

The Seraph of Kitsch



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Part Five:

The Angel of Sodom

The Artist let out a gasp as he awoke in his studio. He was splayed out on his floor, the lights above him bathing him in synthetic glow. He abruptly sat up, the memories of his time in Tartarus flooding back. He clutched at his body, certain that his bones were snapped and twisted, and was relieved to find no injuries. He was no longer cold, no ice caked his hair. His clothes were not torn or shredded, and he lurched back to his feet.

He looked around for any sign of The Seraph of Agony, but The Blazing Sister was nowhere to be seen.

The Artist took in a shaky breath and walked towards his desk. He poured himself another glass of whiskey and began to sip at it. He leant back on his desk and stared into the tortured eyes of his painting. Into the bleeding visage of the faceless maiden he had conjured onto the canvas only days before.

Do you deserve it? He pondered. What did you do?

The more he stared at the painting, the more he came to dispute The Angel of Tartarus' claims. The painting was not beautiful because of some perverted sense of justice. No, he had intended for it to be tragic. For it to be profound. For it to be... Well, something that it wasn't. The girl he had drawn did not deserve her fate. She was just a projection. Just some grisly fetish devoted to the god that all over-emotional poets devoted themselves to. He had meant to inspire, to transgress, but all that stared back was gratuity. Gratuity and self-aggrandisement-

But then two oily patches of rust-coloured energy burst into being before him. Between he and his painting, the wings bloomed. In their incorporeal depths, The Artist could see brothels overflowing with lustful men. He could see young boys and girls being raped. He could see sinful overindulgence and a world sucked dry to fuel its patron's pleasures. Vampires wrapped themselves in fleshy masks, masquerades took place in the streets, and a thousand men drank themselves to death willingly. Doomed mortals partied against the darkness, drugs and elixirs were stuffed into veins, and

at the heart of it all was a city, a city being eternally razed by the heavens...

Then the wings flapped and a creature slithered into being. The Angel of Sodom was a slight figure. Its pale body was clothed in a baggy, rust-coloured gown. Beneath it they were completely naked. They possessed dark hair akin to the Angel of Babylon's and their eyes were a swirling mass of colours, varying from rust to clotting blood. The Angel neither presented itself as a man or a woman. Which mortal gender it subscribed to was completely unknown. To The Artist, The Angel of Sodom appeared a beguiling, slightly androgenous, woman, but to one whom did not find pleasure in such company, it would appear to be a gentle and loving man...

The Angel of Sodom smiled and took a slothful step forward. "Hello Artist," it hissed. "You are an artist, are you not?"

The Artist stared into the psychedelic gaze possessed by the angel. Then his eyes flickered to the oily patches of ethereal energy plumbing behind it. His gaze soon became lost in an ocean of lust. Boats crewed by castrated rapists sailed down rivers of semen while bloated royals bed each other like dogs in the cabins. Fires rained from the heavens whilst angels hacked blind men to ribbons in the streets. Adulterers met in run-down hotels, and engaged in their clandestine revels.

Then, the oily wings of The Angel of Sodom moved, and snapped The Artist out of hypnosis.

"Yes," he answered finally.

The eyes of The Seraph of Kitsch twinkled. They flared, becoming the horrid colour of clotting blood, and then flickered over to the painting of the faceless maiden. Its lips coiled into a grin.

"Um," The Artist said slowly as his angelic companion gracefully lurched about before the painting and ran its oil-slick tongue over black lips. "Who exactly are you?"

"Who?" The Angel asked. "What would be more appropriate, but I'll indulge you." It glanced back over its shoulder and fluttered its eyelashes. "It's what I do." The Angel bit down on its oily lips and hummed with restrained ecstasy. "I am The Angel of Sodom, The Sister of Sin, The Brother of Blasphemy, The Seraph of Kitsch."

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The Seraph of Kitsch splayed its arms and twirled, then came to gaze at The Artist.

“What do you want from me?” it asked. “Inspiration, is that it?”

The Artist nodded. “Yes,” he breathed, his heart fluttering in the presence of the simultaneously horrifying and beguiling creature. The entire entity was a juxtaposition. Holy and unholy. Male and female. Sinner and saint.

“Let me guess,” The Seraph of Kitsch said, sauntering towards its summoner and beginning to prowl around him. “Asphodel refused to show. Eden showed you a bunch of horny apes and writhing serpents. Babylon showed you some rotting towers covered in rodent shit and pigeon bones, and Tartarus showed you a bunch of masochists convinced that their ecstasy is in fact penance for some past sin?”

The Artist felt the hairs on the back of his neck stand on end as The Angel walked around him. “Something like that,” he replied.

He heard The Angel of Sodom laugh. It was a sickly sound. It smelled vaguely of honey.

Then The Artist felt the creature brush up against him, and his shivered.

The Seraph of Kitsch rested its head on The Artist’s shoulder and gazed at the painting enthroned upon the easel. “She’s pretty,” it crooned.

The Artist flinched as the words of The Angel of Sodom slithered into his ears like oily tentacles.

“But she’s not a she, is she?” The Angel continued. “No... I think she’s a he. I think she’s you. Yourself, inserted upon the canvas, disguised as the fairer sex... But where I come from there is no such thing. There is only the individual, and I see her eyes in yours, darling.”

The Angel of Sodom let out its sickly, sweet laugh once more, and brushed past The Artist to stand before him. As it did so, The Artist saw the burning city once again flash across the canvas of its incorporeal wings.

“You have rendered yourself upon that canvas, baring yourself naked for all to see,” it cawed. “Am I wrong?”

“Well,” The Artist began. “No,” he conceded.

The Angel of Sodom grinned impishly and turned to face him. “There is nothing wrong with the picture, darling,” The Angel of Sodom brushed a tussle of The Artist’s hair and sent bolts of primal energy shooting through his system. “I can show you what you fail to see. I can show you everything. Everything my siblings don’t understand.”

The hand withdrew, and lingered before The Artist.

He gazed at it, his eyes constantly drawn to the rusty, oily wings of the accursed angel.

The Angel of Sodom cocked its head to one side and beckoned The Artist forward with its index finger.

“Come,” it demanded.

The Artist took a breath, then took The Angel of Sodom’s hand in his. It was warm, like a fever, and felt filthy and slick against his own.

Then, The Angel of Sodom’s wings flared, and the world around them began to blur. Unlike the previous angels, no nebulous void of inky darkness came to claim them. Instead, the features of the world blurred, and when The Angel’s wings flared again, they were standing in a grimy, dim room. It smelled of sweat and liquor. Strange, psychedelic lights buzzed about on the ceiling. The sound of drinks clinking, people shouting, and music thrumming tore through the air, and bit into the bones of all patrons.

The Artist looked around and saw that they had materialized inside a nightclub. Around them were tables and booths, most of them packed. There were two bars, all of them crowded, and beyond the bars was a large dance floor. It was full, and a legion of youths jumped and lurched about to music conjured forth by a DJ standing on a podium.

“I know this place!” The Artist shouted, barely audible over the din. “This is Empire’s End!”

“No need to shout, mortal,” The Angel of Sodom said as it took a look around the place. “I can hear you just fine.” It brought its oily wings in close to its body, and the horrid images they conjured were lost. Then, the angel laughed. “Lovely place!” it praised.

“What are we doing here?” The Artist asked.

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“You wanted to see,” The Seraph of Kitsch replied.

“I can see a nightclub anytime I want!” The Artist snapped back.

The Angel of Sodom cocked its head to one side. “We’re not here to see a nightclub,” it countered. “We’re here to see Sodom.”

“This isn’t Sodom,” The Artist retorted.

“It might as well be,” The Angel said dreamily. “It’s a lot of effort to drag you halfway across the multiverse to a burning city full of vampires, rapists, and pedophiles. Why go there when I can keep it local? Now, let’s get us a booth.”

“You’re having a laugh,” The Artist scoffed. “A booth at this time of-”

The Angel of Sodom walked into an empty booth that The Artist could neither confirm nor deny existing a moment prior.

“Sit,” The Angel instructed.

The artist raised an eyebrow, then gingerly lowered himself into the seat beside his eldritch companion. From their booth they could see nearly the entirety of the club arrayed before them. They could see drunken girls dancing, bouncers eyeing up people suspiciously, men tipping pretty bartender’s ludicrous amounts...

“So,” The Artist began.

“So?” The Angel of Sodom mocked.

The Artist looked into its strange eyes. “Why have you brought me here? Why not take me to Sodom?”

“Because I can’t be bothered,” The Angel said, biting on its lips seductively.

The Artist smiled. “There shouldn’t be any choice in it,” he said. “I summoned you, remember?”

“Mortal,” The Seraph of Kitsch began, “do you understand the rules and workings of The Codex Infernus and how they interact with a creature like me?”

“Well, no-”

The Angel of Sodom fluttered its eyelashes. “Then shut the fuck up about it.”

The Artist let out a laugh. “You’re not like the others,” he said.

“Why? Because I don’t hold myself with some kind of oldy-

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worldly divine authority? Bah!” The Angel of Sodom cackled. It was a strange sound. It smelled of poison. “I can act how I like. The cycle turns, and my role in it is over, practically.”

“What cycle? The others mentioned that.”

“The cycle,” The Angel of Sodom answered. “Life, the universe, and everything in it. It operates on all levels. In our case, we are dealing with your story. Your cycle, but the universe is as alive as you or I, and it too has a tale to tell.”

The artist shook his head, and allowed for his senses to momentarily get lost in the overload of the club.

“What now?” he asked, shifting awkwardly.

“Do I unnerve you?” The Angel of Sodom asked.

“Of course you unnerve me. Until yesterday I didn’t believe in angels. And even now, now that I have proof, sitting next to me, there’s something wrong with you. It’s like you’re not an angel at all.” “Because I am not,” The Seraph of Kitsch said. “I am Sodom. I am a burning city, razed by the heavens. I am sin, and all that is taboo. I am more than this measly form, as you, Artist are more than yours.”

“Why are we here?” The Artist asked again.

“To see,” the angel replied.

“To see what?”

“Everything. All the sights and sounds this place has to offer.”

“How will this help me with my painting?” The Artist said finally.

“Painting?” The Seraph of Kitsch scoffed. “My dear, there’s nothing wrong with the painting. It’s up here,” it tapped The Artist’s temple with a strangely slick finger, “that’s the problem.”

The Artist frowned and fought to form words.

“Ssh,” The Angel hissed, placing a finger on The Artist’s lips. “Just look. Look around. Tell me what you see?”

The artist leant away from his companion and once again cast his gaze around them room. “A bunch of twenty-something’s trying to get in each other’s pants,” he said finally.

“Oh, my darling, please be more imaginative,” The Angel crooned. “Look closer.” The Angel then pointed across the room, to the second bar. The Artist followed her gesture with his gaze, and

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was met with two very drunken guys. One was slightly older than the other. He had long hair and a lumberjack's beard. He wore an unbuttoned flannel shirt with a vest-top underneath. The second wore a simple jacket and was trying to get the attention of a waitress wearing too much eyeliner.

"Those two drunk guys?" The Artist asked. "What about them? Why are they so special?"

"They're not," The Seraph said, "but drunk is definitely one way to describe them. In fact, it would be an understatement! They're pissed! Blackout, I'd wager. And I'd say they were close to that when they got here a few hours ago," The Seraph of Kitsch giggled at this and clapped its hands together giddily. "Things have only got worse! Judging by the sweat caking them, the fact that this is the second time they've gone to that bar since we've been here, and the fact that Mrs. too-much-eyeliner has b-lined straight to them, indicating they are tipping ridiculously... They're having the best night of their life that they'll ever not remember." The Angel giggled. "Why?"

"What?" The Artist asked incredulously.

The Angel of Sodom turned back to him and smiled impishly. "Why?" it asked again.

"Because they're two dumb idiots who can't control themselves," he ventured.

"No," The Angel said. "Well, yes, but that's not the point I'm trying to make. It's all kitsch, that's my point."

"Kitsch?" The Artist asked.

"Yes, Kitsch," The Angel of Sodom said. "You know, ironic in a knowing way." It winked.

"Okay, it's ironic," The Artist said, "but what's the difference between them and millions of other students getting blackout at the club?"

"Nothing," The Angel of Sodom said. "They're forms, as are they all. But what is the point? What is the point in their night on the town? They won't remember a thing. They won't remember a single song that played. A single girl they danced with. A single taste that passed their lips, save maybe bile. They'll get thrown out of here soon, I'd wager, but look at them. Smiling. Dancing. Laugh-

ing. Enjoying themselves. Why? What's the point in an ecstasy they won't remember? Kitsch. They know it's pointless. Deep down, they know. They know, and yet they party on, as do we all. That is the truth of it, artist. That's what you're missing. You're not in on the joke yet. You still think that galleries care about art."

Once again, the laughter accented with honey.

"They care about so little, in the end. The art they acquire is like those two lads. They'll never remember why."

The Artist crossed his arms and leant back. He gazed deeply at the angel, and as he did so, he became aware that this creature truly was no angel. It was sin. Pure sin and hedonism, given form and function. Its wings glistened like oil. In their depths he saw pedophiles and rapists. Young boys stashing porno mags underneath their beds. He saw vampires, partying in a city being perpetually razed by the heavens. He could see angels in the streets outside, hacking away at the vampires, but the vampires didn't care. Still they feasted. Still they fornicated, with smiles on their fanged faces.

Then he became aware that somehow the city of Sodom was the entire club.

He could see a creature on the dance floor. She was young, younger than he. She was dancing alone. She was dressed up in a revealing dress, with too much makeup on her face. She swayed sensually to the music, but every man that approached her was turned away. Every phone number or drink that was offered was turned away. And as The Artist stared at her, he could see that she was Sodom. The makeup on her vampiric face was that of a clown. She had applied it herself, to attract the other vampires, but she knew, deep down, it was kitsch. She could not bring herself to kiss another, or even, to dance.

Then the entire room became a rust-coloured, oily canvas of ghastly images.

The Artist could see the DJ. Looming above the crowd as their sovereign. He was wreathed in a crown of hubris and wild despair. The music his electronic instruments conjured coiled around the room like the tentacles of a noxious leviathan. He was Sodom, in all its perverted majesty. He was kitsch. He knew it. He knew that not one patron cared about him. They only cared about the music.

Cared that he continued to spin tracks, tracks they could dance to, or tracks they would recognize and sing along with. They didn't care for him. But still he acted as if they did, prattling about on his podium and trying his best to hype up the crowd.

The Artist slowly got to his feet and looked around.

Everyone. Every student or drunken youth. All were Sodom. The rusty, oily energy had come to envelope all, and it all led back to one source, the androgenous angel that still sat at the conspicuously available booth.

The Artist then looked down at himself. Where his dinner jacket and pale hands should have met his gaze, his form was now an oily canvas displaying the wonders of Sodom. He could see men covered in sores and boils bedding each other. He could see whores being beheaded by avenging angels, that upon closer inspection had a rabid glee in their hallowed gazes. He could see children burning as fire rained from the heavens, and above all he could see a pretty maiden slicing off her own face. A crowd of people stood and stared as she did it. She was crying. Screaming in pain, but the people could not notice. They simply stared, in awe. He could hear them discussing the beauty of the cuts, the cleanness of the flaying. And then, the girl started laughing. She started giggling madly. She started to sing a mournful song, and all the people clapped. They threw money at her, for her to keep singing in her hoarse, agonized voice. They gave her canvas' with which to spill her blood onto. They gave her pots of gold to take the canvases away, and the woman continued to laugh. As blood cascaded down her face, she wrapped it in bandages, to heal, and when the money ran low months later, she removed the bandages, and took the blade once again to her still-healing face-

The Artist's gaze snapped back to the angel.

The Angel of Sodom raised an eyebrow. "Welcome to Sodom," it purred.

Then, reality snapped back into focus and The Artist was shoved to the side as a gaggle of drunk girls pushed past him to get to the dance floor. He slowly walked back towards The Seraph of Kitsch.

"I get it," he said.

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The Seraph of Kitsch smiled and slinked to its feet. “Well,” it crooned. “Took you long enough.” It reached forwards and gripped The Artist’s hand in its. It leaned in close, brushing his ear with its oily lips. “You understand?”

The Artist stiffly nodded.

“Shall I take you back to your studio?”

“Yes,” he breathed.

The Angel of Sodom laughed. Once again it smelled of honey.

“Then I shall inform the others that you do not need their services?”

The Artist considered this. “Yeah.”

“You will see them, I fear, regardless. The Scarlet Sister and The White Brother. The Seraph of Sacrifice and The Seraph of Judgement. The Angel of Golgotha and The Angel of Armageddon. The Twins of Finality. But which one awaits you, Artist? I’m certainly not telling.”

The Artist’s brow furrowed. “What do you mean?”

The Seraph of Kitsch’s wings flared, and when the rusty blaze of power had faded, he was once again standing in his studio, completely alone.

The Artist took a look at his painting. He looked into the maiden’s agonized eyes. As he stood there, he poured himself another glass of whiskey, and remembered that he didn’t believe in angels.

He finished his whiskey, then turned out the lights and descended back down to his flat.

No other angels visited him that night.

The two drunk men were bounced on their next trip to the bar.

The young woman never danced with anyone and went to bed alone.

The DJ pretended the crowd cheered for him.

It was all Kitsch