

The Seraph of Kitsch



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Part Six:

Epilogue

“It’s really quite beautiful,” the young woman said as she sipped at a glass of champagne. “In a kind of tragic, artsy way.”

The Artist took a sip from his champagne and turned to her. He could see that her hair was clearly dyed blonde and that she had applied vastly too much makeup. Before them stood The Artist’s latest piece, just purchased by the gallery. The faceless maiden was now affixed to the wall, and many of the London art scene’s most influential people pratted around it, talking and sipping on champagne.

“You think so?” The Artist asked, looking into the woman’s almond eyes.

“Yeah,” she replied, her eyes flickering back to the painting for a moment before becoming lost in The Artist’s once again. “it’s so... Well... I don’t know. It’s just so grisly. I think it’s a beautiful statement about modern beauty standards and how they affect young women.”

“Really?” The Artist asked, feigning sincerity.

The Woman fluttered her eyelashes at him. “Yeah,” she said. “The blood’s ironic, right?”

The Artist smiled wryly, then shrugged. “Couldn’t have put it better,” he said, downing his champagne. “You doing anything tonight?” he asked.

“Excuse me?” The Woman asked.

“You want to see some more of my art? I could take you to my studio.”

The woman slinked towards him. “That would be... educational,” she said, running her tongue over too-red-lips.

“I’m sure,” The Artist said. “It’s above my flat, I’ll get you an address.”

“Get me a phone number first.”

“All professional inquiries must go through my agent, I’m afraid,” The Artist countered, pointing across the room to where his agent was currently talking with the head curator.

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The woman giggled. "Alright," she said.

The Artist watched her go, and before he could disappear back into the party, an old man in a grey overcoat came to stand beside him.

"It's all rather gratuitous," Old One-Eye said, claspng its hands behind its back.

The Artist froze. "Hello," he said.

"Hello," Old One-Eye replied, turning its remaining eye to focus on The Artist. "I trust my friends were educational."

"So it was real," The Artist mumbled, coming to stand beside the strange creature and following its gaze back to his painting. "Indeed," he said.

Old One-Eye smiled. "I don't like it," he said, "but It'll end up as mine, I suppose."

The Artist raised an eyebrow. "What do you mean?"

"Nothing," Old One-Eye said. "You summoned The Seven, they can all visit you now. And every story comes to an end, some far sooner than others. The only question is, what will the headline be?"

The Artist shifted uncomfortably. "What are you doing here?" he asked.

"I came to see my painting, and I came for my pages. I trust you have them."

The Artist nodded and reached into his jacket pocket, He produced the trio of pages, wrapped up in twine. "They haven't left my side since," he said.

"Good," Old One-Eye praised, taking the them off of his hands with a gnarled and twisted limb of his own.

Old One-Eye looked at the maiden. "I see Tartarus' influence," he said before turning away and disappearing into the small crowd like he had never existed.

The Artist shook his head and let out a little laugh. "Kitsch," he muttered.

"Hey!" a voice cut through the din.

The Artist reeled on the sound and saw his agent barreling towards him, ruddy face beaming. "There's my golden goose!"

The Artist let out a sigh, then forced himself to put on a

smile.

His agent reached him and battered him on the back. "I told you!" he said, pushing his pudgy finger into The Artist's face. "I told you you could do it!"

The Artist flashed his best smile. "Get me another champagne before you run your mouth," he said jovially.

The Agent let out a booming laugh and flagged down a waiter.

As he did so, The Artist's phone buzzed in his pocket. He had a single text message from an unknown number.

Ten o'clock?

He looked across the room to where The Woman was looking at him, biting her bottom lip. He winked to her and nodded his head, and she smiled back. Then, The Agent thrust a glass of champagne into The Artist's hand and began to talk.

The artist opened the door to his flat and entered. He looked around the place, letting out a sigh of relief when he realized that it was in a relatively presentable state. His living room had a few empty bottles of whiskey sitting on the table, and his kitchen had the dregs of last night's dinner strewn about the counter.

The Artist walked through the apartment and poked his head into his bedroom. The bed was nearly unmade, and he muttered under his breath. He walked back into the living room, scooped up the empty whiskey bottles, and then opened the door to the staircase that led up to his studio. He walked up the stairs, and as he entered the dimly-lit studio, he became aware of a heaviness in the air.

Then he saw the angels. There were two of them.

The first appeared to be a teenage-girl. She wore a scarlet gown and had a head of blazing, crimson curls. Her skin was pale to the point of being stark white, and her talon-like fingernails were painting red. Her eyes too, were red, and the patches of energy pluming behind her like wings swirled like a bloody mist. In their depths The Artist could see bloody skulls, a thousand lambs being slaughtered, and above all, a lone hill with a cross upon it. Hammered to the cross was a man, crowned with thorns and adorned with blood, the skeletons of a million more like him hammered to

crosses stretching onto the infinity of the horizon...

The second angel appeared to be a man reaching the end of his adolescents. He was wearing a white robe and had the shorn head of a monk. His eyes were an eerie white, with no pupils or irises, and his skin too was nearly as pale as his sister's. In his calloused hands was a dull steel sword, and two wreaths of ethereal white energy were spread behind him in the shape of the mightiest wings The Artist had seen on any of the previous angels. In the midst of The White Angel's wings, he could see a plane drenched in the blood of sinners. He could see a mighty battle. Dragons wrestled with legions of angels, horsemen rode out across the world, a titanic lamb adorned with a dozen eyes peeled seals off of scrolls, and the very world itself was cracked apart and bathed in hallowed fire...

Both of them were bare-footed.

The Artist took a step away from the angels. "What the hell are you doing here?" he breathed.

"You called," The Red Angel said in a soft, manic voice.

"We answered," The White Angel added in a booming, authoritative tone.

"No, no, no," The Artist said, placing the collected bottles onto his desk to join the graveyard of their peers. "I don't need you anymore," he continued. "The painting's done. It was sold weeks ago-"

"It matters not," The White Angel boomed.

"What you desire," The Red Angel finished. "As we were summoned."

"So must we come, in time," The White Angel said.

"We care not about your painting," The Red Angel said.

"Only you," The White Angel boomed.

The Artist felt a lump form in his throat. "So," his eyes flickered to each of the angels in turn. "Who are you, then?"

The Red Angel stepped forward and curtsied politely. "I am The Angel of Golgotha, The Seraph of Sacrifice."

The White Angel took a step forward and bowed his shaven head. "I am The Angel of Armageddon," he boomed, "The Seraph of Judgement."

The Artist licked his lips nervously. "A pleasure, but, some-

one is coming over in a few-”

“We shall not keep you long,” The Angel of Armageddon cut in.

“We are here to show you,” The Angel of Golgotha said.

“Show me what?” The Artist asked. “I don’t need to see anymore. The painting’s finished, as I said-”

“This is not about paintings,” The Angel of Armageddon said.

“It’s about stories,” Golgotha finished.

“Your story,” The Angel of Armageddon continued.

“I don’t have a story,” The Artist said, crossing his arms.

The Angel of Golgotha giggled. “Everyone has a story,” she said. “And every story has a hero.”

“And a villain,” Armageddon said.

“And an ending,” Golgotha finished.

The Artist raised an eyebrow.

“The only question that remains for you, conjurer of arts,” The Seraph of Judgement boomed, “is which one you are in yours.”

“And which ending awaits you,” Golgotha continued.

“Ending?” The Artist murmured, feeling the faintest traces of fear in his veins.

The Angel of Golgotha giggled again. “Hero or villain?” she asked.

“Savior or slaver?” Armageddon questioned.

“Tragedy?” Golgotha said.

“Or comedy?” Armageddon finished.

“Sacrifice?”

“Or judgement?”

“Will they remember your virtues?”

“Or your vices?”

“I don’t understand,” The Artist said.

“Will your death be a tragedy? A hero’s demise?” The Seraph of Sacrifice asked.

“Or a comedy?” Armageddon boomed. “A villain’s just and poetic punishment?”

“I-” The Artist stammered.

“The choice is yours, Artist,” Golgotha said sweetly.

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“But we will show you,” Armageddon said. “We will show you your finality.”

“We will show you what awaits if you choose the ending we offer,” Golgotha said.

Then, the wings of The Angel of Golgotha plumed. The Artist’s gaze was sucked into their crimson depths. He saw rivers of blood, mountains of skulls, and an altar with a heartless child splayed out upon it. Then he saw himself. He saw his fate-

Then Armageddon’s mighty wings exploded behind him, bathing the room in an icy-white illumination. The Artist’s gaze was immediately drawn into their depths. He saw lightning striking the unholy, an army being defeated upon the altar of the end of days, and a mighty dragon bound in heavy chains and cast forever into a fathomless pit... Then he saw himself once more. He saw another version of himself, and he saw his demise-

Then, The Twin Angels flapped their wings, and vanished.

In Golgotha’s place nothing remained but the faintest trace of a grinning skull, and where Armageddon had proudly stood there was nothing left but the image of a sword, wedged deep in a mighty rock...

Then those two images faded, and all was quiet.

The Artist felt his legs trembling, then quickly hurried back downstairs to make up his bed. As he pulled the sheets back over his mattress, he found a smile on his face. He had remembered something important:

He didn’t believe in angels.