An Unexpected Offer

“Sasha, is that you?”

“Yeah.” She stepped into the light and smiled, “it’s me.”

“I—,” Michael tilted his head towards the sky and sighed heavily before looking back down. “I’m sorry. I know what I did was wrong but,” he wiped at his eyes, sniffed, “but I just wanted to tell you that.”

Sasha nodded, “I know Dad.” She stepped forward and pulled him into a hug. “I forgive you.”

Michael expelled a breath he didn’t know he had been holding. Just then he heard a s loud tearing sound coming from above. He looked up and found a tear in the sky. Through it you could see a city made of marble and gold, beings crowded the golden, ragged edges of the tear, looking down on the world below through the sides of their eyes crinkled in laughter. The crowd made space as two of them, descended amid soft songs, large wings of white feathers flapping behind them. They were clad in simple white robes and sandals with laces that wound up and around their ankles. One carried an open book in one hand and a golden quill in the other. The other had his arms stretched wide open, a reassuring smile that made him easily the most beautiful person in the universe. “Sasha,” he said, voice calm and clear like a gentle breeze, yet commanding. “Welcome home.” The being engulfed Sasha in his arms. Tears rand down Sasha’s cheeks and she closed her eyes as a light bathed onto the pair from the tear above. Her bloodied clothes faded from existence, being replaced with a flowing white satin like that of the pair. The dirt and grime that coated her skin was cleaned, revealing smooth, sable skin. Her thick, matted hair had turned into a mass of kinky curls on her head, adorned with a halo.

Sasha opened her eyes and unfurled her wings. She looked at her father and smiled. “Goodbye Dad.” She lifted herself off the ground and followed the two beings through the tear in the sky. As the beings around the edges applauded her entrance, the tear closed.

Michael’s eyes stayed glued to where the tear had been, the image of his daughter’s ascension fresh in his mind. His trance was broken by a loud crack, he scanned the skies and frowned. “There’s nothing up there.” He felt a hot gust of wind from below and his eyes widened. He lowered his head and cursed under his breath. The ground beneath him opened to reveal a land of darkness and fire. The new beings that appeared at the edge of the tear were clad in various armor brandishing weapons.

“For your crime—” A deep, menacing voice boomed as two armored beings clawed their way upward, stabbing their brethren and tossing them below to peals of dark laughter. “of killing your kin.” Michael felt his heart throbbing in his throat, his eyes glued to one being his armor was brass with tortured faces etched onto the metal, he carried a barbed whip on his waist and his muscles flexed as he climbed out of the hole. His eyes locked onto Michael’s, and he snarled, revealing rows of darkened teeth. “You are sentenced to spend an eternity in Hell.” The voice barked a command and the first demon lashed out with his whip. Michael screamed as its barbs sunk into his flesh, tearing his skin as it wound around him. The demon wielding it laughed as his counterpart sprung forward. Reaching the edge of the tear, his arm burst through, releasing a deafening shrill. Michael screamed again and thrashed violently against his restraints. The whip got tighter, and the barbs went deeper as they lacerated flesh and muscle, scratching bone and ripping tendons and blood vessels apart. The demon pulled itself out, towering over Michael, he tilted his head, studying Michael with a sneer before picking him up and tossing him into the tear.

“Welcome Michael,” Michael’s eyes snapped open in the darkness and he moved his head from side to side.

“Apologies,” the voice that had woken him said.

Michael heard wheels rolling, then he felt a scaled hand briefly touch his face. An unnatural yellow glow tinted with red broke the darkness. Michael blinked at the sudden change.

“Is that better?” The voice asked.

Michael turned towards the sound of the voice, wondering who would show him, or anyone, kindness in hell. He felt his heart stop, then it resumes, thundering against his chest as it threatened to leap out at any moment. Opposite him, wearing a lopsided crown made of bones was a demon. He smiled, revealing canine-like teeth.

“How was your trip?”

Michael tried to stand and felt a sharp pain across his body. He looked down and saw the same barbed whip kept him tied to the chair. Trembling, he returned his gaze to the demon. “W—what do you want with me?”

“I’m sure you know where you are.” The demon gestured around himself. “so, you know what’s at stake here.” Michael could only nod, swallowing a lump that formed in his throat. The demon nodded, “Good. With that out of the way, I’m Abaddon, and I’m here,” he paused and slid a slip of paper forward, “to offer you a job.”

Michael blinked, “Come again?”

Abaddon raised his hand, “No thanks,” he reached under his desk and grabbed a small dagger, “already had a session with Lilith.”

Michael flinched as the knife hit the table. After nothing happened after a few seconds, he opened his eyes and saw Abaddon staring at him.

“It’s a joke, calm down.” He leaned back and sighed, “look, Michael, you’re in Hell, and there’s no need to act surprised that you’re here after what you did. But I can’t help you if you don’t work with me. So,” He slid the slip of paper closer to Michael, “work with me.”

Michael’s eyes slowly traveled to the paper in front of him. “Contract for hire?” He looked up at Abaddon and back to the paper. “What is this?”

“You can read, can’t you?” When Michael realized that Abaddon was waiting for a response, he nodded, “Good. Give it a closer look. I’m sure you’ll agree to the terms.”

The whip disappeared and Michael tested his limbs and winced in anticipation of excruciating pain and was surprised when he found none. He let out a breath and reached for the paper, half expecting it to be a joke. When nothing happened, he brought it closer and started reading. He frowned. “Seventeen twenty an hour?”

Abaddon nodded his head, “Yeah, that’s your starting salary. Is there a problem?”

Michael scanned the paper again, mumbling to himself, then aloud he said. “What if I refuse?”

“You’ll be transported to another company within Hell and given a different contract with less pay. Refuse again and the process repeats itself. If you make the mistake of not accepting, you’ll end up being tortured before being sent to do menial labor, which includes joining Hell’s army.” Abaddon picked up the knife and held it out for Michael. “So, you can sign, and start working for me or decline and join another company. I can tell you; the others don’t have the same benefits as I do.”

Michael frowned again, willing the numbers to change. “Fine,” He placed the paper on the table and reached over for the knife, “I’ll sign it.”