

THE FALLEN ANGEL

by

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Chapter One

No one could remember when Favial first took the step that led to his fall from grace. It was something that had happened so quietly and subtly that—besides Favial— only the Creator had noticed. Thus, one fateful morning the vaults of Heaven opened with a flash of light and peal of thunder, and little Favial toppled head over wing into the azure skies of the mortal realm. Who would have known that by day's end every type of immortal creature imaginable would be tossed into a conflict because of one simple little angel? This is Favial's story, and the beginning of a tale that has since become legend within the confines of Heaven, and to a lesser extent, the depths of Hell.

Favial was shocked that he had been so forcibly ejected from his celestial home. He beat his feathery wings in frustration, trying again and again to pass back through, but it was impossible – he was locked from Heaven. His frustration melted to fear, and fear to desperation as he pounded against the unseen walls.

"I didn't mean it! Really! I - I - I'm quite sorry! I won't do it again! Please listen! I'll be good now!"
No one answered.

“Why?” cried the angel, but he knew already he might not have been the most perfect of angelic examples. Perhaps he had ignored his duties on occasion, opting instead to romp through the clouds like a wild rabbit. He had perhaps exaggerated here and there, just harmless white lies that could do no harm. How could they blame him for that?

“This isn’t fair!” he shouted, but Heaven’s golden doors were immobile and silent. They were not listening. For a moment he thought it was a joke, a prank the Elders were playing to keep him in check. He knew he shouldn’t have poked so much fun at that off-key cherubim; Favian just thought it incredibly ironic that one of Heaven’s choir members could sing so poorly.

He furled his fists in frustration and pulled at his short brown hair, spinning lazy circles in the rosy morning light. He expected at any moment for those magnificent gates to swing open, beckoning him back inside to the sound of hearty laughs and maybe a little “I told you this would happen.” However, nothing happened; not a peep, not a glimmer, not a budge or nudge or even a whisper. His discomfort grew stronger.

“What do you want? I said I was sorry! I’ll do better from now on!” His last plea fizzled into the fleecy clouds, carried away by the winds of the world and as far as he knew not even heard.

Just as the angel had given up and decided he was forever lost in the eyes of his Master, a fierce glare broke the stillness. Favian gasped, for in its fading wake stood the seraph Milkus. Six wings of splendid majesty sprouted from his back, flapping lazily. Curly silver locks framed a stern but handsome face. He always seemed stern to Favian, regardless of the situation, and then a booming shout ended Favian’s stammering attempt to greet him—

"FAVIAL!"

The little angel was thrust backward by the voice and knew immediately that all was not well.

“I am here to inform you that you have been banned from Above due to excessive exhibition of greed (Favial cringed), jealousy (another cringe), and general disobedience. You have _thrice_ been given the chance to correct yourself, and having thrice failed, you are banned from Heaven until such a time as you show yourself worthy to return. What have you to say?”

Favial teetered closer. “It was just a little greed,” he offered meekly. I gave it all back! Really, I—”

“Silence! Judgment is passed and until you redeem yourself and abolish the human traits you have exhibited, you will NOT be allowed to return.”

“But, but, I—” He didn’t finish, for the seraph flourished his wings in a grand sweep and vanished as swiftly as he had come. Favial was alone again. “What shall I do? He was terrified, lost and alone and, more than anything, invisible in the eyes of his Creator. That was the worst part – a numbed hollowness within that longed to be filled, but how? This wasn’t supposed to happen!

Favial knew he had to do something. He had to return. “What can I do?” he muttered. “What can I do?” He spun in dizzy circles, brow furrowed in thought. He had sinned, that was obvious. He had to find a way to amend issues between himself and the others, but how? Questions and problems raced through his head until finally a promising idea surged to the forefront.

“I am a lesser angel,” he reasoned. “I am a protector of the human race. Understood. I have protected before, I will protect again, but what can I do that I haven’t done before? What can I do that others haven’t already done a thousand times?” His spinning slowed as the plan coalesced. “The problems on earth come from down below, down in the Pit where the Black Prince sits and broods. His minions are the problem! They are the ones who trick the mortals! If there were fewer demons, then Man might be safer.”

He was thinking fervently now and descended without noticing. “If I can convince some of _them_ the wrong of their ways then maybe He will take notice! Who is to say a tortured soul does not

wish to be a happy one? It has obviously worked the other way!” Favial found the whole idea intriguing. Was such an existence a choice or was it truly an immutable punishment? He realized that despite his immortal status, he still didn’t know all the answers. Not yet.

Nevertheless, the plan sounded good to him; no, better than good—superb! This would work, he was sure of it, and the others would be so pleased with his clever plan that they would let him back inside without a second thought, maybe even congratulate him on a job well done. Imagined pride swelled through his chest. He was ecstatic now, and the surge of energy carried him swooping and laughing down through the misty morning clouds. He had a plan.

Now he had to find a subject.

The spirit Grumbug was quite a nasty one. Centuries ago he had belonged to the flesh of a wealthy Egyptian merchant, a fat, opulent man with greasy skin and stale breath. He would buy and sell children not only for coin but also for the pleasure of separating them from their parents and watching them screech in terror when introduced to their new dungeon homes. That was about the nicest thing he ever did. With little surprise, when he toppled from his camel and broke his neck his soul was in Hell before his heart had stopped beating.

Grumbug now spent his days roaming the earth looking for people or animals to possess. He still boasted an impressive mean streak, but in the hierarchy of Hell he was just a weak and pitiful demon, ugly too, with a bulbous nose and flopping hairy ears. Of course, such monsters have never been renowned for their appeal and Grumbug was no different. Around the time of Favial’s descent, he was

stalking a moody old goat that lived at the edge of a golden prairie. The goat saw him coming, and having been an unfortunate victim before, regarded the approach with a wary huff.

“He - he - hey - hey, Ms. Goat,” grumbled the dirty spirit. “How are you today? Don't mind if I take a ride, do ya?” And with that brief introduction he surged forward, grasping her fleecy gray fur and pulling his squat body over her back. Grumbug was too slow, as usual, and the feisty goat kicked, and reared, and spit, and Grumbug flew off with a violent shriek.

“Curses! Hellfire! Curses again! Sits still you infernal creature! This isn't easy!” He gathered himself together to try again, but stopped when he saw the small white angel sitting on a tree limb. Grumbug snorted once and forgot about the goat.

“Who the hell are you?”

“My name is Favial, little demon, and I am here to offer you a wonderful proposition.”

“What?” he croaked.

“My name is Favial and –”

“Bah! I heard ya the first time. What are ya doin' here? Is this a trap?” Grumbug whirled around but spied no other strangers, just an old she-goat trotting haughtily through the grass.

“There is no trap, Ugly One,” said Favial, wearing a gentle smile. “I have a proposition that will benefit both of us. If I could take just a moment of your time I would be happy to tell you about it.” Grumbug scowled, but having nothing better to do, he flapped his gnarled wings and squatted on the branch beside Favial.

“Talk.”

“Well, I have recently been having some trouble among my Elders, and as a form of punishment they have – um – well, banned me from Heaven.”

“Ha! Hee! Banned from Heaven! An angel banned from Heaven! That is the most stupid story I ever heard. Well, almost,” said Grumbug thoughtfully, remembering the nature of his own Dark Lord. “Bah! Get back to guarding sheep, angel. I got work ta do.”

“No, wait! It's true! The way I see it, I have to do something very special so they will let me back in. That's why I need you. My Master can help you. He can take you away from all this mumbling and grumbling if you will just follow me. You know I can't lie.”

Grumbug frowned at the angel. What in the suffering hells was going on here? The High Ones served no purpose other than to interfere with his demonic duties, thwarting them whenever possible. He still couldn't believe this being was sitting on the tree limb beside him, offering nothing less than a guided tour to Heaven. Yet, for a fleeting moment Grumbug saw potential to the idea, and then it was gone, swallowed again by his intrinsic distrust.

“So, so, I follow you up there, He forgives me, you are allowed back in, everyone's happy. Right? Bah!”

“Yes!”

“Yer are a fool, Favial – disgustingly cute and stubborn, but still foolish. Have you considered that I've got no reason to help you?”

“Of course!” chimed Favial. “I know how painful your existence can be. This is one way to relieve you of centuries of agony and an eternity of suffering. You can't lose! Plus, if you're a good little devil and really, really mean what you do, they might throw in some incentive.”

Grumbug growled. “What kind of incentive?” Favial leaned closed and whispered into Grumbug's hairy, black ear.

“A gift.”

“What kind of gift?”

“Oh, you know, THE gift.”

“Ohhh. Really?”

“You never know.”

“They wouldn't do that.”

“They might.”

“Well...let me just think on dis for a minute.” Grumbug scratched his chin and rubbed his puffy cheeks, drawing upon every source of concentration he could muster. Favial calmly watched, merely pleased that he had found a demon so soon who would even consider the plan instead of automatically chasing him off. Grumbug pouted and puffed, blew his cheeks out and eyed the angel every few moments, trying to glean the hint of a lie or trap. Nothing surfaced, nothing untoward or deceptive, which even Grumbug knew would be uncharacteristic of their kind. He finally quit thinking of weak excuses and spoke up.

“I guess it wouldn't hurt ta try. What's the worst they could do? Send me back to Hell? HA!”

“That's right! What *is* the worst they could do? This is perfect! Now that we agree, let's try to find someone else. I'll need more than one spirit to bring back, don't you think?”

“I dunno, Favial, dis is your crazy plan. I am jus' gonna go along an' see what happens. Now look 'ere...if I want outta dis at any time, I'm gone, ya hears me?”

“Don’t worry! This is the best decision you have made in your entire life. Trust me!”

Thus, Favial found his first subject and the first step on his way to redemption. It had not been as hard as he thought it would be. Of course, he was not totally naïve and realized he would have to watch Grumbug very close. Such creatures were bound to lie about virtually anything, but for some reason, Favial felt that he could trust the squat fiend. Never did he imagine the trouble brewing just over the horizon.

Chapter Two

They wandered the earth for many hours, unseen by the eyes of mortals. Several times Favial spotted the black cloud that often signified an evil spirit, but the ones he and Grumbug spoke to were extremely hostile. They all seemed much more interested in wreaking pain and havoc than ending their own torment. Some of the larger ones laughed and taunted the angel, and Grumbug was careful not to be seen with him, lest the demons get the notion that he was a deserter, which, frankly, he was. So they eventually took to skirting around the big meanies (as Favial like to call them) and searched for anything that looked like it might have a desire for negotiation.

Favial could not understand why most of the spirits he encountered were so blatantly hostile. He thought that his plan would, at the very least, cause them to ask questions, but no, more often than not it resulted in a thick glob of viscous liquid spat in his general direction. So they continued searching, hoping that some fiend, somewhere, would give them a moment to explain the situation. There were quite a few he attempted to communicate with that morning, but he became discouraged when they all

cursed at him. The resolute angel shook it off and became only more determined. Somewhere there *had* to be another spirit willing to change.

They had their chance just after mid-day. Upon crossing a bright patch of sunny meadow they came across a simple shack set near green, grassy hills. A tall, gangly caphenophyte, one of those designated to steal small items and place them somewhere else, was visible through the open shanty door. He had deep red eyes and a pointed muzzle, like that of a weasel, and as Favial and Grumbug came upon him, he was rummaging through the interior of the shack.

"Ya won't be needing this ... Ya won't be needin' that ... or this..." said the creature in a whiny, scratchy voice. He was going methodically through the rubbish, swiping random meager possessions and cherished keepsakes. Favial and Grumbug watched silently for just a moment before the angel gently spoke up:

"Uh, pardon me, Mr. Spirit—"

"Yeeooww!!" The caphenophyte yelped in surprise and dropped the tiny bauble he held. He clattered into the wall and nearly toppled the entire shack, but was able to regain his senses quickly and level an evil glare at the two strangers.

"Ooh, that really frightened me. Never do that! Never come up behind me! I hate that! I ... I'm so mad I could... I could..." His expression changed from furious contempt to quizzical curiosity as he

stared at the strange pair. "What are ya doing here?" he addressed Favial. "And what are ya doin' with HIM?"

"Allow me to introduce myself. I am Favial and this is Grumbug. We are on a mission of *grave* importance and I think that perhaps you can help. This will not take but a moment of your time if you will listen to what I have to offer..."

"I'm not gonna listen to nothing coming out of yer mouth, so don't even try! I know what kind of tricks ya can do, and I don't wanna hear any of that 'You are doomed, you are doomed' rubbish. I am what I am, leave me be..." The weasel-faced demon crossed his arms over his skinny chest and glared at Favial, as if daring him to say just one derogatory remark.

"Oh, no, not at all! I am not here to chide you, but to offer help. Here, let me explain myself..."

The caphenophyte gaped in utter astonishment at the angel's suggestion, for once being truly speechless. On one hand, he felt the instinctive desire to pounce on the little angelic messenger boy for scaring him so bad; but on the other hand, he did seem quite sincere, and of course there was that pathetic looking plump spirit hovering nearby, looking earnestly around the angel's fluffy wings. He definitely looked like he had something to say-

"Ya want me to go ta Heaven?" was the initial outburst, as to be expected, but Favial was quick to the point and wove a fairly convincing argument, allowing Grumbug even his own infrequent, but encouraging opinions.

“It’s not such a bad idea!” Favial said enthusiastically. “Look, even one of your own kind has agreed to it!” Grumbug shrugged sheepishly and looked embarrassed.

“I dunno ‘bout this. Sounds fishy! How do you know I am not da most powerful demon in all of Hell? Blahh!” The demon mockingly sneered at the angel and raised his arms as if to sharply embrace him.

“Well, I’m quite sure you are not,” said Favial matter-of-factly, “so let’s not pretend. I think Grumbug could be much more vicious.” The weasel faced demon winced at his failed attempt at ferocity and looked down.

“Don’t be sad,” Favial said. “Of course you have a wretched and pathetic existence! Aren’t you glad someone is here to help you?” Favial ended on a cheerful up note that had Grumbug bobbing his head up and down in fervent approval, much to the annoyance of the caphenophyte.

“Ugh, you are so gleeful,” whined the demon, pawing in Favial’s direction, “I am not used to it.” Favial was happy to apologize and launch into yet another wave of promises and happiness that could await him. The demon was still not convinced, but with Favial’s earnestness and Grumbug's occasional interjections, they were able to sway the fiend’s skepticism just a bit, and, eventually, after a generous chunk of the day had passed, convince him it might not be such a bad idea.

The plan intrigued the caphenophyte, Weevul by name. At least, he appeared to be intrigued. The thieving demon was also a habitual liar, often lying about things of which no one would have cared the truth. He could not always help it, it was just in his nature. Sometimes he could not even remember what the truth was himself! So far, he had done fairly well, only exaggerating slightly to the two beings who had visited upon him. He was wondering what would happen if he did indeed embark on such a quest. In fact, the more Weevul thought about it, the more he liked the idea. He was tired of the bullying by the stronger spirits and, sad but true, he had nothing to look forward to but an eternity in a lake of fire. Therefore, after a while of debate and discussion, they decided they should try to find just one more spirit to bring back to Heaven, just to adhere to Favial's personal lucky number of three.

“Ooh! Ooh!” exclaimed Weevul excitedly, “I might know one who will work! We ‘ave known each other a long time! If der is anyone who would help, it’s Sheba. A fierce ‘un she is,” growled Weevul, cocking a eyebrow and glancing around uneasily, as if something could be watching and listening even at that moment. “She could be a wicked soldier for your Lord, angel. I am quite sure a’ dat.

“Wonderful!” said Favial, “where can we find her?”

“Oh, that easy. She’s in the Abyss.”

Favial's mouth sagged open and Grumbug grunted in disapproval. Unfortunately, to Favial's great distress, this particular spirit resided in Hell itself, layer fifty-nine, and the only way to talk to her would be to descend into the Pit. Favial was unsure about this stage of the plan. While it could acquire a

possible subject, the very thought of where he would have to go all but left him quaking with anxiety. However, the more he thought about it the more he hoped it might work. It could be dangerous, but he decided it might be well worth the risk. If he could bring back three willing spirits his Master would be sure to forgive him! The thought of being able to return to the gates of Heaven by the end of the day filled Favial with joy and, forgetting all concerns, all three set off at once to find an entrance to Hell.

The closest way into the Dark Realm was atop a bitterly cold mountain in the middle of a vast, deserted wilderness. Favial could not see where the mortal realm crossed over to the netherworld, but his two comrades could sense it from miles away. The trio fluttered slowly toward the imposing mount as the sun winked out behind low-lying clouds during its waning cycle across the afternoon sky. Grumbug told Favial that such places often lay hidden far from human contact, in places that men feared or were difficult to reach. Favial nodded, understanding why no one would want to journey here.

They crept into the heart of a black cave, cold and remote from even the rest of the mountain. Favial felt a chill in the air that was different from the outside, a chill that promised of things frightening and dark. He experienced a brief moment of hesitation, but he was determined to go on with the plan. He had come so far and done so much already, to stop before accomplishing his goal was unthinkable!

Following the two spirits, he watched as they came upon a small pool of murky liquid nestled in the rear of the cave. Steam rose from the puddle while gaseous vapors swirled about their feet. The sludge began to ripple slightly as the two demons stood near it, both anxiously rubbing their hands together. As Favial watched, motes and streaks of light flashed forth from the puddle as the contents

began to swirl. Faster and faster, it moved until the muck was a spinning cauldron of mud flashing with hidden light, like distant lightning on a summer's eve.

“We have to go in there?” he asked, utterly repulsed by the idea.

“You bet, angel,” replied Grumbug, “and it ain't gonna get any better. Follow me. We'll be in and out 'fore anyone knew we were there.” Grumbug hopped forward and the oily muck instantly swallowed him.

“Don't linger too long, angel! The cave demons might decide to just push you in!” Weevul laughed, leapt into the pool and was likewise enveloped, leaving Favial to ponder if he was telling the truth or not. Favial fiddled his fingers and puzzled for just a moment over what exactly he was doing. Could he really trust these creatures? Grumbug seemed sincere enough; Weevul...he wasn't sure. This whole idea now seemed to be taking a rather large risk for a potentially minor outcome. Nevertheless, here he was now, and they were waiting for him in whatever lay on the other side of that stinking pit. Doubting evermore his decision, Favial took a breath and stepped into the gate.

Slamming vertigo toppled the small angel, and a brief second later, a blast of heat hit him like a physical object. A roaring furnace of flame and soot surrounded the three beings and Favial at once regretted that he had followed his companions. The landscape was a burning realm of charred mountains and molten rocks. Everywhere screams from the damned ripped through the air, and Favial tried to cover his ears so as not to hear their torment.

“Haaa ... home again,” mused the caphenophyte. “Now let's get going. We have to find Sheba as soon as possible. I got a pretty good idea where to look.”

They started at a quick pace through the smoky land, the two ugly spirits clambering playfully over the blasted terrain while Favial hovered along behind, his face etched in a grimace of horror. So THIS was what Hell was like. He had heard stories, most contradictory, but he assumed Hell could probably be the worst of what anyone expected it to be. Lost souls screeched by, some even crooning and wailing in Favial's ear. He closed his eyes, wishing there was a way to help, and hoping they could find the third partner and leave this place as soon as possible. The human souls that languished here were so pathetic and sad he could not bear to look upon them.

Weevul came to a sudden halt, waving his long fingers in a gesture to stop.

“Ya hear that, Grumbug?”

“I hears it. We must be close...”

“Close to what?” piped Favial, looking eagerly around for an excuse to depart.

“The Pillar of Discontent. It is the focal point of this layer- anybody who is anybody will be near it, so Sheba should be around here somewheres...”

Even as a new question perched upon Favial's tongue, he too heard the deep, low roar that resonated somewhere in the swirling smoke and ash. Moments later the source of the rumble revealed itself as they crossed a small hill- it was a towering pillar of flame, thousands of feet high and hundreds across. Favial could not believe he wasn't able to see the monstrous thing from further away, but at the moment he was too frightened to contemplate the physics of it. The tower of flame was a burning maelstrom of confusion. Spirits dove in and out of its depths, swirling and sparking with indifference in its radiant body like moths at a candle. Yet, oddly enough, as Favial watched the phenomenon he thought it reminded him of something he had seen before, something majestic and beautiful. He couldn't think at the moment what it might be, but the thought tickled at the back of his memory.

“Okay, I guess I should starts lookin’ for her,” mumbled Weevul. “She can’t be too far from here. Matter of fact, that looks like ‘er right there!” His claw pointed at a smoky apparition with a vaguely female shape. She was flitting from spirit to spirit, moving much faster than most of them. Weevul galloped forward, waving his arms to get the spirit’s attention. “Sheba! Sheba!”

She caught sight of Weevul and veered off through the smoke, gliding swiftly towards him on wings of shadowy gossamer.

“Weevul! What are doing? Is that what I think it is behind you?”

“Look”, Weevul said,” we don’t got much time ‘fore we get noticed, so I will make dis brief. This here is Favial, the shortest of all archangels in ‘Eaven’s multitudes...”

Favial coughed in surprised. “Heavens, no! I’m no archangel. What are you saying, Weevul?” The angel nudged the demon aside and approached Sheba.

Sheba quietly watched and listened as the white little angel bumbled out his story-the trouble he was in, the due punishment, the plan for redemption, everything down to the point where he breathlessly spurt out-

“-and THAT’s why you *must* come with us! We only need one more...”

“Ah, I see now,” said Sheba coolly. “You need my help. Hmm, this is all very interesting. Isn’t it interesting, Weevul? Let me think about this for just a moment. Wait, on second thought, maybe I *will* go. Let me get my whip, I like to keep it near...be right back...” and she was already flapping off into the haze.

“But, hey, Sheba...” called out Weevul, but she was gone from sight

“Now what?” said Favial.

“We just wait a bit,” mumbled Weevul. “She’ll be back.”

Grumbug “harrumphed!” and rolled his eyes. They waited for a short while, impatiently watching for her return. Several minutes later there was still no sign and Weevul was growing steadily agitated.

“Hmm, no, I got a funny feelin’ now. She didn’t even ask any questions. Maybe we should just get goin’.

“I would have to concur with that,” chirped Favial, popping up into the air. “Let us take leave and try our luck elsewhere. Shall we?”

“I’m with ‘im” muttered Grumbug. “Let’s go. We can look somewheres else.” The three unlikely companions fluttered back the direction they had come, deliberately swerving away from anyone they came near, especially some of the larger demons that eyed them from a distance with obvious distaste. They hadn’t made it very far when Weevul raised his arm again and stopped, his rodent –like ears twitching to a sound Favial could not detect.

“Shh! Ya hear that, Grumbug?” The fat little demon cupped his hand to his ear and squinted, his beady eyes suddenly opening just a little bit wider.

“What? What do you hear?” asked Favial.

“Yeah, I hears it,” said Grumbug, glancing around fearfully. “We just better ‘urry on up a bit. Speed it up, angel, we gotta get goin’!”

“What? What is happening?” Faval was scared now, not that he had not been before, but the two fiends weren’t giving him an answer, they just doubled their pace through the broken terrain, heading back in the direction of the black pool.

“We can just try our plan somewhere else. Now, personally, I think we have enough demons, but it ain’t my plaAAAAAAA!!!” A sudden whirlwind of commotion interrupted Grumbug and frenzied into the midst of them all.

Faval crashed into Weevul and the two fell to the ground. Before them, Grumbug was being slowly lifted into the air by a mighty red arm of corded muscle and wavering heat. They were too terrified to speak.

“Greetings,” said a gravelly voice.

It was the Devil himself.

Chapter Three

Faval could think of nothing to say as he watched Grumbug dangle helplessly in front of him. He certainly did not intend to talk to Satan about changing his ways. A shadowy spirit Faval recognized as Sheba hovered near his shoulder.

“Uh, Master,” stammered Grumbug, “we ... uh ... caught this intruder entering. We ... captured him and...and... were just about to bring ‘em to you!” He gulped, a pallid and totally unconvincing smile falsely plastered on his face.

“Is that so? I think you are lying. I think you are traitorous demons gullible enough to fall for the wiles of a clever angel. That's what I think and I DON'T LIKE IT!” With that final word, Lucifer picked Grumbug up over his head and dashed him into the ground. What was left of his body dissolved and melted into the hot earth.

“Please, milord,” begged Weevul, “this is really just a large misunderstanding. I really had the plan all along to-“

“QUIET!” The Dark Prince merely pointed a long, black claw at the weasel-faced spirit and he exploded immediately into a puddle of stinking sulfur and ash.

“Never contradict me. I can't believe they disobeyed me like that! I'll have to think of a fiendishly suitable punishment. Thank you, Sheba for informing me.” The dark spirit bowed slightly but remained silent. “Now, as for you,” he turned toward Favial, “you are *definitely* far from home.” Favial tried to speak, but the words just would not come out. He now realized that this had been a very bad plan.

“I've often thought He would send spies into my domain to see what I'm up to. Humph! as if He doesn't know already. He is so condescending to me, every chance He gets. And now this! You! Here

you are and I'm a little more than upset." The Devil sniffed and scratched his head. "Well, say something!"

"I'm not a spy! I'm not a spy! I just wanted to find some spirits and bring them back with me to Heaven so they can be converted, and the Creator will forgive me for all the things I've done and everything can be made right again and I can get back in, and ... and..." He stopped his babbling as the expression on the Devil's face darkened even more.

"I think you ARE a spy and I'm infuriated that you are here- VERY infuriated. What -what were you thinking? Do you know where you are? This is HELL. Hell is *opposite* of Heaven. It's not for you and you're not wanted here."

"Well, I ... I ... just thought maybe..."

"Did you really expect to take some of my servants back with you? Ludicrous! I can't believe they agreed! I'll have to tighten my rules. You wanted to steal my fiends! How dare you!"

"Yes, yes! You're right! I apologize! I realize now the error of my thoughts. I shan't do it again, thank you though for alerting me, I'll just go now -"

"Stop! You're here now and you're going to talk to me." Satan snapped his fingers and instantly six spindly-legged devils pulled a bone chair up out of nowhere. Lucifer sat down carefully and rested his bulging hands on the skull armrests. "So, how do you like Hell?"

"I don't."

"Heh! Me neither. But it's mine! Not yours. Not His. Mine! Is that clear?"

"Yes, yes, oh yes, I underst – "

"Quiet! Now what was that you blabbed about being forgiven for something? What did you do? Lose a harp? Drop something on a mortal?" The Devil leered at the angel, propping himself haughtily in his grotesque bone throne.

"No. I ... uh ... exhibited ... um ... human traits ... and I'm being punished for it."

"He sent you here? "

"Oh, no! This was my idea."

Satan smirked at the almost proud tone in the angel's voice.

"It was your idea to come to my home and steal my servants?"

"No! No! I just wanted to turn them into good spirits so my Master would forgive me, that is all. Really! It was only going to be three of them! " The Devil stared at Favian without saying anything. Favian could not meet his gaze so he stared down at the ground, scraping a toe across some rocks.

“Only three, hmmm? So He would ... (chuckle) ... *forgive you*. How poetic.” Favial still said nothing. “Let me ask you this, angel. These human ... traits you were showing; how did they *feel*?”

Favial looked up in mild surprise. “Feel?”

“Yes. The...the greed, or the envy, or whatever. Did it make you feel good ... strong, to be able to do what you wanted?”

“I don't ... no ... I don't know ... I think,... uh, no...”

"I think you DID like it. I know how it feels. It's addictive, isn't it? Alluring." Lucifer shifted in his chair and leaned up, poking a claw on Favial's chest. “It's so very *human*.”

“Well, maybe...” Favial had indeed enjoyed the rush, that slight burst of exhilaration as he coveted some small bauble or trinket, or if a mischievous thought entered his head...

“And you've never been human, have you? You're just one of the countless reserves that populate Heaven, waiting your turn if you choose. I can imagine your curiosity. Believe me, I know.” Favial couldn't think of anything to say. The conversation wasn't going the way he expected. The Devil seemed suddenly sympathetic to his problems and that greatly unnerved the little angel.

“Listen, Favial. Since you're here, why don't you stay a while? It's not such a bad place once you get used to it. I could teach you a lot about being human.”

"But, I don't want to know a lot ab-"

“Of course you do!! You are already halfway there. Let me show you more. There is so much to learn Favial. So much to feel.” He leaned in even closer again. “All you have to do is trust me.” Now, if ever there had been a rule ingrained in the hearts and minds of the citizens of Heaven it was DO NOT TRUST SATAN. That golden rule rang loud and clear in Favial's ears and he took a cautious step backwards from the Black King's leering smile.

“What do you think?”

“I don't think that's such a good idea,” he squeaked. “I'll just go now. Thank you for the offer, but I'm really not up to it. I'm very late, and was due home a long, long time ago. Maybe some other time!” Favial fluttered back slowly, easing toward what he hoped was the liquid portal.

“Foolish angel! I offer you an eternity of luxury and worldly delights and you throw it in my face! You have no concept of what could be yours, what you can take and twist to serve your own desires. I was being very generous in my offer! No one does that to me! I was right all along-you are just a spy sent here to root out my business. You'll pay for that! You will all pay for that!” Satan sprang from his throne and whirled around, raising his arms into the dirty sky. From his back unfolded two giant, leathery bat wings that flapped the clouds of smoke and fire. Favial stumbled back in terror as the Devil called upon his servants in a chilling voice:

“Hear me now! The enemy has invaded us! They have tempted us to do battle and we shall answer! Gather your arms! Gather your arms! We fight NOW!”

A cacophonous wailing built throughout the realms of Hell, gaining in pitch and madness, soon drowning out even the low roar of the Pillar of Discontent. Fleshy creatures of insubstantial form and shape began to swarm toward their master, horribly twisted spirits of grotesque proportions and vile temperament. Crude weapons clanged on metal; black nails scraped the ground and dripping maws bit at nearby flesh. In just minutes the hordes of the Underworld had rallied around their terrible master, eagerly awaiting his next command...

Favial quit listening to the Devil's ranting as soon as his back was turned. He flew swiftly back to the liquid gateway and slid in. The portal transported back to the mountaintop, dazed and disoriented, but he wasted no time in leaving the cave and streaking up into the frigid sky. Never before had Favial flown faster and never had he wanted to be home so badly.

“Help!” he cried. “Somebody help me!” Faster and faster, he soared into the sky until he reached the point where the gates of Heaven stood strong and immobile. They were still closed tight.

“Let me in! They're after me!” There was no response. He turned in terror and gazed at the world below. Far away, just at the edge of his sight, there seemed to be a flutter of movement across the whole horizon. A thin line of flapping wings and jagged swords was swiftly approaching, boldly contrasted against the brilliant setting sun. It seemed as if every denizen of Hell had come out and now followed their Master as he made his way to the gates of Heaven.

“LET - ME - IN!” screamed the tiny angel, as loudly as he could, and no sooner than he had done so the gates of Heaven split asunder with a resounding crack. From within swarmed an army of angelic soldiers. Mighty thrones, wheels, seraphs, and all the elder ranks of angels bristled forth in a wave of searing white light. Golden spears and swords glinted in the fading daylight as the two waves of spirits sped closer together across the crimson sky. Favian did not stay to watch. He crawled inside the still open gate and fled for the safety of inner Heaven.

Outside the two armies clashed together with a roar of screams and cries, the chaotic side mingling and crushing into the angelic. It was a long and furious battle. For hours the devils and angels fought in a war that had not happened so openly in millennia. Normally the spirits of the netherworlds took to much more subtle forms of dispute and conflict, but nay, on this fateful eve the legions of Heaven and Hell met with a clash of blatant violence. Despite the suddenness of the assault by Hell's legions, the guardians of Heaven seemed well prepared. The golden soldiers were swift and accurate, their sharp swords cleaving left and right with wanton abandon. Serpentine heads and horned animals waded through the battle, flapping and croaking with careless attacks.

Oddly enough, the very one who had started this battle, the Dark Prince himself, was no longer near. Nevertheless, immortal blood rained in a dark curtain as the two sides fought on and on. Halberds and lances cracked and swung, but as day fell to dusk the fortune of battle turned to favor the ranks of Heaven. The evil tide of darkness seeped back like a skulking plague as the legions slowly turned away. By nightfall, there was no evidence that there had ever been a confrontation outside the gates of the Above.

Little Favial had the courage to poke his head out long after the battle had ended. The angel relaxed when he saw that the sky was clear and no horrible beasts were waiting around to devour him. He stepped out and glanced carefully around; the sky was dark yet beautiful, winking with a hundred thousand motes of light. The small angel could not help but stand in awe as he recollected all that had happened to him this day-it was almost too much to believe. He was about to return inside when a whispery voice spoke out near him-

“Favial...”

The angel jumped from surprise, clambering away from the apparition. Sheba floated down between the angel and the Gates to Heaven, her eyes of midnight black boring into him. Favial didn't know what to do. He quickly stammered out-

“I was only trying to help you. You don't realize that, do you? Perhaps I was being too bold to venture into that tortuous place you call home, but I don't regret what I was trying to do. I'm also sorry you felt the need to betray us like that; that really wasn't necessary, you know, we could have left just fine on our own...”

For a moment there was no response to Favial's remark; Sheba merely gazed at him with impenetrable eyes of pitch. He could not help but notice the flayed barbs of the whip slung at her side.

“I did what I had to do, Favial. You and I are different, you should have known better; I have my master, you have yours. However, I do have to say...”she paused uneasily, “I do have my curiosities now that this is over. I wonder if your valiant quest was so worth it? What if I did go along, what *would* have happened?” She sighed breathlessly, then hissed "But, I guess we'll never know, will we?"

“One day you *will* know, Sheba, and the offer still stands.” Favial fluttered around her, a perk of courage growing in his gut as he slid by. Her body turned to follow him as he eased around until just outside the immaculate gates. “All you have to do is trust me.”

“Ha! Trust? That concept in my world is a useless sign of weakness. I don’t trust anyone.”

“Well, if you change your mind, you know where to come.”

Sheba scowled at him then shook her head. “You talk of things that can never happen, things not meant to be. You are too optimistic, angel, for your own good. There are too many factors at play here that you could not possibly understand. In the future, stay away from the Realm Below, I don’t think the Master would be very happy to see you again.”

“Oh, I am quite sure of that! I shan’t be going anywhere near there ever again, not if I can help it.”

“See to it, angel, see to it,” whispered Sheba’s silky voice as she faded away into the night. “I won’t forget...”

“I suppose not,” murmured Favial quietly as he watched her disappear, sliding into the midnight skies of the mortal realm like some kind of dream. He paused again, contemplating all that had just occurred, and thinking in the back of his mind, he had indeed learned much since daybreak, despite the lack of success. He also thought about how he would never get out of so much trouble for at least two or three millennium.

He turned to go inside when a booming voice shattered the fragile stillness-

“FAVIAL!”

This time it was not Milkus.

“Yes, Master?” he said meekly

“I SEE WE HAVE BEEN VERY PRESUMPTUOUS WITH OUR SELF, HAVE WE NOT? YOU NEARLY STARTED AN OPEN WAR WITH HELL THAT COULD HAVE LASTED FOR AGES. THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN A FAIRLY MAJOR CATASTROPHE, GETTING ALL THOSE SPIRITS RILED UP...THERE WILL STILL BE REPERCUSSIONS FOR A GOOD WHILE, I CAN ASSURE YOU OF THAT. THE DARK ONE IS NOT VERY FORGIVING...”

“I was only trying to please you, Lord - truly! I had the most wonderful plan, only...only it didn't work out quite the way I wanted it to, but I still had the best of intentions! Please forgive me. I have learned my lesson and never again will I disobey!”

“DON'T WORRY, FAVIAL. I KNOW, I KNOW. YOU HAVE LEARNED ENOUGH FOR NOW. WE REALIZE YOU ARE LESS DANGEROUS ON THE INSIDE THAN ON THE OUTSIDE. COME IN, BUT REMEMBER WHAT HAS HAPPENED HERE THIS DAY, FAVIAL, FOR IT WILL BE IMPORTANT FOR A LONG TIME TO COME.”

“Yes, Master, I will!” Favial flew forward and through the gates as they snapped closed behind him, so quickly in fact that it pinched off a single white feather that drifted down, down, down. So it was that one little angel accidentally caused a mighty war between Heaven and Hell. He had indeed learned from his experience and Favial would eventually become one of the more powerful Elder Angels. However, who could have known the trouble that would evolve from that lone little feather that drifted down to earth?

No one saw that coming either, but that is another tale.

THE END