft amber glow refracts across a jar full of rock candy lollipops, making the crystalline sugar treats within glitter like diamonds. Pretty. "Enough, I suppose."

Then I turn to Byron and grin as he stands before me, wearing not a stitch of clothing. Just how I like him. When I



snap my fingers, his wrists are bound behind his back.

“Kneel at the base of the bed,” I command, and though he seems disappointed by the wrist bindings, he doesn’t say anything. Yet. Instead, he shuffles to the edge of the bed and slowly gets down on his knees and looks up at me, waiting. I climb onto the bed and position myself before him and spread my legs wide up towards my ears. “Now, you may begin.”

He clears his throat and lowers his mouth to my cunt, but doesn’t start licking like I expect him to. I raise an eyebrow and sit up when it becomes painfully obvious he’s not going to get on with it.

“What’s the matter?” I ask. “I said start.”

“I...” He looks from my sex back up to my face and winces. “This is so clinical, don’t you think?”

I blink. “I lit some damned candles for you. What more do you want?”

Byron shakes his head and chuckles, though it seems like it’s mostly to himself. “I can’t believe I’m saying this, but... connection. Faith, I need connection. Telling me to get down on my knees and service you without warming you up at all is... it’s strange. That’s all.”

Rolling my eyes, I get up from the bed and place my hands on his shoulders, then begin to knead them in a gentle massage. “What would help with that, then?” I ask.

He appears to chew the inside of his cheek before mumbling, “Kissing. I want to kiss you. On the bed. And I want to touch you with my hands.”

A sound gets stuck in my throat, and I stop kneading his shoulders to sit back on my knees.

“Then afterward, yes, you can cuff me, step on me, bring out the hot iron again, whatever. But I need this, Faith. Please.”

Absently, I run my claws through his hair and massage his scalp as I think back to all the other men I’ve tortured in the past. They were left writhing and screaming, of course, since

they were marked for punishment and soul extraction. Never once in my miserably long life did I kiss those mortals. I never treated them well. Yet when Byron asks me so sweetly for mercy, to be cared for, I want to give it to him tenfold. There is nothing more I'd love than to walk hand in hand through a boring museum, if that's what would make him happy.

I'm not built for this. I'm built to condemn and torment. I'm not built for love. *Am I?*

Yet... I remind myself that I'm probably going to the Pit tomorrow, so now isn't the time to sweat the small stuff.

"Oh, fine. Just promise me you won't get all weepy on me, though. I can't stand tears unless it's because I'm beating you," I say.

Byron's smile stretches across his face so hard I'm worried his muscles might pull. I snap my fingers, releasing him of his licorice bonds, and he jumps up onto the bed like a dog being invited by his master. All he needs is a tail to wag. He positions himself between my thighs and bows his head like a sinner in church, head lowered reverently, and then pulls my thighs apart with care. His eyes home in on the delicate piece of gold jewelry immediately.

"Is this what I think it is?" he rasps, then brushes his fingertip across the little diamond adorning my clit. "I expected you to have nipple piercings, but not this. Don't know why I wouldn't expect a clit piercing, though."

I smirk. "I only have the one piercing. This clit has one, but not the other."

His throat bobs as he meets my gaze, and his mouth falls open. "W-Wait, what? You have more than one clitoris?"

Nodding, I say, "Yes. All demon females have multiple clits, though they're not always in the same place."

"Where's the other one, then? I don't see it anywhere on your body," he murmurs, then brushes his lips across my stomach gently, over and over again. My blood races in my veins, wanting him to devour me until I can't breathe. My fingers trail over my breasts, and I stop to give them both a

firm squeeze. Byron's bottom lip trembles as he watches me pinch both of my hard nipples, giving him a show. Then I run my hands down, down past my breasts, past my navel, and between my slit.

"Deep in here," I rasp. "Deep, deep in here."

His brows lift again, and he peers down where my fingers are dancing, playing. He licks his lips and grins.

"Where your cervix is?" Byron winces, and I shake my head.

"I don't have one. Demons can't reproduce, so instead of it just being a hole in the wall, I've got another clit."

Byron kisses the inside of my thigh again and asks, "Would that explain the earthquake-inducing orgasm earlier, then? Or was I really just that good for you?"

A man's ego is a fragile thing, and normally I'd delight in shattering it to pieces. But Byron has been good to me. I can't even think about harming him like that now. When I don't say anything, he sighs.

"Nah, didn't think so. Not like I did much of anything to you, anyway. It's fine," he mutters.

"You were more than adequate. Helps that you have such a big cock," I say with a wink. "So, in a way. Yes. Your giant cock touched my other clit to the point I almost imploded. It's rare for anyone to get in there deep enough to stroke it. But then again, it's not like I make a habit of riding my marks, either."

He lets out another deep, rumbling chuckle, and I notice myself getting wetter at the sound. Byron presses a kiss to the inside of my thigh, then another, and another until I'm sighing from need. When he lowers himself down on top of me, he's gentle, like he's afraid he might hurt me. His mouth finds mine, and our tongues meet like the last time we kissed. I moan into his mouth, unable to tamp down the ecstasy that's building deep within my core. Kissing is miraculous, I decide. And everyone in Hell is truly missing out. Sucks to be them. After several minutes of kissing that literally leaves me

breathless, he climbs to the foot of the bed and looks up at me from between my legs with a darkened gaze. There's a hazy lust in his eyes, and I lick my lips in anticipation.

Then he leans in and buries his nose and mouth in my pussy. I gasp, my back arching as he slides his tongue in between my sex. The sensation is warm and tender, and he wastes no time in worshipping my accessible clit while his arms slide under the small of my back, scooping me up to hoist my thighs around his ears.

My tail thrashes violently across the silk sheets as a shudder tears through my body.

"Oh," I whimper, and my claws dig into the sheets at my sides. "That feels... perfect."

He doesn't say anything, only groans between my thighs as his tongue moves in and out of me. My tail then slithers across the mattress and up around his biceps before finding his throat and curling around it like a necklace, but I don't squeeze. Byron's throat bobs as he removes his mouth from my cunt just long enough to gaze up at me with darkened eyes.

"Have you ever experimented with breath play, my dear?" I ask. He shakes his head. "Would you like to?"

Byron removes his tongue from my hole and rasps, "Yes. Oh, God, yes."

I will never grow tired of the enthusiastic consent. Not ever. My tail pulses around his throat. Gently at first, to get him used to the sensation. His eyes widen, then he sinks back down into my depths and worships my exterior clit with his tongue. My tail tightens around his throat again, along with his grip on my thighs.

"You want this just as badly as I want you. Isn't that right?" I taunt and prop myself up on my forearms so I can watch as my tail squeezes hard. I release, then squeeze again. So far, he's holding up a lot better than my previous estimations. His licking grows more vigorous. The harder I squeeze, the more aggressive his oral ministrations, until my exterior clit is throbbing in agony, begging for release. And

then, without warning, an invisible thread inside of me snaps. My orgasm comes on fast and aggressive and leaves my thighs quaking. My tail tenses around Byron's throat, and his eyes water as my entire body thrashes on the mattress.

I need to release my tail, or I might hurt him. I know this. Yet when wave after wave crashes over me, it's like I've lost complete control over my body. Byron grabs onto my waist and hoists me into the air and carries me over to the wall, my tail still tied around his neck like a ribbon. How am I not choking the life out of him? A vein throbs in his neck as he slams me against the wall and thrusts his cock up and into me.

I scream, and my tail tightens again. He pumps into me, sending me gliding up and down the wall in sharp movements. What the fuck is happening right now? I don't know, and I don't care because this is hot as hell, being taken like this so violently. One moment he's submitting to me like the good sub he is, and then the next he's fucking me until I nearly black out. Normally, I'd punish him for something like this, but I enjoy this side of him. A brief thought flickers through my mind as the stirrings of another climax threaten me. *Submitting to him wouldn't be the worst thing in the world, perhaps.* Byron claps his palm over my mouth as I let out another strangled moan, and he leans in to whisper harshly in my ear.

"Now how does it feel, you little whore? To be taken like the filthy demon you are?"

My eyes widen as I come undone again. This time, my second clit is the one throbbing, and I scrape my claws down Byron's back, leaving angry marks in their wake. If he cares, he doesn't let on as he continues to tear into my pussy. I come again, and again, and again... until tears spill from my eyes and I'm trembling in his arms. Then he lowers me back down on the mattress. Delicately, like a fragile cup going back in the cupboard, and he presses his lips to my forehead.

My hair is matted across my shoulders and forehead, slick with sweat and tears. My thighs quake, slick with his cum. He drops down beside me on the bed and props himself up on his elbow to look down at me.

“I counted at least five orgasms,” he says with a cheeky grin. “Am I right?”

My chest heaves as I struggle to catch my breath. “What the fuck was that?” I blurt, and bare my fangs at him. “You fucked me like a common whore.” *And I loved every second of it.*

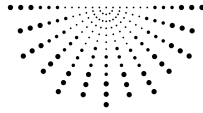
Byron’s damp hair falls in his eyes, making him look boyish and sweet again. “No, I took you like the goddess of a woman that you are. There’s nothing common about you, sweetheart.” Byron brushes his hand across my head, stroking my hair. “Just thought you could use a taste of your own medicine, is all. Did you like it?”

Smiling, I nod and say, “I... I did. Thank you.”

“No need to thank me. You work hard. It’s about time someone repaid the favor, I think.”

Furrowing my brows, I sit up in the bed and pull the covers up to my chest. Is this what it’s like to feel human?

## BYRON



The following morning, I wake up beside Faith in the giant conjured bed in the middle of the candy shop. A tiny sliver of sunlight peeks in through the blinds, and I roll onto my side to put my arm around her waist... only she's not there. Fear grips my heart, sending me bolting upright in bed.

"Faith?" I look around the dimly lit shop. It doesn't look like anyone's been in here yet today, but she had to have left through the front door if she did leave. Right? She wouldn't go back to Hell without saying goodbye first. I swallow hard and wrap the blankets around my torso, then swing my legs around to the side of the bed to go look for her.

Thankfully, I don't have to search the room for my pants, because a black vortex opens up in the middle of the floor. Faith slides out of it, surprisingly, in her human form, with her hair twisted into an elegant high ponytail. She's wearing very little makeup this morning, save for swoops of cat-eye liner. And she's also got on a super-soft looking beige sweater and jeans. Appropriate for the weather, finally, and damn, does the sweater hug her body in all the best places.

"Good morning," she announces, and holds out a cup of coffee like she's my secretary, ready to go over the morning's list of bullet points. "I brought you this. And a bagel is in the bag, if you want it."

I arch a brow and take both the bag and coffee from her, then she walks behind the counter and opens the register.

“What are you doing?” I ask as I toss the bag onto the bed and pop the lid on my to-go coffee.

She doesn't bother looking up at me. “I'm getting ready to open for the day. What does it look like I'm doing?”

“It looks like you're about to open for the day, yeah, which is funny considering this isn't a real business,” I say. “And this is your last day on Earth, right?”

Faith lets out a long, exasperated sigh and then narrows her gaze on me. Then she slams the register drawer shut again. “Yes, Byron. I am well aware of what day it is and how much time I have left. Thank you for reminding me.”

O... kay. She's in a foul mood this morning, despite our incredibly hot night together. But I'd be a special kind of asshole if I thought that her impending date with the Pit would be nullified simply because we had mind-blowing sex. Even I'm not *that* good. I just thought she'd be doing something else with her time. If I only had twenty-four hours of freedom left, you bet your sweet ass I wouldn't be working. Fuck no. I'd be doing everything in my power to make sure my last day wasn't my last day. And I'm determined to make sure it's not her last, either.

Because I've fallen for her.

Not only that, but she doesn't deserve to be sent somewhere like the Pit. She deserves the freedom to make her own choices and carve her own path in life, like we all do.

“Faith,” I start, and take a quick sip of my coffee. Faith stares down at the register and pretends to go through her opening routine, but at this point, I'm starting to understand her a bit better. She's quiet. Too quiet. She must be scared shitless. I know I would be, and I'm not too proud to admit it. “We need to talk.”

She still doesn't look at me while she steps out from behind the counter and flips the closed sign to open. I sigh and shake my head.

“Faith, sweetheart. Look at me, please,” I murmur, not wanting to set her off. But this is important. She finally lifts



her chin and shoots a glare in my direction.

“Let’s not make this any more difficult than it already is,” she snaps, then crosses her arms in front of her chest. I set my coffee down on the counter and search for my clothing. The last thing we need is for random people to wander in to find a bed and a naked man in the middle of a candy store. How would anyone explain that one?

Faith waits until I’m changed and then snaps her fingers, spiriting the bed away.

“No, making this more difficult is precisely what we’re going to do,” I say, and stalk toward her, closing the gap between us. She glares up at me, and I work my jaw as I stare down at her in kind. “The easy thing would be accepting your fate and waiting for it to happen.”

“Correct, because there is nothing we can do,” she says, venom in every syllable. “So let’s not waste our time.”

“As opposed to...? Opposed to what, Faith?” I gesture to the room and snort. “As opposed to working in a fake store for the rest of the day? You can’t be serious. Let’s sit down and talk about this. Work something out. I’m sure if we put our heads together, we can figure out a way for you to either meet your quota or get out of your predicament.”

She rolls her eyes at me, which makes me growl in response, and then she moves to lean against the counter. “You don’t understand how Hell works,” she says.

I swallow. “You’re right. I don’t. Because we haven’t talked about it. We met, we fucked, and haven’t done a whole lot of talking. But the moments where we did talk, Faith? Those were of the best times I’ve ever spent with a woman.”

Her bottom lip trembles for half a second, so quick I almost miss it. But it was there. The slightest tell. “I’m not lying, Faith. I don’t date women. You know that. You’ve seen my soul,” I say, bringing my palm to my chest. “You know what’s in here. It’s black, but you make me want to turn things around.”

“So go turn things around, then. We don’t need to speak to one another ever again,” she hisses. I flinch as though I’ve been slapped. She doesn’t mean what she just said, because I can recognize a fellow damaged soul when I see one. As the old adage goes, hurt people hurt people. Even if she’s a demon, I’m going out on a limb to guess it’s the same. Because Faith might not be human, but we have a lot more in common than she might think.

“Don’t say shit like that to me because you think it’ll make things easier,” I grind out, stepping toward her again. She jerks away, averting her eyes to stare at a random spot on the wall. I brush my fingers against her shoulder and murmur, “Because we both know that’s not the case. We both know we want each other. That’s not what we should be fighting right now.”

Maybe it’s just my imagination, but I swear I see the glimmer of wetness in her eyes. When she goes to dab at them, that’s when I’m one hundred percent positive she’s feeling something other than contempt, too.

“I don’t want to go,” she murmurs, so quietly I almost don’t hear her. “I don’t want to go back. Get thrown in the Pit. Doomed to an eternity of loneliness.”

My heart breaks at the words, and I clench my fists. Who do I have to hit to keep her free? Whose life do I need to ruin in order to save the woman I’ve come to care so fucking much about? At this point, I’d do anything to ensure her freedom. Anything at all. But I have no idea what to do. I’m just a mortal human man, after all. I can’t take on Hell.

She looks back at me, tears slipping from her violet eyes, and places her hands in mine. My fingers curl around hers tenderly and squeeze. No, there really isn’t anything I can do.

“What if you didn’t go back?” I ask.

She lets out a derisive snort and says, “I can’t just not go back. I don’t think that’s how it works. They’ll summon me, and I’ll have to go.”

“So you don’t know for certain.”

She shakes her head. “No. I’ve never not gone back before. I’ve gone in to the office late plenty of times before, but I’ve never just gone... AWOL.”

My lips curl into a smirk as an idea forms in my mind. “Well... I’ve never been tied to a chair with Red Vines before or had a candy cane up my ass, but there’s a first time for everything.”

Faith lets out a small chuckle as she squeezes my hands tighter. “Fine. I’ll try it. But don’t put yourself in danger if they come knocking, okay? I don’t want you getting involved. The only thing that could make the Pit worse is being dragged to the Pit with the knowledge that something terrible happened to you.”

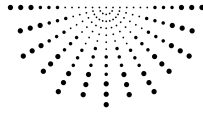
Ugh. I hate this. I hate this because she already knows me well enough to know that I would absolutely fight tooth and nail for her. Even if it’s against some crazy, twenty-foot demon with claws and razor teeth.

“Remember who’s in charge,” she whispers.

I lean over and press my forehead to hers, then close my eyes. “You,” I whisper back. “Always you.”

“Good boy,” she says, and then leans up to brush her lips against mine. It’s the best kiss I’ve ever had.

## FAITH



I nstead of wallowing in misery or keeping the shop open like I had planned, Byron takes me out for ice cream even though it's freezing outside. So cold, in fact, it's started to snow. We sit in companionable silence with our mugs of steaming coffee and pints of mint chocolate chip ice cream—his favorite, evidently—and watch as the snow trickles down from the heavens.

“Hey,” he says, finally breaking the silence between us.

I lick my spoon clean of the ice cream and delight in the pleasant tingle on my tongue, then lift my brow at him. “Mm?”

“Since Hell is real, and damned souls go there to be tormented for eternity, does that mean Heaven is also real?” he asks.

“Yes. Heaven is real. It's not as nice as you may think, though,” I say. Byron predictably blinks in confusion. “Angels are annoying. They're sanctimonious, have a bajillion eyeballs so making eye contact with them is impossible, and they tend to speak in cryptic poetry. Basically, they're a nightmare, especially if you're an introvert.”

Byron takes another spoonful of ice cream and seems to ponder my statement before saying, “You know any, personally?”

Ugh. I wish I didn't. Every time we had a department-wide staff meeting, at least one or two angels are present with binders full of bullshit. Paperwork for us to go over. Souls that

were wrongfully sent down the pipe and need reversing. Stuff like that. My eyes always glaze over during those meetings.

“Unfortunately, yes,” I say. “Now, can we please stop talking about Heaven and angels? It’s ruining the ice cream.”

Byron chuckles then slides his arm around my shoulder and pulls me in for a hug. When he kisses the top of my head, I shudder, and not from the chill of the dessert. “Yeah. Sorry. I was just curious. We have about ten hours left before we find out if you’re getting dragged back or not. How do you want to spend it?”

My lips curve into a playful smirk as he buries his nose in my hair. “I have a few ideas. Not sure you’ll like all of them, but...”

He tightens his grip on my shoulder and chuckles into my hair. “I’ll like them. There’s not much you could do to me at this point that I wouldn’t say yes to.”



“OKAY, when I said all of that earlier? I might’ve been bluffing a bit,” Byron says as I fasten the massive red dildo around my front. “What is that thing even made of, anyway? Because knowing you, it’s not silicone.”

He’s got me there. I lick my finger and slide it along the length of the strap-on before sticking it into my mouth to taste test.

Popping my finger out of my mouth, I murmur, “Cherry gummy bear? Only it’s a gummy cock.”

Byron, cuffed to the bed by his wrists and ankles, lets out a groan. “You’ve got to be shitting me.”

I approach the bed slowly, then hop up onto the mattress and loom over him, dragging the tip of the strap-on gummy across his adorable backside. “No, sweet thing. We’re doing this correctly, so there will be no shitting, never you fear.”

He wriggles on the satin sheets and stares at me, fear and confusion plain as day on his face. “Okay, but let’s be real for half a second, Faith. That’s a food product. Is it even going to hold up once it meets my ass? Because the Red Vines didn’t fare so well.”

I bat my lashes and grab onto my tail, then use it to smack him across his taut abdomen. He flinches, but then he lets out a soft groan of approval as a red streak appears above his navel. “Yes. It will work. The licorice failed because I didn’t account for the food aspect of the ropes in my magic. Since then, I’ve perfected it. Now, I sense apprehension in you... but are you actually okay with this? Remember that you hold all the power here.”

While I swing my tail around in the air, Byron’s face twists from an expression of apprehension to genuine affection. For me. It’s like a kick to the heart whenever he smiles at me the way he does. He strains against his bonds, testing them.

“I thought you said you’re the one in charge?” he asks, arching an eyebrow.

I crawl over to his left wrist and check the rope, then tap it three times. It loosens on my command, and he lets out a soft sigh of relief.

“Yes, but make no mistake,” I begin as I slide across his chest, giving him a racy show as I make my way over to his other bond. “You still hold all the power. You safe out, and we’re done. Scene over. We find something else to occupy ourselves with. I might pick the entertainment, but you get the final word, always.”

Byron nods as he watches me loosen the other rope on his wrist. There. The color is already returning to his hands. Treating him like he’s the most precious thing in the universe to me has been a real and rare treat. Huh. Who would have thought I’d learn something new about myself at my age? Anyway, I’ll never have this opportunity again to be affectionate with a human, so I’m going to savor every second I can get. Byron watches me carefully, never taking his eyes off me as I hop off of the bed and move back toward the edge

by his feet. It's like he's afraid I'll suddenly poof into a cloud of smoke.

"Huh. I never thought of it that way before," he says. "But... thank you. For everything."

I blink, unsure of what to say. Heat floods my cheeks, and I look straight up at the ceiling before my damned eyes can water again. I can't be getting flushed right before I peg the guy. I just can't.

"Stop that. I'm supposed to be fucking your ass in a second and you're making this weird," I say, dabbing at my eyes.

Byron lets out a dark chuckle. "Seriously? You're the one about to fuck me with an oversized gummy dildo and I'm making this weird?"

Whatever. We don't have time to banter and screw around. Not when there's actual screwing to be had. So, I don't take his bait and instead snap my fingers to summon a bottle of strawberry-flavored lube into my hand. I squirt a generous amount into my palms and onto the dildo, then retract my claws before teasing his opening with my fingers. He lets out a deep moan of appreciation as I goad his hole, gently of course, until it stretches to my satisfaction. I insert a third finger, and when I look up to check on him, I nearly bite my own tongue. Byron's eyes roll back into his head, and his throat tightens while sweat already dribbles from his forehead.

"Doing okay? Enjoying yourself?" I growl.

He swallows thickly, then murmurs, "Loving it so far."

I insert another finger into his tight hole and move it back and forth in slow movements. He bucks his hips, and for the first time since meeting him, I'd nearly forgotten all about his cock. Byron's hardened length stabs into the air with each buck of his hips, and precum rolls down his shaft. He's liable to burst soon unless I take things a step further. It wouldn't do if he came already, so I insert my whole hand into his ass and make a fist. His eyes fly open, and he lets out a guttural cry.

“Fuck, yes!” His voice echoes, and a swell of pride makes my chest tighten until I can barely breathe.

“You’re taking me so well,” I croon. “An entire fist in your ass, and no complaints? Color me surprised.”

Byron tenses against his bonds again, as though he’d forgotten they were there. He wants to touch me. I know he does. And a big part of me wants him to touch me, too, but not yet. Not when there’s so much left to explore with him.

He chuckles and says, “To be fair, your fist is tiny. Smaller than a baseball.”

I blink, then lift my other hand and make a fist to examine it. “What? It’s not that small, is it? Anyway, I have no idea what a baseball even is, so that’s irrelevant. What I want to know is how you know that. Did you put something up here before, Byron?”

His laugh sounds exhausted, then he says, “N-No! You’re my first, I swear!”

Byron bites his bottom lip as his hips continue to buck. It’s getting more and more difficult to ignore his cock, even though my mouth and throat want nothing more than to devour him whole.

“Doesn’t know what a baseball is,” he mutters to himself. “I need to take you to a game, then.”

But I shake my head and tap his inner thigh, reminding him with sad eyes that no, there’s not going to be a later for us. There won’t be any more fun outings. There’s only this moment. Right now, right here. His throat bobs up and down, and he nods, remembering himself. Not wanting to spoil the moment with something as disgusting as feelings, I withdraw my fist from his ass and position the gummy dildo to his entrance.

“Are you ready for this?” I purr. When his eyes meet mine, I see a flicker of defiance in them. He nods. “Good. And you remember your safe word?”

He nods again.



I slide the tip of the gummy dildo into his entrance and sink forward. Byron's deep moans are encouraging, so I continue to press into him until I'm up to the hilt and seated against him. I sink down onto the mattress on my knees until I'm seated within him, then wait for him to adjust to the fullness. His eyes meet mine, and his abdomen strains as his chest heaves in deep, rhythmic breaths.

"Good. Just breathe, just like that," I say as I run my claws down his abs. A shiver runs through his muscular body, and then he nods.

"This is okay," he says. "I'm okay."

The scent of sweat and strawberry fills the room, creating an intoxicating blend that I wish I could bottle up as a perfume. Dab it on behind my ears during my loneliest nights so I can remember the way Byron shuddered beneath me. Remember the ways he'd come undone for me. My Byron. My beautiful, charming sub, who I will remember for the rest of my days.

Will he remember me, too, when he is old and gray?

I slide in and out of him as my mind races through all the endless possibilities. The futures I would never have, the moments we would never share. His head tilts back as he lets out a throaty moan. Euphoria takes over his facial expressions, and I quicken my pace, fucking him not like a submissive but like a lover.

"Yes, like that," he moans. And perhaps against my better judgement, I snap my fingers and allow the bonds restraining him to disappear completely. Byron notices his newfound freedom immediately and lifts his arms, beckoning me to come down to him. To lay on top of him. I oblige, of course, because I'm not a monster, after all, and because I also need this, too. My breasts crush against his chest, and our mouths meet like two friends who haven't seen one other in years.

Byron's tongue swirls around mine, timid at first. And then his arms wrap around my waist to pull me tighter against him. I never stop moving within him, doing my best to keep some semblance of a rhythm as our bodies meet in ecstasy.

“Faith,” he whispers hoarsely into the crook of my neck. “I love you.”

For a second, my entire body tenses. I’m not sure how to react. No one has ever said that to me before, and here my submissive just told me he loves me while I’m gummy-balls deep inside of him. But the most frightening aspect of it all is that I think I feel the same way about him. No, we haven’t known each other for very long. But what’s two days when you literally live forever? What’s two days when your life is about to end in a handful of hours, anyway?

Pressing my nose against his, I murmur, “I love you, too, Byron.”

His mouth crashes against mine, and then I feel a burst of wetness across my belly. He grunts low into my mouth as we continue to kiss, his own pleasure ripping through his body. Reluctantly, I withdraw from him and make the strap-on disappear back into the void. Byron doesn’t get up right away to clean himself. Instead, he envelopes me in his arms, hugging me, and brushes his lips against my temple.

“That was... that was incredible,” he breathes. “And a workout. Won’t have to hit the gym later for my cardio, that’s for sure.”

I chuckle against the bare skin of his chest and smile. This is the first time I’ve ever truly felt peace. Never thought it possible.

“I’m glad you enjoyed that. Now you know you enjoy having things in your ass,” I say as I draw an imaginary circle across his chest with one of my claws.

He kisses the top of my head. “Not just ‘things,’ Faith. You. I enjoy having you in my ass. I wouldn’t let just anyone up in there.”

My heart twists again, reminding me that this was a one-time thing. A moment frozen in time. After today, Byron would have to go back to being himself. Fucking other women, probably. Women who aren’t me. A pang of jealousy sweeps through me, which is confusing because I have never

once been jealous of a man. Over other demons and their promotions? Absolutely. But never because I didn't want to share a mark. Forget about my poor monthly quotas. This possessiveness over a human would get me fired on the spot if they ever found out.

After an hour of cuddling in bed, I finally sit up and notice through the blinds that the sun is setting on the horizon. A tremor like a drumbeat stirs in my body. I'm being summoned after all. Our time together is finally at an end.

Exhaustion settles into my bones. A few thousand years ago, I would have fought my fate, perhaps gone down screaming. I would have clawed tooth and nail to stay on Earth. But I don't think I have it in me anymore. Byron is worth fighting for, of course, but he doesn't deserve a demon for a girlfriend. He deserves a fair chance at redemption, and it's going to be harder for him if he's attached to someone like me. I could let bitterness consume me, or I could try to send Byron off as positively as possible. He snores gently behind me, his nose twitching every so often. I can't help but smile. Adorable. My sub. My Byron.

When I run my claws through his hair, his eyes blink open and he grins up at me.

"Hey, you," he rasps. "Morning already?"

"Evening, I'm afraid," I say. "It's time to say goodbye."

He bolts upright in the bed, his sleepy eyes wide with panic.

"N-No. This can't be the end." Byron throws the sheets aside and clumsily puts his clothing back on. I watch him, agony rending my heart with each article of clothing he puts back on. Though my heart is splitting, I know I need to make this easier on him somehow. I get up from the bed and move to his side and cup his cheeks in my palms as he struggles to button his shirt.

"Byron, listen to me. We made tremendous progress here, you and I. You learned much about yourself. Please promise me you won't forget any of it after I leave," I say. "Your soul

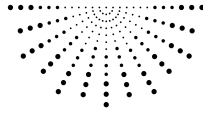
isn't squeaky clean like I hoped it would be, but it's a lot better than it was. Don't fuck it up, okay?"

His eyes well with unshed tears. "Don't say that. Please, don't say that..."

"Byron. Sweetheart. We always knew our time together was limited," I say. "But what you learned about yourself? That's not a fleeting thing. Hold on to it. And babe? Please go to therapy." I pat his cheek lovingly, and he takes my hands into his. His thumbs caress the back of my hands, and after what feels like an eternity, he finally nods.

"I won't forget," he chokes out. "I'll never forget what you taught me. Or you."

## BYRON



**A**fter trying to bargain with Faith for another hour, she left in a black vortex of her own making and disappeared from my life. Like she'd never even existed. The candy shop disappeared as soon as she left, too, leaving me standing in front of Fletcher & Sons in a state of confusion and grief. How am I supposed to go on living my life normally now?

The answer to that was simple: I wasn't going to.

A crimson demon with the most incredible set of legs and pair of breasts I'd ever laid eyes on had waltzed into my life and turned it upside down. I should have been terrified, and at first I guess I was. But then terror turned to lust, which turned to genuine affection. Which turned to...

Tears streak my cheeks. I didn't even realize I was crying, and when I lift my fingers to my face, I blink at the wetness. I never cry. The last time I cried was when my mother left me that fateful day in the rain, abandoning me to the foster care system. For most of my life, I was convinced that women were the enemy; that they only ever wanted two things from a man. That they weren't interested in a genuine connection, only money. How wrong I was.

I shake my head and run my fingers through my hair, letting some strands fall back in my eyes.

Well, what's done is done, I guess. But Faith was right. I probably should see a therapist as soon as possible. Still, the gnawing ache in my heart over her fate makes me want to do anything but go back to the office. Back to my boring, shitty

life where I'm desperately trying to fill the gaping black hole where love should be.

No. No, I'm not going to take this lying down. I'm not going to just sit around and accept that the woman I've fallen for is being sent to some God-awful pit in Hell where she'll suffer for the rest of eternity. She doesn't deserve that. No one does. Dense clouds overhead block out the sunlight, and suddenly, it starts to rain. People on the streets hurry to get indoors, but I allow the rain to soak through my shirt until finally the head of our security team pops his head out.

"Mr. Waits. Are you all right, sir?" he asks in his gruff, friendly voice.

I don't say anything at first and allow the frigid droplets of water to pelt me in the face.

"Sir?" he asks again, and I finally turn around to shake my head at him.

"I don't think I've been all right my entire life," I say.

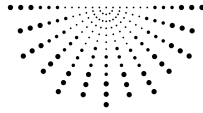
The security guard furrows his thick brow and then coughs into his hand. "Come on inside, Mr. Waits. I'll ask someone to bring you a hot drink and a change of clothes."

Shrugging, I head inside, completely defeated. Unable to save the woman I love. Unable to do a damned thing about my circumstances once again. As one of the buxom secretaries rushes to throw a towel over my shoulders, an idea sparks to life like flint against tinder. If Hell is real, then so is Heaven. And I've never been a religious man. I've never even gone to church. But if a demon chose to listen to me, then perhaps someone else would, too.

"Mr. Waits?" the secretary asks, her face screwing up at me in worry. "Do I need to call someone?"

I shake my head as I stalk off toward the elevator. "That won't be necessary, thank you. I don't want to be disturbed for the next hour." I press the button to call the elevator and step inside with renewed resolve. This is going to work. This has to work. It has to.

## FAITH



The office this evening is thankfully empty, so most of my colleagues aren't around to witness my utter humiliation as I'm lined up with three other demons who didn't cut the mustard this month. We stand in a queue down in the Processing and Requests department office, which is as bland and boring as the rest of the building. Fluorescent lamps flicker overhead, giving me a headache between my eyes.

"Next," a female demon croaks. I've never seen her before because I've never been down here before. She wears a bored expression on her wrinkled face, and her horns curl so dramatically they're in her nostrils. It's hard not to gawk at them as we shuffle forward. "Name and department," she barks to the female demon in front of me. The poor thing seems younger than I am, with dark blue skin and an adorable, stubbed tail that twitches.

"Elysie," she whimpers. "Marketing department."

Oof. Even the marketing department throws its cast-offs into the Pit? As the woman behind the desk slams her stamp into a piece of paper, I let out an exhausted yawn. Elysie, on the other hand, buries her face into her palms to sob loudly. But I can't be bothered. I always knew this day was coming. Could be worse, I guess. I could be going to the Pit without having ever met Byron. His memory will be a comfort to me down there, if nothing else.

"Next!" the demon barks, and I step up to the desk. "Name and department, please."

I open my mouth to respond when, behind us, the door flies open and whacks into the wall so hard it falls off its hinges. Everyone in the room jumps, including the demon behind the desk, who is suddenly on her feet and slamming her claws onto the counter.

“What the fuck is going on—” she starts, but a burst of light streams into the room, blinding us all. I shield my face with my arm and let out a strangled gasp as the headache behind my eyes instantly turns into a migraine. What now? Can’t I just go to the Pit in peace? Evidently not.

“STOP THIS AT ONCE,” a deep voice bellows.

I cringe. The only way this day could get any worse is if an angel somehow obliterated the door and stepped into this suffocating office space. And when the brilliant, blinding light finally dims down to a soft glow, I notice the feathers. The eyeballs all over the chiseled torso and hands. The perfectly sculpted facial features as though cut from marble, and the violently yellow eyes that glint in our direction.

Yup. An angel is, in fact, here to make my day worse.

“Donovan, to what do we owe the pleasure?” the demon behind the desk grinds out, clearly getting ready to hurl a book at his head.

Donovan is one of Heaven’s most annoying attorneys. He never loses his cases, and he’s basically God’s favorite child because he loves nothing more than to tattle on everyone and everything that so much as thinks about breaching the rules. In short, I hate this guy. But I’ll have to get in line, because so does everyone else.

He tucks his wings tight to his back as all seventy of his eyeballs blink in unison. I let out a dramatic gagging sound. It’s hard enough having an obnoxious attorney in the office on the day you’re scheduled for the Pit, but it’s a million times worse when the guy is out of your darkest tryphobic nightmares.

Donovan licks one of his fingers and flips open a crusty-smelling brown book. The friggin’ thing is positively ancient,



like all angels. Why they haven't embraced technology like Hell is beyond me. I go to stand beside the other demons from the queue and try to make myself appear smaller by cowering.

Donovan strides up to the desk, flipping through his book, and says, "I have it on good authority that Hell is sending demons who do not meet their monthly quotas to the Pit."

The demon behind the desk swallows thickly, then nods. "Er, yes. That's true. Is there something wrong with that?"

Donovan's wings fidget as he leans over the desk, his mouth peeled back in a thin line. "Yeaaaaaaah," he drawls. "I'm going to need you to stop processing these demons immediately."

"W-What?! Why? We're not breaking any rules! These four demons are slated for the Pit immediately, and if we don't get them on the next bus, Lucifer will—" the demon processing officer sputters, but is quickly silenced by a single glare from Donovan.

"I've already spoken with Lucifer about this breach of the rules, and he's aware of the situation. You're to stop processing all demons immediately and prepare for the removal of all demons who failed to meet their monthly quotas from the Pit."

My heart leaps into my throat. Am I hearing this correctly? Did Donovan, the worst angel in Heaven, seriously fly down here today and... save my ass? My tail twitches, and he flicks his gaze over to mine. He sneers. I sneer back.

"Faith," he says with utter disdain. "I'm not surprised to see you here. You're a very lucky woman today, it seems."

I narrow my eyes. "Not so lucky, if I have to see your face."

"Careful, now," Donovan says, tapping his book. "My face has saved you from an eternity of torment by boredom."

I plant a hand on my hip and smirk. "Unless you're here to torture me in place of the Pit, in which case I'm going to have to decline and ask you to send me on the next bus."

“Funny. It’s good to see your sense of humor hasn’t waned even in the face of peril,” he says, then lets out a soft cough into his fist. Then he glares back at the officer demon behind the desk. “Hurry up. We don’t have all day.”

“Yes, sir,” the woman says, then immediately gets to work on her computer to file the request.

The other demons in the queue next to me let out sighs of relief. I hate to admit it, but Donovan really did save my ass today. The thing is, I don’t know how or why. It can’t just be divine intervention on my behalf. Or maybe it’s dumb luck that someone decided to audit us today?

My tail twitches again, and I take a step toward the enormous angel. “So, what’s the deal? Why now? They’ve been sending demons to the Pit for the past thousand years or so.”

Donovan rolls his eyes and shakes his head. “Figures. Lucifer wasn’t aware of this, either. Someone up the chain of command is going to hear from this and then *they’ll* be thrown into the Pit. It’s absolutely reprehensible what they’re doing to you all down here.”

A corner of my mouth curves into a smirk. “Careful now, Donovan, or someone might accuse you of actually caring about us.”

He snorts. “I care about the law, as always, Miss Faith. You’re very lucky today that a human prayed on your behalf, begging us to look into this. Normally, we wouldn’t investigate prayers on the behalf of demons, but when he mentioned you were getting thrown into the Pit for your poor job performance... well, we had to at least look into it.”

I blink, too stunned to form words. A human prayed on my behalf? *Byron*. Byron prayed for me?

Noticing my surprise, Donovan smirks and says, “Yes. You must’ve left quite the impression on that human on Earth. In fact, I’m also here for another reason.”

I lift my brows and stare up at him, suddenly feeling incredibly small. He leans down, still smirking that awful

smirk of his and says, “You caught the attention of our hiring department.”

A sharp laugh bubbles up my throat. It’s louder than I mean it to be, and the other demons around me flinch and press their backs against the wall. Donovan rolls his eyes as he straightens.

“Yes, I know. I was amused, too, and thought it was a joke at first.”

I’m laughing so hard tears spill down my cheeks, and I dab at them.

“Are you quite done?” He glares at me.

I gnaw on my bottom lip to stop myself from laughing. “I’m sorry, I’m sorry. I’ll get it together. Okay, I’m good,” I say, and my tail curls behind me.

“Good. Our hiring department noted the soul you saved from possible damnation. At that human’s current rate, his trajectory was for Hell. You’ve turned him around,” he says. My heart swells, and my tail snaps against the floor, cracking like a whip. The demons behind me cower and let out sniveling whimpers. Oh, good grief. No wonder they couldn’t cut it and were doomed for the Pit, if my tail scares them.

“And?” I say, batting my lashes prettily. “He’s going to be okay, then?”

Please let Byron be okay. It would be a blow to my own soul if he ever wound up down here. He’s a little rough around the edges. A work in progress. But who isn’t? He hasn’t done anything to earn himself a place down here. Not yet, at least.

“Most likely, thanks to you. Which leads me to my next point. An offer of employment,” he says.

“W-What?” I stammer. “No, there must be some mistake. I’m a terrible employee. I was about to get demoted to the Pit!”

He flashes me a smug smile. “Yes, I’m aware. But you were a poor employee... here.” He gestures to the room full of bewildered demons.

I shake my head. “I don’t understand.”

“Your lack of conviction in your work and reluctance for cruelty and malice are an asset in Heaven, Miss Faith, She Who Is Ironically Named For A Demon,” he says, and his lips curl into a sardonic grin. Ugh, I hate this angel’s face, but I love the words coming out of his mouth right now.

“So, you’re saying that because I’m terrible at my job in Hell, I have a shot at a job in Heaven?” I ask. “I’m worthy of Heaven?” They think I’m good. They think I’m worthy of working upstairs. This can’t be real. But I’m trash, right? That’s what my boss always told me. “Just want to make sure I’m getting this straight.”

Donovan nods. The demon officer behind the desk stops typing and looks up at me, her jaw slack. Yeah. She can’t believe this shit, either. At least it’s not just me.

“That’s precisely what I am saying,” Donovan says, then squeezes the bridge of his nose. “I would rather not have to explain myself again, and I urge you to consider this carefully, Miss Faith. This is not an offer extended often. Do you accept?”

My heart thrums again in my chest. A chance at redemption. A chance at getting out of Hell and in a job where I finally might be appreciated. It’s more than I could have ever asked for or even dreamed of. It’s the solution to all my problems. No penthouse on the Lake of Fire, which is unfortunate, but at least I wouldn’t have to pretend I enjoyed my job. I could apply myself somewhere that suits me better.

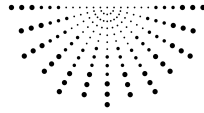
But then Byron’s face appears in my mind, and my stomach curdles like spoiled milk.

“Actually...” I say as my tail goes limp on the ground. “I have another request, if you would hear it?”

Donovan’s brows shoot up as he stares down at me. “Unusual. But very well, I will hear you out.”

“Would you be willing to assign me somewhere else?” I ask.

## BYRON



Days after Faith was taken away, I manage to find myself a therapist on the other side of the city. He's not cheap, but with my office's insurance policy, I can get the help I need. I've also apologized to the accounting department and sent them all restaurant gift cards. It's not enough, I know, but it's a start. I'm trying to make amends one day at a time. Hopefully Faith would approve.

My first therapy appointment is an hour, and I can't help but feel... anxious? Nervous? As I step out of the shower and run my fingers through my damp hair, I grimace when I look in the mirror. The dark circles under my eyes make me look half dead, and my skin is paler than usual. I haven't been sleeping.

Not since her.

Will it always be this way? The woman I love is beyond my reach and being tortured while I'm forced to go about my day-to-day life here on Earth. How is someone supposed to recover from something like that? What do I even say to my new therapist? "Hi, I'm Byron, and I fell in love with a dominant demon, but she was sent to the bowels of Hell to endure eternal torment. How are you?"

I shake my head as I grab the towel from the hook and wrap it around my waist. I'm about to check my phone that I left on the side of the sink when a knock sounds at my door.

"Be there in a minute!" I call out. My apartment is small enough that sound travels from room to room easily, so I hope

whoever is knocking actually hears me. No one ever knocks on my front door. Not even the neighbors. My apartment isn't ritzy even though I make enough money for something better, but it's comfortable. I pad into my bedroom and pull on a pair of gray sweatpants quickly before making my way to the front door.

I draw in a deep breath and yank it open, only to find a young woman with black hair and the most impressive rack I've ever seen staring up at me. Those familiar violet eyes stare at me, round with anticipation.

She's not any woman, she's... *Faith*.

I drop to my knees, unable to comprehend what I'm seeing. Who I'm seeing. Faith smiles, then drops down onto her knees in front of me. She's wearing a cute white sweater dress with a faux fur coat over her shoulders.

"I like your coat," I blurt, finally breaking the silence between us.

Faith runs her fingernails through my hair and chuckles. "Thanks," she rasps.

And finally, the shock wears off long enough for me to wrap my arms around her waist and pull her into my chest for a long, much-needed hug. "How?" I murmur into her ear.

She lifts her gaze to mine and kisses the tip of my nose. I'm smiling so much it's starting to hurt, but I don't care. I have her in my arms, and I still can't believe I'm not dreaming right now. Oh, please don't let this be a dream. Please don't let me wake up in my bed. I'll give anything to not wake up in my bed right now...

"A little birdy told me someone prayed that I should be saved," she whispers.

My chest tightens.

"Aw, you used your safe word after all," she says.

I chuckle into the crook of her neck and inhale her scent deeply. Vanilla and cinnamon, just as I remember. The same

scent that has been haunting my dreams this week. “Yeah, I guess I did. And it worked?”

“Obviously,” she snarks, but it lacks the bite of her previous teasing. “Normally, I’d be pissed if anyone said they were praying for me, but... in this case, I’ll make an exception.”

I laugh through the haze of tears blurring my vision. “I didn’t expect it to work so fast, though. I was prepared to pray every second of every day for the rest of my life. Go to Mass every Sunday. Beg them to bring you back to me, if that’s what it took.”

She pulls back to cup my cheeks in her palms and kisses me deeply. Our mouths frantically move together, and the tip of my tongue slides past her lips. She moans, and my cock twitches in my sweats. When her hand glides over my erection, she pulls away, breaking the kiss.

“I appreciate it. And you,” she says, her laughter becoming serrated. She’s crying, too. “And what’s even better is I also convinced them to send the undeserving damned souls up to where they belong. I really screwed the pooch on some of those jobs. I’m so relieved they could reverse my mistakes.”

Shaking my head with a goofy grin plastered on my face, I brush my palm down the side of her face. Faith shakes her head, too, and snickers like she can’t believe she’s really here, either.

“I missed you,” she murmurs. “And this. I definitely missed this,” she says, patting the bulge in my pants. “But luckily we have all the time the world now.”

I raise a brow and ask, “Really? How?”

“That little birdy offered me a job in Heaven, but I asked if I could be sent to Earth instead. As a social worker,” she says with a slight shrug, like it’s all no big deal. “Really had to work him over on that one, but I did it. The only caveat is that I now have a mortal lifespan.”

My throat tightens again, and I reach for her face, staring deeply into her eyes. “Faith, you gave up your immortality for

me?”

Faith rolls her eyes and scoffs. “Oh, please don’t get twisted, Byron Waits. I gave up my immortality to break through the glass ceiling.”

I bark out a laugh and crush her against my chest again. “Fair enough,” I mumble into her hair. “Fair enough.”

“But...” she mutters against my chest, “you certainly are a nice bonus.”

“Whatever helps you sleep at night, sweetheart,” I say, then kiss the top of her head. Faith squirms in my arms, nestling against my chest like she’s always belonged there.

**The End**



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