



Falling for Lucifer

Author: Cyn

Category: Romance

Description: "He stepped into my life like an angel with the name of the devil..."

My love story started out as a lie.

Nobody should give birth alone, but there I was, seconds away from falling apart while my mother berated me on my life's decisions.

Just when I couldn't take my mother's judgment anymore, he spoke up, claiming to be my baby daddy just to shut my mother up.

He wasn't my baby daddy. His name was of the devil, but his eyes were kind. Far kinder than the man who got me pregnant. I'd never met Lucifer before that night. He just so happened to be there with his sister-in-law—my midwife.

But when he winked at me, letting me know he was on my side, I didn't correct him. I didn't correct him when he held my hand through the pain.

I didn't correct him when he held my daughter like she was his. And I didn't correct him when he kept showing up.

Now, I'm caught up in this charade with a fake boyfriend I wished like hell was real. My mother thinks I'm too good for him.

My father is suspicious of our union. My baby's real father won't let go of me.

But Lucifer? He wants to keep me and my baby safe. And for the first time in my life, I feel seen. I don't feel alone. I feel protected.

His father gave him the name of the devil, but to me, he's the answer to my prayers.

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B abysitting was supposed to be for teenagers to make extra money.

Somehow, it had become like a part-time job for Lucifer.

He didn't mind too much since his sister-in-love, Harley, was cool as hell, but damn.

It was a Saturday night, and instead of chillin' in the crib by himself, he was dragged out of the comfort of his home to accompany Harley, a grown ass woman, to deliver a baby.

Harley glanced up at Lucifer as they stood on the elevator with doe eyes. "I'm sorry, Lu. You know how he is . . ."

Lucifer snorted. "I know better than anyone, sis. You have to admit he's gotten worse since . . ." Lucifer's eyes traveled down to Harley's bulging stomach. When he found her eyes again, he saw that she looked tired and like she would rather be at home too.

She groaned as the elevator dinged. "Yeah. You don't know the half, honestly.

Since I told him I was pregnant, do you want to know how much time I've had to myself?

" Lucifer opened his mouth to respond as they walked off the elevator, but he clamped it shut when Harley stopped and turned around to face him.

He stopped abruptly. Her manicured nail poked him in the chest as she looked up at him with squinted eyes.

“Six minutes, Lucifer Ashford. Six fucking minutes in eight and a half months. If it isn’t him that’s up under me, then he has either you or Eris.

If it’s not one of y’all, it’s Cati, Major, or Cade. ”

She whirled around and stomped down the fairly empty hall of the birthing center, mumbling about being ready to drop the baby ASAP so she could go on a solo vacation.

Lucifer snorted again. Harley knew, just like he knew, that his brother would never allow her to go on a solo vacation.

Hades was just like that. He had been since he was a kid.

If he loved a person, they were forced to be under his careful and constant eye.

Hell, Lucifer could barely leave the state on his own without telling Hades every speck of information about the trip.

Lucifer had learned long ago that was just how his brother loved.

He loved fiercely and with his whole heart, and he tried his best to control the people he loved because he couldn’t bear to lose them . . . like he had their mother.

The day she committed suicide, Lucifer would never forget.

Hades was the one to find her, and he was also the one to get them out of that house where their evil father raised them.

At sixteen years old, Hades took sole responsibility over him and their little sister, Eris, and he hadn’t let up since, over two decades later.

“How long is this going to take?” Lucifer asked as they stopped at the last room on the right.

Harley whirled around on him and cut her eyes once again. Yeah, she wasn’t in the mood for nobody’s shit today.

“Have you ever pushed out a baby through your vagina?”

Lucifer’s eyes widened. “You’re always asking the most off-the-wall shit, Harley.”

When she was in a mood, especially when it surrounded a woman giving birth, her mouth could be reckless. Any other time, she was sweet as pie.

“Answer the question, Lucifer, ” she insisted.

Lucifer crossed his broad arms over his chest, his white T-shirt stretching with the movement. “You only call me Lucifer to piss me off.” One of Harley’s brows lifted as she stared up at him, waiting for an answer. Exasperated, he expelled a deep breath and said, “No.”

Her smile was dazzling, as if he had answered a multi-million-dollar question correctly. She hummed and as she turned on her heels to walk through the door of her patient’s room, she said, “I didn’t think so.”

Lucifer scratched his head as she walked into the room, wondering how any of that answered his simple question. He just wanted to know how long it would be until he could get back to the comfort of his own home.

As he followed behind Harley, he found himself irritated that his brother took that last custom job on a bike for their old personal trainer who owned Fortified Fitness.

That job had been taking all of Hades's time over the past week, making Lucifer on call to watch Harley any time she left the house.

He contemplated how he could successfully sit down with his bull-headed brother and explain to his grown ass that Harley didn't need a babysitter, when he heard a shriek.

His attention immediately snapped back into focus as he realized a woman with long black hair pulled into a sloppy ponytail laid on the comfortable bed in the center of the room, gripping the soft white sheets in her hands.

"This shit hurts, Harley. What the fuck! This shit hurts," the woman hissed through gritted teeth.

Harley was already by her side with a cold, wet rag while the nurse checked the monitors on the screen next to the bed.

"I know, sweetie," Harley murmured as she dabbed the woman's head. She glanced at the monitor and then smiled. "You're almost through this contraction. There you go . . . Good job."

Lucifer stood there as still as a statue.

In the back of his mind, he knew he was intruding on a private moment.

He had only had to accompany Harley to work a couple of times over the past several years, but he always stayed in the hall.

He didn't know what possessed him to follow her into the room that night, but a small voice in the back of his mind rejoiced at the misstep.

He watched in awe as the woman in the bed breathed deeply. Sweat covered her body, and the blue silk gown she wore clung to her large stomach that rivaled Harley's.

"Who is he?" Her voice was so melodic, even with the harsh tint to the words she spoke. Despite the prettiness of her, Lucifer's thick brows pulled in as he snapped out of his daze.

He took a tentative step toward the bed. "You talkin' 'bout me, love?"

"You're the only one in here I don't know, aren't you?"

"Her teeth gritted together, and Lucifer could tell she was in a lot of pain, but he was taken aback.

People didn't tend to talk to him crazy, whether they were in labor or not.

His large frame and mean mug normally caused people to either steer clear of him or talk nice to him.

Most people didn't realize that he was a damn teddy bear compared to his brother.

Lucifer chuckled humorlessly as he swiped his nose with his thumb.

"Lu, go stand in the hallway," Harley said, intervening. Good thing, too, because Lucifer could tell little miss lady in labor was about to say something to piss him off. Harley looked at the woman next. "Ellodie, try to relax. I'm going to check to see how far along you are."

Ellodie, Lucifer thought. A pretty name for a pretty woman. He grunted and turned toward the door, feeling in his gut that it would be a long night, when Ellodie stopped

him. “Wait! Lu, is it?”

He slowly turned to face her with his brows raised. “Yeah.”

Ellodie looked between him and Harley. “This your man, Harley?”

Harley made a choking sound as she held onto her stomach, while Lucifer shook his head.

“He’s my brother-in-law. Trust me, you don’t want to know my husband.”

Lucifer snorted. Not many people found pleasure in meeting Hades’s mean ass, so Harley told no lies as far as he could tell.

Ellodie took in a deep breath and seemed to work through another contraction before she looked back at Lucifer, a sickly, sweet smile curling her juicy lips. “Since you’re here, grab me some ice chips . . . please ?”

Lucifer’s head cocked to the side. She seemed like an uppity woman who was used to getting her way. He didn’t even know her, and here she was bossing him around. Not only that, but Ellodie seemed to take joy in toying with him at the moment, and he wasn’t about to give her the satisfaction.

“Nah, I’m good.” He smiled right back at her, his deep dimples sinking into his cheeks as he finessed the hairs on his chin.

Truthfully, though, he wanted to do whatever she asked.

She was so damn pretty, and not to mention vulnerable at the moment, that his first mind yearned to get her some damn ice chips and lay on that bed and deliver that baby for her if he could.

She had him under some kind of spell, and he wasn't even sure he minded.

Ellodie's smile only widened in challenge as her brow arched. Yeah, he could tell her spoiled ass wasn't used to hearing the word no . He liked that he had said the simple word, despite his desire to give her whatever she wanted.

Another contraction must have hit her, because her smile quickly morphed into a frown as she cried out.

"Go get her some ice chips," Harley demanded, shoving a glass into his hand. "And wait in the hall. I'll let you know when you can come back in."

She pushed Lucifer toward the door, and by the time he opened his mouth to protest, the door had slammed in his face.

"Ain't this some shit . . ."

He muttered under his breath the entire time to the ice machine down the hall.

By the time he got back, the door still wasn't open.

He sighed and rolled his neck, ready to give them these ice chips and then get out of dodge.

He leaned against the wall next to the door, partially blocking it, and closed his eyes, silently urging that baby in Ellodie's stomach to make its way into the world.

Slowly, his thoughts drifted to the sly grin on Ellodie's face when she ordered him to get her ice chips.

As much as her audacity irritated him, there was something about her that made him

want to play her game.

For some reason, he wanted to be the one to humble her, only to give her what she wanted anyway.

“You’re in my way, boy, move.”

Lucifer’s eyes popped open. He was really zoned out because he hadn’t heard anyone near him. He had to look down his nose to find the source of the high-pitched voice.

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“Excuse me?” he asked the older woman, who looked up at him with a scowl. Her lip curled up like she smelled something stank, and she straightened up as if she tried to give off the vibe that she was important.

“I said move. You’re in my way.”

Lucifer’s face turned up as he looked the woman up and down. She was dripping in labels and had enough jewelry on to lace a rap music video.

Lucifer stood straight while peering down at the small woman with a mighty attitude. “I think you got it twisted, ma’am. You walked up on me, so you’re actually in my way.”

The lady sucked her teeth so loud Lucifer was surprised one didn’t snap in half. She opened her mouth to say something, but the door swung open.

“Lu, where are those ice chips? She’s getting ready to push.” Harley’s eyes landed on the woman. “I’m sorry. Who are you?”

The lady huffed and pushed past Harley. That was the moment Lucifer lost all his patience. The woman barely even touched Harley, but she was disrespectful as hell, and one thing he didn’t play about was family.

“Lady, you’re gonna have to get up out of here?—”

Lucifer’s words were cut off when Ellodie said, “Ma! What are you doing here?”

The older woman's eyes turned to slits as she placed her designer purse on a chair before marching over to Ellodie.

"You're lucky I don't slap the hell out of you, Ellodie Glover.

Why in God's name would you not call your mother when you're in labor?

I had to find out from Martin, and that was only because he was trying to reach your father and accidentally let it slip. "

Ellodie groaned. "Uncle Martin, . . . shit."

The woman took them all by surprise when she swatted Ellodie on the hand. Lucifer instinctively took a step forward. Who the hell hit a woman in labor?

"Watch your mouth, little girl. I can't believe you didn't call me. I'm your mother, and it isn't like you know who the child's father is. You can't do this alone."

"I told you I do know who the child's father is, Mama." Ellodie cried as another contraction hit.

"It's time to push," Harley said. Lucifer could tell she was doing her best to stay calm and ignore Ellodie's mother, but her patience had been really thin since she'd gotten pregnant, so it was only a matter of time before she snapped.

"Look at you," Ellodie's mother fussed, criticizing her daughter, who now had tears streaming down her face as she looked at the ceiling in defeat. "Pathetic, honestly. I raised you to be better than this. Now you're going to be a single mother and?—"

"Man, if you don't get out of my way." The words left Lucifer's mouth before he could process them.

The sight of Ellodie crying while her mother berated her at a time that should have been special did something to him.

Just minutes ago, she had a hint of playfulness and fire.

Now, she looked broken, and that shattered something within him.

He bumped her mother out of the way before looking down at her.

“We’re getting ready to bring our child into the world, and I don’t want you in here. You gotta go.”

Her mother’s mouth dropped open as she looked between Lucifer and Ellodie.

Lucifer grabbed Ellodie’s hand and squeezed it.

She squeezed it back, and they looked into each other’s eyes.

A moment of understanding passed between them.

He could see the relief in her eyes, and a bit of that fire came back.

He smirked before subtly winking at her just as she cried out in pain again.

“You? Oh, no.” The older woman looked around Lucifer and at Ellodie. “He cannot be the father of your child. I forbid it.”

Lucifer barked out a laugh. “Too late for that.”

“Is it Ms. Glover?” Harley asked, positioning herself at the end of the bed so she could deliver the baby.

“Yes,” the woman said, looking to be in a daze.

“I need you to step outside, please. We can only have one person in the room during the birth. I can come get you from the waiting room when we’re done, if you’d like,” Harley said with her eyes focused between Ellodie’s legs, where Lucifer was very mindful not to look.

“What? No, he needs to leave. I’m her mother!”

The nurse left her station at the monitor and grabbed Ms. Glover by the elbow. Lucifer appreciated that she didn’t allow Ms. Glover to intimidate her as she escorted her out.

“Thank you,” Ellodie whispered as fresh tears fell from her eyes.

“No need to thank us, honey. I just need you to focus on pushing, okay?” Harley coaxed.

“I’ll just step over here,” Lucifer said, letting go of Ellodie’s hand. He planned to stand watch at the door and make sure her evil mama stayed her ass out, but Ellodie snatched his hand back up and looked up at him with pleading eyes.

“Wait, . . . can you . . . can you stay right here, please?”

He looked down at her, wondering why the hell she would want some strange man by her side while she gave birth, but he didn’t need to open his mouth to ask.

He saw it in her eyes. Baby girl was afraid.

Her mother’s words had gotten to her, and he immediately understood that she didn’t want to do it alone.

Luckily for her, she wouldn't have to. He gave her hand another squeeze and offered her another smile. "I got you."

The look of relief that swept across her face made Lucifer's heart stutter, but it quickly vanished when Harley said, "Okay, Ello. One big push for me."

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“O kay, Ello. One big push for me.”

Those words had been spoken hours ago, and Ellodie was close to giving up. Everyone knew giving birth was hard, but nobody could really understand the depth of the pain until they went through it. At least she didn't, anyway.

“I promise, Ello, just one more push,” Harley encouraged.

Ellodie bit back her words because she really wanted to curse Harley out. She had been saying one more push for the last hour. Ellodie genuinely liked Harley, though, so she grunted instead and pushed with the last bit of energy she had.

“Good job, Ellodie. You're doing great.”

Her eyes fluttered open at the sound of the deep voice as she gritted her teeth.

She kept her eyes on the stranger who held her hand through the most painful moments of her life.

Lu, Harley had called him. Her eyes bore into his as she felt all the pressure in her stomach drop down to her pussy before relief flooded her.

Tears streamed down her face from the effort, pain, and emotion of the last few hours, and the handsome man she had just met looked down at her in awe.

“You did it,” he muttered.

A cry sounded through the room, which prompted Ellodie to tear her eyes away from his and look toward the end of the bed where Harley held a baby.

“Do you want to cut the cord, Ellodie?” Harley asked.

The thought of cutting flesh that was attached to her made Ellodie squeamish, so she quickly shook her head while keeping her eyes on her daughter.

“No, you can go ahead.”

Harley carefully handed her crying daughter to Ellodie, who instantly fell in love.

At the same time, fear clawed at her. She didn’t know the first thing about being a good mother.

She didn’t have one to lead by example. The last thing she wanted to do was mess up this little girl’s life.

As Ellodie stared down at her daughter, she memorized everything about her.

The head full of jet-black curly hair, her little scrunched face, and her mocha skin were perfect.

Even her little cries sounded perfect to Ellodie, who instantly knew she would never be able to get enough of her daughter.

“Okay, Ello, Nurse Allie needs to take her for some testing. She’ll get her right back to you, alright?”

Ellodie actually hated the sound of that.

Her entire world shifted, and it was suddenly her and her daughter against the world, which meant she didn't want to part from her, but Harley was a good doula.

She'd prepared Ellodie for what the birth would be like but also the aftermath, so she sighed heavily and nodded, allowing the nurse to take her baby from her arms.

She could have imagined it, but Ellodie swore her baby's cries grew louder once she was out of the comfort of her mother's arms.

"It's okay, sweet pea. Mommy's right here," Ellodie whispered, too tired to muster up a louder voice.

Harley invaded her vision, and it was then she realized she missed the presence of her doula's brother-in-law. Harley must have noticed her looking around the room, because she smiled and stepped to the side. "Don't worry. Lucifer's right there."

And he was. He stood in the shadows of the corner of the room, curiously observing the nurse with her daughter. Ellodie's lips upturned at the sight.

"Lucifer?" Ellodie asked. "That's his name?"

Harley opened her mouth to respond, but Lucifer was the one to speak, never raising his voice and never moving his eyes from her daughter. "You can call me Lu. Just Lu."

She didn't blame him. Lucifer wasn't a very welcoming name, but as she gazed at him, she realized he didn't look all that welcoming. It said a lot about him that he preferred to go by Lu rather than Lucifer. He clearly didn't want to seem as intimidating as his name and presence might suggest.

"How are you feeling?" Harley asked, stealing Ellodie's attention once again.

Ellodie's eyes fluttered again. She was so damn tired and ready to get some sleep, but her baby's cries reminded her that sleep wouldn't come easy to her for a long time. She was a mother now. A mother. Damn . . . "Ello?"

Once again, Ellodie's eyes snapped open, and she offered Harley a sheepish grin. "Sorry. I'm exhausted."

Harley's eyes softened in understanding as she squeezed Ellodie's hand. "I know. You did so good, and she's beautiful. What do you think? Does she look like an Antoinetta?"

Ellodie's smile was easy this time. "My Etta, yeah."

Antoinetta was her grandmother's name. She passed only five months ago, and that had crushed Ellodie. That woman was her entire heart, but her name, at least, would live on through Ellodie's daughter.

Harley smiled. "Ello and Etta. I love it." Then her smile faltered a bit.

"I'm sorry to have to bring this up now, but you have a little more pushing to do.

We have to deliver the placenta. Just a couple of good pushes, and I promise to let you rest. Etta should be ready for you by then too. Does that sound like a deal?"

Ellodie's heart dropped because the last thing she wanted to do was push some damn more. She groaned and dug her head into the pillow, looking up at the ceiling once again. "Do me a favor, Harley."

"Anything." Harley quickly agreed as she waddled back toward the end of the bed.

"When you give birth, I want you to FaceTime me so I can take delight in your pain."

Harley giggled. “It’s normal for women to take their anger out on their midwives or nurses, but remember who the real enemy is.”

“Who is that?” Ellodie asked as her eyes closed again. Sleep kept tugging at her, but her baby’s cries in the corner of the room forced her to stay awake.

“The men that put these babies in us.” She wasn’t wrong. Ellodie’s mind flashed to Wesley, her baby daddy, just as Harley said, “Give me a big push, Ello.”

Ellodie bared down, grunting with the effort, as her blood ran hot at the thought of the man who put her in this predicament.

Wesley was a mean ass man. He made her feel like love wasn’t real.

He hadn’t always been like that. She met him over ten years ago when she was in her early twenties and as dumb as a rock when it came to men.

Her parents had sheltered her, and Wesley was her first boyfriend.

He was charming and caring and so damn fine. She thought she hit the jackpot.

But then came the abuse. Both mental and physical.

It had been years since they were an official couple, but Wesley liked popping up on her every few months to disrupt her peace.

He refused to let her go completely. Give her space?

Yeah. He didn’t mind that because it allowed him to be a ho, but he would never truly let her go.

According to him, she was his, and no other man was allowed to have her.

And no other man had. Not even because Wesley was truly running anything in her life, but because he had scarred her.

The day she told him she was pregnant was the happiest day of his life.

Funny how that was the case, but he was nowhere to be found when their daughter was actually born.

She'd done her due diligence and called and texted him when she realized she was in labor, but a huge part of her was relieved he wasn't there because he would have added even more stress to the moment. Her mom had done enough of that.

Ellodie allowed herself to breathe deeply after pushing for ten seconds. Her head flopped to the side, and her eyes landed back on Lucifer, who had inched his way closer to Etta and the nurse. She found it amusing that he seemed to watch the nurse's every move.

"Okay, one more should do it," Harley coached. Ellodie focused on getting the placenta out of her so she could finally relax. She pushed with all the energy she could muster, and once again, she felt a sense of pressure build before it released. "Good job, mama. You're done. Go ahead and relax."

Ellodie did just that. She melted into the pillow, thanking God that she had the means to afford this nice birthing center because everything there was meant for maximum comfort.

The cooling sheets and silk gowns felt heavenly against her skin, but she couldn't wait to get in the shower and have them change the bedding.

For now, she praised God for the small luxuries as her chest heaved.

It only took a couple more minutes before Harley walked over with Etta wrapped in a fresh blanket. Ellodie's heart melted at the sight of her daughter, and fresh tears filled her eyes as she whispered, "There's my baby. How is she?"

The question was clearly for Harley, though she kept her eyes on Etta, who seemed to be resting finally, just like her mama.

"She's perfect. Ten perfect toes and fingers. All her tests came back great. You should be able to leave tomorrow as long as there are no complications overnight."

"Thank God." Ellodie placed a kiss on Etta's head and breathed her in. "She smells so good."

"That new baby smell." Harley gushed. "I can't wait to get a whiff of my own baby."

Ellodie caught her rubbing her belly from the corner of her eye. "How long do you have?"

"Couple more weeks, which means it really could be any time."

Ellodie looked down at her daughter for a few more seconds and whispered, "It's all worth it." Then she looked up at Harley. "All the shit pregnancy puts you through, . . . it's all worth it for this moment right here."

Ellodie watched as Harley blinked tears away as she smiled down at the new mother and daughter. "I can't wait." And then, in a softer tone, she asked, "Do you want me to get your mother?"

Ellodie rolled her eyes. "I doubt she's still here."

For some reason, a lump formed in her throat after she said those words. She was used to her mother being absent unless it was for something that benefitted her. Who she really wanted was her father, but she knew if she called him, her mother would come, too, and it wasn't worth it to Ellodie.

“Why would she leave? Do you want me to check?” Harley asked.

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Ellodie shrugged. “You can, but like I said, I doubt she’s here. She’s not the type to wait around in a waiting room. She thinks she’s too important for something like that.”

“Where’s your cousin?”

The thought of Yasmine made her smile, but then sadness hit her all over again. “She had a modeling gig in Dubai. She won’t be back for another week.”

Harley rubbed Ellodie’s arm. “I’m sorry, honey. I’ll go check to see if your mom is still here. Do you need anything in the meantime?”

Ellodie looked around the room and immediately noted the absence of a certain someone. “Is Lu still here? I wanted to thank him.”

Harley flashed a knowing smile. “He’s probably out in the hallway. I’ll send him in.”

Butterflies soared around Ellodie’s body at the thought of laying eyes on him again. She’d sworn off men long ago, but there was something about Lucifer that had her acting as if that wasn’t the case.

She adjusted the sheets over her and snuggled up to her baby while she waited.

“I’m your mommy.” A fresh lump formed in the back of her throat. “I don’t know the first thing about being someone’s mama, but I promise to do right by you, Etta.” She sighed before taking in a deep breath of her daughter’s hair. “Your great grandmother would have loved you.”

Tears fell freely as she got acquainted with her baby. So many emotions swirled around her, but fear was the most prominent one.

When Lucifer stepped into the room, everything seemed to calm. Her breathing from exerting so much effort over the past few hours steadied. Her tears stopped. Her heart rate evened out. Etta twitched in her arms as if she was dreaming. Ellodie rubbed her small body soothingly.

Finally, she mustered up enough courage to look up at Lucifer.

Seeing him for the first time without the haze of pain almost knocked the wind out of her.

He was too damn fine. His skin was a couple of shades darker than her deep chocolate skin.

His hair was freshly lined and cut, and his beard glistened under the soft lighting throughout the room.

She found herself mesmerized and staring, which prompted him to speak first.

“You asked for me?”

She blinked and tried to refocus her thoughts. “Yeah, sorry. I just wanted to thank you. You didn’t have to step in for me when my mother was, . . . well, . . . yeah. Just thank you.”

A flash of embarrassment overtook her as she dropped her eyes back down to Etta.

“Aye, look at me?” It came out more as a question than a demand, but her body immediately followed it like it was a command.

When her eyes landed on him again, he looked down at her intensely with his brows pulled in.

“I ain’t with that bully shit . . . I don’t care if that is ya mama.

No child deserves that, especially not in this kind of situation.

I’m glad I could help. You ain’t gotta be ashamed of the shit ya mama puts you through. ”

She saw a glint of sincerity there, along with a speck of pain, and that caused her to wonder what his story was. He definitely had one, and she instantly yearned to know it.

With a soft smile, she said, “You know, you kind of have to play the part of being my baby daddy now, since you made my mama think you were.”

He chuckled and ran a hand down his face.

“Yeah, I ain’t really think about all that.

I ain’t into playing pretend, love.” He glanced down at Etta while her heart did a funny dance in her chest at the sound of him calling her love .

“I wouldn’t mind checkin’ you and Ms. Etta out again, though, since I did witness her birth and all. ”

His lopsided grin unarmed her completely. And those dimples? Jesus, be a fence. Ellodie figured it had to be the hormones of giving birth because she normally had such a steely attitude toward men.

Jumping at the opportunity, she said, “Take my number. I wouldn’t mind you coming to visit us once we get out of here.”

Lucifer pulled his phone out of his pocket, and she rattled off her number before saying, “Call me so I have yours. I’ll lock it in once I’m able to get up and moving.”

He nodded, and a second later, they heard the sound of Ellodie’s phone ringing from the corner of the room where her purse was before it stopped.

“I’ll hit you up.”

Harley walked back into the room, interrupting their moment. A sad look covered her face, and Ellodie already knew what that meant. “She wasn’t in there. I’m sorry, Ello. Is there anything else you need?”

Tears stung the back of her eyelids, so she focused back on her daughter. “No, I have everything I need right here.” She looked back up at Harley, who looked dog tired. “Go home, girl. Get some rest.”

Harley breathed in relief but looked at Ellodie with worry painted across her features. “Are you sure? I don’t mind hanging around a bit longer.”

Ellodie shook her head. “I’m sure. Go rest.”

“Okay,” Harley said hesitantly, “but call me if you need anything. The nurses will take it from here and help you get cleaned up and adjusted to motherhood. I’ll stop by your place in a couple of days for my first follow up visit, okay?”

All Ellodie could muster was a head nod because she realized she would be left completely alone with her daughter, and that terrified her, but it was her job. She prepared for this, and it was time to put her big girl panties on and do it.

Harley gave her a quick hug, and it surprised Ellodie when Lucifer grabbed her hand and kissed it tenderly. She managed to lift her tear-filled eyes to meet his gaze, and he gave her an encouraging smile.

“I’ll hit you up soon.” With that, he and Harley were gone, but Lucifer managed to leave her with something to look forward to.

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“L il nigga, you need to slow the hell down before my size fourteen foot goes upside ya head.”

Hade’s booming voice startled Dante so badly he tripped and fell right on the hardwood floor of the dining room.

Eris hopped up while Cade’s shoulders shook with laughter.

“Hades, cut it out. You’re always startling my baby,” Eris complained as she helped Dante stand up.

He was a tough boy who didn’t cry much, not even when it came to his uncle Hades.

He did, however, mean mug Hades as he slowly walked out of the dining room to go play with his Switch in the living room, no doubt.

Lucifer shook his head and shoved a heaping forkful of sweet potatoes into his mouth.

Family time was always chaotic, but Lucifer loved it.

All he had was his family, and if it wasn’t for them, he probably wouldn’t have much of a social life.

It wasn’t that he disliked people. He just grew up with a strange family dynamic.

His father had two faces. He always ran in the political circles in Ellwood and served

as a judge for many years.

He could charm the panties off a nun and make a crook look like a saint.

When he got home, he had a problem keeping his hands to himself though.

His mother and Hades were always on the other end of his fists.

The two of them worked overtime to keep his father from turning his rage toward him and his sister.

It was always a big family secret that caused Hades, Lucifer, and Eris to stick to themselves.

When their mother killed herself when Lucifer was only fifteen, Hades immediately took them away from their father and made sure they wanted for nothing.

He and Lucifer started slanging dope, and within a year, Hades was able to buy them a big ass house—the very house they currently occupied for their family dinner.

They didn't stay in the game long. They made enough money to open Underworld Customs. It was their custom motorcycle shop that doubled as headquarters for The Obsidian Riders, which was the motorcycle club Hades founded. They never looked back on the street life after that.

Lucifer helped Hades work on bikes from time to time, but mostly, he invested his money and made a healthy nest from that.

Lately, he had been wondering what kind of legacy he would leave behind.

He'd been fine with being his brother's right hand since they were kids.

He was his brother's keeper and felt he owed him for giving him a better life than their father ever could have.

But that line of thinking had gotten old to him.

He loved designing and customizing bikes with his brother.

He loved being a part of a motorcycle club founded by his brother.

He loved being the glue that held his family together.

But his passion was with fixing things. Since he was a kid, fixing things had been Lucifer's thing.

It was why he made such a good right hand for Hades's hotheaded ass.

Lucifer not only always had a solution for everything, but he was good with his hands, which was why opening up an auto shop for motorcycles had been on his heart lately.

He hadn't spoken the words to anyone yet, because he didn't think the timing was right.

Hades and Harley were getting ready to welcome their baby into the world, and Hades needed him to run things at Underworld Customs and with The Obsidian Riders while he was on paternity leave.

"Why you so quiet, Lu?" his sister, Eris, asked, knocking him out of his thoughts.

"Just thinking. What y'all up to the rest of the night?" Lucifer asked to get the attention off of him. He pushed his plate away from him since he was good and full.

At the same time, he felt a nudge on his calf.

One peek down at his feet confirmed what he already knew.

Hades and Harley's dogs, Pixie and Gotham, sat under the table, looking up at him with puppy dog eyes.

He chuckled and discreetly cut a piece of baked chicken off from the platter in front of him.

He split it into two and fed them while listening to his sister list off their plans for the weekend.

It sounded like a busy one filled with karate lessons, swim lessons, a movie night, and a day at a local theme park.

"Well," Harley announced after Eris finished, "I'm happy to say that I'm about to go to my final appointment before I'm officially on maternity leave."

"Congrats, sis," Eris cheered as she beamed at Harley. "I bet that means Cati will be moving in soon."

Hades mugged Eris. "Ain't nobody moving in here."

Lucifer chuckled. "Ain't you the same man that forced Eris and Cade to move in here when she gave birth?"

Hades glanced at Eris before landing his mean mug back on Lucifer. "Exactly. That shit was my choice. My house. My decision on who stays here. Cati ain't coming."

"Hades." Harley's voice came out as a cross between a hiss and a whine. "She's my

sister. I was there for her when she gave birth?—”

“And I ain’t want you to be.” Hade’s words sounded more like an irritable groan, and Lucifer laughed again.

When Cati gave birth months ago, Hades had been hell.

He and Harley bickered nonstop because she had practically moved in with her sister to help out, and Hades acted like a damn neglected pit bull the entire time.

He had been insufferable, but Harley didn’t back down.

One thing about those Cruz sisters was they did not play about each other.

“We talked about this already, Hades. She’ll be around a lot, so get used to it.

” Harley rubbed her stomach lazily, ignoring Hades’s glare at the side of her face.

It always amused the hell out of Lucifer to see someone put Hades in his place.

She was the only person on the planet that could.

Lucifer had the power to calm his brother down and deescalate, but put him in his place?

Lucifer always thought that was impossible.

Harley turned to look at Lucifer. “You got anything going on after this?”

Lucifer shook his head. “You know me. I’m a go home and chill.”

She shook her head. “You’re coming with me to this house visit.”

“Why?” Lucifer’s brows pulled in, but before she could respond, the answer came to him. He quickly realized the home visit she had to do was for Ellodie.

“Because you helped me deliver this baby, and I thought you might want to go see about her and her mama.” Harley had a knowing smirk resting on her face, and Lucifer smiled while shaking his head.

He had texted Ellodie a couple of times over the past few days, but he had yet to really make a move.

He definitely planned to though. He had been mesmerized by her when she gave birth.

Strong . A beautiful, strong Black queen.

Those were the words that circled his mind those few hours that she worked on bringing life into the world.

And what a beautiful life it was. Antoinetta Glover was as beautiful as her mother.

His heart did a funny dance in his chest when he laid eyes on her.

He longed to hold her, but he refrained.

It wasn’t his moment, and he was a complete stranger, but that didn’t stop him from wanting to get to know Ellodie so he would no longer be a stranger.

“I can do that.” He tried to play it cool, like it was no big deal, but the thought of seeing Ellodie and Etta again had him happy as hell.

Lucifer felt Hades staring at the side of his head, so he sighed heavily, preparing himself for the bullshit that was about to come out of his brother's mouth, and asked, "Is there a problem?"

Hades blinked at him before responding. "Yeah, you're a bitch."

Lucifer's eyes bulged. "Man, what?"

Hades shrugged. He wasn't one for repeating himself, but Lucifer could tell he definitely had more to say. "You watched a bitch give birth and you don't even know her? Ol' life is precious, bitch ass nigga. You held her hand, too, ain't you?"

Harley hit him on his broad shoulder. "Hades, shut up. There's nothing wrong with what Lucifer did to help Ello.

For as long as I've known her, she's been alone, aside from when her cousin could make the appointments.

Lucifer did a good thing. Besides, that's going to be you soon, helping me give birth.
”

She snuggled up to him as best she could from her seat beside him, and he put his arm around her possessively. "Yeah, but you're my wife, and I'm not going to be holding your hand."

Harley pulled away from him as Lucifer watched them in amusement. He truly got a kick out of the way they interacted.

"Boy, what the hell do you mean you aren't going to hold my hand?"

Hades screwed his face up as if she had offended him. "I'm going to deliver the

baby.”

Lucifer couldn't hold it in anymore. He barked out a laugh so loud it startled the dogs under the table. They scattered and left the dining room altogether. “Nigga, you can't deliver no baby.”

“Hades, you are not delivering my child,” Harley argued.

“Boy done lost his mind,” Eris mumbled.

Cade simply chuckled, his shoulders shaking. This was normal. Hades always said the most off-the-wall shit like it was the most normal thing in the world, leaving everyone around him gawking at him. Lucifer would have thought they'd been used to it by now, but that simply wasn't the case.

Hades stared at everyone as if they were dumb, and it was at that moment Lucifer knew he would pay big money to be in that delivery room because his brother was definitely about to act a fool.

“If y'all think I'm going to trust anyone else to deliver my baby, you got fuckin' beans for brains.”

Lucifer snorted and stood up before anyone could respond to his ignorant ass brother. “Hades, I'm going to take your wife to this appointment. You can clean up and be ready to rub her feet when I drop her off.”

Hades glared up at his brother. “How the hell you gon' tell me what the fuck I'm 'bout to do in my own home?”

Harley stood and used her pointer finger to lift her husband's chin. “He isn't. I am. Do as he says.” She pecked his lips and whispered something into his ear. Hades

smiled, something he only ever did for his wife, before he smacked her ass.

“Remember you said that, Tink.”

Harley winked at him and turned to Eris and Cade. “It was good seeing y’all. I’ll text you later, E.”

“Bye, bookie.” Eris waved and then turned and grinned at Lucifer. “Have fun, Lu.”

Eris loved teasing Lucifer about his love life, or lack thereof, so he knew she was taunting him. He ignored her and simply nodded at everyone at the table before making his way out of the dining room.

“Gimme a hug, Nephew,” Lucifer said to Dante, who was sprawled out on the couch playing his game.

Dante hopped up and hugged Lucifer around the waist. “Love you, Unco.”

“Love you too, kid.”

Lucifer always got the best energy from his nephew’s hugs.

He wondered if he would ever have his own kids.

His mind drifted to Ellodie and Etta, and a smile graced his face, but he let it fall pretty quickly.

They were still strangers, and he needed to keep his cool.

Those thoughts didn’t quiet the small voice in the back of his head that told him that Ellodie and Etta would become his family sooner than he thought.

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Pure love. Ellodie didn't think she had ever known it until Etta came into the world.

She stared down at her daughter with complete adoration filling her entire being.

She couldn't understand how some women weren't fit to be mothers.

How did they not take one look at their baby and want to give them the absolute world?

It made her sad for the little girl in her, and just that quickly, tears filled her eyes.

Postpartum depression was really kicking her ass and had her emotions swinging in a wide arc all day, every day.

Her phone vibrated on the bed next to her.

She snatched it up so it wouldn't bother Etta.

Her tears were quickly forgotten when she saw who was calling her.

Her cousin Yasmine was her best friend, ride or die, and the only person truly in her corner.

It broke her heart that Yasmine wasn't there to help her journey into motherhood.

Carefully, Ellodie got up from her spot on the bed.

Her bare feet touched the soft light pink rug underneath her bed before she placed Etta in the bassinet.

Etta stirred and looked like she was about to cry, but Ellodie rubbed her belly for a few seconds, and she calmed down enough for her to grab her phone from the bed and walk out of the room.

Her condo was on the eighteenth floor and overlooked the ocean.

She loved her hometown. Ellwood had everything she needed, including the beach, which she loved.

She was only a twenty-minute drive to downtown, and the building she lived in had everything she needed, from a cute café to a fully equipped gym to a spa.

Luxury wasn't new to Ellodie, but she had started looking at things differently now that she was a mother.

As a wedding planner, she had a flourishing career without the help of her parents, but her trust fund was what really gave her such a luxurious life.

Her trust fund was the reason she was able to take as much time on maternity leave without worrying about a thing, which was a blessing.

But the things that were so important to her, even just a week ago, now seemed mundane.

Giving her daughter a good life was all that mattered to her now, and she knew that meant making some hard changes in her life, starting with Wes.

She had called and sent him pictures of their daughter with no response.

Ellodie had every reason to leave him before, but now, it was a no-brainer.

Her daughter deserved better. Ellodie grew up with a crappy mother and a father who she loved but felt light-years away from because her mother was as jealous as they came and didn't allow her father to love any female more than her.

She would not allow Etta to grow up with a problematic parent.

If she had to play mommy and daddy, then that would be her destiny, and she welcomed it.

Money couldn't buy her daughter the kind of life Ellodie wanted to give her. She wanted Etta to grow up knowing love and with good morals instilled in her. She wanted her daughter to thrive and learn the tools to keep herself happy and to never seek it from others.

As she sat down on her light gray sectional, she let out a long sigh before she FaceTimed her cousin back.

Yasmine answered right away with her pretty mahogany face all up in the camera. "Where my baby at?"

Ellodie giggled. "Hello to you too."

"Come on, Ello," Yasmine whined. "I already feel bad that I wasn't there for the birth, and now you're withholding my god daughter from me. Where is she?"

"Girl, ain't nobody withholding that chile from you. She's sleeping, and I would also like to point out that it's her fault you weren't at the birth. Didn't nobody tell her to come six days late."

Yasmine backed away from the screen and sucked her teeth. “Leave her alone. She’s absolutely perfect and innocent.”

“I can’t disagree with you there, Yas. I can’t wait for you to meet her.”

Yasmine sighed wistfully as she fell back onto the hotel bed. “Only a couple more days. I can’t wait to kiss on those chubby cheeks.”

Ellodie smiled sadly at her cousin because she wished she were there right now.

She’d been extremely lonely since she got back from the birthing center two days ago, and the transition hadn’t been easy, but she was so proud of her cousin.

She had her dream career and could travel all over the world to do what she loved.

Ellodie could never be mad at her for that.

She was disappointed, though, because she felt so alone, despite her daughter lighting up her world.

“I can’t wait either, Yas.”

Yasmine looked at her cousin for a moment before her smile faltered. “You okay?”

With a shrug, Ellodie did her best to smile, knowing it only looked like a forced grimace. “Just miss you is all. Hurry up and get back.”

Yasmine gazed at her a moment longer, as if she wanted Ellodie to keep talking and be honest about her feelings.

It stayed silent for a minute, and Ellodie was thankful that Yasmine decided to drop it

instead of prying.

She felt like she would burst into tears at any moment, and the last thing she wanted to do was worry her cousin.

Besides, other than being lonely, there really wasn't anything wrong with her.

She knew she was blessed. She had a healthy baby, her dream job, and a beautiful home.

Still, she felt a nagging in her heart, like something was missing.

"What are you up to since my baby is asleep?" Yasmine asked, and Ellodie loved her even more for changing the topic altogether.

Ellodie tapped on her screen and noted the time. "My midwife is actually about to come over so she can check on us."

Her mind immediately drifted because thinking about Harley automatically made her think about Lucifer. It felt like a fever dream having him hold her hand and coach her through labor. She constantly had to remind herself that it had actually happened.

Absentmindedly, she clicked through her phone and went to their text thread. There weren't many texts there, but the fact that he thought to actually check up on her and Etta meant everything to her.

"What you over there smiling about?" Yasmine asked. When Ellodie's eyes found the small square with Yasmine's face, she realized her cousin's eyebrows had hiked damn near to her hairline.

"Nothing. I should get going. Harley will be here any moment." Ellodie rushed her

cousin off the phone because she wanted to keep Lucifer close to her heart for now.

She wasn't even sure anything would come of their introduction, but he would for sure be a part of her story for the rest of her life. "Love you. I'll call you later."

Ellodie hung up the phone before Yasmine could respond.

She knew she would get an earful later about that stunt.

Just as she tossed her phone to the side, the doorbell rang.

She wanted to straighten up a bit before Harley got there, but it looked like that was no longer an option.

She looked around the open living room at all the baby things strewn about and shrugged.

She figured Harley had seen her vagina many times. A messy home shouldn't embarrass her.

She shuffled to the door and opened it. Shock filled her as her eyes went completely over Harley's head and landed on him .

"Lucifer." She whispered his name without even realizing it.

A lopsided smirk formed on Lucifer's face. "Ellodie."

"My friends call me Ello," she replied, still dazed that he stood at her front door. It was then that she realized she had a crush on Lucifer. She hadn't had a crush since she was a damn teenager, but the giddiness that filled her just from the sight of him let her know exactly what was up.

“Everyone calls me Lu,” he reminded.

They gazed at each other for several long seconds before Harley cleared her throat. She stood at the same short ass height as Ellodie and right in front of her, but somehow, Ellodie forgot Harley was even there.

“I’m so sorry. I’m being rude. Come on in.” Ellodie stepped to the side to allow them entry into her home. “I didn’t have time to straighten up. Etta has made herself right at home, I swear. Her stuff is everywhere.”

Ellodie hurried behind them, picking up baby blankets, pacifiers, and baby wipes along the way.

“It’s all good. We aren’t here to judge your home, which is lovely, by the way,” Harley replied.

Ellodie watched as Harley stretched her back before rubbing her stomach and wincing slightly. She remembered how uncomfortable those last weeks in pregnancy were, and she wondered why Harley was even working still.

“Harley, sit down. Why are you even here? You should be at home relaxing.” Ellodie ushered her toward the couch as she spoke.

Harley waved her off as she sat down with a sigh. “You’re the last client I have. I wanted to make sure I followed up with you before officially starting maternity leave.”

Ellodie nodded. She didn’t quite understand because she stopped working two months ago.

It got to a point where being on her feet and continuing her busy career was too much

for her.

Since she could afford to take plenty of time off, she did.

Her baby daddy stressed her out enough. She didn't need her career adding to it.

When she was sure Harley was settled, Ellodie glanced over at Lucifer. "And what are you doing here, sir?"

"I told you I was gon' check you out. Where baby girl at?"

Ellodie's eyes swept over his hulking frame. He wore all black and looked comfortable in his joggers. It made her feel better about her black leggings and oversized graphic tee with the Rugrats on it.

Ellodie put her hands on her hips and arched her brow, but a sly smile covered her heart-shaped lips. "Did you come here to see me or her?"

Matching her energy, he crossed his arms and grinned at her. "Both y'all."

"Ello, how are you feeling?" Harley asked, interrupting them.

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Ellodie turned to face Harley and absentmindedly placed her hand on her stomach before she remembered there was no longer a bump.

There was a slight pudge, but she knew her flat stomach would be back in no time.

“I’m . . . fine. Physically, I mean. I’m good physically.

I mean, my breasts hurt, but when I pump, it’s better.

Other than that, mentally has been . . .

” She glanced over at Lucifer and wondered how much she should say in front of him.

Then she remembered he had been with her during the most vulnerable and important moment of her life and decided him knowing her feelings wouldn’t do any harm.

“It’s been hard. I feel sad a lot and lonely. ”

She looked at the ground when she said that last part.

“That’s normal, honey,” Harley encouraged. “When does Yasmine get back?”

“A few more days.”

“And have you talked to your parents at all?” Harley asked.

Ellodie stiffened. She hadn't. Her mother called her a few times, but Ellodie hadn't answered. If Kamilah wanted to see her daughter or granddaughter, she would pop up at her house. All her mother wanted was to berate Ellodie more and remind her of how much of a fuck up she was in her eyes.

Her father not reaching out surprised her. Of course, she could have called him, but she knew with him always came her mother. She typically avoided him for that reason. It sucked for her, because if her mom wasn't in the way, she knew she would be such a daddy's girl.

"No." Elodie kept her response short.

Harley sighed, and she looked tired. "I would normally do more of a checkup with you, Ellodie, but I have to be real. I have the itis, and I'm tired as hell.

I'll just say this . . . You just had a baby.

Your first baby. You need people around you to support you.

You can absolutely do it on your own, but if you don't have to, don't. Okay?"

All Ellodie could do was nod because she felt tears gathering in her eyes.

Harley didn't understand that she really did have to do it alone, at least until Yasmine got back home.

Her mother would only make her want to jump off a damn bridge, and she didn't really talk to the rest of her family like that.

The only person she could think of to call would be her uncle Martin, Yasmine's father, but he didn't know anything about taking care of a baby or offering emotional

support.

He was the overprotector of Ellodie and Yasmine and would fuck anyone up over them.

He spoiled them and could buy her whatever she wanted, but Ellodie could already do that for herself.

Harley slowly stood. “Where’s Etta?”

“She’s sleeping in my room. I’ll show you.

” Ellodie walked ahead of Harley and down the hall to her room.

Ellodie padded over to the bassinet and smiled as she gently picked Etta up.

Etta squirmed a little and whined, but Ellodie quickly soothed her by bouncing her slightly and patting her back.

“We can go to the nursery across the hall.”

Ellodie led Harley across the hall and into the light pink painted room. Harley spotted the rocking chair and made a beeline toward it. Ellodie giggled. She spent a long time researching the perfect rocking chair, and if Harley wasn’t careful, she would fall asleep in it.

“Hand me that baby. I can check her out right from here. You go on and talk to Lu. I know you want to.” Harley smiled up at Ellodie knowingly as she stretched her arms out for Etta.

Ellodie handed the baby over as she giggled. “Not necessarily. I can stay?—”

“Go,” Harley said with a tone of finality.

Ellodie stood there awkwardly for a moment before she looked down at her daughter. She seemed content with Harley, so she felt comfortable to turn around and go back into the living room.

Lucifer still stood in the living room with his hands in the pockets of his joggers.

He looked at her wall, where photos of her and Yasmine filled the space.

It gave Ellodie a moment to admire him. He was tall.

Taller than the average man, and his skin was beautifully dark.

He had a ton of tattoos and muscles all over his hard frame.

The smell filling her living room because of his cologne was heavenly.

“You just gonna stare at me, or you gonna say something?” Lucifer asked with his back still turned toward her. It startled her a bit, but she quickly smiled as she shook her head.

“It’s good to see you, Lu.” She took a few steps toward him, unable to stop herself. She craved to be near him.

“I bet it is,” he replied as he turned around. “Why you ain’t call me if you were lonely?”

That question caused her head to swim. “I didn’t even know that was an option.”

“You got my number, don’t you?” he asked.

She nodded. “Yeah, but?—”

“I don’t give my number out for no reason, love. If you’re lonely, hit me up.”

Something about what he said and the way he said it made her heart stir with security. She looked directly into his eyes and said, “I’ll keep that in mind.”

He nodded and looked like he was going to say something else, and she longed to know what it was because she could listen to him talk all damn day, but her phone rang and interrupted the moment.

She peeked over the couch at her phone where she left it earlier and realized it was her father calling. Her heart skipped a beat, and fresh tears threatened to fall.

Lucifer must have seen who was calling, too, because he said, “You should get that.”

As soon as the words left his mouth, she obeyed. Ellodie picked up her phone and swiped her finger across the screen.

“Daddy?”

“Now why the hell did I have to hear from your mother that you had your baby?”

Ellodie had to pull her ear away from the phone. Her father’s voice always sounded as loud as thunder, even when she turned the volume all the way down on her phone.

“Dad, you know how it is?—”

“My granddaughter has been in the world for three days, and I’m just finding out? You don’t think that’s a problem?”

“Wait, you just found out? I thought you knew the day I gave birth. I thought you might come to the hospital to meet her . . .” Tears gathered in her eyes, and she finally allowed them to fall.

The realization that her mother waited to tell her father about Etta broke her heart.

It had never crossed her mind that her mother would do that, but it made sense.

She didn’t do anything that didn’t benefit her.

Most likely, Kamilah let it slip on accident.

“Daddy, I’m sorry. I should have known better.

That woman hates me . . . Of course she didn’t tell you. ”

Silence filled the line before her father spoke. “No, I’m sorry. I’ll deal with her for not telling me, but you and me have to work on our communication. I have a granddaughter, and I don’t want to miss anything else. You hear me?”

Ellodie sniffled. Her father wasn’t wrong, but she felt like what he asked was impossible. “We can try, Daddy, but you know how that wife of yours is.”

He sighed. “We gon’ work something out, sweet pea. Tell me about my granddaughter.”

“Antoinetta is perfect,” she said with a smile as she glanced at Lucifer. It was clear to her that he could clearly hear her conversation. Her father was that loud, but it didn’t bother her that he was listening. She pointed at the couch and whispered, “Sit.”

He kept his eyes on her as he slowly walked to the couch and sat down. She took that

opportunity to walk over to the refrigerator in the open concept kitchen to grab a bottle of water. She walked over to Lucifer and handed it to him as she listened to her father speak.

“Antoinetta.” She heard the emotion in his voice. “After Mama?”

Ellodie giggled as she sat on the couch.

She realized she sat extremely close to Lucifer.

When he put his arm across the back of the couch behind her, she almost melted.

Being this close to him did something to her insides that she wanted to explore, but first, she had to get her father off the phone.

“Yes, after that old woman.” She paused for a moment as she thought about her grandmother. Her death had been hard on the family, but especially on her. Her grandmother hated her mother and was Ellodie’s biggest advocate. “I miss her.”

“Me too.”

“Listen, Daddy, my midwife is here, so let me get back to her. I’ll send you some photos of Etta and call you back later, okay?”

“Well, hold on now. I was going to stop by. You up to seeing your old man?”

Ellodie shook her head as if her father could see her. “I don’t want to see Mama. You know if you even look like you’re about to leave the house, she’s either going to come with you or follow your location.”

Her father grumbled something under his breath before saying, “Fine. But your

mother put together a huge party this weekend so the family can meet Antoinetta?—”

“Etta, Daddy. We’ll call her Etta for short.”

“Etta. Your mother planned a party for Etta,” he finished.

“She doesn’t even know her damn name, but she’s planning her a party?” That irritated Ellodie.

“I know, sweet pea, but try to keep the peace and come, okay? I want to meet her, and I know the rest of the family does. My baby has a baby. This is one thing your mother got right. You and Etta should be celebrated.”

“Fine,” Ellodie replied. She didn’t want to share Etta with her mother, but she didn’t want to keep her daughter away from the rest of her extended family. They were good people, even though she wasn’t that close with them, and Etta deserved to grow up around their love.

“Good. And bring Etta’s father. Your mother had plenty to say about him, but I want to meet him for myself, and sweet pea? That’s not up for negotiation. Love you.”

Before Ellodie could reply, her father hung up. She looked over at Lucifer with wide eyes. He shook his head, and Ellodie immediately knew he heard exactly what her father said.

When he looked at her again, a playful smirk formed on his lips. “Let me guess? You want me to play pretend?”

She bit her lip, completely unsure of how to respond.

The other day when she brought it up, she had been only half joking about pretending

that he was her baby daddy.

Now, she felt like her back was up against a wall.

Her family didn't really know how to take no for an answer, and she could only imagine the words her mother would have for her if she showed up without Lucifer.

Looking into his eyes, she asked, "If I said yes, are you going to turn me down again?"

He chuckled and dropped his chin to his chest before glancing over at her. "It was hard enough to say no to you the first time. You expect me to say no now?"

Her eyes lit up with relief. In the back of her head, she knew this was childish.

She knew she should just stand up to her parents and let them know the truth.

Her baby daddy was an abusive asshole that had yet to meet his daughter, but the allure of spending more time with Lucifer and not having to hear her mother's mouth overpowered that voice.

With a challenge in her eyes, she gazed at him as her lips turned up, before she said the words that felt like they might change her life forever. "Not really."

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Sweat poured off Lucifer as he walked through his home. Every morning at five, he woke up to get a workout in. When he had this home built, he made sure he had everything he needed within the walls, which included a home gym, a theater, several guest rooms, and an acre of land right on a lake.

When it was all said and done, and he moved in almost nine years ago, he realized he'd built a damn family home, not a bachelor pad.

It got lonely. He knew that was why when he heard Ellodie say she was lonely last night it hit him right in the heart.

Lucifer knew all too well what it was like to be lonely.

He had his family, which grew every day it felt like, but he didn't have a person to himself, nor did he have a family of his own.

Somewhere in the past few years, that had been something he wanted.

As he entered the master bedroom, he noticed the unmade bed with black sheets.

Making the bed was never something he did, mostly because his father used to force him and his siblings to do it every morning before school, and if they didn't, either Hades or his mother would get beaten.

Little shit like that shaped Lucifer's life.

Everything his father used to force on him, he did the complete opposite now.

It was his mission to be nothing like the man who used to dominate his life and now dominated the city.

No resident of Ellwood would guess that the mayor of the city used to beat his oldest son and was the reason his late wife committed suicide.

Lucifer took his time undressing and placing his gym clothes in the dirty clothes hamper before he grabbed his phone from his messy bed and checked it. A smile formed on his face when he saw a text from Ellodie.

Baby Mama: What time are you stopping by?

Last night, before Harley finished with Etta's exam, Lucifer and Ellodie decided that he would stop by again today to go over the rules for their fake arrangement.

Disappointment filled him every time he thought about this situation being fake.

He had been feeling Ellodie from the moment she demanded he get her some ice chips when she was in labor, but he wasn't lying the night before.

He found it hard to say no to her the first time, so he couldn't this time.

Her parents seemed to be overbearing and controlling, especially her mother.

Her pops didn't seem so bad, but he got the sense that she didn't want to disappoint him.

Now, because of that, he was stuck playing pretend instead of actually courting the first woman who had caught his eye in years.

Quickly, he tapped out a response.

Lucifer: I'm getting ready to come through now. Be there within the hour.

He put his phone on the charger before walking into his large master bathroom.

Bypassing the jacuzzi tub, he used the panel on the wall to start the waterfall shower and get in.

He washed up slowly as he thought about his home and his life.

He really spared no expense when it came to his domain.

Everything was purposefully chosen for maximum comfort.

He thanked God every morning for allowing him to make money in the streets to purchase this home and for allowing him breath in his body to enjoy the fruits of his labors.

By the time he finished in the shower, the large mirror above the sink had steamed up.

He quickly dried off and brushed his teeth before going into the large walk-in closet and choosing some joggers and a T-shirt to wear.

After he dressed, he grabbed his phone and put in an order for his favorite breakfast spot, The Buttered Biscuit.

His phone rang before he could put it down. His favorite person was calling. His sister, Eris.

“Yo?” He greeted her before he grabbed his clothes to get dressed.

“What you doing?” she asked, and immediately, he could tell she was bored. Dante must have just gone to school, and Cade was probably at work.

“Getting ready to head out.”

“Where you going?”

Lucifer should have known being short with her would never work.

He and Eris were closer than close. While Hades was busy growing up before his time, they were lucky enough to enjoy being children.

That was, until Lucifer hit the streets with his brother, but still, they had formed more of a sibling relationship while Hades took on the parental role.

Lucifer and Eris were true built-in best friends.

“I’m going to check Ellodie out.” He decided to be honest, because if he was really about to do this, he knew he would need some advice.

The line fell silent for a moment. “Why have I not heard this name until last night? Who is this chick?”

Lucifer went into his bathroom and grabbed his favorite cologne before he sprayed it on. His next stop was back into his closet to grab some shoes.

“She’s Harley’s client. You know Hades been acting crazy since Harley got pregnant. He made me go with her when Ellodie was in labor.”

“Okay,” she dragged out like she still didn’t understand. “That doesn’t really tell me anything, Lu.”

He sighed as he sat down on the loveseat inside his closet so he could put his shoes on. “Her mama came in there talking crazy to her?—”

“While she was in labor?” Eris asked for clarification.

“Yeah, man, and you know I don’t do well with parents bullying their children. I don’t care how old they are. Then her mama was talking down on her for not knowing her baby daddy is?—”

“Wait, she don’t know who her baby daddy is?” Eris asked, and Lucifer paused.

“I’on really know, but I stepped in and told her mama I was her baby daddy, and then I stayed with her while she was in labor, and now I got roped into playing like her man for her family.

” The line was silent as he walked out of his room and through his house.

Once downstairs, he grabbed his wallet from the kitchen counter where he left it, and Eris still didn’t reply. “Hello?”

“I’m still here.”

“You ain’t gon’ say nothing?”

“What the hell am I supposed to say to that, Lucifer?”

“Cut it out with the government.”

“Nah, I think you need to be knocked upside the head with some sense. I thought your government might do the trick.”

After grabbing his keys, he walked toward his garage. He was anxious to see Ellodie, and he hadn't even gotten to see Etta last night because she went right back to sleep after Harley finished with her. He walked into his garage and decided to take his bike.

"Look, I'll hit you up later. I do want to talk to you about this, but not if you gon' judge me."

"Why can't we talk now? I promise to tone down the judgement," Eris whined. If nothing else was true, it was that Eris loved some good tea, and Lucifer was sitting on a piping hot pot.

"I'm about to get on my bike. I'll hit you up later."

She sighed. "Fine."

"Love you, big ass head."

Eris sucked her teeth. "Bye."

Lucifer chuckled as he started up one of his bikes. It was his favorite bike, especially for riding around town. The red and black accents with The Obsidian Rider logo on the side were customizations he and Hades did together. He put on the matching leathers that hung over the handles of the bike.

As he pulled out of his garage, he thought about Eris's response to what he was doing for Ellodie. For the next fifteen minutes to The Buttered Biscuit, he contemplated if this was the right thing to do.

After he picked up the food and put it in the built-in, a compartment on the bike for safekeeping, his thoughts drifted to her baby daddy.

He wondered if that was something he should worry about and why her family didn't know who he was.

Questions swarmed through his mind as he rode his bike.

The spring air whipped past him and chilled his bones.

When he pulled up to Ellodie's condo, he parked in the guest spot, grabbed the food, and made his way inside.

The elevator was directly ahead of him and across the pristine lobby.

It came quickly after he pressed the call button, and he got on.

It didn't take long for it to stop on Ellodie's floor, and his long legs made quick strides toward her door.

He knocked and didn't have to wait long for her to answer.

The first thing he noticed was that she looked exhausted.

The second thing he noticed was she looked like she was still in her pajamas.

She wore fuzzy silk shorts and the matching tank top.

There were dark spots over her nipples, and he realized it was milk.

Etta cried in her arms as she rocked her urgently, shushing her and then looking up at him with her brown eyes framed by long, dark lashes.

"Hey, Lu. Come on in. I haven't had time to make myself presentable. Etta had a

rough night.” She moved further into her home.

Lucifer closed the door behind him. He watched as Ellodie sat on the couch while he placed the food on the kitchen counter and then washed his hands thoroughly before walking over to her. “Give her here. You can go get yourself together. I got her.”

Ellodie looked up at him, her brows pulling together. “It’s okay. She just needs to burp. I just fed her?—”

“Aight, let me burp her. You go ahead and take a minute to yourself.”

She eyed him. “Do you know what you’re doing?”

He chuckled. “When my nephew was a baby, I was the only one he liked for real. I’m like the baby whisperer.”

He sat down next to her and held his arms out. Hesitantly, she passed Etta over, and as soon as the baby was in his arms, her cries ceased.

Ellodie’s brows rose. “Seriously? I’ve been trying to calm her down for hours.”

“You must not got the magic touch.” He grinned at her.

She sighed and stood up. “I guess not. She didn’t eat a whole lot, so I’m going to pump and then shower. It should only take me half an hour.”

“Take your time,” Lucifer said as he positioned Etta so he could burp her.

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Ellodie handed him a burp rag and peered at him for a few more seconds. “Are you sure about this? I know you didn’t come over here for this.”

“Woman, if you don’t leave us alone. Go handle your business.

We good.” He loved that she listened so well.

She turned on her heels and disappeared down the hallway that he assumed led to her bedroom.

“Ya mama is fine as hell, Etta. You know that?” Etta’s response was a loud burp. He chuckled. “Good job, baby girl.”

Lucifer bounced her gently in his arms and watched as she drifted off to sleep. He got completely lost in her pretty round face and smooth dark skin that matched her mama’s. Her innocence was infectious. “I hope don’t nobody take that from you.”

He spoke softly to her like that as she slept, and before he knew it, Ellodie came back into the living room looking refreshed but still tired.

“She’s sleeping?” she asked as though she couldn’t believe it.

“Yeah,” Lucifer muttered.

Ellodie looked stunned. “Here, let me take her and put her in her crib.”

Lucifer stood slowly, dwarfing her with his height. “I got it. Show me where.”

Ellodie walked in front of him, and he admired the gray fitted dress she wore.

It wasn't fancy at all, just one of those comfortable ones that women wore around the house or to run errands.

He watched as her ass bounced with every step.

She had to know she was a true baddie. Even exhausted and with her curly hair piled on the top of her head, she was the most beautiful woman he had the pleasure of laying eyes on.

They entered the nursery, and Lucifer smirked at the decor. All pink everything. It looked like a little girl's dream. He walked over to the crib and placed Etta inside while Ellodie turned on some white noise. Etta was out like a light and didn't even stir as they backed away and out of the room.

Ellodie sighed heavily, and he looked down at her. "You good?"

She nodded. "Just relieved. She hasn't really been to sleep since y'all left last night. Thank you for getting her to sleep."

She made a move to walk away, but Lucifer gently tugged on her hand. When she faced him, he said, "Aye, call me anytime you need some help. I mean that. I don't mind helping out where I can."

She gazed up at him for a second before slowly nodding. "I'll keep that in mind."

Reluctantly, he let her hand go, but he was happy to get a good view of her ass again as she led them back into the living room.

"I brought some food," he said before she could sit on the couch.

Her eyes lit up just as her stomach growled. She placed her hand on it and blushed. “I can’t even remember the last time I ate.”

She rushed over to the counter and poked around the bag with the food in it.

“Go sit down, woman.” He grabbed the bag and chuckled because she pouted before following her to the glass table. “You gotta remember to take care of yourself, love.”

She sat down and frowned. “It’s not that I forget. It’s just hard to squeeze in the time to cook or even order some food, let alone eat it.”

Lucifer made a mental note of that. “I hope you like chicken and waffles.”

Her stomach growled again, and she giggled. “I do.”

“Bet.”

He placed a container in front of her, and she wasted no time digging into the food. Lucifer watched in amusement as she attacked the waffles while he ate his at a more moderate pace.

Halfway through their meal, he finally asked, “How is this shit supposed to work?”

He appreciated that she didn’t try to play dumb. Wiping her mouth with a napkin, she paused her eating as she responded. “I guess whenever I have a family function, you attend with me.”

Lucifer sat back in his seat and crossed his arms. “What about your real baby daddy?” He figured there was no time like the present to ask the million-dollar question.

Ellodie stared at the table for a moment.

Lucifer didn't like that shit, so he grabbed her chin and lifted it so she looked at him.
"You don't want to talk about it?"

"I mean . . . You deserve to know."

"That don't mean you want to talk about it."

Her jaw clenched slightly, and he saw tears swimming in her eyes.

Just when he was about to tell her she didn't have to answer, she said, "He's not in the picture.

We haven't been together for years, but he .

. . never really knew how to take no for an answer.

I haven't seen him for three months. I told him when I was in labor.

I sent him pictures of Etta. He left me on read.

"I can't tell my parents that, because my daddy would kill him, and my mother would ask me what I did to run him away, and then she would use that information as a way to remind me of how much of a fuck up I am?—"

"Aye, man. You ain't a fuck up." Ellodie dropped her eyes. "Look at me." Her gaze snapped back up to him. "I don't want to hear you say that shit again. You hear me?"

She nodded slowly before clearing her throat.

"I know I'm asking you to do the most, and I know it seems stupid.

I'm a grown ass woman and should be able to stand up to my parents.

My mother . . . she's just impossible. I've found it's just easier to give her what she wants than to give her reasons to hate on me even more. ”

“Just because it's easier doesn't mean it's what you should do.

” Although he was tuned into the conversation, Lucifer wondered what kind of father would stay away from that beautiful baby in there.

Then he wondered what kind of mother would be so malicious toward her daughter. Neither of them deserved that.

“You're right. It was a stupid thing to ask you to do.” The sadness in her eyes caused him to grab her hands.

“I ain't say I wouldn't do it.” She smiled, and that made this crazy ass thing all worthwhile to him. “What are the rules?”

She perked up. “Good question. I guess we need to get our stories straight, and we have to make it look believable. You're supposed to be more than Etta's father, but my man. You think you can handle that?”

Lucifer sat back again and gapped his thick legs before licking his lips. “You tell me.”

She blushed as she looked him over. “Yeah, I think you can handle it just fine.”

“So, where did we meet?”

She looked up at the ceiling as she thought about it. “Where do you work?”

He chuckled. “Me and my brother own a custom bike shop. You ever rode?”

He enjoyed watching her squirm in her seat. He knew she understood that he was asking a double-edged question.

“Yeah, a time or two.”

His brows rose. “Yeah, how’d you like it?”

She licked her lips, and he loved that she played his game with him. “Loved it.”

His dick hardened, and he had to discreetly adjust himself in his seat. “I’ll have to take you for a ride sometime.”

“I look forward to it.” She gazed at him for a second longer before returning to the matter at hand. “But no, they wouldn’t believe that I met you at your job.” Then her eyes lit up. “We could say I was Hades and Harley’s wedding planner, and I met you through them.”

“You a wedding planner?”

Her eyes lit up. “I own my own business. I think it’s the perfect story. What do you think?”

He nodded slowly. “That could work. They got married three years ago.”

“That’s perfect.”

“What are we going to tell them about me not being around until now?” he asked. If they were going to do this, he wanted to make sure it sounded and looked good.

She shrugged. “We can just tell them we weren’t ready to meet each other’s families yet.”

Lucifer thought about it, but his phone rang and interrupted the moment. He saw it was Hades calling and knew he needed to answer. Hades was the type to pop up on him if he didn’t answer, since he had his and Eris’s locations.

“Just a second, love. It’s Hades calling.” She nodded, and Lucifer answered the phone. “Yeah, Hades?”

“Nigga, come meet your niece.”

“Huh?” Lucifer asked as he processed what Hades said.

“Stop playing, stupid mothafucka, and come meet my daughter. Harley just had my baby, and she look just like me too.” Lucifer heard the pride in Hades’s voice.

He couldn’t believe his loose cannon brother was a father.

He sat there in stunned silence. Harley was supposed to have a couple more weeks left, so this was the last thing he expected to hear.

“I’m about to kick this midwife bitch out of my house so I can bond with my baby.

Better get here quick before I’on want visitors anymore. ”

“How—”

The line went dead, cutting Lucifer off. All he could do was shake his head. Hades would never change, and he knew now that he had a daughter, there would be a few more loose screws in that man’s head.

“Everything okay?” Ellodie asked.

Lucifer smiled before pinching her chin. “Yeah. Harley just had her baby. I’m about to go over there and check them out. Can I hit you up later so we can talk more?”

He stood as Ellodie’s eyes grew wide with excitement. “Yeah, of course. Give Harley my love.”

He stood, pulling her up with him. “I will. Hey, I have one more question quick though.”

“What’s that?”

“Since I’m your fake man now, will I get to kiss you?”

Ellodie giggled, and Lucifer decided it was his new favorite sound. “I guess you will. Why? You want to practice now?”

Lucifer let her go and gave her a lopsided grin as he backed up a few steps. “Nah. I’ll keep you on your toes.”

Once again, he heard her giggle as he turned toward the door, and it was at that moment he understood that he was a goner. Ellodie had him wrapped around her pinky finger. He only hoped it turned out to be a good thing and not a terrible mistake.

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“ I can’t get enough of these chubby cheeks.

” Yasmine crooned as she kissed Etta’s face.

They sat outside at one of the many tables in Ellodie’s parents’ backyard with a large umbrella shading them from the sun.

Uncle Martin and Daniel, Ellodie’s father, stood at the grill while other family members milled about.

Everyone seemed to enjoy the sunny weather and the cool breeze.

Ellodie shook her head with the biggest smile on her face as her cousin made faces at her daughter.

Yasmine was lucky she wasn’t just anyone because Ellodie would have went upside her head for kissing her baby all over her face.

Nobody could tell Yasmine that Etta wasn’t her child, though, and really, if anyone deserved the other title of parent, it was Yasmine.

She went to most of the doctors’ appointments with Ellodie, funded the entire nursery, threw her baby shower, and made sure Ellodie ate well every single day of her pregnancy.

It was a cruel act of fate that she just so happened to be out of town for the actual labor.

But she was home now and had finally met her goddaughter, and just like it had been with Ellodie, Yasmine fell in love at first sight.

“Do you plan on hogging my grandbaby all day, Yasmine?”

Ellodie’s smile immediately evaporated as she turned to find her mother standing behind them with a frown on her face and her hands on her hips. The pink dress she wore popped against her dark skin, and her black hair hung just past her ears, and not a hair was out of place.

Yasmine didn’t even bother to look at Kamilah as she responded. “Yeah, actually.”

Kamilah scoffed but knew better than to get into it with Yasmine.

The two of them had been in more arguments than Ellodie could count.

Since Yasmine was young, she made her distaste for her auntie known.

Her father didn’t play about his daughter, either, and would get involved at the drop of a dime.

That was smoke Kamilah didn’t want, because she never won those battles.

It was easier for Kamilah to bow out gracefully instead of making a scene, especially in front of all these people.

As soon as her mother walked away, Ellodie giggled. “You and your daddy about the only ones she won’t curse clean the fuck out.”

Yasmine sucked her teeth. “You baldheaded mammy ain’t about shit. Plus, she only wants Etta so she can show her off. I ain’t playing that at all.”

Ellodie had to agree. When she got there earlier, before anyone else, her father teared up and was enamored by Etta.

Her mother, on the other hand, held her for all of two seconds until Etta cried and hadn't been interested in her since.

Now that people were there, she wanted to gloat like she was about to win grandmother of the year, and Ellodie didn't want that either.

“Make sure she doesn't get her hands on my baby, please. ”

“You know I got you, girl. Now, when is your fake baby daddy getting here?”

Ellodie almost choked on the sweet tea she had just taken a sip of. “Yas, hush. That's supposed to be a secret.”

Ellodie looked around the backyard to make sure nobody heard her. Luckily, they were ducked off in the far corner of the yard with nobody around.

“Yeah, yeah. Where he at?” Yas asked as she patted Etta on the bottom since she suddenly got fussy.

Ellodie checked her phone, and her eyes grew wide. “He sent me a text a minute ago saying he's here.” She stood, nearly knocking the metal chair over. “You okay with her for a second?”

“Go get ya man.” Yasmine grinned and waved her off.

Ellodie's cheeks warmed at those words, but she shook them off.

She had to remember this was just for pretend.

After a few months, she could break it to her parents that she and Lucifer had broken up or something.

The thought of having that conversation caused her heart to ache for many reasons, but she refocused her mind on the task at hand.

Quickly, Ellodie zigzagged through the maze of tables with large umbrellas scattered through the backyard. A few family members she had yet to see congratulated her on her baby. She thanked them quickly and kept on her way.

When she made it to the back door, she slid it open and rushed through the massive home.

Her father had been the Ellwood city manager, handling the city's finances and a ton of other things Ellodie was uninterested in.

He made a lot of money, though, and he also owned a couple of low-income apartment complexes that not only served as help for people in their city, but they also provided a good sum of extra income.

She finally made it to the front of the house and saw Lucifer standing on the doorstep through the glass door. A smile graced her face as she took him in when she opened the door. He wore white linen pants and a royal blue shirt today, a change up from his typical all-black fit.

His smile matched hers as he leaned down and gave her a hug before kissing her cheek. Ellodie's insides flip-flopped at the feel of his lips and the smell of his cologne.

"Hey, love. How you?" he asked with that deep voice of his.

Stressed. That was what she wanted to say.

She was nervous their little act wouldn't be believable.

Telling her parents who her baby daddy was and how he was a piece of shit who ran the streets was embarrassing.

Getting caught pretending a man she had only known just over a week was her baby daddy was even more embarrassing. This had to work.

She put on a fake smile. "I'm fine. How are you? How is Harley? I forgot to ask you what they named the baby. I told myself I would ask as soon as I saw you."

He chuckled at her rapid-fire questions. They'd talked often since they last saw each other, and she kept telling him that baby brain wasn't just a thing during pregnancy. Post pregnancy was taking her through it. She definitely would have lost her head if it wasn't attached to her.

"Her name is Kali. Harley is good. The baby is good, I think. I told you I only got like five minutes with her before Hades decided he wanted to kick everyone out. I been trying to give them some space, but I'm definitely going to pop up on them in the next day or so."

"Get pictures when you do." She shifted from foot to foot and fidgeted, jittery energy dancing around her.

He chuckled. "You nervous?"

She let out a shaky giggle. "That obvious?"

He ran a hand from her shoulder down her arm. "Yeah, but it's cool. We can play it

off like you're just nervous about me finally coming around."

She beamed up at him. "That could work." She cocked her head. "You never answered my question. How are you?"

"My bad. I'm cool. You ready to do this?"

She nodded. "Yeah, let's get this over with."

Lucifer grabbed her hand as they walked through the home. She couldn't remember the last time she held hands with a man. It felt good, and she immediately felt a bit of relief from his touch.

"Your people got money." It was a statement, not a question.

"Yeah, I guess you could say that." Ellodie shrugged.

She grew up with money and never had to go without, so this big house wasn't really special to her.

In fact, she couldn't wait to leave it when she turned eighteen.

When she did, she never looked back. It would be a cold day in hell when she moved back in with her parents.

Her father paid for her college tuition and then fronted the money for her wedding planning business, and since then, she had been on her own.

Lucifer didn't respond as he took in his surroundings. He didn't look impressed or in awe, only observant.

When they reached the back door, before she slid it open, she stopped and looked up at him. “You’re sure about this?”

A smile graced his face, and he pinched her chin. “I told you I can’t tell you no.”

She beamed up at him before opening the door. “Then let’s put on a show.”

With their hands linked, they stepped into the backyard.

The smell of barbecued food hit Ellodie, reminding her that she had yet to eat for the day, and it was already three in the afternoon.

She’d been doing better lately, though, thanks to Lucifer.

He’d been sending her food every day since he brought her breakfast. He also made a point of FaceTiming her to make sure she actually ate it.

The fact that he wouldn’t allow Etta to be an excuse that she didn’t eat warmed her heart.

He had unknowingly taken the place of Yasmine while she was out of the country.

Ellodie led Lucifer straight toward her father, ready to get those introductions out of the way.

She peeped her uncle Martin nudging her father and pointing toward them.

Daniel turned, and a smile graced his handsome face.

He was over sixty years old but didn’t look older than forty, with smooth dark skin and a freshly lined goatee.

“The man of the hour,” Daniel said, reaching his hand out to Lucifer to shake.

“It’s nice to finally meet you, sir,” Lucifer replied as he gave him a firm shake.

Ellodie squeezed his hand and pointed at her father. “Lu, this is my dad, Daniel. Daddy, this is Lu.” She pointed at her uncle. “And this is my favorite uncle, Uncle Martin.”

“Nice to finally meet the man who put a baby in my niece.”

“Uncle!” Ellodie’s eyes grew wide before she looked up at Lucifer. “Please ignore him.”

Lucifer chuckled. “Nah, it’s all good, baby. This is long overdue.”

“Damn right it is.” Ellodie rolled her eyes as her mother waltzed up to them with a scowl already etched on her face. “Lu, is it?”

“It is,” Lucifer responded coolly.

“And what’s that short for?”

Lucifer stared her down for a moment before he finally responded. “Nothing. It’s just Lu.”

Kamilah screwed her face up. “That don’t sound right?”

“Kamilah, leave that man alone,” Daniel demanded before looking at Lucifer. “Come have a drink with us. The food is just about ready.”

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Lucifer respectfully bowed his head. “If it’s okay, I’ll join you in a minute. I need to go see my baby girl first.”

Daniel grinned at Lucifer before gesturing toward the corner of the yard where Yasmine and Etta were. “Fo’sho. I’ll be here when you’re ready.”

Lucifer nodded at him before he placed his hand on Ellodie’s lower back and brushed past Kamilah, completely ignoring the stern look on her face.

“Aye, what’s ya mama’s issue, anyway?” Lucifer asked as they made their way toward Etta and Yasmine.

Ellodie’s cheeks heated. Her mother always made her feel embarrassed, because she was so evil. Everyone picked up on that negative energy, and it always left Ellodie feeling miniscule. “I genuinely wish I knew.”

“She always been like that?”

Ellodie nodded. “Always.” Lucifer simply shook his head as they reached the table.

Ellodie quickly grabbed the pink diaper bag that sat in one of the chairs and pulled out hand sanitizer.

She squirted some on her palm before reaching it out to Lucifer and doing the same to him.

“Lu, this is my cousin, best friend, and Etta’s godmother, Yasmine. Yas, this is Lu.”

Yasmine peered up at him and then looked at Ellodie, wide-eyed. “You ain’t tell me he was this fine, Ello.” She looked back at Lucifer. “You got any brothers I can play pretend with?”

Lucifer glanced at Ellodie, and she could tell he was unsure of how to respond since she didn’t warn him that Yasmine knew their secret. She gave him a reassuring smile. “It’s okay. She knows who Wes is, so I had to tell her what was going on. She’s the only one though.”

“Wes?”

Ellodie looked around before whispering. “Etta’s father.”

At the mention of her name, Lucifer reached out for the baby. “Mind if I hold her?”

“Not at all.” She smiled up at him as he took Etta.

She scrunched her little body up and yawned, but her brown eyes were wide open as she peered at him curiously.

He held her out in front of him for a moment with the biggest smile before he cuddled her up to his chest. “Hey, pretty baby. How you been?” His large hand made small circles around her back.

After a minute, he realized it was silent, and he looked up to see Ellodie and Yasmine smiling at him. “What?”

“You’re good with her,” Yasmine pointed out.

“I told you he’s like the baby whisperer,” Ellodie said.

“For real. You got any brothers?” Yasmine asked.

Lucifer shook his head with a smirk. “Trust me, you don’t want nothing to do with my brother. Besides, he’s married, and his wife don’t play about him.”

Yasmine pouted, and Ellodie giggled. “Fix your face, girl.”

Lucifer stood there with them for a moment longer before Daniel got everyone’s attention.

“The food is ready, y’all, but first, I just wanted to welcome Lu to our home. If you haven’t had the chance to meet him yet, he’s Ello’s boyfriend and Etta’s father. Y’all make sure you treat him like family. Now, let’s eat and turn up. Someone get the cards so we can get a game of Spades goin’!”

Ellodie giggled. Her father might have a highly important job that caused him to rub elbows with the city’s elite, but he was from the Ellway Projects. Nothing would change that.

Kamilah scoffed. “Daniel, this is supposed to be a classy event.”

Daniel waved her off and accepted the shot of Hennessy his brother handed him. After they took those down, they headed toward the sound system to turn on some tunes.

Ellodie glanced up at Lucifer. “It’s about to get rowdy real quick.”

Her voice was light with amusement though. She loved seeing her father in his element like this. These were the times she felt more connected to him and like they could have a great relationship if it wasn’t for her mother.

“Ratchet is what she meant. Hell, tell them pass that Hennessy this way,” Yasmine said as she moved away from the table in search of some liquor.

“Hope you don’t mind. When my daddy’s family gets together, it can get wild, but it’s fun.” Ellodie grinned at him.

Lucifer shrugged. “Long as the food is good and you and Etta are cool, I’m aight.”

On a whim, she reached over and rubbed his forearm. “Thank you.” When she dropped her hand, he took her by surprise and pulled her into him with his free arm, securely holding Etta in his other one. Her brows rose as she looked up at him, a smile playing on her lips. “What are you doing, sir?”

“You my girl, ain’t you?”

Her breath caught in her throat for a moment before she murmured, “Yes.”

His smile made her melt against him. “I’m about to kiss my girl.”

And then he did. His lips were soft, and they felt so good pressed against hers. She allowed her mouth to open, and his tongue found hers. They stayed wrapped up like that for a solid minute, completely consumed by one another, before Etta’s cries tore them apart.

Ellodie felt completely breathless as she held herself steady by the back of the metal chair beside her.

Lucifer bounced Etta. “Either she’s really hungry or she’s really jealous I was just giving you all that attention.”

As if on signal, her breasts leaked milk because of Etta’s cries. She thanked God she

remembered to put on her nipple pads; otherwise, she would be so embarrassed.

She held her arms out and said, “She’s hungry. Will you be okay for a moment while I go feed her?”

“You need help?” he asked before biting his bottom lip.

Ellodie felt heat spread over her before she shook her head and let out a nervous giggle. “No, you stay out here. I won’t be long.”

She needed a moment to herself because it felt like he had her under some kind of spell after that kiss. It felt anything but fake, but she had to remind herself that it was, . . . wasn’t it?

“I’ll be aight. I’ll go take your uncle and pops up on that drink.”

She nodded. “Get some food too. I’ll be back in a minute.”

She turned to walk away, but he called out to her, which stopped her in her tracks. “Ello?” She turned. “Miss you already, love.”

She blushed before she turned around and scurried away, hoping she found a lick of sense and reason within the walls of her parents’ home so she wouldn’t get too caught up in the fine ass man named Lucifer.

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It wasn't in the plans to take several shots back to back, but here Lucifer was, tipsy and having a good ass time.

He didn't think he would vibe with Ellodie's family, but he was wrong.

Her mother was the only one who made him want to cause bodily harm, but he refrained.

He had a terrible temper, if it got to that point, and the last thing he wanted to do was show his ass at Ellodie's people's house.

"You tellin' me you did this shit yo'self?" Martin slurred as he eyed Lucifer's bike. It was a nice day to ride, so he drove that over to the party instead of one of his cars.

Lucifer chuckled. "Yeah, me and my brother."

"And y'all own a shop where you do this shit?" Daniel asked as he scratched his head in awe.

Lucifer had already told him about Underworld Customs, but they seemed to be in awe that he had such a cool job.

"Daddy, he already told you that. You don't believe the man?" Ellodie asked as she and Yasmine made their way down the driveway.

Most people had already left, and the party had wound down. Etta was inside sleeping in Ellodie's old room, and it was getting late.

“I’m just tryna make sure I understand, girl, hush.” Daniel playfully swatted at Ellodie as she giggled and wrapped her arms around Lucifer’s waist.

Lucifer got a kick out of their banter. He noticed when Kamilah wasn’t around, everyone seemed to have a good time.

As soon as she made an appearance, tension filled the air.

The past hour had been smooth since Kamilah excused herself from the party.

Lucifer suspected it had gotten too ratchet for her, as Yasmine would say.

“Yeah, we own our own custom bike shop, and I’m in a motorcycle club that my brother founded.

Lately, I been wanting to look into opening my own bike repair shop though.

” While he spoke, Lucifer’s hands found Ellodie’s back.

He rubbed it slowly, as if it was the most natural thing in the world. To him, it felt like it.

Ellodie looked up at him. “I didn’t know that.”

He leaned down and kissed her forehead before smiling at her in response.

“Aw, you two are so cute,” Yasmine slurred. The award for the drunkest person of the night went to her without a doubt.

“On that note, we should get going.” Ellodie tried pulling away from him, but he held her in place, unwilling to let her go.

“Y’all staying the night, Ello. Lu can’t ride this thing in his condition.” Daniel grinned at them like he just told them he bought them a house.

It was true. Lucifer wouldn’t get on his bike after the drinks he had. He wasn’t drunk, but he definitely wasn’t sober. He didn’t plan on staying the night though. He was more than capable of calling an Uber.

Ellodie’s brows drew in as she looked at her father. “I can drive him home.”

“Baby, please. I’m talking to your man right now.

” Daniel grinned at his daughter as he swayed in place, which caused both Ellodie and Yasmine to giggle.

They loved seeing him like this. When his eyes finally focused back on Lucifer, he put his hands up in a praying position and said, “It’s been years since I had my daughter sleep under the same roof as me, and now my baby has a baby.

Do an old man a favor and stay here tonight. ”

Lucifer rubbed the back of his neck and smiled hesitantly as he looked at Ellodie, who shook her head. He could tell she suppressed a smile, though, which surprised him. He didn’t think she would be down to stay at her parents’ house longer than she had to, but maybe he’d been wrong.

“What you think, baby?” he asked. He didn’t miss the way that smile she tried to hide slipped out as soon as he called her baby.

“I guess one night won’t hurt.” She peered up at him, and he swore he saw adoration in her eyes.

His heart did a funny little dance, and the liquor in his system had him forgetting that this was all for show.

With that thought dulling his mood, he looked back at Daniel and said, “Looks like we stayin’.”

Daniel clapped Lucifer on the back with pride dancing in his expression. “I knew I liked you. You’re a good man for my baby.”

Lucifer chuckled. “You’re only sayin’ that ’cause I got her to agree to stay.”

“Nah.” Daniel shook his head. “I’m a good judge of character. I ain’t gon’ hold you. I thought I might not like you ’cause you been MIA, but I was wrong, and I’m man enough to admit that. Thank you for makin’ my baby happy.”

Lucifer was also a good judge of character, so he could automatically tell two things: Daniel was honest with his words, and he was a good father.

Lucifer wondered what it was like to have a good father. He got the impression that Ellodie didn’t understand what she had. It was precious, and the little boy in him yearned to have the love of a father. Not his father. That ship sailed, but a father figure might do.

He shook his head, trying to focus his tipsy thoughts. He did a good job of not thinking about his father, and he wanted to keep it that way, especially now when he was in the company of so many people.

Luckily, Ellodie chose that moment to speak up as she looked up at him. “Can you grab the portable bassinet from my car?”

He didn’t know what the hell a portable bassinet looked like, but he nodded anyway.

“Of course.”

Ellodie pulled her keys out of the hoodie she put on. The T-shirt and jean shorts had been cool earlier, but the temperature dropped once the sun went down.

“Night, Daddy,” Ellodie said before giving her father a hug.

“Good night, sweet pea. I’m glad today went so well for you and Etta. You deserve it, for real.” Daniel kissed the top of her head.

Lucifer watched as Ellodie sank into the hug, and he got the sense that they didn’t have a lot of moments like this.

“That’s because that wife of yours stayed out my way for the most part,” she muttered.

Daniel only chuckled before he kissed her head again and released her. Uncle Martin and Yasmine weren’t as coy though. At the mention of Kamilah, they both went in.

“The Wicked Witch of the West was on her best behavior today, wasn’t she?” Yasmine asked.

“That’s a cute name, baby girl. I normally just call her bi?—”

Uncle Martin’s words cut off when Ellodie giggled and turned on her heels. “Night, y’all.”

They replied with a chorus of, “Good night,” before Lucifer heard Uncle Martin mention another shot. By that time, he was thankfully at Ellodie’s car, because there was no way he would take another shot that night. One thing about the Glover family, they could drink with the best of them.

“It’s in the trunk,” Ellodie said as she pressed the button on her keys.

The trunk opened, and Lucifer saw a box with a picture of a bassinet on it. He picked it up, and she closed the trunk before locking her car.

“This new?” he asked.

She nodded. “Yeah. I haven’t had a chance to bring it up to my condo yet, but it worked out because I don’t want Etta to sleep in the bed with us. Not after all the horror stories I’ve read.”

“That’s dangerous?” he asked. “I thought people always slept with their babies.”

She shrugged as they walked toward the front door. “They might, but I can’t. I let her sleep on me when I’m awake, of course, but if I’m sleeping, she’s in her bassinet right by the bed.”

Lucifer nodded as if it made sense, but to him, it didn’t, really. There was a lot he didn’t know about babies, though he loved kids and had a way with them.

Once inside the house, Lucifer followed her to the grand staircase. The way her ass sat up just right in those shorts had him bricked up. That was the perfect time to give himself a pep talk.

Ain’t nothing happening tonight, big dawg. I have to be on my best behavior. We’re only doing this for her pops.

They walked down a long hall past several rooms before she gently pushed open a door on the left.

Inside looked like a teenaged version of the nursery back at Ellodie’s house.

The color pink was everywhere, from the soft pink carpet to the matching curtains over the large window and the pale pink bed spread.

He chuckled, but it faded away when he spotted Kamilah holding Etta and sitting on the bed.

“What are you doing in here?” Ellodie asked in alarm, which put Lucifer on high alert.

Kamilah’s eyes lifted to meet Ellodie’s, and Lucifer saw nothing but hate in them. He recognized that look from his own father, which caused him to step forward so he stood slightly in front of Ellodie.

“Spending time with my granddaughter. What does it look like?”

“You should have asked me first?—”

“I don’t have to ask you for permission to hold her. You came from me, little girl, which means this child came from me too. You’ll do good to remember that.”

Yeah, Lucifer didn’t like the sound of that. It came off too much like a threat.

“Ms. Glover, I’m only going to say this once. Give me my daughter.” The tone of his voice dropped all niceties, and the tension in the room immediately thickened.

Kamilah glared up at him in shock. He could see her trying to figure out if she was going to try to bully him or give in.

She finally made the right choice by standing and placing Etta in his arms. His eyes swept over her small body quickly before he focused back on Kamilah, who ignored him completely and focused on her daughter.

“You’ll do good to remember you’re in my house, Ellodie.”

“With all due respect, Ms. Glover, you’ll do good to remember that she is my woman, and this is my daughter. Two things I don’t play about.”

Flustered, Kamilah looked between Ellodie and Lucifer before she narrowed her eyes at them both and said, “I planned a christening for Antoinetta for next Sunday. I sure do hope that by then, your attitudes are in better shape.”

With that, she left the room. Lucifer exhaled a breath and looked down at Etta, who was awake and looking up at him. “The shit I have to put up with for yo’ mama.”

“I’m sorry about that, Lu. We can call an Uber or something and go home. We don’t have to stay under the same roof as her.”

Lucifer thought about taking her up on that idea.

Moments ago, staying the night here didn’t seem all that bad, but Kamilah had to mess those good feelings up with her nasty attitude.

Then, his mind wandered to Daniel, who looked so happy to have Ellodie under the same roof as him that night.

One glance at Ellodie let him know that her mother dashed all her good feelings about staying the night, too, but he didn’t want that to be a reason to disappoint her father.

That would only make Kamilah win in the end.

“Come here,” he finally said. She did, and when she was within arm’s reach, he pulled her into him by the waist. “You know ya pops wants you here, right? You saw

how happy he was a few minutes ago?”

She bit her bottom lip and thought about it before saying, “Yeah.”

“Then we’re staying.”

“But—”

“Do you do that often?” He interrupted her.

She cocked her head to the side. “Do what?”

“Let ya mama run you away from ya pops?” She looked up at the ceiling and opened her mouth before clamping it shut again. He had the urge to kiss her pouty lips, but he refrained. “That’s what I thought. Don’t let her keep doing that. You and your pops don’t have the best relationship, do you?”

Her eyes dropped to Etta resting in his arms before she muttered, “No.”

He used his free hand to lift her chin so she looked at him again. “I think you both want that, but ya mama is in the way. Y’all shouldn’t allow her to be. Having a good father is a gift. You need to lean into that, for real.”

Ellodie peered up at him for a moment, and he could tell she figured something out about him. It was his turn to avoid her gaze. He looked down at Etta, who seemed to concentrate really hard on his beard.

“You don’t have a good relationship with your father?” she asked.

He shook his head. Talking about his father wasn’t something he did with people outside of his family, but for some reason, he didn’t mind being honest with her.

“Nah. He’s the reason my mother committed suicide.”

She gasped. “I’m so sorry, Lu. I didn’t know. How old were you?”

“Fifteen,” he replied. “It was a long time ago. My brother basically raised me and my sister after that. I ain’t really seen my pops since. Last time I saw him a few years back I . . . let’s just say it didn’t turn out very well for him.”

He felt her gaze on him, but he kept his eyes on Etta.

Finally, she brushed her fingertips across his arm and whispered, “We can stay.” At that moment, Etta let out a tiny grunt before he felt her diaper shift.

His eyes widened, and he looked at Ellodie in alarm.

She giggled. “We can stay, but you’re on diaper duty. ”

“Yo, man. Did this lil girl just shit in my arms?”

“She did.” Ellodie cooed as she rubbed Etta’s stomach. “And I bet it was the cutest poop ever.”

Lucifer shook his head and tried to hand Etta back over to her. Ellodie shook her head. “I think it’s time you learn to change diapers, baby daddy.”

That was one thing Lucifer never did. His nephew was cool and all, but he wasn’t down for changing anyone’s ass. He could tell that was about to change, because as he looked into Ellodie’s eyes, he knew he wouldn’t tell her no.

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Ellodie smiled down at her phone. It had been two days since she woke up in Lucifer's arms at her parents' house.

Nothing eventful happened that night, other than Lucifer waking up every time she and Etta were up and him holding her when they were able to catch some sleep.

Still, she felt giddy interacting with him.

He quickly became the highlight of her days as she fought through the postpartum changes her body took her through.

After taking a quick peek at Etta, who slept on the bed next to her, she tapped out a quick response to Lucifer.

Lu: What you and my girl over there doing?

Ellodie: She's sleeping, as always. I'm enjoying the break she decided to bless me with.

Lu: Don't do her like that. I told you to call me if you ever needed a break.

Ellodie stared down at her phone as she bit her lower lip.

There were times she didn't understand what they were doing.

All this was supposed to be for show, but she had to admit that Lucifer had quickly become her friend.

Not only that, but she was also highly attracted to him.

She knew he felt the same. It made her wonder if something could come of this.

She hadn't thought of being in a relationship since Wes, simply because that man was crazy as hell.

It was better to appease him than go against the grain.

She felt ashamed to admit it, even to herself, that she had ended up with too many black eyes to count when she went against what Wes wanted.

The last thing she needed was Wes to catch wind of her being up under another man and him crashing out on them both.

With Lucifer, that thought didn't scare her. She felt secure in his presence and like nothing could touch her. That alone had her wondering if something more than this fake dating scheme she came up with could come of them.

She refocused on her phone and replied to his text.

Ellodie: I know, I remember.

He replied immediately, which made her smile.

Lu: I'm getting ready to go to check my niece out finally. You want to slide over there with me?

Her eyes widened. He really just invited her over to his family's house. Not only that, it was his brother she'd heard so much about. Hades sounded like a character she wanted to avoid, but the thought of spending more time with Lucifer had butterflies

swarming in her stomach.

Ellodie: Are you sure it's okay that me and Etta come?

She glanced over at Etta again and smiled.

She used to be the woman who did everything on her own, but she didn't have to do that anymore.

Now, she had a built-in best friend who she loved being with.

It didn't matter how stressed she got when Etta had a bad day or how lonely she felt. Her baby girl made it all worth it.

Her phone buzzed in her hand, and she looked down at it with a grin.

Lu: Am I picking my girls up or what, Ello?

She giggled as she replied.

Ellodie: Yes, Lu.

Lu: Be ready in twenty.

Luckily, she had showered as soon as Etta went down for her nap, so all she had to do was throw some clothes on and make sure Etta's diaper bag was good to go.

As she moved through her house getting ready, she couldn't wipe the smile from her face. Lucifer had her wide open, and she constantly had to remind herself to slow her roll. They had yet to even talk about what this newfound friendship with fierce attraction even meant.

By the time she was dressed in some biker shorts and an oversized shirt, with the diaper bag packed and ready to go, the doorbell rang, startling Etta out of her sleep. Her cries filled the room just as Ellodie stepped back into it, and she rushed over to her baby to comfort her.

“It’s okay, sweet pea. Mama’s right here.” She cooed as she walked through her condo and to the front door.

As soon as she opened it, Lucifer invaded her space, towering over her and assaulting her with his delicious scent.

“What’s wrong with my baby?”

Ellodie arched a brow and playfully responded. “Nothing, I’m good.”

Lucifer chuckled before bending down and kissing her cheek and taking Etta from her grasp. “I meant this baby.”

Etta cried for a few more seconds before she quieted down and snuggled further into Lucifer’s arms.

“The doorbell scared her,” Ellodie said, bending to grab the diaper bag.

“You need to make me a key then, so I don’t do that again.”

Ellodie’s eyes rose as he grabbed the bag from her and put it over his shoulder. “Moving kind of fast, aren’t we?” she joked, but part of her wondered if this would be the moment they had the very talk she was just thinking about.

Lucifer’s brows furrowed. “I already helped you through labor, allowed you to claim me as your baby daddy, bonded with your daughter, and met your family. I’m pretty

sure we ain't moving fast. We're moving backwards as hell."

Ellodie giggled. "I guess you're right."

She grabbed her purse from the coffee table and walked back over to them. When he didn't make a move to go out the front door, she looked up at him. He gazed down at her so intently it caused her to fidget.

"I do like you, though, so if you wanted to give me a key, I'd be okay with that."

Ellodie's heart skipped a beat. "I like you too. I'll see what I can do." The thought of him having a key to her place didn't bother her at all. In fact, it excited her. "But will I get a key to yours?"

He threw his head back and chuckled. "You know I can't say no to you."

She beamed. Little did he know that question was a test, but he passed with flying colors, especially if he followed through on what he said.

They walked out the door, and she locked up. As they made their way to the elevator, she asked, "Where do you live, anyway?"

"Near Ellington Heights," he replied nonchalantly.

Her eyes ballooned. That was a rich neighborhood in Ellwood. "Let me find out you got money."

He chuckled as he hit the button to call the elevator. It opened right away, so they stepped on.

"Something like that," he replied as the elevator doors closed.

Ellodie took the time in the small, enclosed space to admire him.

He was so fine, even when he dressed down.

She could tell he worked out frequently, and her mind drifted to thoughts of what he might look like naked . . . “Like what you see?”

His words snapped her out of her staring, and she focused on his side profile. He wasn’t even looking at her.

“How do you do that?” she asked as the elevator stopped and let them out into the lobby.

“Do what?”

“Know when someone is looking at you or entered a room without even looking.”

He shrugged as he held the door open for her. “You don’t grow up in a house like I did and not develop that sixth sense.”

She instantly felt bad for asking. “I’m sorry, Lu.”

“Don’t ever be sorry for asking a question, love.”

They stopped at his car, and she realized she forgot something important. Being a new mom was an adjustment, for sure. She groaned. “I forgot to grab her car seat.”

He shook his head and unlocked his car. “I didn’t.”

Inside was a brand-new car seat, just like the one she had. She looked at him in disbelief. “You got her a car seat?”

“I figured I needed to play my part, right?” he asked with a grin.

She didn’t know how to feel about his response. She’d hoped he gotten it because he genuinely wanted to and because he saw them spending more time together. He must have seen her emotions on her face, because he immediately reached out and pinched her cheek. “Cut it out.”

Her brows scrunched together. “Cut what out?”

“Overthinking.” He had her there. She was good for overthinking. She offered him a weak smile and then watched as he put Etta into the car seat and strapped her in. When he finished, he stepped back. “You want to check my work?”

She looked up at him sheepishly and nodded her head. It wasn’t that she didn’t trust him. It was just that he didn’t have any kids and this was her kid they were talking about. Ellodie would always make sure Etta was good.

It impressed her that he’d gotten it right. After stepping back, she closed the door and smiled up at him. “Good job, baby daddy.”

He bit his lip as he peered down at her before grabbing her hand and leading her to the passenger side of the car. After opening her door and making sure she was comfortable, he jogged back to the driver’s side and got in.

The ride to Harley and Hades’s house was silent, aside from the soft R&B music playing. It seemed like they were lost in their own thoughts but thoroughly enjoying the comfortable silence.

When they pulled up to a large home, Ellodie appraised it with high approval. She was used to the finer things, and it looked like Harley and Hades were too.

“Welcome to my childhood home,” Lucifer said as he put the car in park.

Ellodie whipped her head around to look at him. “You grew up here?”

“Hades bought this home shortly after my mother died.”

Ellodie looked at him in confusion. “How old was he?”

“Too young to own this home, but he did. He wanted nothing but the best for me and my sister.”

“Wow,” Ellodie muttered. She was impressed with the man everyone kept warning her about, and she hadn’t even met him yet.

They got out of the car, and Ellodie waited patiently for Lucifer to get Etta out of the car. Once her car seat was securely in his hand, he grabbed hers with his free one and led her to the door.

He didn’t bother to knock, which led Ellodie to believe this really was like home for him. Though she didn’t have the best relationship with her parents, she still had a key to her childhood home and felt comfortable letting herself in.

Inside looked like a mansion, and it made Ellodie feel right at home. She’d never been ashamed to admit that she was used to the finer things in life, and she really appreciated people who were on her level.

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Cries were heard in the other room, and Lucifer led them across the marble floors and into a carpeted living room, where two dogs lay on a fluffy gray doggy bed, while Harley and a man who looked like Lucifer sat on the couch.

The puppies immediately jumped up and ran to Lucifer when they saw him, and Ellodie thought it was the cutest thing. They jumped at his legs and sniffed at Etta's car seat.

"Hi, babies," Ellodie cooed. She bent down to pet them. "What are their names?"

"Gotham and Pixie." Lucifer pointed them out while giving them each a pet on the head.

"Who the fuck are you?" A loud voice boomed in front of her. Etta immediately cried out, and the baby in Hades's arms wailed even louder.

Harley, who looked exhausted, halfheartedly hit him on his tree trunk of a leg as he stood and mean mugged Ellodie, who looked between him and Hades.

"Man, shut up with all that and give me my niece," Lucifer said, stepping further into the living room.

"And you give me her." Harley grinned as she reached her hands out for Etta.

Lucifer placed her car seat in front of Harley before giving his sister-in-law a kiss on the head. "You aight?"

“Just tired,” Harley mumbled as she unbuckled Etta, who continued to cry.

Lucifer turned to Hades and reached for Kali, but Hades pulled her out of his reach. He didn’t seem to care that the baby cried mercilessly in his arms.

“It’s a strange woman in my house, nigga. Who she?” Hades asked, his frown deepening.

“That’s Ellodie, and that’s Etta. Ello, this is my dick head brother.” Lucifer made introductions, leaving Ellodie laughing nervously as she waved a hand at Hades.

“Hades, stop staring her down and give Kali to Lu. You know he’ll calm her right down. We need a moment of peace,” Harley said. She’d already made quick work of quieting Etta down.

Hades grumbled something but handed the baby over as he continued staring at Ellodie.

“Come sit down, love. That nigga won’t bite you,” Lucifer said as he sat on the other end of the large couch from where Harley was.

Ellodie tiptoed by Hades, scared as hell that he would, in fact, bite her.

When she made it safely by him, she sat as close to Lucifer as she could.

They hadn’t lied about Hades. He was intimidating, and it seemed as though he would say whatever came to mind.

Couple that with him not seeming to have one nice thing to say about anything, she was a bit afraid of him.

Finally, Hades sat down, but he kept his eyes on her. When he spoke, she jumped slightly. “You the one who had my brother bitchin’ up?”

“What? I?—”

“I ain’t a bitch, Hades.” Lucifer’s tone held a warning to it, and Ellodie thought they would for sure come to blows. Hades didn’t seem like the kind of man who liked to be challenged.

Hades surprised her when he simply waved Lucifer off and asked, “Y’all together now?”

Ellodie wondered what Hades meant about Lucifer bitchin’ up as she opened her mouth to speak. Lucifer responded before she could though.

“Nah, but we faking like we are.” He grinned at Ellodie, who would have turned beet red if her skin was a few shades lighter.

Harley eyed them. “What do you mean you’re faking? Still?”

Lucifer nodded and glanced at Ellodie. “Don’t be embarrassed now, baby.

You told ya cousin. Only right I get to tell my people.

” He winked at her, and she forgot about being embarrassed for a moment and melted into the sofa.

Kali finally settled down as Lucifer rocked her gently.

Ellodie found it so charming that he could calm a wailing baby so easily.

It meant he had a good spirit, something she had picked up on pretty quickly.

“That shit sounds dumb as fuck. Why y’all pretending to fuck on each other?” Hades asked as he glared at them.

Ellodie’s eyes grew wide. “No, we aren’t pretending that . . . I mean . . .” She guessed they kind of were pretending to do exactly that. She sighed. “My parents, my mom, specifically, is a bitch. There’s no other way to say it.”

“Can confirm,” Harley mumbled.

Ellodie let out a nervous giggle. “Lu’s just helping me out. I don’t really know how else to explain it.”

Hades mugged her for a few long seconds before he asked, “You know what I say about shitty parents?”

Ellodie hesitated before she shook her head. She had a feeling he was about to say something completely off-the-wall. “What?”

“Fuck them mothafuckas up.”

Ellodie cocked her head to the side and repeated what he said in a hesitant tone. “Fuck them up?”

He nodded. “Fuck ya mama up. That’ll teach her. Then you can stop playin’ wit’ my brother. I’on play about him, so if you or ya peoples hurt him in anyway, guess what I’ma have to do?”

Ellodie gulped before she responded, taking a stab at what he was about to say. “Fuck us up?”

Hades nodded. “You and ya peoples up, and I’on really wanna do that.

You see my daughter?” Ellodie glanced at the baby resting in Lucifer’s arms. She looked just as chunky and cuddly as Etta.

Her skin tone made her look like a Hershey kiss, and she had a mass of brown curls on her head.

When she met Hades’s eyes again, she nodded but didn’t respond verbally.

“She retired me from being a certified crash out, but if a mothafucka wants to try me or my people, I’ll have to come up out of retirement, feel me? ”

Ellodie suddenly second-guessed her situation with Lucifer. She hadn’t thought about the possibility of him getting hurt in all this. Her mother could say some lethal things when she wanted, and there was also the issue of them clearly gaining feelings for one another.

Lucifer must have picked up on her mental battle because he put his arm protectively around her and addressed his brother.

“You done, man?” Hades simply shrugged. “Don’t listen to him.

I already told you that man is a certified nut.

I’m a big dawg, baby. I don’t break easily, if ever.

Be careful with me, keep it real with me, but don’t be afraid of me or this situation we got going on. That’s all I ask.”

He sealed his words with a swift kiss on her lips. It shocked the hell out of her

because they weren't in a situation where they needed to fake their relationship, which made her feel like he kissed her because he wanted to. She beamed up at him, and they stayed locked in each other's gazes.

"Aw, baby look at them," Harley said. "Reminds me of us when we first met."

Ellodie tore her eyes from Lucifer and looked at the couple on the other side of the couch. Harley snuggled into Hades while Etta drifted off to sleep in Harley's arms.

"Nah, I ain't even like you when we first met." Hades looked around the room like what he just said wasn't bizarre.

Lucifer laughed deeply while Harley hit him on the back of the head.

"Yeah right, nigga. You was a goner," Lucifer joked.

Hades glared at him. "Looks like you the goner now, my boy. Y'all sure you just pretending?"

Ellodie squirmed in her seat and was thankful when Harley intervened. "Leave them alone." She looked at Ellodie and Lucifer. "We were just about to order some food. Y'all want to stay for dinner?"

Lucifer looked down at Ellodie. "What you think, love?"

Whenever he called her that, her insides turned to jelly. She nodded quickly. She was more than okay with spending more time with Lucifer, even if it meant being in the same room as his crazy ass brother.

Sleepiness seeped from Ellodie's pores as she fumbled with her keys to unlock her door. Her eyes felt heavy, and she prayed Etta was just as tired as her and slept well

that night.

“Let me get that, love,” Lucifer said, grabbing the keys from her and unlocking the door. She leaned into him lazily as they walked through the threshold. After the door closed, he wrapped one arm around her while he held Etta in the other arm since he left her car seat in his car. “You good?”

“Just exhausted,” she mumbled against his chest.

He chuckled. “You need me to stay tonight to help with her?”

She perked up at that idea but instantly knew it wasn’t a good one. If he stayed the night, she would be compelled to stay awake and talk to him. She wanted to know more about him and maybe steal a kiss or two in the process. She sighed and shook her head. “Not tonight, but maybe tomorrow?”

Understanding danced in his eyes. “Definitely tomorrow. I’ll call you.” He tipped her chin up and pecked her lips. “Thank you for kickin’ it with me and my people today.”

“I had a good time. I love Harley,” she replied.

He chuckled. “What about Hades?”

Her brows rose. “He scares me, but he might grow on me.”

“Stick around and he will.” Hope soared inside Ellodie at his words. He wants me to stick around. “I know today went against our make-believe situation, but it was good to kick it without the theatrics. I hope we can continue to do that.”

She grinned. “Me too.”

His smile made her tingle inside. “Aight.” He handed Etta over to her, who was knocked out. “Get some rest, and I’ll call you tomorrow.”

She nodded. “Good night, Lu.”

“Good night, love.” He opened the door, and as soon as it closed behind him, she locked it.

All she wanted to do was feed Etta one last time to prolong her waking up, then shower, and then get into bed.

She moved toward the couch and sat down before removing her T-shirt altogether.

Before she could unhook her bra and wake Etta up enough to eat, she caught sight of something moving in the hallway.

She yelped and stood up, ready to bolt for the door, when her worst nightmare appeared from the shadows.

“What’s good, Ello?” Wes asked. He was shirtless with a pair of black basketball shorts on. He looked comfortable, like he belonged there, which both pissed her off and instilled fear into her heart. “Aye, I got a question. Who was that nigga?”

He scratched the top of his head nonchalantly, but Ellodie saw the restraint he exhibited by the popped veins in his arms and forehead and the rage dancing in his eyes.

She clutched Etta to her protectively and slowly backed away. “Wes, please . . .”

He took a threatening step forward. “I’m tryna be cool since you got my daughter in your arms, but you ’bout to make me spazz, for real. Who was that nigga?”

“N-nobody. Just a friend.” By now, her entire body shook with fear.

Wes was not a good person. He didn’t care about hitting women or mentally abusing them either.

He was used to getting what he wanted, by any means necessary, and always picked on people smaller than him.

It didn’t surprise Ellodie that he waited until Lucifer left to make his presence known.

Lucifer. She knew if she could only get out the front door and away from Wes, she could call him to come get her.

As if he read her mind, Wes closed the distance between them before she could blink and clutched her arm painfully.

Etta woke up and immediately cried. Ellodie knew it was because she sensed the danger in the room, and tears fell from her eyes, too, because she never wanted her baby to experience this kind of environment.

To keep her calm and safe, she put on a fake smile and blinked rapidly to get rid of the tears.

“It was just a friend, Wes. He’s just a friend.”

He glared down at her. “You a fuckin’ liar.

It’s cool.” He let go of her arm and walked toward the couch.

“You was ’bout to feed my daughter?” Still shaking like a damn leaf, she nodded.

He gestured toward the other end of the sofa.

“Go ’head. And when you’re finished and my daughter is asleep, you have a lot of making up to do.

” She gave up on trying to stop her tears.

She let them fall freely as she slowly walked toward the couch.

When she sat down, he said, “Give me yo’ phone. ”

Dread filled her, but she knew there was no winning with Wes. She didn’t understand when he became so evil. He used to love her, or she thought he did. He used to treat her with kindness, but a switch flipped, and that man was long gone.

Slowly, she reached into the pocket of her biker shorts and pulled her phone out. When she slid it over to him, she asked, “How did you get in here, anyway?”

“I been had a key made.” She shook her head. He didn’t care about boundaries or doing anything illegal, like making a duplicate of her key without her permission. “Feed my daughter.”

He grinned, which sent chills down her spine. She knew she had to find a way out of her condo ASAP, if not for herself, then for her daughter.

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Quiet days at the shop were the best for Lucifer. It gave him time to get lost in his thoughts while he kept his hands busy with the customizations their clients went wild for.

Many years ago, when he and Hades bought their first motorcycles, he knew they stumbled upon their passion.

There was something about working with their hands and making motorcycles look even better than the manufacturer could ever dream.

Lucifer loved what he did, but he noticed over the years, he loved the mechanical part of the job, not the design and customization part.

For now, he needed to stick with Underworld Customs because Hades was on paternity leave for the unforeseeable future.

His mind drifted to Ellodie. It had been three days since he'd seen her or heard from her.

He couldn't lie and say it didn't bother him.

She had quickly consumed his days, and he looked forward to interacting with her.

He thought they were on the same page, but now he second-guessed himself.

She hadn't answered his calls or texts. Etta's christening was days away, and he didn't want to miss it.

Not because he wanted to keep up the rouse of the fake relationship for her family, but because he genuinely cared for Etta.

When he finished with the bike he was working on, he cleaned up his workstation and washed his hands in the bathroom connected to his office. Hades had an identical one across the hall. Finally, he was ready to close up shop for the day.

As soon as he got outside, he saw a short man with graying hair and caramel-colored skin placing a sign on the building next to Underworld Customs. They were right downtown in Ellwood, and the street they were on had buildings lined up right next to each other, but in all the years they'd had their storefront, there had never been a building for sale.

"Yo, my man," Lucifer called out. The man turned and looked up at Lucifer, who advanced toward him. He was a dorky looking fella who looked nervous as hell as Lucifer walked up on him. "This building for sale?"

The man glanced at the building behind them before looking at Lucifer again. "Y-yes. Just went on the market today."

Lucifer peered at it, his mind racing. Maybe this was a sign that he needed to make a move on the very thing, aside from Ellodie, that had occupied his time lately. A mechanic shop for motorcycles right next to Underworld Customs sounded like a great financial move for the Ashford brothers.

"You got a card?" Lucifer asked.

"You're interested in the building?" Lucifer simply nodded. The man fumbled around and patted his pockets before producing a business card. "I don't expect this property to sell quickly. The price is high, so no rush, but call me if you're serious."

With that, the man scurried away. Lucifer walked to his car, deep in thought.

It didn't escape him that the only person he wanted to talk to at the moment was Ellodie.

He had briefly told her his desire to own a mechanical shop for motorcycles, so he felt the pull to tell her about the building for sale to get her thoughts.

Really, it was just an excuse to tell her the exciting news and hear her pretty voice.

He sat in his car for a moment before he decided to call her.

After pulling his phone out and tapping her name, he frowned because it went straight to voicemail.

He tried again two more times before he tossed his phone on the passenger seat and started his car.

He wasn't about to play games with Ellodie.

Since he wanted to hear from her so badly, he decided to pop up on her.

It didn't matter that they didn't have a label on what they were.

All that mattered at the moment was that he missed her.

He drove the entire way to her condo in silence. After he pulled up and parked, he got out of the car quickly and thanked God that he didn't need to be buzzed into her building, as he walked right in.

His patience wore thin as he jammed his finger into the button for the elevator.

He didn't even wait for the doors to open all the way before he slid inside and pressed the button for her floor.

The more he thought about the way he felt at the moment because of Ellodie, the more irritated he became.

This entire charade was her idea. Now she wanted to ghost him?

It wouldn't work like that. Deep down, he thought they had been taking baby steps toward creating something deep.

Maybe he'd read the room incorrectly. He would live with that if that was the case, but he needed to hear it from her mouth first.

When he finally got to her floor, he took long strides toward her door and knocked loudly.

It was silent for several seconds before he lifted his fist and knocked loudly again.

It crossed his mind that he may have startled Etta by the ruckus he made, but he would comfort her when he got inside.

Next, he pressed the button for the doorbell a few times, his patience completely nonexistent at this point.

Ellodie didn't get to do this. She didn't get to rope him into this shit and then leave him hanging.

He didn't feel for women often. In fact, it had never happened to this level, so in his head, she had a lot of explaining to do.

In his head, she owed him that because his feelings were now invested.

Finally, the door swung open, and Lucifer's frown deepened when he saw a man standing in the doorway. He was several inches shorter than Lucifer, and though he could tell the man worked out, he had nothing on Lucifer's massive muscles.

The man looked Lucifer up and down, which made Lucifer mug him. The hell kind of man looked another grown man up and down. Holding eye contact was way more intimidating than that shit he just did.

"Aye, man, where Ello at?" Lucifer finally asked, sick of the show the man was clearly putting on.

The man's thick brows rose. "What you want with my bitch?"

"Your bitch?" Lucifer's face screwed up.

Even if this nigga was Ellodie's man, he had no right to call her a bitch.

Then there was the fact that she even had a man .

. . Clearly, he was missing something. He shook his head, opting to disregard that comment .

. . for now. He needed to lay eyes on Ellodie so she could explain. "Yo, is she here?"

He smirked, which pissed Lucifer off. He didn't crash out often, but when he did, it was bad. This man was close to making Lucifer cause a scene.

"Nah, she ain't here."

Lucifer was two seconds away from knocking dude out of his way when he heard a timid voice say, “Lu?”

He couldn't see her, but the defeat and fear in her voice instantly put him on high alert. With great force, he shoved the man standing in the doorway back. He stumbled in surprise. Lucifer watched as his arms flailed before he landed with a thud.

When Lucifer's eyes landed on Ellodie, who stood just at the edge of the hallway leading to her room and the nursery, he saw red.

The crash out had officially started. There were ugly bruises around both Ellodie's eyes, and she looked shaken up.

He could see her visibly shaking as her eyes pleaded with him to save her.

She didn't even have to worry about that. Not one bit.

“Where's Etta?” Ellodie glanced at the man in front of Lucifer, who slowly tried to stand to his feet. With a swift kick, Lucifer knocked him back on his ass before he looked back at Ellodie. “Don't worry about this nigga. You talkin' to me, love. Where's Etta?”

It took everything in him to stay calm in her presence.

“In my room,” she whispered.

Lucifer nodded. “Go pack you and her a bag. A suitcase, matter of fact. Everything you need for a few weeks. Whatever you forget, we gon' buy.

You understand?” She nodded, but her eyes traveled back down to the man on the ground who now looked up at Lucifer with a mean mug.

“Look at me, love.” Her eyes snapped back up to him. “Tell me you understand.”

“I understand,” she muttered. He watched as tears filled her eyes.

“Good girl. Go. I’m about to take Mr.. . .”

Silence filled the room until Ellodie finally spoke up to break the tension. Lucifer planned on sitting there all night if he had to until he learned the man’s name he was about to fuck up.

“Wes.” Her voice cracked, and so did Lucifer’s heart at the sound of terror inside her. This her baby daddy? Ain’t no fuckin’ way . . .

Lucifer grinned down at the man, but it wasn’t a friendly grin. “Thanks, love. I’m going to take Mr. Wes on a lil walk.”

“Lu—”

“Go do what I said, Ello. I’ll be back.”

Lucifer didn’t even wait for her to respond. He bent down and grabbed Wes by the size ten foot and twisted it slightly, which caused him to yelp. Then, he dragged him out of the condo and shut the door.

“Nigga, I’m gon?—”

Lucifer cocked his fist back and slammed it into Wes’s face, silencing him into a daze long enough for Lucifer to pick him up and throw him over his shoulder like a rag doll.

It wasn’t until they were inside the elevator that Wes started talking shit again, but it

was with a lot less enthusiasm than before. His feet kicked out, and he tried to wiggle out of Lucifer's grasp, but it was ironclad.

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When they got to the lobby, Lucifer walked right out of the building, not caring about any bystanders or cameras.

Once in the parking lot, Lucifer tossed Wes off his shoulder.

Wes's head smacked against the pavement, dazing him once again.

Lucifer knew the nigga was seeing stars.

While he allowed Wes a moment to catch his bearings, .

.. again, . . . he contemplated calling his brother.

He knew if he did that it meant this man's life was over.

When they ran the streets, they'd ended more than a few lives together in order to stay alive.

Hades hated a woman beater more than Lucifer.

He was more connected to what happened to their mother at the hands of their father.

He didn't play about that shit at all, so if Lucifer told him, Wes's life was as good as done.

He was okay with that, but a future with Ellodie flashed through his mind.

He contemplated if he would really be able to sustain a relationship with her if he killed her baby daddy.

Then there was Etta to think about. There was no way Lucifer would allow this nigga to be around her.

Not after this. But would he be able to face her one day and tell her what he did to her biological father?

Or could he keep up the facade that he had nothing to do with it?

Hell, did any of this even matter? He didn't know if he would be in Ellodie's life that long.

What he did know was he wanted to. At that moment, he realized just how badly he wanted to be there for the long haul with her.

It hadn't been long since they'd known each other at all, but the connection he felt was one he wanted to grow into something that could withstand the test of time.

As he glared down at Wes, he had to breathe deeply because all he saw was red. Finally, he allowed the rational and sane angel on his shoulder to win. . . . kind of.

Fast as lightning, he snatched Wes up and asked, "Where's yo' car?"

Wes's eyes grew wide. He looked terrified, and he had every right to be.

At the moment, he looked into the eyes of Lucifer, not Lu.

Not the loving uncle or brother. He was someone else entirely.

Someone he hadn't been in a very long time.

Someone his brother prided himself on being. The devil himself.

Wes finally pointed a shaking finger at a white truck. Him not using his words pissed Lucifer off, so he reached out and snapped the man's finger back. Wes screamed like a bitch, but Lucifer ignored him. He walked toward the car and said, "Unlock the shit."

He half dragged Wes by the collar, but the man was smart enough to shove away his pain and ignore the fact that his feet half dragged, half walked and pulled his keys out of his pocket.

He was lucky he had them because if he hadn't, Lucifer probably would have killed him at that point. His patience was that thin.

Lucifer yanked the door open and shoved Wes inside.

"Ouch! Hey?—"

Lucifer slammed Wes's head into the steering wheel.

He didn't really fancy the man talking too much.

"Listen up because I ain't about to repeat myself.

The only reason you're living right now is because of Ellodie and Etta.

I promise you . . . Look at me when I say this shit.

" Lucifer yanked his head to the side so he could look him in the eye.

“I promise you I have no issue deading you right here. You think I’m playin’?”

” Wes shook his head, and Lucifer plucked him on the forehead hard as hell. “Use yo’ words.”

“N-no,” Wes replied.

“Don’t let me see you again.” With one quick motion, he hit Wes in the ribs.

A satisfying crunch sounded through the parking lot, followed by Wes’s screams of agony.

Lucifer cut all his hollering off with one last warning.

“And don’t be down here when I come back down with my girl and my daughter. All bets are off if you’re still here.”

For good measure, Lucifer grabbed Wes’s wrist and snapped it back. He took great pleasure in his cries of pain, but he cut them off swiftly by slamming the door in his face and tapping on the car good naturedly like he didn’t just threaten to kill that man and break several of his bones.

He didn’t even glance back at the white truck as he went to his car and went straight for the glove compartment. He always kept a gun in his car and several in his home. Gone were the days when he felt the need to keep one on his person, but that didn’t mean he went without protection altogether.

After tucking the gun into the waistband of his pants and covering it with his shirt, he closed and locked his car and smirked when he saw Wes pulling out of the parking lot slowly.

Too slowly for Lucifer. He walked over to the car and kicked the side of it so hard the entire truck shook.

His shoe left a large dent, and Wes screamed at the top of his lungs at the sudden movement.

“Scary ass, bitch ass nigga. The fuck she find this dude at?” Lucifer mumbled as he watched Wes pick up speed and skirt out of the parking lot.

Slowly, Lucifer walked back toward Ellodie’s building.

He had to take several deep breaths to calm himself.

It didn’t sit right with him that he let that man live.

Flashes of Ellodie’s blackened eyes made him want to turn around and chase Wes down, but he refrained.

He kept the bigger picture in mind. A future with Ellodie was more important to him than that nigga.

Not to mention, the way he felt at the moment was liable to get him locked up.

On the elevator, he did his best to tuck the rage away.

He hated getting like this because it took a lot to calm him down again, and he knew the sight of Ellodie’s bruises would only rile him up again.

He said a silent prayer, asking for forgiveness, but he also asked God to take away his anger so he wouldn’t scare Ellodie or Etta.

To him, they were his main priority from that point forward.

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Ellodie couldn't stop the sobs that tore out of her as she rushed between her room and the nursery.

Her only goal was to pack for her and Etta.

Nothing else mattered. Not even Etta wailing in her crib mattered at the moment.

Her home suddenly felt like hell, and she wanted to get out of there as quickly as possible.

"Shhh, baby. I know, honey. I know," Ellodie called out to Etta. "We're getting out of here. Just hold on for mommy."

Her voice shook as she rushed back out of her room to grab a couple of packs of diapers and wipes from the nursery.

The past few days had been torture for Ellodie.

Wes dominated her space and wouldn't leave.

Every time she thought about bolting, it was like he read her mind because he would choose those moments to hold Etta, which made her stay in place out of fear.

Her days consisted of taking care of Etta, tiptoeing around her own home, and trying to appease Wes enough so he would leave.

Fear controlled her. He controlled her. Whenever he was around, she became a

version of herself she hated.

He got in her head and made her believe terrible things would happen if she tried to run from him.

He'd known her for far too long. He knew her triggers.

He knew how to get into her head. And she fell for it every single time.

And that wasn't even counting the relentless mental and physical abuse.

When Wes realized she couldn't have sex, he blacked one of her eyes.

When she refused to give him head, he blacked the other one and choked her until she passed out.

Waking up from that had been the scariest moment of her life because she now had Etta to think about.

This wasn't like a decade ago when she was in her early twenties and wondering what she did to upset Wes and how she could fix it.

She was a grown woman now with a child, and the hate she held in her heart for her baby daddy was astronomical.

When she heard the knocking at her door, it sounded like the police.

While Etta slept, Ellodie sat in the nursery so she could be near her.

It felt like the only room in her home that was safe.

Wes really didn't want much to do with Etta unless it was to manipulate Ellodie, which meant he steered clear of the nursery.

Wes popped in and glared at her. He accused her of calling the police, which she hadn't.

She reminded him that he had her phone. They went back and forth like that for a moment, but when the knocking persisted, he told her to stay in the nursery and don't make a sound.

Like hell. She wasn't about to do that. As soon as she heard the front door open, she crept toward the front of the condo. She knew now was her chance to get away from Wes. When she heard Lucifer's voice, his name slipped past her lips before she could even think about it.

She had no idea where Lucifer had taken Wes, and she really didn't care. All she cared about was getting out of her house. Tears fell fast and hard as she threw clothes and toiletries into her suitcase.

When she heard a deep voice down the hall, she jumped, but then she immediately relaxed.

"Ello, it's just me," Lucifer called out.

Ellodie immediately stopped what she was doing and ran out of her room.

She collided with Lucifer and didn't hesitate to fling her arms around his neck.

Her feet left the floor, and she wrapped her body around his.

As she clung to him, he rubbed her matted hair and said, "It's okay, baby. I got you."

Etta's cries grew louder, and though Ellodie didn't want to leave the security of Lucifer's arms, she knew she had to.

The same relief she felt right now, her daughter deserved to feel too.

She knew Etta picked up on the hostile vibes over the past few days.

She had been restless and inconsolable whenever she was awake. That only made Wes more irritable.

"Etta . . ." she muttered. She felt like she couldn't form a full sentence at the moment, but she knew Lucifer would understand her, despite that.

"I got her. You okay to finish packing?" he asked, reluctantly placing her back on her feet.

She nodded. "Almost done."

Lucifer cupped her cheek. She saw rage fill his eyes before concern took back over. "We'll be in the living room."

He turned to walk away, but Ellodie stopped him. "Wes?—"

"Aye, real talk," Lucifer turned around quickly, "you ain't ever gotta say that nigga's name again as far as I'm concerned.

" He stepped back over to her and lifted her chin so she looked into his eyes.

"But if he ever contacts you again, you'll tell me, yeah?

" She nodded quickly, and he offered her a half smile.

“Good girl. You shouldn’t have to worry about it, but the nigga don’t seem all that bright.

” He turned to walk away again and then stopped. “Why didn’t you call me, love?”

Fresh tears filled her eyes. He was the only person she craved to call over the past few days, but Wes had taken her iPad, phone, and laptop.

He made sure to cover all basis to keep her a prisoner in her own home.

She wasn’t entirely sure what his endgame was.

She didn’t think he had one. Wes was impulsive like that, which was why he always got caught up with the law.

Lucifer had been right in his assessment. He wasn’t too bright.

“He took my phone and stuff. I had no way to contact anyone, and I couldn’t leave.

He’d hold Etta or make comments . . . I .

. . I don’t know how to explain it.” She felt herself about to hyperventilate.

Trying to voice her fears or why she felt stuck out loud made her sound weak and even a bit crazy.

“Even when he showered, . . . he . . . he made me watch him. If I even looked like I was about to move, he would slap me. I was scared, Lu?—”

Lucifer pulled her into him again. “You ain’t gotta talk about it.”

She melted into him, but Etta's cries were deafening at this point. Her breasts leaked painfully, and she knew she needed to pump, but that could wait.

"Please go get my baby," she whispered. She turned to find a new shirt and some nipple pads so she could finish packing and get her and her daughter out of there.

He smiled kindly at her, though she could see how tense his body was. Somehow, she knew he was containing his anger for her and Etta, and she appreciated that. She'd seen enough loose rage over the past few days to last a lifetime.

"I got my baby." He pinched her chin. "Get yourself together and let's go. I don't want y'all to be here by yourself anymore. We'll talk about what's next when we get to my place."

Instantly, she felt lighter. He had no idea what his words did for her. Security and love were all she longed for her entire life, and for once, she felt it with the stranger who walked into her hospital room not even two weeks ago. Life was wild.

It was late. Ellodie wasn't sure what time it even was, but she knew it was late.

As soon as they got to Lucifer's place, he took care of Etta so she could have some alone time, and she was thankful. She needed time to process what she'd been through. She needed time to cry it out, clean herself up, and set herself up for healing.

It was sad that this was not the first time she had to do something like this.

Wes had done this many times before, but not quite as bad.

A punch here or there or some manipulation sprinkled with mental and emotional abuse was normal, but he would normally do the deed and go on about his business.

Seeing Ellodie with Lucifer had to have been a trigger for him because he made her sit in the trauma that time.

She wasn't sure how long he planned to keep her locked away like that, which was why she spent the few hours she had to herself thanking God for Lucifer.

She'd just finished pumping after a long shower and decided it was time to check on her baby and Lucifer.

After cracking open the door, she tiptoed down the hallway and then stopped abruptly.

She'd gotten in the habit of creeping around, but she realized she didn't need to do that anymore.

Tears filled her eyes, and she wasn't fully sure why.

She wiped them away before continuing down the hall.

She chose to take in Lucifer's home. When they got there, she was too focused on her racing thoughts to appreciate her surroundings.

His home was a beautiful two-story house. He told her there was a gym and a theater as well as a pool and a large backyard. Maybe tomorrow he could give her a tour. For now, all she wanted to do was settle in for bed.

As she walked, she wished she had her phone so she could call him and ask where he was.

She found her laptop and iPad tucked under the mattress on the side of her bed Wes slept on.

He must have had her phone on him because she never found that.

Lucifer told her not to worry about it. The following day, he would buy her a new one.

She didn't need him to, but he insisted.

There was no energy left within her to fight him on it, so she simply thanked him.

She kind of wished she'd asked him to go get her one now, but that thought immediately left her mind when she heard Lucifer's voice speaking softly through a door on the left, down the hall from the room she'd been in.

Lifting her fist, she gently knocked, and it only took him a second to call out to her. "Bring your beautiful ass in here, Ello."

She blushed. Lucifer always made her feel like she had space to be soft. It didn't matter what she was going through. He allowed her to just be . The more time she spent with him, the more she realized she never wanted to be without that safe space ever again.

As soon as she pushed the door open, her heart both skipped a beat and melted at the sight in front of her.

Lucifer's room was huge—way bigger than hers.

She even spotted a fireplace with a TV hanging above it.

Her eyes landed on Lucifer though. He lay in bed shirtless with red basketball shorts on, and Etta lay on his chest sleeping peacefully.

Once again, she wished she had her phone so she could capture the moment and hold onto it forever.

This right here was what she wanted for her daughter.

A father who cared about her and was present for her.

Lucifer could calm Etta down better than she could at times.

It made Ellodie wish like hell she'd met Lucifer sooner and got pregnant by him instead of Wes.

"I was just checking in on her. How's my baby?" Ellodie asked from the doorway.

"Come here and get in on this," Lucifer urged.

Her body reacted to his command before Ellodie could even process it. "What am I getting in on?" she asked as she climbed into the bed.

"Affirmations," Lucifer replied. He used one hand to hold Etta in place so she wouldn't roll off him if she moved.

The other hand pulled Ellodie closer. "I was just affirming her. She's been fussy as hell.

My voice seemed to calm her, so I figured I could take the time to encourage her.

As mean as Hades is, he used to do this for Eris and me when we were little.

In his own way." He chuckled and then mocked his brother.

“Head up, lil nigga. You a king. You strong. You ain’t ever got nothin’ to cry about because you got me.

You gon’ grow up to be a better man than me and Pops . . . That kind of shit.”

Ellodie’s heart warmed as she tilted her head up. Lucifer stared at the far wall and looked to be lost in the memories. After a moment, she asked, “What have you been saying to Etta?”

He blinked and looked down at her. A slow smile graced his face before he kissed Ellodie’s forehead.

“I been telling her she’s a princess. She deserves all the good in her life.

She don’t ever have to be afraid of anything or anyone, especially if I’m around.

She’s strong. She’s beautiful like her mama. ”

He winked, and tears pricked the back of Ellodie’s eyelids. Her heart warmed. Etta deserved every word he’d spoken. She often had conversations like that with her daughter. She wanted Etta to know how loved she was and how she would never be alone.

“Thank you,” Ellodie muttered, “for everything.”

She didn’t bother wiping her tears. They trickled down the side of her cheek and onto Lucifer’s chest. He rubbed her back in slow circles, and they lay like that for a long time. Ellodie hadn’t planned on sleeping in Lucifer’s bed, but her eyelids became heavy, and she allowed them to close.

Lucifer’s voice was soft when he spoke, and she didn’t even bother opening her eyes.

Etta had it right. His deep baritone soothed her to her core. She never wanted to leave this moment.

“You’re worthy of the best, Ello. You ain’t ever gotta put up with no bullshit from a man. You’re smart. You’re strong. You attract love. You’re beautiful. You have a beautiful mind. You’re a great mother . . .”

Ellodie wanted to stay awake and hear everything Lucifer had to say about her and to her, but the mental and physical exhaustion from the past few days finally pulled her into a deep sleep.

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“Y ou know I don’t do churches, dawg.” Hades grumbled as he tugged on his tie and kept his eyes sweeping over the parking lot.

Lucifer, Ellodie, Harley, Hades, and the babies stood just outside the church, waiting to enter.

Nothing stopped them from doing so, outside of Ellodie’s apparent nerves at being in the same building as her mother again, and Hades’s reluctance at stepping into a church.

He swore up and down that he would burn to a crisp after the hell he rained down on Earth.

Harley elbowed him in the ribs. “Hades, hush. You’re going to have to go into one for Kali’s christening, so think of this as a practice one.”

Hades looked at her like she had two heads. “What christening? What the hell you talkin’ ’bout, woman?”

“Of course, I want to have her baptized, Hades. I just haven’t started planning it. Kudos to Ello for making it happen so soon for Etta. I could never. I’m too tired.” As if to emphasize her point, she yawned, which made Ellodie laugh.

“I didn’t plan this. My mother did,” Ellodie corrected her. “She would have been nineteen by the time I got around to planning this.”

“I know that’s right.” Harley agreed as she pushed Kali’s stroller back and forth to

soothe the fussy baby.

For now, Etta slept in Lucifer's arms, her new favorite place to be.

Ellodie knew it wouldn't be long before she was wailing in front of everyone after having water sprinkled over her head.

Her baby hated bath time, so she knew this wouldn't go over well.

It made her even more thankful that Lucifer was there because he would be able to calm her right down.

She couldn't lie to herself and pretend like she wasn't happy Lucifer was there for her too.

Over the past few days, he had been her backbone.

He helped take care of Etta so she could rest. Most days, she didn't even feel like getting out of bed.

She thought she had postpartum depression before, but she knew that was nothing compared to what she felt now.

It was exactly like drowning in a pool in front of people who could do nothing to save her.

But that wasn't true because every time it got so bad that all she could do was cry until there was nothing left, Lucifer was there.

He would sit with her, hold her, and patiently wait for her to calm down.

And then he would make sure she ate, bathed, and spent time with Etta.

She had yet to go home. She wasn't sure she ever wanted to, honestly.

Wherever Lucifer was suddenly felt like home.

She worried that he might want his space back soon, or that she was overstaying her welcome, but he never hinted that was the case.

Her insecurities were at an all-time high.

The last thing she wanted was for Lucifer to find her as a prisoner in her own home with two black eyes.

At the same time, he was the only person she asked God for during that time.

Lucifer must have sensed she got lost in her head because his arm circled around her waist, and he pulled her close. "You good?"

His breath on her ear had her thinking unholy things as she watched one of her mom's friends walk into the church.

The woman held her nose up, and Ellodie had the urge to give her the middle finger in response, but she refrained.

There went her unruly emotions again. Lucifer was the only one grounding her at the moment.

She leaned into him and nodded. "Thank you."

She smiled up at him, and he grinned at her.

“Ello, there you are,” Yasmine snapped as she poked her head out of the church. “Your mama is about to drive me nuts. She’s about two seconds away from making me waterboard her with that holy water. Get in here so we can get this over with.”

Ellodie snickered because she knew Yasmine was dead serious.

“Let’s go,” she muttered to everyone before leading the way into the church.

She heard Hades behind her grumbling under his breath and Harley chastising him, but she tried to tune it out as she focused on the feel of her hand in Lucifer’s.

Yasmine disappeared down the hall to the right.

If Ellodie remembered correctly, the bathroom was that way.

The church was the same one Ellodie used to go to as a child.

Her family wasn’t super religious, but her mom liked to keep up good appearances and attend at least two Sundays a month.

She hadn’t been since she was eighteen. Her and God’s relationship developed into something more personal and relaxed and not for show.

The wooden pews looked like they had recently been upgraded.

The smooth dark wood went well with the bright white walls and purple-toned decorations through the space.

The stage was set up for the christening, and Ellodie immediately felt her mother’s glare land on her.

She groaned quietly when Kamilah excused herself from the conversation she was having with the pastor and marched down the long aisle to meet her.

“Where have you been? Do you know how it makes our family look when we’re late to our own events? I can’t believe?—”

“Mama, I’m here now.” Ellodie had to cut her off for her own sanity.

If she hadn’t, she might have cried. Her mother had no idea the nightmare she had to live for those few days.

The evidence shown from her black eyes were covered by heavy makeup.

Ellodie wondered if her mother had seen her without the makeup, would she have been a bit nicer to her?

Then she shook the thought away because she knew the answer was no . Hell no .

Kamilah glared at her daughter before glancing at the people behind her. “I see Yasmine is here. She told me she’s your daughter’s godmother?”

“Etta,” Lucifer said.

“What?” Kamilah asked, looking at Lucifer with her brows pulled tight.

Disdain displayed across her features, which immediately put Ellodie on the defense.

She hadn’t realized how protective she’d gotten over that man.

It might as well have been Etta her mother was looking at all crazy because Ellodie was ready to pounce.

“My daughter’s name is Etta.” Lucifer remained calm as he looked Kamilah in the eye.

Kamilah glanced at Etta resting in his arms before her hardened gaze landed back on him.

She took a tiny step toward him, causing Ellodie to shift in front of him slightly.

It was rare that she stood toe to toe with her mother.

She’d learned long ago that the best thing to do was to let Kamilah have her way.

Today, something shifted in her. The way Lucifer so easily claimed her and Etta as his own had Ellodie ready to go to war for him.

“Boy—”

“Aye, I know this lady ain’t ’bout to call my brother a boy,” Hades barked, causing everyone in the church to look their way.

“Hades,” Harley hissed, elbowing him in the ribs and hiding her face in embarrassment.

He looked down at her with a frown. “What? I ain’t call her a B-I-T-C-H. I got some respect for the Lord or whatever.” He spelled the word out as if that was a loophole to being able to curse inside a church.

“Oh my God, please ignore my husband,” Harley muttered as she tugged on his arm, pulling him away from the rest of the group.

“Who is that man?” Kamilah demanded, steam practically coming out of her ears.

“My brother,” Lucifer responded. Ellodie looked up at him, and she saw he was cool as a cucumber.

“Your brother? Well, I never?—”

“We aren’t about to do this here, Mama,” Ellodie cut in.

Her mother could be dramatic as hell sometimes, and the last thing she wanted to deal with was her theatrics.

“Either you respect my man and his people, or we’re walking out of here right now.

Imagine how that will make our family look.

” Ellodie raised a brow at her mother in challenge.

Kamilah’s skin tinted red as she looked between Lucifer and Ellodie and then behind them at Hades. Finally, she leaned into her daughter and whispered loud enough for Lucifer to hear. “This man is no good for you. We will have a talk about this later.”

“No, we won’t,” Ellodie asserted.

Kamilah’s jaw clenched as she leaned away and shook her head slightly before clearing her throat. “Yasmine is here somewhere. Where is the godfather?”

Ellodie was thrown off by the change in subject. She blinked rapidly as her brain processed. Here she was ready to throw down with her own mama in her childhood church, and her mother had inconspicuously slipped a mask back on and switched gears.

“Godfather?”

Kamilah sighed heavily. “Yes, Ellodie. You need a godmother and a godfather for a christening. People who will take an oath before God to step in and love your baby as her parents.” She cut her eyes at Lucifer as if there was no way he could possibly love anyone. “In the event of your deaths.”

“That’s morbid,” Ellodie said, mortified at that thought. Of course, if something happened to her, she would want Etta to go to Yasmine, but that wasn’t what she thought of when she imagined godparents. They were supposed to spoil her daughter rotten and babysit when Ellodie needed a break.

“Oh, for heaven’s sake, Ellodie. Do you have a godfather for the child, or am I going to have to find someone to step in?”

” Kamilah asked. Ellodie could tell her mother was losing all patience with her, but she didn’t know what to do about that.

It wasn’t hard to do, and Ellodie seemed to do it often without even trying.

“My brother is the godfather.” Lucifer spoke up, tilting his head back toward Hades.

Kamilah’s eyes grew wide. “Him? Oh no. No. I will not allow it.”

“Aye, Hades.” Lucifer called out to his brother. “Come here.”

“Hades? Absolutely not. Ellodie?—”

Kamilah was cut off when Hades walked up on them, intimidating her into shutting up.

“What?” Hades’s words always seemed to come out in a growl.

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“You remember when I asked you to be Etta’s godfather?” Lucifer asked, trying to drop the hint to go along with it.

Hades mugged him. “Who?”

Lucifer sighed and shook his head. “My daughter, man. Etta.”

Hades glared at Etta and then back at Lucifer. “No.”

Ellodie honestly wanted to burst into a fit of giggles. Hades was far from a comedian, but the look of disbelief on her mother’s face and Lucifer’s exasperation had her ready to fall over laughing.

“Man, just listen to Ellodie’s mother so she can tell you what to do,” Lucifer said. The irritation in his voice was evident, and Ellodie immediately rubbed his arm. When he looked down at her, she smiled, which caused his frown to melt away.

“I ain’t listenin’ to her,” Hades argued.

“You know what? We can just skip the godparents’ portion.” Kamilah threw her hands up into the air.

Ellodie giggled at that. She couldn’t help it. The fact that this had suddenly become stressful for her mother caused her a great deal of joy.

“I want to do my part in this christening,” Yasmine complained.

Hades eyed her. “Who the fuck are you?”

“Language!” Kamilah shouted. By now, the entire church looked their way. Daniel jogged up the aisle from the stage to see what all the fuss was about, but Hades spoke before he could get to the bottom of it.

“I don’t know who you are, lady, but my mama is dead, and my wife would never talk to me about language. She know what my mouth do.” The wicked smile he gave Kamilah had to have been the final straw.

“Just forget it! Ellodie, shame on you for bringing these heathens into the house of the Lord. You will not embarrass me. I forbid it. They need to leave so we can proceed with the day.” Kamilah straightened the white suit jacket she wore and looked around at everyone as she slowly became unraveled.

“Kamilah, you can’t kick them out of here. You don’t own this place,” Daniel reminded her, trying to defuse the tension.

“Shut it!” she hissed.

Ellodie had never seen her mother so irritated before.

Daniel grabbed her arm and glared at her. “Excuse me?”

“Unhand me,” Kamilah said. She snatched her arm away from her husband and glared at the group of people in front of her before her eyes landed back on Ellodie. “Well? Get rid of them.”

Ellodie took a step back like her mother flinched at her. “I’m not getting rid of anyone.” Ellodie was so offended. Her mother was always rude, but it was normally reserved for her.

Hades chuckled behind her. The sound hosted no amusement. Chills ran up Ellodie's spine.

"I'm about to raise hell, bro. Get this bi?—"

"I'm going to take him outside," Harley said, cutting her husband off. She tugged on his arm and turned while navigating the stroller and pulling him out of the building.

"We're right behind you," Ellodie said as she stared at her mother. Tears filled her eyes as she addressed her. "I refuse to stay anywhere they aren't welcome. Until you can accept Lu, you won't be seeing me or Etta." Her eyes found her father, and she swiped at her tears. "I'm sorry, Daddy."

She could see the pain in his eyes, but that couldn't move her. He chose to marry this she-devil, so in Ellodie's mind, he was on her side, even though the pain in his eyes told her otherwise.

Daniel sighed and pulled Ellodie into his chest. Low enough for only her to hear, he whispered, "No, I'm sorry. I'll call you a little later."

She stayed buried in his chest for another moment before pulling away. She didn't bother to look at either of her parents again as she turned and walked ahead of Lucifer out of the church. As soon as she got outside, she felt like she could breathe again.

Harley and Hades stood just outside, fussing at one another. When Harley noticed them, she immediately spoke. "You didn't have to leave for us. I should have known better than to bring his ignorant ass here."

Lucifer chuckled deeply. "Oh, man. Tink is cursing? She's big mad, bro. You definitely showed yo' ass."

“Call her Tink again, nigga. I’ll crack ya skull.” Hades looked highly irritable, but Lucifer simply waved him off and adjusted Etta in his arms.

“Now what, baby?” Lucifer asked Ellodie.

She shrugged, feeling the weight of what happened. “I don’t know. I’m sorry about my mother. She’s honestly the worst?—”

“Aye, what I tell you about shitty parents?” Hades asked Ellodie.

She sniffled before a small smile graced her face. “Fuck them up?”

Ellodie could tell Hades wasn’t the type to smile, but she swore she saw a ghost of a smile form on his lips. “Fuck them mothafuckas up . Want me to go handle that?”

Ellodie let out a soft giggle and shook her head quickly because she had a feeling Hades would have no issues going back in there and handling her mother.

Hades shrugged and looked at Harley. “I know yo’ ass is tired. Let’s go home so you can nap. I got my baby.”

Harley beamed up at him. The chance for an uninterrupted nap was the best thing a new mom could hear. Forgetting all about how he’d just acted, she looped her arm through his and pulled.

“Let’s plan a christening for both babies in a few months,” Harley called out as they walked toward their truck.

Ellodie waved her hand at them in agreement. She and Lucifer watched as they got into the car before she turned to look up at him. She sighed and then pressed her forehead into his chest as best she could with Ellodie between them.

“Why did I get stuck with the world’s worst mother?” Ellodie asked dramatically.

Lucifer kissed her head. “I got stuck with the world’s worst father, so we kind of fit together.”

She looked back up at him. “We do, don’t we?”

Lucifer’s lips twitched up into a half smile. “Is that why you walkin’ around claiming me as yo’ man?”

Her face heated. “My fake man.”

She said it, but they both knew she didn’t mean it.

“Oh yeah?” His brow rose in challenge.

She bit her lip. As much as she wanted to play this game with him, she wanted to test the waters even more. “What if I told you I wanted you to be my man for real?”

She felt exposed asking that. She had only ever been pursued by Wes. She never had to pursue anyone, and it felt too vulnerable for her comfort.

Lucifer leaned down to kiss her, squashing her insecurities with the touch of his lips. “What if I told you I been that?”

Ellodie felt warm all over. Her brows rose in surprise. “I don’t remember you asking me to be my man.”

“That what you want?” His voice was filled with amusement.

She bit her lip and looked at his chest. Shyly, she replied, “I never had that before.

Might be nice.”

Lucifer lifted her chin with his finger. “Say less.”

They kissed again, and Ellodie felt tingles shoot through her body.

Part of her wished she would have made things official right then and there with him, but the girly girl in her wanted to be asked properly.

She knew until he made that happen, she would be on pins and needles, waiting in anticipation.

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The way Lucifer sped home was criminal.

He would be lucky if he made it there without a ticket.

After meeting with Milton, the real estate agent who was selling the building next to Underworld Customs, all he wanted to do was get back to Ellodie and Etta, who had just gotten home from a checkup with Harley.

If Lucifer had it his way, Ellodie would never go back to her place. As crazy as it sounded, after knowing her such a short amount of time, he loved having her around.

She'd officially been at his place for over a month, and the house that once felt too big for him suddenly felt comfortable. Ellodie and Etta brought so much life into his space, and he knew the moment she decided to go back home, he would miss it.

He refused to bring her house up. Whenever she needed something, he bought it brand new and had it to her within an hour. He wasn't about to play that game because he damn sure was not ready to let her go.

A smile graced his face as he wondered how Ellodie's checkup went. It wasn't just any checkup. It was the checkup. The one where Harley would clear Ellodie to have sex, something he and Ellodie had been dancing around and dangerously close to over the past several weeks.

Ever since they talked about making things official, they'd been on each other real bad, but Lucifer wanted to make sure she was cleared before they took it there, because he didn't want to cause any complications.

In the back of his mind, he knew there were some things they needed to clarify, too, because once he tapped into her physically, he knew it would be a wrap.

Regardless of whether she was cleared or not, he had a special night planned for them. He might have to call Harley and have a word with her if she didn't clear Ellodie though. If she did that, in his head, Harley wasn't being nothing but a cock-blocking hater.

Finally, he pulled into his garage before getting out of the car and taking long strides toward the door. As soon as he entered his home, the first thing he heard was Etta fussing. He grinned. Antoinetta Glover had no idea how she'd stolen his heart.

"Where my baby at?" Lucifer asked as he stepped into his living room.

A throw blanket and a baby blanket were crumpled on the couch where he knew Ellodie had been lying. Now, she sat on the floor and bounced Etta in her bouncer as she quietly spoke to her in a pleading tone.

Ellodie looked up at him with tired eyes. Last night had been rough for them all. Etta was going through a phase where she didn't like sleeping much. Still, Ellodie smiled up at him.

"Which one?"

He smiled before leaning down to kiss her forehead and then scooping Etta up. He sat on the couch with her, and she fussed for a second longer before she quieted down.

"Both y'all."

"Lu, you know I'm trying to teach her some self-soothing. You can't go picking her up every time she cries."

“Yeah, and that self-soothing shit is probably why you look like a zombie now,” he teased.

Ellodie slapped his knee and then leaned her head against his thigh, still bouncing the empty bouncer.

That was how he knew she was tired. “Come here.” Ellodie stopped bouncing the bouncer and scooted up onto the couch.

He pulled her into his side and asked, “How was your appointment?”

He felt her smile on his side before she pulled away and blessed him with that pretty curve of her lips. “Ask me what you really want to know.”

He loved when she demanded things of him.

No woman had ever been bold enough to be that way with him.

It felt especially special because of everything Ellodie had been through.

She had every reason to be afraid of him—of any man, but from the moment he met her, she enjoyed challenging him.

Not in a way that told him she couldn’t be submissive when he needed her to be, but in a way that told him she wasn’t afraid of him, even though he looked like a big ass scary nigga.

Lucifer lowered his face so he was all up in hers before he spoke. “Can I dig up in that pussy yet?”

Ellodie made a sound that sounded half like a yelp and half like a gasp. “Lu?—”

“I ain’t tryna hear none of that, love. All I need is a yes or no.

You been sleeping in my bed every night, pressing that juicy ass up against me like you tryna feel somethin’.

You don’t have no idea how you been torturing me.

My sister-in-law done seen more of your pussy than me. Answer the question.”

Ellodie’s mouth hung open slightly, but she quickly closed it and cleared her throat as she squirmed in her seat.

When she responded, a smile danced on her lips as she looked down at her lap. “You’re good to go, sir.”

Lucifer didn’t think he’d ever smiled so big. He was ready to come together physically with Ellodie at that moment, but he refrained and gave himself an internal pep talk that he only needed to be patient for a few more hours.

“Bet. Here’s what I need you to do?—”

Ellodie’s eyes grew wide as she looked at Etta. “Baby, we can’t right now. She isn’t fussing anymore, but look at her. She’s wide awake.”

Lucifer’s brows drew together. “I ain’t say nothing about doing nothin’ right now, woman. What I was going to say is, what I need you to do is go pump and then take a nap.”

Her brows rose. “A nap?”

He nodded. “A nap. When you wake up, we’re going to have a date night in.”

A smile graced her face, and Lucifer's heart felt like it melted. He chuckled when she hopped up excitedly. "You don't have to tell me twice to take a nap. You sure you're okay with her?"

This time, he looked at her like she was crazy. "If you don't go on with that shit. You know this my baby."

"What about me?" She pouted. "Do I get to be your baby too?"

"Come here." She leaned down so she was in his face. "You my baby. Now go rest up for tonight."

Ellodie bit her lip sexily before straightening up and sashaying out of the room. Baby girl had a little extra swish in her hips as she walked away, and Lucifer enjoyed every second of it.

When she was finally out of the room, Lucifer looked down at Etta, whose big brown eyes already watched him curiously.

He shook his head. "I hope you know you ain't going to sleep until later.

Yo' lil ass is going to be cranky, but it'll be worth it.

I need ya mama all to myself tonight, which means it's time to tire you out. You ready to do some tummy time?"

Etta just stared at him, which caused him to chuckle before placing her on the floor and getting down there with her while he tapped away on his phone so he could make sure everything was good to go for the night.

When Ellodie walked back into the living room a few hours later, it had been

completely transformed. Lucifer had just put Etta to bed for the night. Her little ass should stay asleep at least for a few hours before she needed to eat.

He was about to go wake Ellodie up because he was ready to get this date night started, so he was happy to see her standing just inside the living room in the silk red pajamas he set out for her earlier.

Lucifer wore matching silk bottoms. His chest was bare, and he set the mood for a romantic evening.

LED tea lights lit the room. He moved the sectional back some so he could lay plenty of blankets and pillows down, along with the food.

Ellodie still had trouble remembering to eat, and he hadn't had time to make sure she had yet, which meant she hadn't.

He ordered her favorite pasta from the Italian restaurant up the street, along with a charcuterie board and strawberry cheesecake for dessert. Soft R&B played in the background, and the fireplace was lit.

Her smile made all his efforts worth it. She looked around in awe before her eyes landed on him. "What's all this, Lu?"

He stepped toward her and pulled her into him at the same time his hand brushed her curly hair out of her face.

He'd done this many times over the short amount of time they'd known each other.

This time felt different. He felt like he was ready to finally lean into the feelings he had for her.

He no longer felt like they were playing pretend.

He'd spent a lot of time observing Ellodie over the past few weeks.

She no longer hid behind dating to appease her family.

They kissed when they felt like it, flirted whenever they were together, and had deep conversations.

He finally felt comfortable really applying pressure where he'd wanted to since the moment he laid eyes on her.

Lucifer looked around the room before gazing into her eyes once again, a smirk plastered on his face. "Our first date."

"Oh yeah? Does that mean we go together?" She grinned up at him, that same challenge showing in her eyes like when he met her.

He pinched her chin. "I thought you wanted me to ask you?"

"I do." She pouted. "But I didn't think it would take you so long."

He tugged on her bottom lip that poked out and chuckled when she swatted him away. "I had to be sure."

"Be sure of what?"

"Sure that you weren't still pretending anymore. I needed to know you fucked with me for real."

"You couldn't tell?" she asked, her head slightly cocking to the side, which made her

look adorable.

“I wasn’t sure, but I am now.” He couldn’t resist. He kissed her soft lips.

When they pulled apart, she asked, “How can you tell?”

He scoffed with a smile playing on his lips. “You have to be up under me twenty-four-seven.”

She giggled and shoved his shoulder. “Not true.”

They both knew she was lying, but he let her live.

“You love me. Admit it,” he encouraged before he leaned down and kissed her neck.

She moaned. He learned not too long ago that her neck was her spot. His dick bricked up as he stayed there, kissing and waiting for her to reply.

“Is it too soon to admit that I think I do?”

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He heard the fear in her voice. Love hadn't always treated her well.

In fact, he knew that it never really had.

Though he believed her father truly loved her, he didn't really show up in a way that showed it.

Her mother clearly hated her for some reason, and her ex clearly never loved her. He understood her hesitation.

Lucifer remembered his mother's love. She was soft and nurturing, everything his father wasn't.

The only other love he'd known was through his siblings.

Ellodie changed everything for him. He now knew what it was like to have a woman in his space.

He had Etta to care for now. They made his days brighter.

His heart had doubled in size, and he didn't fear it.

Instead, he found himself wanting to drown in this newfound peace he'd found.

"No," he muttered, "because I know I love you. And I want you to be mine. I want to make this facade the real deal. What you say to that?"

Tears sparkled in her eyes as she beamed up at him. “I love you, Lu. Yes. I say yes.”

Their lips met once again, but this time, they deepened the kiss. Their tongues tangled together as the temperature in the room rose.

Lucifer led them toward the pallet. He was thankful he had enough foresight to set the food up on the coffee table to the side, because all that could wait. There was something else he’d been dying to eat for weeks, and all the patience he had was officially used up.

They ended up on top of the soft blankets and pillows, and then moments later, they were both naked. They were a heap of limbs and body parts clinging to each other as they explored the beautiful new territory their relationship presented them.

“Baby, please,” Ellodie murmured as his tongue swiped across her nipple.

Ignoring her pleas, he moved lower. He planned to take his time with her and savor every single moment.

When he got to her pussy, he moaned. It glistened like she’d been waiting for him, and it was so fat and pretty, he couldn’t wait to get acquainted with it.

The first swipe of his tongue caused her back to arch.

The second elicited a long moan from them both.

When he latched his lips onto her clit and went to town, her legs shook.

It took her no time to release her juices into his mouth and onto his face.

He didn’t want to stop, but when she managed to say, “Wait, stop. Let me . . . oh! Lu,

please. Six . . . sixty-nine.”

Her words came out choppy because he wasn't trying to let up, but when he processed what she said, he stopped, but only for a second.

He flipped them over and allowed her to get into position before he slapped her ass.

She arched, and he didn't wait for her to get comfortable.

He spread her cheeks and went back to his new favorite place.

He couldn't lie though. When he felt her mouth wrap around his dick, his toes curled.

She took her time getting used to his size before she got comfortable.

Before he knew it, his entire dick slipped down her throat.

She gagged, which only made him harder. After a while, he found it difficult to concentrate on pleasing her because she was doing her best to outshine him.

“Come here,” he uttered as he helped her turn around and mount him.

She was a good girl because he didn't need to direct her on what to do next. She slid slowly down his thick dick, and he watched as her head fell back while she enjoyed the feel of him.

Her pussy was tight and so wet. He used his thumb to rub her clit while she rode him slowly. He wanted to suck on her titties so badly, but for now he knew he couldn't unless he wanted a mouthful of milk. Instead. He used his other hand to grab her ass and help guide her.

They moaned together as she rode the wave of ecstasy, and he fought the nut building.

“Look at me, love,” he demanded. Her eyes fluttered open. “I need you to cum for me. Give me that.”

Her love faces were so beautiful. He knew right then it would take a whole lot to get him up off her from now on.

She officially had him hooked. He wanted to see her just like this as much as possible.

This right here was his new peace. His new addiction.

And he never wanted to get clean if that was the case. She created a fiend for life.

“Lu, . . . shit.” Her chin dropped to her chest as she watched him rub her clit while she bounced on his dick. “Fuck, I’m cumming.”

And he felt it. He felt her juices seeping out of her and sliding down his dick. He felt the way her pussy squeezed his dick in a vise grip. There was nothing he could do to stop his own orgasm from taking over.

“Fuck, Ellodie. Just like that, love. Just like that,” he coached. “Catch this nut, baby.”

She shuddered again at his words, just as his seed emptied into her womb. When he came down from the high, he smiled. The thought of Ellodie having his baby sounded like the final piece of the puzzle to this perfect picture.

He kissed her head as she cuddled up next to him and knew that his new mission in life was to give Ellodie another baby. He only hoped she was down for that, because

it was suddenly all he wanted.

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Ellodie woke up in alarm. Something wasn't right.

She felt too well rested, and her breasts ached.

As she looked around the master bedroom through squinted, tired eyes, she recalled feeding Etta only one time during the night.

It had been right after she mustered up the energy to shower after sexing Lucifer for hours.

She'd gotten into bed, and Lucifer brought Etta to her.

She fell asleep feeding her, and since then, she'd slept like a damn rock.

"Damn," she muttered as she tossed the thick covers off her.

As soon as she stood, she grabbed her phone from the nightstand where she left it the night before after her nap.

It hadn't been touched since then. She unlocked the phone and saw a text from her father, a text from Yasmine, and a text from Lucifer.

The one from Lucifer was most important because she had a feeling he had Etta.

Those two were joined at the hip, but she wanted to be sure before she took her time getting to her baby.

After clicking on the text thread, she smiled.

Lu: Take your time, love. Me and baby girl are kickin' it in the living room. She's fed and happy. I know them titties is hurtin'. Go ahead and pump

She blushed. It should feel weird to talk to a man who wasn't the father of her baby about all the changes her body was going through, but it didn't.

Lucifer had been there from day one. He had seen it all.

Her leaky boobs, the extended bleeding, the hormones, the extra fat around her stomach .

. . She no longer had any shame with the happenings of her body when it came to Lucifer.

He always supported her and made her feel like the most attractive woman in the world.

Ellodie took her time getting herself together.

She felt a little sore after last night, so she allowed herself to move slowly.

Etta was in good hands. Lucifer knew Etta's feeding schedule and how to properly defrost the breastmilk.

She rarely cried when she was with him, so Ellodie had nothing to worry about.

She allowed herself the luxury of getting lost in her mind as she went through the motions of pumping and then showering. Thoughts of Lucifer and the night before consumed her. She swore she had a permanent blush, though her dark skin wouldn't

show it.

By the time she walked into the living room with her biker shorts and one of Lucifer's white T-shirts, she felt refreshed and like a whole new woman.

"There's my baby." Ellodie's smile was instant when she saw Etta on the floor doing tummy time.

Lucifer, who lay on the floor facing the baby, glanced up with his own smile. "You was looking for me, love?"

She giggled and decided to play along. "Yup. Looking just for you." Ellodie got onto the ground with Etta and Lucifer before scooping Etta up and kissing her all over her face. "Mommy's baby. How are you this morning?"

Etta fussed a bit as Ellodie lay on her back, cuddling Etta to her chest.

"Why you disturbing my baby for? She was just fine doing her lil tummy time," Lucifer teased as he watched them.

Ellodie smacked her lips. "I swear she only likes you anymore."

"Nah, that ain't true, love. Look at her. She's all over you."

Ellodie looked down at Etta, who had a fistful of her shirt in her hand and her mouth wide open. With her eyes rolling upward, Ellodie said, "She's looking for milk, bae. She literally looks at me like a milk factory."

Lucifer laughed loudly as Ellodie sat up and lifted her shirt so Etta could eat.

Although she just pumped before her shower, her breast didn't seem to ever have a

shortage of milk.

She was blessed in that way. Breastfeeding Etta had been a beautiful experience, and she already dreaded the day it would have to end.

She secretly kind of looked forward to it, too, but she felt bad admitting that, even to herself.

She was ready for her body to finally be hers again.

“She loves you, baby,” Lucifer said as his gaze stayed on Etta. “Just like I do.”

Ellodie’s breath caught in her throat as her gaze met his. She didn’t think she would ever tire of hearing those words. “I love you too.”

He grinned. “Bet. So, y’all live here with me now.”

He didn’t say it as a question. It was a statement, which caused Ellodie to giggle. “Is that so?”

He tilted his head from his position on the floor next to her.

He lay on his stomach with his arms crossed and his head resting in them.

Quick as lightning, he reached out and snatched her foot.

When he tugged her forward, Ellodie laughed while Etta fussed.

Her mama and daddy were messing up her mealtime.

“Lu, stop,” Ellodie managed to say through her giggles.

“You stop,” he said. When she was close enough, he buried his head into her lap, his hot breath warming her pussy through the thin fabric of her biker shorts.

“Lu—” The word came out in a half moan and a half gasp.

“Hush,” he demanded, cutting her off. He kissed her inner thigh and then rested his head there. “You live with me now, love. I’ll hire someone to pack up your condo and bring your things here. You own it, right?”

Ellodie nodded. “It’s not paid off though.”

“That’s okay. We can rent it out or use it as an Airbnb.”

“You’re sure about this?” It wasn’t something Ellodie needed to think about.

She didn’t want to go back to her home. She especially didn’t want to take Etta back there.

Not after Wes muddled it up with such terrible energy.

The trauma of that relationship could stay there, but she felt like things with Lucifer were going extremely fast. It felt right to her, but she wanted to be sure he felt the same way.

Lucifer sat up and leaned against the couch.

“Come here.” Ellodie moved slowly so she didn’t disturb Etta, who was finally eating happily.

When she rested between Lucifer’s long legs, she leaned into him and breathed a sigh of relief.

Lucifer's arms had some kind of magic. The entire world melted away when she was pressed up against him, and she felt completely secure and at ease.

She didn't have to do anything but exist when he was around.

The day would never come where she tired of being around him.

"I ain't ever been so sure of something in my life, Ello. "

He kissed her head, and she closed her eyes, soaking the moment in. Finally, she murmured, "Okay."

What else needed to be said? She didn't want to go anywhere, and he clearly didn't want her to go anywhere. That meant they were locked in.

They sat like that until Etta was finished feeding. Lucifer held her while she held her daughter. The only sound was their melodic breaths.

"Give her here," Lucifer said as soon as Ellodie pulled Etta away from her breast.

Ellodie moved slightly to make room for Etta before she handed her over. Lucifer now had them both in his arms, and Ellodie could tell by the serene look on his face that this moment meant just as much to him as it did to her.

Her phone vibrated on the couch where she dropped it earlier. With a groan, she reached for it. She thought it was Yasmine, but when she saw her dad's photo on her screen, she froze.

"It's my dad," she mumbled before glancing up at Lucifer.

He'd called a few times since the botched christening, but Ellodie didn't have the

words to deal with her parents just yet. She wasn't mad at her dad, other than being annoyed that he married her mother in the first place, but she still didn't know what exactly to say to him.

"Answer it, love. That man ain't do nothin' to you," Lucifer encouraged.

Ellodie peeped that Lucifer was always team Ellodie, and he supported her no matter what, but there was a bit of a soft spot there for her father.

She suspected that it had to do with his own upbringing, and guilt clawed at her.

How could she continue to ignore her father, who clearly wanted a relationship with her, when Lucifer's father never wanted him to begin with?

That was why she decided to slide her thumb across the screen and answer her father's call. She didn't miss the smile on Lucifer's face, either.

"Hey, Daddy."

"'Bout time you answered your phone," he fussed.

She sighed. "I didn't know what to say."

Silence stretched between them before Daniel spoke up. "I don't know what to say a lot of the time, either, sweet pea. There's a lot I wish you knew, but out of respect for ya mama?—"

"Fuck her?—"

"Watch it, Ellodie. That's still ya mama, and I refuse to ever do anything to drive a bigger wedge between you two."

“She does that all on her own, Daddy. There’s nothing more you could do,” Ellodie said absentmindedly as she thought about what secrets her father might be holding in.

It never occurred to her that there might be more going on behind the scenes of her parents’ marriage, other than her mom being the biggest bitch born.

“I didn’t call to talk about her. You know my birthday is this weekend. I want to see my granddaughter.”

Ellodie’s face screwed up. “What am I? Chopped liver?”

“Of course I want to see you too. Lucifer too. We’re having a party?—”

“I don’t think so, Daddy. I’m not bringing Lucifer to another event he isn’t welcome at.”

Lucifer rubbed her arm, and she laid her head on his chest as she tried to calm her nerves. The thought of putting Lucifer in that kind of situation again made her extremely uncomfortable.

“He’s welcome. I already talked to Kamilah. She ain’t got no choice. I pay the bills here, and it’s my birthday. I want my babies here, and I want Lucifer here. End of story.”

Ellodie’s jaw clenched as she breathed deeply. Her phone was suddenly snatched from her hand, and Lucifer’s voice filled her ears as she looked up at him. He had her phone up to his ear and spoke to her father.

“We’ll be there, Daniel.”

Ellodie hated that her dad spoke so loud while on the phone.

He was true old-school in that way. He thought he needed to shout to be heard, and now Lucifer's nosy ass was signing them up for another gathering she didn't want to be a part of.

She would much rather take her father to dinner in a more private setting, and most importantly, without her mother.

Ellodie was about to suggest that when Lucifer grabbed her phone.

"Lucifer, my man," she heard her father say. "I look forward to seeing you. This Saturday at five."

"Bet," Lucifer said before they said their goodbyes.

Ellodie glared at him as he tossed her phone back on the couch. "Now why the hell did you do that?"

Lucifer hugged her tightly to him. "Because I fuck with yo' daddy."

Ellodie pouted. "He's married to a she-devil, in case you forgot."

Lucifer chuckled. "You're cute when you're mad."

"Lu, I'm serious. I don't want to be around that woman. How can you after what happened last time?"

"It ain't about her," he replied as if it was that simple.

She shook her head. "I just don't want you to feel unwelcome anywhere. That thought makes me crazy," she admitted.

The way she felt so protective over him should have been studied.

She never understood women who didn't play about their men.

She never had that with Wes. But Lucifer pulled something different out of her, and it felt like she finally understood what it was like to be ride or die for a man.

Because she would gladly protect him and do what she had to do to keep him safe every minute of every day, hands down, no questions asked.

"It's all good, baby," he said, turning her head so she looked at him. "Besides, we ain't faking no more."

She beamed at him, and suddenly, whatever she had just been so worried about no longer mattered. "You're right, we aren't."

"No more playing pretend," Lucifer said with a smile of his own before he kissed her.

When they pulled away, she gazed into his eyes with love spilling from every one of her pores. With him by her side, everything would always be okay. All was right in her world as she said, "No more playing pretend."

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Lucifer watched Ellodie take several deep breaths out of the corner of his eye as he parked the car in front of her parents' house.

He could feel her nervous energy, which didn't sit right with him.

Not much got to him because he knew how he could get, so he learned to control his emotions a long time ago.

He wished Ellodie believed he was okay. That was where her nerves came from.

They were for him, but he didn't need that.

What he needed was for his woman to be at peace.

His woman. It still felt surreal for him.

He never thought he would see the day he had a family of his own.

He'd hoped for it, though, and then Ellodie Glover came into his life and made it complete.

He didn't know how he even lived before his girls.

As he reflected, he realized life was so mundane before.

Now, he felt like he had purpose. The only thing left to do was follow through with buying the building next to Underworld Customs, and he would feel completely on

top of the world.

After Lucifer parked, he got out of the car and opened Ellodie's door. Before she could step out, he crouched down so he was eye level with her and took her hands into his. She cocked her head. "What's wrong?"

"No, love, what's wrong with you?"

Ellodie looked over his shoulder and sighed before making eye contact with him again. "Honestly? I don't want to be here. I don't want to hear my mother's mouth. I don't want any of this."

Lucifer gritted his teeth. Maybe pushing her to come today had been a bad move on his part. "You want to go? We can go."

He made a move to stand up so they could leave, but she tugged on his hand to stop him.

"No, wait." She let out a long breath. "Look, I'm trying not to be a brat about all this.

You were right the other day. This isn't about my mother.

At least not this event. This is about my father.

It's his day, and I do want to see him. I want him to know Etta.

" She paused and looked as though she thought of something important.

"My grandma would want me here. She always told me to ignore my mother and show up as the best version of myself."

Lucifer smiled. “I think I would have liked her.”

Tears sparkled in Ellodie’s eyes. “I know you would have, and she would have loved you. She managed to maintain a solid relationship with my dad, despite my mom. I think it’s time I try for the same.”

Lucifer pinched her chin. “I think you’ll be happy you made that decision. You ready?”

“As I’ll ever be.”

He helped her out of the car and kissed her deeply.

When they pulled away, he could tell she was a little more at ease, which put him at ease.

They fed off each other heavily. He didn’t know when that started, but what he did know was he loved being so in tune with someone.

They truly moved on one accord, and he wouldn’t have it any other way.

After getting Etta out of the car, they walked along the backside of the house where the party was in full swing.

Unlike Etta’s party, this one was way more relaxed.

Loud music played from the speakers hooked up to the outdoor soundbar.

The people in attendance were a mix of older and refined people and younger and ratchet.

Lucifer could tell some of Daniel's colleagues were in attendance based on the stuffy looks they gave the more relaxed guests who were turning up.

The crowd didn't mix at all, which amused Lucifer.

"Aye, what you say yo' daddy did for a living?" Lucifer asked as they weaved their way through the thick crowd. He was glad he opted to take Etta out of her car seat. He always did that though. To him, she was safer in his arms than dangling in a car seat.

"He's the city manager. Something about working with the politicians and finances for the city or something . . ."

Ellodie's voice faded away as Lucifer's eyes landed on the one person he could have lived with never seeing again. His heart rate kicked up as he swiftly handed Etta over to Ellodie without a word.

Daniel looked unamused as he did his best to entertain Lucifer's father, Mayor Henry Ashford, as he told a joke.

The laugh that fell from Daniel wasn't genuine, which would have been amusing to Lucifer if he wasn't so triggered.

He had laser focus as he maneuvered through the backyard.

Ellodie's voice followed him, but he didn't stop.

He couldn't stop. Seeing his father always felt like he'd been stuffed into a time machine unwillingly.

His childhood—where seeing his father rage against his mother and brother had

become normal—came into focus.

The helpless feeling he'd grown accustomed to as a kid hit him full force, all because he saw his father.

It made him feel out of control, and that was never a good thing for him.

If Lucifer was nothing else, he was always in control.

When he made it close enough to the man who caused him pure hell growing up, he reached out and snatched him up by his collar. The mayor's feet left the ground as his son lifted him so they were eye level. His eyes bugged out of his head when he realized whose hands he was in.

“Lu—”

“You need to get the fuck from ‘round here.” Lucifer's voice was a whisper, but the impact felt like it could have been a roar. His anger simmered just below the surface, and one wrong move or word would make it boil over.

“Baby, what are you doing?” Ellodie asked. He felt her hand on his arm. It grounded him and reminded him that this was her family's house, but he still didn't let his father go.

Out of the corner of his eye, he glanced at her. “You know this nigga?”

“The mayor?” Ellodie's eyes grew in alarm. He knew this probably looked crazy to her, so he decided to nip that in the bud quickly. He didn't need her thinking he'd lost his mind, even if the sight of Henry caused exactly that.

“My father, Ello. You know him?” His voice softened as he spoke to her. There

would never be a situation where he raised his voice at her or lost his temper with her. He had enough emotional intelligence to direct his emotions at the right people.

“The mayor is your father?” she asked, shock written all over her face.

“You know him?” He repeated the question. Before he acted a complete ass, he wanted to make sure his father wasn’t someone Ellodie knew personally. That would be the only thing that saved him at this point.

“No—”

The word barely left her mouth before Lucifer turned his attention back to Henry. “The fuck you doing here?”

“I was invited?—”

“Now you’re uninvited.” Lucifer’s voice was deadly calm.

They stared at each other for a few seconds.

Lucifer noticed the fear in his father’s eyes.

It was the same fear he saw five years ago.

That was the last time he laid eyes on the man who helped conceive him.

Lucifer stopped Hades from killing Henry right there in his own office, only for Lucifer to drop the man right on his head.

He’d felt good about it too. Something about finally being able to cause harm to the man who ruined his childhood and drove his mother to kill herself was extremely

satisfying.

In a whisper, he leaned in slightly so only Henry could hear.

“I thought I made it clear I ain’t want you nowhere near me or my family? ”

“I didn’t know you would be here, boy—Lucifer,” Henry stuttered. He’d corrected himself when he saw the flash of anger in Lucifer’s eyes. The devil in him begged to come out and play.

“Now you know. I’m tryna keep it cool in front of these people, but you need to get up out of here. Fast.” Lucifer loosened his grip and then let go completely, allowing Henry a split second to catch his footing.

When he did, he straightened up and glanced around.

The entire party seemed to stop and stare.

Lucifer didn’t care. As soon as his father left, he would too.

He could have let Henry stay, but that would only make him think it was okay to come around Ellodie’s family again.

It wasn’t. Even if he wasn’t welcomed there anymore, he didn’t want to risk the chance of seeing Henry Ashford ever again.

“You can’t talk to me like this,” Henry hissed, trying to save face.

Daniel finally stepped in and clapped Henry on the back, a little too hard. Henry flinched from the impact but did his best to play it off.

“Why don’t I walk you out. Seems as though you’re upsetting my son-in-law,” Daniel said, glancing at Lucifer, whose heart swelled with pride.

He thought for sure Daniel would stick up for Henry.

He was the mayor, after all, and if they were colleagues, Daniel might have been putting himself in a tough situation.

It didn’t seem like he cared. In fact, Lucifer picked up on the fact that Daniel didn’t seem to like Henry too much.

“Your son-in-law?” Henry asked before his eyes landed on Ellodie.

That was when it happened. Lucifer’s blood boiled over. He snatched Henry up so fast. “You don’t get to look at her. Ever.”

He grabbed the older man by his frail arm and tugged, pulling him through the crowd.

Kamilah must have just caught on to the scene unfolding in her backyard, because she shrieked when Lucifer and Henry passed by her.

“Oh my! Mayor Ashford!” she cried, running after them.

“Mama, stop.” Lucifer heard Ellodie behind him, but he kept going.

When he made it to the front of the house, he let go of his father again and watched him stumble. It took everything in Lucifer not to beat his ass. His chest heaved as he spoke one word. “Leave.”

“What in the hell is wrong with you?” Kamilah shouted as she shoved her way past the mini crowd forming in front of the house.

“Woman, mind your business,” Daniel said, trying to control his wife.

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“This is my house, so this is my business. Ellodie, do you see how your boyfriend acts?” Kamilah scolded.

Lucifer’s jaw clenched as he kept his eyes on his father, who gazed at him in mild irritation, but there was something more. Regret? Nah . . . Lucifer shook that thought off as he fought to control the monsters within him, clawing beneath the surface to come out.

“Mama, we aren’t doing this today,” Ellodie argued. Lucifer wanted nothing more than to go to her and comfort her, but he was too busy having his own showdown with his parent.

He simply stared at his father, willing him to leave, while he listened to Ellodie and Kamilah go back and forth.

“Oh, yes, we are. You never listen to me, and it’s about time you do. This man is . . . look at him! He’s roughing up the mayor, for heaven’s sake.”

“His father, Mama, and from what I’ve learned, he hasn’t been a good one at all. Something you can probably relate to,” Ellodie said.

“Excuse me?” Kamilah asked. Lucifer glanced back at her and saw her clutching her invisible pearls.

“You heard me,” Ellodie said. The strain in her voice let Lucifer know she was tired.

He clenched his jaw before choosing to let his past go so he could support his future.

He gave his father one last hard look before walking to Ellodie and wrapping a protective arm around her and Etta.

“Do you know what’s so fuckin’ sad? I’ve never been able to just be myself around you.

It got to the point that . . .” Her words trailed off as she looked up at Lucifer.

He kissed her forehead, hoping to convey to her that he supported her no matter what.

If she wanted to beat her mama’s ass, he would let her have at it.

He was fed up at that point too. Ellodie faced her mother again and squared her shoulders.

“It got to the point that I couldn’t even be honest with you about my first boyfriend. Ellodie’s real father.”

“What do you mean?” Kamilah asked, her voice dripping with judgment as she glanced between Lucifer and Ellodie.

“I mean just what I said. The man who I’d been dealing with for years is Etta’s biological father. He’s abusive, Mama, and I couldn’t even tell you that because instead of helping me, you would have judged me.”

“What you just say?” Daniel asked as he stepped forward. Martin was right behind him.

Ellodie ignored him as she continued to speak to her mother with tears in her eyes.

“He used to hit me. He made me feel like I was smaller than small, and even when I

didn't want to have sex, he made me.

That's how Etta got here. Instead of being able to go to my mother for comfort, I had to hold all that in.

The day I met Lu was the day I gave birth to Etta. ”

“Wait,” Daniel interrupted. “Lu isn't Etta's father? Are y'all even together?”

Ellodie looked back up at Lucifer and leaned into him. He wiped her tears, while Kamilah scoffed. “They sure do look like they're together. Look at them. She could do so much better?—”

“You ain't just hear your daughter?” Lucifer asked. “A grown ass man was beating on her and forcing her to have sex, and you're worried about the nigga that stepped up and makes her happy? Is you cool?”

He was over playing nice. This entire situation overstimulated him, and he was about to crash out.

“You can't speak to me like th?—”

“Kamilah, shut up for once,” Daniel interrupted, and all eyes went to him. “I'm so sick of you tearing this family apart.”

Kamilah shot Daniel a warning glance. “You'll do good to remember your manners when it comes to me.”

Daniel shook his head. “Fuck that.”

“Excuse me?” Kamilah practically had steam coming out of her ears. “What has

gotten into both of you?”

“Years of your bullshit,” Daniel snapped before he turned to Ellodie.

“Your mother and I haven’t been happy since you were a child.

When I tried to divorce her, she blackmailed me.

I’ve been in love with another woman for a very long time, and your mother found out about her.

She threatened to expose my affair and jeopardized my job if I divorced her.

The deal was that I would play like I was a family man to the public, and in private, I could be with the woman I loved.

All your mother cared about was the money.

And I had to think about providing for you, but what your mother doesn’t know is I’m retiring at the end of the month.

” He turned back to Kamilah, whose jaw was damn near on the cement.

“We’re getting a divorce, and there’s no prenup, so guess what, wifey ? You aren’t getting a dime.”

“You can’t do that,” she shouted and then stomped her foot like a child having a tantrum.

“I can and I did. Right in front of the mayor, too, who is technically my boss. A boss I’ve despised during his long run as mayor.

Fuck both of y'all. Only reason I invited him to anything was because you insisted.

You loved feeling important. Wonder how you'll do that now without my connections," Daniel taunted.

Henry's brows rose. "I think that's my cue to leave.

" He took a timid step toward Lucifer. "Uh, Lucifer, I know you don't want anything to do with me.

My time as mayor is coming to an end soon, and while I still have some pull, I would like to do something for you, like I did for you and your brother a few years back.

If there's anything I can do, . . . like making sure a certain ex can't bother you, call my office and let my assistant know. "

With that, he turned and limped away from the front of the house.

He wondered why the hell his father would offer to help him.

Outside of the situation a few years back with Harley's ex, he'd never lifted a finger to help any of his children before.

His mind flashed to the regret he thought he saw in his expression earlier.

He sighed as he tried to process everything before he looked down at Ellodie. "You ready to go?"

He had taken as much as he could for the day. He didn't feel like being around anyone aside from Ellodie.

“No, she isn’t ready to go. Me and my family have things to discuss. You may go,” Kamilah said with the wave of her hand.

Ellodie shook her head. “As far as I’m concerned, we have nothing to talk about ever again.”

Her words came out in a whisper, and Lucifer knew she was close to breaking down.

He didn’t say anything to anyone as he gently guided her toward his car.

He opened her door and made sure she was in before buckling Etta, who had slept through that whole ordeal, into her seat.

After taking a deep breath, he closed her door and made his way around to the driver’s side.

He would be okay with not dealing with family for a while.

This had worn him completely the fuck out.

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“ I can’t believe I missed all that!” Yasmine whined as she stared into the phone, wide-eyed.

Ellodie sat curled up on the couch with Etta sprawled out beside her, surrounded by pillows.

It had been an hour since she’d left her parents’ house, and her head was still reeling.

“It was definitely a lot happening. Right up your alley for sure.” Ellodie spoke to her cousin, but her mind felt a thousand miles away.

“Where’s Lu?” Yasmine asked.

Ellodie tuned back into the conversation. “I think he needed a moment. I can’t believe the mayor is his father, Yas. The things he told me about his childhood . . .”

“I don’t know,” Yasmine uttered. “Uncle Daniel never really liked him. There had to have been a reason.”

“He probably picked up on that negative energy.” Ellodie agreed.

They remained silent for a moment before Yasmine spoke. “You look like you could use a hug. I wish I was there.”

“Me too. Hopefully, Lu will be back soon.” Ellodie’s mind wandered to him again.

The ride back home had been completely silent.

They were both lost in their own thoughts.

Ellodie couldn't believe her mother. Well, she could, but at the same time, she never thought the woman would go as low as blackmail.

And then there was her father. He'd had a mistress this entire time? The shit was too much.

"You really like him, don't you?" Yasmine asked, once again snapping Ellodie's attention back to the conversation.

A slow smile filled her face. She hadn't talked to Yasmine much over the past month. Her cousin had been busy traveling and living her dream. She had no idea how far Ellodie and Lucifer's relationship had developed.

"I love him." It was a simple but powerful statement. One Ellodie meant with everything in her.

Yasmine's eyes bugged out, and it looked like she almost dropped the phone. "Love? Girl, where have I been?"

Ellodie giggled. "Becoming the next Tyra Banks."

"Fair." Yasmine nodded. "But for real. Love? It's like that?"

"It's exactly like that. He's everything, Yas. He treats me and Etta so well. He's my person."

"Okay, Grey's Anatomy ," Yasmine joked before she stared at her cousin for a moment. "You're sure about this?"

Ellodie didn't even have to think about her response. "More sure than anything I've ever felt."

Yasmine's smile brightened. "Good, because I love him for you. I knew when I met him it wouldn't take long for y'all to fall out of fake love and into real love."

Ellodie's brows rose. "Is that right?"

Yasmine nodded. "Now I just have to find my person since Lucifer took mine."

"Never that, boo. I'm not going anywhere, and you'll find your person. Who knows, maybe he's in Dubai or Paris or whatever other fancy ass place you're going this spring."

Yasmine tilted her head back and laughed. "Maybe, girl. Just maybe. But look, I have to get going. It's late here, and I have to be up early."

Ellodie sighed. She didn't want to be alone with her thoughts, but maybe it was for the best. She needed to decompress and unwind. Maybe a nice hot bath would do the trick.

"Okay, thank you for answering," Ellodie said as she suppressed a yawn.

"Anything for you, babe. Love you."

"Love you too. Night night."

They hung up, and Ellodie found herself looking at Etta. Her daughter was the real reason her life had changed for the better. Had she not gotten pregnant, who knew if she would have met Harley and then Lucifer.

With a smile, she leaned down and nuzzled her nose into Etta's tummy, careful not to wake her. "I love you, sweet pea."

She wished like hell Etta was old enough to say the words back, but she knew time would go by quickly, and she was happy to savor these sweet moments while she could as she pushed her family drama to the back of her mind.

Hades was the last person Lucifer thought he would seek council from after such a heavy day, but here he was.

"The fuck you want?" Hades asked as soon as he opened the door with Kali in his arms.

Lucifer couldn't do anything but chuckle softly. "Can I come in, man?"

Lucifer glared at him for a moment before stepping aside to let his brother in.

"It's my daughter's bedtime," Hades grumbled.

"Where's Harley?" Lucifer asked, ignoring him as they walked up the stairs.

"She sleep. Why you askin' 'bout my wife?"

"I was just asking. I have some shit I need to get off my chest," Lucifer admitted as they made their way toward Hades's office.

Hades stopped and turned to look at his brother. After looking at him for several seconds, he said, "Go in. I'll be back."

Lucifer walked further down the hall and into Hades's office before making himself comfortable on the black leather couch.

He allowed himself the moment to gather his thoughts.

Hades was a live wire, so he knew he had to be careful about how he told him everything that went down earlier.

Hades was the type to fuck some shit up first and ask questions never, which made him wonder for the hundredth time why he brought his ass over here in the first place.

He should have called Eris. She was the peaceful one out of the three of them. She didn't have a violent bone in her body, and it took a lot for her to get riled up. Just when he was about to get up and tell Hades never mind, the man of the house walked into the room and closed the door.

“What’s good, nigga?” Hades asked as he sat on a recliner across from Lucifer and made himself comfortable.

Lucifer thought about if he was really about to tell Hades he saw their father.

He must have taken too long, though, because Hades spoke again, this time in irritation.

“You gon’ spit it out or sit there lookin’ ignorant all night? ”

Lucifer sighed. It was best to just come out with it. The way Hades’s patience was set up, Lucifer was knew he only had about two point five seconds before Hades snapped.

“I saw Henry.”

Hades’s jaw clenched. “I sure the hell hope Henry is your new pool boy or some shit.”

Lucifer wished he could nod, but the slight shake of his head was the honest thing to do. Hades hopped up. His fists clenched and he looked like a maniac as he advanced on Lucifer, who remained calm. It was the best thing to do when Hades was like this.

“Where that nigga at? He touch you?” Hades asked, looking over his brother closely as he breathed heavily.

Lucifer knew the thought of Henry touching him or Eris was Hades’s worst nightmare.

He had given up his entire childhood to avoid that exact scenario, so Lucifer had to be mindful of what he said to avoid a Hades crash out.

“I’m cool, bro. You think after last time we saw that man he was gonna try something stupid with me? Can you please sit down?” Lucifer asked, gesturing toward the recliner.

Hades seemed to lighten up slightly, and Lucifer could tell he remembered the last time they saw their father.

It hadn’t been pretty for Henry. Hades’s eyes traveled to the painting hanging up on the wall near the door, and he smiled slightly.

Lucifer shook his head with a ghost of a smile dancing on his lips too.

Hades really found someone to paint a photo of their father from the last time they saw him.

He looked terrified, and Hades’s crazy ass just had to capture the moment.

Finally, Hades sat down and asked, “Stop choppin’ your words and tell me what

happened.”

“Mincing,” Lucifer corrected.

Hades’s brows pulled in. “Huh?”

“The phrase is mincing your words.” Lucifer knew he was playing with fire, but as his little brother, sometimes he really couldn’t help messing around with him, even when he knew he shouldn’t.

“Man, if you don’t get the hell on?—”

“Aight, aight. He was at Ellodie’s parents’ house. It was her pop’s birthday, and I guess he works closely with the mayor?—”

Hades stood up abruptly again and cut Lucifer off. “Where that nigga at?”

“Aye, man, chill,” Lucifer said. He would never be able to get through this story if Hades kept reacting like that. “Her pops is cool people. It ain’t seem like he was really feeling Henry like that anyway.”

“Then why the nigga was at his birthday party?” Hades asked. He still stood with his arms crossed.

Lucifer ran a hand down his face. “I have a feeling it was more of a formality. That ain’t why I’m telling you this shit.”

“Hell, then why are you, unless you want a nigga handled?” Hades asked. He stayed ready to go to war for the people he loved.

“Because seeing him ain’t ever a good feeling. That’s why.” Lucifer’s words came

out in a whisper. Being vulnerable with Hades was never easy because he believed in putting up a strong front and holding feelings in. Lucifer had never been as good at that as his brother.

It was Hades's turn to run a hand down his face. He looked up at the ceiling and took a few deep breaths before he moved to the couch where Lucifer sat. "He ain't say shit to you?"

Lucifer shook his head. "Ain't really give him the chance. Some other shit popped off with Ellodie and her people?—"

"Her mama, huh? That bitch needs her ass beat. Harley ain't pregnant no more. She better be careful. I been trainin' her."

Lucifer barked out a laugh. "Man, gone. You know damn well you ain't 'bout to have Harley's lil ass fighting nobody's mama."

Hades thought about it. "Maybe not, but Eris ain't ever had a problem handling women for us."

Lucifer shook his head. "I don't think she gon' be in the picture much longer anyway. But check it. You remember when you stepped to him about Harley's ex and fixing shit with The Obsidian Riders?"

"How could I forget?"

Lucifer nodded. "He kind of offered to help me out like that too. Ellodie's ex ain't about shit, and I'm worried I might have to catch a body, if you know what I'm sayin'.

Especially since he's Etta's real daddy.

He has rights, feel me? But he wouldn't if Henry could somehow make the issue disappear.

I threatened her ex once already, but I can't be too sure he'll stay away. ”

“Then what's the problem?”

“You think I can really trust Henry with helping me?” Lucifer asked.

Hades looked like he needed a moment to choose his words wisely.

Finally, he said, “He helped me.” Lucifer had to admit to himself that Hades was right.

Still, he felt unsure. “I ain't saying trust that nigga, but if he can help you make that shit disappear without adding to your body count, I say do it and then never speak to him again.

It's literally the least he can do. He did me one solid, and that's all I'll ever need from him.

I promise that. I feel good about it now that I'm on the other side of it. I think you will too.”

Lucifer soaked in what Hades said before nodding slowly.

Seeing his father always rattled him, but to hear him offering to help him and seeing that brief look of regret on his face unsettled him.

He didn't know what to do with those feelings, but maybe it was as simple as Hades made it seem.

Henry clearly wanted to try to right some of his wrongs on some level, so Lucifer should let him.

He would never have to speak to him again, and he could comfortably move on with Ellodie and Etta, who would never have to worry about growing up without a father.

Even if she had questions in the future, he knew he could be honest with her as long as he laid out the terms to his father to keep him with a clear conscience.

“You must be getting old,” Lucifer joked. He wanted to clear some of the heaviness in the space. “You’re wise now. Gotta be those gray hairs in your beard.”

“Aye, get out of here. Ain’t shit over here.” Hades mumbled some under his breath before they dropped into a silence for a few minutes.

Lucifer struggled with what to say next, but the words bubbled out of him before he could really give them thought. “I’m in the process of buying the building next to Underworld Customs.”

Hades glanced at him knowingly. “Yeah?”

Lucifer nodded. “What do you say to Underworld Repair? A mechanical shop for bikes, run by me?”

Hades nodded slowly before a ghost of a smile flickered on his face. “I’d say about damn time.”

“What you mean?” Lucifer cocked his head to the side. He wasn’t sure what he expected from Hades when he told him the news, but it wasn’t this.

Hades sighed. “Underworld Customs was always for me, Lu. I opened it so we could

have a good income and something to our names, but I always knew you would find something else you wanted to do with your life. Never thought it would take so damn long.”

Lucifer chuckled. “Whole time I thought you wouldn’t want to see me go.”

“Nah, you can honestly get the fuck up out my shop anytime.” Hades scoffed, but Lucifer chuckled because he knew his brother didn’t really mean that.

“Real talk, though? I’m proud of you.” Lucifer let those words sink in.

Hades was always hard on him but loved him more than anyone—that much Lucifer knew.

He wasn’t sure he’d ever heard his big brother tell him he was proud though.

That hit different. He sat with that for a long while before Hades spoke up.

“You wanna go for a ride?” A smirk spread across his big brother’s face.

Lucifer’s heart smiled way bigger than his face did. Riding his motorcycle always cleared his mind. It was a fact Hades knew all too well. “Yeah, man. I would like that.”

“You brought your bike?” Hades asked, and Lucifer nodded. “Bet. Go ‘head and get ready. I’ll be down in a minute. I need to check on my babies.”

Lucifer chuckled. “You done gone soft, man. Never thought I’d see the day.”

Hades looked angry, but only for a moment. When he spoke, his words came out calmly. “Ain’t nothin’ about me soft, baby bro, but I know Harley and everything she

gave me rounded me out a lil bit.”

Lucifer smiled at his brother. “I’ve said it a million times, but I’ll say it again. I love her for you.”

“Me too, man. Me too. I’ll meet you down there.”

Lucifer watched Hades walk out of the office before he left too.

He walked slowly and allowed himself time to absorb his brother’s wisdom.

By the time he got to the front door, his thoughts shifted to Ellodie.

He knew she would be asleep by the time he got home, but he thought that might be for the best. They both had a lot on their minds, and a good night of sleep and cuddles would do their hearts some good.

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Warmth surrounded her as Ellodie fought to hold on to the sleep that cradled her.

Her aching boobs won that battle, though, and she slowly opened her eyes, feeling a bit cranky.

Etta had been sleeping better through the night lately and only woke a couple of times to feed, which was great for Ellodie's beauty rest but terrible for her breasts full of milk every morning.

Slowly, she rolled over and noticed Lucifer held her securely in his arms. She smiled. They hadn't had time to talk much after her father's birthday party fiasco the night before. She felt him get into bed hours after she'd fallen asleep, so she knew he was tired.

Ellodie kissed his lips a couple of times, knowing he would sleep through it, before she got up and crept over to Etta's bassinet.

She breathed a sigh of relief when she saw her baby still sound asleep.

It would give her time to pump and shower before she made breakfast for her man.

She figured they could debrief over breakfast and spend some quality time together the rest of the day. After last night, it was needed.

Her mind worked overtime as she got ready for her day.

While she pumped, she thought about her parents.

She knew she wanted to speak to her father at some point, but she also knew she wasn't ready just yet.

Her mother, on the other hand, . . . she wasn't sure she would ever want to speak to her again.

There was a possibility that the urge for clarity or closure might come about, but that day wouldn't be for a very long time.

She couldn't believe she blackmailed her father just to stay in a loveless marriage.

Kamilah had always been materialistic, but Ellodie never knew it was that bad.

She realized her grandmother had to have known the truth or at least suspected it.

Antoinetta Glover was always very perceptive, and she always seemed to have an eye on her son's wife.

After pumping, she prepared for her shower.

While she let the water steam the room, she brushed her teeth and flossed before stepping into shower.

Her mind wandered to her father and his mistress.

There were so many questions she had. She mainly wanted to know what her father ever saw in her mother in the first place.

She also wondered how the family dynamic would shift with her mother out of the picture.

There was no doubt Kamilah wouldn't leave easily, so Ellodie knew things would most likely get worse with her family before they got better.

When she got out of the shower, she dried off, and her mind shifted to Lucifer. She still couldn't believe his father was the mayor. Seeing him had definitely stirred up some feelings for him, and she wanted to be there for him like he had been there for her.

After getting dressed, Ellodie silently walked over to Etta's bassinet and picked her up gently. She didn't want her to wake up and cry because Lucifer would wake up and tend to her immediately. He deserved to sleep in after the night they had.

She went through the motions of cooking while keeping an eye on Etta, who woke up when she was almost finished cooking.

It worked out in her favor, though, because she was able to nurse her and get her back to sleep.

Etta would sleep for at least another hour so she could take her man breakfast in bed.

"Wake up, baby," she whispered after placing the tray with their breakfast at the end of the bed.

Etta was already sleeping in her bassinet. Ellodie was proud of the perfect setup she orchestrated. Lucifer's half smirk melted her heart. He kept his eyes closed but pulled her close so she lay on top of him. He poked his lips out, and she giggled before pecking him quickly.

Lucifer's brows furrowed, and he opened one eye. "Now you know damn well that ain't what I wanted."

She couldn't help but giggle again. He always pulled the schoolgirl act out of her. "Baby, come on. I made you breakfast. We have to eat fast before you know who wakes up."

This time, both of his eyes opened, and he peered up at her before pulling her head down and kissing her like he wanted. When he pulled away, he smoothed her hair back and said, "First of all, we can eat while Etta's awake. Don't play her like she isn't an angel."

Ellodie playfully sucked her teeth and rolled her eyes, but she wasn't about to argue with him. Etta was his baby, and she could do absolutely no wrong. It was one of the main things she loved about Lucifer. He loved her daughter just as much as she did.

"Second?"

"Second, there's something else I would rather eat while baby girl is sleeping," Lucifer said, and then he flipped them over so he hovered over Ellodie.

She grinned up at him. Her juices flowed from that simple gesture as she fought to remain cool. Something about him undid her in the best ways.

"What's that, baby?" she asked innocently.

He chuckled before dipping down and kissing her neck. "Take your clothes off," he uttered. Something about his tone let her know that this was going to be quick. Need hung in the air between them as she undressed. She watched him pull his boxers down, and her pussy ached for his touch.

"Lu . . ." The word came out in an airy whisper as he dipped his head and sucked on her neck. Her back arched off the mattress as she clung to him.

It didn't take long for him to fill her, and when he did, she gasped. Her nails raked down his back as he slowly worked into her.

"You so wet, baby. I did all that?" He looked down at her in wonder.

All Ellodie could do was nod. She matched his thrusts and did her best to wrap her short legs around his torso. The desire to have him as deep as possible overtook her. She knew he could tell because his strokes became shallow and deep as she rocked into him.

"Daddy . . ."

"I know, baby. I know. You 'bout to cum on this dick. It's okay, baby. You have my permission. Wet me up." His words .

. . his deep voice. It completely undid her.

Her body shook as the orgasm tore through her.

Lucifer did his job and kept his pace perfectly until her body calmed down.

When it did, he pulled out of her and turned her around.

"I need you to keep this fat ass arched, baby. Can you do that?"

He didn't give her a chance to respond as he slipped into her from behind. Her back straightened some, and he smacked her ass.

"Shit." She moaned.

"What I say? Keep it arched. Just like that. Good girl." His strokes were long and

deep.

Ellodie's hand found her clit, and she did her best to balance her perfect arch while playing with her sweet spot.

Their moans became a symphony, and she knew if they got any louder, Etta would wake up and interrupt their moment.

It didn't matter though. She could hear Lucifer's breaths becoming shallow.

"You always had this good pussy, Ello? Huh? Shit so fuckin' good.

I'm 'bout to nut, baby. Where you want it?"

"Cum inside your pussy, daddy." She smirked. She knew as soon as the words left her mouth that he would do just as she said, and he did.

"Fuck." He grunted one last time, and she felt his warm seed seep into her.

That was her cue to collapse. Suddenly, she felt like she could go back to sleep.

While she lay there in a dick-coma, she vaguely felt Lucifer get off the bed.

A minute later, a warm rag touched the back of her thigh, and her eyes popped open.

She groaned and rolled over so she could look at him.

He took his time cleaning her off before he discarded the towel and glanced at the food still sitting on the end of the bed.

She lifted her head slightly and looked at it too.

“Can’t believe we didn’t knock it to the floor,” she said.

He shook his head. “You know I don’t play about my food. I was mindful of it while I was working that pussy over.”

She giggled and flopped back down. “Whatever. Etta’s good?”

“Yeah,” he said as he moved the food closer to them. “She’s knocked out. She must have had that good milk this morning.”

“And did.”

“What brought this on?” he asked, and she could tell his mouth was full of something.

When she opened her eyes again, she saw him digging into one of the plates. She smiled. “I thought my baby could use a good breakfast after the night we had.”

He stopped chewing and swallowed his food before leaning over and giving her a syrupy kiss. When he pulled away, his tone was serious. “You doing okay? I know that was a lot. I apologize for not sticking around last night.”

She shook her head. “I knew you needed a minute. Don’t apologize for that. I’m fine. I just want to make sure we’re okay.”

“Why wouldn’t we be, baby?” he asked before stuffing some eggs into his mouth.

She shrugged. “Your dad was at my parents’ house. I didn’t want you to think I ever knew who he was to you or anything like that. I also don’t want you to worry about having to see him around my family again. It won’t happen as long as I have anything to do with it.”

“It’s all good, my love. I ain’t worried about that at all, but I did want to ask you something.”

Ellodie sat up and stretched, and Lucifer looked like he lost his train of thought for a moment as he looked at her. She laughed. “You good?”

“Huh?” His eyes snapped to hers. “Girl, stop playin’ with me.” He reached out and pinched one of her nipples. Milk oozed out, and she squealed.

“Lucifer!”

“That’s what you get for being so fine.” He took another bite of food and chewed slowly before saying, “And don’t call me Lucifer.”

She rolled her eyes and pulled the sheet up to her chest. “What did you want to ask me, bae?”

She grabbed a warm croissant from the plate of food and gave him her full attention.

“You heard my pops yesterday? When he offered to handle Wes?”

Ellodie stilled and gazed at him. “Yeah . . .”

He nodded. “How you feel about it?”

Ellodie thought about it. She squirmed slightly before she asked, “Handle him how?”

Lucifer shrugged. “He helped Hades out with Harley’s a few years back. It was shit he had coming and all crimes he actually did that put him in prison. Didn’t you tell me not long ago that Wes had some warrants?”

Her eyes grew wide as she nodded. “Yeah.”

“You think they can put him away for some time?”

Ellodie’s mind spun. “I don’t really know.”

“Do you want him to go away for a long time?”

She thought about it. The answer came to her pretty quickly. “I honestly don’t care what happens to him. I just don’t want him around me and Etta.”

He nodded, and they ate in silence for a moment before Lucifer said, “You know if you come forward about what he did to you last month, that could add a significant amount of time to his sentence.”

Ellodie peered at him. She hadn’t thought to go to the police about Wes.

From the time they met, he instilled in her that snitches got stitches.

She wondered now if that was a grooming tactic.

She glanced at Etta’s bassinet, and guilt tried to claw at her, but she shoved it back down.

Wes was not the kind of man she wanted around her daughter, so there was no room for guilt there.

“Okay,” she whispered. “Only if you’ll be there with me.”

Lucifer moved the food aside and pulled her into his lap. He cradled her to his chest. “You think I would ever let you do somethin’ like that alone, love?”

She breathed him in and shook her head. Nothing else needed to be said. Ellodie knew as long as Lucifer lived, she wouldn't have to do anything alone ever again. She found a great deal of peace in that.

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“ Y ou look so nervous.” Harley giggled as she bumped her hip against Ellodie’s. They stood at the bar in the underworld, The Obsidian Rider’s headquarters. “I remember my first time in the underworld. The Obsidian Riders are cool, I promise.”

Lucifer had said the same thing to Ellodie. She wasn’t really nervous about meeting them though. She was nervous about seeing her father and meeting his girlfriend.

It was Ellodie’s birthday, and though she didn’t want to make a big fuss about it this year, Lucifer insisted she needed to be celebrated.

When Harley doubled down on that, Ellodie decided to go with the flow.

It had been three weeks since her father’s birthday, and she would be lying if she said she didn’t have a bit of trauma surrounding big birthday celebrations.

That was the reason she was so back and forth on if she wanted to invite her father.

Just last night, she decided that life was too short and that father/daughter relationship she always craved wouldn’t happen if she kept shying away from it out of fear.

When she called him, he was happy to hear from her and asked if he could bring Alandria, his girlfriend.

That almost pulled her back into her shell, but she shook it off and told him it was okay.

Now, she almost wished she hadn’t. It was her damn birthday, for goodness’ sake,

and she had to juggle meeting the important people in Lucifer's life too.

She felt overwhelmed, but Harley's calming presence definitely helped.

When Yasmine got there, she would really feel at ease.

"I'm more nervous about meeting my dad's mistress.

" Ellodie snorted before taking a long sip from the drink Hades passed to her when she walked into the room.

He grumbled happy birthday and told her to drink up.

Ellodie had eyed the concoction suspiciously for the past thirty minutes, but she figured Hades would gain nothing from poisoning her, even though he was scary as hell.

She coughed after swallowing, and Harley giggled as she patted her on the back. "I was wondering when you were going to drink that."

"What's in this?" Ellodie sputtered as she tried to catch her breath. Whatever it was, it was strong as hell.

Harley shrugged as her eyes traveled over to Hades, who held their daughter and spoke to Lucifer and a couple of other bikers. "No idea, but it was on my birthday last year that he gave me a drink like that, and Kali was conceived. Strong, ain't it?"

Ellodie's eyes ballooned as she nodded. "Are you saying Hades wants a niece or nephew? Because if I drink all of this, that will most likely happen."

Not that she and Lucifer had been careful about making more babies, anyway. She

didn't feel like she needed to divulge that information to Harley though.

Harley grinned. "Hades is all about family. The more the merrier." Ellodie grimaced at the drink, and Harley giggled. "Take one more sip to help with the nerves and then nurse it the rest of the night."

Ellodie took Harley's advice and took another healthy sip. Her face screwed up, and she shook her head back and forth before taking a deep breath. "Damn, that is potent ."

Harley wasn't paying attention anymore though.

Ellodie watched as she squealed and ran toward a couple walking into the large space.

They looked similar, so Ellodie was willing to bet it was her sister Cati and her boyfriend Major.

Right behind them, Ellodie saw Yasmine and Uncle Martin.

A smile formed on her face, and she rushed over to them.

"Happy birthday, Ello!" Yasmine cheered as she gave Ellodie a big hug. "Where's my baby?"

Ellodie scoffed. "Girl, it's my birthday. You can't even pretend to be here for me?"

Yasmine seemed to ignore her as she looked around the large space.

Though there weren't many people there yet, there was a lot to look at.

The space was underneath Underworld Customs, but it looked like a different building completely.

There were hookahs on each table that would not be in use that day since there were babies and children attending the party.

The grand chandeliers running the length of the room gave the space a glamorous feel, and the full bar was stocked and ready to be taken advantage of.

Lucifer and Harley hired someone to decorate specifically for Ellodie's birthday.

There were pink decorations everywhere and a photo booth in the far corner of the room.

Ellodie's nerves were definitely relaxing as she took everything in.

Lucifer had gone all out for her, and as always, she appreciated him more than he knew.

Wes never celebrated her birthday, so this was all new for her.

The thought of him gave her conflicted feelings.

A week ago, Lucifer let her know that he had been arrested and the warrants along with her statement about the abuse he put her through would send him away for a very long time.

There was also the promise that he wouldn't seek parental rights from behind bars.

Ellodie didn't even know that was possible, so she was glad Lucifer and Mayor Ashford seemed to think of everything.

“Oop, I see her,” Yasmine said before she thrust a gift into Ellodie’s arms and took off toward Lucifer, who had Etta in a baby carrier strapped to his chest.

Uncle Martin chuckled. “That girl know she ain’t right.”

Ellodie smiled up at him. “That’s yo’ daughter, Uncle.” She hugged him. “How have you been?”

He shook his head. “No, how have you been? I know shit with the family has been pretty heavy.”

Ellodie sighed as she looked around the room again. More people filed in, and she knew by the end of the night, she would know most of them by name. When her eyes met her uncle again, she decided to ignore his question and ask another of her own. “Did you know this whole time? Did my grandma know?”

He nodded slowly. “We did. And we supported your father as best we could. Ya mama threatened to ruin his good name and his career. Your father worked hard for the life he lived, and he found himself in a hard place.”

“Is she nice?” Ellodie asked. She didn’t care much about the other stuff, because there wasn’t much she could do about it now.

Her mother had left her a few voicemails, trying to get her to talk some sense into her father, but she ignored them.

All she wanted to do now was help her family to move on from the mess her mother created.

Uncle Martin put his arm around her. “She’s the coolest. You know I wouldn’t lie to ya. Only thing I can’t stand about her is she don’t got a sister for me.”

Ellodie giggled as relief flooded her. She couldn't deal with an evil stepmother. She already had an evil mother, and she knew her uncle wasn't one to spare people's feelings. She felt comfortable knowing he told her the truth.

"Speak of the devil," she muttered when she caught sight of her father and a pretty, tall, caramel-skinned woman getting off the elevator.

"I'm going to grab a drink. You want anything?" Uncle Martin asked. Ellodie lifted her glass and shook her head as she kept her eyes on her father and his date.

Uncle Martin squeezed her shoulder. "Happy birthday, Niece."

Ellodie watched as he left her side to go greet his brother and Alandria.

Uncle Martin went toward the bar while the couple glided into the room, looking like a million bucks.

Her father looked younger somehow and more carefree than she had ever seen him.

Alandria had beautiful curly hair that touched the middle of her back, and her makeup was flawless.

She looked regal but kind, the kind of image she knew her mother always went for but failed miserably at.

As if he could sense she needed him, Lucifer appeared at her side. His strong hand found her waist, and he pulled her into him before placing a kiss on her head. "You good?"

Ellodie noticed Etta was missing from the baby carrier he wore. "I'm okay," she whispered. "Where's my baby?"

“Yasmine.”

It was all he needed to say. Ellodie was willing to bet that Etta would stay in Yasmine’s arms for the duration of the party.

Daniel spotted his daughter and smiled brightly as he led Alandria toward Ellodie and Lucifer. When he was within arm’s length, he pulled Ellodie in for a hug, which lasted several long seconds before they pulled apart.

“Hey, sweet pea. Happy birthday.”

“Hey, Dad,” Ellodie responded, but her eyes kept traveling over to Alandria, who smiled kindly at her.

Daniel shook Lucifer’s hand before pulling Alandria into his side. “Baby, this is my daughter, Ellodie, and her man, Lu. Where’s my grandbaby?”

“Yasmine,” Lucifer said, and Ellodie covered her mouth to hide her laugh. It was clear to her that he was salty her cousin had come in and taken his baby from him. “Nice to meet you, Alandria.”

“Likewise.” Her voice was warm and smooth like syrup. Although she didn’t want to, Ellodie immediately relaxed at the sound of her voice. Alandria’s eyes found Ellodie, and her smile brightened. “And it’s so good to meet you, Ellodie. I’ve heard so much about you.”

Ellodie blushed as they shook hands. She realized Alandria probably knew way more about her than she knew about Alandria. The woman would have been hearing stories about her since she was a baby. That was a long ass time.

“It’s nice to meet you. I haven’t heard much about you other than you have no

sisters.” She giggled and nodded her head toward her uncle, who was still at the bar.

Alandria glanced in that direction and laughed. Ellodie couldn’t describe the sound other than it sounded like honey—sweet and rich.

“I hope we can get to know each other better,” Alandria finally replied. “And happy birthday.”

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“Thank you.” Ellodie smiled as she leaned into Lucifer. Whatever drink Hades had mixed for her was in full effect, and she knew tonight was about to be a time. “You’re on baby duty tonight.” She looked up at Lucifer with a lopsided grin.

He eyed her and then glanced down at the drink in her hand. As if a lightbulb went off, his eyes lit up in understanding. “Hades made you that?”

She nodded. “Yup.”

“Man.” He chuckled and took the glass from her hand. “You not finishing this. I’ll get you a normal drink. I got both you and Etta tonight.”

She beamed up at him before her father interrupted the moment. “I haven’t been properly introduced to your brother, Lu.”

“You don’t want to,” both Ellodie and Lucifer said at the same time. Ellodie burst out into a fit of giggles while Alandria and Daniel looked at them curiously.

“Go introduce them, baby. Then get me another drink,” Ellodie coaxed before standing on her tiptoes.

Lucifer sighed. She knew he hated introducing people to his brother, but he’d been doing it all his life. He’d survive.

“Cool, but don’t wander too far. I want to introduce you to my sister,” Lucifer said before pecking her temple and leading Daniel and Alandria away.

Ellodie took that moment to go over to Harley and her sister. Already, she found herself tired of introductions. It would be a long night indeed.

One thing about motorcycle clubs, they definitely knew how to party.

It was still in full swing, but Ellodie needed a moment to herself and to get some fresh air.

She stumbled toward the elevators without telling anyone where she was going, but she should have known better.

Lucifer caught up to her just as the elevator doors were about to close.

“Where you think you’re going?” he asked with a grin.

She drunkenly waved him off. “Where’s my baby?”

“Alandria still has her,” Lucifer replied.

Ellodie smiled. Yasmine was just as drunk as her and had given up her stake on holding Etta a couple of hours ago.

Alandria had stepped in, and Ellodie was leery at first, but that dissipated within a couple of minutes.

She was a pro with her daughter, and when Lucifer agreed, Ellodie knew she had nothing to worry about. “Where you going?”

Ellodie realized she never answered his question. Her lips turned up into a coy smile. “I just need some air, baby daddy.”

Lucifer stepped onto the elevator and bit his bottom lip before pressing a button and trapping Ellodie in the corner. “You know you make my dick hard when you call me that?”

She batted her lashes up at him innocently. “I had no idea.”

“Gimme a kiss,” he demanded, and who was she to not oblige.

They kissed hungrily until the elevator signaled their arrival to their floor. When she gathered her bearings, Lucifer was already guiding her off the elevator. She looked around with her brows pulled in. “Baby, I wanted some fresh air,” she whined.

“And you think your man don’t got you?” She clamped her mouth shut real quick because one thing she knew for sure was Lucifer always had her front, back, and sides.

He led her down a long hall before unlocking a door.

They stepped inside, and she gasped at the large windows overlooking the city. “This is my office. Come here.”

He tugged her forward gently, and before she knew it, they stepped out on a balcony where she was able to inhale fresh air. She shivered in delight and closed her eyes, swaying slightly.

“This is perfect.” She smiled up at the moon with her eyes still closed.

Lucifer sat down on the outdoor love seat he kept out there and pulled her down with him. Ellodie could feel his eyes on her, but she didn’t open her own. Not yet. She wanted to bask in the moment.

“You enjoying your birthday?” Lucifer asked after a few minutes.

Ellodie’s eyes popped open, and she smiled. “More than I thought I would, and it’s all thanks to you.”

He kissed her neck and nudged her so she would turn and straddle him. Once she was face to face with him, she nuzzled her nose to his while he spoke. “I love you, Ello. You know that?”

She pecked his lips as her heart swelled. “I know, daddy. I love you so much.”

“Enough to let me put a baby in you?”

She grinned and reached into the back pocket of her jean shorts for her phone. “Yup, but also this.”

She tapped on her phone for a second before showing it to Lucifer. She planned to wait and get the photo printed before presenting it to him, but this moment just felt right.

In the photo, Etta laid on a custom blanket Ellodie had made. She smiled up at the camera with her cute self, and beside her, the blanket read, Will you adopt me, daddy?

Lucifer looked at the photo and then at Ellodie. He repeated that a few times before his thumb and pointer finger pinched the bridge of his nose. He sniffled and dropped his hand. “You for real?”

She looked at him in amusement. “Of course, I am. You’re her father. You feed her and change her shitty diapers. She only calms down for you, and the way she looks at you is exactly how a daughter looks at her daddy. She’s yours and you are hers. I

want you to adopt her. Please?”

“You really think you have to ask?” His voice cracked before his lips found hers. They kissed passionately before he pulled away and said, “Marry me.”

Ellodie’s head pulled back slightly as she blinked a few times. She was pretty drunk, so she wanted to make sure she heard him correctly. “Huh?”

He smoothed her hair back and grinned. “Marry me. I don’t have a ring, but we can get one tomorrow. Let’s get married, baby.”

“Are you serious?” she whispered, pressing her forehead into his. “You want me to be your wife?”

“I want you to be my everything. My wife, my best friend, my ride or die, the mother of my children. Say yes, love. That’s all I need to hear.”

Ellodie’s thoughts raced as she closed her eyes to steady her breathing.

She loved this man so much. He was her heaven on earth.

He was her savior. He was her backbone and her rib.

He had proven himself time and time again.

He was worthy of whatever he desired. She would follow him to the ends of the galaxy.

Nothing could keep them apart, so the answer was clear as day.

As she opened her eyes and let them settle on his, peace radiated from her as a smile

formed on her lips. “On one condition.”

“Anything.”

“Ask me again tomorrow, in case I forget this.” She laughed because she knew she really was that drunk, but soberness wouldn’t change her response. In any condition she was in, the answer would remain the same.

He chuckled. “I’ll ask you every day for the rest of our lives, even after we’re married, if the answer is yes.”

She beamed as she cupped his cheeks. “Yes, Lu. I’ll marry you.”

The kiss that followed was one that Ellodie wished could last a lifetime.

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 2:54 am

Eight Years Later . . .

Lucifer did his best to hold his laughter in. He knew if it slipped out, there would be hell to pay. The occasion was actually extremely sad, but the way Hades was carrying on had Lucifer crying tears of laughter and not ones of sadness.

“She was the best dog. My first baby. My dawg, man. My dawg for life,” Hades said, his voice low and somber as he looked down at the tiny box that sat in a hole in the ground in his and Harley’s backyard.

The way he spoke reminded Lucifer of how Professor Slughorn spoke at Aragog’s funeral in Harry Potter .

That thought caused another bout of chuckles that he disguised behind his handkerchief.

Ellodie cut her eyes at him, but he was saved because Harley sniffled.

Ellodie immediately wrapped an arm around her best friend.

The past eight years had really cultivated a beautiful friendship between the two.

Cati and Eris as well, who stood on the other side of Hades with their men.

They were all gathered around, saying their final goodbyes to Pixie.

She was old and had died naturally the night before.

All the kids were in the theater room, no doubt tearing it up.

Etta was for sure the ringleader, and her seven-year-old brother was her right-hand man.

Anthony had been conceived on Ellodie's birthday eight years ago, and their youngest, Talia, was three now, the same age as Harley and Hades's son, Atlas.

That wasn't even counting all of Eris's kids and Cati's kids.

All Lucifer could think was, Thank God this shit wasn't at my house.

"You okay?" Lucifer asked Harley as Hades droned on about Pixie.

She sniffled again and shook her head. Pixie was her baby.

She'd gotten her as a puppy before she even knew Hades, so her death really hit differently for her.

Lucifer knew she still had to tell the kids about Pixie, and that wouldn't be an easy conversation.

Everyone in Hades's household loved dogs.

Lucifer's amusement died down some when his eyes landed on Gotham.

He lay right next to the little hole in the ground with his head resting on his paws.

He was getting old, too, but the little Yorkie puppy prancing around him kept him young.

Bell was her name, and the family had gotten her three months ago.

Lucifer thought Harley might have suspected that Pixie would transition soon, and Bell was there to help lift everyone's spirits when the time came.

Lucifer scooped her up as she tried to run past him. He petted her head a couple of times before handing her to Harley. She smiled through her tears and snuggled Bell to her.

“... And she was the best listener. Learned how to follow my lead within twenty-four hours?—”

“Okay, Bro.” Lucifer cut him off. “I think that's enough, man.” He clapped his brother on the back and fought to keep control of his somber expression.

Hades had insisted they all wear black today in honor of Pixie, so it looked like they were at a real funeral. Hades took it a step further though. He wore his most expensive black suit and shiny shoes with a pair of shades on.

Lucifer couldn't tell if Hades was mugging him or not from behind his shades, so he exhaled a sigh of relief when Hades took one last look at the tiny box and crouched down.

Just low enough for Lucifer to hear, since he was the closest to him, Hades muttered, “I got your mama, Pix. Rest up, baby. I love you.”

The laughter Lucifer felt disappeared, and he realized his brother really was struggling with this more than he let on. Being dramatic was in Hades's nature, but this time, he hid behind that because there was real pain there.

Lucifer squeezed his shoulder when he stood again but didn't say anything. He just let his brother have his moment and made sure nobody bothered him until he was ready. Finally, he sniffled and took in a deep breath before facing everyone else.

“That concludes today’s service.”

Lucifer bit back another laugh as Hades walked over to Harley and hugged her into him.

Ellodie walked up to him and poked him in the chest. “You ain’t shit,” she whispered. “I know you were laughing that whole time.”

Lucifer grinned down at her. “I can neither confirm or deny that accusation.”

She shook her head and giggled before leaning into him. The past eight years had been beautiful for the couple. They had three healthy kids and a house full of love.

Not long after Ellodie’s birthday all those years ago, they had an intimate wedding in Fiji with their loved ones before she gave birth to their son.

They traveled often, and Lucifer had opened his motorcycle repair shop that he hoped to pass down to his son one day.

Ellodie had retired from wedding planning years ago but still took on a couple of events a year for celebrities.

Life was blissful, and they managed to make it that way together. Lucifer felt indebted to her.

They stood in their embrace for a while before Ellodie whispered, “I love you.”

Lucifer kissed the top of her head. “I love you more.”

Over the years, those words were the truest he’d ever spoken.

He loved Ellodie with all his heart, and there would never be a lifetime where that

wasn't so.

Meeting her saved him. It saved his life, his legacy.

She was the reason for the man he had become.

Fate brought them together, and destiny would keep them that way because if there was one thing he was going to do, it was give Ellodie every single reason to keep Falling For Lucifer.

The End