

## **The Devil's Details – Chapter Five**

*a commissioned work by Devin McTaggart ( <http://www.patreon.com/CorruptingPower> )*

### **Chapter Five**

Tabitha had found that the chase itself held a certain thrill to it that could not be denied, because as much as she'd enjoyed her first night in bed with Kelly and Veronica together, the spark hadn't shined quite as brightly on the second night as it had before. Of course, Tabitha realized, some of that could simply be the fear of her life being snuffed out in less than a month's time. It was fair to say the pressure of that had been creeping into her headspace every chance it got.

Still, progress had been good, and in less than a week, she'd already capped two of her needed seven. If she kept pace, she figured she would finish the challenge a few days ahead of schedule, and could enjoy relaxing a bit to savor her victory.

The time for relaxing, however, was certainly not now.

She'd awoken early again, snapped from slumber by a dream of a flaming sword being brought down on her neck, the angels passing judgment upon her very soul, severing her from the worlds both above and below. The dreams of angels had been far more vivid than anything she'd ever had over the course of her lifetime, more vivid even than what she'd assumed until recently were her waking nightmares, which led her to believe they weren't simply dreams, but visions being sent to her by the opposing team, something she considered unfair and unjust interference.

The lawyer in Tabby knew *just* what to do about it.

One of the things Roni had laid out for her in the apartment was the actual terms of the agreement, the rules of the contest spelled out for any of Lucifer's children to see. The contest, such as it was, had been going on for some time now, and Tabby was the 6<sup>th</sup> child of Lucifer to partake in the game, all of which had been won by the other side.

The competition, which had begun in 1304, happened every time Satan gave birth to a child, and when the first devilish nephilim had been born, rules of engagement had been drawn up, and an accord had been ratified between the demonic forces and the angelic ones. And because of where the first born daughter of Lucifer had made her home, the accord was written in Italian.

Thankfully, a updated and annotated translation into English had been provided, and the translation had been agreed upon and notarized by both sides during the previous competitor's go, back in 1922. Back then, the competition had also taken place in New York City, and Tabitha found herself wondering about her brother or sister whom had died in the game for no small amount of time after she was done reviewing the accords.

Each time the game had run, new conditions had been stipulated by both sides, and Tabitha decided that if she made it through this, she would take some time and study all the other times the competition had happened in greater detail.

After the first run-through, counselors and advisers were limited to one on both sides, something which made sense, as Tabitha imagined an army of demons attempting to all push or pull one person in so many ways their head spun. After the second go around, any direct interference by either side had been expressly forbidden, with the exception of the advisers, and even they were not allowed to directly act in any fashion once the first nephilim had been claimed. After the third, it had been explicitly called out that coercion into conversion via violence would not be permitted, so Tabby found herself wondering if her brother or sister had tried something hinky like kidnapping a nephilim's friend or lover to get them to submit. But also in that third set of revisions was a clause that the angels were required to keep their distance during the game, with the exception of the single adviser that the Heavenly Host provided as their representative for the game.

It was the back two where things got interesting.

After the fourth game, it was stipulated that while the advisers could do some amount of prep work and organization, they weren't allowed to pitch or prepare the nephilim targets in any way, other

than to have them relatively conveniently located within or near to a major metropolitan area. That told Tabby that whomever had tried to run the fourth game for Team Lucifer had tried to stack the deck, and have the nephilim primed and ready so that the Spawn of Lucifer could just knock them down quickly, like dominoes. Either the change had gone into effect during that game, or the prep work had backfired. Regardless of how the outcome had been reached, it'd still ended in a failure for the side of the devils.

The most recent update spelled out in great detail who was and wasn't a candidate for 'claiming,' and this section was surprisingly detailed. It required that the people Tabby brought under her wing have angelic blood at a percentage of no less than 25%, explaining that nephilim of 5-7% angelic blood were actually relatively common in the world, and had very little of that potency left in them, but those nephilim who were more recently spliced onto angelic bloodlines were more powerful, and the very nature of their being was, apparently, considered somewhat of an affront to Heaven, who frowned on (but, Tabby noted, did *not* expressly forbid) carnal relations between angelic beings and humans. By requiring a nephilim be of at least 25% angelic blood, it meant she was dealing with people only a generation or two removed from their angelic progenitor.

What Tabitha found *more* fascinating was that she, herself, was technically considered a nephilim.

Lucifer and a small handful of other fallen angels had retained enough of their angelic might that when they produced offspring, they were nephilim of with angelic blood of somewhere between 30-40%, although Tabitha herself, as a direct spawn of Lucifer, clocked in at exactly the fifty-fifty mark, unless she was carrying nephilim blood in her bloodline from the *other* side, which she had to admit was possible, if somewhat unlikely. Lucifer's primacy was indisputable.

She'd been studying the terms of the accord for almost an hour and was on her second cup of coffee when both Kelly and Roni woke up to come and check on her, a yellow pad of legal paper nearly entirely covered in her notes in the matter. She'd been worried the pen had been about to die on her.

When her life was on the line, Tabitha took her homework very seriously.

"Couldn't sleep?" Roni said to her, kissing the back of her neck.

"Yes, but not due to reasons of my own doing," Tabitha sighed. "Am I entitled to arbitration, if I think there's been a violation of the accords? It's implied at here in one section, but not called out explicitly what the methods or processes are."

"Of course you are, Tabby," Roni said to her. "It'll be mediated by Zhurong and Shango, and Sandalphon will be representing the other side in terms of arguments. Is it important? Does this need to happen soon?"

"As soon as possible. I'm tired of not getting enough sleep. It's impairing my judgment."

"I could set up a late lunch today, or maybe a late brunch, if you're willing to put up with Sandy when she's a little bit grumpy."

"She's going to be *very* grumpy by the end of it regardless of when it happens, so set it up for as soon as possible," Tabitha told her.

"I'm going to go for a run, if that's okay?" Kelly said to them, starting to stretch, dressed in short shorts and a giant baggy t-shirt. "I need to keep my workout schedule up, even if I do have angelic blood or whatever running through my veins."

Tabitha stood up, stretching herself, having been hunched over the papers nonstop since she woke up, wearing only an incredibly large oversized nightshirt of her own, then moved over to Kelly, reaching up to grab the woman's hair within her fingers, yanking her face down to her own, only an inch or two between their lips, Tabby smirking a little, seeing Kelly's trembling a little bit. "Want to try asking again?"

Kelly tried to nod, but the firm grip let her do little more than wobble her head slightly. "Yes Mistress. Sorry Mistress. May your slut go for a run, to keep her body fit and supple for you?" she whispered in quiet supplication.

Tabitha pulled Kelly's lips to mash against hers, the athlete giving a little squeal of delight

before the kiss broke. “Better. Don't forget, or I'll have to paddle your athletic ass until it's cherry red next time.”

“Who's to say that isn't how I get my kicks, Mistress?” Kelly giggled as she slipped away, grabbing her keys and heading out the door. “See ya!”

Veronica laughed, shaking her head and rolling her eyes. “That one's certainly a handful. Anyway, let me go call Sandy and then Shango and Zhurong. I'll have them meet us at Jacob's Pickles in two hours, so that Shango's in a slightly better mood for having to be up early in the morning.”

“Eleven AM isn't exactly what most people would call '*morning*,' Roni,” Tabitha said.

“Shango isn't exactly what I would call '*most people*,' Tabby,” Veronica teased back at her. “He's probably still asleep beneath a pile of female bodies right now.”

“A pile?”

“Shango once told me that if he had anything less than five women in bed with him, it was a waste of his time and a failure of a night,” the demoness laughed. “He preferred seven to eight, to form a perfect blanket of cool human flesh, he said.”

“Was he exaggerating or telling you his truth?”

“Shango's never lied to me before,” Veronica admitted, her tail whipping back and forth lazily. “I don't know why he would start now.”

“I suppose we will put that to the test today. Make your calls. Tonight, I will sleep like a rock, calm, peaceful and uninterrupted.”

Jacob's Pickles was, at this point, practically a Manhattan institution, one of the best known brunch joints for those with voracious appetites, where the “breakfast sandwiches” were simply two pieces of bread with an insane amount of food stuffed between them. Getting a table was a challenge on the best of days, but it seemed like Veronica had contacts everywhere, and when they arrived, there was a table waiting for them, Zhurong having gotten there minutes earlier.

“Hello my dear,” the old tiny Chinese god said to her with a smile, his eyes hidden behind the heavy sunglasses, something they always seemed to do, although no one ever seemed to comment on. Tabitha found herself wondering idly if they had some sort of magic to keep people from noticing they were constantly wearing sunglasses indoors. Then again, it was New York, and stranger things happened all the time. He sat a square table designed to fit eight, two on each side. “You certainly cannot be ready for us to confirm another entanglement, can you?”

“No no, my friend,” Tabitha said, moving to sit down on the table with him, Veronica moving to join them, the two of them sitting to his right. They'd left Kelly to her workout. “But I think you'll still get enough fireworks to make the whole thing worth your time.”

“You're feistier than your predecessors were, child,” he pipped with quiet laughter. “It's a refreshing change of pace.”

“Stars in my soup, woman!” Shango boomed as he stomped over towards the table. In stark contrast to the previous times she'd seen him, he looked slightly ashambles, his outfit not quite as smartly tucked in or tied down as it normally was, large wraparound 80s sheet style sunglasses covering nearly a third of his face. “Your cause had best be most righteous to stir me from my revels so early.”

“Too much rum?” Zhurong asked him, pouring the large African god a cup of tea.

“Too *little* rum and too *much* vodka,” the dark skinned giant grumbled, sitting on the same side as Zhurong. “Many of those Russian stewardesses won't drink anything else, and that liquor is insidious in its ability to creep up on you. Rum makes its presence known, like an old friend or a visiting neighbor. Vodka is a thief in the night, with a blackjack in one hand and your wallet in the other.” He plucked sugar cube after sugar cube to drop into his tea, five in all, before taking the slim end of the spoon, dipping it into the cup, swirling the sugar in with the piping hot liquid. “Are we expecting the angel soon?”

“There is still two minutes to eleven, old friend.”

“And I would wager she intends to make us sit and wait through both of them.”

“Cease with your bellyaching, thunder god,” Sandalphon said as she approached the table, looking impeccable as always, although her fashion sense also seemed out of phase with modern time, also as always. She wore a loose flowery summer dress that looked much more akin to something a flower child of the 1960s might wear, with a huge floppy wide brimmed sunhat resting atop of her head. “One minute prior to expectation. Almost as though I expected you to be cantankerous regardless as to how close to the arranged time of our engagement I inevitably arrived. Deities of dust should learn to temper their anger, much like they do their steel.”

“And angels should allot more weight to the lesson of Icarus,” Shango sighed. “The fire that melted his wings could burn yours.”

“You're nothing but a load of noise, old god,” Sandy said, moving to take her seat opposite from Tabitha and Veronica, with the two gods on her right, leaving the side opposite from them unoccupied. She placed her hands on top of the table calmly, an almost bored expression upon her face. “Hasn't anyone told you that no one is frightened of thunder?”

Shango's teeth bared in a smile more like a predator than a human. “Everyone is frightened by thunder, little cherub, and the lightning that follows. But we can continue our squabbles later, on our own time. We are here because there has been an accusation that one side has violated the accords which oversee the competition. Is this true?”

“It is, Lord Shango,” Tabitha said, slipping right into lawyer mode. “I was woken early this morning by a violent dream of being beheaded by angels wielding a flaming sword. It is a nightmare I have been exposed to multiple times since this competition has begun, and it is in direct violation of the accords that were set forth at the beginning of this competition's inception. It states, quite clearly, in section three, subsection 2, paragraph 4, that neither side shall in any way directly interfere or obstruct the other side in their pursuit, and that any such direct intervention will be considered an infraction by the keepers of the accords, and shall be acted upon accordingly.”

Sandy groaned, rolling her eyes. “I knew we were in for trouble when the daughter of Lucifer decided to take up the law.” The angel shook her head. “I did not *directly* interfere in Tabitha's quest,” she sniffed, lifting one of her hands to flick at the air dismissively. “So I've sent her a handful of dreams, visions of her inevitable outcome in being who she is and doing what she does.”

“So you do not deny sending the dreams?” Zhurong asked calmly. The old god never seemed to get worked up about much of anything, but there was a subtext of menace to his words.

“Why would I? It's not an attack. It's not a disruption. It is little more than a momentary annoyance, and if I knew that the devil's daughter would be such a wimp about it, I would've realized I needn't be bothered with such distractions.” She stood up, pushing her chair back as she rose to her feet. “In fact, I believe I've tolerated this verbal assault long enough.”

“Sit down, Sandalphon,” Zhurong said quietly.

“No! This... this... slander! I will not—”

“SIT. DOWN.” Shango's voice reverberated on some sort of primal level that tapped into the angel's willpower and simply crushed it in a moment, because Sandy moved to sit back down as soon as the words left the god's mouth. “We are in charge of these proceedings down to the finest detail, and if we believe you are in violation of the accords, we serve out justice any way we see fit.”

“That includes the liquidation of the participants on either side,” Zhurong added quietly. “And we do tend to think of that word in the literal sense.”

“You... you wouldn't!” Sandy said, aghast.

“We would, and without hesitation,” Zhurong said, with no inflection.

“You have admitted to interference in the opposition's ability to play the game, and restitution must be made,” Shango said with the sort of authority that filled the air, just as the waiter arrived to take their order. “Yes, I will have the Ham Egg & Cheese Biscuit Sandwich, as well as a pineapple juice.”

The tension around the table rest of them placed their orders was thick enough that it would take

a battleaxe to split it in twain, but everyone placed an order quietly and respectfully, all conversation of treaties and accords waiting until the waiter had left the table.

“It's a minor interference *at best*, arbitrators,” Sandy sniffed, as if the entire conversation was still mostly beneath her, but her entire demeanor regarding the conversation had changed at Zhurong's implied threat, as if the angel had been convinced up until that moment that she could get away with anything, but now realized the two old gods weren't fucking around, and that ripping the wings off an angel, for them, would take exactly as much effort as flicking a fly from the table. Taunting them when they had seemed unwilling to engage in the process had come easy, but now the gods felt their authority had been challenged, and they were willing to make a point of Sandalphon, should it come to that. That had shaken the angel, Tabitha could see, and she was walking on eggshells not to anger them further. “So she's lost an hour or two of sleep. I fail to see how this constitutes as anything more than... what was that term Nixon used? Ah yes, ratfucking.”

“Interference, little angel, is interference,” Zhurong stated quietly.

“And interference is an infraction,” Shango added.

“Fine,” Sandy replied, rolling her eyes. “What's my punishment to be? A slap on the wrists? A stern scolding from the teachers?”

“Oh no, little angel, we will need to make it something more than that, especially if you have been engaging in such behavior for some time now,” the tiny Chinese god said, reaching one wizened hand over to clamp his fingertips around her wrist like a claw, as Tabitha could see hints of flames dancing around the very edges of the old god's glasses, like it was bubbling out of him uncontained, the glasses doing their best to shield it from the world, but only barely holding on. “We will sit and enjoy breakfast, but in an hour's time, your senses are going to engulfed by fire. Not just your sight, but the sounds, the smells, the feeling of it upon your flesh – you will be only able to perceive everything and anything as flames for an entire day. You will be unable to eat, drink or rest, and will certainly be unable to cause any more disruptions to the game during that time, as the balance is restored.”

“This... this is... this is *unfair*,” Sandy pleaded, her eyes softening considerably.

“No, arrogant little angel,” Shango said, grabbing his napkin, expanding it out over his lap.

“This is proper justice, something you and the rest of your angelic chorus seem to forget about any time it suits you and your interests. Judgment has been handed out, and a decision has been reached. Let us eat with the matter settled.”

Tabitha was riding a wave of high as they headed back to the apartment after brunch, because it meant that despite Sandalphon's arrogance and petty attitude, there was someone to appeal to if the rules weren't being followed. The game still felt difficult, but no longer quite as unassailable as it once did. And she knew that this night, she would have an entirely peaceful night's rest, something she would desperately need.

But she needed to decide upon her next target. Even if she didn't approach her today, knowing who was next, so she could start constructing her approach in her head was for the best. Once back at the apartment, they began looking through the list of possible targets that Roni had gathered for her. There was quite the variety of options, and each came with their own collection of appeals and challenges, something that was making it very difficult for Tabitha to pick the next vector of approach.

“I'm considering these two, Roni,” Tabby said, tapping two pictures, one with her pinky and one with her index finger. “They're so radically different, but if your research is to be believed, the two of them are linked, married even. I mean, one's an adrenaline junkie doctor and the other is a local mob boss, so I can sort of see how the links were formed, but it still seems like they're riding the line of getting themselves into all sorts of hot water without us even arriving.”

The doctor, Priya Bhatt, didn't look at all how Tabitha might have an ER doctor to look. An Indian-American woman with long bleach blonde hair, the photo she was in, she was wearing leather pants, a Lynyrd Skynyrd muscle t-shirt on beneath a bulky leather jacket, with a cigarette on her lips, and a spiked leather collar around her neck. The stud through the nose didn't come as much of a

surprise, but the fact that she was straddling a Suzuki DualSport DR-Z400 motorcycle certainly did. Between the cigarette and the motorcycle, everything about the woman screamed 'organ donor at 30,' although Tabitha had to allot for the fact that the woman's nephilim heritage would make her far more resilient to damage. She wondered if that might even be her way in, considering that it would be hard to feel like you were risking anything if you couldn't ever lose.

By contrast, the mob boss, Gabriela, looked incredibly buttoned up. A Latinx woman who almost seemed to be leaning into the 1940s noir look, onyx black hair cut short, barely reaching her collarbone, dressed in a dark suit, although she did have on a skirt that ended above her knees, and sheer black stockings that Tabitha would wager just about anything were held up by a garter belt that also included a little .22 Derringer attached to them. On paper, Gabriela Nuñez seemed like just another real estate mogul in the greater NYC area, but turn over any rock the woman owned and a thousand cockroaches seemed to come scurrying out.

Direct ownership was difficult to prove, but if Veronica's research was to be believed, Gabriela owned at least a dozen bars, three or four strip clubs and a dozen laundromats, several of which had been noted, although never officially linked, to all sorts of crimes like drugs and sex work.

Gabriela also wasn't one to sit on her laurels either, apparently, as one of her rivals, a man named Max Berenstein, had recently turned up dead, stabbed to death in a mugging gone wrong on his walk home, although the notes in the margins of the police report made it clear they weren't taking up too much time looking for the man's killer. Right after Max's death, Gabriela's portfolio had 'acquired' several of Max's businesses for pennies on the dollar.

"I wouldn't dare to question your decisions, Tabby, but I might suggest waiting for at least one or two more acquisitions before attempting either of these two," the demoness said. "They are within your reach, but they will be a challenge, even after you've gotten a bit more of the hang of it."

"You think I'm not ready for them yet?" Tabby asked, arching one of her finely plucked eyebrows at her first acquisition.

"I think you would be *more* ready if you took one or two of the others before them," Veronica replied diplomatically. "The camgirl/streamer, perhaps, or maybe the musician."

"Mmmm... as loathe as I am to do another formal event so soon after our last one, the musician does have a certain allure to her," Tabitha said, taking up the picture of the woman, holding it up before her. "Charlie Carmichael, daughter of a British father and a Nigerian mother. Raised in only the most upper crust parts of England, and yet, seems well-liked by just about everyone. A musical prodigy, picking up the violin at age five, and currently the First Violin at the NY Symphony Orchestra, the youngest ever to hold that position, and both the first woman and first person of color to do that. And yet, despite all her accolades, you can't seem to find a single person who has an unkind thing to say about her."

"Yes Mistress," Veronica agreed. "The closest anyone would come to disparaging her was to that she regularly overcrowded her schedule, and so that she would often have to move from one thing to another very quickly, but always made exceptional apologies for how busy her life kept her."

"Under previous relationships, I see only a couple of male names here, Roni," Tabitha said, narrowing her eyes suspiciously. "I know I have great powers at my disposable, but completely rewriting someone's sexual orientation is probably still beyond them."

"She won't take a complete rewiring, Tabby, but just a little bend," Roni replied. "There's hints of her bisexuality around the fringes of things like her internet searches and who she looks at in a room. I think she simply hasn't *had* the pleasure of a woman's company yet. Maybe some combination of her parents expectations and the stiff upper lip English crowds. I know they like to think of themselves as very progressive, but lesbianism is still more frowned upon than two gay men on that side of the pond. I suppose the British do have a long history of quietly accepting gay men."

"*This*," she said, tapping a single line on the report that Veronica had written up for her, "strikes me as rather surprising. Most women lean *away* from this sort of thing, instead of towards it."

The demoness shrugged. "It's the most commonly searched for thing by her on all the porn sites, so I would imagine it's going to be part of your encounter with her. I wouldn't have thought you the type to be intimidated by that, Mistress," she teased.

"And I'm not," Tabitha replied. "Simply surprised. How soon can you arrange a meeting between myself and Miss Carmichael?"

"There is a performance of the Philharmonic tomorrow night celebrating the works of David Axelrod," Veronica answered. "The three of us already have tickets, and are signed up for a meet-and-greet after the event itself."

"You think Kelly will enjoy going to the symphony?" Tabitha asked, tilting her head to one side.

"I think you can *make* her enjoy going to the symphony, Mistress."

"I suppose that I can."

That night, free of angelic distractions, Tabitha slept, blissfully and wonderfully uninterrupted, getting a full eight hours of sleep with Veronica pressed against one of her sides, and Kelly nuzzled up against the other.

The next evening, the trio found themselves surrounded by high society as they attended the NY Philharmonic, each of them wearing a dress that cost several thousand dollars, and more than a couple of paparazzi wanting to photograph Kelly in her ballgown, out for a night on the town, although Kelly made sure to always pose and stand to obscure Tabitha and Veronica, at Tabitha's insistence.

Veronica had gotten them their own private box, and the view from there was astonishing, as Tabby could get a good long look at Charlie Carmichael, dressed in a tight form-fitting black dress that might have looked plain and simple on a less curvaceous woman, but Charlie had been quite gifted in the bust department, and as such, the dark spaces of the dress only sought to draw eyes inwards, like a black hole, sucking in all the light. Her black hair was done up in a bun, her skin the color of aged wood, much like Tabby's was.

She was surrounded by other musicians, so it was difficult to get too close a look at her, but Tabby knew that soon enough, they would be getting very close indeed.

Her performance was excellent, and the woman had complete mastery of her instrument, getting it to soar and dip along the lines of David Axelrod's magnificent pieces, particularly the swing and sway of "Holy Thursday," a jazz song that Tabitha hadn't been familiar with before but she had instantly fallen in love with.

The song felt more like New York City than anything she'd ever heard in her entire life, busy and bustling without constantly screaming for attention, a majestic beauty painting over an undercurrent of menace and danger.

Tabitha had chosen a glamorous red ballgown, but one that still left her plenty of mobility and freedom, and sensible shoes. Veronica, by contrast, was wearing a black, slinky little number, as well as heels that added a good five inches to the demoness's height. Tabby noted the ease with which Veronica seemed to move in them, as if she had centuries of practice. Perhaps she did. Kelly's dress was a deep oceanic blue, hanging just below her knees, and like Tabitha, she had also opted for more sensible shoes. The dress itself had been something of a challenge, as Kelly had spent a good ten minutes complaining that she wasn't going to be able to figure out how to pee in it, should she need to.

The standing ovation for the Philharmonic lasted a good four or five minutes, and when it was all said and done, an usher came to escort them down to the arranged area backstage for the meet and greet, one which Tabby was sure Charlie Carmichael was never going to forget.