

~ Hearts, Flowers & Snickerdoodles ~

by Mavis Applewater

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As always this is for Heather.

Lilly Ambrose departed this world just before the twentieth century began. In fact, it was just before midnight New Years Eve, 1899. She felt a little miffed that she missed the big party. Since she skated into the heavens by a narrow margin she thought it best not to mention it. Getting into Heaven was more than lack luster for the would be angel. Then again Lilly was a tad on the mischievous side. Still she didn't complain much. The alternative would have been exciting just not the kind of excitement she would opt for. She had heard the stories of what happened *downstairs*. A fate she barely escaped which had been pointed out to her on numerous occasions.

Still Lilly sought more. Over one hundred years had come and gone and still she had yet to earn her wings. Though not from a lack of trying. She wanted to move up the heavenly ladder. Things just always seemed to go wrong. Her overly enthusiastic nature overrode her good sense at times. Well, most of the time. Each time she had received an assignment things turned out badly. She still claimed that the stock market crash was not her fault. Nor was World War II. They were just slight miscalculations. After the big war broke out the powers that be felt safer keeping Lilly sitting on a cloud until they could figure out just what to do with the spunky spirit.

She sat and waited watching time pass back on Earth, envious of the mortals she watched filling their days with mundane tasks. Finally, in the year 2006, Lilly was given another chance. She literally took off like a lightening bolt when she got the call. A move she would later regret. Apparently her zeal caused a major snowstorm to hit the East Coast of the United States. "Oops," she cringed when she heard the news.

"Lilly what are we to do with you?" Grace, her guardian, fretted as the petite blonde spirit sputtered out her excuses.

"Please don't send me back to that cloud," she frantically implored. "I can't spend another century sitting on my duff. Sorry." She quickly threw out catching the stern gaze from the older angel. "I know I've made a few transgressions."

"Transgressions?" Grace yelled rolling her eyes. "Lilly, a world wide conflict is not a transgression. It is a disaster. Now, I may have an assignment for you. But you need to heed my instructions."

"I can do that," she emphatically pleaded her case.

"I am serious," Grace cautioned her. "How is it you died again?"

"It was an accident," Lilly sheepishly muttered nervously chewing on her lip.

"Right, you fell off a beer wagon," Grace groaned. "One you were repeatedly told to stay off of."

"It was a party," Lilly groaned in an effort to defend herself. "Grace. Please give me a chance. I've been up here for so very long and I still haven't earned my wings. The others are beginning to talk. The people I knew in life have long since earned their wings or been reborn several times. It is embarrassing."

"What others say about you is of no consequence," Grace tersely reminded her. "Your actions and heart should always speak for yourself."

"I got it," Lilly grumbled.

"Oh if only you did," Grace shook her head. "This is your last chance. Fail and you are spending eternity watching the clouds roll by. And I mean that literally. There is someone on Earth who has lost her way. We've tried everything. You are our last hope."

"Me?" Lilly gulped suddenly frightened by the gravity of the situation. "Okay. I can do it."

"I truly hope so," Grace noted her angelic voice turning melancholy. "Watch." She instructed waving her hand before the serene blue sky. The world opened before Lilly. "Before you is the life of Roseanna Polley," Grace solemnly explained.

"Rosie Polley? Poor kid," Lilly cringed as she watched the child entering the world.

"Ah hem," Grace chided her. "Watch. No need for commentary."

"Yes, Ma'am," Lilly shrank back drinking in every detail of the girl's life. Lilly had thought her time in heaven lacked a certain excitement. Watching young Rose's life almost put her to sleep. She was a sweet girl, who blossomed into a sweet and mostly unnoticed woman. *'Goodness, gracious this woman is boring!'* Lilly's mind screamed as she forced herself to watch Rose's tedious existence.

"I can hear you," Grace huffed.

"Sorry," Lilly squeaked out momentarily forgetting that those who had earned their wings could hear and see everything. "But seriously she's never taken one risk in her life. Never trying

anything unless she was already assured that she would succeed. When I was alive I put the pedal to the metal."

"When you were alive you flew by the seat of your pants. Often catching them on fire," Grace tersely reminded her.

"I did not start that fire," Lilly vehemently protested. "It was Mrs. O'Leary's cow."

"Shall I remind you of what you were doing in the time?" Grace fumed.

"I was just a curious kid," Lilly blurted out blushing profusely. "And for the record it was Lisa's idea to play I'll show you mine if you show me yours."

"Ah hem," Grace cleared her throat.

"Fine, it was my idea," Lilly meekly confessed. "It was 1871 isn't there a statue of limitations?"

"For torching Chicago?" Grace gasped. "Just focus on the matter at hand."

"Right Rose," Lilly sighed trying to pay attention to Rose's lack luster life. "I swear she has the worst taste in women. She might fair better if when she finds someone she is attracted to she actually speaks to them. Oh no not her?" Lilly couldn't contain her disapproval. "Well that is going to be a disaster." She grimaced watching the scene unfold. "See told you so." She snorted with displeasure watching her prediction come true. "Oh don't like her either." She sneered.

"You're right not to trust Seana," Grace nodded in agreement waving her hand freezing the images. "That one was lost to us a very long time ago. What you have been shown up to this point has already come to pass. What you are about to witness is what will be if Rose continues on this path."

"I just bet Seana is responsible," Lilly grunted as the images began to play. She had watched Rose growing from a gangly awkward child into an equally awkward adult. The shy brunette often fading into the background around others. For someone like Seana she was easy pickings. "Wait what is she doing?" She sputtered unable to believe that Rose was stuffing money from the bank vault where she worked into a bag. "Don't do it. Seana is just using you for the money. If you give her the cash she still isn't going to sleep with you. Much less walk off into the sunset with you. No!" She shouted at the misguided woman as she handed the duffle bag off to the woman who had been leading her on. "Great now you're a criminal on the run. And where is Seana? Off with someone else with all the money. This isn't going to end well." She swallowed hard watching poor Rose trying to out run the police in the middle of a snowstorm. She clutched her heart when Rose's uneventful life ended in the most horrific fashion. One misguided choice leading the normally honest woman to a slow painful death. Worse still dying on the streets alone. "I told you not to do it." Lilly whimpered.

"And you must stop her," Grace nodded the dark images vanishing.

"Oh I'll stop her alright," Lilly earnestly vowed. "Starting with telling her to stay away from that Seana character."

"You can't do that," Grace smirked much to Lilly's distress. "As we've explained to you time and time again even divine intervention has its limitations. The choice must be hers and hers alone. You are to be sent back. To help her find her way. Without revealing who you are and why you are there. You cannot advise her against stealing the money or overtly sway her against Seana's influence over her."

"What? Oh come on?" Lilly whined waving her hands frantically. "How am I going to stop her then? Use a happy spell?"

"No magic," Grace sharply cut her off. "We think it is best to limit your influence as it were. You'll be returning as a mortal."

"A mortal? Not that I mind being earthbound," Lilly frantically tried to voice her objection. "I relished life. Still how can I alter her course when I have no powers or am allowed to tell her what a bonehead mistake she is making?"

"That is up to you," Grace concluded. "Speaking of relish we have come up with the perfect cover for you."

"Unbelievable," Lilly snarled, her breath clouding from the cold air. She looked down at her less than flattering attire. Big bulky coat, fingerless gloves and a large frumpy hat. None of this compared to the embarrassment of the large smelly cart in front of her. Grace must have worked overtime coming up with this ludicrous cover. She was a sidewalk hotdog vendor, standing on the ice covered sidewalk just across the street from the Savings & Loan where Rose worked.

Now Rose seemed sweet enough. It was her lack of emotion and drive that nagged at Lilly. The almost thirty year old woman was a junior something or other after fifteen years of dedicated service. Lilly hadn't been surprised when time and time again the competent woman was passed over for a promotion. The last time really seemed to gnaw at the slender brunette.

"It made her vulnerable," Grace suddenly appeared. "The lack of love in her life, the lack of excitement and general disappointment with the way things worked out for her. Life is full of disappointments and the human heart is fragile."

"We all have our breaking points," Lilly conceded. "So, how am I supposed to get through to her? And how much time do I have?"

"Today is Tuesday the seventh," Grace dryly explained. "You have until the moment she commits the embezzlement. That is only one week. Remember you may not directly interfere. No rushing into the bank screaming for her not to do it."

"Well that blows my plan of attack," Lilly tried to joke. "You'd think you would have developed a sense of humor after watching over us mere mortals for the last thousand years. Okay fine. I get

it. I can't just outright point out that she is making a humongous mistake. Which she must know. I mean, hello, pocketing almost a cool million is tempting, but little Miss Stick in the Mud must know how wrong it is. And I can't tell her who I really am or that I know. And no hocus pocus. So, the only thing I have going for me is her fondness for hotdogs? Well this is going to be a challenge. Fear not I'll get through to her. I can be very persuasive. You must have noticed that back when you were watching over me?"

"Yes, you did have a way of being noticed," Grace grimly noted. "Seven days Lilly. Seana has already planted the idea in her head. Time is of the essence."

"I get it," Lilly groaned. "What's the deal with this Seana anyways. She is doing some serious chain yanking. She hasn't even kissed Rose. Why is she so sure that Rose will go along with this?"

"Because she is a predator who preys on other's weaknesses," Grace drolly supplied. "Rose is lonely, unnoticed by the world and she craves finding someone who will make her feel special. Not finding it has clouded her judgment. She has felt the love of family, but never once felt the admiration of a lover. If you need my assistance just summon me."

"Hold on," Lilly quickly asserted. "Just out of morbid curiosity, why me? Besides running out of options, why was I chosen? Is it because I share Rose's interest in the female form?"

"We have our reasons," Grace smiled knowingly before vanishing in a mist.

"Yeah, of course you do," Lilly muttered looking at the bustling streets. A cold wind suddenly slapping her in the face. She had forgotten about the cold and the wind something that had tormented her in life.

Chicago had always been cold and windy, especially for a girl who spent most of her life wandering the streets. It was one of the things that had troubled her about Rose's life. Rose was a dear, sweet girl who had been afforded so many advantages in life and still refused to step up and feast on the banquet that life was offering. Lilly had emerged from meager means during an age when women's opportunities were more than slightly limited and yet she not only sampled life, she made a pig out of herself.

She lifted one of the covers on her cart when a passerby requested a hotdog. The foul stench from the steam assaulted her senses. Bad smells were another thing her time in heaven had spared her from. "Whew," she blew out her eyes watering from the stagnate stench. She grit her teeth and set about the task at hand never taking her eyes off of the bank. "Well it wasn't like they could have sent me undercover in the bank." She reasoned after her customer had departed. "I can't read or write, handling money was probably out of the question. Cookies!" She exclaimed spying a package hanging on the cart. She snagged the large white package and tore it open. Food was something she truly missed. The cookie melted in her mouth. "Oh that is good." She moaned savoring the sweet taste tickling her senses.

"Snickerdoodles?" A familiar voice clamored breaking Lilly from her bliss.

Her emerald eyes bugged out when she found Rose standing in front of her cart. She choked on the cookie frantically trying to catch her bearings. "I'll have these," Rose exclaimed waving the cookies while Lilly managed to swallow the tasty morsel she had been chomping on when her charge snuck up on her. "And,"

"Two chili dogs and lots of onions," Lilly cut her off with a wry grin. It wasn't a lucky guess. Lilly had witnessed every moment of Rose's life. She knew she had a taste for junk food and never stopped to worry about onions on her breath. There was no one who would have noticed. Not until Seana mysteriously appeared in her life a month ago. A tall blonde full of promises for a future together. Only thing was Seana never made good on her promises. Anyone with a modicum of self assurance would have seen through Seana's manipulative nature. Rose was in a position to help Seana. Once Rose delivered what Seana needed she'd be gone leaving Rose to face the consequences. Knowing all of this about someone was a little unnerving. Not as unnerving as the way Rose was staring at her. "Lucky guess." Lilly boasted knowing that the poor woman was stunned by how she knew her lunch order. "Anything else?" She squeaked out in an effort to cover her obvious blunder.

"No, thank you," Rose softly responded handing Lilly a crumpled five dollar bill. "You're new aren't you?"

"Just popped into town," Lilly boasted handing the brunette her hotdogs and change. "You work at the bank?" She threw out trying to sound innocent.

"Yeah," Rose shrugged stuffing the package of cookies in her coat pocket.

"That must be fun," Lilly prattled on her mind spinning trying to think of a subtle way to tell this woman that pulling a bank heist was a really bad idea.

"Uhm, yeah," Rose grumbled trying to smile. The darkness in her eyes spoke volumes. Rose hated her career of crunching numbers so she could make money for other people who never noticed much less thanked her.

"Well you know what they say, another day another dollar right?" Lilly tried to joke. She desperately wanted to see Rose smile. It was something she noticed when she was viewing Rose's life. She smiled so rarely. "Okay." She sighed heavily when her attempt at humor failed miserably. "Well enjoy the cookies."

"Thank you." Rose politely responded. She looked like she might crack a smile when the slender blonde appeared by her side.

"There you are." Seana huffed. "I was looking for you."

"Lunch," Rose sheepishly answered holding up her hotdogs.

"That is not lunch," Seana tsked with disdain. "Let me take you out for a real meal."

"I can't," Rose sorrowfully explained. "I have a lot of work."

"Speaking of work," Seana hitched her arm around Rose's waist and led her away from Lilly.

"Rats," Lilly groaned straining to hear the conversation. "Seven days. I wonder how quickly she'll get sick of hotdogs? This sucks." Feeling frustrated she popped another cookie in her mouth. Releasing a soft moan when the cinnamon and sugar confection tickled her taste buds. "Food, I really miss it."

"Snacking?" Grace suddenly appeared admonishing her.

"You know," Lilly smacked her lips. "I know you were never earthbound, but food really is a pleasure." She explained holding up the package trying to decipher the letters. She even mouthed the word in an effort to understand what appeared in her mind to be gibberish.

"So is understanding the written word," Grace tenderly offered.

"No one ever thought it was important enough to teach me," Lilly huffed tossing the open package on the cart. "You forget I was born a bastard. I grew up in an orphanage. Reading and writing was never something anyone assumed would be useful for a worthless wretch such as myself. Funny I know every detail of the past one hundred years. I even have the lingo down after watching the human race scurrying about. And I can't read a newspaper. Doesn't matter, I need to focus on Rose. The blonde has her hooks dug so deeply in her I don't know what I should do. Speaking of which what happens when my shift is done? Do I have to return this cart somewhere? And where should I sleep? Since you chose to send me down here as a mortal there are more than a few bodily functions that will need taking care of if you get my drift."

"Don't worry about that," Grace groaned. "We'll handle the cart and the other mundane details. You need to focus on Rose. Right now Seana is explaining her scheme, encouraging Rose that it is the answer to their prayers. And that the bank owes her as much."

"That jackal is a dark one," Lilly concurred clapping her hands together in an effort to warm them. "Her timing is perfect. Rose is on the rebound after that Susan character broke her heart. Then she was passed over yet again at work. If she just had a little confidence in herself she'd be seeing things clearly. That's what I need to do. Remind her of what a truly remarkable person she is."

"The clock is ticking," Grace cautioned before vanishing.

"Thanks for the vote of confidence," Lilly snarled, shrinking back when she noticed the way passersby were staring at her. "Get a hold of yourself." She grumbled under her breath. "Won't do being locked up in the fruit loop factory before I get a chance to talk to the girl."

Lilly's day continued. It was filled with slopping the most disgusting toppings on boiled hotdogs while trying to fend off the cold. Never once did her gaze leave the bank. She had seen Rose returning to work shortly after she had disappeared with Seana. Thankfully the blonde was

nowhere to be seen. As the day clicked by she tried to formulate a plan. If romance was what Rose was seeking perhaps that was the key. Back in the day, when she was truly flesh and blood, she used to be quite resourceful when it came to wooing the ladies. Still in the modern world the rules had changed. Some of her old methods in this day wouldn't be considered romantic gestures. In the twenty-first century they would be considered what is now referred to as stalking.

It grew dark and Lilly was left standing on the frigid sidewalk contemplating her course of action. "Time to call it a day," a gravely voice informed her.

"George," she beamed at the sight of the elder spirit dressed in work clothes. His eyes glowered at her. "Sorry, Saint George. You'd think a saint would be a little more personable. Now what?"

"Do you have a plan? I'm here to assist you," George gruffly informed her. "I'm to take the cart and to provide you with anything you need. Within reason."

"I need to follow her," Lilly hurriedly explained. She watched as her charge left the bank all bundled up and heading down the street. "And I need to make myself presentable. Right now I look like a squishy balloon and I reek of sauerkraut." She held out her arms to emphasize her point. "I'm not going to get the time of day from this woman looking like this."

"No," George shook his head. "She might find it a tad odd if suddenly you were dressed for a ball. Anything else?"

"Money," she grunted wiping her coat in a futile effort to look presentable. "It might help if she stops somewhere for a coffee or something. Can't very well wander about with no cash. I only scored about twenty-seven bucks and a lifesaver some jerk dropped in my tip cup. At least I hope it was a lifesaver. Not that I'm going to try it to find out. Now about the cash?" She held out her hand snapping her fingers.

"Here," George sighed handing her a leather wallet.

She giggled with delight checking the money. "What's this?" She questioned coming across thin plastic thingies with her picture on it.

"Your identification," George curtly informed her. "In this day everyone needs one."

"A driver's license?" She beamed.

"No," he scoffed at the notion. "It is just an ID. It has your name, address and date of birth."

"What's it say?" She demanded holding it up for him.

"You had no problem counting the money?" He squawked.

"Yeah, so? When I was alive one of my careers was picking pockets," she snarled feeling embarrassed that she was unable to read her own name. "Money is easy; the more numbers the higher the value. Although I suspect I didn't fair well with giving change today. Now come on! If anyone asks I need to be able to tell them what this says."

"Lilly Ambrose, 137 De Koven Street, Chicago, Illinois born September 30, 1978," George finally explained.

"Why does that address sound so familiar?" She pondered flipping the plastic card between her nimble fingers.

"Think, blazing inferno?" George grunted.

"Oh the O'Leary place," she laughed loudly before her smile vanished upon noticing that George failed to find it amusing. "Okay since I'm in Boston no one will probably know the address. Got it. Now I need to find Rose." She announced tearing off her apron. "Any ideas of where she is?" She scowled when he just set about packing up the cart. "For a guy who made his name from slaying a dragon you're not being very chivalrous."

"Up two streets and take a right," George reluctantly informed her. "She stopped for dinner at a small diner."

"See that wasn't so hard," she triumphantly smirked her stomach growling at the thought of food. Wasting no time she bolted down the street slipping and sliding along the way. She easily found her quarry sitting at the counter of the small diner. Lilly wasn't surprised to find the tall brunette sitting by herself. Rose wasn't what one would call a people person. "Well hey there," Lilly brightly chimed drawing Rose's attention. "Is this seat taken?" She innocently quipped.

"Feel free," Rose stammered looking around to ensure the spunky blonde was addressing her.

"Thanks," Lilly nodded sliding down onto the stool conveniently located next to Rose. She picked up a menu furrowing her brow. She pretended to peruse the menu silently cursing because it didn't have pictures. She stole a glance at Rose who was squirming. "What's good?" She inquired not simply because she wanted to engage the woman in conversation, but out of necessity.

"I was eyeing the chicken sandwich," Rose nervously stammered folding the menu back up.

"Interesting," Lilly smiled brightly quickly snapping her menu shut. "I'm Lilly by the way." She offered wiping her hand on her bulky coat before offering it to Rose.

"Rose," the brunette nodded with a shy smile before accepting Lilly's hand.

"Pretty name," Lilly gulped when Rose removed her eyeglasses revealing her sparkling blue eyes. "It suits you." She whispered absently giving Rose's hand a squeeze before reluctantly releasing it.

"Thank you," Rose sheepishly responded her eyes darting around nervously. She blurted out her order when the waitress approached. Lilly just asked for the same.

They fell into a stilted silence. Lilly took the opportunity to remove her coat placing it on the stool next to her. "Feels good to be sitting," she wryly commented playing with her coffee that the waitress had just delivered.

"Must get cold," Rose thoughtfully responded. "I don't know how you stand it."

"Wasn't my idea," Lilly grumbled before turning her full attention back to Rose. "Like I said I just popped into town."

"Where are you from?" Rose questioned.

"Chicago," Lilly smiled pleased that Rose had opted for retreating.

"The windy city," Rose stammered once again shifting uncomfortably.

"You have no idea," Lilly sneered before shaking off some of the less pleasant memories. "I haven't really been there for a long time."

"How long?" Rose inquired sipping her coffee.

"Seems like decades," Lilly hedged. What could she say? I died there over a hundred years ago. "Enough about me. Tell me about yourself?"

"Me?" Rose squeaked her crystal blue eyes widening with fear. "I'm not at all interesting."

"I beg to differ," Lilly scolded the stunned woman just as their sandwiches arrived. "Your dinner selection alone should be complimented."

"A chicken sandwich with honey mustard?" Rose laughed suddenly stifling it. "Sorry." She blushed upon realizing that it had been ages since she laughed. "Uhm, well if my sandwich selection impresses you, I have to assume that you are easy to please. It's tonight's special. I didn't really put any thought into it. I just picked the first thing I saw."

"A bold move," Lilly commended Rose even toasting her with the sandwich. She took a huge bite. Her mouth watering from the flavor. "Hmm, that is so good."

"It's alright," Rose shrugged taking a tiny nibble. Her jaw dropping as she watched the little blonde inhaling her food. "Wow you really like that sandwich."

"Sorry," Lilly stated taking a hard swallow. "I haven't had any food, I mean good food for a long time. Amazing what you miss when you are away."

"Where were you?" Rose curiously questioned. "I mean between here and Chicago."

"Well," Lilly put down the morsel of sandwich she hadn't yet attacked. "Cloud Nine," she jested. Actually it was cloud one thousand four hundred sixty seven. But there was no need to get into that. "Uhm, I was in New York and Germany briefly. I don't want to talk about that. Got into a bit of trouble. Seems to follow me around."

"Really?" Rose laughed once again surprising herself.

"I don't know what it is," Lilly shrugged looking around the diner. "Hey I wonder if they have any of those cookies? You know Cry Babies?"

"I haven't heard of those," Rose scrunched her brow.

"You called them something else," Lilly tried to explain. "Snorkydumbdumbs. No that's not it."

"Snickerdoodles?" Rose questioned completely thrown off balance.

"That's it," Lilly exclaimed. "Those were wonderful. Sorry. It just that I've been away for so long."

"What else do you miss?" Rose leaned against her hand taking in Lilly's zealous nature. She blushed when Lilly's sea green eyes raked up and down her body.

"So many things," Lilly whispered snapping her eyes up with a blush. "I am sorry. Okay, things that I miss, breathing. I meaning breathing in fresh air on a cold winter's night." She quickly amended. "Holding hands with someone special, food, but I think you figured that one out already, beer and . . ."

"You were in Germany?" Rose was completely puzzled and a tad concerned that there was something wrong with Lilly.

"There was this little bar in Chicago," Lilly quickly rectified her mistake. "Got me in trouble."

"It is a pattern with you," Rose shook her head. "What else?"

"Feeling my heart beat," Lilly absently commented her eyes misting up. "There I go getting all sentimental and not letting you tell me about yourself."

Lilly leaned back waiting until Rose finally began telling her story. It was a short version of what she already knew. Still she loved listening to the sound of Rose's voice. She felt slightly disenchanted when Rose passed on dessert and the checks arrived. Then Lilly was filled with a sense of panic as she tried to understand her bill. She fumbled with her money, knowing that her claims of understanding money weren't exactly true.

"Having trouble?" Rose asked with concern slipping her glasses back on.

"I can't quite seem to focus," Lilly trembled out her lie. It wasn't the first time she had used the ploy to save herself from embarrassment. "Do you mind?" She pushed the check and some of her cash over.

"No worries," Rose tenderly accepted pulling out the right amount of cash to cover the check and leave a respectable tip. Then she slid the rest of the money back over to Lilly. "You're probably catching a cold or something from standing outside all day."

"That would be my luck," Lilly groaned. "Thank you for helping me. At the risk of sounding completely intrusive, where are you heading?"

"Oh I was just going to go home and see what's on the boob tube," Rose sighed her smile slipping away.

"Television?" Lilly perked up. She had seen it from afar and was truly curious about this invention which had dominated the last century.

"I know it's lame," Rose mumbled slipping on her coat. "I was going to stop at this bakery and pick up something positively sinful, before going home and turning into a couch potato."

"Sofa spud," Lilly laughed. Over the passing years some expressions tickled her more than others. That was one of them. "Sorry. Uhm are the sweets any good at this place? I'm still trying to find my way around."

"Awesome," Rose admitted with a hint of guilt. "I could write down the name and address for you."

"That's okay," Lilly brushed it off feeling another pang tugging at her. It had been so much easier in her day. The world was smaller, easier to navigate and so few choices. You just had to point and ask and there it was. The modern world was going to be much harder to navigate since she couldn't read the street signs.

"Or?" Rose began with a nervous teeter to her voice. "Wow this is completely out of character for me, but you could join me. They have tables and coffees from around the world. There is usually someone playing jazz or folk music."

"Great," Lilly blew out with relief. "Lead on."

The little hole in the wall was delightful. A bakery on one side and a cozy cafe on the other. There was a guy strumming a guitar on what passed as a stage. The lights were dim and Rose's smile was really warming Lilly's heart. There was a major problem. The menus. A dessert menu and a coffee menu which could have been in Greek for all Lilly knew. "Anything look good?" She questioned fishing for clues.

"Everything," Rose giggled. "What do you like?"

"From the menu?" She playfully teased her companion with a bright smile. Her smile quickly retreated when Rose shrank back. "Uhm, can't decide." She finally threw out. Her hand was shaking as she brushed an errant drop of sweat from her brow. "I'll just have whatever you have." She concluded snapping her menus shut.

"Oh no," Rose sputtered. "You can't do that. Half the fun of coming with someone else is to order different things. That way you can steal from each other. Kind getting two desserts for one."

"Right," Lilly quivered snapping the menu back open.

"I think I'll get the strawberry short cake and a mocha latte," Rose earnestly stated. "Your turn."

"Okay," she squeaked staring at the words hoping that something would jump out at her. Nothing did. She had been silently pleading for Grace to show up. She constantly looked around the dimly lit room to no avail. She was on her own. Searching her mind she remembered one of her old tricks. When the waitress arrived she asked for suggestions. It seemed to work. When the waitress suggested the ice cream cake, Lilly had made her selection. Honestly she had never considered the possibility of combining ice cream, which had been around a relatively short time when she was alive, and cake. The idea thoroughly enthralled her. The only problem was the way Rose was studying her. "The folks who work in these places always know what's good." Lilly feebly explained tugging nervously at her sweater. *'All those decades of sitting around and I never considered learning how to read?'* She mentally berated herself for wasting time.

"Oh look?" Rose called out pointing to something behind Lilly.

The blonde spun around and much to her horror realized that Rose was pointing to the chalkboard hanging directly behind her. "Oh," she shrugged pretending it was no big deal. Truth was she didn't have a clue what was scribbled on the board.

"You're not into that sort of thing?" Rose grimly questioned her shoulders slumping slightly.

"Uhm," Lilly blinked tucking an errant strand of hair behind her ear. "Not really." She feigned indifference.

"I really like trivia games," Rose muttered lowering her head in embarrassment.

"Trivia?" Lilly squealed. "Oh that sounds like fun."

"Wait?" Rose's brow scrunched giving Lilly an odd look. "You just said you weren't into that sort of thing. What's up? Lilly am I missing something here?"

"Busted," she blew out in defeat just as their food arrived. "Rose I,"

"Did you forget your glasses?" Rose innocently inquired. "I do that a lot. Sometimes I leave them at home, because I'm too embarrassed to wear them. Then I have no idea what is going on around me."

"Yes, no that's a lie," Lilly finally confessed. "Rose you're going to think I'm stupid. I can't read." She offered in a hushed tone her head falling forward. She felt ashamed.

"What?" Rose gasped. "How is that possible. Didn't your parents,"

"I didn't know my parents," Lilly muttered her shame growing by the minute. "From what I've heard they didn't really know each other. Look, I'm in over my head here. I should go." She announced throwing some money on the table.

"Wait," Rose pleaded reaching out as Lilly struggled to put her coat back on. "Please, Lilly. I'm sorry I didn't mean to upset you. I'm such an idiot sometimes."

"Rose," Lilly sputtered. "My lack of education is my fault. Not yours. I'm the one who made the error here. You have been nothing but delightful tonight. I appreciate you taking the time to show a stranger around. I'm just sorry that I thought . . . Never mind what I thought. You're terrific lady. Wish you could see that."

"Stay," Rose implored her. "You seemed awfully excited about ice cream cake. Almost like you've never heard of such a thing."

"It's ice cream and cake," Lilly gushed. "How amazing is that?"

"I never thought about it before," Rose smiled. "I guess it is pretty amazing. Much too amazing to pass up. Ignore my faux pas. I'll feel terrible if you don't."

"You don't mind eating with an illiterate klutz?" Lilly's voice was grim as she slipped her coat off and retook her seat.

"Wow, I thought I was rough on myself," Rose shook her head. "Just to clear up any confusion, I find you to be completely charming. I don't what it is about you. But Lilly you are an angel."

"All I need is my wings," Lilly couldn't help joking. "Seriously you are very kind."

"Can I ask you something?" Rose cautiously began. "If you could . . . I mean if someone offered would you consider accepting help in learning how to read? I hope I'm not offending you."

"Offending me?" Lilly shook her head. "Goodness no. I want to learn. No one ever offered before. Then again up until now I've been really good at hiding it."

"May I be so bold as to suggest helping you?" Rose was still treading carefully. "If you're going to be working tomorrow we can head over to my place afterward?"

"Thank you," Lilly shyly smiled scooping up a forkful of her dessert. "Oh." She groaned with delight. "You have to try this." She grinned offering a large spoonful up for Rose to sample. "Honestly whoever came up with making this a cake is a genius."

The two devoured their succulent treats with zeal. Watching Rose's life and being a part of it were two distinctly different experiences. Far too many times during the laughter and conversation Lilly lost track of the reason she was there. She was inexplicably drawn to Rose. After they said goodnight and she wandered off pretending to be heading somewhere she felt let down. Deep in her heart she questioned if Grace approved of the way she was handling her assignment? Somehow she doubted that the stuffy Grace would approve of her flirting with her charge.

"Illiterate klutz. Now that is an appropriate assessment," a cold voice taunted her from the darkness.

Lilly froze in place peering down the dark alley. Her heart was beating wildly as the blonde with cold dark eyes emerged from the shadows. "Seana?" She fearfully stammered. "How did you?" The question died on her lips the darkness literally seeping from the woman. "I was right you are a dark one. You're after her soul."

"And?" Seana tsked. "Hmm, they are certainly scrapping the bottom of the barrel these days. We almost had you. Those silly selfless acts and saving that puppy are the only reason you and I are serving different masters. You know, we don't have so many rules. I can do whatever I want to sway her."

"It's entrapment," Lilly shouted waving her arms frantically. "She's a good person."

"Then she will say no," Seana laughed. "Are you delusional enough to think you can romance her away from me? Look at you, a hotdog vendor who can't read a coffee shop menu. I'll have her soul. This one is easy pickings."

"She's a person you demonic freak," Lilly snarled.

"So were we once," Seana cackled. "Tell me are those selfless acts really worth it."

"I didn't do them to get into heaven," Lilly scoffed. "After what I had been taught I thought I was damned. Silly me. I did what I did in life because it felt right. I never sought a reward."

"Trust me," Seana laughed cruelly. "What I felt was right too." She hissed out running her long fingers against Lilly's cheek. "I wish I could say that I'm looking forward to the challenge. Can't." She sneered vanishing in a chilly mist.

"Well, she's a charmer," Lilly scowled turning towards Grace.

"She didn't sway you," Grace complimented her.

"With what?" Lilly spat out. "What she is doing to Rose is disgusting. I have to save her. I can't bare the thought of her dying alone thinking that demon is waiting for her in Barbados. Rose deserves better."

"Yes," Grace thoughtfully continued. "You only have six days left. What are you planning to do? Romancing her will only end up confusing and hurting her."

"I'd never hurt her," Lilly defended her actions. "I'm only trying to get to know her. I wish I could tell her the truth. Since I can't I'll just have to find another way to convince her. I won't seduce her. I promise. I'm just trying to earn her trust. Not any easy task. This woman has some issues. In the meantime where am I going to sleep tonight?"

"I'm taking you back for now," Grace grumbled. "You'll return to your cart in the morning. Don't underestimate Seana. She is very gifted."

"She's a pill," Lilly spat out with disgust.

The following day Lilly stood in the cold waiting for even the smallest glimpse of Rose. She kept trying to convince herself that she was only focusing on her mission and not anxious to see the woman who made her feel all warm and fuzzy. "Come on," she chided herself. "I don't even know her." Yet that was part of the problem. For Rose, Lilly was a stranger. Lilly on the other hand knew the most intimate details of Rose's life. All those little secrets she could barely admit to herself much less another person. "I have tonight." Lilly reassured herself when she saw Rose approaching her cart at the end of the day.

Lilly's studies were slow going. Rose was very patient but Lilly still had problems focusing. Instead of focusing on what Rose was explaining she became wrapped up in watching the way Rose's lips were moving. When the telephone rang and Rose excused herself Lilly tried to center herself. *'Come on focus! You're here to save her life and her soul! Not get a date!'* She vehemently scolded herself.

"Sorry about that," Rose was blushing when she returned from the other room. "My girlfriend."

"That's nice," Lilly huffed with scowl. "That blonde you were with the other day?"

"Seana," Rose gushed. "That was her."

"Nifty," Lilly rolled her eyes.

"She's great," Rose prattled on.

"Really," Lilly couldn't keep the disdain from seeping through.

"Lilly is there something wrong?" Rose seemed surprised.

"No," Lilly pouted. "Funny you didn't mention a girlfriend last night." She tossed out in an effort to appear causal.

"I didn't did I?" Rose once again sounding surprised. "Oh, Lilly! I didn't think that you . . . I just assumed that you were just being friendly. I haven't misled you have I?"

"No," Lilly shook her head. "I already knew that you are out of my league. I'm just curious why you would assume that someone wouldn't find you attractive? You are very beautiful and extremely charming. Any woman would be lucky to be with you. I just hope Seana appreciates you. And doesn't try to change who you are."

"Out of my league?" Rose gaped at the quirky blonde. "Half the men at the bank are gossiping about the sexy new hotdog vendor. When was the last time you looked in a mirror?"

"One hundred seven years. Why do you ask?" Lilly couldn't resist being flippant.

"You are so funny," Rose chuckled. "I haven't laughed so much in years. Well it is getting late why don't we try the alphabet one more time?"

"Right," Lilly rolled her head. "A as in amorous. B as in Bodacious. C as in," she giggled when she wrote out her new word.

"Careful." Rose yelped snatching the sheet of paper from her hands. "I really don't think you'll need to be spelling that word just yet." She blushed seeing the randy word Lilly had managed to scribble. "Why don't you try writing out something a little tamer?"

"It was only four letters," Lilly beamed. "Yeah okay. Cat it is. My word was much more fun. How do you spell the others? Amorous and Bodacious?"

"Here," Rose smiled carefully scrawling out the words.

"You have really nice handwriting," Lilly whispered reaching down to retrieve the pencil Rose was holding. She shivered when her fingers brushed against Rose's. She failed to grasp the pencil. Instead they just sat there with Lilly's hand covering Rose's. She jumped back slightly when the pencil fell from Rose's grasp.

"Lilly," Rose whispered. "I told you. I'm seeing someone." She quietly reminded Lilly. Never lifting her gaze.

"I heard," Lilly softly confirmed gazing over at Rose. Her eyes were glued to the paper. Lilly couldn't resist brushing a stray lock of hair from Rose's face. It broke Lilly's heart seeing Rose looking so unhappy. The pain was immense knowing that she was the reason. "I should go." She choked out allowing her fingers to linger for just a moment longer. Her heart breaking a little. The pain growing when Rose sat there not doing a thing to stop her from leaving. "Hurting you was never my intention." She mumbled after she had her coat on. "I just want you to be happy."

"You're not hurting me," Rose absently confided. "You're just confusing me."

"Oh? Well that I'm good at," she lightly quipped hoping to ease the tension that was encompassing them.

"You also said that you have a propensity for trouble," Rose mumbled with a halfhearted smile. "Haven't seen that yet."

"It's only been a couple of days," Lilly boldly smirked. "Give me one more and all hell just might break loose. Or I could just hang out. Wait for your girlfriend to show up. I doubt finding you harboring a backup blonde will please her."

"Such an odd sense of humor," Rose finally looked up meeting Lilly's haughty gaze.

"I've been honing it for a century and still I fail to win you over," Lilly shook her head breaking away from the intense gaze they were sharing. "I've failed at more than that." She sniffed realizing the grievous error she had made. She walked out the door before she could inflict even more damage.

"Grace!" She stormed across the clouds demanding the spirit's attention. "I'm serious. I failed. If anything I've only managed to bring her and Seana closer." She couldn't refrain from curling her lips while spat out Seana's name. "You must send someone else."

"Will you cease flailing about?" Grace implored her. "New York is still digging themselves out from your last tantrum. Three days. You've wasted three days hiding up here and behind your cart down there. Why? She's tried to make contact. Invited you over to study and you resisted. You only have two days left. Tell me you have a plan?"

"No plan," Lilly fussed. "If I had a plan would I be begging you to send someone else? There is less than a day and a half left. Please Grace we must save her."

"I have faith in you." Grace asserted before sending Lilly back down to Earth and her stinky little hot dog cart.

"Crap." Lilly fumed when the steam hit her.

"Most people say good morning," a familiar voice nervously squeaked out.

Lilly's jaw dropped when she found Rose standing in front of her. "Sorry," she gulped. "Haven't had my coffee yet. I'm positively a bear first thing. Good morning. Want some Snickerdoodles?"

"Even my sweet tooth can't handle that this early," Rose laughed lightly. "I'll stick to my donut." She babbled holding up a frosted confection treat.

"Oh?" Lilly couldn't hold her laugh at bay. "Yeah, that is so much better. Uhm, any chance you're free tonight?" Her heart sank when Rose's face fell. "Right. Night before Valentines Day. You're busy. My bad."

"Sorry," Rose sadly blinked. "I have things to take care of." She continued in a distant voice.

"Hey," Lilly cleared her throat. "Tomorrow is a big day. Hearts, flowers and all that stuff." She silently added bank heist. "Don't do anything you'll regret." She tossed out in a blasé manner even as her entire being was filled with dread.

"It's just," Rose's voice drifted off. "Tomorrow is a busy day at the bank. We have this ridiculously big drop off and I'm going on vacation not long after that. Seana says it is a well earned vacation."

"You don't sound so sure," Lilly cautioned.

"Less and less," Rose absently responded not really focusing on Lilly. "I was. Now I'm so confused." She confessed lifting her eyes meeting Lilly's worried gaze.

"Then don't do it," Lilly breathlessly stressed.

"It's too late," Rose swallowed hard.

"No," Lilly wanted to crawl out of her skin. "It isn't. You just need to follow your heart."

"Can't," Rose woefully countered. "It'll just betray me. Always does. I guess this is goodbye."

"Doesn't have to be," Lilly frantically pushed.

"Lilly," Rose shook her head suddenly not following the conversation. "I told you. I'm with someone."

"Do you trust her?" Lilly pursed her lips feeling like she was dying all over again.

"Of course I do," Rose snapped.

"As much as you trust yourself?" Lilly demanded. "Look inside yourself. You know who you really are. This isn't you."

"How dare you?" Rose fumed tossing her donut in the trash. "You don't even know me. And you don't know what you are talking about. I have to go."

Lilly watched in horror as Rose stomped across the street. She clenched her fist in fury.

"Permission to use bad language?" She shouted towards the heavens. She released a growl when no response seemed to be forthcoming. "What?" She barked at some poor man who approached the cart. She narrowed her gaze when he held out a bill. "Are you kidding me? Do you know

what's in these things? Go get a plate of eggs like a normal person!" She shouted shooing the confused man away. "Twenty-four hours?" She wanted to cry.

"That's right sweetness," Seana purred suddenly appearing beside her. "Well more like twenty-nine and fifty-four minutes. But who's counting? The armored car will arrive tomorrow morning. During the lunch break when most of the staff is off running last minute errands for their special someone, Rose will duck into the vault. She'll fill the bag with money. Slip it out right under everyone's nose. Duck out the back door and deliver it along with her soul to me. Of course she'll be caught with the cameras in the vault recording her crime. You didn't even try. I was hoping from more. Pity, still a soul is a soul."

"Piss off!" Lilly shouted almost spitting on Seana.

"Such language?" Seana laughed. "And you wonder why you haven't earned your wings yet?"

"Listen you cloven hoofed twit," Lilly slowly drew out. "You haven't won. Not yet. She's already doubting you. If I have to jump in front of that bullet to save her, I will."

"You're already dead," Seana tried to reason with her. "Well sort of. As for dear sweet Rose not trusting me, I resolved any doubts she was harboring over the past couple of nights. I was hoping not having to hit the sheets with her. You made that unavoidable. Sorry Dear, I know you fancied her. But business is business."

"You're evil," Lilly gasped.

"Uh, yeah," Seana dryly confirmed. "That might explain why I hacked up my family all those years ago."

"Why did you do that?" Lilly asked before she could think better of it.

"They were home," Seana eerily responded. "I was having a bad day. Don't fret. I'll make certain Rose isn't lonely in Hell." Then in a blink of an eye she was gone.

"Does being a bitch go with the job?" Lilly shouted at the empty street. "What am I going to do?" She whimpered burying her face in her hands. "Grace!" She looked up and down the street almost bursting into tears when nothing happened. "Come on? I've screwed this up. Just like always. Please there must be someone else? Grace?"

By the time the sun had set Grace had yet to make an appearance. Lilly's throat was raw from her constant pleading. Still no Grace. Only George appeared to collect the cart. "Wait," she begged him. "What am I to do? By tomorrow morning it will be too late."

"You are to stay tonight," George informed her.

"Hold on?" She gasped rummaging in her pocket pulling out the limited amount of cash she had made that day. Business was far from good, not a big surprise since she spent most of the day shouting at the heavens. "Where?"

"Don't know," George shrugged. "You're running out of time. As you said tomorrow is too late. Best get moving." Then he and the cart were gone.

"Now what?" She wrapped her arms around her shivering body. She looked around finding no answers. It wouldn't be the first time she had slept on the streets. It would be the first time she needed to figure out a way to save someone's life. She wanted to cry. It was too much knowing that she had failed. It happened so quickly. She had mistakenly worn her heart on her sleeve and Rose was going to pay the ultimate price for Lilly's stupidity. "I'm missing something." She tried to bolster her courage her body trembling harder from the icy winds.

"Lilly?" She heard Rose's voice calling to her.

She spun around to find the attractive woman looking at her with fear in her eyes. "Are you alright?" Rose tenderly questioned stepping closer to the frazzled Lilly. "You've been acting really strange today."

"I'm just way out of sorts," Lilly moaned fixing her hat hoping to keep the wind at bay. "Ever feel like everything is coming apart?"

"Constantly," Rose nodded seeming to understand Lilly's plight. "Where are you heading? I see the cart is gone."

"Good question," Lilly almost laughed at the absurdity of the situation.

"You don't have anywhere to stay?" Rose trembled.

"I'm kind of on the outs with the people I've been staying with," Lilly fussed. "I got into trouble again."

"Do you have any money?" Rose pressed inching just a little closer. Her eyes widening when Lilly held out her limited funding. "Lilly that might get you a phone call these days. I can't just leave you here. You're coming home with me."

"I couldn't," Lilly started to protest when she realized it was a smashing idea. "Okay."

"Come on," Rose jutted out her chin while digging her cell phone out from her pocket.

Lilly wanted to gloat as she listened to the shouting match Rose and Seana were engaged in. Finally Rose snapped her phone off and shoved it in her pocket. "She's not happy?" Lilly smirked following Rose up the stairs that led to Rose's apartment.

"No," Rose grumbled shoving her key in the lock.

"I could," Lilly began not certain how to end her sentence.

"Don't be silly," Rose sighed heavily ushering the freezing Lilly into her apartment. "She'll get over it. I couldn't leave you out there. The temperature is going to drop below freezing tonight. Plus Seana and I are leaving tomorrow."

"Right," Lilly pursed her lips pausing for a moment. "On vacation."

"That's right, vacation," Rose quietly agreed quickly cleaning up a stack of papers that were sitting on the coffee table.

"Don't bother," Lilly waved off Rose's frantic actions. "It's not like I can read them." She shrugged knowing full well that Rose was trying to hide her plans for tomorrow's robbery.

"Sorry," Rose quietly conceded with a guilty look in her eyes. "I'll just get dinner started."

"You don't have to feed me," Lilly almost broke down.

"When was the last time you ate?" Rose demanded planting her hands firmly on her hips.

"Don't know," Lilly shrugged.

"That's what I was afraid of," Rose curtly responded. "Sit. And after dinner we'll work on the alphabet again."

"Why bother?" Lilly grimly replied.

"I won't have you giving up on yourself," Rose demanded stressing her point by wagging her finger at Lilly. "Now take your coat off and get warm."

"Yes, Ma'am," Lilly shrank back more than a little frightened. "Geez who knew she could be so tough?" She mumbled after Rose had disappeared into the kitchen.

"You know this a very small apartment," Rose bellowed from the kitchen. "I can hear you."

"And still you don't listen to me," Lilly effectively countered.

"Listen to you." Rose sputtered emerging from the kitchen. "You haven't been making any sense. And I could swear that you're lying to me half the time." She threw up her hands in defeat.

"Most of the time," Lilly corrected her. "Because I can't tell you the whole truth anymore than you can tell me."

Rose parted her lips to speak. The words seemingly unable to come. Instead she shook her head and darted back into the kitchen. They shared a silent meal. After they shared the task of cleaning up, Rose broke out some books. The only words they exchanged were related to

furthering Lilly's education. Despite the stilted silence they were drowning in Lilly's impish nature snuck out.

"I can't believe you," Rose gasped holding up the sheet of paper Lilly had just finished scribbling on. "Your speech sounds like you went to Harvard. Yet, the first words you choose to pen should be in Playboy. This is disgusting." Rose waved the paper at the smirking Lilly.

"Not if you do it right," Lilly couldn't resist teasing Rose. "And as for the way I speak. Anyone can mimic what they see and hear. Monkey see, monkey do. I just listen very well."

"Don't put yourself down," Rose scolded her. "I can't imagine having your courage."

"Courage?" Lilly dismissed the compliment. "Not me. I just know who I am and accept it."

"And I don't?" Rose demanded in a stern voice.

"I don't think that you do," Lilly treaded carefully. "You don't seem to appreciate the truly giving woman that you are. You don't see how beautiful you are. I think you're the one who hasn't looked in the mirror for a long time. Me, I'm just a street kid. Always was. If not for saving a lost puppy once, I'd probably be stoking the fires in Hell right now. I see you and I am in awe. Your beauty and grace takes my breath away. And despite the fact that I do not like or respect the person you have chosen, I do respect that you are spoken for. I don't like it. But I respect it. I just wish I could see self-respect in your eyes. Now aren't you glad you gave me a place to crash tonight?"

"Who are you?" Rose sighed leaning back on the sofa just staring at the curious woman next to her.

"Me?" Lilly smiled her heart swelling from the look of sheer adoration in Rose's eyes. "I fell from heaven."

"The truth?" Rose pleaded.

"It is as much truth as I am allowed to share with you," Lilly earnestly answered fighting to keep her hands by her sides. It was far too tempting to just reach out and touch Rose. To give into the strange feelings that had been clouding her judgment since the first moment Rose began clamoring about the cookies, Lilly was pretending to sell. "Okay, I didn't fall from heaven. More like popped in from the heavens. By way of Chicago."

"You know sometimes your sense of humor is positively enchanting," Rose mulled over. "Other times it is annoying as all get out."

"I vote for enchanting," Lilly chimed in snatching up her pencil. "Now teach me how to spell it."

"It is far more eloquent than the other words you insist on torturing me with," Rose laughed heartily. "First, e." Her motion cut off by a loud banging at her front door. "Now who can that be?"

"Three guesses, the first two don't count," Lilly snarled as Rose got up and answered the door. "Seana." She groaned. "I told you we couldn't get together tonight."

Seana dismissed Rose's objection and burst into the apartment. "Lilly?" She snarled her eyes gleaming with a fiery red.

"Seana? What a pleasant surprise?" Lilly egged the demon on.

"Wait? You two know each other?" Rose demanded as she stepped into the room just as the blondes began a standoff.

"Oh I got her number," Seana growled her eyes turning a deep shade of red.

"And I have yours," Lilly boasted. "Six-six-six."

"That's just a myth," Seana hissed her eyes dimming as Rose approached.

"I know," Lilly smiled. "Still I might just have some holy water in my back pocket. Care to test that theory?" Lilly's smile grew brighter when Seana flinched.

"She can't stay!" Seana turned towards the very confused Rose.

"I beg your pardon?" Rose was furious. There was no mistaking the chilly tone. "This is my home. I say who stays and who goes."

"For now," Seana slowly drew out brushing her fingers against Rose's cheek. Lilly wanted to cheer when Rose jerked away from Seana's touch. "Rose? Tomorrow is a big day. We have a lot we could be doing."

"I don't mind watching," Lilly taunted.

"They certainly bend the rules these days," Seana sneered at the smug Lilly.

"You'd be surprised," Lilly wiggled her fair eyebrows playfully. "Hey speaking of rules? Born from the darkness and so you shall dwell,"

"Stop," Seana eerily hissed.

"I was just getting started," Lilly merrily informed the demon.

"Okay," Rose stepped between them pushing Seana towards the door. "Now before the battle of the blondes gets out of control, Seana go home. I'll see you tomorrow."

"Yes, go home," Lilly gleefully encouraged. "Satan is waiting."

"Always room for one more," Seana seethed just before Rose slammed the door in her face.

Rose stood there opening and closing her mouth several times before speaking. "What in the hell was that all about?" She finally spewed out waving her hands about. "No, don't tell me. You can't say."

"Wish I could," Lilly sighed. "It would make things a lot easier."

"Insanity much be catching," Rose rubbed her throbbing temple. "I'm going to bed. And before you get any naughty ideas there are blankets in that closet. Good night."

"Good night, Rose," Lilly nodded. "Uhm, just so you know. No matter what happens tomorrow, I wanted to thank you for everything. You truly have a beautiful soul."

"Thank you," Rose muttered. "Are you a cop or something?"

"Me?" Lilly laughed. "No, met a few in my day. They were usually chasing me."

"Now that I can believe," Rose snorted. "Maybe I'm hallucinating? Good night." She repeated before disappearing into her bedroom.

Lilly sighed deeply still fearful that in the morning Rose will take the duffle bag that was sitting by the sofa and make a horrible mistake.

"Interesting approach," Grace's voice stirred her from her musings.

"Oh now you show up," Lilly snarled turning towards the spirit. "As for my approach, best I could come up with on such short notice. Come tomorrow one or both of us will be dead. The question is are we both heading in the same direction."

"Nothing is certain when it comes to humans," Grace sighed. "Was this all part of a plan? Ending up here, getting into a direct conflict with one of the devil's minions and falling in love with your charge."

"I didn't plan on it happening," Lilly helplessly sputtered.

"Which part?" Grace softly questioned.

"All of it," Lilly bit back the tears. "Why did I fall in love with her? I thought that sort of thing didn't happen."

"We sent you here as a human," Grace tenderly confided. "Complete with all the weaknesses, strengths and emotions. When you spied upon her in the heavens it was like peering through a

spy glass. The images distorted and distant. Here as you are now, there is no distortion just who you are and who she is."

"So, if I had met her back in the nineteenth century I would have fallen just as hard?" Lilly laughed at the cruelty of her quandary.

"Harder," Grace regretfully confessed. "Might have kept you off that beer wagon."

"Again it was a party," Lilly pouted. "Who am I kidding? For her? I wouldn't have been dancing in the streets. I would have been dancing somewhere private. Just the two of us. Then again back then we could have gotten hung for that sort of thing. She would have been worth it though."

"She's on the edge," Grace tried to comfort her. "You could have your wings."

"I don't care about my wings," Lilly snapped. "All I care about is saving her." Suddenly Grace was gone. "Where did you go?" She spun around halting her motion when she discovered Rose looking at her. "Oh this just gets better."

"Were you talking to someone?" Rose tentatively questioned. "I thought I heard you speaking to someone."

"Just myself," Lilly whimpered knowing that Rose was already doubting her sanity. "I thought it might help me sort things out."

"Did it?" Rose sincerely questioned.

"No," Lilly slumped down onto the sofa. "Before you ask, no I'm not on medication. Nor do I need to be."

"Lilly, everyone talks to themselves," Rose reassured her. "So long as no one answers it's all good."

"Nope no voices," Lilly laughed. "Just little old mixed up me."

"Did you really save a puppy?" Rose surprised Lilly with the strange question.

"Yes," Lilly answered honestly. "He fell in a well. Poor little guy just kept yelping. I had to do something."

"You do that a lot? Just jump in when you think someone needs your help?" Rose shyly asked picking at her robe.

"Yeah," Lilly wearily sighed. "Can't help myself. I just do. Usually gets me into trouble. That and my fascination with cleavage. Like I said, can't help myself."

"I've shared that blind spot once or twice," Rose smiled still picking at her robe. "I was really young when I realized that I was gay. After that moment I felt like I was letting everyone down. I still feel like that. Now that is screwed up. Talk about your after school special."

"That's why you don't take risks," Lilly finally understood. "Your life doesn't work on paper. Rose, no one's life does. That's all a part of living. Having said that. You shouldn't do something that isn't in you. The biggest risk sometimes is just staying true to yourself."

"What if you no longer know who that is?" Rose feebly argued.

"Look inside yourself," Lilly prompted praying with all her heart Rose would heed her words.

"Right trust my heart," Rose scoffed.

"It'll bite you in the ass more times than not," Lilly agreed. "At the end of the day it is all you have. There you go. Words of wisdom from your friendly neighborhood street urchin."

"I . . ." Rose began suddenly falling silent. "Good night." She offered once again before hiding behind her bedroom door.

"Please, save her," she fell on her knees praying.

When the sun rose Lilly grabbed her coat and hat and darted out of the apartment. There was only one thing left to do. It wasn't a grand gesture. More of a heartfelt prayer. With the last few pennies she held she did what she needed to do. Lilly arrived at the bank just as the armored car was pulling away. She had so little time left and there truly was nothing left for her to do. All she could muster was goodbye.

She clutched her treasure tightly against her chest weaving around the patrons and employees. She ignored the strange looks she was receiving as she sped at a determined pace towards the back row of cubicles.

"Lilly?" Rose beamed when the blonde barged into her cubicle. "I was worried. I woke up and found you gone."

"I had something I needed to do," Lilly blushed shoving the bouquet of multicolored flowers into Rose's hand. "I needed to say goodbye. I know I wasn't the one you wanted. But you touched me. Oh and here." She concluded handing the stunned woman a package of Snickerdoodles. "Those are the right ones right? S- N- I," she shakily began to spell out running her finger along the package. "C- K," she paused with a hard swallow. "E- R- double O- D - L - E again and S again." She was out breath once she finally managed to enunciate each letter.

"You are going to make me cry," Rose sniffed clutching the package of cookies and bundle of flowers to her chest.

"Oh, no, no, no crying," Lilly frantically pleaded. "You cry and I'll start crying. I'm pretty sure they're already calling security. You know the crazy wiener lady storming into the bank and all. Please don't cry."

"Okay, no crying," Rose brushed an errant tear from her cheek. "Thank you."

"Happy Valentines Day," Lilly choked out. "I pray that it will be just one of many. I have to go."

"Wait?" Rose called after her. "Just like that? Flower me and run?"

"It's almost lunchtime," Lilly informed her in an ominous tone. "We could go get something to eat."

"I can't," Rose blanched. "There is something I have to do."

"I'm so sorry to hear that," Lilly's head fell. "If you change your mind. I'll be at my usual spot on the sidewalk."

Lilly was crestfallen as she slumped her way out of the bank. With each step she prayed that Rose would call out suddenly changing her mind. By the time Lilly reached her cart she had to accept that she had failed. She stood there serving hotdogs and watching the bank. She knew that she wouldn't see Rose when she made her exit. Still she watched hoping and praying even after the sun had set.

"Why?" She shook her head slamming the steel lid down on the steamer. Before burying her face in her hands.

"Why what?" Rose's curious tone disrupting her misery.

Lilly couldn't believe her eyes when she spotted Rose standing in front of the cart. "Why do these suckers stink so badly but taste so good?" She sputtered in an effort to cover up her error.

"You're lying," Rose challenged her with mischievous grin.

"No, I'm not," Lilly huffed. "Stand back here. The stench is disgusting." Rose challenged her with a determined look. "What makes you think I'm lying?"

"Your lips are moving," Rose snorted with delight. "By any chance are you free tonight?"

"I thought you were going on vacation?" Lilly bounced up and down unable to curb her excitement.

"It's canceled, permanently," Rose groaned. "Not all vacations. Just this one. That's what I had to do at lunchtime. Call Seana and tell her goodbye. She didn't take it very well. Honestly she scared me just a little. So about tonight?"

"George?" Lilly choked out as he approached. Now she felt horrible. She was happy that Rose was safe. And miserable because it meant their time together was over. He cleared his throat. "Saint George." She whispered for his benefit.

"What did you call him?" Rose questioned.

"Long story." Lilly cringed.

"Seems to be a trend with you," Rose smiled. "So about tonight?" She repeated.

"I," Lilly stammered unable to say the words.

"Better get going before the lady changes her mind," George interrupted.

"What?" Lilly gaped at him. "I can go?"

"Is there a reason why you can't?" Rose nervously questioned.

"Thousands," Lilly furrowed her brow. "But the boss said it is okay. The boss did say it is okay, George?"

"Yes," George laughed.

"Let's go before they change their minds," Lilly squealed tossing her filthy apron at the unsuspecting saint.

"You are a curious woman," Rose gaped at her before claspng Lilly by the hand and guiding her towards her home. "What was that business with that fellow George?" Rose question once they entered her apartment.

"In my business it is all about titles," Lilly giggled. "But they are really, really hard to earn. So it is understandable."

"And because he is your boss you call him Saint George?" Rose failed to understand the joke. "Wasn't he the saint who slew a dragon?"

"That would be him," Lilly answered with complete honesty.

"Why do I get the feeling you always have your own private joke going?" Rose laughed.

"Because I do," Lilly once again answered honestly. "I really want to kiss you."

"Then why are you standing way over there?" Rose beckoned her with a crook of her finger.

"Good question," Lilly was mesmerized by the smoldering gaze in Rose's eyes. She closed the distance between them. Reaching up she clasped Rose's face in her hands and drew her closer.

Her heart swelled when their lips met in a shy promising kiss. Lilly's knees were shaking when the tender kiss ended.

"I have a better question," Rose stammered brushing her thumb against the back of Lilly's hand. "Are we going to make love?"

"Do you want to?" Lilly could barely get the words out. Everything she desired and wanted from her life was standing before her. She was terrified that she was about to screw things up again.

"I would sell my soul just to touch you," Rose vowed.

"Oh don't say that," Lilly squeaked out. "Sometimes a simple yes is best."

"Yes," Rose smiled before capturing Lilly in a searing kiss.

Lilly forgot how to breathe or think as she put everything she had into that one kiss. The feel of Rose's fingers playing with the nape of her neck was making her body hum with desire. "Oh, I forgot how good this feels," she gasped when they finally parted.

"How long has it been?" Rose murmured against her neck.

"Don't go there," Lilly pleaded lacing her fingers through Rose's long dark hair.

"Right you can't tell me," Rose whispered her hot breath tickling Lilly's skin.

"I can now," Lilly whimpered clinging to Rose. "If I do you'll be calling those nice men in white coats to come and get me."

"Uhm, what?" Rose looked up meeting Lilly's smoky gaze.

"I'm trying to be honest," Lilly confessed slipping her hands beneath Rose's coat. "Speaking of honesty. Would it be too forward of me to request that we go into your bedroom and very slowly undress one another? Make mad passionate love until divine intervention forces us to stop?" Lilly pleaded slipping Rose's coat off her shoulders allowing the garment to fall to the floor.

Rose responded by brushing her fingers against Lilly's cheek. Kissing her tenderly before taking her by the hand and leading her into the bedroom. Lilly silently acknowledged that sometimes words are just unnecessary. She stood there trembling watching Rose's hands drifting along her body, her clothing slipping to the floor. The only sounds in the room was their labored breath.

Lilly could feel her desire escaping her, painting her quivering thighs. Her lover slowly removed each article of clothing until the blonde stood before her completely exposed. Rose stole a kiss, brushing the tips of her fingers across Lilly's shoulders. Lilly stood there enjoying the feel of her skin prickling. Rose's fingers drifted lower teasing Lilly's arms until the smaller woman reached out, taking her turn at revealing Rose's body to her eager gaze.

"I thought I had seen heaven before," Lilly whispered in astonishment when she cast the last remnant of clothing across the room. "I was mistaken." She confessed running her fingers up along Rose's naked torso.

"How do you know just how to touch me?" Rose gasped.

"I know everything about you," Lilly whispered nuzzling her face between the valley of Rose's ample breasts. "And nothing at all." She concluded gliding her tongue along the swell of the Rose's breasts.

"Lilly," Rose whispered her hands roaming down Lilly's back pulling her closer.

Lilly emitted a sensual growl her tongue sweeping against Rose's erect nipple. She slowly circled the bud; coaxing and teasing it. Rose's thigh pressed against her aching need. She captured the bud between her lips; suckling it feverously, her lover's flesh gently stroking her engorged nub.

Lilly could feel her body moving. She suckled her lover hard; teasing her with her teeth and her tongue. She moaned when the back of her knees struck the mattress. Rose gently guided her down, Lilly still clinging to her lover's breast feasting upon her as she came to rest on the bed. She released a feral moan feeling Rose's body coming to rest on top of her own.

Their bodies fit together perfectly. Hands roamed in urgent exploration. Lilly arched against Rose's firm thigh. Rolling her hips in a desperate need to quell her aching need. "I want you so much," Rose whispered hotly in her ear. Lilly was helpless to refuse slipping her thigh between Rose's legs and releasing a fierce growl when she felt her lover's wetness greeting her touch.

They rocked against one another in a wild rhythm. Lilly smothering a cry of sheer pleasure. Glancing up watching her lover looming over her. Rose's face flushed with desire, the veins in her neck bulging and her body thrusting harder. Lilly's body clenched. Her mind spun out of control. Rose's hand slipped between their bodies; caressing and teasing. "So wet," Rose cried out parting Lilly.

Lilly wrapped her legs around Rose's gyrating body struggling to hold on. Reaching up she clasped her lover tightly guiding her towards her until she was tasting Rose's velvet tongue slipping between her lips. Kissing deeply. Rose's fingers danced against Lilly's throbbing clit. Lilly's head fell back as her lover slipped inside of her stroking her long and hard. Bright crimson colors flashed through her mind. The feel of Rose's kisses drifting down her body.

"Rose," she stammered glancing down to find her lover happily nestled between her thighs. She fought to keep her eyes focused. Rose's warm breath caressing her thighs. Her long fingers plunging deeper inside of her. Rose's tongue flickered against Lilly and she was undone. Lilly was lost in a haze. The world vanishing and only the feeling of pure bliss comforting her.

She happily blinked her eyes open realizing that her lover was licking the drops of wetness from her quivering thighs. "Oh no," she croaked out when Rose seemed determine to continue her feast. "Come here!" She asserted needing to sate her desire to pleasure her lover.

"I wasn't done," Rose whimpered and pouted.

"I need to touch you," Lilly pleaded; smiling when Rose nestled beside her. "You're so beautiful." She whispered her hands raking down along Rose's sinewy body. She took her time touching every inch of Rose's slender form. She had to commit every curve and each freckle to memory. The memory of this night would stay with her for eternity. Her fingers memorizing all of Rose, taunting and teasing her lover until she was begging for more. Lilly held Rose in a fiery look. Not wanting to miss the look on her lover's face when she fell over the edge. Lilly held her prisoner; dipping into her wetness slowly stroking her pulsating clit.

The wild look plastered on Rose's face tugged at her heart. She slipped inside of her lover gently waiting. Slowly plunging in and out. Committing each gasp and tremble to memory. She drove Rose higher. Ebbing her touch when she felt the walls tightening. Then teasing her once again before finally guiding her over the edge. Rose's body still shaking as Lilly kissed her way down. Smiling when the sweet nectar greeted her. Lilly's fingers wiggling inside of Rose's warm wet center. Her tongue peeking out. Her mind swirling when she tasted her lover for the first time.

Lilly pleased Rose with everything she had. Feasting upon her while her nimble fingers plunged deeper. Her own body convulsing as her lover's passion spilled over her. It wasn't enough. Lilly never wanted to stop. Finally Rose's pleas for mercy curbed her zeal. She kissed her way back up Rose's tantalizing body. She rested her body on top of her lover's listening to the steady beating of her heart.

"Ah hem," was grunted in the darkness.

"Oh this is bad," Lilly yelled when she spied Grace lurking in the corner of the room. "Uhm, Hi." She stammered climbing off her slumbering lover. "Do I have to go now?" She pleaded.

"No," Grace just smiled at her. "You have a choice."

"I do?" Lilly carefully said.

"Yes, you do," Grace smiled once again. "You've more than earned your wings. You can return and spend eternity as an angel. Or you can stay. You'll have no memory of heaven. Your memories will be close to the rather flimsy tales you have spun for Rose's benefit. Of course we'll file all the documents and papers to back up your memories."

"You can do that?" Lilly gushed.

"We do it all time," Grace sighed.

"Really?"

"No," Grace smirked. "Me do paperwork? See I can have a sense of humor. You'll remember everything. It is a part of who you are. I wouldn't recommend telling anyone."

"No, kidding," Lilly scoffed. "If I hadn't met her this way, would we have even noticed one another?"

"Of, course," Grace sternly asserted. "In fact you were quite taken with her former self."

"I don't understand."

"I told you that if you had met during your life you would have fallen in love with her. In fact you did. Rose in every lifetime has never believed in herself. Until now."

"Who was she?" Lilly demanded.

"Audrey," Grace smiled once again.

"I adored her," Lilly confessed. "She never gave me a second glance."

"Yes, she did," Grace quickly corrected her. "She just didn't trust her heart. Now it is up to you. If we send you back she'll have no memory of Seana or you. But she will have a newfound sense of herself. It is entirely up to you. If you stay be warned that Seana will not go away quietly."

"Yeah, I kind of guessed she isn't the forgiving type," Lilly grumbled glancing down at Rose's slumbering body. "Look at her." Lilly gushed. "How can I leave her? I want to stay."

"I had a feeling," Grace snickered. "It is done." She whispered before vanishing.

"What are you doing up?" Rose whispered.

"I don't know," Lilly laughed at herself. "Just admiring you and wondering how I ever got this lucky."

"Then come back to bed you fool," Rose murmured. Lilly didn't question she simply climbed back to bed and into her lover's waiting arms.

"Happy Valentines Day," she cooed softly kissing her lover tenderly.

"One of many," Rose moaned her hands gliding to Lilly's body. "Then again this one ain't over yet."

"Ah, this is why I like you so much," Lilly laughed straddling Rose's body. "That and your amazingly good taste in cookies."

"Come here you nut," Rose laughed capturing her lover in a tender embrace.

The End.

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