

Ekko's New Neighbor

by Ian/Iana Spencer

I stumbled out my apartment in a sleepy daze, unsure of how I got dressed and pretty, stretching my fuzzy wings and yawning lackadaisically with my maw agape. I thought I looked quite cute doing this, somewhere between a bubbly goth baddie and a large cuddly dog. The unfamiliar man, poor guy, took it quite differently, with less the endearment I would have imagined and more crying, pleading.

“Please! Spare me demon! I... I don't know where I went wrong in life, I... I voltun-”

“I- Uh, did I do something wrong?”

He, who was a bit under six feet tall, looked up at me with a confused face, “Did... did you?”

I rubbed my tired eye, “I'm sorry, littl- uh, my friend, but I just woke up. Did I offend? I apologize if I upse-”

“U-uhh... Well, no, I'm the one in Hell, aren't I?”

I began to come to my senses, “Oh, are you recently deceased?”

He looked mournful, perhaps that was too heavy a question, “I... I did everything right.... I mean, I was agnostic, but I volunteered for charity, I dedicated my life to helping people... I...”

“You said you were agnostic?”

“Well, yes... Is that grounds for damnation...?”

Oh, poor little thing, I thought, before reminding myself to treat him with a bit more dignity. I've always had a terrible habit of doting on humans. It isn't *my fault* that I find them so endearing, that they live their sweet little lives with such self-assigned meaning, create purpose of their own. Creating gods and pantheon with their belief, willing angel and demon alike into our existence because they can't stand the thought of being alone in the universe. And of course, why should they be? It would be a crime against every bit of matter in the cosmos that humans be alone. Such beautiful, sweet, precious, adora- *Snap out of it Ekko! Treat your Damned comrades with some fucking dignity!* “Y'know”, I smiled warmly, “I think perhaps you misunderstand your place here.” *Ekko! You fucking moron!*, I nearly slapped my hand upon my forehead, *You were suppose to sound comforting, not menacing! You always do this!*

This poor soul shivered, his shoulders tensing up, “What... what's gonna happen to me-?”

“I'm so sorry!”, I rubbed the back of my neck so haphazardly I nearly scratched myself with my own claws, “That came out wrong! I meant to say, that Hell isn't as bad as the newlydamned often assumes it to be.”

“The sky is red, the rivers are blood and all the trees are dead...”

“Well, aesthetics aren't a metric for a person or places moral aptitude. I personally thing the sky is a

lovely shade of red at night this time of year, but if it makes you feel any better, the sunrise is a lovely shade of purplish pink, and even if you don't care for the aesthetics of day or night, the people you meant in Saint Bedlam will more than make up for it.”, I paused for a moment “I'm guessing you just got here, am I correct, friend?”

“Well... yes?”

“Well then you must have skipped the ethics rehab! You didn't even need to learn to be a good, kind person, that means you lived a good life! Doesn't surprise me at all, you seem like a very kind man.”

“Why am I in Hell then?!”, red tears were filling up this poor mans eyes.

“God is very... choosy. A perfectionist, if you will. If you ask me, a bit needy. You said you were agnostic, that's almost certainly why. But we're happy to have people like you. You seem a kind soul, yes? I'm sure you'll brighten up everyone's day. We take care of each other here. Now, do you need help finding you're apartment?”

The man looked up at me sadly, rubbing his eyes and then looking at his bloodstained hands, “Are my eyes bleeding? I didn't feel any pain....”

“No sweetie, the damned just cry blood. We demons do too, nothing to be alarmed by, it's perfectly normal down here.”, I looked down at him, placed a gentle hand on his shoulder and smile, “My name's Ekko, by the way. A Hellbat, of course. It's nice to make your acquaintance.”

“My name's William”, he gave a halfhearted smile, looking down at his shoes.

“Oh, I have another neighbor named William. We call him Blind Willie. He was jazz musician in life. Cool guy, very talented musician and theorist! You should meet him, too, at some point!”

William paused for a moment, “I think I can find my apartment on my own, number 205. Not far from here right?”

“Not at all, just around the hall!”

“Thanks Ekko.”

“Of course. I'll see you around William!” I smiled, “Get some sleep! I hope you feel a bit better tomorrow.”

“I think I will.” He smiled back, “It's good to meet you.”