

The Downtown Review

Volume 10 | Issue 1

Article 2

December 2023

Birth, Death, and Syllabus Week

Nico Fierro

Cleveland State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://engagedscholarship.csuohio.edu/tdr>



Part of the [Fiction Commons](#)

How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!

Recommended Citation

Fierro, Nico. "Birth, Death, and Syllabus Week." *The Downtown Review*. Vol. 10. Iss. 1 (2023) .

Available at: <https://engagedscholarship.csuohio.edu/tdr/vol10/iss1/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Scholarship at EngagedScholarship@CSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Downtown Review by an authorized editor of EngagedScholarship@CSU. For more information, please contact library.es@csuohio.edu.

Birth, Death, and Syllabus Week

The first rule taught in Heaven has always been that angels and humans are meant to be separate. Humans are unholy, unworthy until death. Angels are pure and clean. Worthy until birth.

The second rule taught is that birth is not something to desire.

The truth is, birth is painful. It tears the wings from your back and rips the halo from your head. From the ichor of the veins bloom hair, generating the skin of humans as we shed our own, rendering us no better than them. And it is painful.

Or so they told us, the elder angels did. I wouldn't know. I haven't been born, and I don't plan on it. And unless I change my mind, I'll remain stunted emotionally, tempered evenly in both feelings and body heat, and I won't gain the ability to either. We may look the same as humans, minus our halos or horns, but we aren't the same, our skin more translucent, less sensitive, and, cold, like holy and unholy versions of humans.

We jump through time, back and forth and back and forth, to watch the humans, the once angels. My current assignment is a woman, Marley Gallagher. I will watch over her for her entire life, paired with my case partner demon, and together we will assess, once she is dead, if she will go to Heaven or Hell. After that, I will be sent out again, paired with the same demon. We can't see other angels and demons unless the people are of significance to our assignments. It's not because there are so many of us that the world would be obstructed, but because we'd likely end up seeing ourselves with a different assignment and that would throw us all for a loop.

My case partner, Addison, is fine, most of the time. I enjoy working with her, though she does enjoy rubbing it in my face when our assignments do bad actions. So far, Marley seems to be on the path to Heaven, and Addison is painfully aware of that.

"It's a big day," she says beside me.

"Hm?"

"She meets her one today."

"Her one?"

"Don't tell me you didn't read the schedule, angel," Addison teases me, and I know I must look as frazzled as I feel.

"I- I did. I just didn't realize it's that day for her already." I sit down on Marley's floor. It needs dusting. "I've never had a human meet their one in their lifetime, I've only known of them meeting their one in Heaven."

"Neither have I," she confesses to me, joining me on the floor, close enough that her knee is pressed against mine. Her knee is warm, warmer than I, and she's leaning back, her pinky finger just barely brushing mine.

It's quiet, if only for an hour. When Marley wakes, she follows the routine Addison and I have watched every day for years, though it feels like just a blink for us. She showers, feeds her cat, eats a granola bar, and then leaves for work. We follow her as she leaves, follow her as she attends meetings, follow her as she packs up to leave, but this time she's delayed this time by her boss with an announcement:

"Everyone, please join me in welcoming our newest addition to the team, Charlie Turner."

Marley looks at Charlie, and now I can see Charlie's angel and demon, appearing out of thin air. They're elders, the size of their halos and horns indicating they've been doing this gig for a long time, even longer than Addison's and my 3,000 years. To them, our 3,000 years is nothing but a blink of an eye. They give small waves to us, and now Marley's schedule is thrown off as she lingers in the office, wanting to introduce herself to Charlie.

We spend four hours after the end of Marley's work day straying from her schedule, watching slowly as they transition from the office to a cafe not far from the office. We sit on empty stools, Addison's head on my shoulder, and watch. The cafe isn't busy, so we don't have to move, thankfully, because our view is perfect of Marley and Charlie. We can't be seen by any humans, and we wouldn't be felt, but *we* would feel weird being inside a human.

We watch as Charlie nervously asks for her number.

We watch as Marley grins and plugs it into Charlie's phone.

We watch as Marley giggles to herself as she finally drives home. And if we, ourselves, giggle at Marley and Charlie, well, no one but us will know.

It goes on like this for several weeks. Charlie and Marley stay after the work day ends, and talk. Sometimes it lasts for an hour, sometimes it lasts for three, but it happens practically every day.

We watch as they fall in love.

We watch as Charlie brings Marley chrysanthemums on her birthday.

We watch as Marley texts Charlie every morning as soon as she wakes up.

We watch as Charlie begins to be Marley's first thought as she wakes up, as Charlie becomes the first person Marley looks forward to seeing at work.

"Marls, can we talk after the meeting?"

The words send Marley into a panic, though Addison and I know it's nothing to worry about. Addison just sits on the floor by Marley's chair, and she pats the space beside her.

"You just want to use me as a headrest."

Addison shrugs. "I plead the fifth."

"That joke only works because our assignment is American."

Still, I do sit. And Addison does rest her head against my shoulder, warming me. And we watch as Charlie hesitantly approaches Marley, and we watch as Charlie's demon and angel smile at us causing us to smile back, and we watch as Charlie takes a deep breath.

"Marley, I really like you. I think you're magnetizing and I just- I want to take you on dates. I want to walk you back from the car and kiss you and-"

There are no more words. Marley kisses Charlie. I glance at Addison, just briefly, and if I could blush I would; Addison is staring deeply at me.

I want to feel like how Marley feels.

I mean... I do feel like how Marley feels. I feel like I'm in love with Addison, though if I am, it's muted because we aren't allowed to fall in love. We're not supposed to. It's a human emotion, not an angelic one or demonic one. But maybe it's both, maybe it's both holy and unholy, and I so desperately want to feel it fully.

So I go to God.

"I want to be born."

He looks at me. He's pensive and thoughtful, though that is to be expected of Him.

"Why, child?"

"I... I have fallen in love with Addison."

"The demon?"

"Yes."

With a snap, He summons Addison and Lucifer.

"Sadie wants to be born," He says.

"Addison does, too," Lucifer responds. Her hands rest on Her hips and She looks as pensive as He does.

"Love?"

"Yes."

"The one?"

"If they were both born, yes."

I take a deep breath, my chest puffed out in some fake form of bravado, and chew on my lips as I wait for their answers. If He says no, I may break. The seconds tick by agonizingly slow, slower than the entire year prior, and Addison's hand slips softly into mine, and I wait, closing my eyes tightly.

"Granted," He says to me, and He takes my halo in His hands, pulling. I weep, both in relief and in fear of the pain to come. I open my eyes, listening as Lucifer says the same to Addison, and She grabs her horns. The pain is blinding where my halo is being ripped off, white flashing in front of my eyes, yet I turn more to face Addison. She's blurry, my tears clouding my vision of my demon, but I blink them away. I want to see her. I need to see her.

She squeezes my hand, and it is like sparks are running up and down my spine. I smile, and she does too.

“Find me,” I beg. I need her to find me, to find me in every life we may live, regardless of if it is holy, unholy, or human. I need her to find me in life and in the afterlife, and in any life after that.

“I will, Angel,” Addison says softly, her own brown eyes teary, but soft, and she nods, and our fingers curl around each other’s, and—

My leg bounces as I stare at the whiteboard. Syllabus week is always hectic for me since I haven’t settled into a routine, and it’s no better than when I was a freshman. Honestly, it’s worse, since now I have to deal with the lost freshmen instead of being one. Not that I mind helping them, but when I’m running late to class already, it’s kinda annoying.

“Hey, is this seat taken?” The woman smiles at me. I’ve seen her around campus before, her long red hair glinting in the sun as she does tricks on her skateboard behind the dining hall, though I’ve never actually talked to her before.

“No.” I gesture, allowing her to sit next to me. The room isn’t even small, but the seats are already close to being filled. The woes of being in STEM, I suppose.

“Cool. I’m Addison.” She slides into the seat, offering a hand.

“I’m Sadie.” I reach out and shake the outstretched hand. It’s warm, and when she sits, her knee presses ever so gently against mine.

And something just... clicks.