**Business As Usual**

*Wednesday August 28th, 2013. Chicago Tribune*

*MICHAEL KNAVISH: EXPERT DEFENCE LAWYER*

*FOUND DEAD IN OFFICE*

*Knavish died from a heart attack at age 32.*

Michael remembered being in his office late at night – as usual. He remembered feeling a lot of pain around his stomach and back. He also remembered thinking it was gas from the Indian food he picked up on his way back to his office. But then the pain had spread to his chest, and he felt nauseous. He thought his heart was on fire, trying to rip itself from his chest.

And then it was over.

Now he was in an empty, white hallway. It was lit with those cheap, horribly bright fluorescent lights. He could see, a few feet down the hall, there was a newspaper on the ground. The headline read, “MICHAEL KNAVISH: EXPERT DEFENCE LAWYER FOUND DEAD IN OFFICE.” *Oh. That explains it.* He skimmed the article. *At least they called me an expert.*

Michael continued walking and came to the only door open in the deserted hallway. *I’m dead. What else have I got to lose?*

He took the final few steps and peered inside the doorway. It was a boardroom. It was oddly similar to the one Michael usually held appointments with clients in.What he had neglected to notice was the beautiful, blonde haired, young woman sitting in the farthest chair, by the farthest wall, in the farthest corner of the right side of the room.

Michael was awe struck. She looked heavenly, and Michael did not – could not – often use that word to describe the women he was with. *Is she dead too?*

“Michael. Michael Knavish. Correct?” The smile she presented him with was so genuine and beautiful he could have cried.

*How does she know my name?* “Yes. That’s me.”

From the other side of the room, he heard the clicking of a doorknob click. The man who walked through the door looked like someone Michael would have undoubtedly have done business with. But he did not have the same stature as the woman. He seemed rushed, hectic, yet he was dressed impeccably. *Was that a black corduroy suit he was wearing? I could use one of those.*

When Michael looked back at the woman she looked irritated; nothing like her previous appearance.

“You’re always late. What could you even be doing, that would delay your arrival to these very rare meetings?” The woman looked furious, but her angelic glow was still present.

“I was simply reviewing files of potential candidates for our new position.” The man unbuttoned his suit jacket and took his seat in the farthest chair, by the farthest wall, in the farthest corner of the left side of the room.

Michael stood, lost for words, staring at the two. *What is happening? Who are these people?* As if she could read minds, the woman stood up to introduce herself.

“Michael, I know you’re probably very confused and a little nervous, but I assure you everything is fine. My name is Eloah.”

“And I’m Abaddon.” The man stood up again to shake hands with Michael. “But you can call me Nefarious. Abaddon is just too formal for these type of things.”

“What do you mean, ‘these type of things’?” Michael looked horribly confused.

Nefarious looked back at Michael pitifully. “I suppose you could also call me Lucifer, Prince of Darkness, Satan: whichever you prefer really.” He glanced back at Eloah. “You were here first,” said Nefarious matter-of-factly, “you tell him.” This didn’t please Eloah, but she sighed and began the well-needed explanation.

“Michael, you have to understand that this rarely happens and that we don’t like to do this. But when the circumstance arises, we must.”

“We could just make the decision for you, but I said that wouldn’t be fair.”

Nefarious spoke up then. “I really didn’t see a problem with it.”

 “You,” Eloah pointed at Nefarious, “hush. Michael, I do hope that by this point you’ve figured out why *we* are here for *you*.” Her eyes glanced over at Nefarious before she turned her attention directly to Michael.

“It is your decision whether you go to Heaven or Hell.”

Michael’s vision went blurry then. He felt hyper aware of his surroundings; Eloah’s heel rhythmically tapping the hard tile floor, Nefarious’ steady, deep inhales and exhales of air. But what sound he lacked was the sound of his own heart beating. He felt like it was racing. But how would he know? *I’m dead.*

Michael couldn’t remember how many times he’d been told to rot in Hell. It struck him that, all of a sudden, this was a possible fate. He seemed – though he was dead – to feel like he was living. And if he was already dead, but felt physically alive, could he really rot?

“Why is it *my* decision? Why do I get to decide my own fate?” Michael was utterly confused. Why was he so deserving of such a privilege?

“Listen, Mike,” Nefarious began.

“I prefer Michael, please.”

“Michael. I want to send you the most cordial of invitations to my place of business or *home* I suppose you could call it. But Eloah seems to think you showed a lot of love for your parents, and that you also deserve the benefit of the doubt. So we’re giving *you* the opportunity to decide. Wherever you think you belong, is where you’ll go.”

*I don’t deserve this. Why me? I would imagine these two would’ve been quite efficient at making decisions on their own.* “I’m sorry. But could one of you explain why this is happening?” Michael was setting into a state of panic.

Eloah spoke first. “Michael, I know you are a good human being; You have morals and an honest love for your family.”

“Yeah, but do you remember that secretary he slept with to get info for that fraud case?”

*How does he know that?*

“Abaddon!” Eloah was completely shocked. “We will not speak of that time or any other events of the kind.”

Michael was perplexed. “How on earth do you know about that?”

“Michael,” Nefarious shook his head with amusement, “we see everything you do. We have seen everything you’ve done – everything anyone does – from the moment you are born. That secretary you slept with. More importantly, we know about the man you threatened with a gun to his head and told him to pay you his outstanding debt. And we even know about that dog you kicked in the alley off of Fullerton Avenue two weeks ago, after you ran out of cigarettes.”

“Michael,” Eloah spoke up, interrupting Abaddon’s speech, “we’re not forcing you anywhere. I truly believe that you would be accepted, and loved in my sanctuary. And I can guarantee you, your parents will be there too, whenever their time comes.”

*I don’t deserve this. I don’t deserve my own choice. There are days I cant decide what to make for breakfast, and now I’m supposed to choose my eternal fate? I want to go to Heaven. There is no questioning that that’s where my parents will end up. But would I be able to see them again? Wouldn’t I be hated for all the innocent people I’ve sent to jail? I’d probably be praised for that in Hell.*

“Michael.” Nefarious was ready to explain his side of the story.

No answer.

“Excuse me, Michael?” Nefarious questioned again.

No answer.

“Michael, please. Sometime soon.” Nefarious was getting impatient.

No answer.

“Michael! I swear I’ll take away your decision in this matter.” That was enough to pull Michael out of his thoughts.

“Thank you,” Nefarious sighed; thoroughly agitated. “Michael, we’re a company - a fast growing business. And we need you. A mind like yours will be valued. How could I possibly let talent like yours go to waste? And you’re so young.”

“I didn’t ask to die young.”

“No, but you smoked enough to call death to you.”

Michael sighed in agreement. “What kind of work are we talking about?”

“Why Michael,” Nefarious’ grin was slowly growing, “any job you want.”

*Eloah seems to believe I would be accepted into Heaven. But Nefarious is offering work, and what else would I be doing with my after life? I might as well do something I’m good at.*

“Nefarious?”

Abaddon’s eyes lit up with delight. “Yes dear, Michael?”

“What kind of work are you offering?”

Eloah’s eyes flashed with alarm. If Michael chooses to go with Abaddon, she thought, he’d be forced into whatever job Abaddon wanted. No choice in the decision. No matter what Michael thinks.

“Michael wait. You can’t go with Abaddon. You don’t understand what he’ll do to you. If you want to see your parents again, you’ll come with me. I want you to believe you are a good man; everyone is, deep down. And I know you are a principled man. You are too noble for Abaddon. Please, come with me.”

Eloah’s eyes shone with such intensity and beauty – the colour of a Tiger Eye crystal – Michael wanted to believe her. But he couldn’t.

*I don’t deserve this. I’ve sent a woman with 3 kids to jail for a murder she never committed. I robbed a man of 27 million dollars for “criminal negligence” on a charge that he wasn’t even in violation of. I defended a man who killed his son because of the girl he was seeing. And I won that case too. I’ve sent the most innocent to jail, and the guiltiest are currently walking around the street. I don’t deserve a choice.*

“Nefarious?”

Abaddon’s head peeked up from where he was fidgeting with something under the table. “Yes, Michael?”

“I think I’ve made my decision.”

Nefarious, with a face splitting grin, revealed what he was hiding under the table. A contract.

*A contract?* *To Hell? Do they do that? This is more formal than I thought.*

“I knew you’d make the right decision Michael.” Nefarious’ smile looked like it would not fade for days.

However Eloah seemed more than disappointed.

“Michael, I hope you know what you’ve done. What you’ve chosen.”

*Yes, I do.*

“Michael has just made the best decision he could have made my darling, Eloah.”

*I think I have.*

“Just sign along the dotted line and we’ll be all set. I promise you, it’s a fun journey down.” Nefarious was elated. Intoxicated with joy.

But Eloah was already beginning to leave the room.

“Michael, my dear, be safe. I’m sorry to see you go. I’ll tell your parents you said hello.” Before he could respond she was out the door. To wherever she was meant to be.

He lazily scrolled his name onto the paper Nefarious presented him with. He did not bother to read whatever the fine print said, as he was always taught to read in Law School. Michael was about to embark on the same journey as Eloah, to where *he* was meant to be.

*I belong in Hell.*

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