

Chapter 5:

If anyone here is an angel, it's probably you.

I was nervous as I walked to the front door of Marlene's house, Rhys had assured me multiple times that morning that it would be fine for me to come by his aunts' house and keep him company while he babysat his cousins.

I took a deep breath before I knocked and heard him holler, "Come in!" followed by deep growls and fits of childish giggles. I opened the door and followed the sound of laughter to the back of the house where I found him on the floor under tickle attack by two young girls. His eyes brightened as I came into the room and he easily detangled himself from the attack led by the children.

"Hey! I'm glad you came," he smiled his easy smile and I couldn't help but smile back. One of the girls came up to me and reached for my hand, I looked at him alarmed for a moment as she tugged in an attempt to pull me down to her height, so I crouched down after an encouraging look from Rhys. She was about 5 years old and beautiful with blond curls and blue eyes, her sister looked very much like her at 4 but with straight hair and brown eyes.

"You're really pretty, are you an angel?" I couldn't resist smiling at the irony of her analysis and saw Rhys smile too as he swooped her up into his arms.

"As a matter of fact she is, and she came down here just to visit us today." I blushed crimson. Though he had used the plural term, I knew that he meant that I was here just for him.

"But now I need to talk to the angel alone so it's time for cartoons!" the girls squealed as he chased them back to their bedroom and turned the television on to their favorite movie.

He came back with a grin on his face and took my hand to lead me through the kitchen and out to the back porch. "They'll be in there playing Barbie's and watching *My Little Pony* for a while." he said as he leaned casually against the side of the house.

"Was it really a good idea to tell them that I'm an angel?" I asked and he watched the worried look cross my face before he laughed.

"They're kids, they already thought it otherwise they wouldn't have said it. Don't worry about it. Besides, you're an angel to me." He reached for my hand and pulled me closer to him.

"If anyone here is an angel it's probably you." I murmured, more honestly than he knew, before looking up into his eyes with a small smile.

“How about we both be angels for today?” He seemed a little breathless as he spoke and I realized that his face was much closer than it had been, my heart began to pound as his fingers gently brushed my cheeks before sliding into my hair and pulling my face even closer to his. My hands were resting on his chest and I could feel the quickening of his heart as the distance closed between us.

“That works for me.” I responded in a whisper just before our lips came together.

I couldn't help the triumphant feeling that washed over me along with the voice yelling in my head 'YES!' as his lips pressed more firmly on mine, more urgently. My heart raced and I felt a little lightheaded as he pulled back after a moment and looked down at me with a crooked smile, I knew that I was fighting a losing battle when I found myself pressing my lips against his this time. He pulled my arms around his waist before wrapping his around me and pulling me closer. My head was spinning and I was breathless now as he gently released me who knows how much later. Not trusting my legs to support me I sank into a patio chair.

“So that's what it's like to kiss an angel?” he asked with mischief in his eyes and I could only reply, “Yeah.”

“I wish I'd done it a lot sooner then.” He said ruefully.

Those seemed to be the magic words because I was out of my seat with my arms around his neck, my fingers were in his hair and I was pulling his face back down to mine as I whispered, “Why not make up for the lost time?” Then I was lost in a frenzy of lips and pounding hearts.

I reluctantly broke the kiss first, still wary of how quickly our relationship was progressing but we were both breathless and needed to sit down for a minute before things got out of hand.

“Wow,” was all he said as he settled into his chair and took my hand.

“Yeah that's what I was thinking.” I grinned at him, “But what took you so long?”

“I didn't know if it would be appropriate before, it was just one of those things that felt right in the moment this time so I went with it.” I nodded and thought *Always the gentleman*.

We spent the rest of the morning getting kisses in when the girls weren't looking, chasing them around, playing tag, red light green light and a game they called “explorers” which was just their way of pretending that they were explorers looking for lost treasures around the back yard which consisted of rocks, flowers and butterflies.

I helped them wash their hands as Rhys fried up grilled cheese sandwiches for lunch. All of us sat together and ate at the table, talking about the games we'd played, what the girls wanted to do the rest of the weekend and how much they liked it when Rhys came to visit.

“You'll come with him next time right Saydie?” The curly haired one asked. I'd learned that her name was Elizabeth and her sister was Emily.

“Of course I will.” I couldn't help but smile at her as her eyes shone with excitement and both girls cheered. I also noticed that Rhys looked almost as excited as the kids did.

After lunch Rhys got the girls settled in their beds for a nap with another pony movie, each girl with their favorite blanket and toy to sleep with. We went to sit on the couch in the living room and he flipped on the TV; I couldn't tell you what was on the screen though. I had barely gotten myself curled up next to him when his lips were on mine. The next thing I knew, I was beneath him breathless and staring into his eyes.

“I'm sorry if I got a little carried away.” He apologized and quickly sat up pulling me with him to curl me back into his side.

“It's okay.” I whispered back kissing his cheek and then his lips again as he turned to me.

“I should probably get going though, it would be bad to let things get out of hand while you're babysitting. Why don't you come over after you're done? We can make dinner together or something.”

“I'd be interested in that 'or something'” he winked at me and I laughed as I stood up.

He followed me to the door and kissed me one last time, “I don't think I'll ever get tired of that.” He said as I pulled away and grinned back at him, “I know I won't.” I replied and then all but danced down the steps and back to my car. I blew him a kiss as I drove away and watched him shrink into nothing in my rear view mirror.

The phone rang just as I walked in the door and I saw that it was my dad calling before snatching up the phone, he never called me at home, “Dad?” I frowned into the phone and waited for his response.

“Hi darling, how are you?” I relaxed a little; small talk wasn't the best sign but a sign that nothing was wrong at least.

“I'm fine I just walked in the door from helping a friend babysit.” I sat down in the chair by the fireplace and put my feet up on the ottoman.

“What a wonderfully human life you lead my dear! I called because I was wondering if you could come by for a bit. I have some things I'd like to discuss with you and your mother has been hounding me to demand that you come visit her.”

“Is everything alright dad?” I was worried, he never asked me to come home and he generally left the discussions to my mother.

“Yes, darling, of course everything is fine, can you just come by?”

“Right now?” I was suspicious now.

“If it's convenient for you, sooner would be better than later.” I heard him sigh a bit.

“Why do I get the feeling that there's something you're not telling me?” he laughed.

“You're very perceptive my child but we will discuss it when you get here.”

“Alright dad, see you in a few.” I didn't know what to think but I knew he wouldn't have asked me to come if it wasn't important so I ran upstairs to make sure I still looked alright after a morning of rough and tumble with children. I combed out my hair and decided to change into linen slacks and a short sleeved button down shirt.

Once I was satisfied with my appearance I stood and focused on my parents' house for a minute. I watched as flames flared up around me and the next second I was standing at the front door. Burning out was one useful demon trait I used when visiting my parents or getting to places quickly. Attempting to find their house any other way would be hopeless since they live in the middle of nowhere. I couldn't even tell you where they live exactly, I think it's somewhere on an island in Sicily.

They didn't tell me for fear that I might share the information with another person without thinking. It didn't bother me that they didn't confide their secret in me, I just went with it. As long as I could get there who cared?

I didn't bother knocking since I was expected so I turned the knob and walked into the entry way, “Mom? Dad! I'm home!” My mother came out of the kitchen looking like a 50's housewife, apron and all. She held her arms out as she rushed to me and enveloped me in a big hug. “Sweetie I'm so glad you're here you don't visit nearly enough.”

I smiled, “I know mom I'll work on it.” My answer seemed to soothe her and she led me to the kitchen where she was baking as always. I took a seat at the table in the bright kitchen,

“Where's dad? He just called me asking me to come over to talk.”

“Oh he's just finishing up a little business; he'll be here in just a minute.” The words were barely out of her mouth when a ball of flame appeared directly in the middle of the kitchen. As the flames receded my father became more visible and suddenly looked very pleased to see me.

“Saydie, darling I'm so glad you came!” He exclaimed and wrapped me in a warm hug (and when I say warm I mean physically as well as emotionally), “You look beautiful.” I hugged him back, glad to see him as well, it had been a while.

“Thanks, you don't look bad yourself. How are things at the office?” I asked him as we sat down.

“Oh a nightmare at the moment, we're having a problem with a group of lower level renegades who seem to think that taking a stand against the hierarchy is the only way to get my attention.”

I smiled, there was always something going wrong when demons were involved, living a life more demon than human definitely influenced some to push the line between right and wrong which in this case was really not a good idea.

**I should probably mention that my father is also my boss and I am the only demon child born of the devil himself. All full demons are created and when I say created I mean in the way that God created Adam from dust, (And Lilith too if your beliefs go that route) so in a technical way you could call them my half-siblings but I prefer not to see it that way.

Every demon that had ever been created by my father came into existence long before I was born and he hasn't created another since, not that he's needed to. The created demons were then free to mate among themselves creating more pure evil spawn or if they chose to mate with humans they created half-demons.

The pure demons generally never lived among mortals, their characteristics being too noticeable and their tempers too strong to co-exist with people. Once in a while you'd find one who managed to blend in to live a happy and all but invisible life among humans but it was rare.

Then there are the half-demons who had no problem blending in with people but from the moment they're born what's already determined is whether they're more demon or more human. Those with a stronger demon trait tend to have more powers and those with the stronger human trait have less but the kind of life they lead whether human or evil is always their choice which is how I came to live mine.

Got to love free will.

What may surprise you is that my father lives a very half and half life himself. Because he's married to a human woman, the time he spends with her is in a human form that he adopted after the first time he laid eyes on her. I won't go into the chaos it caused when the ruler of hell declared that he would be marrying a human woman and giving her the gift of eternal life with virtually nothing expected in return. All he asked was for her to love him as he was and she did.

I know some of you are probably thinking, "*He's the devil, how does that work? Is your mother crazy?*" but remember, he was an angel before he fell, so he's not quite as evil as you may think.

Once they were married, it took a long time before the demons trusted her but after a few centuries they accepted that she did not interfere with demon business and eventually welcomed her into the fold.

You can imagine the uproar it caused when I declared that I would do my job as needed but maintain a human life. It was assumed that the child of Satan would live an evil life once changed, despite the fact that I was also human and lived a completely human life from infancy.

My mother was adamant about my living as demon free a life as possible until I was old enough to decide for myself and my father indulged her, assuming that I'd turn out to be evil enough to make up for lost time when I changed and took my position at his right hand.

I can't say I was surprised when the change finally did happen one night.

My father and I got into a huge fight when he forbade me to continue seeing a boy that I enjoyed spending time with. I think he believed that the boy was courting me in secret, but in reality we were just good friends. That was when my appearance changed and I came into my power.

I'd known it was coming. I knew what my father did and what would be expected of me some day. I always wondered if part of the reason why I have the job I do is because he saw my opportunity to live a human life in it, knowing that humanity was what I wanted more than anything else. Whatever the reason I'm thankful for it and I can't complain about the perks either, though I have a sneaking suspicion that they are his way of thanking me for the compromise, since it turned out to be a fairly win-win situation for both of us.

Neither of us knew exactly what to expect when it happened, but being his daughter made it easier for me than others, the child of the devil only needed a strong burst of emotion to change

forever (good thing I hadn't fallen in love or something first huh?). Evil already flowed undiluted through my veins so the fit I had thrown was no more than pulling a switch. I didn't need the time to rise through the hierarchy like other demons, my power was pre-packaged and ready to use the instant it was activated.

I was so angry that I didn't even realize what had happened even though I felt it in every fiber of my body, the flame engulfed me and I found myself coiled and ready to attack him if he moved even an inch, then my father projected his image of me into my head and the flames receded as my mouth fell open in shock and I realized what I'd become. Despite the way I'd just acted, he radiated the pride of a parent who knew without a doubt that their child was destined for greatness.

Of all the demons and even my mother, my father seemed to be the least surprised when I turned my back on my place in the hierarchy. The hierarchy is something like a demon military, you work your way up through the ranks and the higher up you are the more powerful you become and the more revered you are. My father, of course, is their leader, kind of like a president or king then the strongest and most powerful demons could be compared to the President's cabinet.

Of course, since we're talking about legions of evil there's always someone trying to undercut the next demon to get even the smallest step closer to the upper level and ultimate power. As my father's child and a naturally powerful demon by birth I have an automatic spot among the upper levels but I very rarely choose to exercise that option or get involved in demon politics.**

“It sounds like you have your hands full, is there something you need me to help with?” I knew this conversation was going to end up work related before he had the words out, but what made me even more suspicious was that this kind of conversation could have taken place in his office, he didn't get me to come home for things like this.

“I'm always happy to have you help with anything you feel the need to try your hand at but I know it's not exactly up your alley dear.” He smiled kindly at me and patted my hand.

“Actually I must admit that I have an ulterior motive for asking you here.” I raised an eyebrow at him. Now we were getting down to business.

“I called because I have to discuss something with you and you're probably not going to like it.” I frowned at him, if he already knew I wouldn't like it, that was never a good thing. He held out his hand and I was reaching to take it but yanked my hand back when a ball of flame suddenly appeared and just as suddenly the flame disappeared and there sat a large, flat, red velvet box.

“I'm not going to like jewelry?” I asked curiously, he gestured for me to open the box so I took it from him and opened it slowly like it was a bomb ready to go off at any moment.

Inside was a beautiful gold necklace with a flat, braided chain and two giant triangular rubies placed next to each other to form a sideways diamond shape. For a moment I couldn't speak, and then I noticed a card tucked under the necklace and pulled it out to read it.

Dearest Saydie,

My deepest apologies for not delivering this gift myself but my demon duties prevented me from accompanying it.

I wish to inform you that I have asked your father for your hand and hope that you will consider accepting. I understand that we would need time to get to know one another but I am confident that you would find me to be an agreeable suitor, an unselfish lover and reliable husband.

Please accept this gift as a symbol of the beginning of our courtship. I look forward to seeing you in person very soon.

Always yours,

Malcolm

I stared at the paper for a minute in shock and then I found myself laughing, I laughed so hard that tears came to my eyes.

“Saydie what is so funny?” Dad asked,

“This....well dad, this has to be the best joke ever.” I managed to choke out.

When I focused on the severity of his expression I managed to slowly calm myself down.

“It is a joke right? Malcolm is what, a few millennia old and a full demon to boot? Be serious dad.”

“My dear I assure you that this is a matter of the utmost importance.” My mouth fell open and I gaped at him.

“Seriously?” I asked and he nodded.

“What the hell dad, is he crazy? He lives an even more demon life than you do, why on earth would he think that I of all people would find him to be an 'agreeable suitor'?”

Dad sighed heavily, “As you know Malcolm is one of my oldest and most trusted associates, he is treated with the utmost respect and reverence and sees it as being below him to marry someone who is not of equal rank. Despite your lack of participation in the hierarchy, you're the only female with a rank equal to his own.” He watched me for a minute as I tried to form coherent words, “I told you that you wouldn't like it.”

I barely noticed when my mother sank into the chair on his other side.

“What did you tell him?” I finally asked.

“I told him that I would talk to you about it and let him know how you wanted to proceed, I know that you like to avoid the underworld whenever possible and he rarely leaves it, though he would have for this had he not been ah- otherwise engaged.”

I felt a sudden surge of gratitude toward my father, sometimes I wondered if I deserved for him, of all people, to be so understanding. I also found that I was relieved to discover that other demons apparently didn't view me as a sibling any more than I did them, they wouldn't marry someone they considered to be a sister would they?

I took a deep breath to steady myself before I delivered my next sentence, “I'm actually seeing someone, we feel very strongly about one another and I think he could be perfect for me.”

“You're seeing a human?” My mother asked in surprise. I nodded.

“Saydie that's wonderful!” She looked like she was about to cry and I smiled at her, glad that she was happy for me, with no trace of worry in her face at all.

I looked at my dad, “You knew I wouldn't agree to this dad and I honestly believe that this guy could be the one.”

He nodded, “I know darling, but I have my own position to uphold and I made a promise to pass on the message. He won't take the rejection well though, especially if he finds out that his competition is a human.”

I started to laugh, “He won't take the rejection well? Did he honestly believe that I would just turn my back on my entire life and say 'Sure I'll marry a demon why not?'?”

“Don't be rude Saydie, he feels very strongly about this,” he chastised me.

“Well I feel very strongly about Rhys so please extend my apologies and the reasons that I cannot accept his proposal.” I put my hand over his with a pleading look.

He nodded solemnly and squeezed my hand before rising from his seat, “Give your old man another hug so I can be on my way.” I stood and wrapped my arms around him, taking a moment to enjoy the warm feeling that came along with his hugs.

“I love you dad.”

“I love you too darling.” As he released me I could see that he really wasn't looking forward to delivering my message and suddenly I felt bad for him.

“Are you alright with my decision dad? I don't want to embarrass you or anything.”

“Of course dear, whatever you feel is right is what you should do, you were always cut from a different mold and I've come to expect nothing less from you.” I could see the pride coming off of him in waves as guilt stabbed at my heart.

“Wait here.” I told him and dashed to the desk in his home office to grab a piece of paper and a pen.

I hastily wrote-

“Dear Malcolm,

I regret to inform you that I am already involved with another man and while I am flattered and honored by your interest and your beautiful gift, I feel that I could not accept it or your proposal in good conscience.

My deepest apologies and sincerest wishes for you to find what you're looking for,

Saydie Mason"

I folded the paper tri-fold and rushed back to hand it to my father.

“There now you don't have to deliver the message yourself.”

I smiled at him and he kissed my cheek, “You're such a joy to me Saydie.”

He stepped away from me with a smile and in another flash of flame he was gone.

My mother pulled me back down into his seat and insisted that I tell her everything about my new beau as she served me up a piece of apple pie with vanilla ice cream on top and a glass of milk.

It was going to be a long afternoon.