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11/7/02

Disagreement Revision

### Crisis of Conscience

Sidero is Edmund's demon conscience. She sits on his right shoulder and acts as a balance to the monotonously moral advice of Avaro, the angel who rests on Edmund's left shoulder. Avaro is convinced that Sidero is trying to direct Edmund straight to hell.

"You could at least pretend you believe in God, instead of trying to rationalize everything," Avaro admonished Sidero, waving his arms around inside his loose white robes.

"Look, all I'm saying is that God isn't a factor here," she shrugged, adjusting her short leather skirt.

A few minutes ago, Edmund had opened an email from his friend Sean. It read:

"Hey man, hope the work is going well. I just finished the coding for our CS lab. I attached it all in a file, in case you get stuck. I know you've been pretty hosed lately. Good luck!"

Edmund has been awake for more than twenty-four hours. He is sitting and staring at the email, unsure of whether he should risk copying the code, or pull another 'all-nighter' to do it himself. Edmund can neither see nor hear the ethereal creatures who are yelling at each other around the back of his head. The demon and the angel do not

control him: they guide.

"What are you talking about?" Avaro asked, stroking the pendant that hung from his neck. It was a small wooden disk suspended by twine. The disk was engraved on the front with the word 'forever' in small, simple lettering, and the back was carved with a woman's name. Avaro closed his eyes and thought of her while Sidero began to yell.

"Our job is to look after Edmund and make sure he doesn't screw up, right?" Sidero opened her hands toward Avaro, asking for her point to be granted. Avaro nodded. "So, the poor guy hasn't slept in a day. All he has to do is open up the email attachment, make a few changes, and he's done. Do you think it's in his best interest to stay up for another night?"

Avaro laughed, "Since when are you concerned about his best interests? Wasn't it your advice that led him to flirt with that girl in his morning lecture?"

"So?" Sidero crossed her arms.

"She was 15! She was visiting her older brother. He nearly called the police on Edmund. Yeah, that was some nice work."

Sidero smirked at the memory, "I just figured Edmund could use a little excitement."

"Let's try to come up with a way to do it without getting him arrested, OK?" Avaro ran his pale fingers affectionately through Edmund's soft, black hair. "If he just stays up to finish the coding, then he can hand it in tomorrow and get some rest. There's no need to steal."

"Oh come off it!" Sidero spun to straddle Edmund's shoulder, facing Avaro. "Sean gave him this code, there's no stealing involved. Don't pretend like Edmund is

committing some deadly sin. He's breaking a rule that is hurting him more than helping him. He knows how to do this, there's nothing to be learned. It makes no difference. He either gets it done and sleeps, or gets it done and doesn't. You want to tell him to stay up?" Edmund's mouth hung slightly open. He was staring through the screen more than at it.

"I won't let you do this to him," Avaro gestured to Edmund.

"Oh, I get it," Sidero rolled her obsidian eyes, "You're back on that old 'Sidero's trying to get Edmund doomed to an eternity of flames' kick again."

Avaro shook his head, "No, I'm still on it."

"Are you worried he'll get caught? There are programs that look at the algorithms in your code and rearrange them and change variable names until you can't tell it's even related to the original. That's a non-issue."

Avaro looked at Edmund, concerned that this was an argument he was not going to win. The People Upstairs had explained it very clearly to Avaro after he had died: he would be going to heaven, but not yet. He was to stay with Edmund and help him make the right choices until They decided it was time. Avaro had stood before Them, stroking his pendant nervously and wishing he were with his beloved, while They told him, "you are not ready."

They explained that he would be partnered with a petty shoplifter named Sidero. She would probably be going to heaven, too, They conceded, but she "needs to overcome some personal issues about bending the rules." Sidero was sentenced to be a demon in limbo. She was told the same thing as Avaro: "Keep Edmund out of trouble."

Avaro was tired of fighting Sidero at every turn. He looked down at his pendant

and thought back to days of lying in shimmering glades, hand-in-hand. He could feel the sharp blades of grass tickling his neck, and he could hear her voice. Her laugh. Avaro shivered as he remembered that it had been three years. Three years since he had passed away, and three years since he had seen her crystal blue eyes. Avaro cringed with the thought that had plagued him recently: she will move on. She has the rest of her life to live. It wasn't just what Avaro feared; it was also what he hoped. It was because he loved her that he would have to leave her behind.

Sidero was looking at Avaro, waiting for him to respond. Avaro stroked Edmund's shoulder. Someday, he knew, he would leave Edmund behind as well. Avaro finally spoke, "If you want to make your suggestion then go ahead; Edmund is free to make up his own mind."

"Are you kidding?" Sidero laughed, "The poor kid's exhausted. Have you ever tried making suggestions to him in this state? He doesn't even think about it. It's like leading a cow to the slaughter."

"You're not supposed to do that." Avaro's cheeks tinted red from slight envy. "Besides, if we keep getting him in trouble, we might be stuck here forever. Or we might get reassigned! Do you want to be stuck advising some loser?"

Sidero glanced meaningfully at Edmund.

"Give me a break," Avaro shook his head, "Don't pretend you don't love him."

It was Sidero's turn to blush. She composed herself. "I don't think you've provided any convincing arguments that using Sean's code is the wrong thing to do."

"I have a feeling you know why he shouldn't."

"Look, just let me advise him, and we'll let him make the decision."

“Fine,” Avaro turned away, distancing himself from the act. He faced the window, but could not see the world outside. It was dark beyond the window, and he could only see the reflection. He and Sidero cast no reflections, of course, and so Avaro saw only Edmund. He was slouched in his chair, utterly alone. “I need to learn when to let go,” Avaro thought.

Sidero leaned to whisper in Edmund’s ear. He heaved a sigh as she spoke. His hand moved to the mouse and he double-clicked the email attachment. An error message popped up on his screen. The file was corrupted.

Sidero balked. “What the hell?”

Avaro turned back to the screen, “Corrupted! Ha!”

“Don’t sound so happy. Sean’s asleep now. Edmund’s gonna have to do it himself.” Sidero hung her head.

Avaro was smiling, “And you said God isn't a factor.”

Sidero slowly shook her head, bewildered. “What did I do wrong?”

Avaro did not answer. She raised her head to look at him, but he was gone. There was only a small wooden pedant, the tattered twine draped gently over Edmund’s shoulder.