

The Worst Succubus Ever

Horns & Halos #1

Author's Note:

Welcome to Horns & Halos, a new, Patreon-exclusive series set in the Fur & Fangs universe! Short installments will be provided for my \$10+ Patrons on a regular basis. They will also be offered as short podfics/audio recordings. Once in a while, there might even be extra goodies, like polls to decide the setting/theme of the next installment, as well as art and character concepts!

Lila is a bisexual succubus, a demon who feeds on the intense emotions of others (especially sexual desire). However, she isn't usually all that good at interpreting which emotions other people are projecting — or getting laid.

Mikey is an angel. They are genderfluid, and while I use they/them pronouns in this installment, they will probably also use she/her and even he/him at various points in the series. They usually wear a little pin to let people know what pronouns they want that day (including one that says 'whatever'). Their DGAB is up to the reader and doesn't really matter, tbh. The way they present their gender (including sexually) will vary from installment to installment.

JOHNSON & BZORGNAX ISN'T THE worst place in the world to work. I get to spend my days surrounded by books, one of my favorite things. The hours aren't bad either, although my boss loves to change the schedule at a moment's notice. But, like every other retail store, *Johnson & Bzorgnax* has its downsides. *Lots of downsides.*

At least half the customers don't know what they want when they walk in:

"It's about teenagers in a dystopian future."

"I think the cover was blue?"

"It was on TV last week."

People get pissed when we sell out of a specific book, sometimes pissed enough to ask for a manager. I've heard, "I'll have you fired!" more than once, even though I'm unfailingly polite to customers. Their anger usually gives me a tummy ache, and not just from the stress of being shouted at. It's a common misconception that succubi only feed on lust, but a pissed customer can spoil my appetite as well as my day.

I much prefer to feast on the energy of kids opening brand new books for the first time. It doesn't hurt them—it can even amplify their joy—and they rarely notice. Excitement is also a simple, easy-to-recognize emotion, not a weird stew of feelings I might struggle to digest.

But not all simple emotions are good emotions.

Sometimes, creeps come to sit in the café, staring at me and my female coworkers, making it clear they aren't there for the coffee or lackluster pastries. Their emotions are simple, all right—simply disgusting. Worse than drinking orange juice after brushing my teeth.

They stare at me a lot, being a succubus and all, but my coworker Maeve gets it worse. Luckily, she has a means of defense. One flash of her fangs and fathomless black eyes, and most men back off. Her rabbit ears and tail might look adorable, but only idiots mess with a pooka.

That's why my stomach sinks when, half-way through an afternoon shift in the café, Maeve nudges me with her elbow and whispers, "Lila? The angel by the window's staring at you."

My first instinct is to look at whoever Maeve's talking about, but I resist the impulse. Making eye contact might be misinterpreted as an invitation. But Maeve is smiling instead of snarling. My curiosity is piqued. Since there's no line, I steal a glance over my shoulder while pretending to wipe the counter around the coffee burners.

The person at the table is, indeed, an angel, complete with golden halo floating above their head. Their gender isn't obvious, but their purple hair is buzzed in a dramatic undercut. Definitely some flavor of queer. I've never seen an angel with purple hair before, only brilliant blonde.

They're wearing a denim vest covered in faded patches and buttons, and their forearms are heavily tattooed. Their blocky face has numerous piercings—lip ring, eyebrow barbel, studs along both ears—but their smile is friendly instead of predatory.

Maybe not a creep. I'm tempted to send a tendril toward them, for a quick taste of whatever they're feeling, but I'm too far away. Usually, I need to stand near the person and focus directly on them. Other succubi are better at it than I am—more casual—but I've never been great at feeding myself.

The angel notices me looking at them. Their smile widens. With an agreeable nod, they return to the half-eaten muffin and open book on their table, seemingly content. I whip around and focus intently on polishing the stainless steel counter.

“Oh, she’s *cute*,” Maeve squeals in my ear, her voice rising well above the whisper she’d obviously intended.

I chew my lip, but I’m not brave enough to risk another glance at the angel. From a distance, I’m tempted to agree with Maeve’s ‘cute’ assessment, but if I say so, she’ll never let me hear the end of it.

“You think they’re a she?” I ask, setting the rag aside.

“Thought so at first glance. Now I’m not so sure. You should go ask—”

“No!” I stare at Maeve in alarm. “I’d *never* just march up to a stranger and demand to know their gender. I can’t even begin to describe how rude and hostile—”

Maeve rolls her eyes, like I’m being especially thick. Instead of endless pools of black, her irises are a cheerful emerald green. “Not their gender, dummy. Their *name*. Ask their name. And maybe for their number.”

Oh. *Oh*.

I avert my eyes, stammering awkwardly. All I manage is, “Um. Customer?” It comes out as a questioning squeak instead of the firm statement I was hoping for.

“It’s creepy for customers to ask out baristas. Not for baristas to ask out customers.”

“I can’t,” I protest. “What if I make them uncomfortable and ruin their day with awkwardness and they never come back to the

store again because they're afraid of seeing the pervy succubus who hit on them that one time?"

"Too late now," Maeve says. The angel has finished their muffin, bookmarked their page, and is heading for the door. They shoot me a brief smile before walking out with their book under their arm.

A wistful sigh escapes before I can stifle it. I don't find people attractive all that often—probably why I haven't been on a date in years. That, and the fact that talking to strangers ties my tongue in knots. It makes retail a special kind of torture.

"That's what you get for being a wimp," Maeve says, fussing with her apron. "Your handsome devil of an angel is gone."

I shake my head in bewilderment. I have no clue why Maeve thinks I'm capable of flirting with a stranger, or even just talking to one without canned phrases to rely on, like: "How can I help you today?" But the angel's gone, so... problem solved, I guess? I head into the back to check the ice machine, with Maeve's glare following me the whole way.

THE SECOND TIME THE angel comes in, I'm restocking shelves. Restocking is my favorite job. It's quiet, mechanical, and I don't have to deal with customers unless it's especially busy. When they see the large boxes at my feet, they usually flag down a different employee.

That's why the back of my neck prickles when I feel someone watching me. It's an intense stare, like a customer trying to get my attention. When I extend my aura, I feel a sense of urgency.

Uncertainty, maybe? Either way, the taste pops, kind of like citrus. I straighten up from a crouch, tucking my tail and turning so whoever it is won't have to keep staring at my backside. "Hey, how can I..."

My voice trails off, and I find myself staring into the clearest pair of blue eyes I've ever seen. Below them is a rounded, regal looking nose, and beneath that, a friendly grin. The angel's fair skin has a faint golden glow, but their bright purple hair is still the stand-out color. Except for those eyes. I have a hard time tearing my gaze away from them.

"...wondering if you know where this goes," the angel says, holding up a hardcover in a slightly sheepish manner. "I found it on a chair and didn't wanna leave it lying around."

I withdraw my aura immediately. Angels are one of the few species that can actively sense us feeding. "Um." I glance at the book: *One Hundred Celestial Recipes For Carnivorous Dinner Guests*. "That's from cooking, next to home and garden. If you leave it with me, I'll take it over once I finish restocking this shelf." I gesture at the half-empty box of books at my feet.

The angel's eyes widen. "No, you don't have to do that. I can put it back. I just didn't know which section."

I'm not sure what compels me, but I reach out and take the book. "It's really no problem." But they don't let go. My fingers accidentally brush theirs. I stiffen as a charge of something like electricity shoots through me. *Wait, was that from me or them?*

"Sorry!"

"It's, um. It's fine."

We continue staring at each other for several awkward moments until the angel clears their throat. I surrender the book.

“Here, if you really want to put it back—”

“I’ll just—thanks.” The angel takes the book and hurries down the aisle, walking in the exact opposite direction of cooking. I consider calling out to correct their course, but my voice fails me. As usual. *Bless it. I scared them off.*

I whirl around at the sound of muffled snickering behind me. Maeve smirks at me from the other end of the aisle, and she isn’t alone. Our coworker Nico is there, too—a huge male minotaur with a big brass ring through his nose. He laughs along with her, and my face burns. I don’t even need to try to sense their amusement.

“What’s so funny?”

“*You*,” Maeve giggles. “You’re hopeless.”

“Don’t exaggerate, Maeve,” Nico says once his laughter calms down. “It wasn’t that bad.” But his twinkling brown eyes give him away. He definitely agrees with her assessment.

I bury my face in my hands. It *was* that bad; I can tell.

Maeve strolls up, clapping a hand on my shoulder. “At least it wasn’t just you. Your devilishly sexy angel wasn’t exactly a smooth talker, either.”

“What?” I’d been so wrapped up in my own awkwardness that I hadn’t paid much attention to theirs. Bats flutter in my stomach as I chew my bottom lip. Could what I interpreted as awkwardness really have been nerves? “So, I didn’t mess up too bad?”

“Well...” Nico’s nose ring gives a small leap as he snorts through his velvety, wide-set nostrils. “Sorry, but Maeve’s right. You’re the worst succubus ever.”

I can't exactly be annoyed with him for speaking the truth. I probably *am* the worst succubus ever. I'm crap at feeding on mixed emotions, and I've only had two datemates: a demon 'boyfriend' when I was thirteen, although that relationship mostly consisted of hand-holding between classes; and a somewhat awkward relationship a few years back with a human woman who probably wasn't good for me. Not a high number of 'conquests' for a supposed demonic entity of lust.

"It's okay," Maeve says, giving my shoulder a reassuring squeeze. "We like you for who you are—even if who you are is a hopeless nerd. Right, Nico?"

"Right," Nico chuckles. "Who else will switch shifts with us last minute for a soda from the vending machine?"

I narrow my eyes at him. "Are you calling me easily bought?"

"Just too nice for your own good. Which is why you don't want to bother a stranger who clearly *wants* to be bothered."

I look at Nico in confusion. "What do you mean, wants to be bothered?"

Maeve shakes her head in disappointment. "We saw the whole thing. 'Oops, I found a book and I don't know where it goes!' They were making up an excuse to talk to you, dummy."

My heart swells with stupid, stupid hope. "You think so?"

"Anyone else would've just left it there, or *maybe* brought it to the front desk to be reshelfed." Maeve's sly grin shows off the sharp points of her teeth. "I bet they grabbed a random book and just pretended someone left it out."

I look at Nico for confirmation. He nods. "Yep. They were definitely looking for an excuse to talk to you."

"And I blew it," I moan.

“Don’t give up,” Nico says. “They’ve already stopped in twice this week. Bet they’ll be back in a few days. I think they come here to read sometimes.”

“Or to see Liiilaaa,” Maeve adds in a sing-song voice.

I reach down into the box and brandish a book at her. “Stop being a dick and help me with this. You might as well work while you drag me.”

“What’re you, my manager?” Maeve mutters, but she bends to help me shelve the books. Nico departs with a wave to continue helping customers, leaving me alone with Maeve, books to reshelve, and my thoughts.

I hope he’s right and the angel does come back in. Maybe next time, I’ll remember to ask their name.

NEXT TIME THE ANGEL comes in, I do remember to ask their name—at the absolute worst time. I’ve just clocked out for the evening when I spot them in the music section, wearing a pair of headphones. They’re tucked beneath the halo, which continues floating overhead without any visible interference.

How does that even work?

I stare in bewilderment, but come no closer to solving the mystery. I haven’t had the opportunity to meet many angels, partially because they’re rare even in New York, and also because I’m a succubus. Angels and demons aren’t mortal enemies anymore, but we usually treat each other with appropriate caution.

I take a deep breath. *Okay, Lila, this is it. Introduce yourself. You've seen them before, so it won't be weird or presumptive.* The voice in my head sounds an awful lot like Maeve's, and maybe that's why it does the trick. Gathering my courage, I walk over and tap the angel's shoulder.

They slide off their headphones, eyes widening in surprise. Very large, very clear, very blue eyes that leave me weak in the knees. *Come on, say something!* But my pathetic, shouting brain doesn't force any words out of my mouth. It's all panic sirens in there.

The angel speaks first. "Um. Hi?"

My mouth opens and closes a few times before I manage a hesitant greeting. "Hi. Um, I was just wondering if you... found what you were looking for today?"

It's a pathetic excuse, but the angel smiles. Then they laugh, a beautiful sound that sends a pleasant shiver down my spine. "Yeah, thanks. I remember you..." Their eyes flick down to my chest. For a moment, I think they're staring at my boobs—and for once, I'm not displeased. But then they add, "Lila," and I realize they were only reading my nametag.

Is it weird to be disappointed that they weren't checking me out? I'm sorely tempted to extend my aura and see if I can sense any lust in their emotions, but that would be rude, not to mention obvious. I resist the impulse. Instead, I glance at their vest. They're wearing several new pins, including a small purple one which reads 'they/them', and another that says 'whatever' in white text over a nonbinary flag.

"Yep, I'm Lila."

The angel takes my hand, and I can't help but notice how warm and soft their hand is. "Mikey."

"Mikey?"

"Michaela," they explain, "but I usually go by Mikey. Depends on the day."

I blink, unsure how to respond.

"Sorry, never mind," Mikey says. Their eyes flick away, and I want to squirm out of my skin.

There's another awkward pause, during which we both stare at each other. My tail coils around my thigh, squeezing in embarrassment. *Maeve was right. We're both clueless here.* Strangely, that makes me feel a little better. At least I'm not the only one.

"So, you're in here a lot," I say eventually.

"Yeah. I like books."

Duh. Why else would Mikey be here?

I can't help it. I start laughing. After a moment, Mikey gives a faint chuckle as well. "Sorry," I groan, cupping my forehead in my hand. "I didn't mean to make it weird. I noticed you a few times and wanted to say hi, is all. Sometimes I'm awkward with new people."

Just like that, the tension is gone. Mikey grins, and when they relax, I relax. "Yeah, I noticed you, too. It's okay, I'm probably even *more* awkward around new people than you."

"Wanna bet?"

"Sure. Should I tell about the time I threw up on my boss at the company party, or the time I realized I'd been saying my therapist's name wrong in my head for three years?"

I can't stop myself from snickering. Not *at* Mikey, but because the second example is exactly the kind of scatterbrained mistake I'd make, given half a chance. "That last one doesn't count, if you knew them for three years."

"Yeah, but the length of time only made it extra mortifying."

"You wanna talk mortifying? Once, my boss opened a bathroom stall while I was in it. Using my phone, but still. Then there was the time I had to tell her two people were using the restroom for 'recreational purposes'."

Mikey's eyes widen, and I get the sinking feeling I've screwed up. Sometimes, in my eagerness to make friends, I stumble over social boundaries I don't see until too late. Then I hear the delightful sound of Mikey's laughter again, and I taste the tingle of their amusement. "Seriously? Who uses a *Johnson & Bzorgnax* bathroom for that?"

"I don't know, but they're out there. Believe me. Customers are weird. Present company excluded."

"Oh, I fully admit to being weird, just not to retail workers. They have enough on their plate. I did retail at Top Tech for a while. I could tell stories..."

"Same. The customer horror stories I have could fill a whole section of this store."

"Yeah?" Something flashes in Mikey's eyes. Interest? I can only hope. "Maybe we could, uh, swap war stories sometime? I could drop by the café before one of your shifts. Unless you don't want to..."

Heat floods my face. Part of me *desperately* wants to blurt out, 'Yes!' but another, terrified part of me is already coming up

with reasons to say no. Unable to keep looking at Mikey, no matter how cute they are, I stare at my shoes.

What if I embarrass myself?

Well, Mikey hasn't run for the hills yet...

What if this isn't a pre-date, and I'm misinterpreting everything?

You aren't. Maeve says so.

Or, oh Beelzebub, what if Mikey expects a hook-up right away because I'm a succubus? Is that what they're after?

It's before work. Designated end-point that doesn't involve going home with them.

Unfortunately, Mikey takes my panicked hesitation as a 'no'. When I look up again, their brow creases with a tiny notch of disappointment. I don't even have to reach for it. It just hangs over them like a damp cloud, tasting about the same. "Sorry if I overstepped. I didn't mean to make things weird—"

"Yes!"

"What?"

My lip feels strangely numb as I try to explain, and I realize I've been biting it for a while. I let up, but then I forget how to talk. Mikey's expression shifts from disappointed to confused, and I shoot them a pleading look, hoping they'll understand.

"So, yes to me swinging by? Or yes, I made things weird?"

"The first thing. I'm on Saturday at noon?"

"I'll come at eleven, then. Buy you coffee. Okay?"

"Okay!" My voice is much too loud, even to my own ears. Several patrons browsing the music section turn to look at me, and I duck my head to avoid their eyes. "Sounds good," I add, much softer.

If Mikey notices my blunder, they don't let on. Instead, a wide grin spreads across their face, making the glow of their skin even more noticeable—and more beautiful. “Sounds good to me, too.” They grab their tote bag from beside the music listening station. “I’m gonna check out, but... I’ll see you, Lila.”

Lila. I already can't get enough of the way Mikey says my name. I stammer out the expected reply: “Yeah. See you.”

Then they're gone, heading toward the front desk, leaving me too dumbstruck to move. Partially because I can't believe what just happened, and partially because I get a good look at Mikey's rear end as they walk away. Their relatively loose pants don't completely hide the shape or movement.

“What was *thaaat*?”

I turn in alarm to see Maeve and Nico hovering by my side. They're both staring at me in surprise, and maybe—if I'm flattering myself—just a bit of pride.

I smile to myself, a genuine and relaxed smile. “Guys? I think I have a date.”