

The Great Biblical Bake-off!

By TheGuyWithTheFace (yes, that one)

-Sunday Evening-

The alarm blared on and on through the impenetrable smoke. Within that smoke was darkness, but from that darkness, came a light, shining strong, shining beautiful. In the doorway, before the wall of soot stood Hildegarde the valkyrie: tall, resplendent, and calm. She drew her long, powerful wings back and snapped them forward, throwing forth a gale which dispelled the choking miasma. The darkness dispelled, she leveled her steely gaze forward to the source. What she saw was Adaline the angel: slight, dirty, and infinitesimally close to crying into the vaguely cake-shaped hunk of charcoal in her hands. Adaline turned away from her 'cake' and looked at Hildegard through the tears that were already forming in her eyes. Hildegard let out a deep sigh as she prepared to do what she knew must be done. Without another word, she closed her eyes and raised both arms up and out in front of her. Adaline did not waste a second throwing her arms around her roommate and sobbing into Hildegard's prodigious chest.

"H-H-Hiiilddyyyy...I...the cake...smoke-hic-ruiiiiiinnnnned!" was about all Hildegard could make out as she stiffly tried to comfort her friend.

"It is... better than last time," Hildegard offered uncertainly, "It held the shape of a cake... mostly. It certainly did not melt like this morning.

Somehow those words had an effect and Adaline managed to compose herself to at least use full sentences. "M-maybe the next one

will be good," she squeaked out from between Hildegard's breasts with the faintest trace of hope.

Hildegard's neutral expression cracked for the smallest moment as she recalled that this was the 3rd fire alarm she had heard in nearly as many hours. "Maybe it is time for a break Adaline, you have made... good progress. Perhaps you would enjoy watching one of your..." Hildegard's face scrunched with exertion as she tried to force out the words her body fought to hold back, "Rrrromantic... c-c-comedies." She forced a stiff smile as Adaline looked up with sad tear-filled eyes and gave a small nod before returning to the safe refuge of her roommate's cleavage.

"The cupid one", Adaline managed to mumble out, "with the piolt." This wasn't, strictly speaking, necessary, as Hildegard already knew it would be that one the moment she even made the offer, but it helps to go through the motions sometimes. Steeling herself she gently guided Adaline to the bathroom to clean herself up before making her preparations: pillows were arranged, the DVD was found (because chief god help her if it were every taken off Netflix when she needed it), and Zipangu take out was ordered. Hildegard looked down at herself and finally noticed the black stains on her previously immaculate white blouse. Somehow, even the stains seemed to form into a deeply sorrowful frowny face which Hildegard was quick to mirror. Sighing again for what must have been the hundredth time today, she slinked off to her room to change into a more presentable night shirt. It was going to be a long evening for this valkyrie, and an even longer week at this rate.

Hildegarde had just finished paying for the takeout when Adaline emerged from the bathroom in a cloud of steam. When she wasn't covered in ash, flour, and tears Adaline was quite beautiful by angel

standards. Her golden blonde hair hung down past her shoulders and shimmered in the light. Now that the puffiness had gone down her green eyes were able to shine again and her face returned to its naturally slender profile. The heat of the shower lent her delicate cheeks a healthy blush which only highlighted her fair complexion. A fluffy towel hung around her waist like a flowing skirt while her downy wings hugged her prodigious chest. Were a man to see this he'd be forgiven for falling to his knees in reverence as she passed from the bathroom to her bedroom, a trail of steam following close behind like a bridal train. He would also have to be forgiven for taking some exception to the much more mortal woman that took her place moments later. She reemerged in a far less beguiling, fashion. The long locks of gold were now wrapped up tightly into a towel turban and the skin it did precious little to conceal was now replaced by a baggy college sweatshirt (Go Fighting Seraphim!) and a worn out pair of dove patterned pajama bottoms. The invitingly soft wings her kind were known were folded in beneath her sweatshirt, giving her an almost hunched look as she ambled over to Hildegard. She let out a contented hum as she smelt the deliciously unhealthy feast before her and gracelessly fell back onto the couch. Hildegard smiled softly at the familiar display, "feeling better?"

Adaline's smile turned a bit sadder at the question, "a bit," she answered as she took up her chopsticks. "I just... really want it to go well next week." She stared at the spare rib before her fondly before biting it half. "Maybe I'll just throw a couple of these in the oven and call it baked. Though if today is anything to go off of, I bet I'd still find a way to ruin it," she suggested with a joyless laugh.

Hildegard hated seeing her so mopey and defeatist. Still, she had personally seen the extent of Adaline's baking skills, and words of encouragement were hard to find. "You still have time before the

contest. And you only just started today. You have made... progress since the morning. There was no actual fire during the last attempt.”

“Sorry again about that, I’ll pick up a new spatula tomorrow...and another fire extinguisher...and a new blouse for you.”

“Do not worry about the blouse..es... Laundry is this week anyway,” Hildegard said dismissively while laying a hand on Adaline’s shoulder. “Still, have you at all considered other means of courting? Perhaps a movie and dinner?” Hildegard offered hopefully. “or maybe cooking rather than baking. You have always been quite skilled at sautéing.”

To this Adaline shook her head vigorously, and her sad eyes hardened with determination. “No. Its gotta be a cake its gotta be this baking contest. Eros 10-42 states ‘the way to a man’s heart lies past the lips’” she recited with trained certainty.

“That verse has... many interpretations” Hildegard said with audible discomfort. She recalled many an argument she had had with other girls at the academy on just which ‘lips’ were being referred to and what was expected to pass through them. When Adaline’s determination remained, steady Hildegard knew she wasn’t going to budge. As much as she wished Adaline had set her sights elsewhere, she couldn’t help but smile. Adaline’s stubborn determination was what made them friends in the first place. “I can see you are set on your course, but I think that it would not be suitable for you to continue practicing in this way.”

“If I don’t practice I won’t get any better! I can’t just walk in on Sunday with a pile of ash!”

“I did not mean to say you would not practice,” Hildegard corrected her defensively. “If you want to win then you cannot

continue alone. You need an instructor. I have a number of co-workers who may be able to lend assistance if you'd like."

Adaline's brow furrowed in thought as she slurped a seemingly endless noodle. "A teacher, you're right Hildy! That's exactly what I need!" she spoke with increased excitement as her smile grew wider and her eyes lit up. She turned to Hildegard with manic glee, "when can I meet them? Who are they? Where do they live? If I head out now I could reach them in..."

Hildegard stopped the excitable angel's rant with a firm hand on the shoulder. "I will speak to her tomorrow during work and try to schedule instruction for you. I can let you know what she says then. For the time being let us just rest," she pleaded. Calmed down now, Adaline lept forward to wrap her arms around the Valkyrie in a tight hug. Hildegard stiffened involuntarily from the unexpected skinship but returned the gesture after a moment, protectively wrapping her wings around the comparatively small angel. After a moment, the two separated. Adaline curled into her corner of the couch with a box of noodles Hildegard pressed play on the remote. The rest of the night was filled with salty takeout and the cheesy Rom-com dialogue (most of which a certain angel knew by heart).

-Monday Morning-

The clacking of keyboards and the murmur of meetings filled the office that Adaline sat in. For her part, she was typing diligently on her laptop. As one of the younger members of the accounting department, she was often left to take care of the data entry and grunt work and the last few hours of staring at excel documents were taking their toll. She reached for her mug of coffee hoping to get a much-needed boost, only

to find it tragically empty. Smiling to herself, she seized the first opportunity to procrastinate that presented itself. She closed her laptop and made her way to the coffee maker with a cheerful hum. She took her time heading to the kitchen making sure to stop at some of her coworker's desks. After a quick hello to Alex and some lunch plans with Susan, Adaline was back to her bubbly cheerful self. Right up until she opened the kitchen door and spotted Lucas next to the coffee machine. A barely audible squeak came out as she swiftly closed the door and stepped back out into the hall, her previous smile replaced by self-conscious panic. *'Frick, frick,frick,frick,frick!'* she thought to herself. She opened her phone's camera to give herself a quick inspection. *'Hair: kempt, makeup: subtle, smile:...'* she took a deep breath and put on her best, albeit nervous, smile. *'It'll have to do.'* Composed and ready now, she walked into the kitchen with all the strut she could muster. She took the seconds of approach to look over the source of her nerves. Lucas stood about a head taller than her and had a slim build with just enough muscle to fill out the button up shirts he always wore both in and out of work. His short, brown hair was as always just messy enough to be endearing without looking like a slob. His face was angular and the glasses that perched on his nose gave him a sharp, clever look. He might have been mistaken for a cold, haughty man if it weren't for the easy, guileless smile that he was quick to show anyone who met his eye. "Luke! Heeeeey! Happy Monday! Haha." *'Happy Monday? What kind of stupid line is that!?''*

For his part Lucas laughed along with her terrible joke, "Morning Addy!"

'Eeeeeee! He used the nickname! That's practically a pet name!' she silently cheered.

"I thought that was you just a second ago at the door."

'Crap he saw that! Say something!!!' Unfortunately, as per Eros 34-18: Let thy lips be as thy hips, and never spread false. "Oh, that hahaha... well I was about to come in when I realized I had to... check my phone quick!" luckily, half-truths were never specifically mentioned by Eros. "So, what are you doing here?" she asked in hope of changing the subject.

He flashed a smile that nearly brought the poor angel to her knees and held up his now filled mug. "Same as you I imagine, equal parts refueling and hiding from my work," he said with the easy laugh that Adaline desperately wanted as a ring tone. "How goes your stack of bitch-er- grunt work?"

Adaline rolled her eyes but still smiled. "I know I'm an angel, but you can swear around me. It's not like I'll punish or you or anything" *'unless you wanted me to'* she added guiltily to herself.

"I know but still, just seems like the polite thing, you know?" he took a sip of his coffee and leaned back on the counter. "So, while we're committed to wasting precious company time; how was your weekend? Do anything fun?"

"Weeeeelll," Adaline started, trying hard to spin things in a pleasant way and not mention the fires. "I had some fun, I met up with a few of the girls on Saturday and spent some time with my roommate. I... also started practicing for the baking contest" She said with a forced smile.

"No way, really? I didn't know you baked."

"Yeeeah, I...picked it up recently." Just how recently, he didn't need to know.

To Adaline's delight his smile grew even broader at the news. "Well, now I'm excited. I'm gonna be one of the judges you know."

“Whaaat, that’s craaaaazy” she said unconvincingly.

None the wiser to the angel’s nerves, he continued, “Yeah, I only found out I was picked last Friday. I just figured I’d get some free cake but now I’m really looking forward to it.”

Holding her hands behind her, Adaline leaned forward conspiratorially. “Well, anything in particular you want me to make?” Adaline asked hopefully. *‘Add in a couple bats of the eyes just for good measure.’*

“Now Addy,” he halfheartedly admonished, “Just what kind of judge do you take me for.” He brought his hand up to his heart theatrically, “Great authority has been invested in me, and I cannot betray that trust with such a blatant attempt at bribery”

Despite her failure, Adaline could help but to giggle. Dramatically lifting her hand to her forehead in sorrow, she said, “you are right dear Lucas, you are right. To think that a celestial servant such as I would try to sully the sanctity of this most sacred of competitions. The temptation of sweet victory was just so sweet.” They both paused in their poses for a moment before cracking up laughing at the silliness.

“Haaa, I needed that.” Lucas said with a happy sigh. He took another drink from his coffee before making towards the door. “Insider info or not I’m sure you’ll do great. Talk to you later Addy!” he said cheerfully as he left. Finally alone, Adaline all but melted onto the counter.

‘Three times, he called me Addy three times~,’ she thought as a doping smile spread across her lips.

“Well are you two chummy~,” came a honeyed voice that made Adaline jump to attention in alarm. She turned an embarrassed glare at the infernal owner of the voice.

“Morning Evelyne,” she greeted the demon through gritted teeth. Evelyne stood across the kitchen by the other kitchen door with her famously smug grin plastered across her pale purple face. “What brings you down to accounting? Did legal run out of blood?”

“No, Vivian is well supplied, but I’ll pass along your concern,” she answered without even acknowledging the slight. “Just dropping some stuff off with the bean counters. Tell me does every cup of coffee down here come with a show or am I just special?” she asked with a wicked grin. “It’s no wonder why you guys are always late with your reports.”

‘Just breath girl, don’t let her get to you.’ It took all her strength, but Adaline was able to keep from losing what little cool she had. “Sorry about that, these things just sort of happen amongst friends. I wouldn’t expect you to understand.” The angel silently cheered at seeing Evelyne’s eye twitch in annoyance. Something had clearly landed close to home.

The demon was quick to recover though, “You’re right, you two really do seem like friends,” she retorted, “and nothing more.”

That barb did its job and what little professionalism Adaline had mustered was slipping quickly. “And just what is that, supposed to mean.”

“Come on now, I’m just being honest with you. You two look like such good friends. It’s just a shame that things are so lopsided don’t you think.” She said twisting the verbal knife. “Just don’t be too disappointed on Sunday. I’ll make sure he’s happy as can be.” Adaline’s thoughts of anger stopped in their tracks at that. “Try not to look so dumbstruck, you didn’t expect to be the only one hunting that piece of man, did you? And you certainly aren’t the only one with plans for the bake off. I mean, who do you think got his name selected in the first

place,” she continued with a downright devilish look. “I’m just warning you for your own good. Nobody bakes like a demon; my cakes are almost as sweet as the rest of me.” Evelyne waved her hand to emphasize her body and angry as she was, Adaline was hard pressed to disagree. Evelyne was tall and curvy with a wardrobe that always made the most of that fact. Her suit and pencil skirt managed to look professionally intimidating while still showing a scandalous amount of skin. There was a reason she was often sent in when someone needed to sign on the dotted line. Few men can focus on the papers in front of them with the barely restrained purple mounds before them. None could deny that she was gorgeous, and no one knew that better than she did.

The truth of it all only set Adaline off further. “I don’t care what strings you pulled or how good your mom is filling her pies! I’m making the best cake you’ve ever seen, I’m winning that contest, and I’m getting. My. Husband!” The Angel didn’t wait for a replay before storming out with her mug. No pleasantries were traded on the way back as she headed straight for the relative privacy of her cube and collapsing into her office chair. She sat silently stewing in her anger for a moment before her phone went off in her pocket. Eager for a distraction, she fished it out to find her roommate had sent a text.

‘I just spoke to my coworkers. They are more than happy to teach you what they know. They will be free starting tomorrow night. Do you still wish to work with them?’ the text read.

‘Tell them yes. I’ll be ready’ Adaline replied immediately. If she was motivated before, she was fired up now. She cracked her knuckles and set about taking care of the reports she was avoiding moments ago. As the laptop booted back up, she reached for her coffee... only to

find it was still empty. Amongst the clicking of keys and the chatter of water cools, a dull thud and a quiet groan was briefly heard.

-Tuesday Evening-

“This is the home of Kesi,” Hildegard announced over the whistling wind as she and Adaline flew over the suburban neighborhood. Dipping down, the two angelic women gracefully descended onto the sidewalk. Once on the ground, Hildegard took a moment to stretch out while Adaline opted to double over in panting exhaustion.

“I still don’t get why we couldn’t get a cab.” She soke between breaths. The house was a fair way from their city apartment and Adaline’s lazy living was coming to haunt her.

“Because you have spent far too much time on your rear Adaline. I sometimes wonder if those wings of yours are for show,” answered the athletic valkyrie. “Besides that, you will be having many sweets this week. I will not see you return to your university days so easily.”

Adaline found sudden energy within herself at that and was bolt straight in a flash. “We do NOT bring that up. Freshman fifteen happens to everyone!” she exclaimed with an accusing finger. “Sometimes it just happens more than once,” she added in a much soft voice as her cheeks began to blush.

“Think of it as a warm-up. You will likely need it.” With that Hildegard let the embarrassed angel forward up the walkway of an immaculate house. While by no means a mansion in terms of size, the effort that clearly went into the house was stunning. The lawn was a deep healthy green, sprinkled with the vibrant colors of flowers spread throughout. The front face was a lovely sandstone yellow that might have been mistaken for actual stone from afar. There didn’t seem to be

so much as a single stain or piece of mulch out of place. Hildegard gave the dark wood door three crisp knocks and the pair waited for whoever managed this artwork of a house. They didn't wait long as the door opened to reveal a tall anubis woman standing within, clad in an apron, mom jeans, and a stern expression of disapproval. While this intimidated Adaline deeply, Hildegard was unphased. "Good evening Kesi. Thank you for your help today."

"You are late," was her only response.

"I apologize," Hildegard answered, "the flight over took longer than expected. May we come inside?" Adaline silently thanked Hildegard for leaving out the specific reason it took so long. While the Anubis did not say anything more, she stepped back into the house and ushered the two to enter. As Adaline stepped in, she couldn't help but gawk at the interior. It proved to be just as precisely managed as the exterior was.

Adaline spoke up hoping to ingratiate herself with her new teacher, "You have a lovely home!"

"I am aware," was her reward. Though this time Kesi continued the conversation herself. "A woman's home is her domain, and one's domain speaks to one's character."

"Oh, umm, yes," was all the angel could muster to say. They walked through the house in silence after that till they reached a clean, modern kitchen. An Island table sat in the center covered in appliances, tools, and ingredients. As expected, everything was sectioned off and meticulously organized. *'Did she label everything? I get labeling sugar and salt but is the milk label really needed?'*

"Hildegarde said you wished to learn to bake, yes?" the anubis spoke up suddenly. Adaline merely nodded vigorously in response.

“Then I will assist you as much as I am able. To bake is to create and creation is the goal of life.” In spite of her oddities, the grandiose words and deep voice Kesi spoke with made Adaline grow more and more determined. As she continued the once stern and stoic anubis became more animated. “Take heed however, baking is a science. It demands rigor, exactness, precision! Follow my instructions and you will create a cake that will make your husband to be WEEP at its majesty! Are you prepared?”

“YES!” Adaline answered automatically as Kesi’s enthusiasm infected her.

“Yes what?” Kesi asked with a hint of disapproval.

“YES MA’AM!” came the angel’s response without a second thought.

“Excellent, Hildegard informed me that you would like to bake an Angel’s Food cake. Not a good cake to begin with, but with my tutelage even you make one. Let us begin!” Taking the moment of quiet Hildegard excused herself to the living room to wait. And thus, the baking began.

-Roughly 1 Minute Later-

“No no no! You cannot simply throw the ingredients together! Sponge cake requires only the most finely sifted ingredients. You must take care to prepare each ingredient individually before combining. Good, now measure carefully. The proportions in baking must be exact! Each ingredient serves a purpose and that purpose requires no more and no less than what is listed. No, that is the salt! I labeled it for a reason!”

“Be careful separating the eggs! We can allow no yolk to remain, but we cannot lose too much of the white, else the ratio will be ruined!

What are you doing! You cannot let shells get into the mix, get it out! No not with your hand!”

“Is that all you can do? Whip harder! Those egg whites will never peak at this rate. Use those skinny arms!”

“No, you are adding the flour too quickly! Your cake will not rise if you lose the air in those eggs. Do you want a cake or a blob? These are not grandmother’s cookies; you cannot simply stir it all together with a mixer. You must fold it in carefully. Start again!

“No, that is still the salt.”

“It is still too early to check it! To open the oven would be to ruin all our efforts. You must have patience and faith in the recipe.”

After hours of measuring, mixing, whipping, burning, and starting over Adaline finally collapsed over the table, right in front of a golden-brown bunt cake. As Kesi invited Hildegard back into the kitchen Adaline mustered the strength to at least lift her head up to look at the fruit of her labors. From the outside it certainly looked like a fine cake. It lacked any of the garnish or decoration that could be found in bakery displays, but it looked appetizing none the less. Hildegard returned just as Kesi made the first slice. Everyone looked on with bated breath as she removed the slice to reveal the light fluffy interior. The slice was carefully placed onto a plate (without so much as a spilt crumb). Adaline watched in anticipation as Kesi slowly took a fork to the sponge cake, fist poking it judgmentally before removing a small piece and delicately taking a bite. Adaline didn’t breathe as Kesi chewed contemplatively. It was a long moment before the anubis spoke. “Acceptable.”

Adaline’s head dropped with a thud. *‘Acceptable, all that work for ACCEPTABLE!’* she raged internally. She continued to sulk until she felt

the comforting hand of her roommate on her shoulder. She looked up to see Hildegard with a partly eaten slice of her own.

“I may not be an expert on these things, but I think it came out very well,” she said encouragingly. “Wonderful progress for one’s first day, right Kesi?” Hildegard punctuated her comment with a pointed look to the anubis still working at her slice.

“Is that not what I said?” she asked nonchalantly. “This cake is acceptable by my standards. For a novice this is quite the feat.” Another fork-full of cake was eaten before she continued, “you should be quite proud.” The praise did its job and raised Adaline’s spirits enough to raise herself up. “The next one will be even better” the anubis announced as she began setting up the bowls and ingredients again, prompting Adaline to fall right back onto the countertop.

Luckily Hildegard was quick to intercede. “Perhaps we should call it a night Kesi. It is getting rather late.” For the first time that night the jackal-girl’s calm guise faltered as she looked with shock to the clock on the wall.

“Oh, oh my I believe you are right Hildegard. I seem to have gotten... caught up in our activities.” She stammered out as she became uncharacteristically meek. “My husband should be home soon so perhaps it is for the best that we finish for the night.” She began to frantically gather everything together to clean as she spoke. “When shall we continue the lessons?”

Hildegard took the initiative and began, “I am not sure that-“

“Does tomorrow work?” Adaline spoke up, interrupting Hildegard’s refusal.

“Yes, I will be free tomorrow as well. We can begin more advanced topics such as presentation and garnishment. I am

unfortunately going away with my dear husband this weekend, but until then I shall train you to the best of my ability. I will make a baker out of you yet!” Kesi answered, slightly out of breath but with a bright triumphant smile. “Now then, let me see you both out.”

The trio said their goodbyes before Hildegard and Adaline began walking down the road. The sun had long since fallen but the moon and streetlights were providing more than enough illumination that night. “I feel I should apologize to you Adaline,” Hildegard began. “I perhaps should have warned you about Kesi’s... intensity. I should have prepared you better.”

“Don’t worry Hildy, I’m a big girl. I can handle some hard work.” Adaline replied with a forced smile. *‘That said I think my arms are going to literally fall off if I so much as open a door.’*

“I know that,” Hildegard proudly said with a warm smile. “You are an impressively hard worker when you are properly motivated. Please do not over work yourself, however. It will do no one any good if you cannot compete at all.”

“Thanks, but I’ll be alright. Although, Hildy?”

“Yes?”

“Can we please call an uber home” Adaline pleaded with her best puppy dog eyes.

“Yes, I think that would be for the best.”

-Friday Morning-

The minutes ticked by painful slowly as Adaline stared wearily at the clock. Lunch couldn’t come soon enough for the weary angel. The past few days of training with Kesi were hell, but after all her hard work, Kesi finally declared her ready. Her cake was moist. It was fluffy.

It very nearly melted in your mouth. And with a side of berry compote (handmade of course: the anubis would abide by nothing less) it was as close to perfection as Adaline could expect. Despite a somewhat rocky start, the two women had grown to respect each other over the last few days of training. Kesi even saw fit to let Adaline borrow all the appliances she would need. Successful or not, the late nights and hard work had taken their toll, and Adaline was struggling to so much as type let alone work. She was very nearly asleep at her desk when a familiar voice perked her up instantly.

“-easily one of the worse snacks they make, come on.” came the jovial voice of Lucas as he argued with one of the other men of the office.

“You’re out of your mind, twinkies are great. Who the hell doesn’t like twinkies?” Came the reply. Curious Adaline peek up over the cubical divide to see Lucas walking along side Jim from HR, a somewhat portly older man who was (to no shock of anyone who knew him) a very vocal bachelor. The former held a coffee in hand and the latter carried a package of twinkies. “They’re sweet, they’re soft, and they’ll survive the apocalypse. What’s not to love” Paul asked incredulously.

Lucas shrugged, clearly not as invested in the argument as his opponent. “I’m just saying, there are better choices. Twinkies are just so bland, and who even eats sponge cake anyway?” Though there was no ill will behind the words, Adaline took them like a punch to the gut, very nearly crumbling on the spot. “Why would you go for a twinkie when you can get a hostess cupcake, or better yet, a devil dog. Now that’s a snack, haha.”

“Baaah! ~” Jim continued on with the debate, but Adaline heard none of it. Instead she was utterly consumed by the knowledge that all her training seemed to be for naught.

'He hates sponge. Why didn't I know he hated sponge?! I should have known that!' she screamed in her head as she sunk back into the safety of her cube. *'What am I gonna do? I can only make sponge cake. That's all I trained for. Now he'll hate my cake and I won't win and we won't fall inloveandwewontgetmarriedandwewon'thavebeautifulkids-'* Her breathing quickened as her despair spiraled. As far as she could see, she lost before the bake off had even begun. She considered calling Kesi, but she recalled the anubis' plans for the weekend. She was on her own without any hope, doomed to lose to-

"Evelyne! To what do we owe the pleasure?" Greeted Jim, whose nasally voice cut through Adaline's turmoil.

"Ah, hello James. And Lucaas~ it is soooo nice to see you again," greeted the demon, doing nothing to hide her obvious favoritism.

"Oh, uh, h-hey Evelyn." Lucas stammered out. Adaline could only imagine his cute blush but she couldn't bring herself to see for herself, knowing full well the cause of it.

"Well you know how it is up in legal. The people there get sooooo uptight sometimes. Its nice to swing around here every once in a while, and... cut loose for a while, don't you think~."

"Oh, I couldn't agree more," Jim responded. "Maybe you'd like to cut loose wit-"

Evelyne continued as if she hadn't heard Jim as all. "It's just about lunch time I reckon. How about we grab some food? My treat of course. I know I could really go for a nice steamy sausage right now~." Even from a ways away Adaline could hear Lucas gulp in response to the assault on his willpower.

Jim was quick to pipe up hopefully, "well how could I say no to an offer like that?"

“I- uh- I’d love to...b-but I already brought my lunch from home you see haha. Be a shame for it to go to waste,” was Lucas’ response, even more audibly uncomfortable than before.

“Your loss,” said Jim, completely ignorant of how he was being ignored. “I knew a great spot we can go to and-“

“Come on Lucas, I’m sure a big strong man like you works up quite the appetite. I’ll be sure not to let aaaanything go to waste~”

“Oh, well, I-my doctor! He says I should be watching what I eat you know. So sorry, can’t go today. Doctor’s orders afterall hahaha.”

“Ooooooh alright then.” Evelyne whined with dramatic disappointment. “We can take a rain check for today. Maybe next time I can get some nice sausage. See you around Lucassss~” the gentle clacking of her heels announced the infernal woman’s retreat.

“You see that Lukey boy?” Jim asked with ample (if undeserved) confidence.

“P-pretty hard to miss Jim,” Lucas shakily answer.

“Yup, she was coming on to me reeeeeal hard back there. I knew I still had it. Hey, did I ever tell you about that time I went home with the kitsune and her frien-“ Jim and Lucas’ conversation slowly faded out of earshot of Adaline as she silently sat at her desk. Her once frantic breathing had slowed to an even, deliberate tempo. She was still for a long moment, before raising her head in the direction of Evelyne’s retreat.

“That, purple BITCH is going down,” she spoke through gritted teeth. “One way or another, I. Will. WIN.”

-Saturday Evening-

Hildegard paced nervously outside the kitchen door. There had been a near constant clatter of bowls and plates and utensils coming out of that room since Adaline had entered it...yesterday afternoon.

When she had barged into the apartment, Hildegard nearly tackled her on reflex, so violent was the angel's entrance. It was lucky she hadn't done it too, because Adaline was loaded with groceries nearly taller than herself in either arm. The valkyrie tried to greet her and help her carry them in but Adaline did not even react to her presence, instead marching straight into the kitchen without a word only to slam the door behind her. Attempts to follow behind her were thwarted when found the door jammed from within. Hildegard's first instinct was to kick it down but fought that impulse. Whatever was happening on the other side of that door, Adaline needed to do that herself. That wasn't to say Hildegard wasn't just waiting for a sign of smoke to tear that door off its hinges, but no signs showed and so the action-oriented valkyrie waited less than patiently for her roommate to emerge.

The first few hours were easy enough. When Adaline didn't leave when the pizza arrived Hildegard became concerned. When the Valkyrie woke up to the beeping of the oven at 10 am, she became worried. She tried multiple times to talk to the determined angel but was only met by whirl of a mixer and the clatter of metal. Hildegard was worried for her dear friend, but there were no signs of fire, nor smoke, nor sirens. And she couldn't deny that whatever was happening in there smelt positively heavenly.

It was 8 o'clock and with the kitchen still indisposed Hildegard was just about to order more take out when the kitchen door slammed open. Silently Adaline stepped forward. Covered in white and brown stains, hair an unruly mess, dark bags under her eyes, and a crisp white

cake box in her hands. Slowly, reverently, she walked forward and gently placed it onto the table as one might place a priceless vase. With that, she marched to her room, not so much as glancing at the shower she so desperately needed to use. Just outside her bedroom, she turned a fiercely determined face to the stunned Valkyrie. “Let’s see that purple skank top that.” And with that the angel disappeared into her room for some much-needed sleep.

Still deeply curious as to what just happened. Hildegard came incredibly close to ripping open the mysterious cake box before her. Common decency took command however, and she opted to inspect ground zero instead. Walking in Hildegard knew only one thing for certain: there was no way she was cooking tonight. “Thank the chief god for take out.”

-Sunday Afternoon-

The park was packed full of people as employees from every department mingled and networked while enjoying enough sweets to sicken an alicia. Dozens of participants had entered the company bake off the fruits of all their labors were laid out for everyone’s enjoyment. From cakes to muffins to pies, nearly every baked good imaginable was on the event’s menu that day. And once the judges took their samples, it was a free for all. Naturally, nobody was supposed to know whose was. But some were better at anonymity than others. There was truly little doubt who brought it the strikingly purple, multi-tiered wedding cake. Especially considering the topper featured a scantily clad demon. Amongst the cacophony of small talk and noisy chewing, sat Adaline, still somewhat sleep deprived, still very much nervous. Once the fuel of rage burnt out on Saturday night, Adaline was left with the same worries that plagued her since she first impulsively wrote her name on the sign-up sheet. She did her best to chit chat with friends, but it was

plain to see that her heart wasn't in it, so she elected to stay to the edge of the event and try to be unnoticed. "You seem to be lonely; may I join you?" came the familiar voice of Hildegard. Adaline turned in shock to see her muscular roommate suddenly beside her.

"H-Hildy! What are you doing here?" She asked in shock.

Hildegard merely smiled, "Did you not expect me to come and lend my support to you? I am confident you will win the day. Kesi also sends her love."

The appearance of her dear friend did wonders for Adaline's frayed nerves. "Yeah, she sent me a text this morning. Encouraging me to 'devastate my enemies, see their souffles collapse before me, and hear the lamentation of their husbands,'" Adaline recited with a laugh. "She really knows how to motivate a girl."

"Yes, she is always like that. She truly missed her calling as a motivational speak... Or perhaps warlord."

At that Adaline laughed in earnest. "I sure wouldn't want to face her in battle hahaha."

Adaline's laugh was cut short however as a magnified voice called out, "The judges have made their decision. Would all bake-off contestants please step forward." Taking her cue, Adaline gave one more look to Hildegard, one with infinitely more confidence than she had mere moments ago and jogged over to the makeshift stage in the center of the park. Now amongst the other bakers, she looked up onto the stage to as her boss, a mature lamia in a smart business suit and skirt, waited by the microphone, flanked by Lucas and the other judges. When the murmur of the crowd died down, the lamia spoke up once more. "Thank you everyone for making this day possible. We have had a tremendous financial year so far and it is all thanks to your hard work

and dedication. Over 25 employees enter this, our companies very first annual bake off, and I could not be more pleased with the results. Though judging by what little is left of the plates, I don't think I have to tell you all that." Everyone in the crowd gave a hearty 'my boss told a joke' laugh at that, which did seem to please the snake woman on stage. "While each of you have done a tremendous joke, the judges were able to make their decision after much deliberation. In no particular order, I would like to invite the finalist onto the stage to receive their rewards." The crowd held their breath in anticipation of the winner. "From sales, Hellen Rigby!" The holstaur in question shouted in glee as she bounded up onto the stage to the cheers and applause of the crowd. "From Legal, Evelyn Laval!" There were considerable cheers from many of the male employees, but the demon in question simply strode onto stage as if there was never any question of her place there. Adaline trembled slightly, both in rage at seeing the demon on stage and fear as her boss made to read the last name. "And finally, from accounting.... Adaline Martin!" More cheers erupted as Adaline stood in shock. it too a moment for her to catch up with reality and when she did, she wasted no time flying up onto the stage.

There she stood, besides Hellen on the end of the line, so happy she was that Adaline didn't even notice the scowl Evelyn was shooting her way. "Before we continue" the lamia began, "let's have one more round of applause for all the bakers who competed today. For all your efforts, each of you will be receiving a free day off!" If the cheers for the three winners were loud, the cacophony that followed was thunderous. "I knew you'd be happy to hear that," she said with satisfaction, "but without further ado; in third place leaving with a 20\$ gift card to femboy hooters... Hellen Rigby!" A subdued cheering followed as Hellen happily accepted her ribbon and prize. "and now in first place..." Adaline held her breath. "going home with two tickets for

an all-expenses paid weekend getaway...” Adaline tensed her every muscle just to stop from trembling in anticipation.

“iiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiissssssssssss,” the snake woman hissed dramatically, “Evelyn Laval!”

The crowd erupted into cheers and applause and shouts of excitement. For her part, Evelyn did her absolute best to appear humbly shocked. “Oh my god, I can’t believe it. You really liked my cake that much? Oh, I just can’t tell you how honored I am!” the purple demon gushed. All the while shooting smug grins to Adaline at every opportunity. And in second place, with a \$100 gift card to Mofu Steakhouse, Adaline Martin!” There were more cheers, but Adaline was deaf to them all. She smiled as best she could while accepting her prize and she even shook Evelyn’s hand without vomiting on the spot, but the moment everyone’s eyes were off her, the smile fell and she retreated to the outskirts of the party, making sure to avoid the throng of people congratulating Evelyn.

Hildegard was the first to find her. “Congratulation Adaline. Second place a novice is quite the accomplishment!” she said, hoping to raise her friends spirits a bit.

“You’re right, it really was stupid of me to hope for first,” the angel glumly commented. The valkyrie looked around unsure of how to proceed without making things worse. She opted to tentatively open her arms to Adaline, expecting to be tackled in a hug. No such hug came however, as Adaline contented herself to simple stare into the ground. Panic crept onto Hildegard’s normal reserved face as she floundered for what to do. Luckily, Lucas was there to bail her out.

“Addy! You did great!” he announced with excitement.
Adaline straightened up at his entrance and gave a weak smile.

“Lucas! Th-thank you, I’m...happy I did as well as I did.” She responded meekly. “Evelyn was just better I guess.”

Now it was Lucas’ turn to frown, “actually I-“

He was interrupted however by a slender purple arm falling across his shoulders. “Thank you so much Adaline, it means so much to hear you say that,” Evelyn said venomously. “and Lucas! Just the man I wanted to see. I can’t thank you enough for naming me the winner. how can I ever repay you~,” she all but whispered into his ear.

“Well, actually I-“

“Oh I know!” the demon spoke as if struck by an epiphany, “I’ve got these two tickets for a lovely getaway, but I sadly have no one to accompany me. Why don’t you join me? I’ve been dying to spent some...quality time with you. Now what do you say? I won’t take no for an aaannnsweeeerr~” she sang with an impossibly smug look on her face.

Lucas’ attention solely on Evelyn, Adaline took that as her cue to leave, head hung in defeat. “I...think I’ll pass. Thanks though.” Adaline stopped in her tracks at her crush’s words. “I think I’m busy that weekend.”

“I- ah...” Evelyn stammered, totally flummoxed by the sudden rejection. “I didn’t say what weekend...”

“Look, Evelyn, we can talk about that later, I was kind talking to Addy here.” Adaline felt a tear nearly well up in her eye at hear her nickname. She was so happy she couldn’t even take pleasure in Evelyn’s stunned retreat. The interloper gone Lucas turned towards Adaline

instead. "God, sorry about her. That girl is way too pushy. I mean I don't know her even half as well as you and she just keeps throwing herself at me." He paused to shiver dramatically. "Just gives me the creeps being around her. Anyway, I can tell you really had your heart set on first," he said, smiling sympathetically. "For what its worth, it was a really tight call, and I'm probably not supposed to say this but..." He leaned in close to whisper, "I thought yours was way better." Nothing could stop the tears now as Adaline smiled from cheek to cheek while her eyes watered up.

"Y-you mean it?" she asked with uncertain hope.

Lucas smiled warmly at her, reaching up to wipe a few tears from Adaline's cheek. "Of course, I do! I didn't even know it was yours at the time, but it blew all the other's out of the water!"

"Thanks Luke," Adaline said, using all her joy to steel herself and make her move. "I...listen, there's no way I can eat \$100 dollars' worth of food. Do you...maybe... want to go with me?" She held up the card meekly, "My treat."

The seconds that passed next seemed to last an eternity, but finally Lucas' surprised face melted back into the smile Adaline had come to adore. "Yeah," he said, "that sounds great." And so, they walked back to the party, side by side, with smiles bright enough to blind a basilisk. "I gotta say, never expected you to make devil's food cake."

"Well... desperate times call for desperate measures," Adaline answered as they both laughed happily, both excited for what the future would bring them.