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BAD BOYS



Pat Cunningham

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EROTIC ROMANCE



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A SIREN PUBLISHING BOOK

IMPRINT: Erotic Romance

BAD BOYS

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DEDICATION

To Becky
See, it can be done.

BAD BOYS

PAT CUNNINGHAM

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Chapter 1

Boranaz the demon gazed down on the mortal plane and considered all the forms of delicious mischief he could indulge in. Today, he had a taste for romance. He focused his attention on a small city park and the couple strolling hand in hand along its walking path. He noted how the male's head turned as a female in tight shorts sashayed past, and the furious look it earned him from his companion. Now there was a situation ripe for conflict. He need only take on the appropriate form and show some interest in the male, fan the female's insecurities, then sit back and enjoy the show.

"I wouldn't."

Bricks and brimstone, not again. With an inward groan, Boranaz wrenched his attention from the rich gold mine of mayhem below. "You wouldn't what?"

"Do whatever it is you're contemplating." The angel Solian floated down to hover alongside the demon. He wore his heavenly aspect today, appearing as a man-sized, vaguely man-shaped, sparkly golden glow. If one looked carefully, one could discern the slow sweep of powerful wings.

Boranaz lifted one clawed paw to shield his eyes. "Turn down the wattage, willya? You want to blind me?"

"I want to stop you from doing whatever you're planning," Solian replied mildly. He made no effort to dim his glow. "By whatever method it takes."

"You just want to wreck my fun."

The cloud shrugged wispy shoulders. "It's my job. Or was."

"Buttinsky," Boranaz muttered. Which god or devil had he offended to get this divine albatross chained around his neck? Hey, wait a minute. "What do you mean, was?"

"This is the last time I'll be interfering in your *fun*. I came to tell you I've been reassigned." His glow had a tinge of regret in it. "You're someone else's problem now. Good-bye." He drifted away.

"You what? Hey, hold up!" Boranaz scrambled after the angel, all thoughts of mischief forgotten. "You can't make my life miserable for sixteen centuries and then just float off on me."

"I can, and I must. It's been a pleasure thwarting your petty little wickedness, but I'm moving on to better things. Do play nice with the next angel, won't you?" He flapped his wings abruptly and soared away, leaving Boranaz in a field of fading sparkles.

For a moment the demon just stood there. He gnashed his fangs and lashed his tail and scraped his claws against his palms with the fists he formed. Bricks and brimstone, just who the hell did that stuck-up prissy pussy think he was?

"He walked out on me," Boranaz said to the aether. "That son of a seraphim. Well, listen up, sunshine. Nobody walks out on a mischief demon and gets away with it. You just bought yourself a whole mess of trouble."

He had no problem following Solian's trail. Sixteen centuries with a seraphic monkey on his back had taught him a couple of tricks, like how to dodge out of Solian's way, or stalk him without detection. Whatever the angel's new assignment might be, Boranaz intended to screw with it royally. Without Solian, he had no one to piss off. Solian owed him, no question.

In short order he caught up to Solian. He found his long-time adversary floating in space, much as he himself had been doing, watching the mortal plane. He settled in beside the angel. “Hey, bro. What’s up?”

Solian started. “What are you doing here? I’m done with you.”

“The talon’s on the other paw now, sunshine. So, whatcha got cooking?” Unlike demons, angels showed little interest in the day-to-day matters of humans. Boranaz peered through the dimensional mists, eager to learn what could hold Solian so intrigued.

Well now, would you look at that? The dirty dog had been spying on a mortal woman. Not even that attractive of one. No scales or claws to speak of. Being a tail man, Boranaz rarely bothered with humans. Except in the line of mischief, of course.

Still, she had a glow about her. He recognized it as the glow of divine attention. That rushed her straight to the top of Boranaz’s interest list.

“Nice,” he commented. “Not what I’d go for, but okay. Not what you’d go for, either. So why the voyeur act?”

“That’s none of your concern,” Solian said stiffly. “If you’ll excuse me—”

“Oh no you don’t. Not until I get to the bottom of this. You don’t give two flaps about anything mortal, let alone a woman. Now, all of a sudden, here you are—”

The light went on. Boranaz smiled, showing tusks. “She’s your new assignment, isn’t she? You got promoted! And didn’t even tell me, your best bud. I would’ve bought you a beer.”

“I don’t drink,” Solian said primly. “There was no reason for you to know. In fact, no demon is supposed to know.”

“But you came and told me anyway. I’m touched.” He peered down at the female and felt plans coalesce.

“We’ve known each other for centuries. I couldn’t simply fly off and leave you with no word,” Solian said. “I felt we both deserved closure.”

“Closure. Yeah,” Boranaz said absently. “So what’s so special about this bimbo that she rates her own guardian angel? She a virgin? You guys going that route again?”

“That’s none of your concern.”

“She doesn’t look very virginal to me. In fact, she looks like one hot tamale.” He slanted a sly look up at Solian. “I’ll bet I could prime her pump. I’ll bet I could even get to her to fall in love with me.”

Solian’s amorphous form flashed several hues paler. “Don’t you dare! Don’t you even try!”

“Why not? Got your own eye on her, do you?” He elbowed Solian’s sparkles. “You sly dog. And all this time I thought you feather dusters were asexual.”

“That’s hardly the issue here. Wanda is not—”

“Wanda? You’re on a first-name basis already? Damn, you don’t waste a second.”

“Wanda,” Solian said bitingly, “is destined for better things. I’m to see she fulfills her potential. That potential does *not* include ravishment by the unclean.”

“Unclean? Now you’ve hurt me.” Boranaz sniffed his armpit. “Hmm. Okay, maybe you got a point. But so do I. I mean, look at her. That is prime mortal flesh on the hoof down there. She deserves the best Hell has to offer.”

“She does not deserve anything associated with Hell. Certainly not you.”

“Why not? What am I? Diseased or something?” Boranaz puffed out his scaly chest. “I got loads to offer.”

Solian sniffed. “She’d show no interest at all in you. She’s not that kind of a girl.”

“The hell she isn’t. She’s mortal. They’re all that kind of a girl. Trust me on this, sunshine. I know humans way better than you. I could win her over to the dark side before you could mumble a prayer. Chicks dig the bad boys.”

“Not this one,” Solian maintained stoutly. “This one is marked for Heaven.”

“Yeah, so was Joan of Arc. Maid, my scaly ass. I could tell you stories that’d curl your feathers.”

“I’m not interested.”

“Y’see, there was this Viking raider who made it to France and they—”

“I can’t hear you, la la la la.”

“Bricks and brimstone. You’re no fun at all. Go ahead, play peeping Gabriel with your little bimbo there. See if I care.” He got up and stomped off as loudly as the insubstantial aether would allow, well aware of how determinedly Solian was ignoring him. *All to the good, sunshine.*

So Sparkles had a new assignment, did he? He’d better buckle in for a rough ride, then, because Boranaz had a new mission in life: insinuate himself into this Wanda’s existence, win her, seduce her, corrupt the hell out of her, then leave whatever remained for Solian to mop up. Ignore him, Boranaz king of the mischief demons, while he fluttered over some human? They’d just see about *that!*

He had no doubts of the outcome. Whore, nun, virgin, wanton, male, female, didn’t make a lick of difference. They were all human, and humans loved to flirt with evil. If evil chose to flirt back, hey, that was their own fault. They invited it in and let it sit on the sofa and drink all their beer and wreck their lives and then had the gall to cry afterwards. No scales off his tail.

He flashed his tusks in a demonic grin. One week, tops, and this Wanda-mortal would be on her knees licking his feet and loving it. Chicks dug the bad boys.

* * * *

Boranaz posed before the full-length mirror and eyed his handiwork critically. To win the fair maiden’s heart, not to mention

his one-sided wager, he would need to pass for human. Not just any human either, but one from the wild side. That should be a snap. Hell, when he was done, even sexless Solian would have to sit up and take notice.

Body: check. Tall, so the lady had to look up, reinforcing the whole dominant male dynamic. And hot. Reel 'em in with sex so they never noticed the humiliating condescension. He patted his sculpted abs and nodded, satisfied. More bulk up top? No, better not. Too much and he'd look grotesque. Chicks lusted after buff but not after monstrous. He settled for the standard wide shoulders, narrow hips, and the classic tight ass to die for. He slimmed the whole thing down a touch for that lean, insufficiently-fed appearance. Appeal to the nurturing instincts. Couldn't hurt.

Face: check. Chiseled cheekbones, dark hooded eyes, full, pouty lips that dared a woman not to kiss them and promised explosions if they did. He curled them into a one-sided sneer and chuckled happily at the effect. No woman worth her estrogen could resist an expert sneer. It made him look dangerously sexy, or sexily dangerous. Hell, he'd give those lips a wet smack himself.

Hair: check. Black as sin, thick and untamed, inviting women to comb their fingers through it. He toyed with the 'do until he got that one errant lock to fall artfully across his forehead. Chicks went absolutely wild for that.

The Big Lebowski: check and double-check. All demons were blessed, if such were the word, in that department. He eyed Li'l Nazy appraisingly and wondered if maybe he should tone it down a bit. He didn't want to scare the bimbo off. Nah. Let her deal with it. He was a bad boy. Pain had to come with the package.

He twisted to look behind him, and heaved a leaden sigh. Now came the hard part. That tail was his pride. Demon females judged a male by the length and supple muscularity of their tails. Humans, on the other hand, sadly lacked such sophisticated taste.

No choice. Buck up and do it for the cause. Boranaz gritted his now-human teeth and absorbed his tail into his body. Only then did he truly feel naked.

Which led to the next priority: clothing. Black, of course, and heavy on the leather. His first attempt at jeans came out too baggy. He tightened them up until they left no room for doubt, or much for circulation. Black leather jacket, check. White shirt underneath, unbuttoned almost to the waist. He added a brush of chest hair, just enough to entice without looking like a mat.

Still needed something...yeah. He put a tattoo over his heart, where it could be glimpsed through the open shirt by curious feminine eyes. She'd have to get his shirt off to see the whole thing. And she'd want to, guaranteed.

One last detail. As he had with the mirror and the clothes, he drew on the elements of air and earth to form and shape the specific item he wanted. Sleek, black and shiny with chrome, the Harley-Davidson glistened in the moonlight, both iconic symbol of bad-boyhood and invitation to join its rider in same. He fiddled with the engine until it roared like a tiger, and with the seat until he had it just the right length to hold himself and a smaller, slimmer rider.

No woman capable of drawing breath could possibly resist him now.

"We are set," Boranaz announced. He hopped aboard his ride, revved it to ear-splitting life, popped a wheelie just for the hell of it, and shot like a leather-clad comet toward the earthly plane. Let the games begin.

* * * *

The scent of Solian's presence led Boranaz right to his quarry, as he had known it would. He beamed a mental smile full of thought-tusks. The insufferable prig would be hovering right there when

Boranaz made his move, and would therefore have a ringside seat when the demon seduced his charge. Life just didn't get any sweeter.

He spotted the mortal chit inside a park, at an umbrellaed cart that sold hot dogs and sodas. Dammit. He'd wanted to ride the bike right up to her and make a grand sweeping entrance. No sweat, he shrugged mentally. Just switch to Plan B. Evil was all about improv.

Boranaz parked the motorcycle at the curb near the gates, dismounted smoothly and swaggered inside. He was proud of that swagger; he'd worked hard to perfect it. He stumbled only once, still unused to legs that bent forward at the knee. Fortunately his quarry didn't notice.

Others did notice his progress, and Boranaz took note of their reactions. The men's glares burned, the women's stares lingered. Perfect. Exactly the effect he'd been aiming for. Had he not been a demon, he might have felt a fleeting moment of pity for the wench he now bore down on. She'd never even know what hit her.

He reached the cart and his victim just as she completed her transaction. She turned. They collided. The frothy strawberry smoothie in her hand spilled all over his leather jacket.

Her hand dropped the cup and flew to her mouth. "Oh. Oh my goodness! I'm so sorry!"

"Hey, not a prob." Boranaz drew a finger slowly through the froth on his jacket, then inserted the finger into his mouth. He sucked briefly. With his dark, smoldering eyes firmly fixed on the woman, he casually withdrew his finger. "Sweet as sugar."

She blushed red enough to make her look almost demonic. "I'm so sorry," she repeated. "I—"

He held up his hand. "My fault. I was standing too close to you." He broke out his well-rehearsed bad-boy half-smile. "I couldn't help myself."

She blushed even harder. To cover it, she grabbed a handful of napkins and dabbed at the liquid on his jacket. Boranaz caught her hand in his. "It's okay. I got it."

“But I—”

“It was an accident. But if you insist... ” He rubbed his thumb lightly on her palm. “The name’s Naz. I just blew into town, and I could use a tour guide. I’ll bet a hottie like yourself knows where all the action is.”

If she went on blushing like that she’d catch fire. “I-I really can’t.”

Boranaz widened his smile, glad now he’d taken the time to get his teeth just right. “Then we’ll just have to make our own action.”

“That’s...nice,” she said uncertainly, “but I’m with somebody.”

“Ditch him. I assume it’s a him. A woman like you must have her pick of him.”

“No, just the one,” she said, with a nervous little giggle. “Would you like to meet him? He’s right over—”

“Sorry, babe. My Harley only holds two, and it’s reserved for you and me.”

She tried to tug her hand free, but feebly. He could smell her interest. Like all mortals, she was curious to nibble at the edges of evil. He upped his smile to the high beams. Yeah, there went the resistance. She’d follow him anywhere now.

“Excuse me. Am I interrupting?”

And this must be Mr. Lumpy Mortal Boyfriend. Ought to take about a second to blast him out of the water. You there, Solian? Boranaz thought. Watch and learn.

He looked beyond the woman’s shoulder.

Oh my— Having no God, he couldn’t finish.

Dawn had broken upon a virgin world and taken mortal form. Thick, wavy hair with all the colors and beauty of a sunrise in it. Eyes so blue he marveled that the sky didn’t sue for copyright infringement. Full, perfect lips that made his own seem flabby as a chimpanzee’s. Tall and slender and aglow with a radiance that drew one in like a whirlpool. Next to him, the demon might as well have remained in his hunched and scaly body. He moved gracefully toward

them, his feet seeming to skim just a breath above the pavement, every inch of him absolutely perfect and absolutely beautiful.

Just like an angel.

He removed Boranaz's unresisting hand from the woman's and captured her hand within his own. His brief touch sent a thrilling tingle up Boranaz's arm. An all-too-familiar tingle. As familiar as the self-satisfied laughter that danced in those impossibly blue eyes.

"How do you do?" this icon of masculine perfection said in Solian's voice. "I see you've met Wanda. I'm Sol."

Boranaz's mouth dropped open. A croak fell out.

"He said his name's Naz," Wanda offered. "I spilled my smoothie on him. I told him I was sorry."

"You've got some on your blouse," Solian murmured, in a voice dulcet enough to melt souls. "Why don't you run off to the ladies room and fix it? I'll wait right here."

"Don't go away." She placed a sweet little kiss on his cheek and trotted off on her errand. Solian gazed after her fondly before turning his attention to Boranaz. "Fancy meeting you here," he said.

"You—" Boranaz coughed the rasp out of his throat and tried again. "What the hell's this all about?"

"Precautionary measures." Solian smiled. He had dimples. The bastard. "After sixteen centuries, I've come to know how you think. I figured you'd try something like this, so I approached Wanda first. You don't know what a pleasure it is to be a step ahead of you for once." He cocked one perfect brow. "Although you don't appear so disappointed."

"More like shocked. I don't think I've ever seen you solid before." His gaze dropped to Solian's slacks, molded to him like a second skin. A very bumpy skin. "Or hard."

Solian glanced down. His cheeks flushed a fetching shade of salmon. "It keeps doing that," he muttered.

Tell me about it. Boranaz was all too aware of his own pride and joy's betrayal. His cock strained painfully against his jeans as if it

wanted to shake hands with Solian's equally-eager little friend. Ho-kay, not so little. The feather duster hadn't skimmed on that detail, surprise surprise. Boranaz struck a jaunty pose that he hoped would hide his reaction from Solian's eyes. "It's one of the perks of a meat body. You'll find out. Or have you already?"

Solian blushed even darker. Bricks and brimstone, he flushed more prettily than his lady friend. "That isn't why I've encased myself in this...thing. I'm protecting Wanda from the world's temptations, as I was assigned. This form allows me to stay close to her."

Boranaz looked him up and down and whistled. The divine dip surely knew how to build himself one hot erection set. "Just how close are you planning on staying?"

"Close enough to keep you at a distance. For once in your existence, take the hint."

"Fancy a little of that mortal meringue yourself, do you?"

Solian's embarrassment gave way to righteous anger. It pinked up his cheeks most delightfully. "I would never consider such a thing, and neither would Wanda. She's a moral, upright woman."

"She was two seconds away from hopping onto the back of my hog. I guarantee she wouldn't have stayed upright for long."

"You disgusting—"

He broke off as Wanda returned from the ladies room. She approached the two nervously. "Everything okay?"

Solian smiled at her in a way that would have shivered Boranaz's tail if he'd still had it. "Everything's fine. Naz here has to leave."

Her gaze bounced back and forth between them. "Do you two know each other?"

"We're old buddies," Boranaz said before Solian could deny it. "We used to hang together. Right, Solly?"

"We were never buddies," Solian snapped. "Don't you have some puppies to kick?"

“Sol!” Wanda said. “You apologize to your friend right now. He’s not that kind of a person. I can tell.”

Boranaz flashed his grin. He draped one arm around Wanda’s shoulders, the other around Solian’s, and grinned still further at the way the angel stiffened up, both above and below. “I like this one,” he told Solian. “I like this one a lot. You better watch out, Solly old boy. I’m liable to take her away from you.” He winked broadly at Wanda.

The angel clamped his own arm unshakably around Wanda’s waist. “We have to be going. And so do you.”

“No we don’t,” Wanda said. “He can come along, if you guys want to catch up.”

“Hey, those puppies ain’t gonna kick themselves. Maybe some other time.” Boranaz flicked Solian a breezy salute, and treated Wanda’s shoulders to a brief squeeze before he let her go. “Definitely some other time.”

“I doubt that,” Solian said.

“It’s a small world. You never know.” He winked openly at Wanda again before he ambled away.

It was not a smooth amble. His hard-on made smoothness difficult. Bricks and brimstone, this made everything difficult. Damn that huffy angel and his please-jump-me body anyway. Didn’t he know by now demons could resist everything but temptation?

He made it to his bike, where he could hide his arousal behind the fuel tank. He watched through slitted eyes while Solian bought the woman a fresh smoothie, then accompanied her from the park. His gait was none too steady either, which brought a fierce smile to Boranaz’s tight lips. So Halo Boy was also subject to the whims and wants of a flesh form, eh? That opened up intriguing possibilities.

Mounting the bike proved a painful chore. The engine’s powerful vibrations didn’t help any. *I’ll get you for this*, he promised Solian, and rode off at a sedate pace to plot and lay fresh plans.

Chapter 2

He knew he could seduce Wanda. That was a given. In order to get up close to get personal, however, first he had to slip past her heavenly gatekeeper. In addition to his role as solicitous boyfriend, Solian proved a committed and dogged guardian. When he wasn't physically at her side and in Boranaz's way, his presence hovered around her like a barbed-wire fence. That didn't make breaching the wall impossible, in Boranaz's eyes. It simply spiced things up a bit. The chit was mortal, after all, and unpredictable. Sooner or later, she'd slip the leash, and Boranaz would be waiting.

Sure enough, four days later she went off to the grocery store without any heavenly aura Siamese-twinning to her body. Sunshine must be taking a break. Boranaz breathed thanks to the Lord of Lies and revved his bike in pursuit.

He bumped carts with her in the cereal aisle, and went through the whole double take, hey don't I know you routine. She remembered him right off, of course. After all the trouble he'd gone through to make himself unforgettable, it was nice to know it paid off. "Naz, right?" she said. "Sol's friend."

"Wanda," he said with a wink. "I never forget a beautiful lady."

A week with sexually-repressed Solian hadn't dimmed her blushes. He maneuvered his cart beside hers. He'd loaded it with every suggestive food he could think of. Melons. Bananas. Strawberries. Sausages. A tin of oysters. Whipped cream and corn oil. Only the candy bar hadn't been chosen for its nuts or phallic shape; Boranaz had a weakness for chocolate.

He checked out the contents of her cart, and quickly discerned the common thread. Lettuce and spinach, tomatoes and basil, grated cheese and olive oil, and—this came as no surprise—angel hair pasta. “Somebody’s cooking dinner for someone,” he observed. “So your relationship with Sol is going well?”

“He’s a great guy,” she said, but Boranaz didn’t miss the hesitation in her voice. Trouble in paradise already? Leave it to Solian to botch something as simple as a seduction. What did an angel know about romance anyway? Through such chinks in the armor did wickedness worm its way in.

Boranaz started worming. “Doesn’t sound like the Sol I remember. Don’t get me wrong, babe. Sol and me, we’ve been like this since forever.” He crossed his fingers. “But—and this is just between us, so don’t breathe a word—he’s not exactly the adventurous type. Y’know what I mean?”

“I wouldn’t call him dull,” she said, in a tone that implied just that. “He’s the kindest, most considerate man I’ve ever met. But sometimes...”

And she was off and running. They wandered the aisles while she spilled the beans. Boranaz listened attentively and took copious mental notes. He learned things about Solian he hadn’t uncovered in sixteen centuries. “He likes jazz?” Boranaz shook his head. “Who’d have thought?”

“And dancing,” Wanda added. “No, that’s not really right. *I* like dancing. I’d like to go dancing with Sol, if I could drag him out of the house. He just wants to sit around and watch *Highway to Heaven* reruns. It’s like he thinks I belong locked up in a tower like I was a princess or something. Oh geez. I know he’s your friend and all, but he’s not one of those freakos, is he? Like a stalker? I heard isolating the victim is one of the signs.”

“Sol, a freak?” Boranaz chuckled. Didn’t *that* conjure up intriguing mental images? “Nah,” he said, with a touch of a sigh. “Not him. You’re absolutely safe with him. He’s the most trustworthy guy

you'll ever meet. He wouldn't do a thing to hurt you, other than bore you to death." He bumped his cart against hers suggestively. "You strike me as a lady who doesn't tolerate boredom."

"Well, I do wish we'd go out more," she confessed. "There's this new club I've been dying to go to."

"Tonight good for you?"

She glanced regretfully at her cart's contents. "I invited him over for dinner tonight."

"Tomorrow, then. Or the day after. You're going to that club, and you're going with me, and I won't take no for an answer."

"Welllllll..."

"'Well' is not 'no.' Tomorrow night it is. I'll pick you up at seven."

"I really shouldn't."

"Yes. You really should."

A flash of compliance flared up in her eyes, just for a second, before her better judgment horned in and stomped it out. "No. I mean, we only just started dating. It's not like we've made any serious commitments or anything, but he's just been so nice to me, I'd feel like I was cheating. We'd better not."

Bricks and brimstone. The bimbo had a conscience. This called for sterner measures. "How about if I ask him?" Boranaz suggested, turning up his demonic charm. "I could *happen* to drop by your place tonight, tell him I wanted to ask you out, see what he says. If he trusts you, he'll let you go out with me. Unless I'm totally wrong about him and he really is a freako," he added in a calculatedly ominous tone.

"That's pretty underhanded," Wanda said. "Why don't you just join us for dinner?"

Whoa. This one must have imp blood in her. "I couldn't intrude on your date."

She snorted. "Date, my fanny. If I could get him to go out to a restaurant I wouldn't have to cook. I want to get to know him better,

and what better way than to see how he acts around his friends? Guys are a whole other breed when they're with their buddies, y'know?"

"Oh, absolutely," Boranaz said. The little mortal minx. She wanted to run a comparison. He'd have this bet wrapped up in a bow in forty-eight hours, tops. "What time do you want me there?"

"Seven-thirty. And *I* won't take no for an answer."

They traded addresses, even though he'd already scoped out her dwelling. The number he gave her belonged to a vacant apartment he'd usurped for the duration. He also gave her a number for the cell phone he'd need to create. "See you two tonight," he said, and left her with a wink and a jaunty salute.

He ditched his cart short of the checkout line, although he did pay for the candy bar. Larger evils loomed on the horizon; why not be generous? He gobbled the chocolate outside the doors and dropped the wrapper on the ground, just to keep his hand in. His mind peered ahead to the upcoming evening. Oh, the look on Solian's face. Would he get the full-on patented self-righteous scowl or only a partial? He could hardly wait to find out.

* * * *

Boranaz arrived early, with flowers and a bottle of wine. He even helped Wanda set the table. It went against the bad boy stereotype, but he was battling an angel here. He thought about complimenting her on her dress and decided against it. No need to go overboard.

He'd switched from the leather look to tight black slacks and an ab-hugging tee, and his hair artfully combed to look as if it hadn't been. Wanda clearly appreciated his efforts; she kept sneaking peeks at his backside and especially his frontside. He made sure to flex and pose whenever possible. Hook the fish before Solian got here, keep the scoreboard tipped in his favor.

When the doorbell rang, Boranaz stopped Wanda from dashing to answer it. “Allow me,” he offered, and headed for the door. No way did he intend to pass this up.

The doorbell chimed again. Boranaz tugged his t-shirt flat and swung the door open.

Oh Hell.

Solian’s magnificent eyes widened, and his jaw dropped. So did Boranaz’s. Could a guy get any more desirable? Maybe not a mortal, but an angel could certainly swing it. He’d changed into crisp white slacks that highlighted his every bulge and curve, and a powder-blue shirt that clung to a narrow waist and abs every bit as chiseled as Boranaz’s. He hadn’t combed his hair at all. The casual rumple of that thick golden corona had even Boranaz’s fingers twitching to smooth it.

He shown like a freshly-polished coin. Prissy haloed prick. That divine glow of his definitely counted as an unfair advantage. He’d also brought flowers—no, wait, no he hadn’t. That heady aroma was pure him, dammit all. Boranaz himself perpetually reeked of wickedness no matter how many showers he took. He’d told Wanda it was Brut.

Solian recovered first. “What are you doing here?”

Boranaz put on his heartiest smile. “I was in the neighborhood. Wanda asked me in.” He ogled Solian up and down and watched the angel seethe. “You’re looking better than good. Not that it’s going to help.”

“You—”

Solian’s voice shook. A bulge appeared at the front of his tight white slacks. Boranaz watched it grow in fascination. “You really should get that looked at,” he said.

“Oh, hi. There you are.” Wanda breezed in from the kitchen. She greeted Solian with a kiss on the cheek. If she noticed his reaction to Boranaz, facial or otherwise, she didn’t let on. “Look who I ran into at the grocery store. I invited him to join us. You don’t mind, do you?”

Solian forced a smile. Even fired by rage, it was dazzling. Boranaz narrowed his eyes against its glare and its promise of imminent smiting. “Of course not,” Solian said tightly. “Naz and I are old buddies.”

They went in to dinner. Normally Boranaz would have reveled in all the tension, awkwardness and hostility at what should have been a relaxed and intimate occasion. However, he found it tough to revel when he was one of the tense, awkward and hostile parties involved. He hadn’t expected Solian to show up looking so infernally tasty. The sneak preview a few days back had only whetted his appetite, and now he had a full-on hunger raging. For the enemy, yet.

I’m into chicks. I’m into demon chicks. Just because I’ve known him for sixteen centuries doesn’t mean I like him. He doesn’t even have a tail, for Beelzebub’s sake.

Hellfire. I think Old Scratch himself would jump the prick the way he’s putting himself out there. Hang in there, Naz ol’ boy. Remember what we’re here for.

The seating arrangement didn’t help. Wanda had a round dining room table, and she’d placed the three of them equidistant so everyone could see and talk to each other without having to lean or shout across somebody. She probably thought she was being fair, when in actuality she’d set up the classic triangle.

Okay, don’t panic. Work with it. So what if he had Solian and his smoldering hot looks and vicious glower planted directly before him? He still had Wanda on his left, well within flirting range. Of course he could pull this off, and right in front of the angel, too. That worked out even better than he’d planned.

He offered to pour the wine. He considered slopping Solian’s onto his pristine shirt, or maybe those whiter-than-virtue slacks, then decided he didn’t need to. The way the feather duster gripped his glass, he was sure to shatter it sooner or later. It’d be worth a spray of Chardonnay to see that happen.

“So,” Wanda chirped, “how do you two know each other?”

“We used to work together,” Boranaz said. “Then Solly got promoted. It kind of split us up.”

“Yeah? What do you do?”

“Security work,” Solian said before Boranaz could answer. “I keep people like him from making trouble for people like you.”

“Now there you go, blowing everything out of proportion again.” Boranaz leaned back in his chair. “I’m a free spirit, babe. I drift where the wind blows me. I like adventure, and I like my fun. Some people have a problem with that.”

Wanda glanced uncertainly from one to the other. “You’re not a criminal, are you?”

“More like a petty annoyance.” Solian’s dimples flashed. “He never had the brains for anything worse.”

“That you know of,” Boranaz countered. “Nobody’s ever been able to prove anything. Hey, chill, babe. I never killed anybody.”

“No, you haven’t, I will grant you that,” Solian conceded. “He’s more of a con man,” he added to Wanda. “He likes to ruin people’s lives for a cheap laugh. Not the type of person you want to know.”

Boranaz aimed a kick at him under the table, but missed. Solian smiled serenely.

“And you two are friends?” Wanda said doubtfully.

“Okay, maybe *friends* is a bit strong,” Boranaz said. “But so is adversaries. Here’s how it is: I do my thing, which is my right, and sunshine here comes along and ruins it. A professional wet blanket, that’s what he is. You might want to keep that in mind for future reference.”

Solian’s sub-table kick landed solidly on Boranaz’s shin. Boranaz clung precariously to his grin. *I hope you molt.*

Wanda wisely opted not to pry any further. “How long have you known each other?”

“Oh, for ages,” Boranaz said.

“Feels like forever,” Solian agreed. “But enough about us. How’s your new job going?”

Wanda was more than pleased to chatter about her new position in AP/AR at Conroy and Co., Inc. She'd always wanted to work for them, and now she got to march through the front doors of that beautiful high rise downtown, just like a real professional. It was still only part-time, but if things went well she should go full in three months, with a hefty salary increase. They *never* had openings, but apparently her resume had landed on the right desk at the right time, can you believe it? It was like a miracle. Solian coughed modestly into his hand.

Boranaz tuned her out after the first thirty seconds. Solian appeared utterly captivated by her blather, but then angels were known for their high tolerance level. Not so demons. Time for a little of the things demons were best known for. See if halo head could top *this* maneuver.

With Wanda focused on all the male attention, and Solian focused on Wanda, neither noticed Boranaz's tail wriggle free past his waistband, lengthen and slip to the floor. Now just wait for the deluge to end and he could get down to business.

Eventually Wanda ran out of chatter. Boranaz hopped nimbly into the conversational gap, with a slightly fictionalized and heavily-edited account of a good time he'd been having in Ottoman Turkey before Solian mucked it up. While he talked, he snaked his tail under the table. It probed blindly for a moment or two before it encountered a leg. Its tip dipped beneath fabric and commenced a serious exploration.

His voice faltered for a second. Whoa. She wasn't wearing hose. That had to be the smoothest, warmest skin he'd ever encountered. Not even stubble. Like silk with pores. His tail wrapped itself contentedly around the upper shin and instigated a slow, casual rub on the firm calf muscle. Bricks and brimstone, if the rest of her skin was this sweet, he might even keep her past the bet's expiration.

Solian made a choked noise into his hand. "Everything okay, honey?" Wanda asked solicitously.

The angel downed a gulp of wine. “Just fine. Sorry for the interruption, Naz. Do go on.”

Boranaz shrugged and wrapped up his tale. While he talked, he watched Wanda’s face for any reaction. She chewed her food and smiled prettily at both him and Solian and showed no indication whatsoever that she was affected by, or even aware of, his tail’s attention. One tough customer, all right. Okay, move on to drastic measures.

He sent his tail questing higher. The tip encountered briefs.

Solian cried out and rocked on his chair. Wanda sprang up. “Are you sure you’re okay?”

“Something... Something went down wrong,” he said around coughs. His glare stabbed at once to Boranaz.

“Let me get you some water.” Wanda dashed for the kitchen. Boranaz stared after her. His tail continued to nudge and rub at its quarry.

Oops.

Solian’s face had darkened to a furious shade of pink. Boranaz snatched his tail away. The last of it shot back into his body just as Wanda returned. She hovered at Solian’s shoulder while he sipped the water and assured her he was fine. “I ate too fast,” he said. “I couldn’t help myself. It’s all so delicious.”

“Are you sure you’re all right? You’re all flushed.”

“I will be once I’ve had that dessert you promised.”

“Sure. Let me clear the table.”

“Allow me.” Boranaz shot out of his chair. He needed to put some judicious distance between himself and Solian, like about five minutes ago. Unfortunately, Solian also rose and began to collect dinnerware. He stuck like a burr to Boranaz’s back all the way to the kitchen sink. “Playing dirty already?” he muttered. “I suppose I should have expected that.”

“I wasn’t aiming for you,” Boranaz snapped. “If it bothered you so much, you should’ve said something.”

“I thought that was Wanda!”

“With a tail?”

Solian grumbled but didn’t respond. They wrapped up their chore in record time and came out of the kitchen together, all open smiles and camaraderie. “Have a seat,” Wanda said, and indicated the sofa. “I’ll be right back.”

They sat on the sofa at opposite ends, leaving a healthy empty space in the middle. “She wants me,” Boranaz announced with satisfaction.

“Only in your twisted dreams. She’s just being polite.”

“Yeah, you go on telling yourself that. Face it, Mr. Stuffy. In a comparison taste test, you come up short.”

“Wanda’s taste is far more refined,” Solian said on a sniff. “Granted, you’ve constructed a highly desirable physical form, but she’s not so shallow as to settle for mere beauty. She looks for more in a man. Once your numerous personality flaws reveal themselves, she’ll no doubt—”

“You think I’m hot? Seriously?”

Solian blinked. “Your physical body is quite attractive, yes. But when it comes to matters of—”

“You think I’m hot.” Boranaz grinned. He dropped his gaze to below the belt, where the proof of Solian’s opinion had been straining at the leash since the unfortunate tail incident. “No wonder you didn’t squawk. How long’s it been since you had any? From anybody?”

Solian flushed again. The results made him look even lovelier and caused Boranaz’s own treacherous sidekick to poke its head up for a peek. He hastily crossed his legs, with some difficulty. Solian did the same. They sat in a seething, uncomfortable silence.

“So,” Boranaz said finally, “you think she puts out?”

“If you had a soul I’d—”

Wanda came in with a tray of coffee and iced slices of cake, which she set on the coffee table before them. Both smiled charmingly at her. Neither dared get up. She wriggled herself into the

empty spot between them and sat with her thighs touching each, as clearly enjoying all the attention as Solian clearly wasn't. She wasn't yet playing them against each other, but Boranaz was certain that would come. My kind of gal, he thought, and helped himself to the biggest slice of cake.

"Chocolate," he said. "My fave."

"It's devil's food."

He thought Solian would choke again. "She cooks, she reads minds, she looks like a sex addict's wet dream," Boranaz said between gobbles. "What else do you do, babe?"

"That's quite enough." Solian sliced off precise little bites with his fork and nibbled at them like some kind of upper-crust pansy. Holier-than-frigging-thou. Thought he was better than everyone else. Thought he was better than demons.

Wouldn't it be a sight to see that prissy feather duster get all down and dirty, like some sweaty mortal? Get that look on his face again, the one he'd let slip when he'd had Boranaz's tail up his leg. The thought had Li'l Nazty champing at the bit.

Boranaz recrossed his legs and decided now might be the perfect time to drop his trump card on the table. He waited for Solian to pick up his cup and take a nice full swig. "By the way, no point in calling Wanda tomorrow night. She's going out on a date with me."

He even spat coffee like a puss.

Wanda shoved napkins at his hands. Solian snatched them from her in a most unangelic grab. He rounded on her in righteous alarm. "You didn't actually agree to go out with this...person?"

"He asked me. You didn't." Her eyes burned with challenge. Boranaz grinned and sat back. "It's not like we're going steady or anything."

"You don't know a thing about him."

"So? I hardly know you either. He's a friend of yours, so what's the big deal? If you know him, he must be okay. Anyway, I'm old enough to take care of myself."

“Not with him, you’re not. I absolutely forbid it.”

“You *what?*”

And we’re off. Boranaz reached across Wanda’s lap and appropriated Solian’s cake.

“What are you, my father?” Wanda blasted. “I can go out with anybody I please. I don’t need your permission. Who do you think you are?”

“Yeah,” Boranaz chimed in around a mouthful of devil’s food. “Lighten up. We’re only going out to a club. Whatever happens, happens.”

“I...” Solian floundered, then abruptly switched tactics. He took her hands in his and turned up the divine shine. “I realize we haven’t known each other long, but you’ve become very special to me. I’m concerned about you. I couldn’t bear it if you were hurt.”

Those indescribably blue eyes hit Wanda, and Boranaz, like a ton of bricks wrapped in velvet. He felt his resolve start to melt and tightened it up with an effort. An overwhelming urge to throw Solian to the floor just to see who’d land on top shuddered through him. If Solian had that effect on a demon, he could imagine how weak little Wanda must feel.

She was dissolving, all right. He could see it in the slump of her body, angled ever closer to Solian. Two seconds more and she’d be a pliable puddle seeping into the cushions. Boranaz squeezed his arm around her shoulders in a desperate effort to break the spell. Somebody needed to remind her she deserved a little action in her life, and remind him he liked chicks. “C’mon, bud. Drop the leash. I swear on my honor I’ll bring her home intact.”

Solian arched a brow at him. “Honor?”

Hellfire. Why had he said that? “It slipped out. You know what I mean.”

“Yes. I know exactly what you mean.” But a crack had appeared in his gleam, and Wanda had stopped her forward lean. The wrong word now and he’d lose her. Solian swallowed, and sighed. In defeat,

as in everything, he remained immensely graceful. "I'm sorry," he told Wanda. "I don't mean to be so smothering. You two go and have a good time. If you find you need me, call and I'll come at once."

Mollified, if a little confused, Wanda kissed him lightly on the mouth. "Thanks, honey. I know you're not much of a party guy, but why don't you come along? It'll be fun."

"No way," Boranaz said at once. "This is couples night. No three's a crowding."

Scarcely had the words left his lips than Wanda rounded on him. Even the demon recoiled from the flash in her eyes. "Not you too," she said. "What is it with guys that they always think they can make up a girl's mind for her?"

"Hey." Boranaz scrambled after lost ground. "He's had you all to himself for, what, over a week now? I want a turn. Fair's fair."

"Yes," Solian agreed. He was smiling again. Boranaz decided he definitely didn't like that smile. "Fair is most definitely fair. I won't impose on your date, *if* Naz agrees to behave like a gentleman and treat you the way a lady deserves to be treated, with courtesy and respect."

"What? What kind of a date is that? I'm all about fun, sunshine, and if people can't keep up—"

Suddenly he had Wanda right up in his face, and not in a good way. "Are you saying I'm not a lady? That I don't deserve respect?" Her tone had a coating of frost on it. Beyond her shoulder, Solian beamed triumphantly.

"Okay, okay. I'll do this your way, just this once. Wanda, would you do me the honor of going out with me tomorrow night? Without the chaperone? Or the fun?"

"I'd be delighted. And we'll see about the fun." She giggled. "See what a nice guy he is, Solly? You could learn from him."

"I'm sure." His face and tone were neutral. Boranaz decided he'd rather face the smile.

They chatted for a while, then called it an early night because Wanda had work in the morning. Boranaz couldn't resist a victory strut down the walk after she closed the door behind them. "Told you," he crowed as they reached the tree-lined street. "I got her to go out with me. First crack out of the box, too. How many strikes did you get before she got fed up with saying no? It's all in the attitude, sunshine. Chicks go for the—"

Solian abruptly grabbed him by the miniscule give in his t-shirt and slammed him up against a sturdy elm. Sheer astonishment, more than the angel's unexpected strength, pinned him there. "Hey!" Boranaz protested. His voice squeaked. Another wonder. "What the hell?"

"You listen to me." Solian pressed in so close their noses brushed. "I can't, and I won't, interfere with Wanda's freedom, but I will curtail yours. If you try to coerce or violate her in any way, you will face the vengeance of Heaven. Do you hear me?"

Boranaz swallowed, hard. It was tough to hear anything over the flood rush of blood through his arteries, with a rock-solid angel crushed up against him and that sweet breath fanning his lips. He'd been on the receiving end of Solian's divine wrath for sixteen centuries and never reacted like this. It had to be these damned meat-sheathes. He felt like he was drowning in pheromones. How did humans stop themselves from humping each other in the street?

"Okay. Okay. Pay attention, because you'll never hear me say these words again. I meant what I said. No lies, no tricks. This one time only, just for you, I'm going to play by the rules. I won't force her. I won't trick her. I won't use any demon powers to nudge her over to the dark side. I won't do a thing a human bad boy wouldn't do. You make sure you act the same, sunshine. You play the virtuous boyfriend. At the end of a week, Wanda makes up her mind. Free will, free choice. No demonic temptation or divine coercion. Agreed?"

"This isn't a game."

“The hell it isn’t. It’s mortal love, the wildest ride in town. The rules can change on a woman’s whim, so you need to keep on your toes. Think you’re up to the challenge, sunny boy?”

Solian growled raggedly under his breath. His hips jammed against Boranaz’s. And those eyes... Something a helluva lot hotter than normal angelic fury churned in their depths. Boranaz knew bottomless pits in Hell that weren’t as deep.

Bricks and brimstone, you’d think the guy was—

Boranaz chuckled. “Well, I’ll be redeemed. Don’t tell me you’re jealous.”

For just a second, astonishment flashed in the angel’s eyes. Pathetically honest, the Heavenly Host didn’t do so well at hiding their emotions. They made for the world’s worst poker players. “Why would I... Oh. You mean Wanda. Don’t be absurd. She’s under my protection, nothing more. I’ve no intention of breaking her heart, or allowing it to be broken. That doesn’t mean I’ll meekly hand her over to you. She deserves far better.”

“Then it’s game on?”

Solian gritted his teeth. “Yes. Game on, and fairly played. None of your lies or tricks. I know how you operate.”

“Like this, you mean?” Boranaz ground his hips against Solian’s. Why not? The angel’s hips were crammed up against his, and they weren’t going anywhere. “Or—”

“This?” Solian crushed in so they were chest to chest as well as groin to groin. He matched the demon’s rhythm until Boranaz’s pulse pounded in his ears. “Is this what you had in mind for her?”

Boranaz managed a thin, high sound, too long for a yelp, too short for a moan. Where the hell had Mr. Priss learned moves like this?

“Well, don’t.” Solian abruptly shoved himself back. The tree trunk kept Boranaz upright, but only just. “Enjoy your little *date*. Just remember I’ll be watching you.” He jabbed his finger into Boranaz’s chest. “Every. Single. Second.”

Boranaz groped for breath, and a comeback. He found the latter first. “Hang on a sec. Who exactly are you jealous of?”

Solian blasted a snarl worthy of a demon. His flesh form dissolved into a shower of sparkles, which dissolved into nothing. Guy could make an exit. You had to give him that.

He could make a helluvan impact, too. Boranaz’s heart pounded like the Devil’s bongo set. He wouldn’t be getting angel stink out of his nose any time soon. Or the memory of that hot, perfect body jammed against his own out of his head.

“Play fair, my ass,” he muttered. “You are going down, sunshine, and so’s your little bimbo.” He reeled to the curb and mounted his bike and rode off, a trifle unsteadily, into the night.

Chapter 3

At seven on the dot the next evening Boranaz, in his shiniest leather and tightest jeans, showed up at Wanda's door. He peered around before he rang the bell. He spotted no overt sign of observation, but centuries of angelic meddling had attuned him to Solian's presence. "Don't blink," he shot at the sky. "I don't want you to miss one second of this."

Thunder rumbled, and dark, foreboding clouds scudded across the previously-pristine sky. Boranaz sneered and flashed the finger heavenward.

Wanda came to the door, looking sinfully cute in low rider slacks and a simple blouse that cast coy hints of the joys beneath without revealing secrets. Boranaz made the appropriate noises, though he couldn't fully appreciate it. Too much of his attention had focused itself on their celestial chaperone. Okay, then. Revenge made a satisfactory face-saving cover. They'd agreed on the general "fair" without defining specifics. Boranaz vowed to make tonight all about definitions.

Wanda hesitated briefly over his custom Harley. "Shouldn't we have helmets on or something?"

"Helmets are for wussies." He mounted up and pulled her on behind him. "Grab hold," he instructed with a leer. "This is where we separate the tigers from the kittycats."

He pushed the bike to its limit, causing Wanda to cling to his waist and shriek and giggle against his back. The feminine physical contact wasn't quite as enjoyable a sensation as he remembered. Wanda had a little bit of padding on her bones, which made her warm

and soft and huggable. Not hot and hard and dangerous like Solian last night. Nothing cuddly there, no sir. Talk about excitement on a stick.

“You okay?” Wanda shouted over the wind. “You’re all tense.”

“Just looking forward to the evening, babe.” Inwardly, he swore. Leave it to the feather duster to ruin Boranaz’s good time without even having to show up.

Fortunately, the club was everything he’d hoped for: loud, packed and cramped. He would have preferred more sleaze, but this would do.

They found a square foot of unoccupied space and started dancing. Boranaz made sure to bump up against her often. She bumped him back, but he suspected that was due to the crowded conditions and not true attraction. He added hands to the mix. A grope here, a pinch there. Hellfire, what he wouldn’t give to have the use of his tail right now. Show her the kind of good time mortals hardly dared to dream of.

Speaking of tails and daring to dream ... He remembered the slide of Solian’s skin against his tail and wanted to go back for seconds. His mouth watered. If his leg had felt so buttery smooth, imagine what the rest of him...

Hands striking his brought him back to the dance floor. “What are you doing?” Wanda squawked.

“What?”

“What, he says.” She scowled and tugged her blouse shut. Boranaz glimpsed a hint of a scratch on her chest before she slammed the cotton doors in his face. He must have been trying to cop a feel, before thoughts of Solian distracted him. “Sol warned me you could be an animal, but you don’t have to be so darned literal.”

“Sorry, babe. A tasty piece like you, I guess I got carried away. How about a slow dance?” He opened his jacket and his arms. “Come to Papa.”

“No thanks. I think I’m danced out for a while.” She turned away from him, her arms crossed over her chest.

Great. Just friggin’ great. Boranaz spotted Solian’s buttinsky hand in this, putting sexy thoughts in his head to throw him off his game. Never mind that he knew Solian had no such mental powers. Since the thoughts couldn’t possibly be Boranaz’s doing, they had to be Solian’s. Simple no-fault logic.

So now what? Thanks to the fair-play rule, alcohol was out. He could just imagine Solian roaring at him if he got the bimbo snookered. “You like beer?” he asked her.

“Not really, no.”

“Beer it is.” He found them a table and ordered a pitcher. She took one delicate sip, made a face, then glowered at him over the rim of her glass. He downed his own in big, manly swallows. Alcohol had no effect on demon metabolism, but beer chugging fit the persona.

While he drank, he scanned the crowd. His suspicious glare passed over the women and focused instead on the men. Any second now he expected his eyes to light on a face beautiful beyond all comprehension and a glowing gold halo of hair. Or was that hoped? Didn’t matter. Boranaz didn’t trust Solian any farther than he could stretch his tail.

His tail against Solian’s leg. Just like silk...

“Hey.” Wanda snapped her fingers in front of his face. “I’m over here.”

“So I see. How’s your beer?”

“Lousy.” A word, as he could tell by her tone, that covered all sorts of things. “Maybe you’d rather go dance with one of those other girls you’re checking out.”

“You can’t stop a guy from looking, babe. How else will he know he’s already out with the hottest chick in the place?”

His attempt at placation slid right off her. “Sol told me going out with you would be a big mistake.”

“That’s right. Sit here with me and think about the other guy.” Like he hadn’t been doing the same. “Maybe you’d rather be here with him.” Crap. Why had he gone and said that?

“Maybe I would,” Wanda said, “except he hates places like this. He just wants to be alone with me all the time. He treats me like a princess. Why am I even here with you?”

“Because you’d rather have a life? That’s what I figured.”

“I guess.” She grimaced at her beer and shoved it away. “He wants to spend time with me, but he never *does* anything.” She lowered her voice. “He’s not gay, is he?”

Good question. Boranaz scoured his lengthy recall for memories of Solian with a female. Or with anyone, for that matter. He came up short and a half. “Not that I ever noticed. But forget about him.” He leaned across the table toward her. “Sooooo...you’re a gal who likes to do things. Wanna go do something?” He took her hand and urged her to her feet before she could protest. “C’mon, let’s blow this dump.”

He’d done his homework thoroughly and knew exactly where to go. He steered his cycle up into the hills and into a roadside pulloff that offered a panoramic vista of the town below. No traffic, no people around. Perfect.

He kept his arm glued to Wanda’s waist while she ooh’d over the view. When she leaned against him, he knew the time was right.

No point in bothering with preliminaries. Just dive right in for the kill. He bent his head and kissed her on the lips. Not for long, though, just a tease. Just enough to show her what she could have and let her know what she was missing.

Except...

Bricks and brimstone. This wasn’t going right. All he could think of was Solian. How much sweeter he smelled than this crude mortal. How hard and exciting his body had felt when pressed against Boranaz’s. When Wanda pulled away from him, he almost felt a wave of relief.

Boranaz mentally shook himself and forced his thoughts back into character. “What?”

“I...” Wanda gulped. “This is moving kind of fast for me.”

“Fast is the only way to go. C’mon, babe. Get in the jet stream.”

He dragged her against him and clamped his mouth over hers and let her have it good. Demon kisses packed a punch no mortal could resist. He gave her butt cheeks a rough squeeze for good measure. If only she had a tail back there... Well, a guy couldn’t expect everything.

He timed his assault to the second: wait for the precise moment of surrender, then break off a shard of a second before and leave the vic unsatisfied and craving more. Then sit back and wait for the begging to start.

She gasped for breath. He grinned. He patted her butt. She stared up at him. He leered. “C’mon, babe, you know you want it.”

She smacked him hard across the face.

Shock more than impact sent him reeling. “Hey! What the hell was that for?”

“I just told you you’re moving too fast. Don’t you listen? What kind of person do you think I am?”

“The kind who likes to do things. That’s what you said.”

“No, that’s what *you* said. I’m not one of those easy lays who falls into anyone’s bed at the drop of a hat.”

“Who said anything about bed? All I did was kiss you, for Hell’s sake!”

“So what are you saying? That you *don’t* want to sleep with me?” Her eyes narrowed down to slits, which shot sparks. “You *were* checking out those other girls.”

“Yes. No! What?”

At that precise moment the heavens opened up. Just a few drips at first, then a steady patter that promised an imminent downpour. “Oh, great,” Wanda grouched. She eyed his bike sourly. “You better have a roof for that thing. Not even a helmet! What about my hair?”

“Uh...”

The sound of a car engine roaring up the hillside overrode the grumble of thunder. A white Corvette with a sky-blue pinstripe, shimmering even in the gloom, pulled up alongside them. The passenger door swung open. Solian lounged behind the wheel, looking as pristine and perfect as his vehicle. “Can I offer you a lift?” he said.

Wanda needed no urging. She practically dove into the car. “How did you know?”

“I didn’t. I was lonely and missing you and went cruising around. It’s just coincidence I ended up here. Lucky for you, eh?”

“Lucky,” Boranaz mumbled. “My ass.”

The door remained open. “You too,” Solian invited. “I wouldn’t leave even you out here alone in the rain.”

“No,” Boranaz spat, “you wouldn’t. Forget it. I’ll be okay. It’s not like I’ll melt or anything. Just so you”—he pointed at Wanda—“understand what you’re saying no to.”

She didn’t answer. She barely even looked at him. Here he stood in the rain with his bad-boy ‘do plastered to his head and water running off his black leather jacket, looking all forlorn and stoic and man-against-the-elements defiant and, let’s face it, smokin’ hot. She’d turn all that down for a wuss with a car? You expected demon females to ditch you at a moment’s notice, sometimes in the middle of the act. Weren’t humans supposed to be more loyal or gullible or something?

Solian merely shrugged. “If you’re sure.” Wanda shut the door with only a little hesitation. The Corvette roared away, just as the storm clouds ripped apart to shoot their wad in earnest. Boranaz jabbed his arm through the downpour and his finger after the car. The taillights winked merrily like demon eyes before the ‘Vette rounded a curve in the road and disappeared.

Swearing, Boranaz mounted his bike. Just a minor setback, he told himself. He put the evening in review and decided he hadn’t made any mistakes. He’s been the perfect bad boy all night long. Magnetic,

flouting the rules, thoughtless and indifferent to the needs and wants of his date. Logic dictated he and Wanda should be enthusiastically humping in the mud right now. What the hell was wrong with the stupid chit?

She was playing hard to get. That had to be it. Okay, he could work with that. Let her go without hearing from him for a couple of days. Forty-eight hours in Solian's sexless company, and she'd beg him to rip her clothes off.

Okay. We're back in the game. He kick-started the Harley.

The bike refused to start.

"Not you too." Boranaz swore at it. Kicked it. Pounded his fists on the handlebars. All the while the rain sluiced over him. The bike wouldn't even give up a chug. "You're female, too, aren't you? You're all against me. Fine, be that way. See if I care."

He was sitting on the muddy ground beside the traitorous bike with steam boiling off his skin in furious clouds when a car trundled up to the pulloff. He glanced at it morosely. The white Corvette sparkled in the rain. Solian opened the passenger door. "Get in."

"Eat me."

"Don't be foolish. You're flesh now. Do you know how quickly these bodies take sick? Now get in here before you catch something."

Boranaz's snarl thawed into a sigh. The pompous prig would sit there until Hell turned green. He lurched off the ground and clambered into the Corvette. The bike he left at the side of the road, where it swiftly dissolved into its earthly components. He'd create a bigger, better, and more reliable one tomorrow. Solian put the car in gear and swung back down the hillside.

Boranaz slouched, fuming and dripping, on the seat. Solian looked him up and down. "You're a mess," he pronounced.

"Dare I say it again? Eat me, sunshine."

Solian waved his hand. Boranaz found himself and the seat dry as the Devil's bone. "Thanks," he muttered grudgingly. "Where's your girlfriend?"

"I took her home. She's had enough excitement for one night. I wanted to—"

"Gloat? Forget it. No way I'm giving up. Tonight was just a glitch. The bet's still on, sunny boy."

"I'd hoped tonight would make you see reason."

"No, reason was in short supply. What the hell's the matter with her? I've got a Harley, dammit!"

"Perhaps it takes more than a motorcycle and a bad attitude to tempt a woman to evil. Wanda will never succumb to your blandishments. She has far more strength of character."

"Won't put out for you either, huh?"

Solian arched a blond brow. "Put out?"

"You know. The dirty deed. Bumping uglies. The beast with two backs. Sex, you putz."

"You mean copulation?" He seemed genuinely shocked. "Is that what she wants? She hasn't said."

"Tell me you're not really this dense. She's a human female. It's what they all want. Well, eventually," he amended, Wanda's rejection still fresh in his mind, and on his cheek. "Even angels have to know about sex."

"Of course we know. It just isn't something we constantly dwell on, unlike you demons. We *are* celestial beings, after all."

"And bodiless half the time. That explains a ton. You schmucks don't know what you're missing out on."

"There are far higher pursuits in life than the simple satisfaction of base lust."

"So you're not getting any," Boranaz concluded. "That comes as such a shock."

"That isn't true. Wanda and I have held hands—"

"You *what*? You *held* her *hand*? Oh, you lecherous bastard."

"I suppose," Solian said stiffly, "had I not interrupted, you'd be rolling around on the ground like a pair of soulless beasts by now."

“Well, duh. That was the plan. Only she... Oh hell.” He folded his arms. “Okay. Go ahead, gloat. I gave it my best shot, and my best shot is the *best*, mind you. She didn’t go for it. She slapped me, even. Said I was moving too fast.”

“Really?” He sounded surprised. “She told me I was moving too slowly.”

“*Slow* is an understatement, if you haven’t even gotten past hand-holding yet. And you’ve been with her how long now? Do you even know what to do with a woman?”

“I know the mechanics,” Solian snapped. “But I won’t violate the trust we’ve built between us. That’s far more important than any physical coupling.”

“Not even if she wants you to?”

“She hasn’t said.”

“Of course she hasn’t said. They never come right out and say it. You have to read between the lines. Maybe tonight my pages got smudged, but usually you can tell.” He studied Solian’s thoughtful expression. “You can tell, right? Set my mind at ease. Tell me you can tell.”

Solian’s look had grown distant, as if he listened to a replayed conversation. Boranaz watched the whole scene play out on his face, right down to the shocked realization.

“Let me guess,” Boranaz said. “You rescued her from the rain and the big, bad jerk on the Harley. You took her home. She invited you in. Big smile, sultry voice, heavy on the innuendo. And you, you clueless dunce, you told her she should get a good night’s sleep so she can get up bright and early and rested tomorrow, and left her on the porch with a chaste peck on the cheek, if that. Am I right? Yeah, I’m right. What a putz.”

“While you,” Solian retorted, “forced your physicality on her regardless of her wishes. Small wonder she slapped you.”

“You saw that?”

“I told you I’d be watching.”

“Well, I hope you got an eyeful. Women go for a take-charge guy. They like the rough stuff.” He rubbed his cheek. “Normally. Oh hell, who am I kidding? They’re women. Human women. Who knows what the hell they want?”

“They’re a puzzle, that’s for sure.” He glanced toward Boranaz, then away. “I’m not sure how to proceed.”

“You’re kidding, right? You’ve been watching me operate for sixteen centuries and you still need a map?”

“You didn’t fare so well tonight,” Solian pointed out.

“Yeah.” Boranaz considered the matter. “Pull over.”

“But it’s still raining, and we haven’t yet reached your—”

“Just do it, okay? This’ll only take a minute.”

Solian guided the Corvette to the curb and shut off its engine. “Okay,” Boranaz said, “pay attention, because I don’t do this for just anybody. Since I’m the one with the experience here, I’m going to give you a few pointers. Don’t make that face at me. I’m trying to be a nice guy here.”

“Demons are not nice guys.”

“And angels are putzes. Good to see we know where we stand. Now, the first thing—”

“Why should I trust you?”

“Because this bet is too one-sided. It’s no fun for me without the challenge. That means we’ve gotta get you up to speed. Now, what’s the first thing a chick wants?”

“Respect,” Solian said promptly.

“No no no no no no no no *no*. She wants a man who’s a man. Somebody big and strong and decisive. A guy who knows what he wants and won’t take no for an answer. No is always a prelude to yes. Remember, ultimately she wants it. She might not realize that right off, so you have to give her a push.”

“But shouldn’t mutual trust and respect come first? And what about consideration for her feelings?”

“Yeah yeah yeah, I’m sure that’s in there somewhere. But we’re on a clock here. We don’t have time for that crap. You’ve got to step up to the plate, sunny boy. She’s sending you the go signals and you don’t know how to take the pitch.”

“So if I were to ask—”

“No. You don’t ask. You never ask. You go in and take. That’s what they expect. That’s what they’re waiting for. Wanda wants me. Her head just hasn’t caught up with her body yet. She wants you too, and she’s letting you know it, but you’re just letting the ball dribble around without even taking a swing at it. Wait too long and she’ll get fed up and take her ball and go home.”

“What?”

“Okay, I’m not so good with the sports metaphors. We don’t do teamwork in Hell. Here, look. You be the chick. That shouldn’t be much of a stretch for you. I’ll be what a guy is supposed to be. Now tell me what Wanda said to you.”

“Um, all right. We ran to her porch. I held my jacket over her head so she wouldn’t get wet. They appreciate gestures like that.”

“Aren’t you Mr. Chivalrous?”

“She didn’t slap me for it.”

“Point taken. Go on.”

“We reached the porch, and she said, ‘Would you like to come in? Have a hot drink or something?’”

“You sure she said drink? Not something else ending in k?”

“No, she definitely said drink. I assumed she meant tea.”

“You would. How did she say it? What did she look like?”

“Well... Her voice seemed a bit lower and rougher than usual. I attributed that to the dampness. Her eyes appeared larger than normal. Like this.” He widened his own until they encompassed the universe. He dropped his voice to a throaty, jump-me purr. “Would you like to come in? Have a hot—”

Boranaz charged in, wedged himself onto Solian’s lap as best he could with the steering wheel pressed up against his backside, and

planted his mouth on the angel's soft, startled, unresisting lips. Solian just sat there. Probably having a coronary. Boranaz took both his time and his fill before he finally sat back. "That," he said, "is what a guy's supposed to do with a—"

Solian slapped him.

"For Beelzebub's sake!" Boranaz clambered back to the passenger seat. He rubbed his other cheek. Now he had a matching set. "What the hell is wrong with you people? Don't you know how to have fun?"

"Fun?" Solian snarled. "With no warning and your tongue halfway down my throat? No regard for what I might or might not care for?"

"You hit like a girl."

"And you kiss like an ape. I'm amazed Wanda let you live."

"Me too," Boranaz admitted. "I don't get it. They want the guy to make the moves. They're supposed to melt, not clobber you."

"Obviously you're doing it wrong. How did you behave on your date? Were you courteous? Romantic? Did you compliment her often? Did you tell her how much she means to you?"

"Of course not. They're supposed to fall in love with us. Us loving back is optional."

"Aha." Solian nodded. "There you are. They want us to care, or at least pretend we care. You took her out to that lovely scenic overlook, and instead of endearments and a warm embrace, she got your tongue shoved down her throat. Correct?"

"That's how bad boys operate. It's not my fault she doesn't know the rules."

"Oh, she knows. She knows she doesn't want a bad boy. That means I win."

"The hell you do. You haven't exactly been making huge strides in the conquest department either. Okay. It's you and her at the overlook. What do you do?"

He actually had to stop and think. Boranaz slapped his hand to his forehead. “Bricks and brimstone. She’ll be in her 80s before you get it in gear. Make a move already!”

“Don’t rush me. I’m choosing my words. All right... You have very beautiful eyes. I love how they capture the shine of the streetlights. Like moonbeams shimmering on the ocean.”

“That’s the best you can do?”

Solian snaked his arm around Boranaz’s shoulders. “I love the scent of your breath. Like fresh young rosebuds kissed by morning dew.”

Somehow Solian had inched right up against him without seeming to move. His thigh felt firm and rock-solid where it pressed Boranaz’s. “Oh-kay, better...”

“Will those lips taste like rosebuds, I wonder? Will they be as soft and silky as they look?”

Willya look at those eyes, Boranaz thought. If you squint, you can see all eternity in them. He was still looking when Solian leaned in.

Little demons hopping on a skillet. *So this is what Heaven’s all about.* Funny, he’d never pictured Heaven involving sweet, tender lips pressed to his, or a tongue invading his mouth and sucking up all his evil secrets, or perfect teeth teasing along his lower lip. Or explosions of wonder way down in his belly that jerked Li’l Nazty to full attention with a *whuzzat?* straining at his tip. The pinwheels behind his eyes he’d pretty much figured on. Heaven always liked a good light show.

He became vaguely aware of pressure on his thighs and an insistent poking at the crotch of his too-tight jeans. Solian had taken advantage of his distraction to slide onto his lap. His hand inserted itself between Boranaz and the car seat and began a slow massage of the demon’s lower back, right where his tail would emerge in his natural form. The intimate touch sent an electric tingle straight up Boranaz’s spine, and a blast of desire through his loins.

Teetering on the brink of surrender, Boranaz rallied his dwindling forces and took charge. He grabbed a hunk of sun-bright hair and dragged the angel in closer. His tongue charged into Solian's mouth like a linebacker through the defensive line. Solian allowed the play. He pressed even closer to the demon's chest with a hot and happy little sigh. Boranaz swooped in for the kill, perfectly willing to die himself in the attempt.

They kept the kiss up well past its bedtime, until both their lungs were straining for air. Since Boranaz was leading, he broke it off. They both slumped back and panted. Boranaz puffed out a blast of steam and damn near shouted Hallelujah but caught himself just in time. Why the hell had he been wasting his efforts on mortals all this time?

"You celestial son of a bitch," he said. "You've been holding out on me."

Solian blinked dizzily. "What?"

"Hellfire, sunny, you could raise the dead with that. Why the hell aren't you doing this with her? The bet would be over already."

"Her who?"

"Wanda. Remember her? The object of our mutual affection?"

"Oh. Yes. Wanda." Solian hitched himself off Boranaz and retreated to his seat behind the wheel. He ran his hand through his hair. Did he have any idea how hot he looked, with his golden locks all rumpled and simmering passion turning his eyes to cobalt? "No, I couldn't possibly. I'm her guardian. To take advantage of her in this manner, even if it's her will, would be irresponsible."

"You're joking, right?"

"We never joke."

"You got that right. So you, Mr. Holy Morality, wouldn't give her a tumble if she chained you to the bed, but it's okay to whack me over the libido because I'm just a—"

He stopped. A slow, demonic smile stretched his human lips. Oh, this was just too delicious. "It *is* okay, isn't it? You *do* want some, but

not from Wanda. This is all just fine for you. You've got a hankering for bad boys too."

Solian flushed a delightful pink, his glow bright enough to light the interior of the car. He refused to answer. "So that's why you've been breathing down my neck all these centuries," Boranaz persisted. "You can't get enough of the ol' Naz-man. Evil fluffs your feathers. You even told me you were leaving so I could..." He realized where he was headed and snapped his jaw shut.

"Follow me?" Solian said. "I never asked you to. I always turn around, and there you are. You've always made sure I knew where you could be found and what you were up to. Like you were taunting me. Or maybe trying to entice me? You've always seemed fascinated by all things divine, me in particular. Could someone be craving redemption, perhaps?"

Boranaz sputtered. "Don't flatter yourself. It'll take more than you've got to..."

He shouldn't have said that. His gaze shot to the front of Solian's pants as if magnetized. He swallowed around a sudden lump far smaller than the one he was looking at. "On the other hand, maybe I spoke too soon." He reached for the tantalizing bulge.

Solian slapped his hand away. "Don't! We can't. We're on opposite sides. We've gone too far already. It's forbidden."

"I know. That's what makes it fun. What do you think evil is? Doing things we shouldn't. C'mon, sunshine. Walk on the wild side."

"Your ego disgusts me almost as much as your delusions." He throttled the wheel. "Why won't this blessed car start?"

"You have to turn the key. C'mon. You know you want to."

"No. I don't."

"Then why the kiss, with the hands and all? Somebody wants a tumble bad, and I bet you want it with me."

"That was merely a demonstration. I was—"

"Demo's over. You made the sale. Now hand over the merchandise."

Boranaz lunged, straight into Solian's fist. He reeled back against the passenger door. For a feather duster, Solian sure packed a wallop. Must be the heavenly warrior in him. "Stop playing hard to get."

"Get out of my car!"

"Not until you admit you've got a taste for demons."

Solian's entire body shivered on the brink of cascading into sparkles. The door popped open at Boranaz's back. Solian twisted, got his leg up, and kicked. Boranaz hit the rain-soaked pavement shoulder first, scuffing his leather jacket. Within seconds, he was drenched to the skin again. Before he could scramble upright, the door slammed shut on its own. The Corvette tore away from the curb as if all the forces of Hell were after it.

"Yeah, you better run!" Boranaz bellowed after it, shaking his fist at the tail lights. "Stinking, anal, damned repressed cocksucking tease! I hope she gives that body the clap, you..."

His insults dribbled away like the rain down the collar of his jacket. He sat on the sidewalk and steamed. Hellfire burn his cock to ash, the prissy, perfect, ambulatory enticement for all that mattered in the world. Wasn't that also a hallmark of evil? That you always lusted after the things you knew you could never have?

Another car, a Chevy with a ding in the door, pulled up beside the curb. A high-school kid cracked the window, mindful of the rain, and called out to him. "Hey, dude. You need a ride?"

Slowly Boranaz climbed to his feet, still staring after the vanished Corvette and the unattainable dream behind the wheel. "Thanks, but it's good. I'll live."

"What happened, dude? Your lady ditch you?"

Boranaz snorted. "Something like that."

Chapter 4

He kept clear of Wanda, and Solian, for the next two days. Neither tried to contact him. Matters, it appeared, had reached an impasse, and time was running short. Only two days remained in which to win Wanda, and the bet. No way would he allow Solian to triumph, in this or in anything else.

Solian, right. There lay the whole problem in a nutshell. He couldn't get the pesky, prissy angel out of his mind. In sixteen centuries they'd never been apart this long before. Solian always barged in on him just as his schemes hit the good part. On those rare instances when he hadn't shown his sparkles...

"I went looking for him," Boranaz told the walls of his apartment. "Roast my tail on a charcoal burner. He's right. We've had a thing going on for sixteen hundred years, and neither one of us knew it."

One of them had a thing, anyway. How did Solian feel?

"Let's see," Boranaz said to the walls. "He kissed me. Angels have no sex drive whatsoever and kissing me gave him a hard-on. Then he punched me in the face and kicked me out of his car." A broad, happy smile stretched Boranaz's mouth beyond human limits. "Well, whaddaya know. He does care."

"Not that this changes the bet," he went on. "No way am I going to lose. I lose this one, and he'll never let me hear the end of it. Chicks dig the bad boys, and so does a certain stuck-up feather duster. Now, how do I make both of them admit it?"

He paced the room for half an hour before a solution occurred. The plan was rather spotty, but it would get the ball rolling. Boranaz went into action.

* * * *

As high noon arrived, so did Boranaz. He rode his reconstituted Harley up on the downtown sidewalk and parked himself right outside the doors of Conroy and Co. There he sat until Wanda came out. She did a double take, frowned, and strutted right on by him. He hopped off the bike and trotted after her.

“Go away,” she snapped, her eyes aimed straight ahead. “I’m not talking to you.”

“I don’t blame you. I want to apologize for the other night. I admit it. I’m a jerk. Ask anybody. Ask Sol. He warned you about me from the start.” He fell in step beside her. No heavenly spear pierced him from behind, which he found both odd and alarming. Surely Solian would be reaping the fruits of his victory by sticking to her side like a tick. “How’s he doing, by the way? I guess you’re dating him now.”

“That’s none of your business. Leave me alone.”

He darted in front of her, blocking her path, and matched her moves when she tried to walk around him. “Let me take you to lunch,” he said. “I won’t lay so much as a fingernail on you. We can go to a nice public place and you can slap me around all you want. What do you say?”

She glared up at him. “You’re buying.”

She knew about a little sandwich shop nearby that served the best meatball hoagies in creation. Boranaz ordered two, with fries. They claimed a table by the window. Boranaz kicked it off. “I’m really, really sorry. I move around a lot. Gotta stay one step ahead of the law.”

“So you’re a wanted criminal as well as a jerk.”

“Suspected only. Never convicted.” He leaned slightly towards her, his hand stopping just short of touching her sleeve. “The point is I never know how long I’ll have in a place. When I’m gonna have to up

and bolt. A life like that doesn't leave time for subtleties. I see something, or someone, I want, I go after it."

Wanda nibbled a fry, unswayed. "So I'm just one of a string of quickies. Is that what you're saying?"

"No. Okay, yeah, it's been that way up to now. But sooner or later you run into that special person who makes you go 'Whoa there, partner, this is the one.'" Solian's glowing angelic face rose up in his head. He beat it back down. "Even a jerk like me can change when he finds someone worth changing for." There. That ought to reel her in. Women always thought they were the one who could change a bad boy's ways.

"Bull," Wanda said. "You've been staring out the window ever since we got here. You're looking out the window right now. Which one is it? That girl on the corner in that inch of a skirt? Is she next on your list?"

"No," Boranaz insisted, jerking his regard from the glass. "I was checking for Sol. I know the guy. I can't believe he'd leave you alone for a second, knowing I'm in town. Have you seen him lately? Did he say anything about me?"

"That's it." Wanda threw down her hoagie, shoved back her chair and got up. "Yes, I've seen him. All he does is talk about you. He won't shut up about you. He doesn't even know I'm there. If you ask me, you two should be dating. You jerks deserve each other."

Boranaz's heart did a cartwheel, then slammed back to earth in a panic when Wanda started for the door. He couldn't let the bet walk out on him. He lunged up and caught her by the arm, then caught her other arm before she could swing her purse at him. "Don't, please. Just hear me out."

"You get two seconds. Then I start screaming."

No, he thought, she wouldn't. Not once she caught a whiff of demon pheromones. Hell had been seducing hapless humans ever since Eve in the Garden. He'd been holding back with Wanda, just as Solian had suppressed his full divine allure, in the interest of fair play,

but since when did wickedness ever stick to the rules? Desperate times, desperate measures, et cetera.

He watched while her eyes glazed over and her breathing grew ragged. She swayed a little when he let her go, but didn't try to leave.

"You mean a lot to me," he said. "I want to prove it to you. Will you give me a second chance?"

"I...um...huh?"

"Here." He pressed an object into her palm. She blinked at it fuzzily. "That's the key to my apartment. I want you to come to me tonight, after you get off work. Let me prove how I feel about you. If you don't show up, I'll take that as your answer. I'm hoping you'll show." He beamed a smile so charming no mere mortal could resist. "Do you know where I live?"

She dutifully recited the address he imprinted in her mind. Her eyes weren't focusing, when they should have been filled up with him. "You'll come tonight, won't you?" he pressed.

She sneezed instead of replying. "My nose itches."

"Yeah, whatever. Better get back to work. See you later."

He sent her on her way with a pat on the butt. Wanda stumbled out the door and down the sidewalk. Fresh air would clear out her head soon enough, but unless human biology had radically changed, he knew what now occupied her mind, and would go on doing so right up until she stuck that key in his lock, and well afterwards.

"Ball's in your court," he muttered evilly, but it wasn't Wanda's face that loomed behind his eyes. He returned to the table to polish off the remains of the hoagies and the fries. Best to carb-load this body now while he had the chance. He'd need the energy later.

* * * *

Wanda got off work at five. Boranaz figured she wouldn't just drop everything and rush straight into his arms, demonic compulsion or no. As Solian was fond of expounding on, she wasn't that kind of a

girl. She'd go home, shower, change, paint on a fresh face and then trot on over for a night of sweet surrender. Or rough surrender, as demon sex tended to tip the exuberant side of the scale. Taking traffic into account, he estimated six-thirty, tops.

He was therefore surprised to hear footsteps in the hall along about five-fifteen. She hadn't even bothered to go home. The ol' Naz-man still had it. He bared his teeth in feral anticipation.

The footsteps halted outside his door. A protracted and somehow ominous silence descended. Boranaz struck his well-practiced nonchalant sexy pose. "Come in," he called sweetly.

The door crashed open. Solian stood there in all his heavenly fury. His eyes burned hotter than the Pit. "You bastard."

Boranaz barely blinked. "Super to see you too. And how are you these days?"

"How dare you do that to Wanda? We agreed on fair play. We had a deal!"

"And I broke it. I'm a demon. I'm evil incarnate. You should be used to this by now. So what are you going to do about it?"

Solian surged into the room and slammed the door behind him. Boranaz had never seen him so enraged. Desire exploded inside him like an A-bomb, so powerfully his tail nearly sprouted on its own. L'il Nazty compensated by straining forcefully at the leash. "I should rend you limb from limb," Solian snarled, "but I know you'd only reconstitute. I ought to consign you back to the Pit."

"Except you can't. Old Scratch's orders. Mischief demons aren't really welcome in Hell. We stir up too much trouble." Boranaz grinned, triumphant. "Stalemate. So where do we go from here?"

"You—"

Boranaz held up his hand. "Don't bother with threats you can't follow through on. It doesn't matter. I know why you're really here. You came to offer yourself in Wanda's place. I must say, that's damned chivalrous of you. I knew guardians were devoted, but this goes above and beyond."

“What are you talking about? That isn’t why I’m here at all.”

Boranaz paused in the middle of unbuttoning his shirt. “You’re not?”

“No. I came to demand you remove the compulsion. I’m still willing to conclude this fairly, even if you aren’t.”

“So you don’t want to...?”

Solian folded his arms across his chest and tapped his foot. Boranaz floundered, at a loss. “Oh. Well...okay. It’s not that easy, though. I can’t remove it. It has to wear off on its own.”

“How long will that take?”

“I dunno. Couple hours. I tried to time it so she’d be free by morning.”

“Leaving you the night to take advantage of her.”

“It never would’ve gone that far. I figured you’d bust in and stop me, like you always do.” He added in a mumble, “I was counting on it.”

“Excuse me?”

“I said I was hoping you’d fly in and bust things up, okay?” He thrust his fisted hands into his pockets. Without a tail to lash, he had to content himself with pacing. His cock hurt like Old Scratch himself had a deathgrip on it. “It’s not like I wanted her or anything. She was just a means to an end.”

“It’s long past time we stopped this,” Solian said. “She’ll be here?”

“Within the hour. I’d bet my lack of a soul on it.”

“All right, then. I’ll wait here until she arrives, and then escort her home. In the morning, once her mind is clear, we’ll ask for her decision.”

“No need to rush things,” Boranaz said hopefully. “I don’t suppose you’d go for a threesome? I mean, as long as she’s—” Solian glowered. “No, guess not. Guess I should’ve known.”

He started to button his shirt. Solian made an odd strangled noise. “What?” Boranaz said.

“Don’t. I mean...” Solian flushed. “Leave it open. If you feel more comfortable that way.”

“Oh. Okay, sure. You want a beer?”

They sat side-by-side on the sofa and watched the clock. Six-thirty arrived, then six-forty-five, then seven-fifteen. No Wanda. Boranaz had chugged his way through half a dozen Millers. Solian still nursed his first. “She isn’t coming,” Solian said.

“She’ll be here,” Boranaz insisted. “The ol’ demon come-on never fails. Mortals find us irresistible.” He studied Solian’s perfect face and lush, tempting body and his heart did a triple gainer. “She should have found you irresistible too. She wouldn’t have reacted to me at all if you’d stepped up your game like I told you. You dropped the ball again, didn’t you?”

“No, I didn’t. After our, er, discussion the other night, I realized you had a point. I would have to take more proactive measures in order to keep Wanda safe.”

“I can’t wait to hear this.”

“Don’t be snide. I took her out to dinner and a movie. I paid close attention to what she said and how she said it. I watched for the innuendos and the signals and sent out my own. Tastefully, of course.”

“Oh, of course.”

“Afterwards I brought her home. We reached the porch, and I kissed her.”

Boranaz’s gut thudded to the floor. “You didn’t.”

“I did, as you instructed. I made it as intense as I dared.”

Boranaz took a hasty swig of beer. “And?”

“And she took my hand and told me what a dear, wonderful man I was and she hoped we’d always be friends. Then she said good-night and went inside and left me on the porch.”

He nearly dropped the bottle. “She *what*?”

“I said she—”

“No, don’t inflict that blasphemy on me again. I heard you the first time. I just can’t believe it. You kissed her—you, an angel— and instead of an instant lay you got the friends speech?”

“I suppose she was tired, after our evening out.”

“I don’t give a damn if she was comatose. *Nobody* turns down an angel.” He gulped. Talk about your painful personal experiences. “This was your own doing, right? You let her go. Let her off the hook. I mean, if you kissed her the way you did me in the car, she should’ve banged you right there on the porch. I know I would have.”

“That’s because you’re a demon. You’d bang the porch if it were responsive.” Solian rolled his beer bottle between his palms. “I don’t understand. I did everything right. I was the perfect attentive boyfriend. I even followed your advice. Maybe that was my mistake.”

“What?”

“After she went inside, I-I pounded on the door. Forcefully. Like a take-charge guy. I told her she’d better open up or else I’d break it down.”

“And?”

“She threatened to call the police.”

“So? You should’ve just busted in, like you did just now.” Boranaz shifted his position to ease the pressure on his crotch. “Sure got my attention.”

“I didn’t want to damage her property. Besides, she keeps a baseball bat under her bed.” He studied the bottle morosely, then took a long swallow. “You’re right. I’m a pussy.”

“G’wan. You’re just considerate.”

“Consideration clearly makes no impression on her. Perhaps you’re right. Perhaps she prefers brutality and neglect. The bad boys.”

“If she did, I’d be on this couch with her right now. Hell, we’d be under the couch. Am I under the couch? No, I’m not. I’m sitting here knocking back beers with an angel and wondering why I got my face slapped. I don’t get it. I’m every chick’s secret fantasy, and you’re every woman’s dream. Yet here we sit. You sure she’s not a lez?”

“Oh, absolutely.”

“Then what’s wrong with her that she’d say no to you? I mean, look at you. You’re—” He swallowed painfully. The beer hadn’t spared him from the impact of Solian’s proximity. Damned demonic immunity to alcohol. “Perfect.”

“Perhaps that’s the problem. Perfection scares mortals. They like flaws. They want someone closer to their own imperfect level. Someone they can fix. Bad boys, for instance. Besides,” he finished miserably, “I’m a putz.”

“You are not. You’re a nice guy. Sometimes they’re the same, but not in your case.”

“You’re only saying that to make me feel better.”

“No, I mean it. Cross my heart and hope to die forgiven. You’re a wicked hottie, too. When you crashed through my door and stood there all panting and throwing off sparks... Sunshine, there’s not a woman alive who wouldn’t walk barefoot over Beelzebub’s patio just for a glimpse of you.”

“Really?”

“And you kiss great, too. Take it from a connoisseur.”

Solian flushed brightly. Boranaz edged closer. His whole apartment had taken on the heady, flowery scent of angel. Or maybe it just seemed that way. He threaded his fingers through Solian’s hair, the way he’d been aching to for days. Solian didn’t pull away. He brushed his lips against the angel’s, the way he’d dreamed of doing since their grope-fest in the Corvette. Solian didn’t so much as flinch. If anything, his breath came even faster.

“Y’know,” Boranaz murmured, “it’s hot as Hell in here. I think this shirt should come off.”

The angel moved quick as a lightning strike. Fisting his hands in Boranaz’s shirt, he ripped the tight fabric away. Boranaz sat there stunned, his heart suddenly pounding like the tympanis of doom. “I meant your shirt,” he said weakly.

“I had to see what the tattoo said.”

“What, this? Nothing. It’s just there for show. Look, it’s not even finished.”

Solian leaned in for a closer inspection. His sweet breath, cool as a mountain breeze, stirred the dark hairs on the demon’s chest and penetrated down to the feverish inferno of his skin. A little wisp of steam wafted between them. Boranaz shivered all over, and noticed Solian trembling. “What’s under yours?” Boranaz croaked.

“Nothing half as interesting.”

“I’ll be the judge of that.” He ripped Solian’s shirt down the front with one deft tug. Buttons flew like bullets and ricocheted off the floor. He slid the pads of his fingers over Solian’s chest until the angel shuddered in response. “Smooth as a nun’s behind,” Boranaz said on a sigh.

Solian frowned. “How would you know?”

“Middle Ages. Ireland. Isolated convent. Long story.”

“Not as long as you’d planned on, I’m sure. *Father O’Toole*? How obvious can you get?”

“How would you—” Boranaz’s eyes popped wide. “The bishop! You were the bishop?”

Solian dropped his voice an octave. “I cast thee out, foul imp of Hell! Begone!’ One of my better performances.”

“Sorry, wasn’t paying attention. I was thinking how come a bishop looks so hot in the robe. Not to mention out of one. This isn’t even hair, is it? It’s down.” He traced a swirl of it on Solian’s belly, and leered. “Does it go all the way down?”

Solian’s dimples showed. “Do you?”

Boranaz blinked while he processed that one. “Well, baptize me and dub me Mabel. Sunshine, you just executed an acceptable come-on.”

“We’re not wholly ignorant of human interactions. Michael’s done extensive research.”

“Michael?” Boranaz scoffed. “That prick? Even demon chicks don’t want him. News flash: he’s compensating with that sword. A *lot*.”

“He always was more bark than bite. What about you?”

“Sunny boy, I thought you’d never ask.”

Boranaz shrugged off the shreds of his shirt, and peeled the remains of Solian’s off his torso. Those skin-hugging pants begged for removal as well. Later for those. He’d waited sixteen centuries for this golden opportunity and intended to milk it dry.

Solian’s chest sat right in front of him, just pleading for attention. But first, the appetizer. He teased his tongue over Solian’s lips until Solian opened up. Their tongues did a tango of rough demon length against smooth angel thickness, heat matched to heat. Solian’s mouth made honey taste sour. Boranaz plunged in fully until a mutual moan rose out of both their chests. “You sure you’ve never done this before?” Boranaz murmured when they broke.

“Not personally. I have observed extensively, however, on numerous occasions.”

“You like to watch? You dirty birdie. Now watch this.”

He trailed kisses down the unresisting pillar of Solian’s neck and along his left pec until he reached his objective, the nipple. The word had “nip” in it, so he did. Solian gasped. Boranaz instantly traded lips for teeth to suck the pain away, and won an inarticulate sound from that chaste ivory throat.

Lost in his own dizzy pleasure, he didn’t notice at first that Solian’s pec was growing plumper beneath his mouth. He broke off when awareness hit. “What the hell are you doing?”

Solian glanced aside shyly. His features had become rounder, softer. “I thought you’d prefer ... we are androgynous, you know. Created to be all things to all people. If you’d rather I were...”

“No. No. Absolutely not. Stay the way you are. Right like this. Exactly like this.” His head reeled at the possibilities. But not just yet,

not for the first time out. “I couldn’t handle you as a chick. I think my balls would explode.”

Solian shrugged. His body shimmered, then hardened into its masculine form. Hardened in every sense of the word. He opened his fly to grant his heavenly sword some breathing space. No, he definitely hadn’t skimped on that when he’d put his meat sheathe together, and there sat the long, eager proof. “Well? Do you intend to finish your vile seduction of me, or are you just going to sit there?”

Boranaz stared at Solian’s wondrous cock. It twitched and rose up like a cobra. Tiny sparkles tumbled from its tip. It seemed to wink at him invitingly. He suddenly had trouble breathing. “Gimme a minute.”

“No.”

Solian swept in with the speed and determination of an avenging angel. Boranaz found himself flat on his back on the sofa with his pants yanked down around his knees. L’il Nazty, not so little at this point, sprang up to meet the attack. Solian murmured something in the language of the blessed and fit his mouth around the demon’s shaft.

Bricks and brimstone and Beelzebub tap-dancing. The angel’s lips were like silk, his tongue a flicking blaze of hellfire. His throat ran deeper than the Pit. He took in Boranaz’s entire length, all the way down to the root, then drew his mouth upwards in one endless eternity of agonizing pleasure. Then he repeated the process.

Boranaz howled and clawed at Solian’s shoulders. He rammed his hips upward in a demand for more speed. Solian ignored him and continued at his maddening leisurely pace. Maybe angels figured they had all eternity, but demons were a more impatient breed. All too soon, Boranaz bucked and blasted his appreciation full into Solian’s mouth. He lost his hold on both Solian and the cushions and tumbled off the sofa.

Solian swallowed, then primly dabbed his lips. “That was quick. Hmm. Salty.”

Boranaz struggled for breath and control. “You prissy cocksucking seraphic bastard. All this time and you never once let on to me you could do that. Or that you would. Hellfire. Sixteen hundred years. You think you know a guy.”

Solian grinned at him, still primly. Not in the eyes, though. Nothing remotely angelic burned within his eyes. “You never provided proper motivation.”

“Is that so? Then hang onto your motivators, sunshine. I’m about to make you scream for Papa.”

He snagged Solian’s wrist and hauled him down onto the carpet. Solian’s golden aura flared. Boranaz squinted against it, and smirked. “You bad boy. You really are hungry for a taste of the wicked, aren’t you?”

“As hungry as you for the light.” He crushed his mouth to Boranaz’s for a kiss that set off skyrockets behind the demon’s eyelids. Solian’s body blurred a bit at the edges before he tightened it up again. “I never dared stay solid in your presence. The temptations of the flesh are so...tempting.”

“So you’ve been denying yourself for, what, over a thousand years? I take it back, what I said before. You are a putz.”

“You’re a creature of pure evil.” Solian trailed his finger, then his tongue, along Boranaz’s shoulder. “Pure, delicious evil.”

“Maybe you need to keep that in mind.” Oh crap, here came the honor again. Tainted, that was the problem. Solian had tainted him. “Look, sunshine. I’m sin on the hoof. I’ll do things to you you won’t find in the Bible, all for my own amusement. Then, when I’m done, I’ll laugh in your face and leave you lying in a cold, goopy pool of remorse. I don’t give a damn about you, and I never have. You know all this, right?”

Solian smiled and peered into his eyes. Boranaz shivered from head to invisible tail. Was this what having a soul felt like?

“I know,” Solian said, “that demons lie.”

“Just so we’re on the same page,” Boranaz said roughly. That wasn’t love for an angel he was experiencing just now, either. Couldn’t be. No, sir. “Now let’s get this party started.”

Much as he wanted to claw and bite and get right down to business, Boranaz pressed his hand with unaccustomed tenderness against Solian’s throbbing, frustrated demand. He wondered that the angel’s slacks hadn’t burned off him by now. “You just settle back and let ol’ Brother Naz do the driving. Oh, wait, just one more thing.”

Boranaz kicked free of his pants to deal with his own major frustration. His tail erupted out of his backside like a whip uncoiling. Solian stared at it, fascinated. “What does that do?”

“Well, for starters...”

He snaked his tail’s muscular length around Solian’s slim torso and teased its tip against the angel’s lips. Solian obliged by opening up and accepting the invitation. He suckled on eight inches of demon tail while his hands kneaded and caressed the taut stretch lying on his chest. Boranaz crooned encouragement. When Solian had his tailtip good and wet, Boranaz withdrew it and sent it questing around to Solian’s back and down inside his waistband. It found what it was probing for and knocked at the door. Solian yelped.

“Ding-dong, demon calling.” As long as Solian had his mouth open wide like that, hey, what the hell. Boranaz inserted his tongue at the fore while his tail crept in at the aft. Taking its time, his tail advanced along Solian’s tight, burning tunnel and made itself at home. Once it had the lay of the land, Boranaz pulled it almost free and then plunged it full in. Solian made an incoherent noise around the plug of Boranaz’s tongue.

“What was that?” Boranaz said, grinning. “I didn’t quite catch that.”

He wasn’t entirely sure the angel could hear him over all the noise he was making. The walls shook. A chunk of plaster fell from the ceiling. Boranaz stared around worriedly. “Whoa, wait a minute.”

Solian sang a note that shattered the heavens and two of the windows and knocked Boranaz onto his back. Golden wings sprouted from Solian's shoulders and stretched the length of the room. Their shining tips scraped the ceiling. Solian fell back with a sated moan. The walls shuddered twice and finally stilled.

"Beelzebub in a barbecue pit." Boranaz shielded his eyes against the wings' glare. It faded back to viewable levels as Solian fluttered down from Paradise. Boranaz gingerly withdrew his tail and coiled it behind him. "And that," he said unsteadily, "is what's known as a piece of tail. Whoo-ee. Sorry about your pants."

The little that remained of Solian's garments had dissolved to fine ash, along with a huge swath of the carpet. The angel knelt before him, breathing deeply in time to the slow beat of his wings. He started to drift off the floor. Boranaz lunged up and caught his forearms and tugged him back down. He wrenched his stare off Solian's wings. "Back to earth, sunshine. You sure you've never done this before?"

"Never," Solian confirmed. He looked dazed. "This must be why they won't let us stay solid."

"You hot little bird of paradise." Curious, Boranaz raked his fingers through Solian's feathers. They were stiff as a teenager's cock and hot as a harlot's clit. Solian shuddered against him. His flaming sword jabbed Boranaz in the belly. "Bricks and brimstone. What *doesn't* turn you on?"

"I just told you—"

"You're new to solids, got it. Okay, we'll slow the pace a bit. Just try not to bring the building down around us once we get rolling, all right?"

Solian brightened. Boranaz squinted against the light. "There's more?"

"You bet your feathers, sunshine. I just want to make sure we survive it. You up for round two?"

Solian grinned. "It appears one of us is."

“Major advantage to being a demon. Next to no down time. Now let’s get you devirginated.”

Oh, how he wanted to ruffle those shining gold feathers with claws. He stuck with human fingers, though, scratching and smoothing those glorious wings until Solian cursed hoarsely with need. “Talons. I want talons, God bless you.”

“Next time, baby.” Boranaz jogged his own member until it salivated. “You good to go?”

“I’ve been good for over a thousand years.” He ground his hard-on against Boranaz’s belly and fisted his slender fingers in the demon’s already-mussed hair. The lust in his eyes would have blinded the Devil. “I’ve had enough of good.”

“On your knees,” Boranaz ordered. “Like you’re praying. Oh yeah, here we go.”

Keeping the feathers out of his face proved the least of his problems. Solian kept drifting off the floor. Boranaz had to clamp his tail around Solian’s waist to keep them both earthbound. He slid around to the back door and readied his battering ram. Primed and long past ready, Solian willingly accepted Boranaz’s demonic invasion.

In spite of his tail’s intimate recon, Boranaz found the passage a tight squeeze at first. Suddenly it widened out, then clamped aggressively around his cock as Solian adjusted himself. “Oh yeah,” Boranaz crooned. “Perfect fit. Perfect.”

“Major advantage—ah!—to being an angel.”

This time, Boranaz paced himself. He didn’t want either of them shooting off too soon again. He timed his moves to the flap of Solian’s wings until they had a steady rhythm going. When the keen in the angel’s voice warned him he had Solian teetering on the brink, he thrust home with a vengeance. His tail went stiff as a pole, and Solian’s flailing wings nearly burst the apartment’s flimsy walls. Both collapsed on the scorched remains of the carpet, spent.

Boranaz rolled over, Solian's hand clasped tight in his. "Now that," he rasped, "was Heaven."

* * * *

Eventually, a long time later, they dragged themselves back onto the sofa. Boranaz coiled his tail around Solian's waist and leaned against him contentedly, relaxed within the curve of Solian's wing. He couldn't stop smiling. Solian, on the other hand, couldn't let go of his frown. Boranaz sighed. "Okay. So what's the problem now?"

Solian slumped on the cushions. His hand absently caressed the demon's tail. "I suppose I'll be damned for this."

"For what? For getting laid? No wonder Hell's so crowded."

"But I've lain with a demon."

"Like that's never happened before. How do you think your buddy Michael's been doing his *research*? The library? Our sides have been banging each other on the sly since the dawn of creation. You arrogant twits aren't half as discreet as you think you are."

"Nevertheless..."

"Look. Look out the window. What do you see?"

Solian peered into the darkness. "I can't see anything."

"Exactly. The firmament's still in place, the moon hasn't fallen from the heavens, the earth's not consumed with boiling lava. Offhand, I'd say we're okay." He wrapped the end of his tail around Solian's cock and gave it a playful squeeze. "You don't feel corrupted, do you?"

"Um...no, not really. Do you feel redeemed?"

"Hell no. There y'are. Your head office knows everything, right? Including your inclinations. So why keep you assigned to a mischief demon for sixteen hundred years?"

"Because if we were preoccupied with each other, we wouldn't bother anyone else?"

“Uhhhh...I wouldn’t have put it that way, but now that you mention it, it does kind of sound like a plan. I’m pretty sure your side knows all about this, and they’ll forgive you for it.”

“My side has to forgive me. What about yours?”

“Eh. It’s Hell. Who gives a rip? I can’t get any more damned than I already am. If I want to love an angel, that’s my business.”

Solian’s brows rose. “You love me?”

“Did I say that? Must’ve slipped out. Just another demonic lie, of course. You know I despise your kind and everything you stand for. Just so we’re clear on that.”

“Of course.” Solian smiled. “I despise you too.”

“Solid.” He snuggled more comfortably against Solian’s shoulder, and happened to glance at the clock. The time read well after midnight. “Guess Wanda never showed.”

“Perhaps she did, saw us and ran. I doubt we would have noticed.”

“No, she’d’ve screamed or yelled or cursed us out or something. One thing she’s good at is expressing herself.” He rubbed his cheek in memory. “She shook off a demon’s compulsion. Damn. That is one tough chit.”

“I told you she was special.”

“You got that right. Wonder what she would’ve thought of my tail or your wings? You got a cell phone? Let’s call her and ask.”

“Absolutely not.”

Boranaz chuckled and gave Solian’s penis another proprietary squeeze. “Jealous already?”

“Concerned for her safety. I doubt if she could survive one of us, let alone both.”

“Yeah. That’s the trouble with mortals. Just when you’re getting into the rhythm, they up and immolate on you. We still have to settle the bet, though.”

“Not tonight.”

“No, not tonight. Tomorrow. Tomorrow she picks a winner. As for the rest of tonight...”

“Yes?”

“I think I’ll leave the details as a surprise. Help me get this coffee table out of the way. Oh, and try not to go airborne this time. Turbulence makes me queasy.”

Chapter 5

As the noon hour neared and office workers readied for lunch. Boranaz and Solian, somewhat stiff but ambulatory, approached the entrance of Conroy and Co., Inc. Wanda had not answered either demon or angel's repeated phone calls. "Just as well," Solian said. "We all deserve the dignity of a face-to-face meeting."

"Says you. This face keeps getting slapped. Better let me handle this. I know what to say."

"You say things that get your face slapped. I'm beginning to think you like the pain."

"You know exactly what I like. Someday you're gonna have to tell me how a supposedly sinless angel knows how to— Hey, there she is."

Wanda had emerged from the building, in the company of a pudgy young man in glasses and a pinstriped shirt, with a smudge of a stain on his tie. She spotted them and stopped. After a murmured exchange with the man, she stepped to one side. She watched the pair approach her with her arms folded over her chest and a dangerous frown on her lips. The young man withdrew and observed from the curb, his eyes squinted in bemused concern.

Forewarned by her stance, Boranaz halted just out of slapping range. "Hey, babe. Missed you last night."

"I'll just bet you did. What was that about?"

"A chance to get to know each other better?"

"I know all I need to know about you. Such as, you're a creep and a jerk. 'You come to my place when I snap my fingers and sleep with me or it's over.' What the heck was that? You think I'll put out just

because you threatened to walk off? If you wanted to sleep with me, why didn't you just ask?"

"Would you have said yes?"

"Of course not. You're a thoughtless jerk." She whirled on a startled Solian. "Cut it out with the smirking. You're not any better. He's all over me like dirt on the rug, and I can barely get you to kiss me good night. Being with you was like dating my grandfather. And where were you last night? I called you because I was upset over this piece of garbage, and you listen for two seconds and then hang up on me. Thanks for loads of nothing. Do you even like girls? Either of you?"

Boranaz stuttered something. Solian maintained a wise silence.

"Shut up," Wanda snapped at Boranaz. "Don't even try to explain. I know exactly what went on last night."

Solian blanched. "You do?"

"Of course I do. It's so obvious. Here you are, together. You two planned the whole thing, didn't you? Two old buddies, sure, let's have a little fun with the poor stupid girl. I'll bet you put him up to that ultimatum, right? Then ran over to his place the minute I called you. Then you sat around drinking beers and having a good laugh at my expense while you waited for me to show. You think just because you're both so pretty women'll fall all over you? Well, guess what? We're not that dumb any more. You can't order us around and expect us to like it, or stick us up on a pedestal and expect us to be happy. You're a creep and you're a dunce, and neither one of you knows the first thing about women, and I'm done with both you losers."

She shoved between them and marched to the sidewalk, where the pudgy young man waited. They walked off arm in arm. The man sent a brief, confused glance over his shoulder at them. Wanda didn't bother with glances. Her rigid back said it all.

Boranaz and Solian stood in stunned silence and watched the couple leave. Finally Boranaz said, "What the hell just happened?"

Solian shrugged. "I believe we've just been dumped."

“Say what?” Boranaz gaped after Wanda and her new companion. “Okay. Explain this to me slowly, in small words. I’m Hell on earth and you’re Heaven incarnate. As far as mortal hotness goes, we’re both off the scale. We’re what women fantasize about while they’re banging their husbands. And she threw us over? *Both* of us?” He waved his hand to indicate the pudgy man. “For *that*?”

“Apparently he was what she wanted.”

“But they don’t know what they want! That’s the point!”

“She does.” He nodded after the distant Wanda. “Perhaps we should have asked her at the outset. It would have saved us both a wealth of mistakes.”

“But...” Boranaz sputtered. “We’re...and he’s...”

“Physically imperfect,” Solian agreed. “Weak. Flawed. Neither pure evil nor impossibly good. In short, a human male. Exactly what a human female wants. Compassionate enough to care about her needs, yet wicked enough to hold her interest. You were right. We should have suggested a threesome.”

“You don’t seem too upset about it.”

“Humans reject salvation on a daily basis. One becomes inured.”

“You still guarding her?”

“I suppose, until I hear otherwise, though I’m not sure why I need to. Any woman who can resist both a demon and an angel can certainly take care of herself.”

“Huh.” Boranaz considered. “You don’t suppose this whole promotion thing was a ruse, do you? A kick in the ass to get us together? I mean, we’ve been dancing around each other for sixteen hundred years and neither of us made a move. Maybe somebody got impatient and used the chit as a catalyst. It’s what Hell would do.”

“Nonsense. Heaven would never act so underhandedly.” A speck of doubt tainted his tone.

“Of course not. Silly me.” Boranaz chuckled and peered after Wanda and her choice of companion. “Wonder what it would take to break them up?”

“Don’t you even contemplate it.”

“Killjoy.” Boranaz stuck his hands in his pockets. “Want to go back to my place and hump each other’s brains out?”

“I wondered when you’d ask.”

* * * *

This time they made it to the bed, although they fell out twice. Solian’s wings kept them from hitting the floor. During a break in the action, Boranaz went for beer. They sat in bed sipping while they waited for their flesh forms to recover. “How long can you stay like this?” Boranaz said, skimming his finger over Solian’s velvety forearm.

“As long as I choose.” He returned the caress on Boranaz’s shoulder. “I think I’ll keep it for a while. I’ve gotten quite accustomed to it.”

“Same here. But this stays.” Boranaz lifted his tail briefly before settling it possessively across Solian’s legs. “And you’d better hang onto those wings if you know what’s good for you.”

“In private, absolutely. In public is another matter. Mortals are notoriously closed-minded.”

“Let ‘em stare. Good for the soul.” He took a swig of beer. “I won.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“The bet. I won.”

“You most certainly did not. Wanda rejected you.”

“But you didn’t. Proof positive. Chicks, and good guys, dig the bad boys.”

“And bad boys lust after the good guys. Don’t try to deny it.”

“Whatever.” He snickered and nudged Solian’s thigh with his own. “You’re not such a good guy, y’know.”

“You’re not nearly as evil as you pretend.”

“You think so? Then you need to broaden your horizons. We’ve got seven deadly sins to go through—well, maybe five by now— and more mischief than Old Scratch can shake his pitchfork at. I’m going to devote the rest of eternity to dragging you into enough trouble to choke a whole legion of archangels.”

“Then I shall devote the rest of eternity to keeping the both of us out of it.”

“Good luck with that.” He clinked his bottle against Solian’s, then kissed his hot, wicked angel on the lips. “Here’s to the next sixteen centuries.”

THE END

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Pat Cunningham was born at the Jersey Shore and grew up in Pennsylvania. Corrupted by *Star Trek* and Marvel Comics at an early age, she began writing science fiction and fantasy stories, publishing over a dozen. Paranormal romance allows her to combine fantasy, romance, humor and adventure into one package. She currently lives in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania and finally bought that laptop. Now she can type in bed or while watching TV. Modern technology rules!

Also by Pat Cunningham

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