

50,000 words.

Paint it Black

HELL ON EARTH 1

by Stacy Phay

CHAPTER ONE

Chapter

"Hi, welcome to Salvation, what can I get you?" Abby approached the man slumped in his booth seat.

Jonathan barely looked up at her, "Just a club soda," he tried to smile. It came out more like a grimace. Salvation. What kind of person names a bar Salvation he wondered.

Abby stepped behind the bar and filled a glass with ice, sprayed the club soda on tap into it, stabbed a tiny plastic straw into the ice and headed back for the man's table. She reached into her pocket and set down a small square napkin before setting the club soda down a little harder than she meant to, spilling some of it onto the bar's logo. A crude drawing of

a man, with someone's take on the angel on one shoulder, devil on the other trope. The angel looked very unangelic, tattered wings and a scowl, and the devil looked like a sharply dressed man wearing those horns you buy in a costume shop at Halloween.

"Thanks," the man tried the smile again. His face did not cooperate.

"What's he doing here?" Tyler stood at Abby's elbow when she was back near the large mahogany bar in the middle of the dank and grungy restaurant/bar/hangout.

"I have no idea," she kept her back to the man, barely even looking sideways at Tyler.

Jonathan Cramer, looked to be in his 30s if Tyler had to guess. He wore slacks, a black button down shirt and a black suit jacket. It was the white band tucked neatly under the cuffs of the collar that surprised Tyler most. What was the preacher doing in this shitty bar? Tyler went back to wiping down the glasses and stacking them on the shelves.

Jonathan kept his head down, making sure his club soda

seemed as interesting as he was trying to make it feel as he sipped it slowly. When he could no longer feel the eyes of the bartender on him he snuck peaks around the place. Everything about it felt wrong. From the cracked leather booth seats to the alcohol stained hardwood floors and the rot iron arched doorway that led to a room that held a single pool table and two more worn out booths. He reached into his jacket pocket and took out the worn card he had been handed in the confession box. He stared at the scratchy writing. "Salvation" he had said out loud when the hand on the other side of the curtain dropped it at Jonathan's feet. "War is coming," his confessor's whispered voice chilled the preacher. "Be there tomorrow, noon," it had said. "Be where?" Jonathan asked, but got no answer. When he flipped the card over he saw the logo of the bar he had now been sitting in for over four hours on it. It did not take long for him to know exactly where "where" was.

Abby paced the small kitchen in the back of Salvation for the hundredth time. In the three years she had been working there the place had never been empty. There were always pockets of people sitting at the bar, lounging in the big booths or playing a loud game of pool. The tinny sound of bar music coming from old speakers near the tiny stage area was all Abby could

hear and it made her skin crawl. Quiet was never good in her world. Her mind ran different scenarios through. Some of them reasonable, most of them end of the world caliber. Someone behind her cleared their throat loudly and Abby screamed.

"Sorry, didn't mean to startle you," the man smiled gently and Abby's entire body relaxed. His smile made his eyes glow, his dimples sank deep into his cheeks and his face just felt, right. "It's Abigail, right?" his voice was smooth, Abby felt like she was floating on a cloud. She could not answer, so she just nodded. "What are you doing here?" she finally found her ability to speak, and then realized she had not said it out loud. "Come, I will explain," he answered, in her head. She nodded again.

"Who's this?" Tyler asked as the man and Abby stepped out of the kitchen.

"Come, Tyler, join us," the man answered. Tyler could not understand why he had done it but he followed them to the booth where Jonathan had been waiting. There were several empty glasses with plastic straws sitting there but the preacher was no longer there. The man motioned for Abby and Tyler to take

seats and he sat across from them. They sat in silence for several minutes. The man stared straight ahead, past them, they stole glances and shrugs. They both jumped when the man slid over and Jonathan sat next to him.

"You have been chosen," the man told them before Jonathan could settle in.

Tyler stood up. "I'm not interested," he spit out, turning his back to the table.

"Sit down, child," the man's voice remained steady.

This made Tyler spin on his heels. The man could not be any older than 25, how dare he call Tyler child. He opened his mouth to protest but the man held up his hand "Tyler, please join us." Tyler closed his jaw and stared the man down. He was so unassuming, lightness filled his eyes and he had a kind, gentle smile. Tyler dropped his hands to his sides and sat back down.

Chloe's feet felt like they were ten feet off the ground. Was she floating? She wasn't sure. There was a door in front of her, she seemed to be slowly heading toward it. She could not

tell how far away it was, or how long she had been heading toward it. What was there and why was it so important for her to get there? She was unsure of that either but something inside her kept telling her to go to that door. She felt a pull, like gravity had given up on her, or something had taken hold, and she could see the door clearer, it was ordinary, like the ones you would see at someone's house, with a welcome mat in front of it. Whatever had been holding her up let go and she was now standing firmly on cold concrete. She reached for the knob and it was locked. Chloe looked down at her left arm, instinctively reaching out with her hand, seeking a purse that was not there. She felt around for pockets. None. Her heart began to race. Where had she left her key? She tried to look behind her, maybe she had left them in the car? She was unable to move.

"She's fading," a voice rang out in her mind. "Who's there?" she asked into the darkness. She could hear a faint beeping sound, steady, unchanging. The door in front of her reclaimed her attention. She closed her eyes and tried to remember where she had left the damn key. When she opened them again she was in a dimly lit room. The cold metal of the chair underneath her was sending chills through her body. She wrapped her arms around herself to warm up. "Hello?" she called out. No

one answered. She saw no windows, just three plain walls. She tried to look behind her but again, could not move. She closed her eyes once more, when she opened them she was in a living room. It was lit only by a fireplace that had a roaring fire in it, she was still sitting on the cold chair, not anywhere near the flame, although the room was filled with couches and chairs that looked significantly more comfortable. She was trying to make out the words on the books lining the dark wood shelves on either side of the fireplace when a door opened behind her.

"Chloe," a man's voice behind her. She tried to turn to see who he was and was reminded she was unable to move. "Who's there?" she called out.

"Are you ready to go Chloe?" the voice asked.

"Go where?" she asked in earnest.

"Heaven, hell, or wherever it is you think one goes when they die," the voice had no inflection. Just a monotone, matter of factness to it.

"I'm dying?" Chloe asked, and then remembered. Cancer. She

had cancer. Brain tumor, inoperable, deadly. The beeping, hospital bed, tubes in her arms and nose and other parts came rushing back into her consciousness.

"Well, that is entirely up to you," the voice spoke behind her.

Of course she did not want to die, and of course she was going to heaven when she did. She was a good person, had lead a good life.

"Not really," the voice took her out of her revelry.

"What do you mean 'not really'," Chloe was agitated. The beeps in the back of her mind changed pace, she hoped someone heard them, woke her up from this nightmare. "Who are you?"

"Death, or the reaper, or whatever it is you think takes you where you go when you die," the voice answered. "But I prefer my given name, Azazel," for the first time his voice inflection shifted. "We have a task for you, Chloe," he adjusted back to the monotone.

"We, who we?" Chloe's agitation continued. She listened for the beeps to flutter but they were back to normal. Damn.

"Hell, the place you're going despite your best efforts to convince yourself otherwise," Azazel was finding it increasingly harder to keep himself objective. He had not been in agreement when Lucifer he had chosen her out of the candidates for this task. And it was his objection that got him sent on this inane mission.

Chloe considered this. Okay so she had not led the best life, she had done, things. "Yes, yes, there will be plenty of time to stroll down memory lane," Azazel snapped. "Do you want to die today?" he asked, again.

After a long pause Chloe answered "No."

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"I am Gabriel," the man spoke after a long, uncomfortable silence. The name made Abby shift in her seat. Tyler glanced sideways at her. Jonathan sat still. "There is a war coming," Gabriel continued.

"You a recruiter, you trying to get me to join the army?"

Tyler growled.

"Messenger," Gabriel answered. "I am a messenger," he repeated when confusion washed over Tyler's face. It did not change his expression. "I am a messenger. Heaven and Hell are on the precipice of war," Gabriel continued. "You three have been chosen to defend the human race against, us."

"What church are you from? Did my parents send you?" Tyler was still battling.

"He sent me," Gabriel.

"He who?" Tyler demanded.

"God," Jonathan and Abby said, in unison.

Tyler jumped out of his seat, again and stormed off into the kitchen. Abby and Jonathan both moved to go after him but Gabriel held up a hand and they sat back down. "Let me," Gabriel stood and followed after Tyler.

The small kitchen smelled like old food and cleaning fluid.

Tyler was standing at the back door trying to turn the nob, for the two hundredth time. He kicked the bottom of the door and cursed. He turned to head toward the front door when Gabriel entered.

"Look, I don't know who you are or what you're trying to pull here, but I am not interested in your cult," Tyler spit out.

Gabriel put a hand up to stop Tyler from passing him. When it landed on his chest Tyler felt a surge of energy, light, and strength. "I am Gabriel, I am an angel. I am here on behalf of Him," he looked up when he said the word. "There is a war coming, and whether you believe or not, it is going to be here soon and you are going to be a part of it."

"Why me?" Tyler tried to remain defiant, but wavered.

"I cannot answer that, I am only the messenger," Gabriel answered.

"What is the message?" Tyler asked.

"I must tell all three of you at the same time, please, come," Gabriel motioned for Tyler to follow him back to the table.

"What is going on here?" Jonathan whispered to Abby once Gabriel was out of sight. "What war?"

"How should I know," Abby answered more angrily than she meant to.

Jonathan sat back against the booth seat. He watched the door of the kitchen wondering if Tyler had bolted, and asked himself if he should do the same. Then he wondered why he had waited all day for this messenger in the first place. For some reason neither answer came to him. Abby picked at the leather seat next to her pulling at a tear in the fabric. She knew exactly why she was here but was not so sure what Gabriel meant by war. They both sat up straight when Gabriel followed Tyler out of the kitchen.

Chloe sat in an uncomfortable chair in the waiting area, her carry on back between her feet, her boarding pass resting on her lap. "Do you want to die today?" she heard Azazel's monotone

voice in her head. "No," she heard herself say again. She shifted, trying to get more comfortable. She promised herself she would buy the most comfortable furniture available when she got to her destination.

"There is a war coming," Azazel had told her. "Between heaven and hell," he paused to give her a moment to process this, her face was unchanged, so he continued. "Do you know the story of Him and Lucifer?" Azazel asked. "Of course, I went to bible school," Chloe snapped. "Bible school," Azazel snorted. "The stories you know are only part of what happened," Azazel continued. "Lucifer lived for several years on Earth, wrecking havoc on the lands and its people, and in a fit of ultimate rage, the big man sent Lucifer to his own purgatory, a lone soul in a dark, underground place," Azazel explained. "But Lucifer had been a busy boy and he had been recruiting. Before the gates of purgatory could be sealed, an army of demons and lost souls followed Lucifer down," he paused. Once again Chloe was unmoved. "The big man sealed the gates and set about warding it to those who would attempt to open it. The wards were left all over the world. The strongest of which were left where the gates are most vulnerable," he waited for her to ask. "Los Angeles," he answered when she didn't inquire.

"What does any of this have to do with me?" Chloe asked.

"We need someone, a human, to destroy the wards and open the gates back up," Azazel told her.

"Me?" Chloe pointed at herself when she realized what he was implying.

"Yes," Azazel's voice showed his exasperation.

"Passengers boarding flight 708 from Atlanta to Los Angeles may line up now," the PA voice pulled Chloe out of her revelry. She stood and slung her bag over her shoulder, still amazed at how strong she felt. She had only been in the hospital two days ago. Tubes coming out of her, drugs pumping through her veins. On the verge of death.

Jonathan, Tyler and Abby sat in the same spots in a small booth at the Salvation bar pouring over a map of Los Angeles. There were several red X's marked on different spots all over the map. For a relatively small city there was an awful lot of space, Tyler mused. The X's marked places in which an item, a

ward, Gabriel had called them, was located. No one could tell them which of the items were still in tact. They would have to find out on their own.

"This is ridiculous," Tyler ran his hands through his already messy hair. Gabriel had long been gone, his message delivered, his time on Earth completed. "Why are we believing this nut job again?"

"I cannot tell you how I know this but you are going to have to trust me that the man who sat here and told us of this war was the angel Gabriel," Abby was rubbing her temples. "And if he was here, and he tasked this mission to us, there is a good reason."

"I understand why he has to be here," Tyler pointed at Jonathan. "A priest makes sense. Mission from God, blah blah," he half-smiled in the preacher's direction hoping he was not sounding as bitter as he felt in his presence. "But why me, why you?"

Abby looked up. At some point she was going to have to tell them. Now was not that time. "I think it might be a good idea to

stop asking questions and get on with this mission," she suggested. "We have a lot of places to go and very little time."

"I just don't feel like I need to be running all over town trying to find some old relics supposedly placed here by a man I don't believe exists," Tyler protested. "I stopped enjoying scavenger hunts when I was kicked out of the Boy Scouts," he huffed.

"Be that as it may, we have been asked to do something for a man we both know exists and we are wasting time listening to you whine," Jonathan broke.

"Typical," Tyler scoffed. "Following the word of God even when he is not the one speaking them," he folded his arms across his chest.

"My reasons for believing in him are my own," Jonathan fought back. "Whatever it is you think he's done, I am sure it was not in some sort of slight against you," he tried kindness.

"If, and I use that word strongly, if I am going to be joining you two on this stupid mission, I will not be preached

to, understood?" Tyler pointed a finger in Jonathan's direction.

The car that picked Chloe up at the airport in Los Angeles had very comfortable seats and a nice blast of air conditioning. The driver had been holding a sign with her name on it when she exited the terminal. How he knew almost exactly where she would be was a mystery to her. She was beginning to get used to that feeling. Traffic on the highway was as reported. Bumper to bumper and never ending. By the time the car pulled up to the curb in front of a swanky looking hotel in Beverly Hills, Chloe had noted the sign marking their entrance into the city, she was chilled to the bone from the AC and ready to climb into a comfortable bed. She very much hoped the bed was comfortable.

The bellhop left her standing in the middle of a large room decorated from floor to ceiling in the richest fabrics and lushest furniture she had ever seen. Too good to be true was beginning to creep into her mind but Chloe let it pass through without further thought. She sat at the edge of the bed, which she was happy to find was indeed comfortable. Sleep came easily. When she woke up in the morning she could feel that she was not alone in the room. Wiping sleep from her eyes she sat up to find Azazel lounging on the love seat near a large window sipping

from a teacup as if he was some European aristocrat.

"Good morning," he cooed. She wondered where the monotone voice had gone. She preferred it, honestly.

"Are you going to be making this a habit?" she snapped at him.

"No change in the attitude then," Azazel uncrossed his legs and set the teacup on the glass table in front of him. "Some people have no sense of gratitude," he made a noise of disapproval with his tongue. "We have things to do today, go get yourself prettied up," he waved his hand at her.

"And here I thought I was in charge," Chloe whispered under her breath as she pulled the covers off her and headed toward the bathroom.

Tyler raised his hand like he was in a classroom. "Yeah um, how are we going to know which items are no longer guarding us from hell?" he used air quotes and immediately felt dumb.

Abby let out a big sigh and set her cell phone on the table. She had been entering the different addresses into her GPS app. "They will have a specific energy," she looked at Tyler and then glanced at Jonathan who was mapping out their routes in a more non-tech way. On the map. He looked up at her when she paused. Abby folded her hands together and picked at her fingernails. "I'm an angel," she told them.

Tyler snickered, more loudly than he meant to. Jonathan went back to mapping their route. "The ones that are no longer active will give off little energy or none at all, ones that are in tact, will pretty much call out to anyone who knows what to look for," she continued.

"Uh huh, you are an angel and the items are going to talk to you, got it," Tyler stood up from the table. "I need a drink, anyone else need a drink?" he headed for the bar to find the largest bottle of alcohol he could.

"What did you do?" Jonathan asked Abby quietly.

"Nothing, he's just a brat," she waved her hand in Tyler's direction.

"No, to be sent here," Jonathan clarified, sort of.

"What makes you think I did something?" Abby protested.
"Maybe I was sent here to watch over someone, or something."

"You are a waitress in a dive bar, who, or what, could you possibly be watching over?" Jonathan looked back at the map as soon as he said it. "Sorry, it's just, in our teachings angels are a part of a church or place of worship," he tried to make his words seem less judgmental. They still sounded wrong.

"I didn't agree with what they stood for," Abby answered him despite being hurt by the implication.

Tyler returned to the table with a bottle of tequila and three large glasses. He poured a hefty amount into one and handed it to Abby. She refused it. He offered it to Jonathan who also refused it. "This is going to be fun!" he declared as he

drained the entire glass.

"Feel anything?" Jonathan whispered to Abby.

"It's not as simple as walking through a door," she snapped, moving further into the building.

"This does prove one thing," Tyler was rubbing his temples as they walked through the hallways of the Grammy Museum. The walls were lined with gold and platinum albums, Grammy memorabilia, outfits worn to award events. "Whoever it is that has us on this silly scavenger hunt has a sense of humor," he noted. "Who puts a spell on a Grammy award?"

"First, it wasn't originally on a Grammy, they had to switch it when the original item was destroyed in an earthquake, and second, it isn't technically on a Grammy, it's on the disc they use to display the artist's awards," Abby explained.

"George Stoli, over here," Jonathan called out from the Classical Music section. Abby and Tyler joined him at the display. "31 awards," Jonathan pointed at the wall of gold discs indicating the composer had won 31 awards.

"I am going to have to touch them," Abby whispered, checking around to see how secure the area was. One guard nearby but otherwise not very protected. She reached out her hand to touch the first disc and an alarm rang out. The lone guard moved toward them. "I'm sorry," Abby smiled bright and cocked her head to the side. Where Gabriel had an ethereal quality to him, Abby's angel mojo was long gone. She had lived on Earth far too long. Fortunately she had a certain beauty that helped in these situations. The guard nodded and motioned for them to move on.

"There is no other way to tell?" Jonathan asked for the twelfth time.

"No," Abby snapped at him.

"Sorry, I just, what are we going to do now?" Jonathan sat down on the concrete bench next to Abby. Tyler was laid out on another bench shielding his eyes from the sun. "He's going to be useless," Jonathan noted. Abby nodded in agreement.

"I am not useless," Tyler sat up, too quickly, "Whoa steady now," he held the edges of the bench. "I'll have you know, I am

devising a plan," he said, laying back down to stop the world from spinning around him.

"Might be good to fill us in on this plan," Jonathan suggested.

"There are currently two plans," Tyler answered. "There's the one where we go in and knock the guard unconscious, and another where we find the control room and turn the alarm off," he continued. "Neither have a very positive success rate, in my calculations."

"Maybe we should move on to the next location and return to this one when we can devise a plan that might actually work," Jonathan suggested.

"Yeah, you go do that, I'll wait here," Tyler waved an arm at them.

"Not an option, remember? Gabriel's instructions were all together or not at all," Abby was certain her angelic powers would never return given the thought she was currently hurling in Tyler's direction.

Tyler sat up, slower this time. "At the risk of sounding like a broken record, this is typical, truly," he said. "This is how it is, because He said so, by the way you're on your own!"

Jonathan was holding the map of locations on his lap. "The closest location is only 5 miles from here, El Pueblo museum," he ignored Tyler's vitriol.

The El Pueblo De Los Angeles Historic Museum held Los Angeles's deepest history. A fact that was completely lost on Jonathan, Tyler and Abby as they passed through Olvera street passing colorful murals and statues of historical figures important to the development of the city. They stopped at the Bell of Dolores, a replica of the bell rung by Father Miguel Hidalgo in Mexico to signify the battle for independence from Spain, and paused. Abby got close enough to place her hand on the structure.

"Nothing," she told them.

"What's next chief?" Tyler slapped Jonathan on the back, not very gently.

"Central Library," he took out a black pen and drew a circle with a cross through it on the El Pueblo X.

They stood in front of Central Library and once again the history and architecture were lost on them. They passed through the archway and into the lobby, immediately searching the directory.

"Again, I point out, sense of humor," Tyler whispered. "A bullfighting book?"

Abby was running her fingers over the bullfighting books in the rare books section. She stopped on Bullfight by Yashushi Inoue. A faint buzz rang through her head. "No," she put the book back on the shelf.

"We are going to have to discuss one of the two options I suggested about the guard," Tyler pointed out when they were back in the car and headed to the Grammy museum again.

"I would like to avoid any sort of violence," Jonathan announced from the passenger seat.

"Of course you would," Tyler quipped.

"I don't know what your problem is, but we're stuck here together, so I'd appreciate you not taking things out on me," Jonathan snapped.

"Nothing personal, Johnny," Tyler sat back in his seat and stared out the window.

"I have another idea," Abby broke in before any more words could be exchanged.

The Grammy museum was still empty, as it had been when they had visited it earlier. The same guard was in his spot in front of the classical music section and he looked about as bored as a guard at a museum could look. Abby approached him in what she hoped was a sultry way.

"Remember me?" she asked the guard in a sing song voice.

"What's she doing?" Tyler asked Jonathan as they waited nearby.

"I think she's, flirting," Jonathan smiled genuinely for the first time since they had been thrown together.

"Maybe I should try," Tyler suggested. He swore he saw a light bulb flicker on in Jonathan's eyes.

"Getting any vibes?" Jonathan asked.

"Gaydar isn't real," Tyler folded his arms over his chest.

Jonathan was about to ask another question but the guard had reached out to push the talk button on his walkie talkie. The avoidance of violence he was hoping for looked to not be an option. "Frank, can you disarm the discs in the classical section, one of them is upside down," he said into the speaker. "10-4," Frank answered. Abby looked in their direction and shrugged before heading into the display room. Back in front of the wall of George Stoli awards, she ran her fingers over all 31 discs. She shook her head no after each one.

"Thank you, Joey," she smiled at the guard and he blushed. He radioed back to let Frank know all was clear.

"I would categorize that as a miracle, if I believed in them," Tyler noted when they got in the car. "You are a terrible flirt," he teased.

"It worked," Abby teased back. "Next time you do the flirting," she suggested.

"OK," Tyler wasn't even kidding.

"Tomorrow we head to museum row," Jonathan said from his passenger seat.

"Yes, dad," Tyler answered from the back.

Jonathan unbuckled his seatbelt and turned to face Tyler. In the dark car with only street lights and passing vehicles it was hard to see his eyes. "I get it," he said in as gentle a voice as he could muster. "We don't all hate gay people, though," he told him.

"Good to know," Tyler shot back. "But this has nothing to do with a bunch of hateful bigots holding up signs outside

funerals," he said.

"What is it about then?" Jonathan asked.

"You going to save me, preacher?" Tyler snapped back.

"Not sure there's enough time for that," Jonathan turned back and locked his seatbelt back in place.

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"Customers," Tyler pointed to a corner table. Abby headed in their direction. The closer she got to them the more uneasy she felt inside. When she got to the table she figured out why.

"Azazel," she greeted him with a firey tone. She looked at his table mate and wondered who she was. "New recruit?" Abby joked.

"Yes, as a matter of fact," Azazel's monotone had returned. "Friends of yours?" he nodded in Tyler's direction. Sitting in front of him was Jonathan, nursing his requisite club soda and holding a map. They were both staring in her direction.

"Can I get you something?" Abby ignored his question.

"This is Chloe," Azazel motioned to his companion. "She is going to be the one stopping you three from finding the warded items," he informed her. "Chloe this is Abigail. She used to be an angel," he sneered.

"Abby, and I am still an angel," Abby half smiled. "You're not a demon, no, strikingly human," she observed in Chloe's direction. "What did he promise you? Eternal life? All the riches you can imagine?"

"Actually this one came cheap, all she wanted was to be in charge," Azazel answered.

This made Abby laugh whole heartedly. "Lucifer agreed to let a human be in charge of hell?"

"No, silly angel, he offered her eternal life and all the riches in the world, she," he pointed a long finger at Chloe "only took it because she thought that meant she would be in charge."

Chloe growled in Azazel's direction. He smiled, allowing

the moment to prove his point. "We need to borrow the kitchen for a few, won't take long," Azazel told Abby as he stood up.

"It's interesting, how little regard you have for the powers of angels," Abby stood in front of him, blocking his way.

"I would have more regard for angelic powers if you had any, dear," Azazel pushed her aside like she was a feather. Chloe stood and follow him into the kitchen. Abby followed, motioning for Tyler and Jonathan to do the same.

Having five people in the small kitchen was more than it could handle and they stood in a line like they were waiting for some show to start. Azazel had his hand on the metal handle of the stainless steel industrial sized refrigerator and he was reciting some sort of spell only Chloe could hear, as she was standing behind him. A light flashed from under the door and Azazel pulled the door open forcing the line to move back a step. When it was open the refrigerator did not contain tubs of butter and vats of milk. Not a single egg or piece of food was to be found. Instead, a giant black rot iron gate stood before them.

"This is the entrance to purgatory," Azazel explained. "You and I are going to go say hello to some friends," he turned to glance at Chloe. "These other three are going to just watch us and wish they were this cool," he snapped his fingers and the lock on the gate slid open. He stepped through the gates and led Chloe through before snapping his fingers again. The lock slid back into place and the refrigerator door slammed closed. Tyler lunged forward and pulled open the door. Just a generic fridge again.

Purgatory was just as Chloe expected. Dark, foreboding, and not at all welcoming. A thick fog covered the floor and black trees lined the entire area making it look like a forest of burnt trees. Azazel led her into the depths of the trees and fog where it became lighter, if you can call less creepy foggy but the same burnt out trees light. He stopped in a clearing where several men and women stood around making small talk. Chloe silently wondered what someone in purgatory chit chatted about. The group got quiet and turned their attention to Azazel once he was in the middle of them. He turned to Chloe and motioned for her to step forward.

"This is Chloe, she will be leading you all in this quest,"

Azazel announced to the half dozen of them. Now, close up, Chloe noticed that some of them did not so much look like people, as they did demonic beings. She immediately wondered how they were going to go unnoticed outside of this place.

"Do you all know what you are being asked to do?" Chloe asked them. They all nodded. "Good, then I do not need to tell you how important it is that we work as a team to accomplish this task. She turned to Azazel and whispered quietly "Am I going to have to come here every time I need someone to do something?"

"No, they will be staying in an old warehouse downtown, you will not be able to enter purgatory once we leave here, unless you are with me," he told her. "Don't look so disappointed, no one really wants to enter purgatory, lovely."

Oddly enough, exiting purgatory was easier than entering it. Chloe began to wonder if the antics at the Salvation bar were just for show, as they exited the dark world and stepped right into the abandoned building Azazel had spoken of. There were cots and chairs and tables and even a couple televisions set up in the dark, dank, cold concrete space. Chloe silently

thanked the heavens that she had been put up in her swanky Beverly Hills suite. And then wondered if she was committing some sort of faux pas for thanking the enemy.

In the center of the room a table was set up with the same map the good guys were working from, large red X's marking the spots where wards were hidden. The difference in this map was that more of the X's had been crossed out. "These X's indicate where wards are still hidden. Anything that has been crossed out is where our brothers and sisters have found wards and destroyed them. What we have on our side is this. The angels do not know which wards we have found, so they are having to have their allies, whom we met this very morning, lovely trio they are, search for every single ward set throughout the city," Azazel explained. "Unfortunately there are still a great number left, and we are increasingly running out of time."

"I have been going over the map, tracing out the best course of action, I will divide you into pairs so that we can better eliminate more of these items," Chloe spoke up. "I will be on my own team," she told them. None of them seemed to mind that.

"It is probably better if you let them pick their own partners, putting them in random groupings might cause some, issues," Azazel whispered at her shoulder.

"How are they going to travel through the city without being noticed?" Chloe asked him.

"You would be amazed at how little people pay attention to things," Azazel assured her. "They will go virtually unnoticed, unless they do something stupid, which is a possibility," he warned.

Chloe stood over the map and explained her planned route system to the group in front of her. No one seemed to disagree with her plan of action, which made her confident that this task was entirely doable. Next to her Azazel seemed unfazed by it all, another indication that she was on the right track. It never dawned on her that things were moving along too easily. Until it came to the part when they were going to pair off.

Demons like to work alone. Chloe was beginning to get that as each pairing would come back to her and ask for a new partner. "Is there any reason why we cannot have them work

alone?" Chloe finally asked Azazel who was watching the debacle with some amusement. "You aren't really suggestion we let six demons loose alone in the world," Azazel remarked. "Oh, and paring them up in twos is better?" Chloe quipped. "There is an unwritten rule, among demons, that what you do individually is your own problem, what you do with another demon becomes the problem of both of them, they are less likely to cause trouble in pairs, and as you can see they do not agree on anything so, the likelihood of them teaming up to cause havoc is, slight," Azazel told her. "Right," Chloe sighed.

When the group had finally settled and was in the pairings that were going to work best, Azazel handed each of them a cell phone. "These have been programmed to only communicate with Chloe and your partner," he explained. "They have GPS tracking and a working map with updated information on each ward. When a ward is found and destroyed you will mark it off on your map here" he held up the phone, touched the screen and demonstrated, "Chloe is in charge, if she tells you to return to the warehouse, you will return to the warehouse. If she tells you to move on to another place, no matter how far away, you will go to that place, and you will, under no circumstances, defy her orders," he commanded. "Good luck," he turned to Chloe and

grinned at her before disappearing into thin air.

"Alright. Let's get started," Chloe told them. "Meet back here at 8 o'clock tonight," she commanded.

For a few brief moments Chloe felt like the king on a throne commanding an army. She gathered up her own cell phone and map and headed out to start her own journey. That's when the pain hit. Her head, felt like it was going to split open. A burning sensation ripped through her and made her eyes blur. She dropped to her knees and screamed out. "Remember, my child, I can take away this new life as easily as snapping my fingers," she heard a deep voice ring through her ears. "You have not done you job yet, do not get cocky."

#

"There is a gateway to hell, inside the refrigerator," Tyler shook his head and took a swig from his glass.

"Yes, let's move on and figure out how we are going to stay a step ahead of them," Abby was rubbing her temples. Being in Azazel's presence was one thing, knowing that she was so close to purgatory was another. She was about to say something else but the words never came. She felt herself slump in her seat and

fall to the floor.

Jonathan jumped off his stool and grabbed for Abby, just in time to keep her head from hitting the concrete. "Abby," he shook her. "She's breathing," he told Tyler who had joined him. "Should we call 911?" he wondered.

Abby felt herself fall and then felt light again, and realized she was floating. "No, this is all wrong," she said out loud. "You can't take me back now," she tried to pull herself back down. It didn't work. Once she was high enough she stopped floating and a light flashed before her. Gabriel appeared above her, wearing his proper suit and smug look.

"Do not worry child, we are not taking you away from them," Gabriel told her. "We needed to see how dedicated you would be to this cause, now that we have, we thought you might like to have your powers back," he attempted a smile. It looked wrong on him. When he was even with her he placed his hand on her forehead and closed his eyes. Abby felt her body change, she could feel the angelic powers resurging through her.

"Azazel is recruiting in purgatory," Abby told Gabriel when

he had taken his hand away from her head.

"Yes, we are aware," he told her.

"Who is the woman with him?" Abby asked.

"We are not sure," Gabriel said.

"She smelled human," she told him.

"Yes," Gabriel agreed. "I need to get you back down there, the humans are beginning to panic," he looked down, Abby saw Jonathan and Tyler scrambling to figure out what to do about her unmoving body. She nodded. Gabriel snapped his fingers.

Abby's eyes opened and she took a deep breath. Jonathan and Tyler both jumped up like they had been shocked.

"Sorry," Abby tried to calm them. "Gabriel called me," she pointed toward the ceiling "up," she watched as they both sat down and tried to steady their own breathing.

"Is that going to happen often?" Tyler asked.

"No, well, I don't think so," Abby answered.

"What did he want?" Jonathan asked.

"I have my powers back," Abby told them.

"What does that mean exactly?" Tyler asked.

"It means that there will no longer be any flirting skills required," she patted him on the arm and went into the kitchen. She stood in front of the refrigerator and held on to the handle, giving it a strong pull. When it opened, the gates to purgatory were there once again.

"Whoa," Tyler had come in behind her.

"Just testing," she told him, shutting the door.

Museum row was not truly as advertised, as the buildings were not exactly in a row. In fact some of them were nowhere near each other. Jonathan, Abby and Tyler had agreed, after much deliberation, to start at the La Brea Tar Pits and work their

way through the area before ending at the Petersen Automotive museum which was more on the way back to Salvation. With Abby's new powers it was much easier to enter and exit the buildings unnoticed, and her feel for the warded items was extremely heightened. There was no working ward at the Tar Pits, LACMA was also a bust, and they were heading into the Petersen when Abby's angel senses started to tingle.

"Something here?" Jonathan asked when he noticed her eyes searching the room.

"Someone," Abby whispered. This made Tyler and Jonathan look around, like they knew what they were looking for. "There," she pointed toward the Hollywood display. Jonathan and Tyler followed her. She stopped next to "Greased Lighting," the vehicle used in the movie "Grease," and watched as a man and a woman ran their fingers over the fender and wheels. "Demons," Abby said under her breath.

"What do we do?" Jonathan asked her.

"Nothing, this ward is not active," she answered. "And we can't risk being seen by," she waved her hands at the few

patrons in the area, "anyone." She led Jonathan and Tyler out of the museum and back to her car.

Back at their headquarters, otherwise known as the Salvation bar, Jonathan, Abby and Tyler sat in a booth pouring over the map of warded items. "Now that you have your angel powers back, is it going to be as simple as walking into a room?" Tyler asked.

"Sort of," Abby answered as she pushed buttons on her cell phone. "It depends on how many people are in the area at the time, human interference sometimes causes the signals to go wobbly," she said.

"How many demons do you think they have on their side?" Jonathan asked after a few minutes.

"I can't be sure and Gabriel didn't know," Abby answered. "He also was unsure of who the Chloe woman was," she told them. "We just have to keep going as we planned, and hope the demons are not as far ahead as I think they might be," she set her phone down on the table and looked at the map Jonathan was working on. It was a quick glance but in that moment she saw

something new. Lights. Coming from some of the X's. She grabbed the map out of Jonathan's hands, he looked at her and was about to protest when her eyes lit up. "Ha!" she yelled and grabbed for his pen.

"Asking me would have worked too," he sat back and watched as Abby took the pen and made marks on all of the X's she could see light illuminating from.

"These, these ones are no longer active," she told them.

"How do you know?" Jonathan and Tyler said in unison. It freaked them both out.

"They are telling me, on the map," Abby explained. "37," she counted the X's remaining. "There are 37 wards left to check on," she handed the map and pen back to Jonathan.

Jonathan looked at the map and at Abby. "It would be really nice if we could see some sort of pattern, but these are all over the place," he noted.

"They aren't going to go in some sort of order, they're

demons, they thrive on chaos," Tyler quipped.

"I thought these things didn't exist," Jonathan remarked.

Tyler gave him a dirty look and stood up from the table. "I am still not okay with this scavenger hunt and I am not entirely sure this isn't some big game, but it's curing my boredom, so, here I am," he said as he walked to the kitchen. Just for kicks he reached for the handle on the refrigerator and pulled it open with force. Nothing but eggs, milk and wilted lettuce.

"Customers!" he heard Abby yell from the front.

When Tyler saw the people Abby had referred to as customers he stopped short. Six mangy looking men and women were squeezed into a booth near the one a very uncomfortable looking Jonathan was still sitting in. Abby approached the bar and started to give Tyler the order. She nodded when she saw his face. "Yes they are demons, no we cannot refuse them service, yes I am serious," she said.

"Why are they here?" Tyler asked as he prepared the drink order.

"This is the only place they can go," she told him. "This bar has always had demons in it Tyler, you just never noticed," she put the glasses of booze on her tray and walked toward the demon table.

Jonathan sat as quietly as he could with a group of demons loudly celebrating next to him. He tried to listen in on their conversation but every time he turned his attention to them they noticed, and turned their attention to him. After a few minutes he gave up and joined Tyler and Abby at the bar.

"Someone really has gone out of their way to punk me," Tyler was saying when Jonathan got to them. "I work in a demon bar where there are gates to purgatory in the kitchen, I am being asked to save Earth from hell with an angel and a preacher," he continued. "Wait am I in a movie?"

"I really think we should talk about why you are refusing to believe any of this is really happening," Jonathan suggested.

"I am not going to confess to you preacher," Tyler told him. "Bless me father for I have sinned, wow have I sinned, I lost count the times I have sinned, also it has been 10 years since my last confession," he rambled out.

"I am amazed you ever went to confession at all," Jonathan remarked.

"Twelve years of Catholic school, I had no choice," Tyler admitted.

"Catholic school and Boy Scouts, did someone touch you inappropriately?" Abby chimed in.

"Define inappropriate, if you mean with electroshock paddles and water boarding, then yes, quite possibly," Tyler cracked open a beer bottle and took a long swig.

Jonathan was about to say something, he wasn't sure what, but the demon table made it known they were ready for more libations. Abby set off to find out what they wanted and Tyler made himself busy behind the bar. So he went back to the map, which seemed to be becoming one of his best friends.

"Two of those demons were in the Petersen," Abby announced after returning to the bar to put in the order.

"Do you think the others are part of the search party?"
Tyler asked her.

"Not sure," she shrugged. "It's possible, they usually travel in packs when they have some sort of assignment," she told them. "I'll see what I can find out," she took her tray back to the table as Jonathan and Tyler looked on.

#

Chloe lounged comfortably on her bed in the Beverly Hilton suite Azazel had put her up in. For a few moments she wondered how people like Lucifer and Azazel could possibly book a hotel room, where the money came from, how that logistically worked, and then she remembered she was comfortable in a large suite and she didn't have to pay for it.

"We actually have credit accounts," Azazel's monotone voice rang through her room, startling Chloe.

"I am going to start carrying a gun, and every time you pop by unannounced I am going to shoot you," Chloe threatened.

"I can't die," Azazel told her, dryly. "Do you really think you are the only human on Earth that we have in our employ?"

We're everywhere," he continued.

"Good to know," Chloe quipped. "Something I can do for you?" she asked.

"Just wanted to see how you were holding up," Azazel stared at his fingernails. "Any more headaches?"

"Was that you or your boss?" Chloe asked.

"It was our boss," he reminded her that there was someone above both of them, so to speak. "I can speak to you through your mind but I have no other powers," he regretted saying that as soon as it left his mouth.

"Also good to know," Chloe noted. "And I am doing just fine thanks," she told him.

"Our friends have informed me that the trio the big man upstairs has working for him have a full-powered angel with them," Azazel spoke as if Chloe would know what that meant.

"Okay," Chloe shrugged.

"No, not okay," Azazel said. "It is going to be harder to destroy the wards once they are found, with her milling about."

"Question," Chloe turned and faced Azazel head on. "Why was I chosen to carry out this mission?" she asked.

"You were in the right place at the right time," Azazel answered. Just as the words left his mouth he paused and looked like he was listening to someone Chloe could not hear. "Lucifer chose you based on factors of your personality that met a long list of standards," he sounded like a machine reciting dialogue.

"So, I was chosen," Chloe reiterated. "Out of how many others?"

"Is there a point to this?" Azazel asked.

"Yes, as a matter of fact, there is a point," Chloe told him.

"Are you going to get to it?" the demon sighed.

"I get that you're a big bad demon and all," Chloe smirked at him. "But this attitude you are giving me reeks of contempt, or jealousy," she accused.

"Contempt, maybe, but jealousy, sister you are way out of your league," Azazel snapped back at her.

"Did daddy choose the new girl over his long-time follower?" Chloe poked at him with her words.

"This is a path you do not want to go down love," Azazel's eyes began to burn bright red. Chloe had not seen this before, and she was interested to see how much further she could take him.

"It seems to me that this would go a lot smoother if you weren't constantly standing in my way," Chloe folded her hands across her chest.

"You have yet to prove yourself," Azazel did not back down and his eyes continued to glow. "As a matter of fact you haven't left this room since that little headache this morning," he reminded her.

"I think I have proven myself plenty already," she remained defiant. "My demon army has already been all over the city taking care of these wards you are so damn worried about," she told him.

"Six demons does not an army make," Azazel chuckled. "You honestly think you are some sort of general in this war," he leaned on the back of the big fluffy chair dangerously close to Chloe's bed.

"That is exactly what I am, isn't it?" Chloe asked in earnest.

"You are one part of a greater whole," Azazel told her. "We needed someone topside to keep an eye on things, but you are not their leader and you are certainly not their king."

"I think I am starting to understand," Chloe tapped her finger to her lips. "You were overlooked. I took your job, didn't I?" she was not sure why she wanted to push him so badly but adrenaline was rushing through her veins as she noticed him growing angrier.

"It's cute that you think that, but no, this was never going to be my job," Azazel did his best to keep his anger from boiling over. This human was testing his patience though.

Chloe never got a chance to see what it looked like when a high powered demon got angry, as Azazel disappeared in his usual manner before she could push him any further. She decided that she was definitely right about this and set out to become the leader Lucifer had chosen her to be. She had no idea what that meant, but she would find out, if it killed her. Again.

The Salvation bar was now empty and quiet. The six demons had finally left their booth, after an unnatural amount of time drinking copious amounts of beer, not only stiffing Abby on a tip, but not even paying the bill at all. Tyler was equally bothered by this, as his cut of the tip and bill would be zilch as well, but Jonathan tried to put his own spin on it, explaining that it was obvious this bar was only open to serve certain demons at this point anyway. That did not settle the matter to either Abby or Tyler.

"We need to get out of here and go after more of these

wards," Jonathan suggested after Tyler and Abby had finally dropped the money matter.

San Fernando Valley used to be the porn capital of the world, until digital media and the Internet gave any amateur with a camera the ability to post videos online from anywhere. That being said, it surprised all involved in this mission, but no one more than Jonathan, that one of the wards was nestled deep in the depths of the archive vault at Vivid Video, top producer of porn even with the online competition. Abby used her angel powers to convince the guard that she was meant to be there and that Jonathan and Tyler were her agents. For a brief moment Jonathan wondered why Abby would use angel powers in this instance, she looked quite like the girls on the posters hanging prominently on the walls in the lobby of this place that was making him increasingly uncomfortable. He pushed the thought out of his mind.

The video vault was vast and Jonathan felt queasy just being there. As soon as Abby entered the room she informed them that there was no active ward there, but Tyler insisted they remain to be sure. Jonathan protested strongly and Abby rolled her eyes. Both of them laughed quite whole-heartedly when Tyler

discovered there was not a single gay porn to be found in the rows tapes and reels collecting dust in the basement.

Jonathan felt an instant wave of relief once they were outside the studio and on their way to their next destination. The Warner Bros backlot fascinated Chloe, Jonathan and Tyler to no end. They were on a guided tour, finding that would be the best way to get on the lot without being quickly thrown out. When the tram entered the New York backdrop Abby sat up straight in her seat. "There's a ward here, and it is active," she whispered into Jonathan's ear. He nodded to Tyler hoping he would understand the unspoken message. Somehow he did.

"What do we do?" Tyler asked as the tram came to a stop. The tour guide gave them the go ahead to explore New York Street on their own.

Abby's senses went into overdrive when she noticed two of the demons that had been in Salvation just a few hours earlier were exiting the tram in front of them. "Demons," she whispered to Jonathan who noticed them as she did. He pointed in their direction and whispered to Tyler. While most of the group went in one general direction, Abby, Jonathan and Tyler followed the

two demons in an opposite direction. Abby knew the demons could feel her presence, she was well aware of theirs.

It turns out, the very New York looking buildings were much less straight out of the burrows and much more straight out of Storage Wars. The demons slipped behind the doors of a replica brownstone, Jonathan, Tyler and Abby following close behind, and they all found themselves in a large storage space with boxes and props strewn all over the place. Abby's internal alert mechanism was on full blast inside her ears, she wondered if everyone in the room could hear it. Apparently not because the demons never turned to see who or what was behind them and Jonathan and Tyler continued to stare at the space like it was some sort of phenomenon. She grabbed at both of their arms as the demons stopped short in front of them, barely stopping Jonathan from running straight into a huge ugly demon. "They found it," Abby whispered to them. She held up her hand to throw a light beam in their direction and heard voices just outside the door. She paused just long enough to contemplate the consequences of stopping the demons from destroying the ward versus the humans outside discovering them where they should not be and that was a big mistake. The bigger of the two demons slipped a large weapon out of his coat pocket and stabbed

directly into a miniature replica of the Statue of Liberty. A loud shriek went off in Abby's head and Lady Liberty let out a long beam of light from her torch before it went completely dead.

"Dammit!" Abby screamed out loud. Thus rendering she and her companions no longer invisible to the demons before them.

#

Abby knew she had made a huge mistake as soon as the word left her lips. For a few long seconds her invisibility hold on Jonathan, Tyler and herself fell and they were fully visible. The two demons spun around and the biggest demon swung his sword hoping to hit anything at all, but found nothing behind them. Abby pulled the guys out of the storage space and back onto New York Street just as the tour guide was rounding the corner.

"Dammit," Abby swore again as she led Jonathan and Tyler back to the tram. "There are only three items left guarding the gates," she whispered as they were back in their seats.

Chloe's cell phone rang loudly in her bag. She fished around for it and pulled it out just as it stopped making so much noise. As she held it in her hand it went off again.

"Hello," she snapped into it. "Oh, well that is good news," she smiled as the voice on the other end told her one of the wards had been destroyed. "That is less so," she nodded to no one as he informed her that the angel was there when they had done the job. "Return to the warehouse and wait for the others," Chloe commanded and pressed end.

"So, worst case scenario here," Tyler was slouched on one of the leather seats back at Salvation. Abby was pacing the room and Jonathan was sitting at the bar. "The gates of hell open and the demons come to Earth," he continued. "We go to war against them, no?"

"War, yes, but," Abby paused and looked at them both for a moment before continuing. "You will be on your own," she felt embarrassed as she said it.

"On our own, meaning heaven will not help us?" Tyler knew exactly what she meant but wanted it said out loud, mostly for Jonathan's benefit.

"Yes, even I will have to return home," Abby went back to her pacing.

"Why is that?" Tyler asked.

"If God and angels were here to save us every time something went wrong we would not learn to defend ourselves," Jonathan spoke from his stool.

"God is a dick," Tyler punched the table.

"And we're back again," Jonathan threw up his hands and turned away from Tyler.

"You cannot tell me that does not make you angry preacher," Tyler stood up from his booth and walked toward where Jonathan was sitting. "All that time you spend talking about how God will save us and how he is always there for us and the truth is, he's not," he was standing directly in front of Jonathan now. "How can you follow someone so blindly, that would leave you to your own defenses when his help is needed most?"

"You don't understand faith, son," Jonathan faced Tyler head on. "Faith is not praying to an unknown being and hoping he shows up to save you when you're in trouble," he continued.

"Faith is about knowing you have the strength to save yourself, even if it means believing some deity is watching over you guiding you on the right path," he tried to explain.

"That is a very rose colored view of things, Jon," Tyler was not ready to give this up. "But what you are failing to understand is that this situation has obviously taken a very real turn," he looked directly into Jonathan's eyes. "Heaven and Hell are real, they are converging on Earth, Hell is winning, and once they take over Heaven is going to leave us humans to fend for ourselves against forces we cannot possibly beat," Tyler stopped himself.

"If that is what God wishes, he has a reason for it," Jonathan argued.

"Are you not hearing what is going on here? God is not on our side, he is not on anyone's side but his own, instead of taking care of an issue he has sent a preacher leading on blind faith, an angel who was exiled for going against his wishes and me, a man who hasn't believed in him since he abandoned me in an alley to die," Tyler's voice cracked. "He wants us to fail."

"So what do you suggest we do? Give up?" Jonathan answered after a silence. "God isn't coming to help us so we will just sulk and stomp our feet and be angry at the world?" he paused.

"No," Abby stepped forward. "You fight anyway," she put her hand on Tyler's arm. "I was not just any angel, before," she looked at them both, her eyes solemn and sad. "I was a guardian," she explained. "The human I was sent to watch over had a tough life, and I was not allowed to step in and make it better," she told them. "I went to Him and asked, on numerous occasions, why I was guarding this person when there was nothing I was allowed to do, and He said we do not interfere in the trials and tribulations of humans because it would teach them bad habits," she closed her eyes. "I stepped in anyway, and my actions got me a lifetime on Earth as a mortal," a tear rolled down her cheek. "He wants you to learn to fight on your own, not rely on interference from higher beings or, fate, or any other mystical power humans put their faith in," she explained.

"That's all fine and good when we are talking about winning the lottery or, battling a bully on the schoolyard, but we are talking about real demons coming onto our world, and we are not

prepared for that," Tyler told her.

"The problem, I am beginning to see now, is not that you have no faith in God," Jonathan pointed at Tyler. "The problem is you have no faith in anyone at all," he let his arm drop to his side.

"I believe in myself," Tyler tried to sound convincing, but he didn't.

"No, you really don't," Jonathan noted.

Tyler was about to protest when Abby went stiff. Her eyes glowed white. Tyler and Jonathan stood in front of her, poking her arms, but she did not respond.

"You really need to give me warning before you do that," Abby warned as Gabriel appeared in front of her. They were floating in the clouds again.

"We are losing them," Gabriel said, in an ominous voice that even made Abby shudder.

"They'll come around, just a momentary lapse," Abby told him.

"No, not them," Gabriel spoke after a moment of confusion on his face. "The wards, they are falling."

"Yes," Abby agreed. "What do we do about it?"

"Continue the mission as planned," Gabriel told her.

"Any word from Him?" Abby asked.

"Nothing," he answered in such a quiet voice it took Abby by surprise. "You understand once the wards are destroyed you will be brought back home and not one of us will be able to enter Earth until the demons have been vanquished?" he asked.

"I understand, that is why I am trying so hard to find them, but the demons are one step ahead, it appears," she explained.

"Yes, I think it is the human woman that has them on that path," Gabriel said. "I have been asking around, there is some

sort of prophecy Lucifer uncovered, about a human female who will lead a demon army and conquer Earth," he told her.

"And there is not prophecy describing a human or angel or anyone else on their side?" Abby knew the answer before asking it. "The humans will never survive a demon war Gabriel," Abby pleaded.

"I know," he said. "I do not know how to help them," he sounded genuine.

Abby's eyes went back to normal and she flinched as Jonathan and Tyler continued to poke at her. "Ow, stop," she smacked them away. "I was with Gabriel," she explained. "We might be in more trouble than we imagined," she said.

"Well I imagine the death and destruction of billions of humans once the gates of hell are opened so, if it's worse than that, we are indeed in a whole hell of a lot of trouble, so to speak," Tyler quipped.

"The demons are being lead by a human woman, some sort of descendant of Lucifer's, who will help him open the gates and

then rule your world while he continues to rule Hell," she told them.

"So we find the woman and stop her," Jonathan suggested, more excitedly than he meant to.

"Easier said than done," Abby said rubbing her temples, "Gabriel could not tell me who she is, he said that she must be under some sort of protection spell Lucifer cooked up to keep her hidden from us," she explained. "There's another thing," she looked at them and bit her lip. "I have not been totally honest with you," she looked down. "No one has heard from Him in ages, we have been operating on our own," she told them. "When, IF, the gates open I will be pulled back to my own world automatically, because that is how he left it before he went AWOL," she said. "Not because he will pull me back up."

"I really did not want to be right, this time," Tyler started. "We are truly on our own in this fight," he threw up his hands and walked toward the kitchen. He was not done trying to open the refrigerator into purgatory. He pulled the handle and it opened to the usual food cooling machine it always is. He closed the door and closed his eyes. In his mind he saw a place

he wanted to go, what he imagined heaven to look like, the images he saw in Sunday school. Keeping that image in his mind he pulled the handle again. Inside the doors was a bright light and the place exactly as he imagined it in his head. He took a step forward and the door closed behind him.

#

Heaven is cold and unwelcoming, Tyler thought as he moved further into the space in front of him. It was bright, cold, and overwhelming. He had a nagging feeling inside that he was trying to find something, or someone, but he could not say who or what it was. He came to a clearing and stopped. "Hello," his voice echoed through the air.

"Hello," a voice answered back. It sounded eerily like his own voice, and that made Tyler even more unsettled.

Tyler moved further into the clearing. There was absolutely nothing in this place. Nothing but light and air and just, nothingness. "Where am I?" Tyler asked into the air.

"Where do you think you are?" the voice that sounded like his own came back to him.

"Heaven?" Tyler asked in a small voice.

The voice laughed. "How can you be in a place you don't even believe in?" the voice teased.

"How do you know I don't believe?" Tyler was starting to regain his composure.

"You are going to have to trust me, Tyler," the voice answered him. "I know that is not entirely in your nature, but you are going to have to try."

"Trust you about what?" Tyler played dumb.

"What I am about to tell you," the voice explained.

"I'm listening," Tyler looked up, for reasons he could not explain.

"There is going to be a war, you are going to be at the forefront of it, you are going to have to find your faith," the voice began. "Not your faith in a higher power, but your faith in yourself, and your faith in humanity," it continued. "You

have been chosen for a reason, Tyler," it finished.

"What reason?" Tyler asked.

"You have the power within you, to fight this war," the voice answered. "You just need to find it."

Tyler was getting annoyed. The voice still sounded very much like his own and it was not telling him things he wanted to hear. "I am telling you things you need to hear, Tyler," the voice answered his thoughts. He was about to protest when he felt a pull behind him. He turned to see the door to the Salvation refrigerator from the inside. As soon as he saw it his mind pictured the dingy, grease stained walls of the kitchen and felt the pull even stronger. In moments he was standing in front of the fridge again, surrounded by stainless steel appliances and staring into a normal refrigerator filled with rotting food.

"Where were you?" Abby questioned as Tyler stepped out of the kitchen and back into the bar area. The place was empty, a state it had been in for the last few days. Except that one day the demons came to taunt them and drink all their booze, for free. Tyler wondered for a moment if the place was going to go

under, and then wondered if the owner had some sort of deal with the devil, and then asked himself silently why he was worried about any of it at all.

"I don't know," Tyler answered her honestly. Abby gave him a quizzical look. "I went into the refrigerator, and it told me I had to trust it and I was going to be involved in a war," he shrugged.

"The fridge told you that?" Abby cocked her head to the side. Something clicked and she pulled her head back up. "What did the place look like?" she asked.

"White, cold, vast," Tyler answered. "Do you know where that is?"

"There is no actual place," Abby told him. "You were wherever you needed to be to hear the words spoken to you," she added.

"What did the fridge tell you, exactly?" Jonathan chimed in. Tyler hadn't been sure he was even paying attention.

"That I had to find my faith," Tyler told him.

"We're doomed," Jonathan turned in his stool and stared at the ward map.

Chloe's phone was disturbingly silent since the morning call had come that one of the four remaining wards had been eliminated. She could feel the other three still pulsating loudly in her newly tuned mind. She was sitting in her usual spot, in the middle of the fluffy comforter on the big bed in her hotel suite. It was dark out and she knew the demons had all returned to the warehouse by now. She wondered if there was a way to pinpoint the exact location of the wards, finding the one at the studio had been a fluke.

"I can teach you that," Azazel's voice rang through the room. Chloe jumped. She wondered if she was going to get used to him just showing up like that.

"Teach me what?" she hoped he was talking about something else. It was really getting creepy that he was constantly in her head.

"How to find the locations," he told her.

"We really need to set some boundaries," Chloe sat back against the pillows she had stacked behind her.

"You can try," Azazel leaned against the table where the television was muted behind him.

"Look, I get that you needed to be in my head when you recruited me for this job," Chloe was her usual demanding self. "But I am all in now, it's not necessary to be rummaging around in there," she told him.

"I am not thrilled to be there, believe me," Azazel said, "But I do not trust you, so I am going to be 'rummaging' in there until this whole thing is over," he announced.

"Great," Chloe sighed. "So how do I do it?" she went back to the earlier conversation.

"Concentration," Azazel told her.

"Your suggestion is that I think real hard and I'll find

them?" Chloe shook her head at him.

"Try it," Azazel suggested.

After a brief moment of stubbornness Chloe realized Azazel wasn't kidding. He truly wanted her to close her eyes and picture the item. She lowered her head, closed her eyes tight, and focused on one of the items, a pillow with the Union Jack painted on it. Nothing was coming to her, and she was about to give up. Azazel's voice came through the room "patience," he said. She took a deep breath and pictured the pillow in its exact form, fluffy, white, with the blue and red of the British flag neatly painted on it. A room came into view. The item sat in a glass case, surrounded by other items depicting the flag. A sign read "Tea with Diana." Chloe lost focus and the room melted away.

Azazel was about to protest but noticed Chloe had grabbed for her laptop and opened it quickly. She typed something in and looked up at him. "The Queen Mary, Long Beach," she announced with pride.

"Don't get cocky," Azazel told her. "Demons cannot board

that ship," he said. "You're going to have to destroy that one on your own," he smirked. "No, not the whole ship," he folded his hands over his chest, reading her mind. "The ship was warded against all evil on its maiden journey. Despite the long stagnant status as a museum, the spell is still in place," he explained. "Only you can board, and only if you concentrate very hard on not being evil," he added. "Good luck with that." He snapped his fingers and disappeared.

"Queen Mary, Long Beach," Abby said out loud. Jonathan and Tyler stared in her direction. "That's where the next ward is," she told them.

"How do you know that?" Tyler asked.

"I was looking at my phone and the X lit up," Abby turned her screen toward them, all they saw as the map with Xs on it.

"Seems like someone is helping us after all," Jonathan quipped in Tyler's direction. Tyler ignored it.

Everything in Los Angeles was said to be just fifteen minutes apart from each other. But with traffic the time was

usually triple, quadruple, sometimes infinity more than that. Abby was on her last nerve sitting on the freeway as Tyler and Jonathan continued to bicker about faith and higher powers and things Abby had been trying to tune out. This was after Tyler had tried to get them to leave later in the day to miss the traffic they were not stuck in. Every once in a while, between arguments, he would point out how right he was about this particular spot they were in.

"Somehow I doubt our demon friends are stuck in this same traffic," Tyler pointed out.

"There is no portal between places," Abby snapped at him. "No matter how many times you suggest that is how they are getting around here."

She had a point. The demons had been on the same tour tram just yesterday, but Tyler was not fully convinced they weren't using some sort of hell magic.

Truth was, Chloe was in fact sitting in the same traffic. Just a few cars ahead of them. She wondered how anyone lived in this city and functioned. She wondered how anyone stayed sane

with the lack of good music to listen to. And she wondered, again, how she was going to board a large boat and destroy a museum piece, lame as it was to her that a union jack pillow was holding the gates of hell closed. She should have brought demons with her, she thought as the car in front of her moved an inch. She moved up and put on her brakes again. "There should be some other way to move between places here," she said out loud. "Like some sort of portal."

"What good is believing in Heaven and Hell if there's no magic to go with it?" Tyler asked as they inched along slowly.

"You seem to be forgetting I made us invisible yesterday," Abby told him. "There is magic, but we cannot portal between worlds and places, that's science and we are not equipped for that," she gripped the steering wheel tighter. She was seriously ready to punch someone. Her mind went to devising plans to lay waste to the cars in front of her. She was about to carry out her plan when the road opened up a bit. Her path of destruction plan would have to wait.

#

"How are we going to get that out of there?" Tyler asked Abby. They were standing in front of a glass case in the Tea

with Diana room on board the Queen Mary. Abby was feeling strong vibes from the Union Jack pillow sitting in the case so close to her she wished one of her angel powers was reaching through glass.

"We are going to have to wait until the room is empty," she whispered. "I'll use my invisibility and get inside the case, get the pillow and walk out," she continued. "You two can follow after me."

"There are cameras all over the place," Jonathan pointed to the ceiling where small security cameras were strategically placed around each display.

"Maybe we can cause some sort of distraction?" Tyler suggested.

"We may not need to, I think I can work fast enough that no one will notice," Abby said.

"You think?" Tyler looked at her with a raised eyebrow. "That's re-assuring."

"I can get it, just keep a look out and get ready to walk out quickly," Abby moved toward the back of the glass case, turning herself invisible in the process. Tyler watched the case, the pillow lifting and disappearing into Abby's bag. Jonathan was keep a close eye on the doors, making sure no one was coming in.

"I can't believe that worked," Tyler and Jonathan were walking as quickly as they could without being obvious. When they were far enough outside the boat and away from onlookers Abby reappeared. When she did a woman grabbed her from behind and held a sharp object to her side. Jonathan and Tyler reached for the woman but she pushed the object further into Abby's side causing her to let out a whimper.

"Who are you?" Jonathan demanded. The woman smiled, but it was not a warm gesture. Tyler and Jonathan felt cold, unsettled.

"Chloe," the woman answered.

"The human, in the prophecy," Abby grunted out, the blade of whatever it was Chloe held against her was digging into her ribs. "If we give her the pillow she will destroy it," she tried

to fight her way out of Chloe's grip. It only made the pain in her side worse.

"That's right, angel, and if you don't, I will destroy you," Chloe threatened. "So why don't we just play nice and everyone walks away happy."

Tyler made a move toward Chloe again but Abby shook her head. "The blade she's holding, is made of demon materials, it will kill me," Abby warned them. "I am going to hand you the pillow, but I can't reach for it without you removing the blade," she held up her hands "I'm not going to pull anything," Abby assured her. Chloe thought on it and moved away from Abby's side. Abby slowly handed Chloe her bag with the pillow in it. Jonathan and Tyler flinched in front of them.

"That was easy," Chloe sounded disappointed, but she took the bag and turned toward the parking lot. When she was far enough away Jonathan and Tyler moved to Abby's side.

"Why would you give up so easily? We could have taken her," Tyler protested.

"No, you really couldn't have," Abby was rubbing her side, her hand came away bloody. "She has demon blood in her, she would destroy all of us and then where would we be?" She started toward the parking lot with Jonathan and Tyler following slowly behind her. Just as she reached their car she stopped short. "Two down," she frowned.

The car ride back to Salvation was quiet, and excruciating. Back inside Tyler made himself a drink. Jonathan seriously considered joining him, and Abby went to the restroom to mend her side. When she was back in the room Jonathan sat with her at a table. "We need to plan better, we need to work on being a team," Abby told him.

"I thought we handled ourselves pretty well," Tyler joined them.

"We did well, until the part where that Chloe woman put a knife in my side," Abby agreed. "But we should have been more prepared for her, or one of her demons to be there, and we weren't," she added.

"Then let's do that," Jonathan suggested.

"Well done," Azazel was clapping like a fanboy.

"I need to find a way to ward this place," Chloe frowned as she entered her hotel room. Her feeling of accomplishment dwindled at the sight of the demon sarcastically clapping at her.

"Sorry, love, can't be done," Azazel told her, a little too happily. "You did very well today," he continued. "But don't get too cocky, the final two items are doozies," he smiled at her with a look that told Chloe his confidence in her was no higher than it had been before she accomplished this mission.

"That angel, said something about a prophecy," Chloe sat down on her bed. "Know anything about that?"

"Interesting," Azazel clucked. "Lucifer believes you are the key to this war," he told her. "That's why you were saved, and sent on this task," he stared at his fingernails. "I personally think that's a load of crap," he shrugged.

"So, jealousy it is then, definitely," Chloe smirked.

Azazel returned her smirk and nodded to her, "I have to report back to Lucifer, toodles," he snapped his fingers and disappeared.

Chloe was standing in a stream of hot water, showering off the remains of the pillow she destroyed earlier in the day. Her mind was going over this prophecy thing. She reached for her shampoo and a voice spoke deeply in her mind. "I suppose we should talk," it said. "Really? Do you people not have any concept of privacy?" Chloe yelled into the air. "Who's talking?" she demanded. "It is Lucifer," the voice answered. "I cannot see you, child, I am speaking to you telepathically," he tried to sound gentle. As gentle as the ruler of hell could possibly sound.

Chloe stepped out of the shower, dried off and wrapped a towel around her body. Despite his assurance that he could not see her, it made her feel better to be covered. "So let's talk," she said out loud.

"Azazel tells me you performed well today," Lucifer started. "I had no doubt you would do fine," he said. "As you

know, Azazel's feelings are a bit less, positive," he continued. "There is a legend, in our writings, that talks of a woman who will lead us into battle against the human race," he said. "I have been searching for her for my entire existence, and I found her, you," he explained.

"Why me?" Chloe asked.

"You are a direct descendant of mine," Lucifer told her, like he was telling her the weather.

"Excuse me?" Chloe choked out.

"You have demon blood in you, from many ancestors before you," Lucifer tried to explain. "It was not dominant until I found you," he said. "We have enhanced it so that you can find the warded items, destroy them, and lead our army onto human soil," again, without a tone of urgency, simply how it was.

"So I am in charge," Chloe smiled. "You might want to let Azazel know," she laughed.

"Azazel is aware of the prophecy, he does not believe,"

Lucifer said. "You are in charge, of this part of the mission, there are many things going on behind the gates that will prepare us for the coming battle," he informed her.

"Azazel says the final two items are extremely hard to find and destroy," Chloe told him. "Is there anything I need to know about them?"

"They are bigger, and more heavily warded items," Lucifer said. "We know where they are, generally, but we cannot be certain of what they are and, how they can be destroyed."

"Where are they?" Chloe asked.

"Look on your map, it will tell you, and remember, the angel will know as soon as you have discovered the next ward, find them one at a time," Lucifer said, and somehow Chloe knew he had left her mind.

She sat down on the bed and pulled up her map. The Xs all over it had been marked off, 113 of the 117 non-significant wards had been destroyed by her demons. It made the task of keeping the locations of the final 2 significant ones harder,

but Chloe managed to focus on one item. West Hollywood. The Abbey. She pulled open her laptop and searched for the location.

Back at the Salvation bar Abby's brain snapped into gear. "The Abbey, West Hollywood," she blurted out.

"What about it?" Tyler chimed up.

"That's where the next item is," Abby said, opening her phone GPS.

"There's a ward at a gay bar?" Tyler looked at her with a look of serious doubt. "I suppose that makes sense, leave it in charge of the gays, no one will even think to look there, God hates us," he shrugged.

"He does not hate gay people," Abby and Jonathan spoke at the same time.

"Could have fooled me," Tyler quipped. "What's the item?"

"You know how our refrigerator is a gateway to purgatory?" Abby asked. Jonathan and Tyler nodded. "They have one too, but

it goes straight to the gates of heaven."

"There's a gateway to heaven?" Tyler looked at her like she was crazy.

"Sort of," Abby told him. "Angels are the only ones who can use it, and it is heavily warded against humans and demons," she said. "Which gives us the advantage here, since that Chloe woman appears to be both."

"How do you know so much about her when you only just met her?" Jonathan asked.

"I can feel it in her blood, she's part demon, or at least has demon blood flowing through her. That's why she was waiting for us in the parking lot at the Queen Mary. She couldn't board it, that is why she will not be able to destroy the Abbey's ward," she paused. "But, it's also why she is able to destroy me."

#

Chloe spent most of the day shopping on Rodeo Drive, picking the perfect outfit for her night at The Abbey where she planned on casing the place, finding the item she needed to

destroy and, maybe having a good time. She then spent quite a bit of time making sure everything was perfect, from the fold of her skirt to the exact amount of cleavage she intended on showing and every hair in the right place. She arrived in front of the restaurant/bar to find herself standing in line. As she waited to greet the doorman a voice came at her elbow.

"Want some company?" Azazel asked.

"No, not really," Chloe answered.

"Too bad, this one is a two person job," Azazel told her.

"I wasn't planning on carrying out the mission tonight," Chloe protested. "I am just checking things out, and I had hoped to have some alone time with a nice drink and maybe a nice man," she added.

Azazel chuckled. "Didn't do your research well, then, did you?"

Chloe glared at him. "I did plenty of research, thanks," she assured him.

"Yes well, I am definitely sticking around now," he smiled.
"I would not want to miss the show."

They reached the door and Azazel flashed a perfect white toothed smile at the doorman. He smiled back and let Azazel in, looking right past Chloe as she followed. Once they were inside Chloe started to understand Azazel's joy at her ignorance. It only made her more determined to meet someone and take them home. Even if it turned out to be a she. She wasn't that picky, generally.

Chloe stepped up to the bar and ordered a drink. Azazel stood behind her and waved at the bartender, who immediately forgot about Chloe and went about making the drink Azazel had ordered. She glared at her demon thorn in her side and went to seek the help of another bartender. Drink in hand she headed for an empty table, which ended up being all the way in the back of the dining area. Azazel joined her, unfortunately.

"So the good news is, my charms are working on the staff here," he shouted into her ear, over the music coming from a speaker that was way too close to their table.

"Lovely," Chloe took a swig of her drink. "Is there bad news?"

"The bad news is, this ward cannot be destroyed," he informed her.

Chloe turned and faced him. Azazel wasn't sure if she was going to hit him, spit at him or scream her lungs out, all he knew was the look on her face was angrier than he'd ever seen it. "That is a bit of information you could have given me hours ago," she shouted at him.

"I tried, but Chloe doesn't listen to anyone, so I let you get yourself prettied up and come down here anyway, because, like I said, I am enjoying the show," Azazel nodded to a passing waiter who winked at him in response. "I could totally get laid here, if I had the equipment," he shook his head.

This news gave Chloe a lot more satisfaction than it should have. "Explain to me why this ward cannot be destroyed, and what it is," she took another sip of her drink.

"You know how we went through a refrigerator door at the Salvation bar and stepped right into purgatory?" Azazel asked. "Well, the one here at the Abbey goes to a place in between Earth and Heaven," he explained. "And it can only be destroyed by an angel or someone working with them."

"The ward is the refrigerator?" Chloe asked to clarify.

"One of them, not sure which, but there are several stainless steel ones in the kitchen back there," Azazel pointed past the bar area.

"How are we supposed to find the right one and, destroy it, if we can't do it ourselves?" Chloe asked.

"We wait for the angel and her human companions to show up, and we get them to do it," Azazel said in a matter of fact tone.

"You think they are going to destroy their own ward?" it was Chloe's turn to chuckle.

"Not willingly, no," Azazel answered like it was obvious.

Chloe watched as men and women mingled, flirted, drank and sang karaoke till the wee hours of the night. Her desire for fun had taken an evil turn with the name Azazel written all over it. He, on the other hand, was having a great time getting to know several people on the staff at the Abbey, it was only the fact that the demon had no means of enjoyment other than mentally and, that he was working, that made her happy. He returned to the table and leaned over to her. "You could be doing some of this information seeking, ya know," he shouted into her ear.

"But you are doing so well, and I wouldn't want to take away from your enjoyment," Chloe answered. "What do we know?"

"We? I have found that there are 4 full sized refrigerators in the kitchen, the night staff change shifts at 2 A M and that bartender," he pointed at a very cute blonde guy wiping down the bar, "lives close by and would love to show me his place," he folded his arms over his chest in satisfaction.

"Oh please, take him home and let him find out what you are, for me?" Chloe begged him sarcastically. "No sign of the angel and her clan," she informed him.

"They'll show," Azazel assured her.

"This isn't a fun night out on the town," Abby snarled at Tyler who was checking himself in the mirror behind the bar at Salvation, again.

"I know," he snapped back at her before taking one more look into the mirror. "You might want to take the collar off preacher," he nodded toward Jonathan who was in his same black suit with the white collar of his faith showing clearly through his shirt.

Jonathan said a silent prayer and pulled the collar out of his shirt, placing it gently in his pants pocket. Tyler approached him and tried to mess up his hair. "Hey," Jonathan smacked his hand away. "My hair is fine," he patted down the parts where Tyler had mussed it.

"OK, dad," Tyler teased. "You look more like our chaperone than our companion," he pointed out. Abby was wearing a cute top and tight jeans. Tyler's jeans were not much looser, and his shirt brought out all his muscles. Jonathan indeed looked like he was bringing his teenaged kids to the prom.

"You suggesting I change into a tight shirt and painted on jeans like you two?" Jonathan tried to make it sound like a joke. It came out more serious.

"Do you own a pair of jeans and a shirt matching that description?" Tyler asked genuinely.

"No...I mean, yes I have jeans and a shirt, at home," Jonathan noted.

"We're stopping there on the way," Tyler informed Abby, who started to protest and then decided looking like they fit in together was more important than time in this case.

Abby and Tyler waited in the car while Jonathan ran up to his upstairs apartment just up the street from the Salvation bar. Tyler asked several times if he could go up with him and help him out, but Jonathan absolutely refused. Abby offered after Tyler shot her a dirty look but Jonathan refused her too, assuring them that he knew how to dress himself. Tyler left him with a "debatable" reply as he bounded up the stairs and disappeared into his apartment.

"You really should go easier on him," Abby suggested as they waited. "You would be surprised at how much alike the two of you are," she told him.

Tyler's eyes shot darts in her direction. "I am nothing like that man," he growled. Abby just sighed and let the matter drop. When Jonathan returned to the car he looked halfway decent, in a nice pair of Levi's and a button down shirt. "You almost pass for normal," Tyler noted, Abby's comments still weighing on his mind.

When they arrived at the Abbey there was no sign of the place closing any time soon. A line was still formed outside the doors and music could be heard loudly from inside. Abby and Jonathan let Tyler take the lead, and when he returned from an unsuccessful mission of getting them into the place before the line failed, Jonathan fought back a smile of satisfaction. He then proceeded to make his way up to the door and whisper something in the large bouncer's ear which made the muscle man smile and nod. Jonathan waved at Abby and Tyler to join him. Tyler could not decide whether to laugh or cry at this.

As soon as they were inside the room Abby stopped and stared in the direction of the kitchen. "It's in there," she pointed at the door near the bar. She then scanned the room for the other signal she was picking up. And found Azazel and Chloe chatting in the corner. "They're here," Abby informed Tyler and Jonathan. Tyler was hardly paying attention. The eye candy had taken over. Jonathan was barely with her as well, but he at least acknowledged she had said something. "Boys!" Abby screamed at them. They both snapped to attention next to her.

"Where?" Jonathan asked, following Abby's eyes to where Chloe and Azazel were sitting. They had noticed the trio and were paying close attention to them now. "What do we do?"

"We carry on the mission as planned," Abby said as she moved toward the bar and kitchen. "We have the advantage here," she reminded them. "Although I have no idea how we are going to get a refrigerator out of here unnoticed."

"Wait, we have to take the whole thing?" Tyler asked as they continued to push their way through the crowd. "You never said that before," he added.

"I didn't know until we got here," Abby told him.

Before they reached their destined point a tall, handsome gentleman stopped in front of them "Jonny!" he kissed Jonathan on the lips, causing both Abby and Tyler to nearly fall over.

#

Chloe and Azazel watched as Abby, Jonathan and Tyler made their way toward the kitchen. When they were stopped by a brief road block, they both sat forward in their seats. But it seemed that the trio were able to move on soon enough. The pause gave Azazel a moment to devise a new plan. As he was contemplating the logistics in this new scheme he noticed Abby had disappeared. "She's inside the kitchen," Azazel informed Chloe as he stood up to head in that direction.

"How?" Chloe stood up to join him.

"She can make herself invisible, it's an angel thing," Azazel told her as he pushed his way toward where Jonathan and Tyler were standing guard.

Tyler was shaking his head. "That's a piece of information you might have shared like, three days ago," he was saying.

"You didn't ask," Jonathan shrugged.

"No, you were keeping it a secret, on purpose," Tyler insisted. "Which means you aren't out," he noted. "Not so open minded in that church of yours are they?"

"They are plenty open minded, and no, I am not out, to them," Jonathan admitted. "I am out to everyone else though," he made sure to add. "Now is not the time to discuss this though," he nodded in the direction where Chloe and Azazel were approaching.

"Shit," Tyler said under his breath.

Inside the kitchen Abby was standing in front of the middle of three large stainless steel refrigerators. She was still trying to figure out how to get it out of the place, and if she could not do that, how could it be protected further so that the demons could not get to it. She was concentrating so hard she did not notice that she had been zapped to the skies where Gabriel was waiting in front of her. She opened her eyes and nearly let out a squeal. "What did I tell you about warnings?"

she snapped at him.

"This is important," Gabriel answered. "I know it has been a while for you, do you not remember that this ward cannot be destroyed by anyone other than an angel?"

"Oh, no, I had forgotten," Abby smacked herself in the head. "They why are we worrying about this one?" she asked.

"They are going to try to get you to destroy it yourself," Gabriel told her. "And you are going to do it."

"What?" Abby's jaw dropped.

"It is how things are meant to happen," Gabriel told her.

"No, I will not destroy another ward," Abby put her hands on her hips and stood there in complete confusion. "Are you saying this whole wards mission was never meant to be a success?"

"It was always our goal to keep the demons from destroying the wards, you know that Abigail," he answered. "But this one is

not strong enough to hold and the demons are close to finding the final ward as we speak," he told her.

"You expect me to destroy this ward because it will be the only one left anyway? Sounds like you are giving up on me," she told him.

"Not giving up on you, putting our faith in humanity," Gabriel answered. "We have to leave them to their own devices now," he said.

"No," Abby said again.

"The human, Tyler, he is finding his strength, and his own path will be clearer once this mission fails," Gabriel told her.

"Again you are speaking as if this was always the way it was meant to happen," Abby protested. "Why have you given us false hope when there was never any to begin with?"

"We needed them to see that they had not been abandoned, until they were strong enough to fight on their own," Gabriel said.

"They are not ready," Abby told him.

"They are going to have to be," he told her before returning her to the kitchen where she stood and stared at the big giant metal box and cursed at herself.

Tyler and Jonathan were doing their best to keep Chloe and Azazel from entering the kitchen, which really meant taunting them and trying to make as much commotion as possible so that all eyes remained in their direction. Azazel attempted to flirt passed Jonathan who laughed out loud at the attempt. Tyler admired Jonathan's guts, standing his ground in the face of a very powerful demon and his equally demonic female friend. When Abby returned to their side, no longer invisible, the commotion stopped.

"Azazel," she spit out the name.

"Abigail," he returned the fire.

Those were the only words spoken. They group stood in silence, until the crowd inside the Abbey had dwindled down to a

few lone souls still looking for someone to take them home. No one seemed to be paying them any attention now, and it became clear that they were under some sort of angelic spell by then. When the final patron exited and it was only a handful of staff inside Abby moved toward the kitchen again. The group followed.

The kitchen was empty. Abby dropped the invisibility spell and stood in front of the refrigerator with her arms crossed. Jonathan and Tyler stood on either side of her.

"Thank you, we weren't sure which one it was," Chloe smiled at her.

"Doesn't matter, you're not getting anywhere near it," Abby told her.

"You know you have been defeated, why don't you go ahead and destroy the ward like Gabriel asked you to and we'll move on," Azazel said.

"Wait, what?" Tyler and Jonathan said at the same time, turning to Abby who was still standing firm.

"Gabriel gave no such order," Abby lied.

"He did, but we will go with your answer," Azazel shifted his feet. "Are you sure you want to take on this battle?" he asked as he slipped a blade from his pocket. He nodded for Chloe to do the same.

"I am going to give you the fight of your life, demon," Abby held up her hands, palms first. They began to glow white hot. Azazel made a move to lunge at her and she shot a bolt in his direction. It landed at his feet, frying a hole into the floor beneath him.

Azazel smiled. "One angel and two unarmed humans against two demons," he said. "I like these odds."

Chloe moved forward and Abby aimed her other hand her feet, burning another hole in the floor. Chloe jumped back and looked at her feet. "These are \$1,500 shoes!"

"Your demonic human hasn't sorted her priorities yet," Abby pointed out.

Chloe lunged again and Abby aimed her hand at her shoes, breaking off the heel and causing Chloe to trip. Jonathan and Tyler stood still next to Abby and Azazel contemplated his best move. He chose to step forward slowly and Abby tore a hole in his pant leg. He stopped in his tracks.

"Defying orders and going against your angelic duties, I am impressed," Azazel quipped.

"What duties?" Tyler whispered. "Shush," Jonathan answered him.

"I can do this all night," Abby told them. "My powers are new, and itching to be utilized," she said with a wry smile.

"We have infinite energy as well," Azazel informed her. "Chloe here has brand new demon blood flowing through her veins, and she is just dying to kill her some angels," he nodded in Chloe's direction. On cue she held up her demon blade. She had kicked off her shoes and looked slightly less menacing barefoot, but Abby knew it was just an illusion. That blade was dangerous and in the hands of a demon who had never killed an angel before it was even more so. Azazel gave a signal and both he and Chloe

lunged forward. As they did Jonathan and Tyler put up their palms and shot bolts of electricity at the duo, hitting them both square in the chest. The move stunned them, but did not do the damage Abby alone could do.

Chloe and Azazel stood up and brushed themselves off. "That was a nice trick," Azazel teased Abby. "Too bad they can't hold the amount of power angels do, being so human and all," he spit out.

"They have enough power to keep you away from me, and the ward," Abby told him. "Keep trying though, it's starting to get fun."

Azazel and Chloe made no move toward the refrigerator. Abby, Jonathan and Tyler stood still in front of it, guarding it with their lives. "What are you going to do? Stand here forever?" Azazel tried using words over force. "If I have to," Abby answered. Jonathan and Tyler looked at her like she was crazy. She didn't expect them to be there with her did she?

"Your humans do not share your enthusiasm," Azazel noted. "Abigail, why don't you be a dear and move away from the item so

that we can get this over with?" he tried again.

"I am not going anywhere," she told him. He looked down at the floor and back up at her. "I really was hoping to avoid this," he said as his eyes darkened. Abby understood what he was about to do. She pushed Tyler and Jonathan out of the way before they could be caught in the blast. When Azazel's eyes were fully black he held up his hands toward Abby and let out his own beam, this one of pure fire. Abby fought off the blaze with her angel bolts. They continued to throw blasts at each other, as Chloe, Jonathan and Tyler watched, helplessly. Abby held her ground, Azazel gave no sign of giving up. Chloe made a move to stab at Abby with her blade and Jonathan blasted her with the remainder of his temporary angel powers. He stood behind Tyler and watched as Azazel and Abby continued to throw their powers at each other. Chloe made another move to stab at Abby and Tyler used his last bolt to stun her. It took less than thirty seconds for Chloe to recover and lunge at Abby, stabbing her demon blade through the angel's heart.

#

As soon as the blade penetrated Abby's skin her entire body lit up like a light bulb. Her mouth opened as if to scream but no sound came out. Everything else seemed to move in slow

motion. Jonathan and Tyler were lunging forward to get to her but they would not reach her in time. Just as they passed Azazel and grabbed hold of Chloe's arm Abby's light blinded the room. They all hit the floor, shielding their eyes from the brightness. The room went dark and they stood up, unsure of what they would see.

What they saw brought them pain, sadness, anger. Abby was gone, and a large crater was now in the place where the warded refrigerator had been. Chloe and Azazel noticed the hole at the same time. They exchanged looks and took off out of the club leaving Jonathan and Tyler to deal with the aftermath.

"We have to go," Jonathan was pulling Tyler away from the wreckage. Tyler was searching for any sign that Abby had survived this. "Now, Tyler," Jonathan screamed. "C'mon," he put his arm around Tyler and led him out of the Abbey and onto the street. As he walked out he realized they had no transportation, Abby's car sat, alone, in the parking lot. He led a still stunned Tyler down the street and away from the building. As they rounded the corner they could hear the sounds of sirens approaching. Jonathan pulled out his cell phone and called them a cab.

When they arrived at Salvation they found Gabriel inside waiting for them. Tyler nearly punched him but Jonathan held him back. "Bad idea," he suggested.

"You knew this mission would fail," Tyler screamed at Gabriel. "You set her up to die!"

"Abigail was a warrior," Gabriel answered. "She knew the risks," he said in a tone that made Tyler want to punch him even more.

"What do we do now?" Jonathan asked, still all business. As he spoke he noticed a group of people forming outside the front window. "What's this?"

"The wards have been destroyed," Gabriel told them. "They are here to greet their brothers and sisters as they come through the gates."

"We have to get out of here," Jonathan panicked, grabbed Tyler by the arm and started to lead him toward the door.

"This fight is not over," Gabriel spoke directly to Tyler. "You must do what you are destined to do," he put his hand on Tyler's forehead. Tyler went limp, Jonathan caught him before he fell to the floor.

"What did you do to him?" Jonathan demanded.

"He is in a dream state, he will awaken, and he will know what to do," Gabriel snapped his fingers and disappeared.

Jonathan was not going to stick around to watch the demons take over the bar. He threw Tyler over his shoulder, a task that was tougher than he imagined, and carried him the five miles to his apartment. When they reached the stairway Jonathan set Tyler down on a step and sat beside him. He looked at the twenty-seven stairs ahead of him and took a deep breath, stood back up and lifted Tyler into his arms. They slowly made their way up, one by one. Inside the apartment Jonathan dropped Tyler on the couch as gently as he could, jostling him enough to wonder what kind of sleep state the angel had him in. He hadn't moved.

Tyler stood in a bright room that looked very much like the nothing place he had stepped into inside the refrigerator at

Salvation. He looked around, all empty. "Hello," he echoed through the room, it had worked last time. He was about to say it louder when he saw a figure approaching in front of him. For some reason it did not make him feel uneasy or scared. He felt about right. When the figure was close enough he noticed it was Abby. But, not exactly Abby. She was brighter, lighter, less, whole. "Abby," he whispered and stepped forward.

"Hello Tyler," her voice was much less human, it sang. "If you are here, I must be gone from your world," she said.

"You exploded," Tyler was not sure why he would say that, it was the truth, but it seemed harsh to tell her.

"Yes," she agreed. "The wards have all been destroyed and the war is about to begin," she said.

"Gabriel said I was going to have to do something, what did he mean?" Tyler asked.

"You will lead a human army against the demons, and you will save your world from destruction," she told him, in a way that made Tyler shudder. Like it was a fact, not a request or

story.

"How am I going to do that?" he asked her.

"You will know what to do when you return to your form," she pointed under them. The floor was glass, Tyler could see himself lying still on a couch, he was unsure of where, he had never seen the room before. He was about to ask Abby about it when he saw Jonathan enter the room and check on him. "You are going to have to trust him," Abby said as they watched Jonathan check Tyler's pulse, feel his forehead and run his fingers through his own hair. Worry washed over his face.

"Why me?" Tyler asked.

"Why not?" Abby replied.

Tyler could not answer that. Abby gave him an angelic smile and nod. "I am going to have to send you back now," she told him. "Good luck to you Tyler," she kissed him on the top of the head.

Tyler woke up to find Jonathan sitting across from him, in

a dining room chair, dozing. He sat up and tried not to make any noise. Jonathan woke anyway. He said a silent prayer and sat forward, looking for Tyler to give him answers.

"All I can tell you is that I am somehow supposed to lead a human army against the demons," Tyler answered the unasked question. "They are limited to Los Angeles right now, Chloe and Azazel will be leading them out of state, we have to stop them," he said. "Lucifer cannot leave hell until all gates are open," he continued. "They are spread all over the US, this was just the start."

"We?" Jonathan asked.

"Unless you want out?" Tyler answered.

"No, I just wasn't sure how many people you were referring to in the we," Jonathan answered. "So recruiting?"

"Would seem so," Tyler told him. "Any ideas of where we should start?"

"Yes, but you're not going to like it," Jonathan told him.

"Churches," Tyler figured it out before Jonathan said it.
"Armies, Jon, not cults," he snarked.

"Can you really afford to be choosy at this point?"
Jonathan asked him. Tyler hated that he had a point.

It took very little time for chaos to begin in the streets of Los Angeles. The Salvation bar was just one major part of the gateway to hell, and the demons were spilling into our world like ants from several newly opened ant hills. Chloe and Azazel were holding court at the warehouse, where all of the newly freed demons seemed to be heading. Unfortunately they were laying waste to cars, trees, buildings, and anything else they could get their hands on as they made their way downtown.

"Brothers and sisters," Azazel was greeting them as they entered. "Come, gather around," he waved them in. "We have a lot of work to do." He stepped aside and let Chloe take over. As much as it pained him to surrender the driver's seat, he had seen her step up and take charge, and he was afraid of what she might do to him if he didn't play nice.

She tried to quiet the crowd by clearing her throat. Azazel almost laughed at this. But then she put her fingers in her mouth and let out a whistle that brought a silence over the crowd. Demons continued to enter as she spoke. "We are almost there," she shouted. "Lucifer's reign on Earth is coming," the demons cheered. "We must continue our mission, moving state to state, city to city, opening the gates and bringing our brothers and sisters out into the open," she told them. "We are on the verge of greatness," she shouted "Let's show these people who's in charge!" The crowd of demons roared and stomped their feet.

Azazel returned to Chloe's side. "You do know how to rile up a crowd," he smirked at her. "This plan of yours better work," he told her.

"As long as you do your part, the plan will work just fine," she told him.

"I will, don't you worry your pretty little face," Azazel put his arm on her shoulder, she quickly pushed him away. "Don't ever touch me," she snarled at him. "Understood?"

Azazel nodded. "I have to return to Lucifer, tell him

things are progressing nicely," he handed Chloe a cell phone.

"This is a direct line to me, if anything changes," he told her.

"This mean you are going to stop showing up unannounced in my hotel room?" Chloe asked. "I am going to miss our little chats," she teased.

"Don't count on it," Azazel winked at her and disappeared.

Chloe watched at the demons in front of her celebrated. She reveled in the power she felt, she would lead this army across the United States and take over once it had been conquered. She felt herself swelling with strength and confidence. As soon as she felt that last bit of pride her head exploded with pain. She did everything she could not to drop to her knees. She leaned against a nearby table and waited for the wave of pain to leave her. She cursed silently and gave a half hearted apology to a being she could not see, but was not aware was watching her. If Azazel was going away it wasn't to give Lucifer the news. It was because he had to let her lead this mission on her own.

#

Tyler felt uncomfortable the minute they walked out of Jonathan's apartment, and that was before he saw the streets

lined with demons, overturned cars, things on fire and utter chaos. He had not stepped foot inside a church in over 10 years and the last time he had it was for his final "pray the gay away" session his parents put all their faith, and money, into. Deep inside he knew Jonathan was right. If anyone was going to believe this demon apocalypse it was the church going folk. They'll believe anything. That's not what Jonathan had said, Tyler filled in those words on his own.

"Do you have any idea how to fight these creatures?"

Jonathan asked as they walked passed a burning trash can with a demon standing proudly over it.

"Not a clue," Tyler admitted.

They walked several blocks before coming upon the church where Jonathan just two weeks ago had been presiding over sermons and listening to confessions. Tyler's comfort level dropped to the bottom notch and Jonathan felt a wave of guilt as they entered through the front doors. Not surprisingly, the church was standing untouched by any demon rioting. The hallowed ground was working after all. Jonathan almost pointed it out to Tyler but decided not to push his luck here.

What they were surprised to find was a large group gathered inside the church, scared people holding crosses and makeshift weapons. Crying children, terrified adults and confused clergymen and nuns trying to calm the masses. When one of the nuns spotted Jonathan she ran toward them. "Thank God," she grabbed his arms. "We thought you were dead," she whispered.

"No, just on leave," Jonathan tried to smile but the sight of this room was giving him chills. He was not prepared for how many people would be looking to the church for answers. "I need to speak to these people," he told the nun and walked to the front of the church. Jonathan raised his hands and tried to quiet the crowd. Many turned to face him, some ignored him. He realized the ones that had turned would recognize him, but the others would see his absent collar and not understand he was the pastor there. "Please, can everyone listen just for a moment," he pleaded.

Tyler stepped up to the front with him. "Excuse me!" he yelled. "Your pastor is speaking!"

Jonathan felt embarrassment, and then gratitude. Tyler's

effort had worked. The room quieted and Jonathan had their full attention. "Where to begin," he looked at Tyler for answers.

"The truth," Tyler whispered to him. Jonathan nodded. "You have been outside and you know that the city is in chaos," he began.

"There is a way to stop them," he said.

"Who are they?" several people shouted out from the crowd.

"Demons," Tyler answered before Jonathan could. "They are the things the bible and your preachers warned you about," he said.

A murmur spread through the church. Jonathan held up his hands "People, listen," he started again. "We need volunteers, to fight them," his voice faltered.

"We are now in the midst of a war, between humans and Hell," Tyler shouted. "We need soldiers, we need you," he knew he sounded like an Uncle Sam ad. "Listen, I know that this is a lot to take in, but what you are seeing outside these walls is real, we are under attack, the gates of hell have been opened and demons are taking over our world," Tyler explained. "They can be stopped," he assured them. "We can stop them," he was

mainly referring to himself and Jonathan but he knew they needed people to back them up. Strong people. Not many of which he saw in front of them.

More murmurs scattered through the crowd. "How?" "What do they want?"

"Lucifer," Tyler shouted the name so that people would pay attention to it, they did. "He is planning to resurface, and he needs the remaining gates opened," he explained.

"There are hell gates all over the US, the demons are gathering their army to leave the city, spread through the state, spread into all the states, and open these gates one by one," Jonathan said.

"Resurface?" a man asked from the middle of the room.

"We do not have much time to explain but yes, many millennia ago Lucifer ruled over this land, he turned it into chaos and blackness, God forsake him to hell, giving him only purgatory between his world and ours," Tyler explained. He was unsure how he knew this information, but it was just there in

his brain. "As you can imagine Lucifer has been seeking revenge," he told them. "And his ultimate goal is to take back what he feels is his. Humanity."

"What can we do to stop him?" another voice asked.

"We need to stop the demons from leaving the state," Tyler answered. "As of right now they are scattered within the limits of Los Angeles, but they are well organized, led by a human named Chloe who is some sort of demon ancestor to Lucifer himself," he said. "We need to organize ourselves, and take her and her army down before any of them get past our borders."

He turned to Jonathan. "I am not sure any of these people are going to be willing to die out there, we need soldiers, we should be talking to the army, navy, air force," he noted.

"These people are stronger than you think," Jonathan assured him.

"We still need people who are fit for battle, we will never win in a war against superior beings without at least a few high powered weapons and people who are both willing to use them, and

know how to," Tyler pointed out.

"Where do you suggest we find these kinds of people?"

Jonathan asked.

"I might be able to help with that," a woman, mid-twenties, dressed in full Army fatigues approached them. "Corporal Amy Rivers, pastor," she introduced herself to Jonathan and turned to shake Tyler's hand. He introduced himself to her.

"I can probably help too," another voice came up behind them. This was an older gentleman. "Officer Parker," he introduced himself. "LAPD."

"Parker," Tyler repeated. "Bring me any cop willing to join us, will you?" Tyler asked him urgently. The officer nodded and headed toward the front door of the church. As he reached the doors he paused, reached under his pant leg and removed his revolver.

"Where are you stationed Corporal?" Tyler asked Amy as he watched officer Parker leave.

"Amy, please call me Amy," she said. "Monterey," she answered.

"How far is that from here?" Tyler asked.

"A few hours," Jonathan and Amy answered together. Amy bowed her head in apology. Jonathan shook his to indicate it was alright.

"Can you call your commanding officers and get tell them the situation?" Tyler asked.

"Yes, sir," Amy answered as she took out her cell phone and scrolled through her contact list.

Tyler looked at her and smiled, a genuine gesture, "Please, call me Tyler, sir makes me feel old," he tried to sound light.

Amy walked away with her phone to her ear. Tyler turned to Jonathan, who looked almost too satisfied. "Nothing is happening yet, Jonny, don't get cocky," he teased. "I guarantee Chloe has her demon army ready to move out as we speak, and we've got the glimmer of an Army captain who may or may not answer his phone

and may or may not believe what Amy is telling him if he does," he nodded toward her. "Our chances are not looking so good." Amy came back to his side. "He wants to talk to you," she handed him her phone.

"Sergeant Tom Nelson," the voice on the other end introduced himself when Tyler said hello. "What is going on?"

Tyler explained the situation to Sergeant Nelson, a task he found he would have to do several times over the course of the next hour or two. Officer Parker returned with half a dozen cops, some in uniform, some not, all still clutching their weapons when they entered the church.

"How is it out there?" Jonathan asked when they were gathered together.

"Seems to be getting worse," Parker answered. "Bullets only stun them, they don't kill them," he told them. "In case you weren't aware."

Tyler was only barely aware of what would and would not kill a demon. He was learning as he went, information flowing

into his brain from who knows where. He was not prepared to be a leader, a demon hunter or a responsible adult. Jonathan shook him awake, his mind must have wandered off. "Sorry," he said. "Sergeant Nelson is gathering soldiers at Fort Hunter Leggit in Monterey," he told the officers gathered in front of him. "They are at least three to four hours drive from Los Angeles, and that is IF the roads are not blocked by the time enough of them can be convinced to head this way," he was beginning to sound skeptical. The officers noticed. He adjusted his tone and started again. "We need holy water, we need to have pastor Jon here bless your weapons, we need armor of some sort and we need numbers," he told them. "The demons cannot be killed by regular bullets, this is true, but anything blessed by a servant of the Lord, can kill them," he said. They can also be killed by pure silver, so if anyone has any silver blades, swords of any kind, arrows, those will come in handy," he kept going. "Also, grenades and other incendiary devices may not kill them but they will stun them and give us more of a chance to kill them with the weapons that will." He turned to Jonathan and nodded. "You OK with this?" he asked.

"Please, hand me your weapons, anything you would like me to bless, the quicker the better," Jonathan stood in front of

the group and began his task.

#

Chloe watched as groups began forming amongst the demons entering the warehouse. She kept an eye out for the ones who looked like they would make good leaders. Probably not the best way to pick out her lieutenants but it was all she had to work with in the little time she had. She stepped off the platform she was standing on and mingled through the crowd. The demons gave her space as she came through them. "How many are still out there pillaging the streets, do you think?" she asked a demon woman as she passed by. "Quite a few," the demon answered, "some of them have been in hell a very long time," she noted. Chloe nodded at her and kept moving through the crowd. She stopped when she was in the middle of them and quieted them down.

"I need volunteers," she announced. Several arms went up. She motioned for them to put their hands back down. "Let me explain what you are volunteering for, first," she told them. "We are going to be spreading out through the states to open up the gates in cities across the US," she began. "I need leaders. I need warriors. I need strong ones and I need smart ones," she looked around, many of the demons who had been eagerly waiting to lead had stepped back, leaving only a handful still stepping

forward. "Good," she nodded to them.

Chloe led ten demons, six male and four female, to a table where a map of the united states had been laid out. Black push pins were pushed into cities on the map. "Los Angeles, Denver, Atlanta, St. Paul, Boston and Austin," Chloe pointed to each one. "Those are where the strongest holds are," she explained. "We will be entering those cities and opening those gates in teams," she pointed to the pin in Austin. "Each one must be opened in specific order, beginning in Austin," she looked up to see if everyone was with her, they were. "Unfortunately we are unable to use an transpiration other than busses, trains, or cars," she told them. We will not be allowed in the air. "Why's that?" a demon woman asked. "The angels have been banned from the ground by their boss man," she said. "But they still have control of the skies."

Chloe continued to pour over the map, handing out assignments to each demon and giving them instructions on where to go, what they needed and who they should choose to join them. "Only pick the strongest, most devoted to the plan to free Lucifer and the least likely to cause problems along the way," she suggested. When the leaders had their orders they scattered

through the warehouse to being choosing their traveling companions. Chloe watched over them.

"Huh," Tyler turned to Jonathan and looked at him with a grin. "I know where they're going, and I know how they're planning on getting there," he told him.

"How?" Jonathan looked at him like he had gone crazy.

"I can't explain it, but there is a constant stream of information flowing into my head right now, and every time something really important comes in I feel it stronger than the rest," Tyler tried to explain. "Anyway there are six major cities with strong gates," he said. "Los Angeles being the strongest. The demons need to travel to the other five in order to open those doors and let Lucifer in," he kept going. "But, they cannot travel by air, so they are taking busses, trains, and cars," he stopped.

"Our goal is to make sure none of them leave the state though, right?" Jonathan asked.

"Yes, but not I know what directions they will be heading

in," Tyler smiled. He pulled up a map on his phone.

"Unfortunately, it is the middle, the bottom, and top of California we need to guard."

Jonathan looked up from his task, blessing water containers and piling them in boxes. "What's the status on the Army help?"

"No word yet," Tyler told him. "In the meantime we should have people stationed at the bus depots and train stations," he suggested. "Until we can get a hold on whether or not we'll get those road closures we asked for," he noted.

"I'll see if I can get some people together," Amy volunteered. "Have you heard from Parker?"

"The streets are still in chaos," Tyler answered. "The LAPD is trying to get them under control, but it has been tough to tame them."

"May I make a suggestion?" Amy asked.

"Of course," Tyler answered.

"Let the streets remain in chaos, it will be harder for the demons who have calmed and are ready to deploy to get through the wreckage," she suggested.

Tyler thought on it. "Yes, you do have a point," he put his phone to his ear to relay that message to Parker and his squad.

Out in the streets chaos reigned supreme. The demons who had been in hell and purgatory longest were the hardest to tame. They were unwilling to rest until everything in Los Angeles and the surrounding areas was in flames. Officer Parker and his LAPD squad had spread out in order to stop the worst of it. They had stunned several dozen demons and killed a few others as they moved along the streets. Parker had knocked over a large creature who looked less like a man and more like a monster when his phone vibrated in his pocket.

"Parker," he answered. "Understood," he hit the end button and radioed to his squad. "All officers cease crowd control," he shouted into his radio. "Repeat, all LAPD officers cease crowd control." Several officers came to his side as the order came in. "Why are we stopping?" one of the officers asked. "Orders from the top, they need the streets to be harder to travel on,

so we're to allow the demons to continue their fun until further notice," Parker answered him. "OK boss," the cop did not seem happy with this plan but he holstered his weapon and signaled for his fellow officers to do the same. "Let's head back to base," Parker suggested.

Tyler was slowly getting comfortable with being the leader of this movement, and only slightly more comfortable with base came being a big church with crosses and saints and nuns and church going folk watching his every move. He had been watching Jonathan preside over his congregation as people slowly began to panic, being locked up in a big room for so long. They had so many questions, and Jonathan answered them the best he could, sometimes turning to Tyler for the harder ones. He was watching the preacher bless his hundred and who knows how many bottle of water when his phone went off.

"Yes," he had not decided how he was going to answer calls yet. Yes seemed appropriate. "Sergeant, what can you tell me?" he asked into the phone. "No, new plan," Tyler told him. "We need troops in San Francisco, San Diego, Los Angeles, and right where you are," he said. "Yes, I'm sure," he said. "Understood," he hit end. "We have Army troops," he told Jonathan.

"How many?" Jonathan asked.

"About 150," Tyler knew that did not sound like much. It definitely was not enough, but it would do the damage they needed most, he hoped. His main focus were the demons trying to leave the state and open up other hell gates, not the ones still trying to tear down the city. At least they were content on staying in one place.

"That's not enough," Jonathan pointed out.

"Not enough to push the entire horde back into hell, but enough to prevent the ones trying to take over the country from doing so," Tyler tried to sound confident in that.

Officer Parker and several LAPD officers returned to the church looking ragged and ready to drop. Parker approached Tyler and gave him a full report. The streets were full of demons, he could not be sure if many of them had ever been human but he was certain if they were, their humanity had long been lost. Cars and buildings sustained heavy damage. There was no order to how the demons were attacking, they were just going after anything

they could turn over, light on fire or smash in. Tyler thanked him for his update, and his work, and suggested he rest up, he would be sending many of them out to check bus depots and train stations now that he had word the Army was able to add more bodies to the cavalry.

"We need to send out people to get supplies," Jonathan approached Tyler with the news shortly after he blessed the last bottle of water he could lay his hands on.

"Supplies, right," Tyler answered.

"I'll go," Jonathan volunteered.

"No, I need you here," Tyler spoke too quickly. "I mean, we need you here," he corrected his statement. "Parker," he called the officer over. "Can you have a couple of your officers escort one or two civilians on a supply run?" he asked him. Parker nodded. "Make a list of what is needed," he turned to Jonathan and tried not to make that sound like a command.

Tyler watched as two men, three woman and two male officers left for the supply run. Officer Parker returned to his side

"The demons only seemed to pay attention to us when we engaged them," he told Tyler. "I don't think they will have a problem getting through," he said. Tyler hoped that was true. "Thank you," he tried to give an air of confidence, but he knew the officer wasn't buying it.

"You are doing a good job," Jonathan tried to assure Tyler. "It's not like we were prepared for any of this," he said. "Look at what you've put together in just a few short hours."

"A room full of scared people, a handful of cops I have no orders for and a vague idea of how to stop a demon from leaving the city," Tyler sighed. "Yeah, I'm great."

#

Tyler strapped a holster to his leg and put the revolver Parker had leant him in it. He made his way to the table where hundreds of bottles of holy water sat waiting for them to take and filled his backpack with several. Behind him Jonathan was filling his own pack with supplies. "I wish you would stay here," Tyler turned his head to speak to Jonathan over his shoulder. "I wish you would stop asking me to," Jonathan snapped back.

"Are you sure you want to go out there?" a woman with a very young baby approached them. "Isn't it dangerous?"

"We have to, miss," Jonathan told her. "We need to be on the front lines," he said, looking toward Tyler as he did. He had just spent an hour arguing with Tyler over the same thing. Tyler insisted that Jonathan needed to stay in the church where he could take care of the people. Jonathan insisted he would be useful in the field. Tyler finally gave in when he realized Jonathan was not really asking permission and would go with or without his say. "We're not going far," Jonathan assured her. "We just have to clear a path for the rescue vehicles to get here," he smiled.

"Couldn't someone else do that?" she asked him.

"I am not of much use in here if I cannot get you all help," Jonathan started to raise his voice but tempered it as the baby girl looked up at him with her bright green eyes. "It is going to be fine, we'll be back before you know it," he promised.

"I told you, they are scared and they need you here to

assure them it is going to be alright," Tyler whispered into Jonathan's ear.

"You don't want me along because you think as a preacher I cannot possibly fight a demon with any kind of strength," Jonathan snapped at him. "I thought you were working on that faith in humans thing," he walked away from Tyler and toward the door where the others were waiting for them.

"No, that's not what I'm worried about," Tyler whispered before heading to the door himself.

There were still flames coming from cars and buildings, windows of local businesses were smashed in. Trash and metal and trees and anything that was not completely nailed down were strewn across the streets completely blocking anyone from entering five miles on either side of the church. "We have a lot of work to do," Tyler noted as the team moved forward, kicking car parts and trees out of the way as they did. He picked up his two way radio and pressed the talk button "We are coming your way but we might be a bit, there is a lot of debris and it isn't going to be as easy to clear as I expected," he said into it. "10-4, keep us updated," a voice came through in answer. "Thank

goodness we have no one injured or in serious need," Tyler said to Jonathan as they moved a fairly large tree out of the street.

An hour later Tyler hit the button on his radio "All clear," he said, out of breath. "10-4, on your way," the voice answered. A second later sirens sounded. In the shadows of the buildings creatures stirred. "Sirens off!" Tyler screamed into the radio. They went silent but not before the team found themselves being pursued by three mangy looking creatures, more than likely hell hounds if Tyler had to guess. He reached down and unholstered the revolver, firing a round in the hound's direction. It missed, ricocheting off of a building, scattering brick and mortar all over the sidewalk. He fired another shot that also missed. "Dammit," he lowered his gun and reached into his pack grabbing one of the bottles of holy water. Behind him the team, including Jonathan, were dealing with a handful of other monstrous creatures he was unsure what to make of. He unscrewed the cap on the water bottle and tossed it in the direction of the dogs and they disintegrated just before pouncing on him. "Neat," Tyler said as he joined the rest of the team.

As it turned out, Jonathan was a damn good shot and held

his own, better than Tyler, a fact he would never admit. Jonathan was shooting toward the creatures to slow them down while his team was throwing holy water at them. They had the situation completely cleared by the time the fire and rescue team truck had made its way to them. "There are about thirty people inside, no one is hurt, as far as I know, but we need to get them checked out anyway," Tyler told the first fireman he saw. "Where can we take them?" another fireman asked. Tyler paused. "They need to stay where they are," he answered. "The church is a safe place for them," he admitted. The firemen nodded and headed down the street toward the building.

"Not a word," Tyler said to Jonathan. "We should head back, get ready to head to the train station tonight," he started toward the church.

"I still don't understand why they are taking so long to get in motion," Jonathan questioned as they were walking.

"She needs to work under cover of darkness," Tyler answered. "The creatures she is working with are not strong enough in daylight," he continued. "The things we saw here today, they were straight from the underbelly of hell. The ones

who are going to carry out these missions are new, some were not even in hell at time, they had just been as far as purgatory, so they have not had the years to rot away, become hardened and strong," he said. "In darkness though, they can manage."

"This whole thing is becoming one big stereotype, isn't it?" Jonathan noted as they entered the church.

"How so?" Tyler asked.

"Can't travel by air, the angles have that under control, can't go anywhere during the day, they're not strong enough," Jonathan said.

"Your book, your rules, preacher man," Tyler patted him on the back and gave him that smirk that made Jonathan want to both punch him in the face and hug him at the same time.

Tyler's phone buzzed in his pocket. "Yes," he answered. "Go ahead Sergeant," he pulled on Jonathan's sleeve, pulling him close enough so they could both hear.

"The borders of San Francisco and Fresno are secure, and

there is very little activity nearby, the cities are on fire, in complete ruin, we've managed to clear just enough space for us to move about but not without some difficulty," Nelson told them. "Our friends in the Navy had agreed to help out in San Diego, they are reporting the same amount of damage down there," he continued.

Tyler looked at his watch. "Sun goes down in two hours, keep a good eye out and let me know if anything changes," he said into the phone. "And, thank you," he added.

"The calm before the storm, it seems," Jonathan noted.

Tyler agreed. "Do me a favor and check with the information team, see what's being reported, if anything," he asked Jonathan.

"Yes, sir," Jonathan saluted him.

"Did I forget to say please? Silly me," Tyler pushed Jonathan in the direction of the information team. A group of people who were in charge of checking social media, television and radio signals to see if anyone outside of the state was

reporting on activity. Tyler moved to a quiet corner to collect his thoughts. As he leaned his head back against the wall and squeezed his eyes shut everything went white. "I thought you were out of this fight," Tyler said into the nothingness.

"They are," a voice said back. "I am just checking up on you," a figure stepped in front of Tyler. It was Abby, looking more light and less solid than ever.

"Do they know you are doing this?" Tyler asked her.

"No, but then again, I have never been one to follow their rules, have I?" she answered.

"Well, today I killed three hell hounds and several hell demons," Tyler told her. "How was your day?"

"You are not doing any better on the faith thing," Abby noted. "I can feel it, you are still holding a lot of contempt," she said.

"That is not contempt," Tyler said. "It is anger, at this whole situation," he was clenching his fists at his side to

fight the need to punch something, or someone.

"Your anger is misguided," Abby moved forward.

Tyler could see just how invisible she was becoming. "You are returning to your full angel form, despite being a rebellious one, you are still one of them," Tyler backed away from her. "If you did not bring me here to be of any help, put me back where you found me so that I can get some rest," he snapped at her.

"You are resting, Tyler," her voice was calm, it felt like a song in his mind. "This is just a dream," she told him.

"Well, not exactly a dream but, something like it," she said. "Listen to your instincts, now more than ever," she said. "Don't let any doubt stop you from completing this mission and don't let what you see color your decisions from here on in."

"Vague messages, are they listening?" Tyler asked her.

"Someone is always watching," she answered and disappeared. The room faded away and he was back in the church. Jonathan was approaching as he opened his eyes and shook off his not a dream

but something like it.

"No reports from outside the borders," Jonathan told him. "But, there are some reports from within them," he sat down next to Tyler. "The train station is on fire, and so is the bus depot."

"What?" Tyler sat up. "Who?"

"Reports are the creatures who have been seen all over the city, tearing it down, did not get the memo that their friends might need the trains and busses," he said.

"Interesting," Tyler noted.

#

"What do you mean we can't use the trains?" Chloe demanded when one of her demon horde informed her of the news.

"There are train cars overturned on the tracks," the demon stepped back as he told her.

"So jump the train further up the railway!" she screamed.

"The trains won't run if there is anything blocking the rails, no matter where they are," the demon explained.

"Something about it being an electronic failsafe. They're dead," he was backing further away, unsure of what his master was going to do to him.

"What about the busses?" Chloe tried to calm herself, she enjoyed the fear she was seeing in her informant's eyes, but she needed him to answer more questions.

"The streets are still blocked off, the hell creatures have been let loose all over the city," he told her.

"Thank you," Chloe tried to sound less menacing. The demon was not convinced, he averted his eyes and nearly tripped over his feet as he ran in the opposite direction.

Chloe closed her eyes and screamed out in her own mind, hoping it would reach the ears of Lucifer or at least Azazel. "Your damn creatures are destroying the city, we cannot get through, I hope you're happy with yourself!" An explosion of

pain hit the back of her skull. "Hey! This one's on you boys!" she screamed at them. The pain subsided and a flash of light flickered behind her eye lids. When she opened her eyes Azazel was in front of her. "You should have put leashes on your hounds," Chloe snapped at him.

"Yeah, well, it's not that simple, those creatures have been in the bowels of hell for far too long to control any of them," Azazel said.

"You couldn't have thought of that before you let them loose?" she continued to berate him.

"Technically you let them loose," Azazel poked at her. "You're not taking into consideration that the creatures here are more resilient than humans," Azazel pointed around the room. "They don't need wheels, their feet work fine," he told her.

"I thought we were on some sort of time schedule. I was not aware that you and the boss were not in any kind of hurry," she folded her arms over her chest. "Do you want the gates open this week, or within the next month?"

"The sooner the better," Azazel answered.

"Are you suggesting these demons can move faster than a train?" Chloe asked.

"Not likely," Azazel answered. "But that's where you must be creative," he said. "Trains and busses and cars run all over the state, not just in LA, dear," he smirked.

"Yes, I am aware, but Los Angeles is currently the only city not being guarded by military forces," Chloe told him.

"You're going to let a handful of humans with firearms keep you relegated to the LA area?" Azazel scoffed.

"For the time being," Chloe answered. "We need to eliminate Tyler and his preacher friend, they're calling the shots and apparently Tyler and I are connected in some way," she said.

"Oh, yeah, forgot to mention that," Azazel shrugged. "The angel we eliminated, she's still got her fingernails deep in that skin, she's feeding him information," he told her.

"How do we stop her, them?" Chloe asked.

"You don't," Azazel answered. "Lucifer's orders."

"You want the gates open sooner than later, but we can't leave the city because we are being blocked by our own creatures and a group of humans on the side of the angels, but we're not allowed to harm their leaders and we can't control our demons," Chloe rambled out. "Makes perfect sense."

"If it was easy, we would have done it on our own, you're supposed to be the smart one," Azazel told her.

Chloe walked away from him and toward the map. She stared at it looking for any sort of opening, any way out of the state that did not involve homicide or cranes. If there was a way, she wasn't seeing it. She turned back to Azazel. "We have to fight within the borders to get out of them, if that means one of them gets hurt, so be it," she told him. "In war, people die, it's why we keep fighting them."

Azazel nodded. "Now she's getting it," he smiled.

"You could have said that from the beginning," Chloe retorted.

"You wouldn't follow the advice, if I had said it, you had to come up with it on your own," Azazel disappeared back into the ether.

Chloe watched the spot where he had been standing and thought to herself that he had a point. It was time to prepare her troops for war, not mobilization. She whistled through her teeth and got their attention. "New plan," she yelled to them. They turned their attention toward her. "We are going to war," she announced. Most of the demons cheered. Some were indifferent, some just stayed silent.

"It has been brought to my attention that the ability to leave the state, and the city, to be truthful, has been hindered by destruction done by our own," Chloe tried not to sound like she was pointing fingers, although she felt like she wanted to point fingers. "The previous plan to take over the railways and bus lines is temporarily on hold," she continued. "Our mission for the next couple of days is clean up and containment," she said. "I need the strongest of you to wrangle the creatures

currently running rampant through the streets, and I need some tactical teams to assess the damage and report back to me with the damage throughout the city," she commanded.

"What are you going to do?" one of the demons who was brave enough to speak up asked. He cowered back into the crowd when Chloe shot him a look of death.

"I have plans of my own," Chloe answered. When she had given the last of her troops their assignments and the warehouse was quiet she looked around and wondered how she had gone from high powered defense lawyer to demon army leader in just a few short months. A throbbing in her head reminded her of the day she fainted in the court room and was rushed to Georgia General Hospital where tests revealed the tumor. Sitting right on the base of her brain where it met her spine. If she hadn't gone into a coma she would have had it removed and had her ability to speak and move her limbs put at severe risk. She silently thanked whoever it was that brought on the coma for saving her the trouble of living as an invalid. She shook off the thoughts and set out for her own task.

As Chloe walked through the streets she saw that the

destruction was just as her scout had reported. The roads were scattered with overturned vehicles and debris from buildings and trash and billboards. "God damned animals," she cursed under her breath.

"God had nothing to do with it," a voice came up behind her.

Chloe whipped around to see a white figure behind her, nearly invisible, as if it were a hologram. "Angel," Chloe snarled at her. "I thought I killed you."

"Angels do not die," Abby said. "You sent me back to my own world, this is true, but angels never die," she repeated.

"You here to haunt me?" Chloe asked with only a small smile, it seemed absurd but then again, last week demons and angels and hell gates were something she saw on television in her favorite shows.

"Angel," Abby pointed toward herself, "Ghost," she pointed at Chloe.

"Alive," Chloe pointed at herself. "Dead?" she said it with a question in her voice.

"Angels are neither alive nor dead," Abby said. "I don't guess they teach you about heaven, God and angels in law school," Abby snarked. She smiled at the fact that she had kept some of her human qualities. For now.

"Only to warn us," Chloe was not one to pass up a good come back. "What can I do for you? I'm in a bit of a hurry here," she put her hands on her hips.

"Seems to me you're not going anywhere any time soon," Abby looked around at the damage to the streets and buildings in front of them. "You might want to get a better handle on your pets," she paused. "I know that the rumor around town is that the angels are all but gone and the humans have been left on their own," Abby's voice got serious. "I am here to tell you that is not quite true," she said.

"Thank you for the information," Chloe answered and then looked at Abby with amusement. "Oh, was that supposed to be a threat? That's so adorable," she laughed.

"Do not underestimate the power of a human with a guardian angel on his side, or one that has lost faith in anyone but himself, they are the worst kinds of dangerous," Abby told her.

"As you can see, the demons are not exactly at a loss for strength and destruction ability," Chloe pointed to their surroundings.

"Yes but you're not exactly in control of those demons, are you Chloe?" Abby poked at her.

"Ah, do the humans know you are controlling them?" Chloe poked back.

"No need, they're on our side anyway," Abby shrugged.
"Anyway I need to get back, I just wanted to check in, see how you were coping with things," she was beginning to fade, she would not tell Chloe but she only had a certain amount of energy she could use to stay on the Earth's plane. "Good luck with the clean up," she waved and disappeared completely.

"O...K," Chloe said out loud and went back to making her

way down the street. She hoped she was going in the right direction. Her GPS was indicating that she was, but Chloe was unsure if the app took into account road blockages and buildings in rubble.

#

"You look tired," Gabriel greeted Abby just as she returned from Earth. "Why do you insist on going against His wishes?"

"I lived among them for too many years to watch them die while we sit around here and do nothing," Abby snapped at him as she sat down on a small bench in her room. Just above the clouds and out of sight of human eyes was a space some would refer to as heaven, although from the stories Abby heard, the humans would be disappointed by the looks of the place. It was a bright white, sure, but there were no fluffy clouds, no pearly gates, no one was ticking off naughty and nice lists. Your soul either floated above or sunk below. No fuss. There were buildings, small and inconspicuous. Each one had three or four small rooms inside. Where the angels rested. They did not need sleep, food, anything other than a place to watch the people below. For Abby it was a bench and a few baubles she managed to sneak in from her time on Earth. The middle plane, they sometimes refer to it as.

"How are you on helping them?" Gabriel asked.

Abby hesitated. Giving Gabriel any information meant he could, would more than likely, go to Him and tell on her, again. This time the punishment would be harsher. Truth was, she had learned to appreciate being sent to the middle. It was the endless time not sleeping, hiding who she was, and not being able to help anyone in need that was the worst. Being there was good for her though, she learned that fighting for what you believe in is worth the risk. However, this risk was the worst she was taking in her young angel life. There were two options He would decide between, should He find out she was disobeying orders. The first she could almost deal with, being sent to the underworld. Which, come to think of it, was a moot point now. The other she could absolutely not deal with. Death. The only way an angel could die is if He commanded it. He had only done it a handful of times, and those angels were so out of line he could not bear to see them on any plane. Upper, middle or lower. "It is best that I do not tell you," she broke herself out of her thoughts.

"I would not go to Him," Gabriel told her. "I do not want

to see you punished," he sounded sincere. He looked like he was struggling for the next words. "I, I want to help," he sat next to her on the bench.

Abby sat in silent awe for several minutes. This was Gabriel, who never disobeyed an order in his angel life. He did everything by the book, the only book, the one the angels and demons followed, not the one the humans adapted into their own. "You do?" she finally choked out.

"They are never going to win this war on their own," Gabriel repeated words she had said to him when this madness started. "They need help, and I am unsure of whether He is right to leave them defenseless," Gabriel struggled with those words.

Abby tried not to look excited. If Gabriel was willing to go against His word, maybe others would join them. "I have been feeding information to Tyler about Chloe's movements and where he needed to focus his efforts," Abby told him. "Nothing more," she told him. After a moments pause she asked what was on her mind "Do you think others will follow us?"

"I am not sure," Gabriel truly wasn't. He knew that his

change of heart would be a defining factor in anyone joining them in the fight, but he was unsure of who he could trust, and how to go about finding the right allies. "Do you know any others that we can talk to, without them going straight to Him?"

Abby thought on it. Gabriel sat and watched her stare into the plane below. "I have an idea, but I'm not sure if you are going to like it," she finally said.

Gabriel was standing in the court yard that linked the housing complexes together. It was a common area where the angels would congregate and talk and collectively watch over the human race. Some gossiped, some just gave the days events as if they were newscasters. Today it was empty. The war below had all of the upper plane stressed out. Whenever they looked at the middle plane all they saw was destruction, fire, and demons. Too many demons. Gabriel sounded a silent call to get the angels to come out and see him. A group of angels began to form around him. It both scared him and thrilled him at the same time. "Hello, friends," he greeted them. "What I am about to ask you is, complicated, and highly irrational," he began. Way in the back, behind the group, staying as quiet as can be, was Abby, who almost blew her own cover by sighing at his silly need for

honesty. "I need your help," he continued. "The humans, need our help," he amended. "I am hoping that you will assist me in giving them that help," he nodded to them.

"You, alone?" an angel asked him. When he stepped forward Gabriel saw that it was Raphael. A fellow archangel.

"No," Gabriel answered him. As he did he motioned for Abby to step forward. A gasp went through the crowd as she did.

"Of course," Raphael spoke again. "The human lover," he said it as if it was wrong, nasty. "We cannot help them Gabriel, and you should not be in the company of a lower angel, especially one with no regard for our hierarchy and rule following," he scoffed.

"Is it so wrong to want to look after the humans?" Gabriel protested. "And spare me the lecture on lower angels and hierarchy Raph, you seem to be doing just fine co-mingling with them when they're following your rules," he pointed out.

"This is not the way to win them over," Abby whispered into Gabriel's ear.

"The humans are outnumbered, they do not have the strength to fight on their own, and they should not be asked to fight a war we started," Gabriel could not believe those last words had left his lips. Abby smiled proudly next to him.

"It is unbecoming of you to be so heavily influenced by this traitor," Michael stepped forward and pointed at Abby. "She was sentenced to life on the middle plane for a reason," he continued. "She does not belong here among us, with her admiration for the humans and their weak little minds, bodies, and souls."

"They are not weak," Gabriel retorted. Abby was still staring at him, surprised by his willingness to fight his brothers. "And I would watch what you say, brother, some of the angels among you here were once humans," his eyes washed over the crowd.

"What is it you suggest we do?" Raphael asked.

"Are you agreeing to help us?" Gabriel asked him.

"Not quite, but someone seeing as you are so willing to fight Michael, an act that has given me more joy than I could have imagined, I am willing to listen to what you have to say," he shot a wry smile in Michael's direction. Michael glared daggers at him.

Gabriel nodded to Abby, who stepped forward. "We need to enter their plane and help them in battle," she told them. The crowd rustled and whispered to each other. "I know that it is not like us, to fight, especially alongside ones such as them," she continued. "But this is not their fight. Is it?"

Raphael thought this over. "You want us to take up arms and fight alongside the humans?"

"Yes, that is what I am asking," Abby answered, with confidence.

"Even if we agree to do this, what you are asking is that we go against every law set forth by Him, laws set in motion for reasons beyond our comprehension," he added.

"You do not have to agree to join us, Raph, we are asking

everyone here, and anyone who did not come out to hear us," Gabriel told him.

"You need us, the archangels," Raphael told him. "You alone cannot guide these souls into battle," he pointed to the rest of the group, many of whom were confused at what was even happening. "They are new, they are not yet aware of their own powers, and some are still under the, correct, impression that they will be smote from this plane if they go against his word," he said.

"I am aware of what I am asking of you," Gabriel told them. "And I will not force you to go against your will," he said. "All I ask is that you take some time to watch what is happening below, and give it some thought. We can help them, we just have to be willing to take the risk to do so."

"Uriel, Raguel, Remiel and Saraqael are with Him, they will never agree to this," Raphael told them. "But I am with you, brother," he stepped forward and clapped Gabriel on the shoulder. "Michael?"

"I am sorry, I cannot go along with this, and my angels

will not be joining you either," Michael answered.

"Fair enough," Gabriel told him. "Those of you remaining, meet me back here in one hour for your assignments. Again, this is not a requirement, it is a simple request. No one is asking you to disobey the laws He set forth and no one will force your hand," he tried to assure them.

"Well, that went slightly better than expected," Abby noted. Raphael returned to his small group of angels who were loyal to him. Michael approached Gabriel and Abby. "I cannot promise I will not tell Him the truth, should he ask where you have run off to," he warned.

"Counting on it," Abby whispered as Michael walked away.

#

Chloe made her way past the falling buildings and overturned vehicles and into open air. The downtown area had been claustrophobic before the wreckage, wading through it, on foot, no less, made her feel like she was swimming through quicksand. Her GPS told her that the church she was looking for was roughly 15 miles away. Her feet already hurt. She looked around, there had to be some way to get around other than on

foot. But every bicycle she saw was heavily damaged, it was as if the creatures purposely destroyed every mode of transportation available. If she thought they were smart enough, she would think that was the case.

The church was just a few yards ahead. Chloe's feet hurt, she was feeling parched, and she was beginning to wonder if this little experiment was worth the effort it just took to get there. It was that thought that was on her mind when she stopped at the edge of the grass just off the sidewalk in front of the building. She was unable to go any further. Not because of aching or fatigue. She just, could not get any closer.

"Hallowed ground," Tyler yelled from the door of the church. A scout watching for demon activity had alerted him to her approaching. The streets had been empty all day, other than her appearance. "Next time send a text?" he teased.

Chloe felt herself blush as she realized the error. She was part demon now. How could she forget that so easily? "Didn't have your number," she answered him back. Not the best comeback but, it was the truth.

"What brings you to our neighborhood?" Tyler asked. He stepped out of the door and down the two steps in front of it, making sure to stay on the grounds of the church, where Chloe could not get to him.

"I had a visit from your angel friend," Chloe told him. "Abby, I think was her name?"

"Yeah," Tyler wondered how, and why, Abby would pay Chloe a visit. Maybe this was a trick?

"I think she was trying to get me to surrender," Chloe laughed, an actual whole-hearted gesture.

"Angels," Tyler shook his head as he said the word as sarcastically as he could convey.

"That couldn't possibly be why you walked nearly 20 miles to a place you cannot even enter," Tyler asked it a different way.

"My scouts have been through here a number of times, keeping an eye on you, they said you have weapons that kill

demons, and people who are willing to use them," she said.

"You want to verify that information is correct?" Tyler asked her.

"I came to talk, Tyler," she told him. "I think it might be best, for you and your friends, if you just surrender now, before anyone else gets hurt," she suggested.

Tyler laughed. "You are negotiating a surrender. Okay, I'll bite, what exactly do we get if we lay down our arms and play nice with the demonfolk?"

"Get?" Chloe laughed again. "You get to live," she said.

"Lucifer is not going to let us live in harmony with his demon horde, Chloe, I am beginning to question why they thought you would be able to lead this fight," he said.

"Maybe not, but I will," she tried to step toward him but could not move forward. Only backward.

Tyler thought for a moment. "Does Lucifer know you plan on

keeping him behind bars and taking over his high Earth ruling plan?"

Chloe was taken aback by Tyler's assessment. She was unsure of how he came to that conclusion but, it worried her that he saw through her plan so quickly. "I don't know what you mean," she answered.

"Mhm," Tyler stepped a bit further forward, until he was almost face to face with her. "Be careful of this game you are playing. You are literally dealing with the devil himself," he warned before turning his back to her and returning to the church. Chloe could only watch him go.

"What did she want?" Jonathan was by his side as soon as Tyler was back in the chapel.

"She wanted to negotiate our surrender," Tyler tried hard not to laugh out loud as he said it again. "I think we might not need to worry about her as much as we thought," he said. "She's got some plan to keep Lucifer out of the mix and take over this place on her own."

"She told you that?" Jonathan was surprised she had been so forthcoming.

"Not in those exact words, but her implication was that we would not be dealing with Lucifer, in the end, we would be dealing with her," Tyler told him.

Instead of returning to the warehouse, Chloe made her way back to the hotel in Beverly Hills to freshen up and wait for word on how her efforts were being met all over the city. When she opened the door to her room, after over two hours of more walking, she was not at all surprised to find Azazel waiting for her.

"It is a wonder," he said as she passed him and sat down on the bed, "that you won so many of your cases," he stood over her. "We can hear your thoughts, Chloe, it is a perk we were afforded when we fixed that tumor you were carrying," he told her. "Whatever it is you are planning, give it up, stay on the path to getting Lucifer free, and maybe he won't kill you before he lets you run this place willingly."

"I know that it must pain you that I am the one who was

chosen to lead this battle," Chloe poked at that topic again. "But you are going to just have to start living with it," she brushed passed him and headed for the bathroom.

"You were not chosen, do not get confused," Azazel stepped in front of her to block her way. "The blood that runs through your veins is the blood of Lucifer," he looked her straight in the eyes. "Choice played no part in the matter, it was you, or wait another thousand years before an ancestor of the same blood was born into this world. Lucifer is tired of waiting."

"That may well be true, but choice or not, you need me, you've just proven that yourself, so I would say I am holding the cards in this hand," she forced her way passed him and slammed the bathroom door behind her. She peeled her sticky clothes off her body and stepped into the steamy hot water of the shower.

Azazel returned to the lower plane and stood in front of Lucifer. "We are going to have to find a way to control her," he implored his brother. "She cannot be trusted."

"Who among us can be, brother?" Lucifer answered him.

"There is no way, you said it yourself when you spoke to her, she is the only one of my blood for the next thousand years, and I am indeed, tired of waiting," he paused. "We may have another issue."

"What now?" what little patience Azazel had was wearing thin.

"The angels are moving," Lucifer pointed above them.

"Moving how?" Azazel asked.

"They are planning on returning to the middle plane to help the humans against us," Lucifer told him.

"He will never allow it," Azazel said.

"He does not know," Lucifer cracked a smile. Sworn enemies or not, it made him happy that His own angels were attempting to go against him.

"Interesting," Azazel admired the implications as well.
"Should we warn Chloe?"

"No, we may be unable to get around having her lead this battle, but we can make it more difficult for her to manage it," Lucifer told him. "Even with the angels on their side, the humans cannot defeat our brethren, we are many and they are too few."

Chloe stepped out of the shower and was only slightly surprised to find her room no longer occupied by the thorn in her side. She thought of that extra hard, not at all concerned that he might hear her think it. She prepared to leave at a moments notice and set herself up on the fluffy comforter on the big bed. She turned on the television and flipped through the channels, only to realize that they were all news programs reporting on an apocalypse she had helped create. This gave her a sense of pride. Despite her annoyance with being stuck in the city, the damage looked a lot more glamorous on television with a make-up wearing reporter dramatically recounting events.

"The borders on all sides of the state have been closed off, with patrols checking for authenticity by applying a holy water test to anyone attempting to enter or exit the state," a reporter said. Chloe began to wonder if this was an

uncompletable task after all. Then she had an idea. There had to be humans willing to join her cause. She looked up the channel's news site and found a link where you can contact the station.

"Yes, who do I talk to about giving an exclusive interview," Chloe asked when the news manager called her cell phone. "I am leading the army of demons that are currently laying waste to your city," she answered his question of why she was qualified to give him said exclusive. "Those holy water tests being conducted at the borders, I will come down to the station and you can do one on me," she said. "You will find that it proves that I am in fact a demon, and then I will give you information no one else has been able to give you," she told him. "I would be more than happy to go to another channel with my information," she threatened when he hesitated. "Yes, very good, I will see you then," she hung up the phone and began to type on her laptop with a grin.

#

"We are not going live?" Chloe asked the producer when they were set up in her hotel room. She had convinced them to come to her. The station sent a segment producer and a cameraman.

"We will air your interview in between live reports from

the field," producer Samantha told her. "Problem?" she asked watching Chloe's expressions change.

"No," Chloe tried to smile. She put on as much charm as she could muster and answered the Samantha's off camera questions, looking directly into the camera, speaking steadily and clearly.

When Samantha and her cameraman left Chloe's room she set herself up on her bed, turned on the television and waited for her segments to air. Samantha had mentioned it would be on fairly quickly. When Chloe asked her how she was traveling so fast, she said they had helicopters. Damn angels, Chloe cursed inside.

"Sir, you might want to see this," Cory called to Tyler.

"I am never going to get used to that," Tyler told Jonathan as they both walked toward the back of the church where the information scouts were set up, watching various televisions and keeping track of social media.

"What's that?" Jonathan asked him.

"Sir," Tyler answered. "What's up?" he addressed Cory who stepped aside and let Tyler and Jonathan watch what he was seeing on the television.

Chloe was speaking into the camera. The title card in the right corner of the screen read Chloe, with Eye-Witness under her name. "They were gathered in a warehouse downtown, I pretended to be one of them, stood in the back of the room and listened to their leader," she was saying. "The leader, a woman, said they needed to get out of the city, and then out of the state, so that they could continue their plan," she stopped. "What is their plan?" an off-air voice asked. "I am not sure, I was not there long enough to find out, I got scared, left quietly."

"What's she doing?" Jonathan asked Tyler.

"Recruiting," Tyler answered pulling his phone out of his pocket. "Nelson, it's Tyler," he said into the phone. "We might have a problem." When he had explained the new development to Sergeant Nelson, Tyler turned to Jonathan. "We need to find out where that warehouse is and meet her head on," he said. "I can't sit here waiting for something to happen anymore."

"You understand that she's setting a trap for us, as much as she's recruiting new blood," Jonathan pointed out.

"I do, but we have to take that risk, we take her out of the equation and the demons run wild," Tyler told him.

"Azazel?" Jonathan reminded him of the other demon in the mix.

"He may be a problem but they need her for some reason, if they no longer have her, they might fall easier," Tyler hoped he was right.

Tyler took Amy, Jonathan and three LAPD officers with him to travel downtown and find the warehouse where Chloe's army was congregating. He had a vague idea of where it was, a vision flashed in his mind as soon as he put the plan in motion. "That wasn't all that helpful," he thought, directed at Abby, who stayed silent.

Downtown was in worse shape than Westchester where the church was. City busses were on their sides, cars and trucks

were upside down, some of them still on fire. It was utter chaos. They kept a close eye on the shadows between the buildings, making sure none of them moved. So far there were no monsters lurking. When they reached the third warehouse in the area a bell went off in Tyler's head. He stopped walking and looked up "Really?"

"What?" Jonathan stopped next to him.

"She rang a bell, in my head," Tyler answered still looking up.

"Who did?" Jonathan asked.

"Abby," Tyler answered. "She's the one feeding me information," he felt guilty that he had forgotten to tell Jonathan about his meetings with the angel.

Jonathan would have been hurt if things were not in shambles. It was an oversight he could live with. "How?" was all he said.

"I am not sure how she's doing it, but it is her, we had a

conversation while I was resting yesterday," he said. "Was that as crazy as it sounded?"

"Nothing is shocking to me these days," Jonathan admitted. "Is she alive, how is she talking to you?"

"She's sending me messages, telepathically, she never was alive, technically," he pointed out. "I think she stole me and brought me to heaven once, or something like it," he said.

"Can we maybe have this conversation later?" Amy asked behind them.

"Sorry," Tyler and Jonathan said in unison. "That's the building there," Tyler pointed to a large industrial warehouse that from the outside looked empty. "Let's take a closer look," he suggested. "Carefully," he added.

The team moved forward and ducked down under the windows of the building. A handful of demons were milling around the inside, a large table sat in the middle, from the little bits of peaking Tyler did not see Chloe there. "Demons, but no Chloe," he reported to the team. "About six or seven, more human looking

than any of the others we have seen," he told them.

"We going in?" Amy asked, her firearm was unholstered, aimed at the ground, her finger on the muzzle ready to reach for the trigger.

"We're looking for Chloe, if we go in, disturb these guys, she won't come," Tyler said.

"How long we going to wait?" Jonathan asked.

"As long as we can," Tyler answered.

They crouched under the window and kept their eyes on the doors of the warehouse for at least an hour before any activity started. To their dismay, humans began showing up, looking to join the cause. "Not surprising," Tyler noted. Another hour passed and more humans appeared at the doors. And more demons. Still no Chloe. "Where is she?" he said to the sky, hoping Abby would hear him and answer. After twenty minutes he got a flash of the Beverly Hilton. "Why are you showing me that?" he looked up again. Another bell dinged in his mind. "Don't do that, it's annoying," he protested. "Apparently, Chloe is at the Beverly

Hilton hotel," Tyler told the group who were staring at him. He chose to ignore the awkwardness. "Let's head that way," he suggested.

"As much as I enjoyed the karma in having the demons stuck here because of their own inability to handle their own hell monsters," Jonathan panted next to Tyler. "I hate walking," he said.

"Jesus walked the desert for his people, you can't walk six miles to a swanky hotel?" Tyler teased.

"Comparing me to Jesus, I would be flattered if my feet weren't so sore," Jonathan teased back.

They reached the hotel in under two hours, as the sun was setting over the mountains and the shadows began getting longer and more ominous. "Watch for movement," Tyler pointed to the places where the buildings met. The team members nodded and raised their weapons.

The alleyway between the Beverly Hilton hotel and the building next to it was darker than the team liked, and they

passed by cautiously. It was not enough. Two large creatures emerged from the darkness and ascended on them. Their weapons stunned the monsters, but not before one of them took a chunk out of one of the LAPD officer's arms. Tyler lobbed a full bottle of holy water and eliminated that demon as the rest of the team took care of the second. Jonathan tore off a piece of cloth and wrapped it around the officer's arm.

"She must be inside, they're guarding the building," Amy suggested.

"I think it was a coincidence, them being here," Tyler told her. "She's too confident to think any of us would come after her," he said. "Looks like the hotel staff have all gone home," he looked inside to see the front desk empty.

The group entered the lobby and Tyler ran toward the desk, checking to see if the computers were working. "Password protected," he slammed his fist on the keyboard.

"We don't have time to check every floor," Jonathan said.

"I can hack it," one of the officers told them. Tyler

motioned him forward.

After several minutes spent listening to the sound of the keys on the keyboard echoing the empty marble lobby and watching the door for more demon attacks Chloe's room number was located.

"Should have just assumed she would be on the top floor, penthouse all the way for that princess," Tyler was a little upset with himself for not thinking of it, and then he cursed Abby for being so quiet lately. "No more bells?" he looked up. He silently thanked whatever being was listening for letting the elevators work. He was unsure if he or the rest of the team could climb seven flights of stairs.

Room 717 was at the end of the hallway. "Do we just knock?" Jonathan asked as they reached the door.

"I don't guess she'd fall for room service paying her a visit?" Tyler answered. "I am pretty sure she knows the hotel staff are not on site."

"Just knock, I'll cover you," Amy held up her gun and flanked his left side. One of the officers followed her lead and

flanked him on the right. Tyler gently tapped the door with the brass door knocker conveniently fixed in the middle of the giant wood door.

Chloe wondered who could be at her door. It couldn't be Azazel, he just shows up in her room, never would he have the courtesy to knock. No one else knew she was there, she thought. Curiosity forced her to get up and check the peep hole. When she saw Tyler standing there she cracked a wry smile. "Did you come to your senses and decide to surrender after all?" she said as she pulled the door open. "Oh," she amended when she saw the guns pointed in her direction.

#

"To what do I owe this honor?" Chloe asked as she kept herself wedged between the partially open door and the guns pointed at her from the hallway.

"Saw you on the news today," Tyler answered. "Yeah, you look tired," he said when her face lit up.

"Must have been the bad lighting in here, not good on the complexion," she tried to deflect his jab.

"Or the demon blood," Jonathan threw out from behind Tyler.

"What can I do for you?" Chloe asked again.

"We just thought we would come say hello, let you know we found your hiding place," Tyler told her.

"You are a terrible adversary," Chloe snickered.

Tyler smiled. "Is that why you're hiding here while your demon horde deals with the onslaught of volunteers down at the warehouse?" "Yeah, we know where that is too," he added when her face changed.

"Oddly enough, I was just heading over there," Chloe assured him. "You caught me just as I was leaving."

"Right," Tyler did not believe her. "You don't really think we are going to let you leave here do you?"

Chloe laughed hard. "You can't kill me," she told him. "Like, I cannot physically be killed. Lucifer put some sort of mojo on me, only he can do the deed," she shifter her weight and

tried to show that she was relaxed, but the idea of Lucifer holding her life in his hands was suddenly heavy on her shoulders.

"We weren't looking to kill you, just maybe injure you enough to keep you from carrying out the dumb ass plan you are cooking up in your tumor riddled head," Jonathan got snippy.

"Rawr, wow preacher, does your master know you talk to people like that?" Chloe answered. "This has been fun but, I really do have to be going," she tried to close the door and return to her room. Tyler put a steel toed boot in to block it.

"We came so far to see you," Tyler purred. "Won't you even invite us in?"

"Not a chance," Chloe answered quickly.

"That's a shame, we really need a place to rest our feet," Tyler pushed on the door, Chloe put all her weight against it making it hard for him. He nodded to his team and they pushed against the door and they were all inside the room within a few minutes. "Swanky," Tyler whistled as he checked out the

penthouse suite. "You know there's no staff on duty here anymore right?"

"I am aware," Chloe sounded annoyed.

"Oh, we ran into your bodyguards, took them out pretty easily," Tyler was picking up crystal candle holders and knick knacks, admiring them.

"Bodyguards?" Chloe asked. "If you're referring to those hell monsters who have been lurking in the shadows, they're not with me," she acted like he had offended her.

"Shame, you might could use some protecting," Jonathan suggested.

"Your preacher friend doesn't like me much," Chloe said to Tyler. "Think he might be jealous at the attention you're giving me," she teased.

Jonathan cracked a smile. "You're not his type."

"So you are jealous," she winked at Jonathan and turned to

Tyler "What do you have against hot demon women?" she tried to flirt with him.

Tyler noticed, and it made him laugh. "Aside from the whole evil thing, nothing, but what he meant was, as a female you are not my type," he clarified.

"I am everyone's type," Chloe told them.

"I wonder, did the demon blood turn you into a conceited bitch or did it simply enhance what was already inside you?" Jonathan wanted to hit her, hard.

"Please stop fighting over me," Tyler put on his own conceit, as playfully as he could.

"Look, really, this has been a blast, but I am going to go now, as you said, I have volunteers to greet," Chloe stepped toward the door. Jonathan and Tyler blocked her way. "It's cute, you thinking you can beat me," she backed up slightly. "Azazel," she said his name out loud. It was the first time she actually wanted him to show up in her room. For a few seconds she wondered if he would show up, based on that fact alone.

Azazel did not fail her. "Can I help you? Oh," he noticed Tyler and Jonathan blocking Chloe's exit.

"These gentlemen are under the impression that they can keep me here, like some sort of prisoner or something," Chloe told Azazel.

"Since when do you need my help to get out of a situation like this?" Azazel asked her.

"Since they have weapons that can do me a lot of damage," Chloe told him.

"News flash, Chlo, I can also be damaged by these weapons," Azazel said. And then he realized why she had summonsed him. Too late. She pushed Azazel at Tyler and Jonathan and ran for the door, pulling it open. Amy and the two LAPD officers fired shots at her but they either missed or went right through.

"You can get off of us now," Tyler told Azazel who had pinned down their arms to ensure he was not going to get shot or stabbed by any of the weapons they held.

Amy stepped into the room and saw them attempting to untangle from each other. "She wasn't lying, she cannot be killed," she informed them. "Our bullets went right through."

Azazel smiled at them when they were all standing apart from each other. "I might be willing to tell you how to do her damage, if you are willing to help me," he said.

"Not quite a happy little family?" Tyler said. "Look it's a tempting offer but I think we'll have to pass," he told him. "I think I know how to defeat her without physical harm anyway."

"Suit yourself," Azazel disappeared back into wherever he came from.

Tyler led his team out of the hotel and back onto the dark streets. It might have been safer to stay in the hotel overnight, but they were taking the chance anyway. They made it three blocks before running into their first demon. Amy dispatched of it quickly with a direct shot to the head and a splash of holy water. They watched as it melted to nothing and moved on. A few more blocks and another large creature stepped

into their path. Tyler shot it in the shoulder, as high as he could get, and Jonathan administered the holy water bath. This went on all the way to the church. By the time they were back inside the safe haven they were all exhausted, dirty, and hungry.

"I feel like we did not accomplish anything with that exercise," Jonathan told Tyler as they grabbed food and sat together in one of the pews.

"I am not so sure," Tyler told him. "We got a lot of information we did not previously have," he pointed out. "We know that she cannot be killed, by usual means, we know that she is unorganized and we know that she and Azazel aren't exactly on the same side," he said.

"And we wasted resources killing demons all the way back to base," Amy said as she passed by them. "Let's not do that again, okay?"

Tyler nodded. "We won't, from now on we will travel by day and make sure we are back or at least not so far away by nightfall," he told her.

Tyler nibbled on some cheese and crackers and sipped on a bottle of water. After a long silence he looked at Jonathan and said "You didn't protest to her jealousy accusation."

"That's what you took away from our excursion?" Jonathan acted annoyed but his eyes gleamed.

"Just wanted to let you know I noticed," Tyler finished off his water and stood up to take away his trash. He left Jonathan sitting there.

That night Tyler's dreams were filled with silent chaos. He could not explain that feeling, other than that. Abby did not visit him, there was no information hidden in his mind when he woke up. All he knew was something was happening upstairs and it was keeping Abby from visiting. He wondered if she was in trouble, but then he knew he did not feel that. Some kind of movement from the angel camp was what he was getting from the silence.

"You okay," Jonathan asked Tyler when they woke up in the morning. "More messages from Abby?"

"No, no messages at all," Tyler said. "Well, she did not come visit me," he amended. "I think the angels are getting ready to return to Earth."

Jonathan stared at Tyler. "If that is the case, and I hope beyond all hope it is, it could mean serious punishment from them, elimination, expulsion from heaven," he explained.

"I know, I am just telling you that's what it feels like, I can't explain it, but when I closed my eyes I saw nothing, but it was active nothing," he shrugged. "I am starting to make less and less sense every day."

"This may not be reassuring, but you are making perfect sense to me," Jonathan told him. "You are connected to a higher being, sometimes the messages are clear, sometimes you have to add your own spin on them."

"Yeah, I seem to remember getting that sense when the priests and nuns were trying to cure me of my homosexuality," Tyler tried to make that sound less serious as it was. "Between them and my parents, there was a whole lot of self-

interpretation when it came to the bible and the word of God." He stood up and started toward the bathroom.

Jonathan stopped him, gently putting a hand on his forearm. "We don't all do that," he told him.

Tyler smiled genuinely at Jonathan, for the first time since they had met. "I know," he let Jonathan's hand fall and touch his own fingers. "I wasn't telling you because I want you to feel bad, or because I think you will do the same thing, he said as he turned to walk away. "I was telling you so you would know just how damaged I am."

#

Chloe stood in front of the warehouse crowd admiring the fullness of it. Her plan worked better than she had imagined. She thought maybe one or two humans with DNA that could get across the borders would show up. But this was much better. Now she had an army of them. Ones that were eager to join, it seemed. She was rethinking her plans as she watched the people mingle with the demons. No fear, she thought. Chloe pictured groups of them ascending on border patrol, overtaking them, getting into Oregon, Nevada and Arizona. Then moving into Utah and Texas, and so on. She was daydreaming about gates opening

and Lucifer walking freely outside of them when there was a loud thunderous boom outside. All heads turned, Chloe stepped off the makeshift stage and went outside to investigate.

Tyler was plotting his own plan of attack when the boom hit, shaking the church and scaring the people who were holed up inside. He and Jonathan met each other in the aisle as they headed for the door to find out what the noise was. Tyler pulled the door open.

Standing on the steps in front of the church were Abby, Gabriel, and at least a dozen or more angels. "Hi honey, I'm home," Abby greeted Tyler with a smile. Gabriel shot her a dirty look, this was no time for jokes, the look read.

Chloe stepped outside and saw nothing, at first. But as she looked around more closely she saw bodies of creatures being thrown out of alleyways and into streets. She saw fires being put out. She could not make out the forms that were doing the work. Then they started to head right toward her and she realized who, or rather what, they were. Angels. She was unsure how she knew that's what they were, they had no distinguishable features that would make one identify them as such, she just

knew. She could feel their energy in every cell in her body. And she hated how it felt.

Tyler could not decide if it would be right to hug Abby so he just ran down the stairs and grabbed her by the hand, leading her into the church. The other angels followed. The effect on the people inside was instantaneous. Tyler and Jonathan had been so used to being around Gabriel and Abby that they had forgotten what it was like. It was hard to describe what it was like, there were no wings, no glowing auras, no halos. Just a feeling of peace. The people began to drop to their knees.

"How did you manage this?" Tyler whispered to Abby as they waded through the kneeling folks.

"Gabriel," she nodded toward him. "He convinced them."

"How much trouble are you in?" Tyler asked.

"A lot, I would imagine," she answered. "Pretty sure Michael went straight to Him as soon as we left the compound. Oh, and, this is not all of us, some went straight to the warehouse where the demons are gathered," she said. "Raphael is

leading them."

"So we have two archangels on our side?" Tyler asked.

"Six. We have six archangels here, only Michael stayed behind," Gabriel answered him.

"Wow," Jonathan had thought that he would not be surprised by anything after what he had seen lately, but he was wrong. Being in the presence of this many angels was making him both exuberant and unworthy.

"There's something I need to tell you," Abby pulled Tyler aside. "We don't have our full powers," she got right down to it. Tyler's face dropped. "We still have some, we are powerfully strong, but we do not have Him on our side at all, we are alone here," she told him.

Tyler looked at her for a moment and smiled "I'm glad you're here," he kissed her on her forehead.

"Everything okay?" Jonathan asked when Tyler returned to the group.

"Nothing we can't handle," Tyler assured him. "Just know that the angels might not be the solution we were looking for."

"Why not?" Jonathan's tone made it sound like he was assuming Tyler meant that in his non-believer way.

Tyler noticed. "The went against God and he sent them here as punishment, not to save us," he told him. "They were stripped of most of their angel powers."

Jonathan's heart sank. "What does that mean?"

"It means we have more people on our side but don't get your hopes up that we have been saved," Tyler walked away.

"Are those angels?" Amy asked when Tyler passed her near the back of the church.

"Yes," Tyler answered.

"They came to help us?" she asked.

"Yes," Tyler answered again.

"What does that look like?" Amy asked.

"Nothing changes," Tyler told her. "We have more soldiers, that's all," he said. "Gather everyone together," he commanded. "Please," he tried to sound less so.

When the pews were full of the people taking shelter in the big church, Tyler stood at the pulpit and looked out over them. He felt weird being up there. He took a moment and then began to address them. "As you may have noticed, we have a new group with us," he did not want to say people, it felt wrong. Though he saw them as more human than not. "Let me tell you about them," he said. "Yes, they are angels, yes they came here from up there," he pointed to the ceiling. "But," he paused. "These are not exactly the angels you learned about in your books," he paused again. "Book," he amended. "They have limited powers, and they are not invulnerable," he looked at them. "But they are here to help us and that is a very important thing," he tried to sound more grateful than he felt.

Gabriel stood up and silently asked Tyler if he could approach. Tyler nodded. He stepped up to the podium and turned

to the confused refugees. "Tyler is correct, our powers have been lessened," he said. "That being said, please understand that even at half power, or, even one fourth of it, we are still stronger than the average human," he tried to sound more practical than conceited. "What Tyler is trying to make sure of is, that you do not rely on us to be your saviors," he looked at Tyler who blushed. "He is right, we are here to help, we are not the answer," he turned the room back to Tyler.

"So that's all I wanted to say," Tyler stepped off the stage.

Abby followed Tyler to where he had made his temporary home. A cornered off area of the church as far from the religious paraphernalia as he could be. Although the ceiling was stained glass angels and crosses. He tried not to let it creep him out at night. "I understand your disappointment," she said when they were alone.

"Not disappointed," Tyler turned to her. "Well," he looked for the words. "Not disappointed in your appearance here," he said. "More disappointed that I was right."

"You are not right, Tyler," Abby stood tall over him and used a deeper voice than usual. "No one abandoned you," she relaxed. "We did not leave you here to fight on your own, be grateful for that, if you can find it in yourself to be something other than angry," she walked away from him.

Tyler sat down on his makeshift bed and put his head in his hands. He was exhausted, confused, and unsure of what to do. He was not ungrateful to Abby and the other angels for being there, he was not sure what that meant for the battle now. He was also dealing with the feelings he was suppressing toward Jonathan. The outer shell he was so good at building was beginning to crack open and he did not know what that meant. Jonathan woke him from his inner mind trip.

"It's good that you told them the truth," Jonathan said, misinterpreting Tyler's mood as guilt. "The more they understand the less they will be surprised when all hell breaks loose," he smiled. "Not that it hasn't already."

Tyler did not answer him. He let Jonathan believe that was what was weighing in his mind.

Chloe stood at the door of the warehouse and watched as angels ascended on the building. They had sent the demon creatures in the area back to wherever they had come from, they had put out all the car fires and righted most of the overturned vehicles. Now their sights were set on Chloe and the demons inside the warehouse. Chloe stepped back inside and assessed the situation. She had no idea what it took to defeat an angel.

Raphael led the angels up to the door of the warehouse and motioned for them to stop. He stood at the window and looked inside, attempting to count how many demons were inside. "There are humans in there, among the demons," he said over his shoulder.

"Are they prisoners?" the angel behind Gabriel asked.

"It does not look like it," Gabriel answered.

"What do we do?" the angel asked.

"We cannot harm the humans," Gabriel turned and faced the group behind him. "We have to focus on the demons," he said.

"Even if the humans attack, we must not cause them any harm."

"Understood," they assured him.

Inside the warehouse Chloe was addressing the horde. "There are angels outside our doors," she announced. "We must not let them enter this building, we must not let them cause us any harm, and we must make sure they do not return."

"Angels cannot be killed, ma'am," a voice from the middle of the room spoke out.

"I am aware," Chloe told him. "They can be injured though, and we need them to go back to where they came and send the message that we will not be taken lightly," she was doing her best to rally them.

Gabriel reached for the door handle and pulled it aside. The demons stood in front of the humans as a wall of protection. "Now," Gabriel commanded. He and the angels held up their hands and blasted as much light at the ceiling as possible. "Just a warning shot."

#

Jonathan stood in the designated media room where news was

constantly feeding through television screens and computer monitors. He watched as news reports came in about supply trucks being turned away at border checks, he saw helicopters crashing to the ground, shot down by demons before they could reach designated areas. Anchors kept talking about being low on food, water, essentials. The ticker at the bottom kept that thread going even as reports of angel sightings in the downtown area came through via footage and on site reporting. He stepped out of the room and headed toward Tyler's corner in the back of the church. Tyler was napping, after a long night of strategizing with Gabriel, Abby and the newly arrived angel army. Jonathan sat at the end of the cot they had found for Tyler to sleep on. Tyler stirred awake.

"Hey," he sleepily greeted Jonathan.

"Sorry to wake you," Jonathan smiled at him.

Tyler was really beginning to rely on that smile. It was one of the only things keeping him going. He sat up and smile back at Jonathan. "What's up?"

"I just came from the media room," Jonathan started. "Those

demon assholes are preventing supplies from reaching the people."

It was the first time Tyler had heard Jonathan swear. He knew that meant something. "Damn," his brain started working on a way to fix that.

"I want to go help them," Jonathan told him straight out. "I know I said I wanted, needed to be near you at all times, but I feel like, this is something I can do something about," he continued. "The people are suffering, I need to do something."

"I understand," Tyler told him. And he did. There was very little for Jonathan to do in the church other than be a calming presence. "I think it's a good idea, actually, but take a couple angels with you maybe," Tyler suggested.

"They should all stay here with you, they will be needed soon," Jonathan protested.

"We have half a dozen more downtown," Tyler reminded him. "You cannot go alone, first of all there are too many demons out there gunning for us, plus the more of you there are, the more

borders and hotspots you can protect."

"I am more concerned about keeping you protected," Jonathan admitted, looking at his fingers, not at Tyler directly.

Tyler pulled Jonathan's chin up gently and looked at him. "I want to protect you, you want to protect me, how about find a compromise."

Jonathan nodded. "I will take one LAPD officer and one angel."

"Two officers, one angel," Tyler said.

Jonathan agreed. "Do you want to talk to them?"

"Not necessary, there is no hierarchy here, they respect you more than me anyway," Tyler shrugged.

"They just don't know you," Jonathan smiled again.

"Let me know when you have your team and you're getting ready to head out," Tyler said. "And let me know if you need

anything from me."

Jonathan thought that over. What he needed was to know if he should have any hope of Tyler coming around and giving him the chance to show him what true friendship, true faith and true, unconditional love could be. But Tyler's hard outer shell was only lightly cracked and he would not have the time to do all that before he left. "I'll come say goodbye when we're heading out."

"Not goodbye, do not say goodbye," Tyler stood up and walked toward the media room.

Jonathan approached Abby and Gabriel who were sitting together in one of the pews watching the people milling about. "I have a mission," he said when they turned to him in acknowledgement.

"What kind of mission?" Gabriel asked.

"Supplies are not getting through the borders and apparently the skies are no longer being protected by the angels," he sounded more accusatory than he meant to. "I mean,

whoever was guarding it is either no longer doing so or, not able to keep the demons from shooting down rescue helicopters," he added.

"We can only keep the skies from being occupied by demons, if the copters are being shot down from the ground, we are unable to protect that," Abby told him. "How can we help?"

"Tyler has agreed to let me take a few LAPD officers and one angel to the worst hit areas and make sure supplies get to them, I am not sure what that means yet, but something needs to be done," he told her.

Abby looked at Gabriel "Do you want to pick someone or should we ask for volunteers?"

"Let's send Jessica, that is a very good task for her to be a part of," Gabriel suggested.

Abby nodded in agreement. "I will talk to Jessica," she said to Jonathan.

Parker and his LAPD officers were in their own group. They

looked up and greeted Jonathan as he approached. "What's up chief?" Parker asked him.

Jonathan stifled a laugh at the word chief. "Looking for a couple volunteers to help with a mission," he told them. "Could be dangerous, but will help a lot of people."

The officers sat up straighter and gave him their full attention. Jonathan filled them in on what he needed, where they were going, and when. By the time he was done he had to explain many times that he was only being allowed to take two officers with him. Parker left the group to go talk to Tyler himself.

Parker found Tyler in the media room pacing as he watched the coverage. "You should really stop watching the news," he suggested.

"It helps keep me motivated," Tyler told him. "What can I do for ya?"

"I know that we need the numbers, I know you are planning a big showdown in the next day or so," Parker said. "But you cannot let Jonathan leave here with one angel and two police

officers," he paused. Tyler thought he was protesting but before he could respond Parker held up his hand "that's not enough. You can see that can't you?" he pointed at the televisions still rolling the footage of helicopters falling to the ground in flames and trucks being turned away at the borders.

Tyler nodded. "As many as you can spare without leaving us more vulnerable, and I will talk to the angels about sending one more as well."

Tyler approached Jonathan who was sitting on his own cot packing items he thought he might need. "Parker and Abby seem to think I am insane for letting you leave here with one angel and two officers," he said. Jonathan looked up and raised an eyebrow. "So, we came to an agreement and you will have six officers and three angels with you," he sat down next to him.

"Where does that leave you?" Jonathan asked.

"We will be fine," Tyler told him. "Have a strategy yet?"

"Nope," Jonathan continued to add things to the backpack he was stuff with a mixture of holy water, weapons and food items.

Tyler sat forward. "If you can ensure that the helicopters can fly in safely, you will not have to worry about the border patrol issue. The trucks can stop near the borders, load choppers with supplies and let them fly in," he said.

"Yeah, that's where I was going to focus the efforts," he said.

"You have an endless supply of holy water," Tyler reminded him. "And weapons if you need to continue to bless the bullets and knives and such," he said.

"I know, I cannot be in more than one place though, and it seems that all the supply areas are being affected," Jonathan said.

"Set up a central landing area, have the supplies dropped off there, and have the officers and angels distribute them to other areas," Tyler suggested.

Jonathan nodded. "You are better at this than you think."

"I am not sure that is such a good thing," Tyler told him.

Jonathan turned to him and put a hand on his knee. "People who are meant to be good at certain things shine when the time is right," he said. "I know that you are struggling with the leadership role, and having so many people rely on you, but embrace this now, defeat this enemy and store away what you have learned for later."

"I wish I could see what you see," Tyler said. "A future in which we win this fight, and things go back to normal."

"See it, believe in it, have faith in it," Jonathan said.

"Faith," Tyler said the word back to him. "It still amazes me you can talk about faith when things are so epically falling apart."

Jonathan waited to find the words that did not pull Tyler out of this conversation. "The thing is, when times are toughest, faith is what gets some people through," he said.

"Faith is what let me down in tough times, Jon," Tyler

said.

"Faith did not let you down, humans did," Jonathan told him. "Or at least, a handful of them who put their faith in the wrong thing."

"Who decides what is the right thing and what is the wrong thing?" Tyler asked him.

Jonathan looked at him. On the one hand this was the first time he had ever had Tyler opened up in a non confrontational way in regards to this topic. On the other, that was a question that would take days to discuss. "Those that are out to cause other people harm, wrong kind of faith," he said. "What your parents and your church did to you is abhorrent and yes, a common occurrence all over the country," he admitted. "But they thought they were doing something right, and they did not take into consideration the doing people harm rule. By denying your sexuality and trying to take away who you are they were going against their own faith, without even knowing it. I am sorry you had to go through that," he said. "I am not asking you to believe in God, or Christianity or any other form of religion. I am asking you to believe in humanity. I am asking you to believe

in me."

Tyler felt his throat close. Instead of allowing tears he leaned forward and pressed his lips against Jonathan's. Jonathan did not protest, he not only let Tyler kiss him, he leaned into him and kissed him back.

#

Raphael stood in front of his angel army. Chloe stood in front of her demon army. No one made any moves. After several long minutes Chloe spoke to the angel. "Right now, you are thinking, there is no way our small group of angels can beat this army of demons," she said. "And you are right in thinking that. Go back to wherever it is you came from and watch from there as we continue to dominate this city, and begin taking over the others."

"You are mistaken," Raphael answered her in his booming voice. It was a stark contrast to his ethereal appearance. "My companions are working out their targeting plan in order to do the most damage without harming any of your human followers. I was also trying to figure out what such a powerful demon as yourself would find useful about such weak creatures, and then I realized they are shields. Sacrifices you are willing to make to

save your own skin."

The humans scattered within the demon army began shifting their weight, whispering to one another. Chloe silenced them by holding up her hand. "That is an interesting observation," she said. "Wrong, but interesting."

"Then you wouldn't mind having them wait outside until we are finished laying waste to you and your horde," Raphael said. He was not hopeful that his tactics were going to work, but it was worth saying the words to get the minds of the humans whirling about, wondering what their real purpose here was.

"I am afraid I cannot do that, you see you have already told me that you are not willing to harm us as long as their are humans around, not a good strategy, what was your name?" Chloe smiled in her defense lawyer winning over a jury way.

"Ah, you misunderstood. We are willing to harm every last one of you, we just wanted to make sure the humans among you were aware of their function here," Raphael told her.

More shifting and whispering went through the crowd. Some

of them began moving to the back of the crowd, shielding themselves behind larger demons.

"Humans are so predictable," Raphael smiled at Chloe. "And changeable."

Chloe had about enough of the talking. She signaled for the demon next to her to attack Raphael. He charged at the angel, but Raphael was much faster. His palm was up and shooting bright white light before the demon took more than a step forward. It disintegrated into thin air causing many of the humans to gasp and move even further back from the horde, and causing some of the demons to flinch enough for Chloe and the angels to notice.

"I am Raphael," he turned his eyes back to Chloe who's demeanor had changed from the tough demon leader to someone wondering if she was in over her head. "Perhaps you have heard of me. I am one of the archangels."

Chloe noticed a bright gold glow in Raphael's eyes. Despite her best efforts the effect on her was chilling. She recovered fairly quickly though. "Parlor tricks, what's the matter Raphael, afraid to beat us in hand to hand combat?"

Raphael motioned for one of his angels to step forward. Chloe glared at the demon on her left who had just watched Raphael disintegrate his counterpart into nothing. The demon begrudgingly stepped forward. The angel grabbed his arm, pulled it behind his back and threw the demon to the ground like he was a feather, he then pulled a silver blade from his belt and plunged it into the demon's heart. The demon vanished. "Any other requests?" Raphael asked Chloe.

"I am not going to sacrifice anyone else so that you can prove you have a bigger dick than me," Chloe snarled at him.

"We will be going now, we just wanted to make sure you and your friends knew what was in store for you in the coming days," Raphael told her. He motioned for his group to head back out the door, backing up toward it. "This has been fun."

Chloe was tempted to send demons after them but when she turned to make the command she noticed they were much less an army as they were a group of terrified children.

Raphael led his group through the city, stopping to clean

up some of the mess as they made their way toward the main hub in Westchester where Tyler and his people were waiting.

Inside the church Jonathan was doing one final inventory check on the supplies he and his crew were taking with them. When he was certain they had everything he went to find Tyler. He had made Tyler promise he would not say the word goodbye under any circumstances. He was unsure Tyler could hold up that bargain but he was not going to walk out of the church without at least seeing his face. He found Tyler sitting at a table drawing lines on a map and circling certain points of interest. Tyler looked up and tried a smile when he saw Jonathan enter. "Heading out?"

"Yeah, we're all set," Jonathan told him.

Tyler stepped out from behind the table and stood in front of Jonathan. He was unsure exactly what to say, so instead of words he used his eyes, and then hugged Jonathan tight before sending him off with a light kiss on the lips.

Jonathan joined his group, three angels and six police officers, and led them out of the church.

Tyler was doing his best to keep focus on the map in front of him and not watch Jonathan walk out of the church. Abby came into the room and caught his attention.

"Gabriel and I have been talking," she said. "And we think we have figured out how to close the gates back up."

"Close them?" Tyler was unsure what she meant.

"With Chloe and as many of the demons as possible inside them," she said.

"That is a great idea, except, there is no way we are getting Chloe and a city full of demonic creatures back into hell by walking them into one of the four designated places."

"I did not say it would be easy," Abby pointed out. "I just said we may know how."

Gabriel appeared in the doorway. "Raphael is here," he told them. Abby and Tyler nodded to him and headed out to the main area of the church. Gabriel introduced Tyler to Raphael, and

pointed to Uriel, Raguel, Remiel and Saraqael, the archangels.

Tyler felt small in this group of angelic beings. Especially with six high angels surrounding him. He nodded to them all and thought about saying thank you but could not speak.

"How did it go at the warehouse?" Gabriel asked.

"Your visit did not seem to scare them as much as we hoped, the Chloe woman is defiant, overconfident," Raphael answered. "But we were able to send a stronger message," he motioned to the other high angels. "I have a feeling the humans will be leaving her cause, if they have not done so yet, and the demons are scared. They are all very young, I do not believe they were aware of what kind of damage an angel can do."

"What kind of damage did you do?" Tyler found his voice.

"Intimidation tactics only, do not worry," Raphael answered.

Tyler leaned against one of the pew backs. "Abby was telling me you may have found a way of closing the gates back

up," he said to Gabriel. "We did not have a chance to discuss the details, and, what the benefits of that would be at this point." A silent moment passed between and Tyler realized the angels were speaking to each other psychically. "Can you speak out loud, please?"

"Sorry, we were filling those who have just joined us in on the discovery, no disrespect meant," Gabriel told him.

This rattled Tyler for a moment. "Sorry I am very on edge with all of this, please, go on," he said.

"There are two ways this can be done. One, we find and eliminate every demon in the city except Chloe, who we now are aware cannot be killed," Abby started. "Then we lure Chloe to the final open gate and lock her inside when we close it."

"Eliminating the demons first would be the easiest, I would think," Tyler said. "I am not sure how we can lure hundreds of demons to four locations."

"Agreed," Raphael said.

"So we continue with our plan of attack against Chloe's army at the warehouse, while we send as many as we can spare to West Hollywood, Burbank, Wilshire District and Long Beach," Tyler suggested.

"The final gate is down the street, at Salvation," Abby's voice cracked when she said the name of the bar. Where she had fought Chloe and lost. "There are five gates here, remember?"

"Right," Tyler nodded to her, remembering the same night vividly. "Which is likely going to be the best place to lure Chloe in," he pointed out. Abby nodded in agreement. "I have been mapping out an attack plan, we need to fan out into the city, we cannot focus on the downtown area alone. We know from the news reports that there are still many demons loose all over the city."

"From what we witnessed at the warehouse this morning, the younger, more controllable demons are with Chloe, the ones she and Azazel have not been able to tame are the ones running around destroying things," Raphael said.

"Which is both good and bad for us," Tyler said. "The good

news is, Chloe's army should be easier to defeat, the bad news is, cleaning up the city will need the more powerful among us."

"As long as there are two archangels in each other's presence, the power we can yield will be a huge advantage," Gabriel told him. "Raphael's efforts were more affective than mine because he had four higher angels with him, I had only myself," he said.

"Good to know," Tyler smiled at him.

#

Jonathan led his team through the streets of Los Angeles. He could already see a noticeable difference in the state of things in the area. Raphael and his angels had obviously taken the same route, cars were on their wheels instead of their roofs or sides, trash cans smelled of smoke and fire but were no longer burning. Some of the downed power lines were back upright. "There are no demons in the area," Jessica announced as they continued up Sepulveda through Culver City. When they reached West Los Angeles they rounded the corner onto Pico, they passed the Westside Pavilion shopping mall and Jessica whispered "There are demons somewhere near here."

"Continue walking quietly, they are usually asleep during the day," Jonathan told the officers. The angels had continued on anyway. They knew of the sleeping habits of demons. They passed the mall and were heading toward Century City and the Fox Studio Lot, there had been no movement but Jessica continued to confirm the presence of demons near every building they passed. Which in the city of Los Angeles was a lot. They had reached the golf course and were feeling confident that they were going to make it to their destination without incident when Jonathan saw movement on his left. He kept the group moving, watching the shadows between buildings. "Cross the street, now," he commanded as quietly as he could. The more light they were in the less strength the demons had. They followed the rot iron gates of the golf course. They could see the studio in a few yards in front of them. The demons who had been hiding decided it was worth the risk to attack in broad daylight and ascended on them. That was their first mistake. The second mistake was going after Jessica first. Because she had been in the lead next to Jonathan her angel scent was stronger than the other two who were mixed in with the officers. Jessica held up her palm and blasted her attacker into the ether. Jonathan and Frazier, one of the officers who was flanking him took care of the other two.

"Let's pick up the pace," Jonathan suggested.

There were many reasons Century City served as a good hub for rescue workers to send people running out of food or needing shelter. Fox Studios was the centerpiece of the area that covered several miles. The studio's stages served as housing for those displaced by the destructive monsters and just up the road, on Avenue the Stars, a helipad sat atop one of the Fox owned buildings. Just ahead was the big outdoor mall where people had raided stores for food, clothing, and of course electronic devices and expensive jewelry which they had been selling between them for more food, clothing, and shelter.

Jonathan had been in contact with the people in the area and been given as much information as they could tell him. He was still surprised by the amount of shelter seekers there. He was not as surprised at how chaotic it was. "Demons keep sweeping through here, causing trouble, we do not have the means to fight them, we can only hide inside until they are done wrecking havoc on our camp. I'm Isabelle, I think I talked to you earlier," a woman with a round face and dark brown eyes greeted them at the studio gate. "I cannot tell you how happy I am to see you," she grasped Jonathan's hand tightly, like she

was holding on to life. She led them further into the gates.

Jonathan noticed a pile of chains and locks sitting in front of the metal sliding gate.

"We chained and padlocked it until we ran out of chains and padlocks," she told him.

Jessica turned back and picked up one of the chains and one of the padlocks. Her hand glowed white and the chain fixed itself. She wrapped it around the end of the gate and the poll that held it closed and then fixed the padlock in the same manner.

Isabelle reached for her neck and wrapped her hand around a crucifix she was wearing. "When you said you were bringing angels I thought you meant people who were willing to help, I did not think you meant actual angels," she said to Jonathan.

"These are strange times," he answered.

Isabelle led them into the depths of the Fox Studio lot. If you were not aware that an apocalypse had taken place outside

the walls, you would think this was a film set and these were extras waiting for the director to yell action.

"We have been in contact with the other shelter sites, I guess being stranded in Los Angeles makes one turn to entertainment at all times," Isabelle noted. "Sony, Paramount, Warner Bros and Disney are all housing people, they are having the same issues as we are, late night attacks, monsters blocking them from receiving supplies," she said.

"We are going to set up around here, make this the central area to receive supplies. We will be distributing the supplies between each shelter using humvees which are being delivered first thing in the morning," Jonathan told her.

"Delivered how?" Isabelle asked.

"The army is flying them in, they are military grade, bullet proof, debris proof machines," Jonathan assured her. "In the meantime, we are going to have officers stationed at the gates overnight, we will be able to eliminate any demons attempting to enter or cause damage to the area," he told her.

"Eliminate?" Isabelle asked him.

"Eliminate," Jonathan said again. "Meaning, gone, vanished, sent back to the depths of hell from which they came," he emphasized.

Isabelle let out a giant sigh of relief. "You are all angels, indeed," she patted Jonathan on the arm.

The presence of the angels among the sheltered men, women and children made a difference immediately. Isabelle's demeanor had changed, and that helped the people around her feel hope as well. Many hands reached out to touch Jessica, Theo and Alexis. The angels smiled and assured them that things were going to be alright. The uniformed officers also made a strong difference, especially to the studio guards who's mortal weapons had been no help to them when the demons attacked each night. Jonathan walked through the crowd and blessed their guns, bullets and clubs. "Bring me as many bottles of water you can spare, used bottles filled with any water you can find, but do not diminish your water supply," he told Isabelle, who passed on the command to others who had been designated as helpers.

Jonathan spent the afternoon blessing water bottles and varying weapons people had brought in with them. Before sundown he took Jessica and two officers with him to assess the damage to the helicopter landing site. Inside the SunAmerica building he pushed the up button on the elevator just on a whim. They were surprised to find it was still working. They used it to travel to the roof. Heavy damage had been sustained to the walls surrounding the outer edges of the helipad, propellers and tails were strewn across the roof. "Let's clear a path," Jonathan suggested. When they felt the roof was cleared enough they took the elevator back down. Jonathan surveyed the lobby area. "Can you check and see if there is a freight elevator?" he asked one of the officers. "Callahan, right?" the officer nodded and made his way to the back of the building. "This is a good place to store and distribute the supplies," he told Jessica and Sharp, the other officer. He agreed.

"You will need at least two guards, down here, I think you will be okay with mortals," Jessica told him. "I will travel with one humvee, we should have an angel travel with the other," she said. "Alexis, I would suggest," she continues. "Theo should be on the roof, and there should be officers stationed on all sides of the building."

Jonathan looked at her puzzled.

"I was military before I, ascended," Jessica told him.
"That is why they sent me with you."

Jonathan nodded. "Thank you," he said. "For everything."

Eric returned to report that there was in fact a freight elevator. "Great, we will need it to move supplies from the roof," Jonathan said. When felt he had assessed the area enough he suggested they head back to the studio before the sun set. When they returned Jonathan filled Isabelle in on his plan to use the SunAmerica building as the main hub for receiving and distributing supplies. "I need volunteers," he told her.

"Are we safe here now, do you think?" she asked him.

"Yes, you will be safe here until this nightmare is over," he said.

"We try not to gather in one place, but I will have everyone meet in the cafeteria, it is large enough to hold all

of us and will be a good place to let the people know what is happening," Isabelle said. "We will let them know what we need and go from there."

"Very good," Jonathan told her.

By the late evening Isabelle had everyone that was willing to come gathered in the cafeteria. She introduced Jonathan and gave him the floor. "I am going to keep this brief," he began. "If anyone would like a full sermon I would be happy to hold one, but for now, I would like you to know what is going on out there, and what we intend on doing about it."

People sat up turned their full attention to him. He explained the efforts he and Tyler had been putting into place, without giving too much information, and then he came to why he had come to them. He laid out his plan to for the supply chain and asked for volunteers. It did not surprise him that dozens of hands shot up eagerly. Some parents pulled their children's hands down. "We need anyone able to help, if the children would like to be a part of this effort, let's let them," he suggested. "We will meet here first thing in the morning, until then, please sleep peacefully in the knowledge that you are safe here

now."

#

Jonathan settled himself into the sleeping area he had been given inside stage 8 where prop beds from various sets had been laid out in rows leaving just enough room to allow for some sort of feeling of personal space. He looked around at the people in the room and saw a bit of hope. He had just given one of his most impassioned sermons, which had been requested by an overwhelming vote. He had never seen so many people gathering to pray and hear positive words at once. Hope was exactly what he was hoping to bring to them. It felt right to be there. After a few moments of reflection Jonathan pulled out his cell phone and began typing on the screen. He promised Tyler a full update. Tyler replied with short answers, they had agreed to keep their conversations to business. So far they were sticking to that rule.

Officers Frazier, Callahan and Sharp joined angels Jessica, Alexis and Theo on the first watch, one angel and one officer were posted at three gates located throughout the lot. That night there was little to no activity. At the front gate Jessica and Callahan watched as two demons approached the area, sniffed around, and headed back to the shadows. The others reported no

activity at their gates. . Tate, Muñoz and Williams relieved their fellow officers just before dawn. "Angels do not need sleep," Alexis assured Tate when he joined her at the side gate for his shift. By the time the sun rose in the morning none of the gates had been bothered. This news both satisfied and bothered Jonathan.

Jonathan took Jessica, Frazier and Sharp with him to the SunAmerica building to wait the arrival of the humvee and first round of supplies. There was no need to have any of the volunteers there at this point, he had told them, and he was glad he had made that decision once they arrived at the building. His phone chirped right as they reached the lobby doors, the Army helicopter was five minutes away. Jonathan turned to tell his companions and saw that three creatures were barreling down Avenue of the Stars toward them. The sound of the chopper could be heard in the distance. Jessica and officer Sharp took defensive stances, Jonathan and officer Frazier stood behind them ready to take on whichever demons got through. Jessica's military training and angelic powers rendered that plan obsolete, all three creatures disappeared in front of them instantly. "Watch for others," Jonathan said, motioning for Frazier to follow him.

The chopper slowly lowered the humvee onto the street in front of them in an area with the least amount of debris strewn across it. Jonathan jumped into the driver's side and started the engine. That was about all he was able to manage. Beside him officer Frazier smiled. "Maybe should have had Jessica handle this part?"

"Maybe," Jonathan smiled back. "Know anything about driving one of these things?"

"A little, let me try," Frazier told him as they switched places. Turned out the officer was much better at operating the Army vehicle than he let on. They headed toward the SunAmerica building to park the monster machine nearby, crushing objects with ease as they traveled.

Once they had the humvee in a spot where Jessica and officer Sharp could keep an eye on it while also guarding the doors Jonathan and Frazier headed to the roof to wait for the first supply helicopter to arrive. When the sounds of the propellers could be heard in the distance they stepped to the edge to see if any demon creatures had come out to play. They

watched as Jessica surveyed the building on all sides.

"I feel like John McLane," Frazier joked. "Yippee ki-yay!" he screamed into the wind. "Die Hard?" Frazier said when Jonathan looked at him in utter confusion.

"Oh," Jonathan answered but was still not sure what that had to do with anything.

"McLane jumped from one of the windows, it was filmed at this building," Frazier told him. "Cop thing I guess."

Jonathan's face lightened with the realization "Ah, okay."

The awkward moment between them was saved by the sight of a large supply helicopter approaching. Below, Jessica was stalking around each corner ready to disintegrate any demon she saw. She had just rounded the corner at the front of the building to rejoin Sharp when she saw two demons, less creature and more human, approaching with large weapons. She put her finger to her lips to make sure Sharp did not give away their presence. When she knew she was at close enough range and just before the trigger was pulled on the rocket launcher being aimed at the

approaching chopper she blasted the shooter and one of his friends, one with each hand. The other three demons spun around to find out where the blast had come from. Jessica eliminated the next two and then the final one in less than ten seconds.

The helicopter landed on the roof of the building and the pilot turned the propellers and engine off before jumping out to greet Jonathan and officer Frazier. "When they said that there would be backup waiting to ensure safe landing I had my doubts," the pilot greeted them. "But I appear to have been mistaken." They were unsure of what he was talking about. "Below, a group of demons vanished, some girl with light shooting out of her palms took care of em," he explained. Jonathan nodded to Frazier who ran to the edge to check out the scene below.

"All clear," he shouted when he saw Jessica and Sharp standing together at the front door and no other sign of activity nearby.

The first chopper was sent in as a test, it had only a handful of boxes of food and clothing on it. Jonathan had agreed to allow them to fly in with a light load to ensure that the promises he had made were going to be true. "Let the others

know, it is safe to fly in to this airspace as of today," Jonathan told the pilot when the last box was unloaded. He saluted the pilot and watched as the two large propellers on top of the vehicle began to spin and lift it back into the air.

When Jessica heard the engines of the chopper fire back up she went on high alert once again, darting her eyes back and forth, smelling the air for any demonic scent. "Sulfur, demons smell strongly of sulfur, and death," she had told Sharp who had asked what it was she had been sniffing around for. When the chopper was out of sight she relaxed and looked up toward the roof. Frazier waved and signaled for them to come up.

"Wish our radios hadn't gone out," Sharp commented as he and Jessica joined Frazier and Jonathan.

Frazier nodded. "I wonder if we can find some on the lot."

They stacked the boxes behind a large desk in the lobby and waited for another wave of choppers to arrive. Jessica kept walking in and out of the building watching for any sort of demon activity. She was not a good sit and wait person before she became an angel, now with the endless life and new powers

surging through her she was even less patient. "Another chopper," she announced after about an hour of pacing in and out of the lobby.

"I told them the skies were free and clear of danger," it was the same chopper and same pilot, now with many more boxes and bags. He helped unload them and stack them in the lobby before leaving for another run. "See you again soon," he saluted at them as he left.

"Jessica, can you let the other angels know we are ready to have the volunteers head over," he asked, remembering they were linked telepathically.

She closed her eyes and stood still for a minute. "They're on their way," she told him.

"We need to be able to do that," Sharp said to Frazier as they watched her. "Instead of those dumb ass radios that constantly run out of batteries."

"Not so sure I want to know what all of my fellow officers are thinking," Frazier joked. "No offense," he chuckled.

"You bring up a very good point," Sharp noted.

Jonathan put Isabelle in charge giving the volunteers jobs to do and keeping them moving. He grabbed a handful of them and led them to the roof to help unload choppers and load the freight elevator as supplies came in. Theo had joined them, taking some of the burden off of Jessica to be the only angel on site to ward off any demons who dared attack.

Organization lacked slightly, this being the first day. But before the sun had set there were boxes of food, water, clothing, weapons and other essentials stacked in the lobby, with areas designated each kind of item. The humvee was filled with the same supplies, with officer Muñoz and angel Alexis ready to take it to Sony, the first drop off point.

"We will have the rest of the humvees tomorrow," Jonathan told them. "We needed to make sure this was all going to work first."

As the sun was beginning to set the officers led the volunteers back to the Fox lot while Alexis and Jessica stayed

with Jonathan to secure the building from any demons who might try to break in overnight.

"Angelic spells will lock these doors tighter than any mortal devices," Jessica told Jonathan as she and Alexis waved their hands over the windows and doors. She was taking care of the lower floors while Alexis took care of the roof and upper floors. "Our powers reach farther than you can imagine," she said. "The only creatures entering this building will be of the angel or human kind."

Jonathan nodded and smiled at her. "I am glad you're here," he said. "I am sorry about whatever it is that took you away from your mortal world," he added.

"I took a bullet meant for a soldier in my platoon," she told him. "Not in battle."

Jonathan did not ask any more questions, Jessica had turned her attention back to the job of warding the building and dropped the subject.

#

The church felt emptier, Tyler thought. He knew that it was

only because Jonathan was not by his side, and that made him feel strange. He sat in his corner and watched as police officers, angels and soldiers mingled with men, women and children seeking safety. Responsibility. That is what he felt for them. That was not a feeling he was comfortable with either.

Jonathan had sent him a text message with his daily report. Efforts on that end were going better than they could have imagined. That gave Tyler a small bit of solace. But shortly after that update he received one from Sergeant Nelson at the border between California and Nevada. Border patrol was losing their ground, an influx of people were trying to leave California. And there was no way tell if they were part of the new Chloe regime or if they were simply looking for food, shelter and safety the state was unable to provide. Tyler told Nelson about Jonathan's news that the supply runs were no longer in danger. He suggested Nelson pass that on to his people and to the border patrol agents who were working with the Army to ensure safety in and out of the state.

Tyler stood up from his cot, he looked around the room and found who he was seeking. Officer Parker was resting his head against a pew toward the front of the church. Tyler sat next to

him. "Sorry to wake you," he said. Parker nodded to indicate he was alright with it. "I need to get a team out to the warehouse, keep an eye on Chloe's movements, bring an angel with you," Tyler told Parker.

"I can go, I'll bring a couple officers," Parker stood up and stretched his legs. "Expect there to be any trouble?"

"What I expect and what happens do not seem to be in sync these days," Tyler answered. "But, no, I just need someone posted nearby so that I know what she is doing, any demon movement, if the humans are still with her."

"Understood," Parker said as he stepped out of the pew and headed toward his group of officers, Tyler moved toward the angel group and asked for one of them to join Parker on his journey.

A few minutes later Parker, two officers and two angels were gathered at the front door. Tyler handed Parker a cell phone. "I am still not sure why the satellites are all working but, text me information rather than radioing it in, we need to keep things as quiet as possible out there."

"Will do," Parker said taking the phone and putting it in the pocket of his uniform pants. He motioned for his group to head out and they were gone.

Tyler knew that the time to move out and go to war with the demons was coming. Sending Parker out was the last of the information gathering missions before he and the angels made their way downtown themselves. There had been no information coming in from anywhere now that Abby was on the same plane, and he had lost his link to Chloe's thoughts along with the link to the angel. "As soon as I hear from Parker about the situation, we'll be heading out too," he told Abby and Gabriel. "Be ready."

Amy approached and checked in with him. "We getting ready to roll out?" she asked.

Tyler nodded. "Couple hours," he said. The church was somber even when Tyler wasn't preparing to attack a city full of demons and their un-killable leader. Right now he felt like he was going to suffocate. He stepped outside the doors and stood on the steps, reminding himself of the damage done and the reasons he was doing this. He was still outside, sitting on the

step just outside the chapel doors when his phone pinged. The good news is, there are no more humans here, the angels are certain that the only bodies inside are demon in nature. The bad news is, there are more demons in the area than I have ever seen. It appears they are preparing for battle just as we are. The angels tell me that some of the creatures Chloe had not previously been able to control are here too. The only movement is in prep for war. The text read. Tyler shuddered.

Inside the church Tyler stood at the front and faced his warriors. He watched the officers and soldiers preparing weapons, shoving bottles of holy water into packs, bags and pockets. The angels watched the activity along with him, their preparation had already been done, on the higher plane, days ago, when they made the decision to defy their own rules and join the humans in battle.

As they left the church Tyler hoped that Parker had been exaggerating in his text and the numbers were not so skewed toward the demonic creatures side. He had a strong feeling that was wishful thinking. It took them just over an hour to walk from Westchester to Downtown Los Angeles. They met up with Parker and his small group who had been stationed just behind

one of the taller buildings across from the warehouse. "We have not seen anyone else arrive, or leave, since we have been here," Parker told Tyler after they had greeted each other. "Chloe is inside, as is Azazel."

Tyler nodded and stepped out from behind the building, catching the attention of the demons outside the warehouse. One of them headed inside after stopping the other two from charging at Tyler. Not a moment later Chloe was walking toward him with her usual evil smirk splashed across her face. "I was beginning to think you were not going to come through," she said to Tyler. "My demons are eager to sink their teeth into some flesh," she snarled out.

"How about you and I make a bit of a wager," Tyler ignored the threats. Chloe raised an eyebrow. "When we have defeated your demon army," he pointed behind him to indicated his team as we, "Let's you and I have a sit down and talk about how you are going to join Azazel and Lucifer in hell where you all belong."

Chloe laughed. "Your overconfidence is stunning," she said. "I will make sure it says that on your gravestone where you are buried, when I kill you." She shook her head and laughed again.

"How about we just get this all over with so that I can fulfill my prophecy and reap the benefits of my victory."

Chloe turned and motioned for the demons who had gathered outside of the warehouse to watch their little show to attack. As they moved toward Tyler he raised his hand and watched as bright white light shot out from the rooftops of the three buildings directly behind him. Demons disintegrated into thin air. Chloe motioned for the next wave to attack. Bottles of holy water joined the streams of angelic power being sent toward the hordes of creatures ascending on the downtown street. "This is how it is going to go for you, Chlo, you might want to reconsider my request," Tyler said as Chloe watched demon after demon disappear around here.

"They were weak, you have no idea what this army is capable of," Chloe screamed at him. She put her fingers between her lips and whistled, loud. Four large creatures barreled out from behind the warehouse and charged toward Tyler and his human army. The angels hobbled them with their light, but they were running out of juice. Tyler had to wait until the beasts were almost upon them before he could give the command to lob the holy water at the monsters. Two of them were eliminated in an

instant, one leaped at Parker who stabbed him with a silver blade that burned the demon's flesh and sent it reeling. He threw a bottle at the hobbled creature and it vanished. The other creature was heading directly at Tyler who held up his hand, "Stop," he yelled at the demon. It did, to Tyler's surprise. "I guess you don't have as much control over them as you thought," he taunted Chloe. "Catch," he yelled at the creature and tossed a bottle of holy water into its mouth, turning it into dust and air.

Chloe turned to Tyler and did her best to keep her composure. "You understand this entire state is crawling with demons, we can do this all day and deep into the night," she said.

"We have nowhere else to be," Tyler told her. "Call them all, we'll wait."

Chloe stomped back into the warehouse and Tyler rejoined his group. "She does not have as many creatures willing to fight this battle as she thinks," he assured his team who was looking worried despite their clear victory. "But she was not lying when she said this was the weakest of them, the ones we took care of

here were the least of our worries. Even the big guys. How long before you are back at full strength?" he asked the angels when they returned from the rooftops.

"Not long," Gabriel told him.

"You know she was not showing her full hand here," Tyler said to Abby when she came to stand next to him.

"I know, we are prepared, we did not show her our full hand either," she promised him.

"Let's set up back behind those buildings," Tyler pointed to the three buildings in front of them. "The angels will stand watch up top, I need a couple people on the ground," he told them.

Officer Parker volunteered, and so did Amy. Tyler nodded to them and they each took a post in front of a building directly across from the warehouse, where at the moment all was quiet. Tyler could not imagine what the scene looked like inside. He almost wanted to sneak up to the window and peak in, but he stifled the thought, reminding himself not to get too cocky.

#

Chloe stood in front of Azazel, her face red with anger, words not coming to her. He watched her in amusement, instead of trying to help her come up with the things she needed to say. Her mind was racing with ideas, plans, panic. Azazel could read the thoughts, he just enjoyed watching Chloe melt down.

"The archangels are here?" Azazel asked when Chloe's mind flashed on Gabriel.

"I told you, Raphael came to visit once already, and you saw Gabriel," she sounded annoyed.

"I know, it's just, they usually do not all gather at once, it isn't safe for them to be in the same battle," Azazel told her.

"Well, they're here," Chloe told him.

"All seven of them?" Azazel walked over to a window and looked out, and immediately up. He counted. "Three, there are three here," he said over his shoulder. "Gabriel, Michael, Uriel," he pointed to each one when Chloe joined him at the

window.

"Are the others here on this plane?" Chloe asked him.

"I am not sure," Azazel said. "But I am going to find out," he snapped his fingers and disappeared.

That left Chloe nearly alone in the large, cold, cement building. A handful of demons who had come when they heard her call to return to base were waiting on her to give them instructions. She approached them. "I need everyone in the city back here immediately," she told them. "And I need as many giant, mean, angry monsters as we can get to follow them here," she said. "Can you make that happen?"

They all nodded and fanned out of the building. Now Chloe was alone.

Azazel stood in front of Lucifer's giant leather chair, which was empty. The flame from the fireplace behind him was heating his cold blood, which had become so from being on the middle plane too long, and being alone in a room that used to be full of other hot blooded beings. "Lucifer," he said again, and

waited. A few minutes later Lucifer appeared in the chair, legs crossed, hands folded in front of him.

"I was quite busy making preparations for my ascent, what is it I can do for you," his smoky voice filled the room.

"Archangels, they have descended and are helping the humans, alongside their underlings," Azazel told him.

Lucifer paused for a moment. "Yes, but not without consequence," he said. "And not all of them."

"Gabriel, Uriel, Raphael," Azazel said.

"Remiel, Raguel and Saraqael as well, Michael, on the other hand, stayed behind and stood with God as he smote the angels when they left the upper plane," Lucifer said.

"That is what I needed to know," Azazel said. "There are only three archangels standing in battle with the humans and lower angels."

"They are not all together?" Lucifer asked him.

"No, only the three I mentioned," Azazel answered.

"That is puzzling, their rules of battle should not matter now that they have been stricken from the higher plane," Lucifer said. "We cannot worry on this," he decided. "I have been working on something, something big, that could make this entire exercise all for naught anyway."

"What do you mean?" this news bothered Azazel. The only other alternative he knew of involved bloodshed of the higher demon kind, which meant himself and Lucifer, and that just, was not going to be possible.

"In time brother," Lucifer said. "Return to the middle plane and continue to help Chloe with this angel problem, make sure she does not lose all of our brothers and sisters in one day."

Azazel noted that Lucifer did not say all of them period. Even his older brother was having doubts that anyone but the three of them would survive this. If Azazel had his way it would end in just the two of them left standing in the center of the

middle plane, ready to paint it black. He returned to the warehouse as instructed, to find it empty except for Chloe. "Did you send more out to their deaths?"

Chloe jumped when she heard his voice. "Seriously, why can't you give me a warning when you are going to appear out of thin air?"

"Demon," he pointed at his chest. "Where is everyone?"

"I sent them out to drag the rest of the demons back here," Chloe told him.

"You better hope none of them have heard about what happened here earlier," Azazel commented.

That was what Chloe had been worrying about before Azazel returned from wherever it was he had disappeared to. News of demons being eliminated from this plane was traveling all over the city. She knew that any one of them that had not shown up when the battle was at hand were hiding from her, and the human/angel army. They would have no choice but to join her, once they were found. It was the deal they made when they came into this

world.

On the other side of the city, Archangel Remiel stood in front of a glass case on board the Queen Mary. It had previously displayed items from Princess Diana, one of her outfits, some other paraphernalia, and a Union Jack flag pillow. The pillow was gone. Remiel stood there and felt around, in his mind, for the next strongest item in the room. His inner eye stopped on a jeweled tiara. He looked around the room for it. Among the broken glass and ransacked items he found it hiding. When he picked it up he felt the energy it held. It was stronger than anything he had felt on this plane. It made him wonder why they did not use this item as a ward in the first place. He said a prayer over it and placed the tiara inside the display case where the pillow had previously sat. Item is in place. He sent a psychic message to his brothers and sister.

In the back of the Petersen Auto Museum Saraqael stood over a painted machine that read "Greased Lightning." It confused her, but she did not ponder on it for long. She placed her hands over the hood and said a silent prayer, securing it as a ward once again. Item is in place. She announced when her task was complete.

When Raguel arrived at the Warner Bros studios in Burbank the place was bustling with activity. They had just received their first wave of supplies and were distributing the items amongst each other. He went virtually unnoticed, and continued down to the New York Street setting further into the lot. He entered through the door of a building that looked like a brownstone, but held props and other items used on different sets throughout the studio's history. It was one of the forgotten vaults, and Raguel was able to find an item to bless much quicker than he had imagined. Item is in place. He announced. Return to base. He heard in reply.

Abby made her way down from the top of one of the building she was standing watch on and found Tyler talking strategy with Parker and Amy. "The items have been put in place," she told him.

Tyler nodded. "Thank you. How does everything look up there?"

"Not much movement, Chloe and Azazel are the only ones inside, the demons who had been there earlier have not returned,

which tells me they might not have been successful in finding others to join them," she said.

"Good," Tyler said. "Thanks again," he tried to smile.

#

Lucifer's study looked like the apocalypse he had helped create had extended into his lair. Books, papers and talismans were scattered on his desk, on the floor, on chairs. He sat in a large red leather desk chair with his face in a giant book that was so old the pages were yellow and disintegrating. The ancient words and images swam on the page. Lucifer watched as they slowed down and began forming a story. He followed as each image and letter combination gave him more information, showing ancient beings offering blood, animals and humans as sacrifices to ancient gods. It was the final image that intrigued him most. A demonic woman, red in color with small horns on her forehead and sharp teeth bared, was handing the god of fire a baby. Her baby, the story said. "A female child born in the bloodline of a being of pure evil is sacrificed, returning evil's reign the middle plane," Lucifer read the page out loud. "I already know that!" he screamed and banged his fist on the desk, watching as the corners of the book he had open flaked onto the mahogany wood. He looked at the page again. "A baby, born in the

bloodline of pure evil, will be sacrificed," he read again.

"Baby, sacrifice! Azazel!" he called for his brother.

Azazel was standing next to Chloe as she waited for her minions to return to the warehouse with more minions and giant demonic creatures. Standing there in normal circumstances was risky, in these times it was terrifying. Her anger traveled through her like heat from a burning stove, and although Azazel quite liked being hot, this was stifling. He had decided to move to distance himself from her when he heard Lucifer's voice inside his head, loud, calling his name. "Be right back," he said and snapped his fingers. When he arrived in Lucifer's den it was empty. He could not understand why his teleportation power always brought him to this room. "Lucifer," he called out to see if his brother would answer him, giving him some sort of idea where he was. No answer. He finally found the hell king in his study, staring at an ancient book, grinning ear to ear. "What?" Azazel could not help but ask him, he had never seen his brother so happy.

Lucifer pointed to the book. Azazel stepped around the table and looked at it. The pictures and words were swimming around the page again. "It's all jumbled," he told Lucifer.

"Give it a minute, it will come together," Lucifer said. Sure enough, the pictures and words formed the story for Azazel as it did Lucifer. "I do not understand, I thought this was what we were doing already?" Azazel asked when he had finished reading.

"This book, it dates back to before even our time," Lucifer told him. "This is an ancient bible telling the story of how the demons who came before us were able to rule the middle lands," he said. "He must have taken from some of this scripture to form His own book. When we found the hidden text in our book, the one we have been living by for centuries, we believed that the savior of evil would be found, and she would break down the gates of hell," Lucifer pointed to the picture again. "We were wrong."

Azazel knew what Lucifer was suggesting. He did not want to believe it was where his brother was taking this, but he knew that the demon would do anything to have his time in Earth restored. "You cannot possibly be thinking about impregnating that woman," he shuddered.

"Oh no, it cannot be me," Lucifer looked at Azazel and waited for him to catch up.

"No, that is, no," Azazel shook his head violently.

"You are acting as if the human ritual of sexual contact is necessary to impregnate her," Lucifer laughed at this idea. "You have already spent too much time traveling between the planes. No dear brother, you know that is not how we do things down here."

Chloe was so busy watching the door that she missed the fact that Azazel had for once warned her that we was leaving, and she barely noticed his return. Azazel was not surprised to find her in the same spot he left her in, and not any less surprised that the warehouse was still empty. What surprised him was the change in energy he felt just outside the building. "Something is different," he told Chloe and moved to the window to have a look. "Six. All six archangels are here now," he pointed up to the rooftop where the angels were standing guard. He was going to name them off again when he noticed Tyler approaching the building.

"I know that it is not usually customary for the good guys to tell the bad guys of their plans, but we really have not been

doing any of this in a traditional manner so why start now?"

Tyler did not greet Chloe, he just blurted those words out when she opened the door a crack and peeked out at him.

Chloe shrugged in agreement. He was right, this whole thing was going strangely.

"It does not appear that any other demons are coming to join your cause," he said. "I was wondering if you would like to join me in celebration of my victory, either at The Abbey, or down at Salvation."

"First, you have not yet won, second, even if I were to admit defeat to you, I will not be celebrating anything with you, at any bar anywhere," Chloe answered.

"Well, I thought maybe if I invited you nicely we could have a drink, toast to my job well done and then I could escort you into hell, where you belong, before we close the gates again," Tyler said.

"You're right, you do things in an odd manner," Chloe responded. "You just told me your plan, now I am definitely not

showing up to either of those places, for celebrations or anything else."

"See, I think maybe you will show up. Because you still think you can win," he taunted her.

"There is only one way this fight is over," Chloe told him. "In death," she stepped back from the door and started to close it. "Yours." She slammed the door in his face. "They are planning on closing the gates back up, with me inside, by inviting me to my own goodbye party," she told Azazel.

"He's right," Azazel told her. "You will go, you will meet them at The Abbey, in fact, because you think you can beat them, despite all signs pointing otherwise."

"Why would I do that?" Chloe asked him.

"Because you already beat them there once," he said. "That is where you stabbed the angel, that is where you sent them running to hide in their house of worship, that is where this needs to end."

Chloe thought on this. It was definitely a trap, on both ends. She was beginning to like Tyler more than Azazel, which was not saying much to begin with but at least Tyler had been honest about his intentions. Maybe she could defeat both of her enemies in one shot. She opened the door and called back to Tyler. "I was just thinking, I am not usually one to turn down a good party," she told him. "You understand that I am not agreeing to celebrate a victory, and you are aware that I will not walk into the gates of hell without a fight, which will most definitely result in deaths and me dragging as many of you into hell with me, if you are able to succeed, that is."

"I would not expect anything less," Tyler told her.

Chloe turned to Azazel. "It is refreshing, that he is being so honest," she said. "I think you should give that a try, you might find it a useful tool."

"Demon, of high order," Azazel pointed at himself. He stared at Chloe for a few minutes, assessing whether or not the information should be shared, or if it would cause her to flee on the spot. He decided he liked the idea of making her skin crawl, as Lucifer had done with him. "We are defeated here, if

you have not noticed," he said. "Lucifer would be furious, if he had not found out that there is another way to carry out his plan."

Chloe's mouth dropped and her entire body tensed up at this revelation. "This was all for nothing?"

"Not necessarily, he just came upon this new development," Azazel tried to calm her.

"What is it?" Chloe demanded.

"Believe me when I tell you, I do not like the idea at, and if I thought we had any other choice, I would be going that route instead," he started. "Lucifer found a book, older than the ones we have been living by. Inside there are stories, very similar to our own, but the book is older than us, older than anything we have ever seen," he was dragging out the conversation.

Chloe huffed. She could tell that he was stalling.

"You and I need to have a baby," he told her.

Chloe choked on air. "I don't care who he is and how much he wants to rule this world from above ground! I am not having a child with you, or any other demon, and you are all out of your mind if you think I am going to go along with this!" she screamed at him.

Azazel smiled a little, this was the Chloe he wanted to see. His smile did not make the situation any better, it made it decidedly worse. "Calm yourself, you are going to burst that brain tumor of yours," he reminded her of that big thing looming, in her head, as it were. "We do create children in the traditional way, as demons," he told her. "There is a ritual, a blood ritual, those are the only bodily fluids exchanged."

Chloe stared at him like he had gone insane. "The answer is still no."

#

The Salvation Bar felt darker and dingier than it did when it wasn't in shambles. Tyler stood in the middle of the wreckage and wondered why he had never noticed how desolate the place felt. Abby appeared next to him. "It wasn't," she answered his

unspoken thought. "The gate has been wide open back there for longer than it ever was when we worked here," she said. "The evil and darkness has bled through."

Tyler nodded to indicate he understood what she meant. "Let's see if Gabriel needs help," he knew that sentence made little sense when he said it, but he wanted an excuse to get into the kitchen and get the ritual over with. When he and Abby entered the small kitchen it was in even worse shape than the front area of the bar. Pots and pans, kitchen utensils and rotten food items were spread across the entire room. Gabriel stood in front of the gaping hole that used to be a stainless steel industrial sized refrigerator. "Where is the door?" Tyler asked when he saw that it was not on its hinges.

He and Abby looked around the room. "There," Abby pointed to the other side of the kitchen where a heavily dented door was teetering on the stove. They moved to retrieve it. Gabriel had not moved from his spot, Tyler realized he was praying. Tyler held the refrigerator door against the hinges while Abby used her angel light to secure it back in place. "There is no way this is ever going to look like a regular old kitchen appliance again," Tyler pointed out. Abby shrugged. "Not sure it is going

to matter for a while," she said.

When the door was steady enough Tyler stepped back and watched as the fog that he had not noticed until that moment rolled back into the open space and some of the darkness and desolation started to retreat. Gabriel finished his long prayer and raised his arms, palms forward. Tyler could almost hear the rot iron gates closing and locking inside, he wondered if he was imagining that, he could not see it happening in front of him. When he thought he heard the final bolt slide into place the gaping hole that was the opening of purgatory once again became the inside of a refrigerator, one that had been sitting, open and broken, for a long period of time.

"I don't guess you could have restored it to a new fridge without the rotting food smell," Tyler commented. He gave Abby and Gabriel a faint smile to show them he was kidding.

The three of them stepped back into the open air of the still debris ridden streets of Westchester. As they made their way to the church they noticed that people were venturing out, some were attempting to clean up the mess, some were standing around staring at it. When they were inside the church the

activity was different than anything they had seen since this whole mess began. Tyler made his way to the back where the media setup was still running news and social media feeds. News reporters were standing in the streets as more people milled about. The reporters were saying things like "Demons no longer present" and "Hope restored."

"What's going on?" Tyler asked.

"They're gone," Cory told him.

"They who?" Tyler had no idea what could be going on. He knew that at least one gate was still open, Chloe had not been defeated and there was no way she had voluntarily gone through that gate on her own.

"The demons, there are no more demons here, according to reports on the news, Twitter, Facebook, all saying the same thing," Cory said.

Tyler watched the news footage as cameras panned around different points in the city. It felt wrong.

"Tyler," Amy came into the room. "Chloe is outside, again."

At least he knew he had been right about that, Tyler thought as he made his way to the door. He stepped outside and found Chloe standing in the only spot she could be, the hallowed ground still in affect. She looked shattered, defeated and scared. This took Tyler by complete surprise. For a moment he wanted to run to her and comfort her, then he remembered, enemies. "I have been watching the news, it seems there are no more demons terrorizing our streets, did they all go back home?" It was a weak attempt at taunting but Chloe's disheveled state was really throwing Tyler off.

"It appears," her voice shook when she spoke. "That they are no longer needed here," she told him. She paused for a moment, pondering whether or not she was going to go through with this. "I need your help," she said it so low he barely heard her.

Tyler cocked his head to the side. He contemplated considering this a trap of some sort, but if it was, the elaborate nature of her acting was Oscar worthy. "What?" was all he could think of to say.

Chloe shifted her weight from foot to foot. "This whole thing, is way further out of hand than you know," she told him. "Lucifer is determined to return to this world no matter the cost, obviously," she waved her hand around to indicated the state of things all around them. "Apparently I have failed so epically that they are planning the ultimate punishment," she continued.

"Death might be a fitting ending for you here, sorry to say," Tyler felt gross saying that, but it was how he felt about the situation. She was responsible for so much death and destruction herself, maybe that was what she deserved.

"Oh, I would prefer death to this," Chloe agreed with him. That threw Tyler off even more. "They want me to have their demon baby," she blurted out.

Tyler stared at her. "Do what now?"

"Apparently, there is some sort of ritual they can perform to impregnate me, which they want to do in order to produce the ultimate evil child who will then be sacrificed to some fire

demon who will grant Lucifer control of both the middle plane and the lower plane, which he is losing his grip on, seeing as he depleted the entire population with this whole exercise here," she waved at the destruction around them again.

Tyler could not find any words to say so he stood there, still, and quiet, processing the information. As they stood there in silence Tyler noticed a figure approaching in the distance. He tensed up, thinking the other shoe was about to drop and he was in fact being punked. As the figure approached his entire body relaxed. It was Jonathan. He wanted to run to him but his instincts told him to stay still. If this was a trap, all she needed was for Tyler to move into her space, and out of his safety spot, and it would be over for him. And then he remembered that meant Jonathan could be in danger. He was weighing all of this out as Jonathan continued to approach them. When he was just a few short feet away Chloe moved and Tyler reached behind him for his hidden weapon. But Chloe simply moved out of Jonathan's way and let him pass right by.

Jonathan gave Tyler a short, somewhat awkward hug, trying to both show that he was happy to see him but being cautious of Chloe's presence. "What's up?" he whispered in Tyler's ear.

"Do you want to explain to him?" Tyler asked Chloe. She motioned to him to go ahead. "Chloe is here seeking our help," Tyler told Jonathan. "Apparently there is another way for Lucifer to take what he wants," he paused and watched as Jonathan's face read confusion, curiosity and caution. "They want her to have their baby."

Jonathan looked at him, and then at Chloe, and back at Tyler. "Damn," he looked at them both again. "That makes sense," he told them. "Stronger bloodline," he shrugged when they both stared at him like he was insane. "What do you think we can do about it?" Jonathan asked. When Tyler looked at him in confusion he followed up with "I just spent a great deal of time handing out food and clothing and getting medical help to thousands upon thousands of people affected by the war created by this woman," he said. "So, pardon me if I am not getting too many warm and fuzzy feelings of needing to jump to her rescue."

"See, that is the Catch-22, isn't it," Tyler looked at Jonathan and smiled slightly. "I would very much love to take advantage of her obviously weakened state, tie her down and deliver her to Lucifer in a box with a bow on top," he said.

"But then I realized I would be delivering their vessel right to them, and that did not sit well with me. I thought about killing her, but remembered, she cannot be killed, and even if she could, would I be able to carry that out?"

Jonathan thought on this. It gave him great pain, and some satisfaction, that Tyler had been able to assess the situation and come to those conclusions, rather than act on impulse. "So, our choices are, help her defeat them, or help them take over our world," Jonathan shook his head as he said them out loud. He turned to Chloe.

"I don't like it any more than you do, preacher," Chloe told him. "If you think I came here seeking your help proudly, you have been away saving mankind for far too long," her strength was returning, at least verbally. "But I came to the same conclusions you did. Either I ask for your help and eliminate this problem, or I let them use me to manufacture a demon baby and I get to watch as they kill it and feed it to some monster who has an appetite for baby flesh." She shuddered as she said that last part. Even if there had been a part of her willing to carry out the Lucifer plan, it went away when those words left her lips.

Tyler and Jonathan exchanged a look that spoke volumes. They were going to have to help her. It was no longer a question of right and wrong. It was a necessity.

#

"She is with the angels," Lucifer told Azazel when he entered the study. The room was even more of a mess than it had been earlier. Lucifer has been pulling more books off the shelves, searching for every piece of text he could find about the blood ritual and sacrifice.

"She's dead?" Azazel's usually monotone voice went up a pitch with mock excitement.

Lucifer stared daggers at him. "This really is not the time for jokes."

"If you know where she is, why don't you send someone to go get her?" Azazel asked, and then realized that might be why he had been called there.

"They have her at that church," Lucifer told him.

Azazel closed his eyes and searched for Chloe's signal. He needed to see what that looked like. When the picture came into focus it was better than he expected. Chloe sat alone in a pew toward the back of the church. Everyone in the room was watching her like she was either going to spontaneously combust or attack them, they were not sure which. She was miserable. "Brilliant," Azazel opened his eyes to an annoyed Lucifer.

"They are planning on taking her to the final gate as bait," Lucifer said.

"She must have told them we can hear her thoughts, that is more than likely not even the plan," Azazel pointed out.

"Either way, you are going to be there, and you are going to make sure she is on the right side of the gate when they close it," Lucifer told him.

Azazel started to protest but knew it would be fruitless. He wanted this to happen as much as Lucifer did, he just wished it was not all up to him at this point.

Chloe was not sure she was happy being bait, but she

understood why they were using her. Azazel would be more willing to show his face at the Abbey with her as a prize he could take home to Lucifer and present like he'd won something. As she thought about it she realized they had won, in their way. Lucifer was not yet free to roam this plane, but he was about to be if this plan went south. It made her even more comfortable that she was putting her own well-being in the hands of others.

Tyler approached Chloe, snapping her back to the present. "It's time," he told her.

Jonathan had parked one of the humvees he had been using to transport supplies between shelters just around the corner from the church. The bumps and turns as they went over debris and avoided larger items made the ride more awkward than anything else. When they arrived in West Hollywood and stopped the large vehicle in front of the Abbey six archangels, Abby, Chloe, Tyler and Jonathan exited. They stepped inside the bar to find it in shambles, chairs and tables overturned, bottles of booze leaking all over the floor, broken glass. In the middle of the chaos stood Azazel.

"If these were simpler times I would make one of those

human jokes about people who do not belong together walking into a bar," he said.

The archangels formed a barrier around Chloe, Tyler, Jonathan and Abby stepped forward to meet Azazel head on. He stood up straighter and adjusted his suit jacket. "I am wondering," his eyes scanned the the room. "How you imagine the punchline would go."

"I have a feeling that however it goes, you will not enjoy it as much as you think," Tyler answered him. "Besides, I am more of a fairy tale kind of guy," he said. "It's always so heartwarming when the hero wins in the end and everyone lives happily ever after."

Azazel laughed, held up his hand in a wait motion, and then laughed again. "I love it, that is a better punchline than anything I could ever come up with. You truly believe you are the hero of this story and you are saving a damsel in distress," he nearly choked on his laughter. "It does not matter how many ways you spin this story, son. You cannot save that creature from her fate," he pointed at Chloe who seemed to cower as he did. "Aw, don't be scared of me darling, what will our baby

think?"

"Enough," Tyler stepped forward and nearly bumped into Azazel. "Look, here is what I know to be true. You need Chloe and we are not going to allow that. You have no army, no backup, nothing but yourself and the quick wit you think is going to save you from the inevitable. We have six archangels who have been sworn to protect humanity, even lost causes," he paused. "And it only takes one of them to close the gate. The odds are skewing in our favor."

"Remember when I mentioned Chloe's invincibility?" Azazel asked. "And I said there was only one way she could be killed, and we held that key?"

"You are not going to kill her," Abby said from behind Tyler. "Killing her means bringing on your own death, and you are too proud to die at the hands of someone like Lucifer."

Azazel smiled. "I beg to differ," he addressed Abby and then looked at Tyler directly. "You see, we do not need Chloe alive to carry out the ritual, we need her blood, but that will be easy enough to get," he lunged forward, knocking Tyler aside.

Every angel in the room held up their palms and shot light at him. It did not kill him, but it did enough damage to stop him from moving forward.

Jonathan helped Tyler up. Abby and Gabriel had Lucifer's arms behind his back, bound in a golden rope Tyler had not seen either of them carrying. They walked him into the kitchen and stood him in front of the door of the stainless steel refrigerator. Almost an exact replica of the one at Salvation. "For the record," Tyler motioned for Abby and Gabriel to bring Azazel forward. They stood, holding him tight, at the doorway. "I wanted them to kill you," he pointed at the archangels. "They refused."

"How very, human of you," Azazel snarled at Tyler. "And how very righteous of them," he nodded toward the angels.

"Nah, they just did not want me to become you," Tyler said. "Tell Lucifer that I will be waiting for him each and every time he attempts to enter this world, in whatever new and disgusting manner he can come up with."

"I think maybe, you should tell him yourself," Azazel broke

free from the grasp of both Abby and Gabriel and snapped the golden rope around his arms, grabbed Tyler by the shirt and yanked him forward into the darkness, all in one motion.

"Get him back!" Jonathan screamed at the angels. They shook their heads.

"It's blocked off, we cannot get in," Gabriel told him. "But they can still get out. I have to close the gate, we cannot risk them sending someone to retrieve Chloe."

Azazel dragged Tyler through the dark forested area of purgatory and into a black gate. In front of him he could see buildings, they looked like castles from ancient lands, with vines and black moss growing all over them. They continued on through the large wooden doors of one of the biggest castles and into the depths of the dank, cement structure, he nearly fell down the steps as Azazel pulled him forward with great force. Tyler knew he would never escape the demon's grasp, although his body kept trying to fight back anyway.

They stepped into a large room that turned out to be Lucifer's den. A large red leather chair sat in front of a

burning fireplace. Azazel stopped in front of the fire and waited. Moments later Lucifer entered. "What is this?" he demanded when he saw Tyler.

"She was too protected, I could not get to her," Azazel said.

Lucifer looked at him, that did not exactly answer his question. "Yes, but why is HE here?"

"Bargaining tool," Azazel smile proudly.

Lucifer looked at him like he was going to snap his neck. Next to Azazel Tyler's body tensed up. He tried to remember the words Jonathan had said to him. "Have faith in me."

"Wait," Abby put her hand on Gabriel's arm before he could start the prayer. "Either way, open or closed, they are going to use him as a bargaining chip," she said. "His life or hers, they are going to make us choose."

Gabriel stepped back from the doorway, Jonathan stood next to him and stared into the gaping hole of darkness. He could

feel the emptiness all the way through to his soul. Abby stepped forward and stood next to him. "We will get him back," she assured him.

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