

SCRAPBOOK OF HELL

Cats and Dogs

(Part I: Beginnings)

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#1

Once upon a time in Hell

“Uncle Luuuuu!!!” the sweet looking little girl screamed as she barged through the office door and tried to hide behind the massive mahogany desk standing there in the middle of the room.

Lucifer, Prince of Hell and overall badass ruler of all that was unholy, cringed inwardly. There he was the epitome of evil and sin, a being feared even by the mightiest of angels, and she still called him *Lu*. How much more pansy-assed could you get? But since she only had laughed off her ass the last time he tried to intimidate her, he had decided to let it go. His PR division would throw a fit if it was to be known that he couldn’t even get an eight-year-old to comply nowadays. Hmm, maybe it was time to run a new campaign, one called *Eternal Punishment* – just as a little reminder.

“You know I love you, but I have an important meeting concerning the upcoming apocalypse. Something we want to go over without a hitch, so we won’t accidentally lose someone important who is *not* on the list of eternal damnation!” he told the little munchkin in a severe tone.

Now that would be real bad since there was no way to revoke the final judgment. Once the soul was back in Chaos’ abyss, there was no coming back. Ever. He shuddered at the thought; the paperwork and damages were a bitch for that one. He sighed heavily.

“So, what are you doing here and how did you get away from school, little menace?” he asked her then in a mildly annoyed tone.

“You said I could come to you in case of an emergency. Well, this is one!” she answered and batted her lashes at him, going for the innocent child routine. “And I lost my

warden at a portal to your office. Somehow she didn't reach it in time," she added with absolutely faked bewilderment. That and calling him Lu should do the trick, she thought. It was always amazing to see the epitome of evil cringe at this lovely nickname – and good for her bottom line, because her father always gave her a gold coin when she called the Lord of the Pit by that particular endearment.

Mercenary, she knew, but when you were an eternal resident of Limbo, D.H., with zero chance to ever ascend to Heaven (the only downfall of being a god of many (being a heathen god/ess came with an eternal residency in Hell, albeit in the more luxurious district of Limbo instead of the Nine Circles reserved for everyone else), the Ten Commandments or the Golden Rules didn't carry a lot of weight. Which was a good thing too, especially for the daughter of an Aztec War god. Because the Rules of Engagement in Hell? Never ever admit to anything without hard proof. And when confronted with said proof, deny until you're blue in the face, then inconspicuously change the topic and push your opponent's buttons until he exploded. And worst case, if all of the above that failed, then cry. A river.

That shit worked every time. The things you learned when hanging out in the Hall of Judgment – *amazing*. And it very much helped to learn from the best, that is, 'Uncle Lu' aka the King of Cheaters, Liars and Gamblers. (Go, Satan, go!)

She wondered how far she would come with this strategy this time around. Since Lucifer was a sucker for an angel face, she thought it might work well enough for him to defend her against her escort when he finally arrived.

Poor Hermes was so in for a dressing down. But that's what you got for being the messenger. Not that he didn't deserve it for being a meanie to Aphrodite and calling her a whore (which she wasn't since she did *not* get paid for sleeping her way through Olympus). Something a little girl shouldn't know at all, but it was kind of hard to stay innocent and well-spoken when everyone over the age of fifteen didn't care. At all. And wouldn't you know it, that was the crowd she was used to. There simply weren't that many children in the Aztec realm of Limbo.

"You bet, she didn't." Lucifer murmured under his breath as an answer to her rather thin explanation on the whereabouts of her warden and rubbed his temples, recognizing her game for the utter bullshit it was. But being the sucker for an ethereal face that he was,

always were as a matter of fact, he felt himself soften when strength would have been in order. And then there was the fact that her face always reminded him of his former home and his childhood, flying through Heaven with his brothers and raising hell – figuratively speaking, of course.

Still, he was intrigued to see her next move to avoid punishment. Sure, he could have extracted the truth from her mind and be done with it, but figuring it out old school was always way more fun and he so liked the thrill of the unknown. It was a bit like carefully unwrapping a special present at solstice instead of simply tearing it apart. He was patient like that; unbelievable but true. And of course that way he could always plead ignorance when her old bat of a grandmother would interrupt his fun at some time in the near future and demanded to know what happened *right now*.

Ah, it was always a pleasure for him to get one up on the meddling know-it-all and to subtly undermine her authority by pointing out how well behaved her little devil of a granddaughter always was in his presence. A total lie of course, considering most of the time she was anything but, even by his standards; but that was one of the perks of being the Lord of the Pit: he was the only one allowed to be the liar instead of the lieé.

He slowly looked her over and took in her tattered appearance. Scratches and bruises along her arms and bare legs; her toga or whatever those Aztecs called the shit was ripped and bloodied and barely hanging on to her body by a measly thread or two. Maybe he should have been shocked, but then, that was her usual appearance. Making him wonder what exactly her definition of casual was. He snickered.

Then he composed himself and said in a strict tone, “I ask again, considering you look like the winner of *Inferno*,” – which was a game where you had to battle your way through all Nine Circles of Hell on the off-chance to earn a place in Purgatory; and yes, some people were *that* desperate – “What did you do this time, and how much will it cost?”

“Nothing. On both accounts,” she answered, nonplussed. “You see, today was open door at the animal shelter and the whole school made the trip. After lunch the teachers said go play with the others and I did. There I went looking for my BFF and you know what I found, Uncle Lu, huh?” she told him, severely enraged. “The nasty buggers in her class were making fun of her and saying mean things because she is a girl. And that evil cuz of hers was just standing by and laughing his ass off. So I rushed over, good friend that I am, and told them to stop, or else. And you know what? These evil little spawns just laughed some more,

which, of course, pissed me off to no end and then I somehow lost my temper. At which point the screaming, threatening, and what else not started, prompting teachers to remind us to behave. Which we did and therefore opted for a friendly little game of Hide and Seek instead.” She stopped and took several deep breaths, hoping like hell – no pun intended – that Lu didn’t ask for details. No such luck though.

“Hmm, the shelter. You wouldn’t happen to know who got the hounds and cats in such a frenzy that Icelus had to ask Hypnos to put them to sleep, which rendered them useless for today’s episode of *Gladiators of Hell*? Because my revered Keeper of Beasts demanded I find the perps and throw them into a cell with the Giants,” Lucifer asked her, deceptively calm.

“Um, no, not really. Why would I?” she replied innocently. “We were allowed to interact with them during the tour until they were led onto the training ground,” she said, which was true.

Not her fault that the shortest way to the exit was through said training compound. Who would have thought the idiot puppy would try and chase her? But the rules of the game stated that the winner was the last to be found. Which would be her, since there was no chance of him catching her in here, she thought, smug.

At least that would be a point in her favor when her scary-as-all-hell grandmother heard about this little incident. Hiding between Hell’s finest of the animal persuasion was not the smartest move she had ever made. But totally worth it.

Being the awesome friend that she was, she couldn’t just let her bestie get expelled from class for losing her temper when she was a day away from her final exam – something those idiots fully well knew. *Chauvinistic pigs, or dogs in that case, not wanting a female on the team.*

The stupid dog’s expression after she had punched him in the face had been priceless. It had reminded her of Cerberus’ face when she had clawed his snout the first time he had growled at her. He had never done that again after that. Who said old dogs couldn’t learn new tricks? She had to chuckle at the memory. Maybe there was yet hope for the Egyptian jerk.

“Why am I not surprised? You never know anything of interest,” Lucifer tried another approach of finding the truth. “But how did you get here, exactly? I thought the shelter had airtight security?” he asked and wondered how this angelic looking girl always managed to be the epicentre of disaster and appeared sweet and innocent nonetheless. The goddess of retribution, balance and righteous indignation: the poster girl for sweet revenge. Apparently that’s what you got with Night for a mother, a War god for a father and a pair of Death gods for grandparents: one of the top contenders of Hell’s Finest. A position she was holding since the tender age of four. Rather impressive and promising as, well, hell, since he was always in need of professionals who knew how their stuff. Good thing though that she was an only child since it would need a miracle of divine proportions to find a mate for her; a task he sure as shit didn’t envy her father for, assuming the overprotective shithead ever came around to the idea of his baby girl dating one of the idiots available. Though he was pretty sure that the mother of the unfortunate individual who would get hooked on the little menace was going to fear for the live of her darling boy.

Well, at least she *looked* like an Angel with her tanned skin, gleaming hair and brilliant emerald eyes, which she refused to conceal. Since those were the only warning the idiots who challenged her would ever get, one might consider it fairplay on her part. Somehow those poor buggers always failed to recognize the cats’ eyes, when they dismissed her as harmless. *Stupid*. No one Lucifer took a liking to was ever harmless, something his subjects should have learned that by now. But it did make for a lot of entertainment seeing grown men getting their asses handed to them by nothing but a babe.

But back to the disaster at hand, he thought and switched his attention back to the girl before him. He was rather interested in how she had managed to leave to shelter – because its security *was* airtight (everything else would be a disaster of epic proportions; what with the dragons, hounds, beasts, and what not).

“Yeah, well, the portal at the shelter said either here or Tartarus,” she said, shrugging, “so here I am.” She paused for a bit and then said, looking upset at the thought, “Anyway, I need a place to stay until someone comes and picks me up.” She closed her eyes when another thought entered her mind. “Damn, Grandma will have my hide when she hears about that one, especially since I am still on probation for the dragon incident.”

She flinched slightly. Not that her fur wouldn’t grow back in a day or two, but it sure did hurt getting it ripped off of her, the whole thing feeling like a giant band aid coming off.

And she had to admit it was a little morbid even for her family to see her granddad use her hide as blanket. Apparently her soft baby fur didn't scratch as much as the adult ones and his cronies envied him his silky unharmed skin. Gross, but that was Aztec society for you.

"Yep, she did mention something about needing a new rug to Eve last week," Lucifer quipped. "Do you think she would sell me one? She must have a few by now. I promised Cerberus a new blankie, you know, and I'm pretty sure that he'd be especially delighted to have yours," he mused and chuckled at her obvious disgust and indignation. "You'll probably get grounded for that one too, but what's news there? So, do I have to notify school about your whereabouts again?"

"No need, they should be here in about twenty minutes, I guess," she replied, unconcerned.

"How so?" he asked, puzzled.

"Trace spell, what else? A dozen of us or so got hand-picked by Apollo to test the thingies. From what I picked up, I was volunteered so that they could find me in a time frame where I can't damage too much if I get lost. Which is a total lie since I never get *lost*. I can't help it if they put incompetent people in charge just to have them occupied. Even I know that putting a motion-challenged Hestia in charge of shifters is a dumb-ass move and I'm only twelve!"

"You do realize that order which is facilitated by rules is at the base of your power? Otherwise you wouldn't be able to punish those who neglect those rules. The Divine Law of Balance in a nutshell. How do you expect to use your gift properly when you neglect its principles?" he asked her. "However, since I have a meeting now, you will sit tight and listen to Apollo serenading Daphne while you wait for your escort. And you might want to prepare yourself for telling me the truth about this stunt after this meeting. No more pulling the wool over my eyes! Got that?" Lucifer decreed.

"Oh, come on! Now, that's totally uncalled for! And I would never try to pull wool over you," the little whirlwind whined.

"I suggest you put your ass in the chair over there and put the hPod to good use, *now*, otherwise it's going to be Eirene's rendition of *Hallelujah* and *Peace for Everyone* until even you get the message," Lucifer said in his strictest voice.

That shut her up quickly. Not like he wanted to be cruel, but he had learned the hard way that giving her an inch was likely to get a whole continent nuked – see Atlantis. Never a

good idea to let a four year old tantrum-prone whiz kid goddess skip her afternoon nap and then have her offended by a bunch of self-proclaimed 'enlightened' assholes who thought that the perfect female had to have Aphrodite's looks and a doormat's personality. Moral of the story: you want to live a long, healthy life, don't tell a goddess of the war-happy persuasion to be more like a saint and less like Xena. You won't like the outcome.

"Okay, okay. No need to be evil," she muttered and went to sit on the comfy chair in his state-of-the-art media corner.

His pride and joy, thanks to Hell's leading R&D company HephaTech, included everything from an hRoD (Receptacle of Doom), the most badass 3D-HD flat screen MoD (Mirror of Doom) in existence, the newest HellBook, (all 'Hercules approved' of course; for further information, please visit: gadgets-for-real-men.pit), to his personal favorite: the hphone. Originally invented for those incapable of mental communication, thanks to the DemonsUnited's equal opportunity clause, it had recently gotten shortlisted for the "Most Innovative New Torture Device" Awards. No more excuses for slacking on the job and total and constant availability of his subjects, day or night, whenever he felt like it. Yeah, Big Boss is watching you. So what, he never said he wasn't a control freak.

Suddenly there was a strong knock on the door.

"Enter," Lucifer said and his older brother Mike aka the great Archangel Michael aka the big bad scary-ass Bouncer of Heaven, came in.

"Hello, Bro. Long time, no see," he greeted his favourite sibling.

"Same here," Mike said and grabbed Lu in a bear hug and slapped his shoulder. #He let Lucifer go and went straight to the enormous panorama window in front of him.

"Oh Lord, I want one of those, too. You simply can't beat that look."

Mike watched Hell's eternal fire as it illuminated the pit in a warm inviting light that made Hell look almost comfy. If you ignored the whole torture thing, the screams, and the appearance-challenged demons in charge.

"First things first though, Lil' Bro: any new playthings?" Mike inquired, since Heaven only dealt in all things family friendly, Seventh-Heaven-Disney style, which explained Discovery channel's *The Wild Life's* amazing quote up in Heaven.

"You promised me *Angry Birds* and *Call of Duty*," he said and went to look through the pile of games on Lu's side desk. Then he suddenly went still, only to relax again after a

second. "What's up with the audience?" Mike asked, "I thought this was an adults-only zone?"

"Just ignore her; she will be gone in a few minutes. And she won't be able to hear anything other than what I want her to hear. Turnabout's fairplay, honey" Lucifer said smugly and winked at the girl.

"You the principal now? I thought you have a school for that now?" Mike asked, irritated.

"Yes we have one, but I found the personnel a bit lacking at times. Hence, my intervention when I deem it necessary, as you can see. But then, what can you expect of a bunch of no-good-gods under the command of a prick like Apollo? It seems there is a reason most of those Greek jerks got raised by someone other than their parents," Lucifer sneered.

Mike chuckled, entertained as always by his brother's so-called ordeals. "So, the pissed-off puppy boy out there is with her?" he asked nonchalantly, not being above getting the kid in trouble if it meant free entertainment for him. A just compensation for coming to Hell in his humble opinion.

Too bad Lucifer had refused to do that spin-off of *The Real Life*. That would have been a totally win-win situation for everyone: free PR for Hell, educational material for Heaven and a lot of fun for everyone in between. But no, it was against the Heavenly Law to enjoy the pain and punishment of others. *And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise*, yadda, yadda, yadda. Sometimes, Love, Faith, and Hope really sucked.

Since that was why he joined God's Army in the first place, namely to get some action and 'rain down a world of hurt' on those who sinned, it kind of sucked that all he had to do nowadays was finding ways to improve the perfectly good security detail of Purgatory and looking pretty while at it. So not what he had envisioned when he made general a few centuries back.

"What little boy?" Lucifer asked with suspicion lacing his words and turned around to glare at the little girl, who just smiled at him innocently and gave him the thumbs-up.

"Slightly bigger than that one, loincloth, a couple of bruises, reeks of wet dog? Did they have a field trip to the arena or what?" Mike asked. "You know, if you need help, I will

gladly be of service. Don't get much opportunity of questioning miscreants in Heaven. I'm sure it would be fun," he suggested.

If there ever was a sure fire way to rile Lucifer up, it was offering assistance. Nothing said 'weak' better than 'let me help'.

"What the HELL???? No, I do *not* need help with two little kids!" Lu yelled, enraged.

Oh, his brother would pay for that one. Insulting *him*, the Bringer of Light, who had taken it upon his shoulders to punish the sinners, after his lazy wimp of a brother had backed down from the challenge? That screamed for retribution. *Ask and it will be given to you*, wasn't it? Boy, was Mikey in for a surprise.

"Sorry, Bro, but I have to take care of that. Otherwise I would be as useless as Apollo and that wouldn't do at all. Five minutes top."

With that Lucifer left the room and sent a plea of balance to the little goddess in his office. "*Request granted,*" came the instant reply from her immense power.

Mission accomplished, Mike thought satisfied. Since his brother's M.O. was to put two culprits together in a confined space and let them hang themselves by their own rope, he thought it would be nice of him to create the right setting. He looked around pensively and decided a mini arena layout was what was needed. He shoved the two desks at the eastern wall and put the chairs in a semicircle around the media corner, which left enough space for the kids to go at it if they liked. Considering they likely had the ability to change their forms into animals, that seemed to be a distinct possibility. Judging by their tattered clothes and varying wounds, he would put good money on the likelihood of them having something to do with uproar at the animal shelter. Icelus' scream of outrage could even be heard at Heaven's gate.

Yep, that was going to be fun. Hmm, now where would his brother hide the popcorn and soda for his occasional long hours aka fun night with his buddies?

He started searching through Lu's drawers and cabinets, when the little girl touched his arm with a 'duh' expression on her face and pointed to an old filing cabinet on the opposite side of the office – as far away from the media corner as you could get.

“Well, thank you, little lady,” he said and started in on the treats he found there. Popcorn, chocolate, sport gums, bonbons, soda, coke, sweet iced tea, ambrosia, root beer – sugar overload wherever you looked. He saw the girl sit down with a satisfied smile on her face and briefly wondered about how she knew what he was looking for but since he heard a Hershey Kiss calling his name loud and clear, he decided the girl was just happy to have helped the greatest Angel ever created.

The little girl watched the big beautiful Angel preparing the room and running through Lucifer’s treats as if they were going out of style. She thought about how to go about Lu’s request of retribution since she couldn’t exactly beat the strongest Angel in existence to a pulp and giving him digestion wasn’t going to cut it. Although it certainly was a beginning. And here everyone thought that Angels were the epitome of good. Not.

Since she couldn’t think of something appropriate on her own, she decided to let her power come up with something *proper*. She let her consciousness withdraw and let her gift envelope her until only the cold and icy blade of judgement remained. It wasn’t a pleasant feeling for someone who lived on strong emotions, but it was necessary if it meant she scored brownie points with Lu.

She softly spoke the pretty little verse of judgement in her mind – not that she really needed it, but it certainly helped in reducing ‘unfortunate accidents’ – and waited. And waited some more. Apparently her power was a bit slow today or confused by its target’s status – no harming current residents of Heaven. But since her gift didn’t make exceptions – not even for God’s favourite pet – she would just have to see and wait. And then there it was, the sweet, sweet feeling of completion, of coming full circle. She heard the verdict in her mind and had to cover her laugh as a choke.

It seemed even the mightiest of angels had a weak spot. Michael turned around to check on her, sucking on a candy stick, and she managed to smile at him innocently. God, her power was not only awesome, but made of awesome. She only hoped that the Archangel possessed a good sense of humor.

Michael raised a brow and said condescendingly, "Are you good? Wouldn't do for you to suffocate during my watch, you know?"

When she just looked at him blankly he remembered her current inability to hear. He tried signing, but to no avail. Apparently military sign language was not part of Limbo High's curriculum. However, she seemed to have recovered, so he picked more goodies for the impending match of doom and parked his ass in his chair. After he made himself comfortable, he occupied himself with watching the girl. She looked delicate and sweet and pitiful in her tattered clothes. Taken in by her innocence, Mike hoped his brother would take it easy on her and he really hoped that the boy had gotten his bruises from saving her from the hounds. Otherwise, he would kick the little shit's ass himself.

Chivalry was *not* dead yet, not even in Hell. The girl noticed him watching her and sent another smile in his direction, then quickly let her long hair fall over her face, successfully obscuring her pretty face. He thought he saw a glimpse of glee in her face, but that was surely his overactive paranoid imagination. So he dismissed the sudden heavy feeling in his gut as a sign of hunger and went on in his noble quest to rid the world of the evil temptation of sugary items. In hindsight pretty delusional; but hey, they did teach you to think the best of people where he came from.

#2

In the meantime Lucifer stood in his reception hall aka the Court of Doom and looked around for his ever efficient PA Eve. Giving her a job was the least he could do after getting her cursed and kicked out of Paradise, or so she had claimed. That's what you got for trying to be helpful; see Prometheus.

"Where's that infernal boy and why wasn't I informed he was here?" he barked when he spotted Eve coming out the break room.

She looked up from the papers in her hands and pointed to her right. "I put him in Cerberus' old playpen after he barged in here growling and snarling and tried to sneak into your office right under my eyes. I tried to get his name, but the little beast wouldn't answer. I couldn't very well disturb your meeting for that, could I? Anyways, the little bugger has a GPS tracker on his arm, so I figured I'd wait until whoever is in charge of him comes and picks him up." She shrugged, then asked him pensively, "So, do we collect little miscreants now? Because if so, then I would be happy to hand over those naughty little shits Adam calls sons. You know, nothing in my job description said something about babysitting some nasty spawns of evil. If I wanted that I could have just stayed at home!"

"I know, I know," Lucifer answered, exasperated. "But you have to admit, their entertainment factor sure beats *The Real Life: Olympus*, doesn't it?"

"Yeah, but what doesn't?" she grumbled.

"Now, be the wonderful PA you are and make me some chamomile tea, will you? I foresee the mother of all headaches in my near future," he told her, miserable.

"How the mighty have fallen," she sighed wistfully. "The things I do to get away from home..." She shook her head as if to clear it and went on, "Chamomile for you, Herbal for his Loftiness? Plus some donuts, I assume?"

"You've got it. You are the best, Evie dear! Thank god you took the apple, or else I would be totally lost here," Lucifer said. "PMS or not," he added under his breath.

“Which is entirely your fault! That’s what you get for seducing innocent females – PMS. But one thing you got right though, I’m awesome,” she informed him haughtily and went to do his bidding.

The Lord of the Pit shook his head fighting the desire to throw another pity party and turned to the side and looked at the boy in his favorite pet’s playpen. “So, puppy, who are you and why did you try to sneak into my office?” he asked, put out. Of course he knew who was in front of him, but he wanted to give the boy the chance to commit a little punishable sin like, say, lying to him. Damn, he was really generous today.

“I’m no puppy, I’m a junior,” the boy said, insulted. “And I was tracking someone and the trace led me here,” he informed Lucifer, looking a tad hilarious standing in the playpen trying to look all manly.

Lu watched him like a bug under the microscope. The boy managed not to twitch under his glare. Much.

“Bonus points for trying, but as you know lying to the King of Cheaters and Liars is neither recommended nor particularly healthy. So better answer my questions, boy!”

His father aka God the Almighty couldn’t complain about breaking the rules when he gave the boy the chance to confess his sins and repent – it wasn’t his fault if the boy wasn’t feeling repentant, now was it? Yes, this reasoning was rather thin, he knew, and his father would know it too, but if he didn’t give his subjects ample opportunity to sin, he would be out of a job pretty soon. And then he would probably end up in some choir up in Heaven without any fun at all. He loved his father, he really did, but that prospect was simply cruel. *Ugh.*

“I would never dare to lie to my liege. Why would you accuse me of that, Sir?” the boy asked then in obvious fake shock.

“Maybe because the black shiner, the bruises on your pecs, and the mark on your throat suggest ‘attack by animal’. And wouldn’t you know it, I received word that my hellcats were riled today by a bunch of idiot school kids and the beasts’ keeper requested that the culprits were to be punished. Severely. So, you want to try again, kid?” Lucifer said, all traces of leniency gone.

He had a really, really angry Icelus to pacify and the kid here tried to outsmart him? So not a good move. And the boy didn’t have the angelic appearance of his favorite menace

to help him either. However, Lu wondered if the boy would be courageous enough to try the same tack as the little girl and give him some meaningless shit instead of the truth.

“Yes, we were at the shelter today. But we were allowed to play with the animals! I learned that the animosity between hounds and cats is as strong as Fauna and Mistress Artemis said. A very valuable lesson, indeed. One I sure won’t forget any time soon. Furthermore, I won’t doubt their superior knowledge any longer and accept their wisdom. I am sorry to have inconvenienced you and your assistant, Sir. It won’t happen again. I must have mistaken the scent of my prey.” The boy bowed his head and gave the impression of sincerity hoping to thwart Lucifer’s anger. Disturbing Hell’s prized creatures was a serious offense and a bit of ass-kissing and flattery aka diplomacy would go a long way to placate the Lord’s ire. Or so the ‘legends’ claimed.

Lu had to hand it to the boy, he sure had guts. Not that it would do the kid any good in this case. He had used up all of his leniency for today for the little girl. Too bad.

Since his five minutes were almost up, he decided to switch to intimidation to get results. He did have a reputation to uphold, after all. Maybe the boy would be scared enough to actually give him some answers that he could then convey to Icelus. The girl sure wouldn’t back down, whatever the cost. And it wouldn’t do to threaten a goddess of revenge too much – he wasn’t in the mood for comeuppance. He would be occupied for centuries. So he focused on the boy.

“I repeat my question, what or whom did you chase, you stubborn little beast? And if you don’t answer me to my satisfaction, and *pronto* I might add, then your punishment will start with thirty minutes in the hellcats’s training cage and getting worse every time I have to ask anew. Got it now, you irreverent shit?”

Lucifer’s eyes began to glow with an unholy shimmer changing his eyes to black orbs that eclipsed all the light in them; always a sure sign that he was leaving Reasontown and was fast approaching Madville. Another sure sign was of course the distinct smell of fire and brimstone in the air.

The boy’s nose crinkled at the foul smell and he tried to suppress the tears that threatened to spill at the sharp stench. Nevertheless, he was never one to cower, because what could the devil do in the worst case? For torture of the eternal heavenly variety you

had to have a soul, which he technically didn't have— sometimes, being a god of Death really rocked – and everything else couldn't be as bad as the tongue lashing of his mother that he was already in for. Unfortunately the woman had an uncanny ability to whine and complain and accuse you until your balls were shriveled up and Tartarus started to look like a comfy place instead of the last stop before non-existence. And here people wondered why his father was a bad-tempered misogynist pig and refused to produce any more children. Why, oh why, couldn't his parents for once have behaved like grown-ups and given him into foster care with some *normal* people? Oh yeah, because that would mean that they cared, which they didn't.

On the upside though, their constant battles meant that he was likely to stay an only child and didn't need to marry a sister of his. The thought made him cringe. Thank God for small mercies. Maybe that's why he got to be Death – inbreeding caused a dead end. He snickered inwardly. However, thirty minutes as cat bait was so not his idea of a fun time, thank you very much, so he tried to come up with an answer that didn't land him in the healing center for an extended period of time. Somehow he didn't think Lucifer would care for the fact that he got into a brawl with a smaller kid and a girl no less – shifter or not – *and* managed to rile all the shelter's beasts in the process of chasing said kitty. Man, those vultures in the camp's woods really gave a new meaning to the term *Angry Birds*. Thankfully, he was immortal and healed fast; his ears would still be bleeding otherwise.

“My mother calls me Anapa, oh great Lord of Hell, and I tracked a fellow disciple during a game of Hide and Seek. Like I said, the scent brought me.”

There, that was the truth, minus a few unimportant details. The cunning feline thought to best him by coming here? Not going to happen, he thought viciously. No one outsmarted Death. But even he had to admit that the kitten was clever to hide in here. On the other hand, she had nowhere to go now. Meaning he had won. A smug and satisfied grin began to appear on his handsome face, which he wisely suppressed, and then he looked at Lucifer with wide innocent eyes.

Lucifer glared at the boy some more, though he was impressed with the boy's attempt of saying a whole lot of nothing and still answer the question. Who would have thought a dog could be so sneaky? Just like a little girl he knew. Come to think of it, that one

too had some bruises and scratches. Seems there was a connection of some sorts. The headache he had been dreading made itself known now. Forcefully so.

A picture of what most likely had been going down formed in his head. If he was not mistaken, his favorite little miscreant had gotten herself in another brawl, and judging by the animosity he picked up from the boy when he mentioned his 'fellow disciple', he would bet that she had won it, too. Probably by punching the canine shifter in the face – the shiner – then throwing him on his back with her claws firmly lodged in his chest – the claw marks – and then besting him with a mark of dominance on his throat. Damn, that had to hurt. What a blow to a man's ego, regardless of his age. And since he had been a junior too at some time, he would take another educated guess here and state that the boy had tried to chase the kitty down in revenge. Through the shelter's training camp. Riling up the entire pride of hell cats. *Stupid dog.*

Yeah, he could vividly imagine the whole scene now. Only question left now: who had started the brawl and why. Time for another round of *Hang thyself*, one of his most favorite games. Hopefully his brother had already gotten everything ready. Damn, his job really was awesome.

"Come on, boy! Let's get to the bottom of it; I have more important things to do than talk in riddles. Here is what I think has gone down – best case scenario, of course: you got into a skirmish with another shifter and later, when playing Hide and Seek, you took the opportunity to get even with that individual by chasing him or her through the entire training compound and ended up here when you managed to lose your prey. Right?"

Shit, the little boy thought. That hit a bit too close to home for his liking. Lost his prey? Could the devil get anymore derogative than that? His mother was so going to have his hide for that one.

"Basically that's it. But I only followed my fellow to make sure nothing happened to her on the training ground. You know that little ones are much more vulnerable than we are, don't you?"

The little boy looked at Lucifer with big innocent eyes. Maybe the Good Samaritan act would count for something. If not, then he was screwed. Not as much as his prey, since she

seemed to have gotten caught by the Master of Sin himself instead of scary Eve, and in his Unholiness' current mood he sure wasn't going to be lenient.

Lucifer closed his eyes and then said, pointing a finger at him, "I've warned you. I have your fellow in there with a very special guest – who is not happy that our meeting got interrupted by the way – and I'm sure that together we get to the bottom of this stunt! Move! In there! And behave!"

#3

Lucifer put the boy out of his confinement and shooed him inside his office where Mike just swallowed the rest of a...candy stick of all things? Damn his brother for his unparalleled ability to find the good in everything. He looked around and was satisfied with what he saw. At least his brother had taken care of the setting before he had raided his treats. Lu sighed inwardly. Eve would not be pleased if she had to place another express order at *Sweet Sins* – the receptionist there wasn't exactly known for her custom-oriented approach. Why Dionysus had to give that job to a *dragon* of all beings, was everyone's guess. On the other hand, it was fun to watch when that one scared the living hell out of the weaker and not so weak residents of his realm. He snickered. Harmony's face had been priceless when her request had been shot down, because, "we do not deliver to do-gooders, peace lovers, or any other kind of righteous sissies." Yep, Hell was fun.

Anyway back to the matter at hand. He waved with his hands to gain the attention of his brother and the little menace only to realize that she wasn't sitting in her chair anymore.

"Yo, Bro. Care to explain where the little miscreant is? Can't even keep watch over a little one, nowadays?"

"What?" Mike exclaimed, puzzled. He turned around, blinked at the empty chair, and sputtered, "But, but, but..."

His face turned pink, then scarlet when the little boy behind Lucifer couldn't suppress a snicker. Or didn't want to – the residents of Hell weren't exactly known for respectful behavior.

"You!" Michael yelled, pointing a finger at the boy. "Don't you know who I am? How *dare* you laugh at me?" His voice was booming now and his deep blue eyes glowing.

If there was one thing that got his brother riled, it was disrespect. Especially when he was caught doing something less than perfect. Apparently it was bad for his image as the most powerful being up there in Heaven – next to Father and Gabe of course.

"Calm down, Michael. I've just finished redecorating and Eve would have our hides if she has to deal with Icarus so soon again. Presumably the boy is even more conceited than his father. So please, don't!"

He stared menacingly at the little boy and told him, “And you, keep your mouth shut, little moron! Laughing at him is never a good idea!”

“Even when it is funny?” the little boy murmured defiantly. Which made Mike’s wings glow.

Lucifer closed his eyes and hissed, “Yes, even then!”

Then he exhaled heavily and with a little unholy and a bit scary smile, he said, “You might want to show yourself, little girl. Playtime is over – it’s question time!”

He waved his hands again and the little girl’s form reappeared in the chair again. She looked at him with innocent, wide eyes. “What?”

Lu rolled his eyes. “Both of you in the middle!”

The children complied, but were careful to keep as much space between them as possible.

“Gotcha!” the boy murmured smug under his breath as he took his position.

“That doesn’t count, dog!” the girl hissed without ever looking at him.

“Sure it does, kitten!”

“Hell no, it doesn’t. You didn’t find me on your own and you have yet to touch me, moron!”

“Oh I will, pussycat, I will. And I did track you here, didn’t I? Bad form by the way, hiding in Lucifer’s office. For the punishment I’ll get for this, you are going to pay extra,” the boy hissed back.

“Will you shut up?” Lu’s voice boomed then. “The only thing I want to hear is a comprehensive explanation as to why I’m going to have spent my free time with placating your families! Whatever did I do to you that I warrant this, is what I want to know?”

“Well,” drawled his ever helpful brother from the sides, “the list is rather long, Brother – want a detailed account?”

“What I do on the job doesn’t count, asshole, so that list will be rather short. I am a good person!” Lu pointed out.

“Duh, hate to break it to you, but you are not. Seems to me that your job is more of a vocation – so it does count! And no, good is not the word I’d use, *asshole!*”

Lucifer started to glow in shades of brilliant red and gold, and then his form changed into that of the angel he was. His white wings glowed brightly as the sun, blinding everyone in the room, but his brother just laughed.

“Oh, you don’t really think you of all people scare me? It was me who handed your ass to you, or did you forget?” he scoffed.

At the taunt, Lu’s eyes turned black and the fires of Hell began to show in them. Even the little ones started to growl.

Mike just raised his eyebrow condescendingly. “Shut it, you two,” he ordered and sent a wave of his Warrior power in their direction that froze them for a minute.

“How sweet. The great Bringer of Light defended by pups. Nice army you have, Bro!”

But instead of exploding as his high and mighty brother intended, Lucifer felt a wide smile spreading on his face.

“Bad mistake, Mike. Real bad!”

“Pups? Did that wingy shithead just call us *pups*?” the boy asked menacingly.

“Dude, the asshat freezes us and you are upset about being called a pup? Might want to get your priorities right!”

The boy growled at the girl and showed his teeth for good measure. “Oh, pussycat. That I’ll remedy in a second. No one can freeze Death.” His eyes turned black for a moment and then he could move again. And because he was a nice guy, he un-froze the girl as well. Or maybe because he still hadn’t figured out how to focus his power on one person only. Anyway. He looked at the girl, whose eyes had turned cat.

“I do *not* like to be attacked for no reason. How about you?” she asked with deadly calm.

Hm, maybe he had underestimated the kitten, he thought when he felt steely and *cold* power emanating from her.

“No.” He stilled and a dangerous gleam appeared in his eyes. “How about a game of ‘Herd the Bird’, kitty?”

“Nice,” she drawled. She took in the room and said, “I’ll take his back.”

He rolled his eyes. “Afraid?”

“No,” she replied. “Sneaky.” She smiled evilly as her hands transformed into impressive, razor-sharp claws. “On three.” With that she disappeared again.

The boy shook his head. If she could turn invisible, why the hell had she led him on a merry chase right in the Lord of Sin’s office? But it was time for some action. He used his

second sight to check on the girl – not that he could see her for real, only her body’s outline – and had to acknowledge her skill. She was right behind the taunting imbecile and in the process of clawing her way up the drool worthy media center. Damn the Devil sure knew his gadgets.

The little girl took position on the MoD and grinned. No one froze her. No one. And no one called her a pup. Ugh. The asshat at least could’ve gotten the species right. And brothers or not, no one was allowed to insult Uncle Lu. Especially not a stupid, condescending sissy that didn’t know when to shut up. But his face had been priceless when she had vanished. She didn’t think anyone had seen that look on the Archangel’s face for a very long time. And now she knew why Lu had volunteered for the job here. She would have too with such a family. And there Michael was said to be the easygoing one. Rumor had it that Gabe was even worse, uptight and righteous pencil pusher that he was.

She listened in on the angel’s current monologue, heard the words “lowlife” and “lover of the unnatural” and motioned to the boy.

One.

Two.

Three.

The boy transformed into a very, very large dog and charged growling at the Archangel. She shifted too and when the boy sank his impressive set of teeth in the forearm of a stunned, disbelieving Michael, she pounced.

Landing on his back, her momentum brought the big angel to the ground, a hiss escaping him as her claws sliced through his shirt and his skin. She was careful to leave his wings unharmed though – she did not have a death wish, after all. The boy had let go the second the angel had touched the floor face first and now stood right beside her on the back of the giant bird (really, an angel was nothing else if you thought about it) and had his teeth around his neck. For good measure, she dug her claws in some more; it wouldn’t do to lose her grip, now would it? Another hiss.

“And that, Brother dearest, is why I volunteered. For moments like this!” Lu smirked. “Oh, how the mighty have fallen. Brought down by a bunch of kids. Unnatural shifter kids.” Lu pumped his fist into the air and sent out a wave of his own power. “Turnabout’s fairplay, you know!”

To the two shifters he said, “You can change back now. He’s out of commission for the moment. But hurry up a bit!”

Both children followed his order for once, both grinning like loons.

Suddenly the door opened.

“Your tea!” Eve said and stopped, taking in the scene before her. “Oh!”

“Awesome work, don’t you think?”

She smiled evilly. “Say cheese!”

Click.

“Oh, that will go viral on *Screecher*. Damn, you made my day, kids!”

His ever efficient PA whooped and did a silly little victory dance. Lu was satisfied. That was way better than any gruesome evening show.

“That wasn’t nice, Eve. You know that gloating is a sin!”

“Duh, what will he do? Make my life hell?” She snickered.

“Good point.” To his new favorite miscreants, he said, “Well done, kids. You can go and wait for your escorts outside. I don’t think you want to be there when he unfreezes.”

Seeing the lethal look in his brother’s eyes, the Lord of Sins had to laugh.

“Told ya. Bad mistake. Everyone knows not to rile up shifters. And especially not of the godly kind.” He took his hRod and said, “Ah, Daddy will be so proud. Say ‘Loser’!” *Click.*

Outside, the two kids sat down and waited for their teachers to come get them in silence, albeit with a big, satisfied smile on their faces.

“Nice claws, kitty.”

“Nice teeth, puppy.”

“You think we are forgiven?”

“Yep. At least Lu did. Apollo won’t be happy, though. As won’t be my grandmother. She absolutely loves *Gladiators of Hell*.”

“Yeah, my mother won’t be happy either.”

Both sighed.

“Sometimes family just sucks,” the girl said.

“Yeah. But at least we don’t have to put up with an idiot like the one in there,” the boy remarked.

She nodded and then there was silence again. A few minutes later, their escorts arrived.

A pissed-off Mercury came in and pointed his fingers at them.

“*You!*” A scream of outrage. “*And you!*” Another one. “Oh, you are going to regret making me come here and deal with *her!*” He pointed a finger in Eve’s direction. “That woman is pure evil!” A huff. “You are going to pay for that – especially you, little girl! Enough is enough!”

Suddenly the girl grew cold again, power radiating from her. “Did you just threaten me, Merc? Really?” she asked him mildly curious.

The boy watched as their escort turned red and stammered a muffled apology.

Then they heard a beep and Mercury took his hRod out of his pocket. “What now?” he said, exasperated. Suddenly his eyes grew wide and wider and he turned to Eve, who was sitting at her desk. “That true? Really?”

“Yep, it sure is. One for Limbo, Zero for Idiotville,” replied a grinning Eve. “Got to thank those two beasts for that one,” she said. A sigh. “Why can’t my kids be like that?”

“Because there is lot to be said for some peace every now and then?” Merc gave back sarcastically.

“There is that. But, they made Limbo proud today, no questions about that. Cup of coffee?”

“Sure, why not. I’ve got a little time.”

And off they went.

The children looked at each other and shrugged simultaneously. “Grown-ups!?”

“You think we gonna be famous now?”

“We? No. Lu and Eve – yes. Which is good, because I sure don’t need any more attention than I have already.”

“Put that way – me too.” A pause. “You’ve got skill, kitty. You are the first one to last longer than five minutes in a chase.”

“You aren’t bad yourself, puppy. You were the first one who didn’t give up after five minutes.”

They stared at each other with both their teeth bared.

“I’m Anubis. And you?”

“I’m Nemesis.”

Silence.

“So you were the one who nuked Atlantis?” he smirked.

“So you were the one who destroyed the Sphinx?” she gave back.

“I did not destroy the Sphinx – it’s just her nose that’s missing!”

“And I didn’t *nuke* Atlantis – I just relocated it vertically.”

Before they could get in another fight, Mercury came back.

“Time to go, little idiots. Express delivery home! Apollo informed your parents!”

Before the kids could end their groans, both of them had vanished with a simple snap of his fingers.

When he saw a blaze coming out of Lucifer’s office and the shouting to go with it, he decided that it was time to go.

“Bye Eve. Give Icarus my best, when you call him tomorrow!”

With that he vanished.

“Well, at least the photo was worth it,” Eve grumbled as she took her hRod and called the construction company from Hell.

Up in Heaven, God laughed about the photo his youngest son’s PA had so generously shared. Sure, schadenfreude wasn’t very heavenly, but come on – it was just too funny to see his strong and proud son defeated by those two kids. Maybe he should warn Michael that he would this wouldn’t be the last time he came across those two. But then, maybe not.

He had inkling that it would be much more fun with his son in the dark.

S

COMING SOON

Part II: Prom