

Sympathy for the Devil, Inc.

by Shannon (Haz) Harrower

WPI Alum

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Characters

FORNEUS - The head of The Agency, with a practical head for business and friendly customer service persona. Exceptional at his job, save for the occasional hiccup.

BERNICE - The Agency's receptionist. Deadpan in the face of anything, including all the things the demons pull out to try and ruffle her feathers.

MRS. MICHAELS - A wife who had a little trouble with her mother-in-law.

YUUSUKE - A Japanese *kitsune* demon hired by Mrs. Michaels to drive out her mother-in-law. A little punk, likes wreaking havoc.

EMMA IVERSON - A sorority girl who has a competitive spirit, with an attitude and outfit to match.

ANDROMALIUS - A demon of treasure and thieves. A purring, shameless playboy, having no reservations makes him a perfect employee.

GRACIE HASTINGS - Mousy and shy, and unhappy to be so. Makes an effort to be polite, but otherwise not very outgoing or remarkable.

KOTOKO - Another *kitsune* demon, she shares her species' penchant for pranks and trouble.

SHEZMU - Classically-mannered demon of execution, slaughter, blood, and wine. Has a penchant for maple-frosted donuts, and something of a split personality disorder.

FRANCES - One of the Agency's clients, unable to let go of the demon she hired to the point of mania.

VALEFAR - A demon aspiring to prove himself in field work. Eager to put his abilities to good use.

HOUSEWIFE - A frazzled-looking woman in slippers and an apron, looking like she just ran out of the kitchen in a hurry.

(the interior of an everyday office with a desk, two chairs, cabinets, and anything you'd expect to find in a business. FORNEUS sits behind the desk, shuffling papers and wearing a smart business suit. All demons, including himself, dress in modern clothes with just a hint of who they really are.)

FORNEUS *(pressing comm button)* Could you send in the next client, Bernice?

(MRS. MICHAELS enters)

FORNEUS Welcome to The Agency. How can we be of service?

MRS. MICHAELS Actually, I'm here with a return.

FORNEUS Ah, Mrs. Michaels! *(opens file)* You rented one of our japanese *kitsune* demons last week. Yuusuke, right?

YUUSUKE *(entering)* Yo.

FORNEUS And how did that work out for you?

MRS. MICHAELS I can't thank you enough. My mother-in-law practically ran screaming from the house, then sent us a card saying that she'd never come back, even if we begged.

FORNEUS I'm glad to hear it.

MRS. MICHAELS Not as glad as I am. Yuusuke-kun worked like a charm.

YUUSUKE Do I deliver or what?

MRS. MICHAELS I don't think I'll ever forget the look on her face when you tried to feed her a live octopus. "It's a delicacy in his country! Don't be rude!" I thought I was going to wet myself laughing.

YUUSUKE Yeah, I was proud of that one. "I very sorry! English not good. You want... seconds, yes?"

(all laugh as FORNEUS digs out file)

FORNEUS Well, it sounds like a success. Take this to the front desk, and you'll be all set.

MRS. MICHAELS Thank you so much.

FORNEUS It was a pleasure, Mrs. Michaels. And don't hesitate to call if you need us again.

MRS. MICHAELS I will. I can't thank you enough, Yuusuke-kun.

YUUSUKE Just doin' my job. Be sure to tell all your friends about us.

MRS. MICHAELS I'll see you around! *(exits)*

YUUSUKE See ya. *(drops off plastic bag/specimen jar on desk)* Here you go. Hair from everyone in the household. Even the dog.

FORNEUS Well done, Yuusuke-kun. You're a natural at this.

YUUSUKE Are you kidding? Scaring the pants off of miserable old coots like her is what I live for. Hey, do I smell donuts? *(exits)*

FORNEUS Help yourself. There'll be another dozen delivered in an hour. Don't forget to fill out your assignment report!

YUUSUKE *(offstage)* Yeah, yeah. Hey! Don't you dare get slime on the strawberry ones!

FORNEUS *(presses comm. button)* Bernice?

BERNICE Yes, boss?

FORNEUS Add another dozen donuts to the order, would you? And send in the next client if her screening's finished.

BERNICE All clear. She checked out. I'll send her in with her file.

FORNEUS Thank you. *(stands as EMMA enters, extending his hand to shake hers)* Welcome to the Agency. I'm Forneus.

EMMA *(shakes it, then hands him her file)* Emma. Emma Iverson.

FORNEUS Pleasure to meet you. Now, if you'll allow me one moment to look over your information... *(looks over the list appreciatively)* Dean's list at a top university, and on the executive board for your sorority despite being only a sophomore – not to mention an impressive pedigree...

EMMA Thank you.

FORNEUS What would such a privileged young woman need from the Agency?

EMMA A man.

FORNEUS (pauses) What made you decide to come here for that? Surely you could've just -

EMMA Paid for one? Gotten Daddy to get me one? I don't need just any guy. He needs to be *perfect*.

FORNEUS Interesting. What for?

EMMA My sorority's big fundraising ball is this Friday. It's the biggest event of the year, when all the trustees and big names show up to judge how we run things. It's a red carpet event. Designer dresses, photographers, and an eye-candy competition for the girls.

FORNEUS Sounds like a big night.

EMMA It is. So I invited a hot business major a month ago, we coordinated clothes and made all the preparations, and I thought I was set. But then he calls me up and tells me that he's started dating the president of the Cultural Community Service club on campus, and since they're co-sponsoring the ball this year, he had to back out on me and go with *her*! I bought that dress to match his suit *specifically*, and now it's wasted!

FORNEUS That's unfortunate.

EMMA Usually when something like this happens, I have a back-up plan, like claiming I have a sick aunt in the Himalayas and have to fly out ASAP. But I'm on the committee, so I have to go to this thing! So I lied and told the girls that I was bringing my new boyfriend, who was absolutely gorgeous and totally in love with me.

FORNEUS I see your dilemma. How can we help?

EMMA I need the perfect date by the weekend or I'd be committing social suicide.

FORNEUS Well, there are a few ways to go about it. If you had a certain person in mind, we could temporarily possess him or make him infatuated with you, a little like how a Disney-esque love spell would happen.

EMMA No, that won't work. The girls know every eligible hot guy in town that I'd even consider – and I mean *know*. As in research and catalog. (pauses) Wait, did you say love spell?

FORNEUS Oops.

EMMA And you can do it to anyone, right? So if I wanted, say, Johnny Depp to-

FORNEUS No.

EMMA But you said –

FORNEUS Me and my big mouth. *(sighs)* Yes, we have means to make people head-over-heels for you, but even the Agency has its limits. *(pulls out an enormous book-length list from his desk, clearing his throat)* List of male persons that The Agency will not touch with a ten-foot pole: Orlando Bloom, Ewan McGregor, Viggo Mortensen, Johnny Depp, Jonathan Taylor Thomas, the boy who plays Harry Potter, Colin Firth, Harrison Ford, Al Gore, the artist formerly known as Prince, Hugh Jackman, Vin Diesel, Samuel L. Jackson, Fabio, anyone who has ever been in a boy band, and Jackie Chan.

EMMA *(stares)* Wow. That's...

FORNEUS And that's just the tip of the million-name iceberg. I'm fairly sure that the entire cast of *Saved by the Bell* is on here somewhere, too. *(frowns)* I hated the 90s.

EMMA But if I paid double – Daddy has a business account!

FORNEUS There isn't enough money in the world. I'm sorry.

EMMA Oh, fine. What are my other options?

FORNEUS Tell me what you're looking for, and I'll match you up with the best man for the job we have here.

EMMA You want me to go out with a *demon*? Going stag is better than that!

FORNEUS I assure you, we have an unblemished record for human form outside of the agency.

EMMA Well, he obviously needs to be good looking. And flirty. He needs to dress well, talk well, and be otherwise irresistible. I want every other girl to want him, but to know that they can't have him because he's mine. He has to play lovesick – I mean really mooning over me – and pay attention to everything I say and do. I want a guy who opens doors, pulls out chairs, stands when a girl leaves the table for crying out loud! He needs to know how to dance, give a toast, and look damn good on my arm. In short? I want a prince.

FORNEUS *(pauses, thinking)* Funny you should use that word. We do have someone who meets all of those qualifications... and also just so happens to be a prince of sorts. *(presses comm. button)* Send Andromalius in when you get the chance.

EMMA Does he own a tux?

FORNEUS Of course. He updates to the new Armani line every season.

EMMA Not bad.

(ANDROMALIUS enters, dressed in upscale casual and holding two coffees as EMMA checks him out)

EMMA Not bad at all.

ANDROMALIUS Thank you. *(leans down to hand her coffee)* Brought you a latte.

EMMA Thanks. *(sips it)* Brownie points for no sugar.

ANDROMALIUS *(grinning)* I think it's endearing when girls take so much pride in their bodies. Who would want to belittle all that effort? *(to FORNEUS)* Incidentally, you might want to check the coffee maker in a while. After I used it, Fnarl was trying to brew a pot.

FORNEUS Oh, no. Of what?

ANDROMALIUS Last I saw? Mushrooms, kerosene, a plaid handkerchief, and a small Chewbacca action figure.

EMMA Who the hell is Fnarl?

ANDROMALIUS and FORNEUS *(together)* Chaos demon.

ANDROMALIUS I, however, can not only make a mean latte, but cook like Emeril.

EMMA Well, he has the clothes and the talk.

ANDROMALIUS *(leans back against desk, sipping coffee)* Much more than that, I'm glad to say. Forneus?

FORNEUS Ah, the Andromalius spiel.

EMMA He has a spiel?

FORNEUS He has a selection rate of 65%.

ANDROMALIUS *(grinning)* I'm popular.

FORNEUS This is Andromalius, one of the Great Earls – or princes, if you prefer – and is well-known for his charm and ability to please women. His specialty is as an escort for large-scale events, much like your charity ball, and his experience in that area is unsurpassed. He plays the part of both prince on a white horse *and* fairy godmother, as he tends to enact fantasies.

ANDROMALIUS If you even need a dress, Cinderella, I can convince the designer of your choice to whip you up a custom in two days flat. And take you shoe-shopping. (*sips thoughtfully*) I wouldn't go with Dolce right now, though – this season's designs are a bust.

EMMA A demon playing Prince Charming? Sorry if I'm not sure I buy it.

ANDROMALIUS Then let me bounce a few ideas off you, if I may. (*as he talks, moves about the room like a storyteller*) We pull up to the venue in one of my cars – as if I would trust any other driver with the life of the woman I adore! – and hand the keys to the valet. You take my arm, wearing a gown in (*studies her up and down*) midnight blue crinoline, and of course I can't take my eyes off you. You introduce me to your friends, and I greet each with a kiss on the cheek and murmur of “a pleasure.” As they crowd around you to do the usual adorably feminine gossip over one another's dresses, you'll walk with them to the receiving line of benefactors, where you'll begin to introduce me. Imagine your sisters' surprise when I need no introductions! I know each and every single VIP in attendance personally, and you and I are promptly invited to sit at the head table.

At some point during the evening, I'll call for everyone's attention and, after an absolutely charming vignette about my latest stay in Paris, present you with a gift: a never-before-seen Van Gogh original bought from a private dealer in Montmartre, for no other reason than the subtle hues and gentle brushstrokes reminded me of your unforgettable eyes that night in Florence. After a guest authenticates the piece, you announce to everyone present that it would be a shame to keep such a masterpiece from the rest of the world, and that it should be in a place for all to appreciate. I will have naturally arranged for the curator of the Metropolitan Museum of Art to be present, and you tell her in front of everyone that your only condition for donating this priceless work is that the proceeds from the exhibit gala benefit the charity organization of your choice.

After I shower you with admiration for such a benevolent gesture, I say something to the effect of “Then I'm glad I bought this as well,” and slide a three-row diamond tennis bracelet onto your perfectly-tanned wrist. You become the single most successful philanthropist in your sorority's history, and the subject of much envy among your sisters. And, for that matter, every woman who will hear about the party for years to come.

EMMA (*to FORNEUS, after a moment*) He's good, I'll give you that.

ANDROMALIUS And that's just off the top of my head. I could also disappear from the party, only to reappear later nursing an injured kitten I'd just found while stepping out for fresh air.

FORNEUS Where would you find a kitten?

ANDROMALIUS Yuusuke is a very convincing wet-and-miserable tabby. The way he licks my face in gratitude while held in my arms is priceless.

FORNEUS (*to EMMA*) Yuusuke is one of our more theatrical shapeshifters.

EMMA The girls'll love it. He'll be cuddled against high-grade implants the whole night.

ANDROMALIUS And while he's enjoying himself, I'll declare in a loud voice that you're too desirable for me to wait any longer, and I'll sweep you up into my arms and carry you up the stairs in full view of the guests.

EMMA Nice! And I can tell you something like... to remember that you're too big for me, and that you'd promise to take it slow this time. And then look mortified when everyone hears.

ANDROMALIUS See? Now you're getting it.

EMMA This could work... but there's just one problem.

FORNEUS Problem?

EMMA I told the girls that I met my boyfriend at a charity fundraiser for the hospital's pediatric wing. He was doing a magic show, and asked me to be his assistant. I said I started dating him because of the look on his face when he made sick children happy.

(the other two snort, then start laughing)

EMMA This is serious! If they call him out to do a magic trick, then we're busted.

ANDROMALIUS Darling, I'm a demon. I'd be a disgrace if I couldn't do simple street magic. Now... *(stretches out his arms, cracks his knuckles, and pulls a coin out from behind EMMA's ear)* Voila.

EMMA Gosh. A quarter from behind someone's ear. I'm SO IMPRESSED. What an amazing all-powerful demon.

ANDROMALIUS I never said I was all-powerful. And it's not a quarter. Here. *(hands it to her)*

EMMA Everyone and their *dad* can do that tr - What the hell? This isn't money.

ANDROMALIUS It sure is. Of course, they stopped using the currency centuries ago, and that particular coin has been double-stamped... *(leans back, proudly)* That, my Prada princess, is a Spanish doubloon refashioned into a piece of eight by none other than the pirate captain Bartholemew Roberts in his private forge. None are known to have survived to today.

(ANDROMALIUS pauses, waiting for applause or a reaction of adoration. When EMMA stares blankly, he takes back the coin and sighs)

ANDROMALIUS Too weird?

FORNEUS A little. But she gets the idea.

EMMA Yeah, that works. *(pauses)* Wait. Pirates were in the early 1700s. That would make you...

ANDROMALIUS You know your history! You've got some brains behind those pretty eyes. And yes, I'm infinitely older than you are. *(grinning inches from her face)* How do you feel with all this attention from an older man?

EMMA Do you even *count* as a man?

ANDROMALIUS I am a man in the way that it matters.

(they stare at each other in silence, ANDROMALIUS oozing charm and EMMA ogling)

EMMA I want him.

ANDROMALIUS *(snuggles her)* Yay!

EMMA Where do I sign?

FORNEUS *(hands her clipboard)* Here, here... and here. See Bernice on the way out to draw up the contract, and you'll be all set. Payment due upon completion.

EMMA *(snatches it and exits)* I'll be right back!

FORNEUS That was easy.

ANDROMALIUS I'll say. She was practically drooling. Speaking of which, do you need any bodily fluids too, or –

FORNEUS No, no. Just hair is fine.

ANDROMALIUS Pity. Ah, just as well. Would've spoiled the romance, pausing to scoop them into specimen jars at intimate moments...

FORNEUS Keep in mind that you're not getting paid for that. Anything outside the contract, you do on your own time.

ANDROMALIUS *(salutes)* Loud and clear, boss.

BERNICE *(enters, handing contract to FORNEUS)* Here's the draft.

FORNEUS Ah, thank you. Let me give it a once-over.

ANDROMALIUS Berniiiiice, love of my life...*(cuddles her)*

BERNICE *(ignoring his cuddling)* Should've known it was you; she was panting so hard she could barely write. I could've made the contract for her soul and she wouldn't have noticed. Or cared.

ANDROMALIUS What can I say? I have a way with people. Women and men and everything in between naturally turn into puddles of lust as soon as my lips and breath form words. Any words at all.

BERNICE *(dryly)* Oh?

ANDROMALIUS *(calls offstage)* Emma? Buttered toast and a partridge in a pear tree.

YUUSUKE *(pops in)* Hey, this chick just fainted.

ANDROMALIUS Still got it. *(snuggles BERNICE more)* Why aren't you a puddle?

BERNICE Not that easy. Cheese and camp don't really do it for me.

FORNEUS Or me. I think we're the only two in the Agency you haven't slept with.

ANDROMALIUS Incorporal shagging doesn't count. My darling Bernie-berry, how can I convince you to let me show you what you're missing?

BERNICE Copious amounts of alcohol.

ANDROMALIUS How much, exactly? The office Christmas party is coming up, after all.

BERNICE Enough so I die of alcohol poisoning and don't have any say.

FORNEUS Careful. Necrophilia references are practically a come-on with some of the guys around here.

BERNICE I'll keep that in mind. *(takes contract)* All right. Let's go.

ANDROMALIUS I'd follow you into Hell, my dear.

BERNICE You already took a vacation this month. Don't push it.

(they exit. FORNEUS leans back in his chair and takes a deep breath)

FORNEUS *(presses comm. button)* Next person, when you're ready. *(stands as GRACIE enters, shaking her hand)* Welcome to The Agency. I'm Forneus. I see you don't have a file - Is this your first time here?

GRACIE Um, yeah. My friend Gen told me that this place could change my life.

FORNEUS Gen?

GRACIE Genevieve Bouchard? Tall, red hair...

FORNEUS *(presses comm. button)* Bernice? Can I have the file on Genevieve Bouchard?

(BERNICE enters, handing him a file and holding some papers)

GRACIE ...although I'm not sure what she meant by that, or why she sent me here...

FORNEUS *(frowns)* This is the Stevenson file. I wanted the Bouchard file.

BERNICE I'm sorry, sir, but this was in the Bouchard folder. In the B drawer, between Macleod and... duck.

FORNEUS Macleod - with an M - in the B drawer? And... Duck?

BERNICE Yes. No name, just a duck sticker. *(pauses)* Fnarl did the filing.

FORNEUS *(sighs)* I see.

BERNICE Here's a printout of the Bouchard records. *(hands it to him)* No one but me touches that computer.

FORNEUS Thank you, Bernice. What would I do without you?

BERNICE *(exiting)* Send Temelechus to get the donuts?

FORNEUS Very funny. *(looks over file)* Never hire a chaos demon to do your filing. Not only is there no discernable pattern, you get oozy fingerprints on all your folders. It's just a bad idea.

GRACIE C-Chaos demon? Mr. Forneus -

FORNEUS Forneus, please.

GRACIE To be honest, I'm not... sure what it is you do here.

FORNEUS Ah. For those who are in the dark, we've prepared some literature about our little Agency. *(pulls out a pamphlet and hands it to her)* Here's the abridged version. Ageless beings in modern times, adapting our talents to serve humans. Any service, for a price.

GRACIE What do you do for payment?

FORNEUS That depends entirely on the assignment. Sometimes money, since we do have material expenses, and when the arrangement is mutually beneficial, we might work pro bono. We often get paid in memories or emotions, temporary possession for our incorporeal staff, and - of course - the occasional ritual sacrifice. Genetic code is the most common form of payment.

GRACIE Genetic code? Like blood or skin or something?

FORNEUS Usually hair. It's the least painful, but unfortunately doesn't give us as much pull as we like. We keep tabs on all of our customers by tracking their bodies, but with a stronger source like blood or tissue, we can interpret their senses like a signal. See what they see, hear what they hear, etc.. It's all in the contract.

GRACIE Have you ever taken firstborn children, like in fairytales?

FORNEUS Of course not. That's rubbish.

GRACIE Oh. That's good.

FORNEUS Firstborns are a nuisance. They feel entitled and rebellious, and who wants that? Agency policy is usually the second- or third-born. It's just common sense.

GRACIE *(hastily changing subject)* So, what kinds of demons are there? I mean, that work here. I mean, that you can hire.

FORNEUS Too many to list. It's better to ask for what you want, and I tell you who would be right for the job based on that. What is it you're looking for?

GRACIE I'm... not sure. Actually, I really don't have any idea. But... I know that I'm looking for something... if that makes sense.

FORNEUS I see. That's actually more common than you think, and we're more than happy to help you find whatever it is you need. Would you like to meet one of our most versatile employees to help you get started?

GRACIE If you think it would help. I mean, yes. Please.

FORNEUS *(presses comm. button)* Bernice? Is Kotoko around? *(as KOTOKO enters, still with wolf/fox ears on top of head)* Ah, here she is. Thank you.

GRACIE That was really, really... really fast.

KOTOKO You bet your buns! Traveling in this place is like nothin'. Good for prompt service.

GRACIE Um. You have...on your head...

KOTOKO Huh? (*reaches up, feels ears*) Whoops. Forgot to change before coming in in front of a customer.

FORNEUS (*warning*) Kotoko-san...

KOTOKO All right, all right. (*to GRACIE*) How would these make sense to you?

GRACIE They're not real?

KOTOKO They are, but that makes your brain hurt, right? Gotta fix that.

GRACIE Well, I guess they could be tied on...

KOTOKO What color string?

GRACIE ...Black?

KOTOKO Got it. Gimme a second. (*pauses thoughtfully, then snaps her fingers and reaches around to untie them and tosses them to GRACIE, who studies the black string attached to them in confusion*) All right, I'm ready for introductions now.

FORNEUS Gracie, this is Kotoko. She's a *kitsune* demon from Japan, renowned for their shapeshifting abilities. Kotoko-san, this is Gracie Hastings. She's undecided on which services she's shopping for. I thought you could share an assignment story to give her an example.

KOTOKO Sure thing, boss! (*flops in the other chair, unable to keep still or sit normally*) So, my last job was working for a bunch of trainers at the gym a coupla blocks over. There's one trainer, real full of himself, who does more bragging and flexing than working. You know?

GRACIE Yeah. I know people like that.

KOTOKO Real asshat, right? Keeps slacking off on his work, showing off in front of all the girlfriends and wives an' pulling crap like he was king of the world. Useless and stupid, but can't get fired 'cause he's the boss' kid. His pop thinks he's god's gift to women, too. But I say god's gift to women was givin' us tits, 'cause you can get some

amazing things done if you use ‘em right! (*grinning, pointing to GRACIE’s chest*) You know what I’m talking about, Gracie?

GRACIE (*uncomfortably*) Um... sure?

KOTOKO Anyway, they decide to get him back good and teach him a lesson while they’re at it. So I fake like I work there, make myself look like a playboy bunny who can’t speak English for beans. Tall, dark, leggy, you get the drift. I waltz in a tank top and spankies, and he’s on me like a rottweiler on a ham!

FORNEUS Your analogies need some work.

KOTOKO It’s exactly what he was doin’, drool an’ all! So I play the innocent virgin from some unpronounceable country who fawns all over his biceps and gets weak-kneed for his over-toned ass. But total prude. Then, one night on the full moon, I make sure to say real loud that I’m staying late to shower, and sure enough - the horn dog sticks around to get himself an eyeful! So he watches me strip down to a towel, and I go around a row of lockers... (*cracks up*) and out comes a big ol’ hairy she-wolf with terrycloth wrapped around her middle! I do the change a few times, just to make sure he gets it through his thick skull. Next day, I go from a prude to a poodle in heat! I keep pawin’ at him and pawin’ at him, and he goes white as a ghost! He couldn’t tell anyone that I was a werewolf, and the others kept pestering him with things like “Dude, you should go for it! Hit that, man! She’s so into you!” And I hounded him. I was everywhere he looked! And just when I thought his head couldn’t get any worse, I sidle on up to him and give him a playful bite on the neck! Kid SCREAMED like a girl and fainted. Fainted! In front of a full gym! He’s never gonna live that down.

GRACIE Wow.

KOTOKO Yeah. Now once a month I sit outside his window at night and howl. (*gets up*) I gotta get ready for my three o’clock. Guy’s hiring me to be a sick ferret so he can go hit on the hot veterinarian.

FORNEUS Again? You should remind him that he brought you in as an iguana last week.

KOTOKO Like he’ll care. (*exiting*) Good luck, kid!

FORNEUS So how was that?

GRACIE She’s really... talented. But I don’t think I need her for anything.

FORNEUS That’s perfectly all right. Our staff is constantly expanding, too. We just hired someone new last year. She’s a mountain ogre from Manchuria - spent centuries tormenting Buddhist monks. She can teach you kung fu.

GRACIE I don't think I need kung fu.

FORNEUS Well, Surgat can open any lock - and I mean ANY, Onoskelis can play any instrument, our Maxwell's demons can warm up your car on cold mornings, Belphegor's good for investment banking, and Abaddon can help with any demolition and remodeling projects. Especially the demolition part.

GRACIE I rent.

FORNEUS Want to hire a chaos demon? They're very popular. We have one who specializes in posing as a posh interior decorator and will apply his unique style to your rivals' houses just in time for important dinner parties.

GRACIE I don't have any rivals. I'm not that interesting, so it's normal when guys don't pay any attention to me. I can't blame other girls because they're prettier or more social.

FORNEUS Men, you say? We also serve carnal needs – certain species of demon have capitalized on their tentacles, so they're *very* popular with women and have a satisfaction rate through the roof. Also trained in massage.

GRACIE (*uncomfortably*) Um. I heard. Gen tried to convince me I wanted one for my birthday.

FORNEUS That's too bad. From reading their performance reviews, it seems like you're really missing out.

GRACIE ...I'll pass...

FORNEUS Well, if you want a demon in the traditional sense of the word, we can accommodate you there quite perfectly. We have many who are experienced in intimidation, torture, interrogation techniques – perfect for vengeance-based assignments. As a matter of... (*leans over and presses comm.*) Can you ask Shezmu to stop in? Thank you. (*lets go*) As a matter of fact, we happen to have one of the oldest and most respected demons of torture and bloodthirst. He'll be here in just a minute.

GRACIE (*genuinely terrified*) Oh, no, you don't have to – not on my account – er...

FORNEUS It's no trouble, he's perfectly charming. Ah, here he is.

SHEZMU (*enters*) Good afternoon. You asked for me?

FORNEUS Ah, Shezmu. This is miss Gracie Hastings. Gracie, this is Shezmu, our resident specialist in torture and horrific deaths.

SHEZMU How do you do, miss Hastings.

GRACIE Erm, how do you do. I'm not rea-

FORNEUS Gracie is having trouble deciding on a service, and your name naturally came up.

SHEZMU I'm afraid Forneus may have greatly exaggerated my skills. He thinks far too well of them.

FORNEUS You're too modest, really!

SHEZMU You flatter me. *(to GRACIE, leaning over politely to speak)* Now, you were considering using me to implement revenge of some kind?

GRACIE I...

SHEZMU What, afraid to admit it? Embrace those emotions. They're quite beautiful. Observe. *(switches into 'evil' personality, speech pattern and mannerisms more terrifying and demonic)* You've never wondered what it's like to have any who dare lift a finger against you suffer a thousand fold? To smile as they breathe their last, an arm's length away, as their blood pools around your feet? The need to cause suffering in itself is a kind of joy, a thrill that makes the most primal elements of your nature rejoice in the wash of endorphins. Control. Power. Able to spare and take life on a whim, evoke cries of agony and choose not to silence them. To draw out the torment of another is to feel true peace, that their every action and reaction, reward and punishment, pleasure and pain, is yours and yours alone.

GRACIE I-I...

SHEZMU For centuries, my children and I have tormented your kind. We fed on your screams, bathed in your blood. And to this day, we continue to strike terror from the shadows.

GRACIE St... strike terror?

SHEZMU Abject fear.

(they pause, SHEZMU being as in-her-face intimidating as possible while GRACIE stares at him)

GRACIE Um, you have heart-shaped sprinkles on your face.

SHEZMU What?

GRACIE *(points hesitantly)* Just there.

SHEZMU Really? (*wipes it, laughing as his 'normal' self*) How embarrassing!

GRACIE I-It's not so bad!

SHEZMU My apologies for ruining the dramatic tension. I hope it doesn't affect your opinion of me.

GRACIE Oh, no! Not at all!

SHEZMU I'm glad. Do you have further need of me?

FORNEUS We'll let you know after she comes to a decision.

SHEZMU Then I'll leave you to it. I assure you, no hard feelings will be had if you should choose not to use my services. (*gives a short bow*) If you'll excuse me. (*exits*)

GRACIE Bye!

FORNEUS Thank you!

GRACIE ...What a bizarrely nice guy.

FORNEUS He's only like that most of the time, thankfully.

GRACIE (*pauses awkwardly*) Is... is it bad if I'm a little –

FORNEUS Turned on? Perfectly natural. Humans have always been attracted to the manipulative and violent throughout history.

GRACIE When you put it like that...

FORNEUS So the idea of revenge doesn't appeal to you?

GRACIE No, I don't think so.

FORNEUS There's no one you'd like to see suffer? (*GRACIE pauses*) No one at all? No one ever made fun of you, betrayed you, stole something from you...? (*waits, then sighs*) Did you ever consider that it's dissatisfaction with yourself, not someone else?

GRACIE I suppose. I just feel... plain. Dead. Milquetoast. Dry. Like... the part of me that finds things interesting is missing.

FORNEUS Do you think a change would help?

GRACIE Maybe. I don't know. (*pauses*) I'm sorry. I know I'm not being very helpful.

FORNEUS No, no! Don't apologize. You're difficult to figure out, but I love a good challenge. And if it's change you want... *(presses comm.)* Bernice, could you send in Euryale with her makeup kit and hairstyling tools?

BERNICE I would if I could, sir. But as it is, I have my hands full out here. We seem to have a... situation.

FORNEUS Bernice...

BERNICE Oh, for the love of – who let her in?!

GRACIE What's going on?

FORNEUS Gracie, as soon as I leave the office, you light the candle by the door and do not, under any circumstances, pass through the doorway or snuff the candle out for anyone but myself. Understood?

GRACIE R-Right!

FORNEUS Then you'll be fine. *(exits)* Bernice, let *who* in?

(out in the lobby. BERNICE is there, as well as a smattering of other demons. FRANCES is also there, looking panicked and haggard and waving around a knife. When FORNEUS enters, she is busy accosting BERNICE, and GRACIE watches it all from the doorway)

FRANCES Where is he?!

BERNICE Sir, this is Frances. Two months ago, she contracted with –

FRANCES Where is Andromalius?!

FORNEUS Oh, not this again. Please tell me he didn't do it again.

BERNICE I'm afraid so, sir.

FRANCES Where. Is. He. I got this blessed by a priest, and if you don't let me see him *right now* so help me, I'll –

FORNEUS Calm down. He's in the middle of signing another contract.

FRANCES No! He's mine! No one else can have him!

(as she shrieks and swipes wildly, SHEZMU stops her with ease and plucks the knife from her hands)

SHEZMU Child, did you really think that this could hurt any of us?

FRANCES But I had it blessed in three different religions!

SHEZMU Pity. (*licks it theatrically*) Useless, you see? Now stop this; you're making a scene.

FRANCES I will not! I don't care! I want to see him. I know he wants to see me too!

FORNEUS It seems she won't stop until she sees for herself. Bernice?

BERNICE If you say so, sir. (*presses a few buttons on the desk*) He's on his way.

ANDROMALIUS (*entering*) What's all the commotion? I was –

FRANCES Andy! (*runs up and hugs him tightly*)

ANDROMALIUS ...Frances? What are you doing here?

FRANCES I came to get you!

ANDROMALIUS Get me? My dear, I've just been hired by a new –

FRANCES No, for good! Since you've been gone, I haven't been able to sleep, eat, think, or anything properly! I was in love with you even before our contract ended – and I know you feel the same! So I've come to take you with me!

ANDROMALIUS (*sighing, though constantly treats her with smiles and affection despite whatever he says*) Frances, you know I can't do that. Our contract ended over a month ago.

FRANCES Forget the contracts! If you love me, then –

ANDROMALIUS I don't.

FRANCES But you came out to see me, even though they said my knife was useless so you didn't have to! That means you *wanted* to see me, and that means –

ANDROMALIUS Darling, they asked me to come out here because you were causing a fuss. Now be a good girl and go home. I'm not coming with you.

FRANCES If you can't come with me, then I'll go with you to hell!

ANDROMALIUS (*smiling and patting her patronizingly*) Your idea of hell is vastly wrong. You wouldn't even survive the trip, never mind the place itself.

FRANCES Then I can save you. I'll bring you to this side.

ANDROMALIUS I can't be "saved." It's not like I chose to be this way – it's who I am. Would you want to change who I am, Frances?

FRANCES No. I love you.

ANDROMALIUS *(smiling)* Of course you did. But given the choice, I'm not sure I'd *want* to change. This is what I do when walking the mortal plane of existence. Aren't you happy to have even been a part of it?

FRANCES We were only together a short time. The contract was for a few weeks!
(face lights up) I know! I'll hire you again!

ANDROMALIUS Forneus, you tell her.

FORNEUS I'm afraid that's impossible. We don't contract to those in altered mental states, as you are right now, and after this display, re-contracting would be a horrible idea.

FRANCES Let him come with me, or I'll turn you all in!

YUUSUKE To who, lady? No one's going to listen to a basket case ranting about how an evil agency of nonhumans has stolen the demon lover who broke her heart.

KOTOKO *(leaning on YUUSUKE)* He's right. No one would ever take you seriously – people've tried. We've lost clients to nuthouses that way.

ANDROMALIUS Come now, threatening the man you claim to love? That's not the Frances I remember.

FRANCES *(miserably)* Were you that unhappy with me?

ANDROMALIUS No, no more so than any other client.

FRANCES But you loved me!

ANDROMALIUS I never said that. *(holding her close)* But didn't you love thinking that I did?

FRANCES You always knew what I was thinking, feeling...

ANDROMALIUS It was my job to know. *(laughing)* And it wasn't a difficult one – you're easier to read than the first line of an eye chart, sweetheart. *(stroking her hair)* Shouldn't you remember that happiness, no matter how short-lived?

FRANCES Didn't you enjoy being with me?

ANDROMALIUS Of course. (*ignoring her hopeful face*) I wouldn't be in this job in the first place if I didn't enjoy it.

FRANCES So it's the job you love, not me.

ANDROMALIUS I could never have given you the kind of love you want.

FRANCES I'll never stop until you love me. I'll make you love me, I know I can –

ANDROMALIUS Shh, Frances. Shh.

(*as she clings to him, sobbing and rambling on about how she can't live without him, YUUSUKE puts a hand on her head and transfers her to his chest, gently leading her offstage*)

ANDROMALIUS (*frowning*) I saw the image he put in her head. It looks nothing like me! I don't know how she could've fallen for that; I'm much more attractive –

FORNEUS Andromalius.

ANDROMALIUS Yes, boss?

FORNEUS Again?!

ANDROMALIUS It was just a –

FORNEUS This is the tenth –

BERNICE Twelfth, sir.

FORNEUS ...twelfth time this has happened! Every single time, a client storms in here professing to be your true love. And every time, they're beyond the point of being reasoned with and have to be dealt with in order to silence them.

ANDROMALIUS You know what kind of impact I leave. I can hardly be blamed.

FORNEUS I know what kind of impact? *You* know better than anyone else what will inevitably happen! You've been doing this for *centuries*, Andromalius – have you learned nothing about restraint?

ANDROMALIUS So I go a little overboard sometimes. I function on being wanted – sex, intimacy, affection. *I* can accept that, *they're* the ones that can't.

FORNEUS Then *take responsibility* for it. This is your screw-up. You deal with it. And you're on suspension effective as of the end of that contract you just signed.

ANDROMALIUS I know, I know. Yuusuke has her, right? I'll bring her into the collection, if that's all right with you.

FORNEUS Do it quickly, before she gets worse. And make sure you warn everyone first.

ANDROMALIUS Understood.

FORNEUS *(facing office door)* Miss Hastings?

GRACIE Oh! Y-yes?

FORNEUS The trouble has passed. You may blow out the candle. *(as she does so, he reenters the office)* Are you all right?

GRACIE I'm okay, but that girl –

FORNEUS She'll be perfectly fine, don't worry.

(an earsplitting scream is heard offstage)

FORNEUS And now it's finished.

GRACIE Finished? I thought you said she was going to be fine! She was just really in love with him, does that need to be punished?!

FORNEUS No. We gave her exactly what she wanted.

GRACIE But... The scream...

FORNEUS Part of the process. Andromalius has a collection, if you will, of other beings that he takes into a part of himself. Frances has been added to that in order to satisfy her otherwise insatiable craving for his presence. Now she'll always be with the man she loves, and at complete and utter peace. *(sitting)* I'm sorry you had to see that. The situation has resolved, however, and so –

GRACIE *(still staring out office door)* I want that.

FORNEUS *(pauses)* Andromalius? Unfortunately, he has been suspended...

GRACIE No. I want what she had.

FORNEUS I'm afraid I don't understand.

GRACIE *(sitting)* I want to want someone that badly. I want that kind of... passion, I guess. A drive. I've never wanted anything more than a little in my life, like the way a kid wants a toy or candy or something. I want to feel what it's like to have someone to want to please and look forward to seeing every day. I want the confidence that comes from *knowing* more than anything else that they want nothing but me. I want another person to need me, to want to know everything about me, to want to see me happy, to...

FORNEUS *(pauses thoughtfully)* Now I think I understand completely.

GRACIE If you can give that to me, then I'd pay anything.

(they sit in silence, FORNEUS thinking and GRACIE sincere)

FORNEUS Go get a cup of coffee in the lounge. I think I can help you, but it'll take some doing. When I have an answer, I'll send for you. *(she exits, he presses comm. button)* Bernice? Send in Gremory. And seal the doors after he comes in.

VALEFAR *(entering)* Hey, Forneus.

FORNEUS Valefar? I sent for Gremory.

VALEFAR Well, I've been bribing Bernice with pastries every morning to let me know when a big job comes up.

FORNEUS You got Bernice, of all people, to help you – with mere pastries?

VALEFAR Yeah. She has a weakness for Bear Claws.

FORNEUS Bernice has a *weakness*? Why didn't I know about this?!

VALEFAR You know, I guess I'm good at finding things out about people. And isn't that a coincidence! *(takes a seat)* I hear it sounds like you're prepping a lifetime contract.

FORNEUS Which is why I sent for *Gremory*. These things aren't to be taken lightly – they're some of our most serious assignments.

VALEFAR Come on, Forneus! I spent the last fifty years living among the humans, and I've learned so much! I got a job, owned a cat, *dated*...I'm more than prepared for this.

FORNEUS Fifty years is nothing. This would be easily more than that, spent with *one human* to revolve around. Not to mention that you would be bound to her until her death with physical and nonphysical bonds that you couldn't ever hope to get out of, even at your strongest.

VALEFAR But I've been begging you to do this for as long as I can remember!

FORNEUS I remember when your favorite jobs were the ones that involved crossdressing. That was back when you were adorable and eager to please.

VALEFAR Hey, that's ancient history!

FORNEUS Literally. Remember Nero?

VALEFAR You promised never to bring that up again.

FORNEUS But you have to know that this is an entirely different class. And the only way to satisfy her. Are you sure that you can handle something like this?

VALEFAR Absolutely.

FORNEUS No doubts?

VALEFAR No. None at all. I could leave with her right now.

(FORNEUS studies him, then slides him a folder)

FORNEUS This is the standard lifetime contract. Give it a quick look-over, and when she finishes her coffee, I'll introduce you two and test how you two get on.

VALEFAR *(reading it)* Did you tell her?

FORNEUS Not yet.

VALEFAR Then how can you be sure she'll agree to it?

FORNEUS After a couple of centuries, you've pretty much seen and heard it all. And I saw and heard enough to know that this is the only thing she could want. *(pauses)* Besides, it was the first time I'd seen her speak with so much conviction. She craves that intimate connection between people, so looking for a demon on a short-term basis would have been useless. And dangerous.

VALEFAR Speaking of dangerous, how much would you say this cuts me down?

FORNEUS About half your power. But after she dies, you'll be ten times what you were before.

VALEFAR Still... *(hands it back)* Well, it looks good to me. Now all that's left is to see if she's up for it too.

FORNEUS We'll see. *(presses comm.)* We're ready for Gracie.

GRACIE *(entering)* You guys have some weird coffee in there. *(sees VALEFAR)* Who's this?

FORNEUS Gracie, this is Valefar. Valefar, this is Gracie Hastings.

VALEFAR *(standing, shakes her hand)* I've heard all about you - you can call me Val.

FORNEUS Valefar seems to believe he can help you by agreeing to a proposal I made. I thought it would be best if the two of you met beforehand to see if your tempers agreed first.

GRACIE Proposal?

VALEFAR A contract for the both of us. *(walks over and takes her hands)* In short, I spend the rest of your existence by your side, entirely devoted to you.

GRACIE L-Like a puppy?

FORNEUS More like a husband.

GRACIE H.... Hus...band?

VALEFAR We can be married tomorrow, if you like.

GRACIE Hold on! Wait. I...um... what *is* this?

FORNEUS A lifetime contract. It binds the two of you much like any contract would, except that this one happens to include unconditional affection. No matter what you do, he'll be there to make your life interesting, fulfilled, and never, *never* lonely.

GRACIE And... what would I have to give you for it?

FORNEUS Nothing. Your relationship is mutually beneficial – symbiotic, even. You get a companion whose sole happiness lies in yours, and –

GRACIE What does he get?

VALEFAR Power, of sorts. And companionship. No demon or human who has entered this specific contract has been unhappy.

GRACIE What kind of power?

VALEFAR Your happiness. We get our power from emotions. The stronger, the better. Fear is an easy one to get, and easy to get en masse, so most demons go that route. But since positive emotions are harder to get, they're also harder to kill and much more powerful. It's true what they say about hope – you really can't destroy it. So, according to

the contract, my very source of existence and what allows me to function every day is entirely dependent on you. On my every thought being centered on you, and your happiness.

GRACIE You would... make yourself that vulnerable?

VALEFAR I want this more than anything in the world. Looking at you now just cements it.

GRACIE But...

VALEFAR From the moment you walked in that door, you were the most important thing in my life. And if you sign that contract, I'll be the most important thing in yours.

(they stand in silence, VALEFAR still holding GRACIE's hands as she thinks)

GRACIE Give me the contract.

FORNEUS You don't want any time to think it over?

GRACIE I don't need to. *(signs it, hands it to VALEFAR)* There's something telling me that things will be different from now on, but... for the better.

VALEFAR Before I sign this, you need to know that we'll probably never be able to have a cat. They hate me and they hate baths, and their hair gets all over -

GRACIE I'm allergic.

(they smile at each other as VALEFAR signs and hands it back to FORNEUS)

FORNEUS If you're both happy with the arrangement, then I wish you both the best. See Bernice in the lobby, and she'll get the bonding procedure started.

GRACIE We'll have to go shopping for furniture for you.

VALEFAR Luckily, I come with a big stipend. Like an orphan!

GRACIE ...Like a *what*?

VALEFAR Never once in my time among you humans did I get to snuggle. Even my own cat wouldn't cuddle with me! Although I've heard "spooning" is nice – Wait, you mean I'm not sleeping in your bed with you?

GRACIE You've already said that you're not a puppy.

VALEFAR I could grow body hair. Human women like that, right?

GRACIE Ick! Not this one!

(they continue to argue as they exit and BEATRICE enters)

BERNICE They look really well suited to each other.

FORNEUS I'll say. They took to each other almost immediately – a hell of a lot better than most. You could see it in their faces the instant they met.

BERNICE I sent Alichino to bind them. They'll be ready to go home soon. *(hands him papers)* They'll make each other very happy.

FORNEUS Since when did we demons start dealing in the happiness of humans? What a bizarre means to an end.

BERNICE Bizarre indeed, sir. But doesn't everyone who does something for someone else have a motive?

FORNEUS *(laughing)* I thought that you mortals were supposed to believe in goodwill and compassion! You, Bernice, have to be *the* most cynical member of the human race I've ever met.

BERNICE That's why you hired me, sir.

FORNEUS Why did you even want to work here?

BERNICE I'm the only one who needs a health plan, so I get the entire budget.

FORNEUS I get the feeling that that's not the whole truth.

BERNICE Not all of it, sir. But you underestimate the drawing power of good dental coverage.

FORNEUS And the many offers of contracts? You've turned down dozens by now. I've never known a human who wouldn't jump at the chance to become immortal.

BERNICE With all due respect, sir, if I were to have my body not change for the rest of eternity, I'd want to lose ten pounds first.

FORNEUS Fair enough. *(pauses)* You're a credit to your race and your profession, you know that?

BERNICE Can't make it through a day without thinking it to myself at least once.

FORNEUS Good girl. We'll talk about a raise later. *(hands her a file)* You can send in the next client.

BERNICE Yes, sir. *(exits)*

(after a moment, HOUSEWIFE bursts in, looking panicked)

FORNEUS Welcome to The Agency. How can we be of service?

HOUSEWIFE Do you have anyone who can cook and prepare ten lobsters Newburg in under an hour?

FORNEUS He's got a culinary degree and eight arms, will that do?

HOUSEWIFE Perfect. Can I get him to-go?

FORNEUS *(smiling and holding out paperwork)* Sign here.

END