**Leashed**

By the time Lily found Dana, the zombie had crawled out of the surf and was lying face down underneath someone’s sailboat. The ship had been pulled up next to a set of steps that led to a beach house. Dana’s hair had gone completely gray, a sign that she was almost a full zombie. She could exist this way for a little bit, but the hunger would eventually take over and she would attack someone.

“Hey there, Sparks. You okay?” Lily crouched down to inspect her friend. Dana rolled onto her back and stuck her thumb in her mouth. Her cheeks puffed up as she blew, causing water to comically squirt out of a hole in her chest.

“There’s no need to be a drama queen,” Lily declared as she plugged the hole with her finger. Dana’s body was slashed in multiple places. Some of the wounds were already closed, but others remained open, yet another sign that a zombie apocalypse was on its way. “You wanna tell me what happened?”

Dana bared her teeth in response, then groaned and fell backward.

“Okay, let’s do some mouth to mouth.” Lily pressed her lips to Dana’s, then spat a huge glob of Mike’s magical semen into the zombie’s mouth. Dana sucked it down greedily, moaning as she did so. The cuts on her body knitted together properly as new scars formed. The side effect of the semen was instantaneous. Dana wrapped her arms around Lily and yanked her down to kiss her aggressively. Lily pulled free and punched the zombie in the gut, causing her to spit up a bunch of ocean water.

“I have standards,” Lily said with a smirk, then rolled Dana onto her side and thumped the zombie on the back hard enough to crack bones. More water came up, far more than lungs or stomach could hold. “I’m surprised you could even float with this much in you.”

“Didn’t float for long,” Dana replied, her voice raspy. She rolled over and grabbed Lily by the straps of her tank top and yanked on the fabric. One of Lily’s breasts popped free, causing the succubus to laugh.

“If it was Mardi Gras, you’d owe me beads.” She moaned when Dana latched onto her nipple, swirling her tongue around. “We should probably find somewhere less obvious.”

“Mmmkay,” Dana replied from around Lily’s breast. The two of them scooted further up the shore and found a spot secluded from the rest of the beach between two houses. They were hidden from view, save for a nearby balcony. If seen, it wouldn’t be the first time Lily had been busted for public indecency or trespassing.

“How romantic.” Lily leaned against a concrete wall that marked the boundary between the homes. She lifted her tank top, allowing her breasts to spring free. For shits and giggles, she enlarged them by a couple of cup sizes. “Raw doggin’ it behind—”

Dana spun Lily around and forced her against the wall, sliding one hand down Lily’s shorts and fondling her breast with the other. Dana didn’t bother with any attempt at foreplay, but started fingering the succubus while sucking on the side of her neck.

“At least I’m not getting sand in my ass,” Lily muttered. Dana pulled Lily’s shorts down and penetrated her pussy with three fingers, causing Lily to arch her back and groan. Dana slid down and buried her face in Lily’s ass.

“Oh, yeah, you know what I like!” Lily’s eyes fluttered as Dana’s tongue flicked along her labia and just barely missed her clitoris. It was easy enough to shift her anatomy to allow for better stimulation, but getting off wasn’t exactly going to do anything for Dana. Until the zombie had an orgasm and could experience post-nut clarity, they would be at this all day.

Not that Lily minded, but they were on a schedule.

“Okay, spring break queen, let’s get your head on straight.” Lily grabbed Dana by the hair and yanked, pulling the zombie sideways and then pinning her against the wall. Dana’s eyes rolled up in her head as Lily trapped her against the wall with her body and pushed down Dana’s shorts. her shirt hiked up, revealing the tattoo of gears on her lower back.

“Yes,” Dana hissed, seawater leaking from her mouth. She slid her hands down the wall to play with her clit as Lily’s tail slid along her inner thigh. “Do it.”

“With pleasure.” Lily put a hand over Dana’s mouth and then penetrated the zombie’s pussy with her tail. The sharp cry of pleasure was muffled by Lily’s palm, and the succubus held Dana tight against the wall and used her tail like a giant, cock-shaped piston. Dana scratched grooves into the concrete with her free hand as she desperately fiddled at her clit with the other, grunting and accidentally biting Lily’s palm.

“Yeah, you like it rough, don’t you, dead girl?” Lily licked Dana’s neck. “Pinned up against the wall, can’t even move your hips properly. Bet somebody is wondering why you’re reacting this way, cause they can’t see my tail. They would probably think you’re just a huge slut who loves to…oh my.”

Dana did an odd little squat and squirted, spraying her legs and Lily’s tail. Her pelvis shook as she did it again, then pressed her ass back into Lily.

“Is that you, or did you get seawater up your cooch?” Lily pulled her tail free and turned it into smoke before it could be seen. She knelt down and inspected Dana’s pussy, which was dripping with cum. “Wow, even I’m impressed.”

“Please help me with my shorts.” Dana whimpered against the concrete, her legs wobbling underneath her. “I’m afraid I’ll fall.”

Lily pulled Dana’s shorts back up and then hugged her friend from behind. “So you got into a fight with a werewolf, huh?”

Dana nodded. “I’ll tell you all about it back at the room.”

By the time they were back on the beach, Dana was walking normally, but her shredded clothes exposed too much skin. They stopped to pick up Dana’s backpack, which she had shoved under the sailboat, then stole a towel and walked up to the road. A bus trip and a short walk later, they were back in the apartment.

Dana stepped into the bathroom for a quick shower. Lily waited for the zombie out on the balcony, and smiled when Dana came out wearing a simple sundress.

“That looks cute on you,” Lily said.

“Thanks.” Dana plopped down on a nearby chair and sighed. “My drone got wet, so it’s properly ruined. The power source was fine, which is the only good news. I’m afraid I can’t show you any footage from the event center.”

“That’s fine, we’ll figure something out.”

“So do your remember Tasia, our friend from Hawaii?”

“Captain Funbags?” Lily chuckled. “Or are we calling her tit punch McGee? You should have seen her afterward, the poor girl was all lopsided.” To emphasize her point, Lily squeezed one of her breasts, causing it shrink while the other expanded.

“So she’s a werewolf now.” Dana shared her werewolf tale, which didn’t make a lot of sense to Lily. Her own experience with werewolves was limited, but she had never heard of one who could shift during the day, nor had she ever known one to be in control. The Order was dealing with some next level shit right now, but that was sort of what they did.

Once finished with her story, Dana sighed and stared out toward the horizon. She closed her eyes and went still, as if asleep.

“Something on your mind?” Lily asked.

“Always.” Dana kept her eyes closed as she spoke. “I guess I’m just worried about why the Order is in the area, doing who knows what.”

“Those assholes are everywhere. Go anywhere with a decent population and you’ll run across them eventually. The Bermuda Triangle is nearby, there’s some strange shit that comes out of there that the Order gets hard over. Anyway, they’ve been around for centuries and have managed to weave themselves through every functional society out there. When people joke about shadow governments, that’s them. They try to leave mankind to their own devices, as long as it doesn’t interfere with their sacred duty.”

“Yeah, but…isn’t it a little too convenient that Tasia ended up here? why her?”

Lily shrugged. “You learn at some point that paths cross in certain circles. It’s kind of like how celebrities run into each other around the world. They get involved in stuff that normal people are blissfully unaware of.”

“You an expert on celebrities now?” Dana opened an eye and looked at Lily.

“I’ve eaten a few.” Lily winked. “Take me for example. I’ve been limiting my activities to shitty people, sucking out their souls and making it look like an accident. The Order wouldn’t even bother investigating unless I started making waves. These have always been people who aren’t missed, much less talked about. I’m just a part of the ecosystem. If not for my ability to consume a soul and gain its knowledge, I would just be a simple predator to them. They wouldn’t pay me any extra attention as long as I stayed in my lane.

“But we’re in their world now, chasing the things they do. Actively out and about, hunting a demon so that we can tag the fucker and let Eulalie have her way with it. She’s already done the research, I’ve seen what she has in mind once we figure out its identity. It’ll be positively delicious. But we’re hunters now, and sometimes we come across each other in the woods. Or perhaps fate has a hand in our dealings. Who knows? The truth of the matter is that no matter what happens, we make our own luck. Tomorrow night we’re going to go to that event center, track down that demon, and either get some pictures or slip a few of these in their pocket.” Lily reached into her essence and pulled out a small disk. It was a tracking device that Eulalie had helped develop for the military. No larger than a coin, she deftly rolled it across her knuckles in a display of prestidigitation. “And if a werewolf gets in your way again? We’ll spay that bitch together.”

Dana opened her other eye and sat forward, her dress creeping up her thighs. “Is this the part where I found out you ate a motivational speaker once?”

Lily chuckled, then rolled the tracking disk into the palm of her hand and made it vanish. “Perhaps. Let’s just say that the closer you get to the top of a pyramid scheme, the better they taste.”

Dana stood from her chair and gazed out over the city. She did this for a couple of minutes and then turned toward the door of their apartment. The sun was going down and they hadn’t turned on any of the interior lights. The zombie surveyed the shadows and then looked down at Lily.

“Just you and me, huh?”

Lily winked.

Dana rested her hand on Lily’s shoulder and teased the strap of her tank top. “So who tastes better? Me or some bitch selling makeup?”

The succubus snorted. “Let’s just say you’re one of my favorite things to eat.”

Dana squatted down and ran her hand up Lily’s thigh, teasing her through her panties. There was humor and desire in the zombie’s eyes, and then they kissed.

“You know, we kind of rushed it earlier,” Dana said, her breath hot against Lily’s ear. “Since it’s just the two of us, what do you say we go inside and take it slow this time?”

Lily ran her hands up Dana’s legs until they disappeared beneath the sundress. She discovered that the zombie wasn’t wearing any panties.

“I like the sound of that,” Lily said. “But I get to be the big spoon when we’re done.”

Dana laughed, a surprising sound that brought a smile to Lily’s face.

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Tasia had no idea how much time had passed. After being tossed in the van and driven a short distance, all she could do was cry out in the hopes that someone would hear her. Eventually, the van started and she was moved again.

When the doors were finally opened, it was nighttime and she was blinded by floodlights. Several dark figures climbed in with her, but she was too weak to fight. The silver bullets lodged in her body had sapped her strength, leaving her weaker than she had been when just a normal human.

“Easy with the merchandise.” Esteban stood outside the vehicle, gun in hand. “The Curator wants this one alive.”

The people carrying her said nothing. They moved her through a dimly lit building that seemed to be some sort of performing arts center. Eventually they arrived at a giant set of double doors. They were opened by a young woman in a dress skirt with a matching jacket. She looked to be no older than sixteen and was carrying a tablet in one hand.

“Father is inside,” she said, her eyes flicking briefly toward Tasia. “Who is that?”

“A business opportunity, his ears only.” Esteban studied the woman for a moment. “Do you have any spare cages?”

She nodded. “We do. I’ll make arrangements.”

Esteban thanked her and walked through the doors. The interior of the room was decorated in old venue posters and a few costume racks were set up. A bank of security monitors sat in the back of the room, watched by three men in black. At a table in the middle of the room, Deacon Osgrove leaned over a man’s shoulders to see what was on his iMac.

“Let’s go with that one,” he said, pointing at the screen. “That’ll play well with the crowd.”

“Yes, Mr. Osgrove.” The tech was already working on his task as Deacon stepped around the table and sat on the corner. He picked up a small sandwich that was on a catering tray and took a bite of it, chewing thoughtfully as he stared at Esteban.

Deacon swallowed, then took a swig from a nearby bottle of water. “New body?” he asked.

Esteban nodded. “Indeed. You know how these things go, waste not, want not. But first, the matter of your payment. The money has been deposited into your account.”

Deacon’s daughter appeared at his side, holding up her tablet for him to look at. He frowned and looked at Tasia, then Esteban. “That’s not the amount we agreed on.”

“Correct, it isn’t.” Esteban chuckled. “Your man was supposed to lure out our target. That was beautiful work at the nightclub, by the way.”

Deacon said nothing, his lips pressed together.

“But the Curator was very disappointed to discover that he was sloppy. While acquiring his test subject, he learned that they had gathered enough evidence to start a hunt, which meant the Order was this close to being on your doorstep.” Esteban held his thumb and forefinger up with a small gap between them. “So he is altering the deal.”

A dark shape emerged from the shadows in the back, a thin man with a pale countenance. He moved toward Esteban menacingly, but Deacon held up a hand to stay him.

“Please relay my apologies to the Curator.” Deacon looked like he was going to be sick. Even in her weakened form, Tasia could smell fear coming off of him. “We should have done a better job, and I hope we can continue our current arrangement.”

Esteban nodded. “He is still very much invested in your experiment and does not wish to see it end…prematurely. However, as compensation, you are to hold this woman for the next twenty-four hours. The Order is looking for her, but the Curator wants her for himself.”

“I see.” Deacon licked his lips. “Please take no offense, but why doesn’t the Curator just take her now?”

“His current experiment is time sensitive,” Esteban replied. “This particular specimen was unexpected, which is why he left me behind to collect her.”

“I’m not a specimen,” Tasia growled. The men ignored her. She looked pleadingly at Deacon’s daughter, but the woman avoided eye contact.

“I don’t have anywhere I can put her without blowing my own cover, so we’re trusting you to make this happen. It’s not like you don’t have the facilities for this.”

Deacon nodded. “Then please let the Curator know that I’ll hold her. Are we treating her wounds?”

“Only if you wish to lose a hand.” Esteban chuckled. “She won’t die, if that’s what you’re worried about. This one’s a fallen knight of the Order.”

“I…haven’t…fallen.” She struggled against the men holding her, but they were strong enough to hold her down. “I will…never fall!”

“I’ll take her.” Deacon’s daughter walked out of the room, and Tasia’s escort followed. She was dragged through some dark tunnels and then past a staging area that was completely concealed from view. A large tour bus with Deacon’s face on the side was parkedd just outside the private entrance of the event center. They carried Tasia up the stairs of the bus and toward the back. There were small living quarters and a kitchen, but a secret door in the back opened to reveal a storage area with a stack of cages. There were four of them total, in a two-by-two configuration.

“Put her in three.” The woman stepped aside as Tasia was shoved into a cage on the bottom. She couldn’t help but notice that it smelled of human blood. “I want two men on this bus at all times. It’s your heads if she escapes.”

Nobody else said a word, and Tasia cried out as the door to the room was shut and she was plunged into darkness.

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Lily stood on the roof of a building overlooking the convention center. The sunset over the ocean cast golden rays across the sky like a crown, and those rays sent dark shadows over the far side of the building. She looked over at Dana, who wore a pair of black leggings and a dark shirt. Her backpack was secured to her belly, and she double checked all the zippers

“Looks like it’s time to drop in,” Lily said with a grin.

“Wait.” Dana tightened the straps on her backpack one more time. “Okay, let’s do this.”

Lily’s skin rippled as her wings opened up like a giant glider. Dana moved in front of Lily, allowing the succubus to hook her arms beneath Dana’s.

“Are you making your boobs bigger?” Dana asked.

Lily snorted, then upped her cup size by another letter. “Maybe. They’re airbags in case we crash.”

“Airbags are supposed to be in the front.”

“Then maybe you should turn around.” Before Dana could respond, Lily stepped forward off the roof and wrapped her tail up between Dana’s legs and around her waist like a harness. They flew silently across the short distance and landed on the outdoor patio of one of the upper levels. It was some sort of executive suite. Dana pulled a small pouch from her backpack and selected some shims to help bypass the locked door. Once the door was opened, they walked into a darkened dining hall.

“Where did you learn all this lockpicking stuff?” Lily asked.

“A lawyer on the internet.” Dana stuck the pouch into the back of her waistband.

“Ugh, I can feel how horny these people are from here.” Lily scowled and mimed wiping mud off her body. Dana pulled a dark blazer out of her bag and slipped into it.

“Wait, horny?” Dana looked up at Lily as she hung an id card around her neck. Eulalie had been able to find the template in the event center’s records. “What do you mean horny? For Deacon?”

“Yeah, there’s plenty of that, too.” Lily wrinkled her nose in frustration. “Have you ever been in a bathroom where someone took a massive shit and then sprayed something floral to cover the smell?”

“Charming. But yes.” Dana kicked off her shoes for a nicer pair of flats that came out of her bag.

“It’s like that.”

“Gross. So what are they horny for if it’s not Deacon?” Dana pulled a dark wig out of her bag and slipped it over her head, adjusting it until it sat correctly. Her hair had been braided tightly against her skull to allow for this, a feat that Eulalie had accomplished in less than a minute back at the apartment. The arachne had done a last second check-in on them before sending her agents of chaos out into the world. This had worked out, because Eulalie had been plenty interested to learn that the Order had a project she was unaware of, which meant she hadn’t fully infiltrated their network yet.

“You would have looked so good as a redhead.” Lily moved close to examine Dana’s face. “Probably too good.”

“Just call me Jane Plain.” Dana pointed at her tag, which had the name Jane P. in red letters next to her face. “Which was kind of the point. Now are you going to answer my question?”

Lily sighed and sauntered over to the door, her breasts drooping toward her belly as a shawl appeared across her shoulders. She now had the appearance of an older woman in her fifties. “I hate talking about this stuff, but you’re still hot underneath that get up, so I’ll dish. There are generally three kinds of people at events like this, and I hate them all.”

Dana held up her fingers. “Old people, people who hate sex…I can’t think of the third.”

Lily swatted Dana’s hand down. “It’s not about demographics, darling. No, let me tell you about the three kinds of people who pay good money to come and listen to someone talk about religion.” She moved over toward the entrance and looked through the window. Seeing a wandering guard, Lily shifted away from the window to face Dana. “First, we have the curious. They want to see what the hubbub is all about, a loved one brought them along, or they want to know more about the big man in the sky.”

“Why hate them for that?” Dana ran her fingers along the base of her wig, checking for stray hairs. “I guess they’ve got to learn about it somewhere.”

“Please. The instant you start asking people for money to hear you preach about basic human decency, you’ve already disqualified yourself. The man running this show doesn’t give jack shit about anything other than what can make his pockets heavier. A basic internet search and half a brain cell will tell you that Sky Daddy was never into making money off of His believers, nor did He want people paying someone just to hear about His book. When you consider that this asshole is here to talk about his own, so you do the math.”

Dana stared at Lily for a moment, then nodded. “I guess that makes sense. Shouldn’t have to be rich to get into Heaven.”

“So those are the people I hate the least. Now the other two kinds of people, they’re the gross ones. We have the people who are desperate to get into heaven and will do anything to get there, except try to contemplate the actual instruction manual to get in. The idea of throwing money at the pearly gates until they open has mass appeal because it’s easy. And finally, we have the people who are here because they literally don’t know any better. They just want someone to tell them what to do, the less they have to think about it, the better!”

“And all these people are, what, horny to get into heaven?”

Lily nodded. “Lust comes in many forms. Religious fervor is among my least favorite, and it smells like shit.”

Dana moved next to the door and looked out the window. “Don’t take this the wrong way, but I figured you would be glad that these guys are doing it wrong. I mean, isn’t a demon’s whole M.O. to corrupt souls or whatever?”

Lily contemplated Dana for several moments with a frown. “Do you really think that’s what demons want? To just wreck some shit before the End of Days?”

“If not, then enlighten me.” Dana crossed her arms. “It’ll give me something to think about while I’m wandering around trying to find one of your distant relatives.”

“I love it when you’re spicy.” Lily gently pinched Dana’s chin. “Remember, demons are just fallen angels. Do you even know why they fell?”

Dana shrugged. “Something about pride and jealousy. Lucifer wanted to perform a corporate takeover and a bunch of other angels joined in.”

“Have you read the Bible?” Lily cocked an eye at Dana.

“Yep. Thought I’d find faith or something. Didn’t work.”

“Good.” Lily crossed her arms. “Cause I’ll tell you that at best, you’re looking at the Cliff’s Notes of what’s actually going down. It’s meant to be a gateway to belief, a primer to find a specific destination after you die. But it’s had stuff omitted and altered. Change one word in a passage, and suddenly everyone hates the gays.”

“Seem to know a lot about something that you hate so much.” Dana leaned against the wall and sighed. “Do these security guys ever fucking work?”

Lily ignored her and continued. “It’s about knowing your enemy. Fallen angels were created to be good, they know the written word forward and back. Think of it like their source code. Slip a word in, take it out, maybe even erase a chapter or two, those assholes circle jerk each other in Hell over the changes they got away with. But let’s go back to the demons themselves. They generally fall into two categories. The first category is pissed that humans are considered children of the big man and can ask for forgiveness. They’re the ones that want to watch the world burn and take everyone with them. Technically, I fall in that category, because I was modeled after the first demon that thought ‘I bet that guy would sell his soul for a wicked blowjob.’”

Dana opened her mouth to ask a question, but closed it without a word. Lily had explained to Dana long ago that she had never actually been an angel, but had been born a mortal woman who was transformed into a demon by a powerful wish. Lily suspected that Dana had been about to ask a question related to that, but knew that Lily wouldn’t answer. It was one of the few things Lily never discussed with anyone.

“So now you have your second group of demons. They hate mankind, but they need something from you. Souls. There’s a whole group of demons in Hell who think that maybe they can use your souls to get back into Heaven and beg their daddy for forgiveness.”

“That’s a thing? How would demons do that?”

Lily shrugged. “No idea. The whole thing is like bitcoin. You have a bunch of demons who swear it works, but none of them can explain how. Some demons collect souls and plan to wear them like a protective coat to sneak into cloud city without getting burned. Others are planning a straight swap—their thousands of souls for re-entry. If anyone has ever gotten back in, it’s not like we’d hear about it.”

“So back to my original statement. Aren’t you happy that these people are going to Hell?” Dana gestured toward the floor.

“Ugh, only kind of. Some of them will figure it out, or be nice enough that it doesn’t matter. The rest will make everyone else fucking miserable and burn in hellfire for eternity, which is a little funny. What chafes my ass is knowing this shit should be easy. Be a good person. Do no harm. Feed the poor. Hug your kids. But no! Someone else did all the thinking for them, and now they’ve pissed away eternity because they refuse to spend five minutes using their damned brains to process what they’re hearing!”

“Is that why you work so hard, now? Being nice, that is?” Dana raised her eyebrows. “Are you hoping to get into Heaven someday?”

Lily felt hellfire burn through her gut at Dana’s question and turned her head away. “Fuck you,” she said, regretting it the moment it slipped out.

Dana didn’t seem bothered by the outburst. She looked out the door and then pulled it open. “We’re clear, let’s move.”

The two of them slipped out of the private room and made a beeline for a nearby hallway with a flight of stairs that would take them down near the elevators. They hopped over a railing and passed through a Staff Only door to find themselves in a corner just by the elevators. The doors dinged and a group of people came out, allowing the two of them to slip right in.

Dana ignored Lily and wandered down one of the hallways, her eyes forward as if on a mission. Dressed as she was and wearing false credentials, anyone would be hard pressed to figure out that she wasn’t supposed to be there. Lily groaned internally as she was forced to walk in the middle of a group of older women who were all clutching copies of Deacon’s new book. They seemed to be very excited about something from the sixth chapter regarding personal perception, or some similar life coach bullshit.

Caught up in a gaggle of hens, Lily was forced to endure the stink of cheap perfume as she squeezed through a hallway into the main arena. She could spot at least three different church groups based on the shirts they were wearing. While everyone waited to have their tickets checked, Lily popped in the wireless earbuds Dana had given her and then dialed her up.

“Dead leader, standing by.” Dana’s voice came through the noise canceling earbuds as if she stood nearby. “Where are you?”

“I’m at entrance 137.” Lily stalled her approach by moving to the wall. “Where are you?”

“Close to the opposite side of the arena. Sending you a picture.” The earbuds blipped and Lily pulled her phone out from between her breasts. It was a map of the arena with several lines drawn over it. Most of them overlapped down by the stage. “I guess get down there.”

“Uh huh.” Lily now stood in front of the usher. “Hold on a second, sweetie, I need to show them my ticket.” She swiped the screen until she got to the ticket that Eulalie had purchased for this section. The arachne had purchased several in key locations throughout the event center. This was a two thousand dollar ticket that would put Lily in the first few rows. “How are you tonight?” she asked.

“Ready to hear the good Word.” The usher beamed, and Lily fought the urge to gag. “You’re really lucky. You'll get to see Deacon up close.”

Lily just smiled, unable to even fake something nice to say. She moved past the usher and toward the stage. “There isn’t really anyone down there, so this should be easy.”

“I’ll let you know if I see anything.” Dana ended the call.

Down by the stage, people were being allowed in to take pictures. Lily found her seat, which was just a metal folding chair with a pad on it.

“Pay a thousand bucks to sit on a piece of shit,” she whispered to herself, then smiled at the geriatric woman sitting next to her seat. The woman was knitting a scarf with Deacon’s book on her lap. How fucking cliche.

Not ready to sit next to someone who probably remembered the Civil war, she paced, keeping her eyes peeled for the demon. Plenty of people in this section of the event center were chatting, and Lily realized by the conversations that this wasn’t their first show. It looked like Deacon had a dedicated fan club willing to blow their life savings to see the guy in person.

Was one of them the demon? She felt her phone vibrate and checked the updated map. Dana had drawn three more lines, and they were forming a circle around the front of the stage. That meant the demon was down here with her, but where?

Usually, demons could easily identify each other unless great effort had been made to hide. Whoever they were looking for had been around for hundreds of years, most likely in the same human body. Even a demon couldn’t stop the aging process completely, so would fit in with the older crowd.

She slid amongst the people by the stage, sharing small talk. Lily couldn’t even rely on her usual charms, because these people were only here for one thing: Deacon. Dana had the chance yesterday to use the pendulum within sight of the guy, and it hadn’t even budged in his direction. So much for the obvious answer.

The lights dimmed, and a ripple of energy moved through the crowd. It was excitement mixed with reverence as everyone frantically found their seats. There was the quiet hiss of machinery as the floor of the stage was covered in fog. Up above the stage, a giant monitor came to life, revealing Deacon Osgrove in street clothes as he wandered the urban environs of the city.

“It’s a calling.” His voice came from the giant speakers as the video played. “Every day is a journey for me, and I can’t wait to find out who I meet tomorrow.”

Uplifting music played as Deacon was shown in a nearby park, counseling people in different stages of grief. It showed him crying with the common man, holding hands with strangers, and embracing homeless people.

“And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.” Deacon’s powerful voice washed over the crowd as the video cut to him sitting on a mountain, overlooking a sunset. “I am but a mortal man following in the footsteps of my Lord and Savior, but I like to think that I’m doing His good work. We are a nation in dark times, and it’s more important than ever that you all hear my word and His.”

The fog on the stage was thick, and as the monitor above cut out, the back of the stage came to life. The screen displayed a bank of beautiful clouds lit from below by a golden sky, and the man of the hour himself now stood there. Deacon held a bible in one hand and waved as the audience went nuts. The woman next to Lily started crying, so the succubus stabbed the woman in the foot with her tail, injecting her with enough juice to knock her out.

“Good evening, Florida.” Deacon’s voice had a slight southern twang to it that sounded practiced. “How are you all this blessed evening?”

There was cheering, applause, and so much jubilation that Lily strongly debated jabbing a few more people. Her eyes were fixed on Deacon, now, as her senses came alive.

This was an evil man, a wolf in pastor’s clothing. If that woman on the beach had been a meal, then this man’s soul was a ten course menu fit for royalty. This man clearly wasn’t a demon, but he was absolutely affiliated with one.

Lily texted Dana for an update, keeping a smile planted on her face as she ground her teeth together.

“There’s a lot for us to talk about tonight, and you are all in for a magical evening. But before we get started, there’s something very special I’d like to do with you all. It’s only the most important thing we will do all evening; let us pray.” Deacon bowed his head, the light shifted subtly to make it look like an aura of gold had appeared across his shoulders. The audience went silent, all of them bowing their heads in response.

If given the chance, Lily would absolutely kill this man.

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Over by the concessions stand, Dana noticed that the line for snacks was empty. The employees were busy chatting while wiping down the counters. Nobody had given Dana a second glance as she made another full lap around the outside of the center, even sneaking into the staff areas. There were so many different locations to investigate and she was striking out. Short of wandering down into the middle of the arena with a magical artifact in her hands until it pointed right at her quarry, there was nothing she could do but wait until the demon made its move.

She was on her third lap of the event center, listening to Deacon pontificate through the speakers. His voice had a pleasing cadence and was easy to listen to. A few times, she spotted people who were making emergency bathroom runs, doing their best to quickly return to their seats.

Deacon spoke often of heaven. A year ago, Dana would have given anything to have gone, but she wasn’t so sure anymore. Based on everything she had learned, heaven was only one potential destination. Her desire to ensure her own death someday still burned strong, but should she ever find a cure, she would really prefer to live a little first. It would make her really happy if she could figure out that stupid telescope before she passed on. That project was like an itch in the back of her brain that she simply couldn’t scratch.

As Osgrove started sharing parables from his own upbringing, Dana found herself back in an area heavily patrolled by security guards. A couple looked in her direction, but disregarded her. She moved with the confidence of someone who knew her way around, and that was enough for them.

Finding herself in a quiet hallway with a large set of double doors, she wandered over toward a nearby window to look outside. She could see Deacon’s tour bus from here as well as the lot behind the center. It was dimly lit, which seemed a little odd. With her back to the hallway, she pulled out the pendulum and took another reading.

At first, it swung to point in the direction of the stage, which was frustrating. Everytime she had tried to figure out who the pendulum pointed at, it lined up with different people. If she could go back in time, she would have asked Ratu to make Lily a pendulum, too. Maybe if she wandered backstage, she could collect better data. She was about to tuck the pendulum away when it suddenly jerked toward her right.

“That’s weird,” she muttered, looking over her shoulder. The hallway was still empty, so she took a step back to see what the pendulum would do. It pointed toward her chest, which made sense because the center of the arena was behind her. It suddenly swung to the right, and she tucked the pendulum away in her inner pocket.

She walked a ways down the hallway and repeated the process. The pendulum only pointed to Deacon’s stage now, so she backtracked. She was almost at the double doors again when the pendulum finally swung left.

“Shit.” She scanned the hallway and walked toward the doors. The pendulum clearly pointed at something inside the doors, which could mean only one thing.

There was more than one demon.

Dana sent a quick text to Lily and Eulalie, then moved to the double doors and pressed her ear against the wood. She could hear movement inside and people speaking. Taking a step back, she contemplated the door. What was the best move here? Lily could probably back her up, but then she’d have to leave her position down by Deacon. If there were two demons, how would they know which one was responsible for creating Leeds?

Dana’s decision was made for her when the door opened up and a young woman about her age nearly collided with her. The woman stumbled to the side, dropping her tablet.

“I am so sorry,” Dana began, but a dark figure inside the room detached itself from the shadows and dashed forward, the light revealing a thin man with pale skin. She barely had time to turn her head before he seized her by the neck and lifted her off the ground.

“Something is wrong with this one,” he declared in a thick accent. Dana grunted and kicked out with her feet. The woman backed away from both of them as security personnel came out of the room and formed a circle around Dana and her attacker.

“Please,” Dana gasped. “I’m…just…lost!”

The man’s pupils were dilated, and he pulled her in close and smelled her. His grip was like iron, and Dana fluttered her eyes in an attempt to mime impending unconsciousness. She could tell he was much stronger than she was. Was he the demon? He didn’t smell like Lily did. Instead, he smelled strongly of freshly polished wood.

“Not lost. Rotten. Like a corpse.” He slammed her into the ground and then kicked her hard enough that she slid across the floor and into the wall. The men nearby drew tasers and ran enough voltage through Dana that her thoughts became a jumble and she couldn’t control her body. She had difficulty processing what happened next, but vaguely understood that she was being taken somewhere by the security team.

By the time they reached their destination, her wig had come off and she had lost both shoes. They searched the pockets of her jacket and took her phone and the pendulum. There was the sound of clanking metal, and then she was stuffed into a cage. The room smelled of fresh blood and dog hair. By the time her thoughts were back in order, the lights had been turned off and she couldn’t see.

Dana sat up and felt her way around her prison. The surroundings were pitch black, but a quick examination with her hands revealed that she was in a small cage. It was small enough that she couldn’t fully stand.

“So,” a familiar voice said. “What are you in for?” This was followed by a horrible hacking cough, and then a long sniff. “Wait…I know that scent…”

Dana sighed as the werewolf let out a cry of rage and started yelling. At least she wouldn’t have to worry about being quiet when she broke out.

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Lily sat with her legs crossed, one foot bouncing with irritation as the crowd engaged in another hymn with Deacon. Most of the crowd had their arms raised as if soaking up salvation like dying flowers with insipid smiles on their stupid faces.

“You’re glad you’re missing this,” Lily said to the sleeping woman. “This guy is force feeding people turds and they’re thanking him for it.”

The woman mumbled in her sleep, a puddle of drool forming on the front of her shirt. A rather obese woman stepped in front of Lily, blocking her view.

“Down in front.” Lily stabbed the woman in the ankle with her tail, putting in just enough juice that the woman had time to stumble back to her seat before drifting to sleep. In fact, there were at least five other people who were currently out cold. Four of them were Lily’s, she had been jabbing people who irritated her. One she hadn’t was a woman who had screamed Deacon’s name and fainted into someone else’s arms.

The hymn came to an end and the light on the stage shifted. Deacon had done a quick costume change and now wore his Sunday best and was holding a different Bible from before.

“My friends.” He gazed out over the crowd, his dark eyes glinting in the light as he took them all in. “As much fun as we’ve all had this evening, I’m afraid that I have to remind you that despite the venue, the showmanship, and the beard that my daughter wishes I would shave…” He paused and smiled as people laughed, hooted, and cheered. “That I am a man who has been called, a man of the Lord. None of this would be possible without His grace, His guidance.”

It was like a blanket had been draped over the audience, everyone hanging on his words.

“We can talk about my book, my life, this beautiful country, but all of it pales, it absolutely pales, in comparison with this right here.” He held up a Bible with gilded letters on the front. Some people cheered, others applauded, but the bulk of the audience remained silent.

“Now this tour is named after my book, and my book, well…you’ve all seen the advertisements.” He sat on a wooden stool that a stagehand set out for him. “For you see, my words don’t truly matter. No, that doesn’t mean you can get a refund at the merch table.”

Laughter now. Lily ground her teeth and looked at her phone. She had texted Dana a few times, but the zombie had gone silent.

“No, my words are but a tool, a compass, and they have been divinely inspired to help you all find the right path. And you all know where that path leads, don’t you?” He opened the Bible and flipped through its pages. “If you take anything from this show tonight, it is that God himself has left you breadcrumbs that you can follow. He has an entire kingdom He wants to share with you someday, but you can’t just have it. It isn’t a participation trophy. You can’t just live here on Earth and expect an eternal reward, you have to live by His gospel, to find the way through the words He has left for you and me.”

“Twenty bucks says a grift is coming.” Lily elbowed her sleepy companion.

“You see, I never asked to be chosen. It happened when I was at a low point in my life, when I was out of work and homeless. I was sleeping in a shelter when a man of the cloth left this very book behind on a nearby table. And do you know what I did?”

“You read it!” The voice came from back in the crowd.

“No. No I did not.” Deacon winked. “You see, my soul was hungry, and it had been offered food, but I did not know that this was what I needed. I saw that he had left that book behind and I wondered if I could use it to level my cot.” He flipped open the pages and held out the book. The crowd was silent as the screen above him came on, the camera zoomed in so people could see the torn pages.

“That’s right, friends, I took this good book, the word of the Lord himself, and I opened its pages and tucked it under the leg of my cot. When the Lord’s words were offered to me, I slept on them, but not in the way I should have.” He closed the book and held it high so everyone could see it. “That night, I wasn’t visited by angels. I didn’t see Jesus. Instead, I slept in a void, in a darkness so bleak that I wondered if I would have the strength to make it through tomorrow.”

A woman two seats over burst into tears.

“Gimme a fucking break.” Lily glared at her phone, willing it to light up.

“The next morning, I was in a bad place, but I got a good night’s sleep. I pulled that bible free and felt guilty that I had torn its pages. When I went to inspect the damage, there was a passage that caught my eye and I read His words for the first time.

“Folks, I will never forget that first line, that moment I was captured by the bible. It was Matthew 19:21. Jesus said to him, ‘If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.’”

Lily’s tail was snaking behind the seats, moving toward the sobbing woman. One good jab in her butt cheek brought the sobbing to a halt, and the woman tilted forward as if deep in prayer.

“Well, what could I say? I had no possessions other than the clothes on my back. No bank account, no land, no car. My shoes had more holes in them than swiss cheese. Yet this man I had never met, a man who was the son of God, he already considered me perfect! I still qualified for true treasure in heaven, and he only asked one thing of me. That was the moment, the calling. It wasn’t just about opening my ears, but my heart as well, and to truly hear what He asked of me.” He set the book down on the stool and rose, the video screen becoming clouds once more. “I had to follow Him. That was it. And it’s something you can do as well! Following the word of the Lord is easy, His instructions are right there.”

In the computer generated clouds above Deacon, a QR code appeared. People were already pulling out their cellphones and aiming it toward the false sky. Out of curiosity, Lily did the same. It pulled up a page for donations.

“Now we all can’t start at rock bottom, friends, and I’m not asking you to sell it all. But every little piece you give will go to help people like Veronica.” A side screen turned on, showing the woman from the opening sequence. “Or Matt, who lost his job this month.” It was a trucker now, his arms around Deacon’s shoulders. “This is money you can give today to help us build a better tomorrow. For it is only by following the good book that we can find our way to eternal paradise in His kingdom.”

Lily lowered her phone and saw that the people in the front rows were frantically typing in passwords for Paypal, and bank account numbers. Stunned by this show of blind obedience, she looked up at Deacon and smelled the demon for the very first time.

It wasn’t the scent of sulfur, that would be too obvious. It was a thick smell, like potpourri, and the room was now saturated with it. Sweeping her gaze around the room, she could feel its influence washing over the crowd. Deacon had moved close to the stage and was kneeling down to touch people’s hands as they shouted things like “I want to be perfect, too!” and “I’m going to Heaven!”

The man’s eyes glittered, and Lily could sense the leash around this man’s heart. The demon held the other end of it, but where? She maneuvered forward through the crowd, trying to get close to him. The energy in the room had soured, but everyone was too caught up to notice. Someone started singing Amazing Grace, which caused hundreds of others to join in.

“I’m gonna stab that fucker,” she muttered, nearly to the stage now. Deacon was smiling and waving, but Lily could see the ravenous look in his eyes. This wasn’t a man who would be satisfied with the money he was getting right now. There was something he wanted even more.

Nearly at the stage, she reached her hand for his, hoping to catch his attention. He spotted her, and stretched his fingers for hers.

Lily smiled for the preacher man, her stinger already manifesting in her palm. When they touched, she planned on dosing him hard, hoping that the man would fall flat on his face.

But it wasn’t meant to be. Deacon paused just short of her and a strong hand grabbed Lily by the wrist, slapping her arm down and away. Stunned, Lily looked over to see her seat companion grinning at her from behind red-tinted eyes.

“Hello, sister.” The woman pulled Lily back and away from the stage. More hands grabbed her, but they were strong and many. She was grabbed by a few security guards and dragged out of sight behind the stage. Her seatmate followed, along with a few others that had been sitting nearby. Even the woman who had fainted was there, a dreamy look in her eyes.

Lily tried to squirm away, but a skinny man met them in an underground tunnel and wrapped his arm around her neck. He was stronger than all the others, and she tried to bite him. She may as well have been biting a chunk of rebar.

“A cage will not do for this one.” The security team dragged her through the tunnel as she screamed. If she wanted, she could have teleported away straight home to Mike, but then Dana would be on her own. That, and she didn’t need the demon tracking her.

No, demons. She cast angry glares at the people who had been seeded in the crowd. It was so obvious now why Dana hadn’t been able to get a lock on the creature. There was more than one. That would make the job of finding out which one was responsible for Leeds a bit harder.

But it wouldn’t matter if they found a way to kill them all.

She was dragged into a concrete room with sigils already being prepared by stage hands. Lily gasped as she passed through the boundary. It was just her and the skinny guy now. He slammed her onto the ground and backed away before she could retaliate.

“This one must have been with the woman,” he declared in a thick accent. The audience members stood outside the circle with large grins and glowing eyes. Lily moved around the edge of the sigil in the floor, pressing her fingers against the magical barrier.

Her flesh was peeled away, leaving charred bone where her fingers had been. Swearing to herself, she stepped back and examined the floor.

“These are angelic,” she said, casting a wary glance. “Which one of you chuckle fucks put this together?”

Nobody answered. The scrawny bodyguard contemplated Lily for a couple of minutes, then touched his ear.

“Let him know that the threat is neutralized.” He scowled at Lily and moved toward the edge of the circle. She noticed that he was very careful not to touch the ink on the floor with his shoes. “Who are you? Who sent you?”

“What? I can’t hear you?” She took a step back and held a hand to her ear. “Could you come a little closer, I—”

She definitely didn’t expect him to cross the boundary and slap her. Grunting, she sprouted horns and head butted him in the face, but he didn’t even flinch. Instead, he grabbed her by the horns and twisted her around so that she was looking outward.

“Now it is I who cannot hear you.” He shoved her face into the boundary, and she screamed and flailed wildly as her face ignited. She stabbed him numerous times with her tail, but he didn’t react. After a few seconds, he threw her to the floor again and stood over her.

“Weak little imp,” he sneered, then crouched down. “I ask again. Who are you and who sent you?”

“I’m the girl who’s gonna fuck you up.” She grinned at him and was promptly treated to the barrier again. It hurt like hell, but there was no way she was going to tell this guy anything. He wasn’t a demon, that was for sure. But what the hell was he? Not human either.

He left her smoldering on the floor as her skin regrew. Moving outside of the circle, he spoke with one of the demons and then stepped out of the room. They stood and watched, saying nothing.

“Awe, c’mon. This is like a slumber party, and we’re old friends, right?” Lily stumbled around the room, now aware of how disoriented she felt. She moved up to the edge of the boundary to stare at her former seat mate. “Did we go to demon college together?”

The woman grinned, then licked her lips. “I’m what you would call a dropout, so probably not.”

“Now, now, formal education isn’t everything. Sometimes it’s about life experience, right?” She contemplated the woman. “Oh, I see. You aren’t an actual demon. This is just a possession. I can tell, you know. I can’t actually possess anyone, but you know what they say. Those who can’t do judge those who can.”

“Nobody says that.” This time, the voice came from the next person down.

“Oh, come now, I’m sure someone says it.” Lily strolled over to the next person in line. “It seems like you’re wearing a meat suit, too. They say you should wear your Sunday best, but it looks like you all dug shit out of the bargain bin.”

They all chuckled, raising the hair on the back of Lily’s neck. It wasn’t their laughter, but the fact that they all did so in unison. This was something different, something she hadn’t seen before.

“What’s wrong, sister? Cat finally got your tongue?” This was an older man with a potbelly.

“Or could it be that you realize you’ve stepped into some serious shit?” Her seatmate grinned.

“There are worse things than hell,” said the fainter. “Maybe if you’re lucky, you’ll get to learn all about them.”

“What is this?” Lily paced her prison, sniffing the air. The scent wasn’t as strong as before, but it was there. Every person in this room wore the same leash she had sensed around Deacon. “Holy shit. I thought there was more than one of you, but that isn’t true, is it?”

“Ooh, you’re quite the clever one.” Potbelly sneered at her. “So you can tell there’s only one of me?”

“Yes, but…how?” Alarm bells were ringing in her mind as she stared at them all in terror. “A demon can’t possess more than one person at a time. That’s not possible.”

“It was you who said experience was more important than education.” The fainter picked up a stone and flicked it Lily’s way. “So what you think isn’t possible, well…the world is a much bigger place than you’ve been led to imagine.”

Lily bit her lip and moved to the center of the circle, now uneasy. “Just who the hell are you?” she asked, her voice barely a whisper.

They all laughed again, that same, eerie stereophonic sound. Potbelly crouched down and ran his hands lovingly just outside the edge of the wards.

“I don’t go by any name, not after all that I’ve accomplished.” He gestured to the others. “Or rather, we.”

“But, if it makes you happy,” her seatmate added.

The fainter grinned, her pupils dilating all the way. “Then you can just call us Legion.”

Lily snorted. “Okay, that’s funny. You named yourself after a bunch of discount demons who struggled to possess one person?”

Potbelly shrugged. “It’s all about marketing, sister. But that’s a different kind of Hell.”

“Indeed.” The door had opened, revealing Deacon Osgrove. He walked in while sipping from a bottle of water. The thin man was with him, never more than a footstep behind. “But I’m afraid it’s intermission and I don’t have time to discuss economics with hellspawn today. Succubus, right?”

Lily shrugged. “Come in here and find out.”

“Kinky, but no thank you. My friend here may be bulletproof, but I’m afraid I’m a little bit softer.” Deacon inspected the sigil and nodded. “Immaculate work, but I want to keep a small guard. Have someone go check on our other intruder as well. If this one is a demon, I wonder about the other.”

“They are already on their way.” Deacon’s bodyguard bowed his head.

“Good.” Deacon sipped his water and grimaced. “What an interesting night. I hate to leave, but it’s time for me to go spend more time with the flock. I’ll be back later, so don’t you fret. You’re gonna get the backstage experience of a lifetime.”

“Blow me.”

Deacon chuckled. “Maybe, but I’ll make you sign a contract first. Timotei here will be your company until I get back, so please make yourself comfortable.” On his way out, Deacon paused. “And if you all could go back to working the crowd, that would be great.”

Legion in all their forms grinned, then left the room. Now it was just Lily and Timotei.

“So. Timotei, huh? Did your mom have a lisp or something?”

Timotei hissed, revealing a pair of large fangs.

“Oh. Vampire, huh? Sucks to be you.” Lily snorted.

“Not vampire. Vampyr. Pure blood.” Timotei sneered. “Now shut up for a bit or I’ll make you sorry.”

“Vampyr?” Lily could barely hide the icy core of dread that had formed in the center of her body. Vampires were rare enough, but if this man was telling the truth, then they were in even bigger trouble than she could ever have imagined. “Did you inherit your mother’s li—”

Timotei moved faster than she could blink, and she cried out when her face ignited against the boundary of her prison. Using the holy flames as a distraction, she managed to text a single word on her phone before the Vampyr could snatch it away and crush it between his fingers.

**RUN**