



AN

# ILLUSION

IN HIDING

SHORT STORY

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## An Illusion in Hiding

A Hero in Hiding short story

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Ellison

I close the door, relishing in the quiet of the room as I kneel down and close my eyes. It seems like I can't catch a break and I'm to the point where if I don't split my attention three ways, I'm never going to get through this day. I'm beyond exhausted having to deal with headquarters trying to get me to solve shit that they seem to think I can snap my fingers at. And then when I'd slipped out of the meeting for a brief moment to go to the bathroom, Valerie caught me, asking if I could help her with something, and then I have whatever nonsense Landon and August are caught up in for the day.

That's when I realized that the only way to solve *any* of this was to leave an illusion with each of them.

Maybe if I can sate all three parties at once then I can finish by seven to eat dinner at a semi-decent time and have a moment to breathe before I go to sleep and start this all over again.

The issue is keeping track of all three of them, which is easier to do when I'm in a quiet room where I can switch between them with ease. Because all three illusions are feeding me information at the same time, it's much like trying to pay attention to three conversations at once. While I can focus on one at a time, the others are comparable to background noise in my head.

I switch to my first illusion where I'm seated with some members from headquarters. None of them even notice that it's not the real me in the room with them at the moment. Honestly, I'm confident Deus is the only one who can.

"With these laws, the heroes will have much more control over the situations they are faced with," the woman from headquarters says.

I want to sigh while wondering how long we're going to go over this same topic, but since that'd be quite unprofessional, I keep my displeasure to myself. "The issue you're facing is that you are just talking about it, yet absolutely nothing is coming of it. At this point—"

I hesitate because my third illusion seems *very* adamant that I need to pay attention to it. It's practically screaming that there's an emergency and I need to get over there *now*.

I decide that speed-talking before switching is my only option. "At this point, we need to stop talking and actually implement the laws so they can assist us when we're faced with a situation like this again," I say before letting my mind switch over to the third and make that conversation the clearest.

As I look through the third illusion's eyes, I realize that I have no fucking *idea* why my brain was adamant that I arrived here. Deus is half naked—surrounded by ash that I assume was once his shirt and pants—Landon is cackling, and August is watching the scene with clear interest.

Why in the *fuck* did my brain even fathom to think that of the three, this was the most important conversation? There's nothing important happening here *at all*.

"Lex, you're such a perv. You're getting phenomenal at burning the clothes off people," Landon says with a malicious grin.

Lex looks dejected which tells me his daily training is going as poorly as usual. "No! Please. I didn't mean to."

Deus glances down at his bright pink underwear before seeming to come up with a thought. "Maybe your fire was drawn to me because it knows I was born of ash and fire."

"Excuse me, what? How can one be born of ash and fire?" Landon asks. "I just... honestly, I can't wait to hear what ludicrous memory this one is."

"Very simple! When we are born, our mothers are laid in a bed of ash and fire is lit around them! So we can feel the heat of the demons the moment we enter into this world!"

"That's ridiculous," I say. This whole thing is ridiculous. This is the least important of my worries, so why am *I here right now?*

"And nobody dies doing this?" August asks, which is something I'm rather curious about as well.

"My doctor caught on fire and took off running. He ripped his coat off and it landed on a rather... flammable rug which ended up lighting the whole building on fire! They said that it was a sign from the demons that I was the chosen one."

“What were you chosen to do?” Landon asks.

“Fuck if I know! My whole childhood everyone liked to tsk at me. I guess I was chosen to be tsked at,” Deus says. “Ah well! Look who’s alive and who is not... ha ha...”

That’s the moment I hear a dreadful noise coming from the room next door. The mere sound of it makes dread seep into my body.

“Hold on,” Landon says. “Do you guys hear that?”

“Sounds like a pterodactyl screeching,” Deus says. “It’s either in the throes of ecstasy or being killed. Maybe both at the same time.”

“I think that’s Valerie,” August says, and all of them rush over to listen because none of them know how to be professional enough to stay out of drama.

“I bet this is how she mates. She’s like a praying mantis, tearing the heads off her victims... I mean lovers,” Landon unhelpfully says. “August, have you found many headless ladies around her lately?”

“Well...” August thinks about this far too long, which is concerning.

Quickly, I switch to my second illusion because it’s become quite apparent that the person that Valerie is delivering a pterodactyl mating screech to...

Is me.

Fuck.

“You were *perfect*, Ellison. PERFECT. Your scores are perfect, your temperament is perfect. You are brilliant. You are by the book. I warned headquarters that this group... that they *taint* people. And they told me that you couldn’t be tainted... Ellison... you not only *knew* about them breaking out but you *aided* them in breaking a prisoner out of jail! And the reasonings they gave me? There’s no damn way any of that lot came up with them. Landon might be smart enough to, but he would rather croak than apply his brain. So it had to have been you.”

I... I don’t think I’ve ever been scolded before. Have I ever been yelled at by a superior? I’ve always done everything perfectly. I’ve always gotten *complimented*.

Hell. “I am well aware that my actions were less than satisfactory. I went against the rules and encouraged heinous behavior. I’m horribly sorry and prepared to be disciplined for my actions.”

My brain is suddenly dragged over to illusion three. I don't know *why* but my brain is going "Hurry the fuck up, you're needed over here. It's a goddamn emergency."

I switch to looking through illusion three's eyes as Deus goes, "I didn't need those underwear anyway!" as he stares at the heap of ash on the floor while my eyes drop down to where they *do not need to go, dear god*.

Fucking hell, I am not needed here. There is no part of me needed here.

"Ooh, Valerdactyl sounds like she's devouring her prey!" Landon says, looking far too pleased by this. Maybe because she's not yelling at him for once.

I need to get away from here. I need to go back to my other illusions. Why am I wasting any part of myself here?

Illusion one is dealing with stupid laws and Valerie is lecturing illusion two on how dare the prized super that she was given be tainted by this group and illusion three is needing his eyes burned out because of Deus's naked ass. And why do I keep looking at his naked ass? This illusion clearly has something wrong with it because it's fixated *on his ass*.

Fuck me. Illusion three needs to leave *now*.

"Ellison, where are you going?" Landon asks. "I mean... the party's in here. Amiright or amiright?" He waggles his eyebrows and points his index fingers at Deus's ass as I decide that illusion three has betrayed me enough and needs to go away.

When I'm finally free of all three horrors, I wait until the participants in each room disappear before dropping the illusions.

It's insanely nice to have my brain back to myself. To not have to follow three conversations at once but, when I see that it's already eight in the evening, I feel too tired to even get up. Glancing at my phone, I realize that the cooks for Superheroes United would be gone for the night, so anything I want to eat would have to be acquired by myself, which is far too much work.

I close my eyes and slump down on the table. I'm positive I could sleep away the rest of the day, but tomorrow's schedule is just as dreadful and I'm supposed to prepare for an eight a.m. meeting.

The clink of something being set next to me makes me jump and I realize that I must have fallen asleep. I hadn't even seen anyone enter the

room, but suddenly, there's a plate set next to me with what looks like a chicken sandwich and fries. Next to it is one of Deus's weird dolls and two boxes of pins like he thought one wouldn't be enough. I look over at the open door that I hadn't even noticed had swung open at some point.

"You still in here?" I ask, but I'm greeted with nothing but silence. I watch the plate for a moment before pulling it over and biting into the sandwich. The chicken is hot and delicious, but I didn't think the cooks were even working this late. Maybe Deus had it delivered?

I eat it while spinning the doll around. What does he think these things even accomplish? I mean... yeah, maybe the last one saved my life, but what is the purpose of these things? He seems to think they solve everything. The only thing that solves everything is hard work...

I twirl it again before setting it down and staring at it.

He's such a strange man.

Finishing up dinner, I finally have the energy to get to my feet and head down the hall. Passing by Deus's room, I stop before it and knock, not really sure what I even have to say. When he doesn't come to the door, I feel even more uncertain, so I wander off toward the kitchen to return the plate.

When I step inside, Deus looks over at me from where he's staring at a knife. This would be concerning if it was anyone *but* Deus.

"Did... did you make this?" I realize.

He beams at me in delight. "I did! You weren't at dinner so I thought you ate with Valerie but when I bumped into her, I realized that you hadn't eaten with her either. So unless she'd torn your head off during the mating ritual, I assumed you'd be hungry!"

Of course he knew about the illusion and that I was getting chewed out by Valerie. I don't know why that makes me feel more disappointed in myself.

"Did you like it? The demons charred it for me," he says.

I raise an eyebrow, positive that it wasn't the demons that did it, but there's clearly no changing the strange man.

"Um... thank you," I say.

"You're welcome! I was going to hunt something for you instead, but the chicken looked more convenient."

“Thank god,” I whisper. Who the fuck knows what I’d have gotten conned into eating if he hunted it down.

He stares at the knife again before turning to me. “It’s a good stabbing knife, ya know?”

“Hmm...” I say.

Deus leans against the counter and gives me a huge smile which immediately lights up his handsome face. If he didn’t talk or do anything, one could almost get conned into thinking he was rather attractive.

A fly decides to take that moment to flutter around my face which I’m oddly thankful for because I don’t know what to say or do or why I’m having weird thoughts. I wave it off and look away from him.

“Um, just... thanks,” I say.

“Of course! Any time!” he says and as that fly starts buzzing toward me again, he flicks the knife that soars through the air before stabbing into the wall next to my head. Slowly, I look over to where it’s pinned the now quite deceased fly to the wall.

Slowly... slowly I look back at him as he seems to think no part of this is impressive enough to even draw attention to it.

Instead, my brain is going wild, and why the fuck is it betraying me? Why the fuck? No, no, no, no... don’t think it. Please don’t think it!

Oh, fuck that was hot.

No! No, it wasn’t! No!

Oh my god, I can’t think this man is hot. I can’t think this strange as hell person is attractive. I have to stay focused and do my job. Valerie’s right, I’ve gotten to where I am by being the best and...

Deus walks up to me and I find myself backing up, but he’s so close to me that his body is nearly pressed up against mine. There’s maybe an inch between us as he grabs the knife next to my head but doesn’t pull yet.

“Ellison... you know you’re more than just some mindless worker that they can boss around, right? There is absolutely no reason you should be forced to split your attention between any of them. They want you. They *need* you. You need to make them work for it.”

My eyes are fixed on his and I find my mind racing as I watch him.

“Don’t spread yourself so thin. You’re too good for that,” he says before pulling the knife free.

Maybe... maybe he's right. Maybe I *am* letting them bully me into doing everything they want... by lowering my head and going along with it all. Fuck... I'm sick of it. I'm sick of being exhausted. Of being the perfect person that has been expected of me since birth.

Deus turns around and starts heading back to the sink. "I mean... really, you should have been with us all day. That way Lex could have burned your clothes off instead, and I could have seen *alllll* of your tattoos," he says as he throws a wicked grin over his shoulder.

I scowl at the very idea. "You will never see them again."

"Won't I? I mean... that's pretty selfish."

"Didn't you just get done telling me to be more selfish?"

"Yes because I want you all to myself."

"And why is that?" I ask.

His grin is evil. That's all there is to it. "Because I love how angry you get. And then once I have you completely riled up, I love to just... disappear," he says as he turns invisible.

"Get your ass back over here."

"Why? Will you show me your tattoos?" he asks, ridiculously close to my ear as I feel him pluck at my shirt.

I smack at him, but he's too fast. "I take back all words of thanks, I'm leaving."

"Aww, that's no fun!"

"EVERY single word of thanks. Tomorrow, I'm going back to teaching you guys, but this time will be some goddamn manners!"

"Spicy!"

"You think it's funny now but just wait!"

"I'll tell the other boys to get their asses ready 'cause you're gonna spank some manners into them!"

I jab a finger, not exactly sure where he's at. "Why are you even still here? You're most definitely not a superhero."

"I can't leave until my invoices are paid. I wonder if they got lost or something..."

"You ever think they're just not going to pay you?" I ask as he reappears.

He hesitates, knife in hand. "Ha ha ha... they wouldn't be that foolish, now would they?"



If they want to keep their lives, I'm going to guess not.

He seems to be finished cleaning up, so I head for the door.

"Thanks... for the sandwich... not so much the rest of that," I mumble.

Deus laughs and laughs, clearly quite proud of himself. "If you need me to take care of those pestering people, let me know."

"I'm afraid of how you'd take care of them."

He picks up his rifle as he trails after me. "Only the demons will know." And then he winks at me.

"You're going to burn this world down one day, aren't you?" I ask.

"I came in surrounded with fire, I plan to go out surrounded by it. Let's just say that no one should ever, *ever* fuck with the ones I care about. Because once I care about someone, I will protect them. It doesn't matter who I have to kill to make that happen."

I raise an eyebrow because I feel like he's speaking from experience. "And am I one of the ones you'll protect or murder?"

Deus grins at me. "Have a demonically good night, Ellison."

"Yeah... you have a... night, Asmodeus."

And with that he disappears.

Fucking hell... my head is a mess. Maybe he's right, I'm wearing myself too thin. So thin that I'm over here thinking about being the one he'd tear the world apart for.

Hellllll no. Never going to happen. Deus is chaos.

I am not.

Fuck. I need some sleep.