

A Cold Day
By Adnan Virk

“I don’t know what to do... I think he suspects something.”

Jenal shook her head in disbelief and sighed. She tried to spring up off the couch, but the stern gaze from the significantly older therapist sitting across the room somehow stopped her from standing up.

“Please Jenal, go on,” Camillia assured her. “This is why you came to me, isn’t it? You know I have a vow of silence.”

Jenal sighed heavily and lay back on the couch. Even as she was baring her soul, she had no clue what she was going to do. She’d always been the calm and rational one, never the one to panic. Why was this so different?

How could I betray him like that?

“So, Jenal, what do you think possessed you to behave in such a...” Camilla trailed off, trying to come up with an adjective.

Horrible? Immoral? Reprehensible? Any of them work for ya?

“...manner?”

You think I haven’t asked myself that about a thousand times already?

“I wish I knew,” Jenal muttered. “It was just something that happened... I don’t know how or why but it was just a moment of... moral weakness? I mean we all make mistakes, I’m only demon.”

“Hmm,” Camillia murmured as she scribbled into her notepad. Glancing up towards the clock, she remarked. “I think that about wraps it up.”

“It’s been an hour already?” Jenal cried in confusion, climbing to her feet. “I really need some help here!”

“I’m here to listen, and I’m more than happy to continue listening Jenal, but I’m not an advisor.” Camillia admonished. “However... if you *really* want some of my advice...”

“I do... please.”

“I’d simply say,” she said thoughtfully while leaning in, as if afraid of someone overhearing. “Stop behaving this way. Personally, off the record of course, I think it’s immoral, so just stop with this twisted and bizarre... *monogamy*... you’re secretly practicing.”

“If only it were that easy,” Jenal sighed, brushing her auburn hair out of her eyes and crimson-red forehead and neatly tucking it behind one of the two horns protruding from her forehead.

Jenal burst out of the main door of the stalagmite-black skyscraper and hurried out onto the sidewalk. With nary a consideration for those around, she plunged into the crowd of various red-skinned two-horned bystanders going about their business. She peered around at all others as she stopped at the crosswalk. All of them, some short, some tall, some stocky, some thin, some with thin long horns and yet others with thick short horns, wore shades of apple-red skin.

The faint tint of red the sky usually sported seemed gloomier than usual, like a little bit of black had been muddled into the usual soup of sky, making it unusually littered with maroon-red clouds. The dozens of black and gray skyscrapers stretched their gigantic necks up into the red sky, refusing to be daunted by the clouds. Looking upwards, she couldn't help but wonder, for a split second, *why* the sky was red. It had always been that way as far as she knew.

She stared blankly as the little horned figure on the WALK sign as it lit into existence, giving all those at the crosswalk their cue to move. People crowded into her, bumping left and right. She'd always hated the city during rush hour, so she was naturally relieved when she finally managed to escape it by slipping into the park.

Staring across Purgatory Park was a beautiful sight. It was an amazing contrast to the city, an exercise in the peaceful and the serene, an unending virtual river of eye-straining bright red blades of grass. She smiled faintly watching darker red bare-chested children, not quite grown into their horns yet, dive into swimming pools of lava and magma. Their cries of glee and happiness brought back many a fond memory of this majestic park.

She'd always loved the park, even as a child, when her father and his mistress would play with her and teach her to fly kites and effective ways to burn down other children's kites. She'd had a grand childhood, and she loved her parents for instilling such strong values in her.

For Jenal did not live in any ordinary area of residence. She lived in a place dominated by the red fire and the black ash. It was a land where what's right is wrong and what's wrong is right. It was a place called Hell.

Nobody knew for sure how and when the kingdom was formed, although there were various rumors floating around. Some said that their glorious leader got cast out of some glowing kingdom up high in the mountains and formed Hell as a rival one. Others said the first inhabitants of Hell were people who'd been banished to live in torment for all of eternity as punishment for something. Jenal personally didn't believe that one, since the people of Hell weren't eternal. The average lifespan was roughly 100, although their leader had been alive far longer, possibly lending a bit of validity to that theory. For all its denizens knew, Hell simply *was*. At this moment, Hell simply *is*.

Her parents had brought her up as a purist, as a believer in what was, is, and will be, in right and in wrong. All her life, like most, she was brought up and taught the essential skills of growing up such as the basic Commandments of Hell, such as "Thou Shalt Steal" and "Thou Shalt Kill." As she moved through the ranks at school, she remembered loving her Lying Technique classes. She'd been the first of her class to have a live kill, much to the chagrin of the males. She'd taken great pains to avoid falling into the horrid trap of kindness and charity. There would always be the occasional rebellious teenager indulging in those vices, but she took great glee in helping uncover them, even going so far as to behead a few of them herself. All in all, she had always been a stand-up citizen of Hell.

When she and her husband Trent had first met, at the tender age of 16, the pure lust flowed between them like honey from a bee. After all lust, along with convenience, were the only real reasons to get married anyways. Anything else, such as "love," would be considered highly immoral and the perpetrators would no doubt be ostracized from the community and most likely killed a few days later. The possibilities of mistresses and

external affairs had been the source of endless of eager conversations between the two, since affairs were naturally expected to occur in any marriage. It was like a dream come to life.

So what happened to us, she wondered, as the hot wind whipped around her.
Where did it go wrong?

Truthfully, she knew exactly when it began to go wrong. It was about a year ago when the feelings of discontent started to sink in. She would watch Trenton and his mistress, Michelle, fucking like rabbits on the couch... and she started to feel something. It was something bizarre and above all *scary*. She couldn't quite put her finger on it, but for the first time, she felt uncomfortable. It made her leave the room (they didn't notice).

The next incident came some time later, while walking homewards. As she swooped down the street, peering into an alleyway revealed an elder lady, roughly 70, being mugged by two teenage hooligans. At first she was admiring the teenagers' good moral character. Then, as if a horrid cloud had passed over her, she couldn't help but pity the woman. For an instant, she *almost* went to help the lady. Luckily the thoughts were only fleeting as she came to her senses soon enough and actually knocked the woman out so the teenagers could ransack her purse easier. However, that little feeling had kept her lying awake the entire night. Eventually, she managed to dismiss it as nothing more than an aberration.

Now, however, she was faced with the spine-tingling prospect that perhaps there had been something more to those feelings. After all, she could say she was a moral person until the fire-breathing dragons come home, but actions did speak louder than words, didn't they? The temptation to sin... it just overwhelmed her. One day, when she was taking a trip for an extra-marital rendezvous, this insane idea had popped into her head. What if she stayed true to her husband? What if she kept herself for him and only him? He would appreciate it, right? Even if he didn't know, it would make her feel better, right?

I'm an idiot, she thought, matter-of-factly.

"Honey, I'm home." Jenal declared, glancing around the room and realizing that he was apparently not around. Her coat sunk off of her shoulders and plopped to the ground. She made no effort to pick it up. It was only a few paces before she was in the kitchen. Their little abode was hardly spacious, although it was certainly cozy. Everything seemed to be within a few feet from everything else. The jagged hand-carved walls wore various pictures and paintings of buildings on fires, bones, dismembered bodies, and other related images. The living room was hardly a room of its own, as its black couches served as the only barrier between it and the tiny kitchen.

With a sigh she flung open a cabinet and snatched out a bottle and cup. Pouring her drink, she couldn't help wondering... what happened to her? Why was she thinking this way? Monogamy? What would Trent think if he ever found out!?

I can't believe I'm even thinking about this, it's just too much!

With a scream, she hurled her cup to the wall, where it shattered into a thousand different pieces.

"What in Lucifer's name was that!?" came a husky voice from somewhere out of sight.

Jenal watched, slightly amused and a tad horrified, as the bedroom door on the far side of the room flung open. Out came a virtually nude, save for a sheet wrapped around his waist, tall, skinny, and somewhat haggard man, Jenal's husband Trent, stumbling around in panic.

"Honey, was that you?"

"Yeah Trent, was me," she responded despondently. She gave a half-hearted wave to the lady stepping out of the room behind Trent, who was buttoning her shirt back up. "Hiya 'Chelli, sorry to bother you two."

She'd become rather used to the idea of coming home to her husband and his proud mistress, just as he used to come home to her and her man on the side, which obviously wasn't the case these days. Michelle gave Jenal a sisterly hug before walking towards the door.

"Shall we do lunch next week?"

"Sure," Jenal responded, feeling strangely unenthusiastic about the idea for some reason.

"Listen, Jenal," Trent started, fumbling with his sheets, before finally just dropping them. "About your outside affair--"

"I know, I know honey... he's just really busy this week. I'll bring him by next week, I promise."

He eyed her for a second, and opened his mouth to speak... but hesitated, as if he had something else on his mind. Finally he simply nodded and plopped down on the chair, still nude, and began reading the paper. The front page bore a photo of a square-jawed black goateed intense eyed man, with the headline reading: SATAN: A WORTHY LEADER?

Tap... Tap... Tap...

Satan drummed his fingers against his desk methodically. With great difficulty, he raised his bloodshot red eyes up to level with those sitting before him. Perhaps he was imagining it, but it felt like they *shrunk* when he looked at them. Even he was able to sense the palpable fear emanating from the four sitting before him. All it really took was a simple look or glare from him to change the attitude of those around him. The confident became meek smears of nothingness. The arrogant became sniveling whimpering suck-ups. People chose their words carefully around him. They never said what they really thought... they couldn't afford to. A wrong look or the wrong word and they all knew a beheading awaited them. They knew their roles; they knew they existed solely to carry out his orders. They weren't advisors, they weren't consultants, and they didn't have any say in Hell policy, they were rather personal acolytes, or servants. Every decision, every atrocity, every news bullet of any interest to come out of Hell's regime was the sole and unflinching decision of its supreme leader, ruler, and dictator, Satan.

And he hated it.

Could maybe one of you give me a little advice? An opinion? Disagree with me for once? Warn me before I do something stupid, he silently admonished them in his head. *But you won't. You'll say the same things you always do. You'll agree with everything I say. You'll expect me to be your dictator.*

"Our lord... savior... illustrious leader..."

Here we go again, he thought to himself heavily.

“First on the agenda is the newspaper printing those statements about your-“

“What did they say?” Satan growled, doing his best to sound evil and menacing. At this point it was merely a force of habit that had become rather involuntary.

“Well, are words really that important?” asked one of the servants, clearly attempting to sidestep the issue. Satan inwardly rolled his eyes at the obvious pandering being shown, while outwardly keeping his intense gaze.

Just another day on the job, he thought ruefully.

“Tell me.”

The two men fearfully exchanged glances with each other, ready to break into a panic. The first tried to speak but couldn't get more than two words before sputtering into a completely incomprehensible gabble of words. Satan sighed and leaned forward suddenly to reach for something... scaring the daylights out of one of the servants, whose chair went teetering back and crashing to the floor.

“Please, spare me! SPARE ME!” he bellowed from the floor, wailing and shuddering in fear. Satan, with exasperation, reached past him to snatch the newspaper.

“How can we consider Satan to be a worthy leader?” Satan read aloud. “There has been a marked decrease in numbers killed and a clear recession of ruthless ambition. Dictator... or democratic puppet?” his voice trailed off, and he began rubbing his temples.

The men gaped at him, wide-eyed and nervous.

“What should we do oh glorious one?”

“Give us your order, and we'll make sure it's done!”

“Anything you say!”

“Listen,” he sighed... then had a thought. “What do *you* think I should do?”

Their heaps of sugar-coated proclamations came to a sudden halt. As soon as Satan had spoken the words, he instantly regretted it. He knew exactly what was going through their minds. The people wanted dictatorship, they wanted to be ruled, dictated, and ordered. Once a citizen of Hell had tried to set up a “group system” of leadership and an election... the people of Hell lynched him.

“B-But master-”

“Fine,” Satan interjected. He gave the order he knew the three advisors, as well as everybody else in Hell was waiting and expecting him to give. “Burn the newspaper factory to the ground and slaughter all the writers.”

Like a thunderclap, they launched into instant applause.

Useless, the whole lot of you.

“I don't know what to do. I feel like it's all just slipping away.”

Satan laid his hulking frame back into the plush couch, just as all of Camillia's patients did. He closed his eyes and tried to produce more words. Were his feelings on work just an irritation, or did they mean something? Why were the newspapers and others criticizing his ruthless aggression?

“Is there something wrong with the way I RULE!?” he yelled out, making even Camillia hop out of her couch. “Sorry.”

“Did you just... apologize to me?” she asked curiously, raising an eyebrow. His eyes opened wide with realization.

“I mean, no... I...” he stuttered for a moment, and then waved it off with his hands. “It was a joke.”

“Ok, fair enough, now tell me lord-“

“Don’t call me lord,” he muttered bitterly.

“Ok Mr... Satan,” she addressed him, scribbling something in her notebook. “I can call you Mr. Satan, right?”

“Am I crazy?” he asked suddenly, ignoring her question. “It seems like every week we get some new report about some bizarre soul out there who decided to start being kind, or honest, or something else like that. Don’t they know I’m doing the best I can under *really* difficult circumstances!? I’m under a lotta pressure here!”

“Well Mr. Satan... I certainly hadn’t heard about these reports-“

“Oh we kill any witnesses to them. But it’s more widespread than some people realize.”

“And how do you feel about that?”

“How do I feel... about that...” he mumbled to himself.

How DO I feel about that?

“Do you feel like you’re losing the people? Losing their confidence?”

“I don’t know. I’m doing the best I can.”

“Or are you the one who’s losing confidence? Perhaps both? Neither?”

“I’m supposed to be a leader. I’m supposed to set by ruthless example!” he rambled, climbing to his feet, oblivious of his surroundings. “Kill the most, lie convincingly, cheat, steal, maim, murder, death, kill! I’m supposed to do all that and more!”

“Isn’t that what you’ve always done?”

“Yes!”

“So what’s the problem?”

“What’s the problem, what’s the problem,” he muttered to himself in thought.

“The problem is I’m just so SICK OF IT ALL!”

It seemed to Satan as if the entire world around him halted. His own words came to him as a complete and utter shock, like a dagger had suddenly stabbed him.

At that very moment, the slightly ajar door rattled as a result of a loud thump, from the outside. Satan whipped around, eyes ablaze, squinting to see what made the noise

“Is someone there?” Camillia asked loudly, leaning forward to see.

What am I gonna do?

Jenal punched through the virtual barricade of people on the busy streets, obviously in a hurry.

I don’t even have an appointment... I just need to pick someone. Pick him, take him home, and say, Hi Trent, here he is! Just pick somebody!

Why was this so hard all of sudden? She never had a problem before. There was always enough people around in Hell, so why now? As if fate were answering her

question for her... a horrifying thought popped into her head, just as she arrived at her destination.

What if it wasn't just a moment of moral weakness!? WHAT IF THIS IS WHAT I REALLY WANT?

"I'm a monster."

She cautiously entered the building, to the musk of brand new carpet. Curiously, the receptionist desk, in all its clutter, was empty.

Well, she's the only person I can talk to about this, can't talk to anyone else, the looks they would give me, I couldn't even stand it! I've such a reputation to uphold; I can't face that, I just can't.

She whisked past the desk into the hallway, which seemed to stretch on forever with an endless litany of doors to the right and left. As she trudged down the hallway, she couldn't help wondering, how would Trent react if he just told her? Just sat down with him when he came home and straight out told him? What would happen?

The door to Camillia's office was just slightly ajar, as if someone had entered in a hurry, and not bothered to make sure it had closed all the way. Jenal could faintly make out Camillia's raspy voice asking questions and commenting inquisitively as usual. It was the other voice that was throwing her for a loop. It seemed strong... and deeper than most, yet vaguely familiar.

This is silly; I should get out of here.

Despite the intention to leave, her feet remained firmly planted on ground. She could feel an intense curiosity take hold of her.

"Am I crazy?" asked the husky voice from the room.

You n me both buddy.

Against all her better judgment, she eased closer to the door, falling to her knees. Her pupil leveled with the slight opening in the door. All she could see were two legs peeking out of a flowery dress from a chair, obviously Camillia's, the rest of her body just out of view.

What if they hear me? Paralyzed with a sudden fear, she missed the next few seconds of conversation.

"Do you feel like you're losing the people? Losing their confidence?"

The people? Who in Lucifer's name is she talking to? She began to ease back from the door slightly, fully convinced at this moment that it was time for her to go.

"I'm supposed to be a leader. I'm supposed to set by ruthless example!"

As the man said those words, he climbed up to his feet, suddenly and abruptly coming into Jenal's line of sight.

"Kill the most, lie convincingly, cheat, steal, maim, murder, death, kill! I'm supposed to do all that and more!"

Her eyeballs widened into saucers, in astonishment as she saw the rather giant man's face for the first time. Horrible and sudden realization pierced her skin; she could feel the goosebumps run down her spine and the daggers pierce her chest and zip to her heart. The man she was looking at was none other than the leader of the oppressed world, Satan. Alarms and sirens blared in her eardrums.

Run away run away run away run away run away run away run away run away run away run away run away run away run away run away run away run away run away run away run away.

"The problem is I'm just so SICK OF IT ALL!"

Jenal, in a sudden and supreme mad rush, scrambled backwards, making every attempt to run away from that door. While backing away her foot suddenly thumped the door before she could stop herself.

Oh shit.

Her arms, legs, and entire body, for a split second, seemed unable to move. Her eyes caught Satan's oversized body whip around like a whirlwind. She felt her head spin and a dizziness overtaking her, while she dived to the right to escape his view. Pressing her back against the wall just adjacent to the door, she tried to think, but couldn't form a single thought. Her mind raced and chest thumped, effectively robbing her of all breath.

Did he see me?

"Is someone there?" Camillia's voice asked from inside the room.

Run away! This time she listened and scrambled out of the hallway and onto the streets of Hell, just as she'd done the previous day.

Jenal literally flung herself through her own front door, nearly stumbling to the ground. Backing against the wall, she tried recovering her breath, to no avail. She'd run every single step from the building, pausing for no bystander. Even amidst her own personal panic, she knew one thing.

I saw something I wasn't supposed to.

Her mind raced with possibilities. What if he saw her? Would he have her tortured or killed? Maybe she could promise to keep quiet?

Did I really just hear Satan say he's sick of ruling Hell and committing atrocities!?

"Trent, you home?" she yelled, peering into the bedroom. Her gaze flew past the unwashed dishes in the kitchen, the papers scattered across the table, to a note pinned to the fridge.

At Michelle's, be back tonight.

We have to talk.

What does he want to talk about? Does he know? Not two seconds after that thought, everything went black.

She spun around, in sudden shock. The fridge, the chairs, the sink, all of it was simply... gone. There was just endless void, like a gigantic hole that she was in the middle of. She waved her hand in front of her face.

At least I haven't passed out. What's happening? A faint rumble, like the growl of some sort of creature awakening, filled the ground and the sending vibrations shooting up her body. Instinctively, almost by themselves, her feet began running, thumping the unseen pavement, while the earthquake-like rumbling only intensified, nearly throwing her off her feet.

Out of nowhere, a light suddenly blasted her eyes, nearly blinding her for a second. It was a fiery red spotlight, shining down from the unseen sky. Everywhere she ran, it followed. There was a flash of red light, and for a moment, her eyes blurred rendering her unable to make out what was happening. As her eyes came into focus she knew she wasn't in her home anymore, nor was she in the empty abyss. Had she imagined all that? Perhaps somebody had knocked her out then revived her here? In the

end, it hardly mattered because she wasn't in her home anymore... she was in Satan's personal chamber.

Looking around the room sent a shudder down her spine. It was a complete and perfect circle all around. Its walls were mixture of gray and beige stone, with various cracks and splits showing its centuries-old age. The floor was rocky black stone, slightly illuminated by the faint red light streaming in through a tinted skylight. Her eyes moved across the room before settling on the far end of it, for there sat an enormous twisted gnarled black throne, resembling centuries old tree roots. Seated upon it was none other than the leader of the oppressed world, Satan.

She could feel her entire body cowering involuntarily at the sight of him. Her arms and legs shuddered and buckled beneath her. Those eyes were like fireballs, peering into her very soul, threatening to uproot every secret she had. Had the rumbling stopped? She couldn't even tell with the new spasms of anxiety pulsing through her body.

Satan slowly planted his foot against the floor, pushing his larger-than-life exterior off the twisted throne and casting a shadow that seemed endless in his length. At this moment, she came to a realization. Every iota of fear and panic she had felt earlier, at the thought of Trent finding out her secret, or wondering whether Satan had seen her at the door, meant exactly nothing. It simply didn't compare to what she felt now.

This is real, she thought. This is the end.

Does she know? What did she hear? Has she been to the papers? He looked into her eyes from his throne, refusing to look away. After decades of staring down all different kinds of people and reducing them to tears, he had the whole terrify-your-victim thing down pat. He watched, strangely ambivalent, as she cowered backwards. Why wasn't his heart into this? There was no pleasure wreaked, no satisfaction gained from this reaction. What was the problem?

The problem is, I'm the scared one, he thought to himself, grimacing inwardly. This... woman, she could ruin me. One trip to the Brimstone Times, and that's it. Done, kaput, I could have a storm of people at my palace tomorrow, ready to lynch me and...wow, those highlights in her hair look really nice.

He pondered the possibilities half-heartedly. Shouldn't he be more worried? *I should kill her... I suppose.* His eyes moved up her body... to her neck. *It'd be so simple. Just reach down, grip her neck... and SNAP. I've done it countless times before. So that's it...here I go. Neck-snapping time!*

He deliberately began by planting his foot against the floor slowly for effect, pushing himself up off the twisted throne, making extra sure to stand up straight so his shadow loomed menacingly.

Ok, I'm not snapping her neck right now. Why aren't I snapping her neck right now? SNAP HER NECK! He locked eyes and raised his arm, the hand of death, slowly... and did nothing. His stomach twisted, acids churned, and he felt... something. *I... can't. Why can't I? What's happening to me?*

Jenal stared deep into the eyes which held her in a terrifying trance. She couldn't move forward, backwards, left, right, or any other direction. It was almost magnetic. His

arm reached out... slowly... then stopped. Their eyes leveled, and he opened his mouth to speak.

This is it, this is the end.

She could feel the tears well up in her eyes as she took a gulp and prepared herself for the power and magnitude of his voice and the death knell that would most assuredly come from his mouth.

Then he spoke.

“Hiya,” he greeted her, his outstretched hand forming a friendly wave. “You... uh... want a drink... or something?”

Both of Jenal’s hands fiercely clenched the oversized gold goblet as she quietly sipped from her drink. Nervously glancing up, she saw Satan sitting right across from her, with the exact same anxious look on his face, clenching his own goblet.

“So...” mumbled Jenal, trying to make small talk. “You’re... not happy with your job?”

Oh great, reminding him of why wants to kill me in the first place. Brilliant move.

“I should probably kill you for even saying that,” he growled, making Jenal clench her goblet tighter, her red knuckles whitening. “But I’m not going to,” he finished, somewhat cheerily, his voice rather transformed.

“You know, with the whole voices thing,” she commented, with sudden courage. “Sometimes you don’t really sound like a ruthless dictator.”

“Yeah, well... in my line of work, you’ve got to learn to be menacing,” he explained wistfully. “You know, act all powerful and vicious and stuff.”

“Right, right,” she acknowledged, nodding in agreement.

“What did you hear by the door?” Satan asked suddenly, not even bothering to segue into the question.

“What did I hear? Nothing! I heard nothing! Nada!”

“But didn’t you just ask me about not being happy with—”

“NO! I mean... I...” she stuttered, trying to find the words, suddenly realizing she’d just interrupted him.

“It’s ok, don’t worry,” he remarked with a smirk. “I’m not going to kill you... or maim you... or behead you. Just torture you for the rest of eternity.”

She suddenly dropped the goblet, which clanked against the ground, spilling the drink.

“I’m kidding,” he revealed. “Just a little satanic humor... I guess.”

“Oooh!” she mumbled in realization, smiling meekly. “...hahaha!”

“That wasn’t a very convincing fake laugh,” he observed. “Believe me, I’m the king of fake appearances.”

“Are you saying that the Satan we hear about and read about is all fake?” she asked. “Is he even real?”

“That’s a good question,” Satan responded. “I wish I had an answer for you.”

“What about the Satan I’m talking to right now,” she asked pointedly. “You know, the Satan who just spared my life and offered me a drink?”

“Well... you know what, yes.” He affirmed, more to himself than to her. “This is as close to the real me you’re going to get. So congrats, you’re the first to meet the real Satan and live to tell about it.”

“He’s not so bad.”

“Thanks,” he responded. A strange feeling overcame him, like warmth spreading through his chest, and he couldn’t help smiling.

“So now then,” she started, leaning in closer to him. “What’s up with the whole job thing? Are you really tired of being our lord?”

“I don’t know if... tired, is really the right word for it.”

“What do you mean?”

He closed his eyes, as if in a deep sleep, and sighed heavily.

“It just seems like... every time I do something nowadays, every order of death, act of cruelty, or atrocity carried out, I just start to get this feeling...”

Jenal straightened up in her chair, those words suddenly seeming very familiar to her.

“What kind of feeling?”

“This feeling in my stomach, it’s like somebody’s stabbed me in the stomach with a knife and started twisting... there’s a knot tightening in there,” he explained. “It’s horrible, and I’ve never felt that before... well ok except for the time this guy tried to assassinate me by stabbing me in the stomach with a knife-”

“Is that feeling... is it telling you something?”

He looked up sharply and locked eyes with her, a tad surprised at those words.

“Yes, that’s it exactly. It’s telling me... It’s telling me...” he trailed off.

“Maybe this is all wrong?”

He let out a deep breath, as if he was suddenly able to breath for the first time.

No words came out.

“I’ve been there; I know exactly what you’re talking about. It’s got me completely wound up, and I have no idea what to do,” she rambled “It was just this crazy idea to be monogamous, and now it’s so much more than that, I just think things that I never would have before, and don’t know what to do.”

“Me neither.”

“Everything and everybody around me says that it’s wrong to think and feel this way... but...”

“It’s the only thing that feels right.”

“Yeah,” Jenal affirmed, smiling faintly at him. “I don’t know... feeling this way, it’s just... lonely.”

“Might not be as lonely as you think,” Satan spoke, somewhat hesitantly. “We’re not the only ones feeling it. Something is happening to Hell.”

She opened her mouth to speak, but no words came out as she digested the information. After what seemed like an eternity, she spoke again.

“If things really are changing,” she mused. “Then maybe it’s time to do what our hearts tell us to do...”

For the first time Jenal could ever remember, the traditionally hot wind was no more. The breeze felt a little... cold. She wrapped a shawl around her neck as she strolled down the sidewalk, her head spinning in a litany of conflicting thoughts.

As she was leaving, Satan had offered to pretend to be her outside lover, a façade of sorts. It was a sudden and clear solution to her immediate problem, but something inside of her stopped her from accepting his offer, even though they wouldn't actually be lovers. She no longer wanted to hide behind a charade. Something had changed inside of her.

What is wrong with me?

As she asked herself that question, she knew exactly what was wrong. The once-fleeting feelings were now a part of her, as if the floodgates of her heart had been burst open. She didn't *want* to cheat on her husband. She wished she *had* helped the elderly lady. The thought of killing, cheating, stealing, and lying didn't fill her with pride anymore. At that moment, her earlier worries and anxieties suddenly made sense. It was as clear as a fiery hellish day. The reason she'd been uncomfortable and worried wasn't because of the possibility of Trent or other people finding out... it was because she had to *lie* about it. It was an act that once filled her with pride, but now with nothing but disgust and anger.

She remembered Satan's words about the twisting knife and knots inside his stomach, and could definitely feel them inside her. Satan was a man who should have embodied everything that Hell stood for, but seeing him completely doubt the life and society around him, put everything into perspective. It made all her false preconceptions and apprehensions just disappear. Everything just snapped into focus.

Maybe, I'm not immoral? If Satan is feeling it too, then it's not just me? I'm... not a monster?

She sighed in discontent as she rounded the corner and the shadow of her stony home came into view. Jenal closed her eyes, and remembered the words she had spoken to Satan.

"Then maybe it's time to do what our hearts tell us to do?"

With that, she knew exactly what she was going to do.

I'm going to tell Trent.

Satan stood motionless on the balcony of his royal palace, overlooking the sprawling city in front of him. Hanging from his left hand was a newspaper. Just after Jenal had left, he'd entered his office to find it lying on his desk, left by one of his servants. He glanced down and his eyes darted across the headline for the tenth time that night.

SATAN'S PERSONAL PSYCHIATRIST REVEALS DISTURBING TRUTH ABOUT OUR LEADER! SHE TELLS ALL!

He managed a little smirk and couldn't even bring himself to be surprised by it.

After all, it was the moral thing for her to do.

Most of all, he couldn't seem to bring himself to care.

If they're going to come and lynch me tomorrow... then let them come.

Tossing the paper over the balcony, he rested his arms on the railing, staring out into the town he governed. Despite the news, he felt strangely jovial. For the first time in what seemed like ages, he felt as if a great weight had been lifted from his shoulders.

His thoughts spread to the conversation he'd had with Jenal and to his society in general. What was happening was like a trickle from a sink, but one day he knew it would all come together in a giant tidal wave. He could easily try and fight it while he was the old Satan... but things were different now. He didn't now why or how, but something was changing and he was the leader that would have to lead the way. He wasn't even remotely sure about what he would do... but he did know he'd be doing things differently.

More puzzling than that realization however, was a smaller, simpler fact. He was looking forward to seeing Jenal again. It wasn't a matter of lust, but inner non-physical warmth which seemed to be invading his chest as sure as he stood there on the balcony, overlooking the spectacular skyline of Hell, flanked by the maroon night sky and lighter red clouds.

With those thoughts on his mind, Satan quietly strolled back into the palace. Had he stayed and concentrated a bit on the sky high above the clouds, it's quite possible he would have noticed something a bit odd. For the first time ever, a small patch of white was beginning to form in the traditionally red sky of Hell.

"Honey, I'm home." Jenal declared, easing through the doorway.

She was instantly greeted by the sight of Trent and Michelle sitting on the couch... holding hands. That sort of affection seemed a tad odd to Jenal.

"I got your note, sorry I was out," she explained.

"S'ok," Trent assured her.

Here we go, he's sitting there, so all I gotta do is sit down across from him and tell him.

"We have to talk," Trent suddenly interjected, taking the words right out of her thoughts.

"Sure!" she responded with fake enthusiasm, hesitantly taking a place on the couch.

"We've been keeping a secret from you."

"Oh really?" Jenal inquired, slightly amused at the statement.

Hurry up, I need to tell you...

"We were just so afraid of what you would think of us if you knew," Michelle explained. "I mean, we know you've always been a woman of high standing morals... and I guess we were just afraid the looks we'd get from you if you knew."

"If I knew what?" Jenal asked as worry began to creep into her heart.

"Trent and me, we're..." Michelle began, exchanging worried looks with him.

"We're in love... and I've decided I'm going to be faithful to her. I'm getting a divorce Jenal." Trent finished heavily. "I know you won't understand, you'll think it's wrong and horrible... but we're going to be monogamous."

~End~

