

Dear Xol,

Finally, a moment's peace from the group. I regret that it is necessary for me to wake up early to write this, but I can have a nap later. I have never had a warmer chair in all my life!

I apologise profusely for not asking about your life back in Hell. You must miss home terribly; correct me if I am wrong, but I almost detected hurt in your tone a few days ago. I know we struggle to communicate at the best of times, and your questions to me did not go unnoticed. I *am* sorry for brushing them off. I'm not interested in the rest of the party knowing much. The truth is, I am a very private person. But I trust you won't tattle to the others, and hope that it will inspire faith that I can be trusted with your affairs too, should you wish to share them with me.

If you need any of these human places or customs explaining to you, please do let me know.

I grew up in a large city called Visas, where lots of different classes of people make their home. I suppose my mother cared for me, but she was a deeply troubled woman. I'm unsure what it's like in Hell, but here there are large groups of semi-organised criminals that fall under an umbrella of 'the Mafia'. Even I don't know the big Mafia boss' name, or perhaps I forget, but our city's ring were dubbed the Flind Street Furies by the locals; a silly nickname for a not-silly group of people. My mother was used by them in exchange for money to survive, and ended up living in the city's underbelly in a place called 'The Warrens'. That is where I was born.

I won't bore you with too many details, but growing up as a Flind Street runt was tough. I began as an errand girl, working my way up to housekeeping, then secretary. I felt so grown-up by the time I begged to be let on extortion missions, but how naïve I was- I suddenly found myself out of my depth, forced put my aptitude for talking to the use of such thugs. The things I saw in there... I would bet that some of these men have a heart blacker than your fellows back home. Sometimes I refused, but often the repercussions were so severe I regret to say I wasn't strong enough to go against their wishes. The mafia is an organisation you do not escape from.

A young woman in such a large gang of men of ill-repute is at risk of more than just a mugging or the city police, and I'm sure you can extrapolate on what my life became in there. I gave birth to a little boy, Trevor, and a few years later a girl, Irma. Their fathers could have been any number of those wicked men, or their friends, or the lawmakers we bribed. You said there is no love in Hell, and it is a feeling that is hard to describe. There are many kinds of love, such as that which you feel for your friends, or your husband or wife. The love a mother has for their children is beyond this, and I would still do anything for mine. They were my light in a dark world- I managed to send them to school, and I was so proud.

I watched in fear as Trevor grew to a man, and became close with the son of our leader they called Blackthorn (though I know his real name, it is Erwin Withers, and that is pathetic). Before I knew it, he was wrapped deep in their worst atrocities I don't dare write here. This is the power of love- it blinds you, and as he was blinded to the ruthlessness of his partner, I was blinded to his hardening heart. When it was too late, I lost him. As far as I know, he is still with Flind Street, though what his role is now I can't tell you.

I couldn't let my dear daughter grow up in this place I was forced to endure. The day I saw the first man look at her, I made a plan. It took months, things I'm not proud of, and more courage than I knew I had, but I got her out. With a new identity, a new family, she was untraceable. If Flind Street ever found out what I did, I would be worse than dead. I hope to the Gods now she has a decent life and a family of her own. This is the last thing about love I will explain to you- it hurts us more deeply than any wound you or I have endured.

I suffered through the rest of my days with Flind Street, and retired with honours. It took every power in me not to vomit as they commended me for my efforts, knowing what they were capable of, what they had made me do to myself and others; *you* are more human than they are. I was desperate to feel something- find a purpose, or to forget, so I took a job as a dinner lady at the Crystal College to occupy my time while I contemplated my newfound freedom. I had a small sum from Flind Street, and couldn't bear to look at it, so I began to foster young children- a few at first, and before I knew it, I had a house full of happy voices and little feet pattering. I wish I could say it was an entirely selfless decision, but in reality I couldn't bear the weight of my heart in my chest knowing I had failed as a mother to Trevor- that I would never meet my grandchildren. The thought of the foster childrens' smiling faces helped me sleep at night.

One day I picked up an amulet, and you know the rest.

Gods, it gets so dull serving supper to highborn brats, and I must admit the thrill of adventure drew me the moment I knew of the journey we would be taking. I know I have a good heart, and the right intentions. I have never let myself forget that despite what I have done, and all my failings, I am not an evil woman. But my belief is that goodness does not mean shrinking into the placid, meek old lady so many think I am. I have seen more in my long life than most can imagine in their nightmares! I can't stand being underestimated, and our battles of late have reminded me why I chose life over death in my darkest days.

I know what it's like to be a slave, to have your power stripped away, to be underestimated and trodden down until you feel like a shadow of who you could have been. I know the lust for vengeance on your own behalf, and to want so badly for

your oppressors to feel the pain they inflicted on you. I hope, at the very least, we can relate on those matters.

Lastly, I hope you know I have given a great deal of thought to your proposal. For the chance to see those abominations in human clothing ruined the way they ruined my life, my family... I may just consider joining you for one last hoo-rah before I die.

At least, I'm not completely against it. Just mostly. I'm not sure a good woman can really make it as a hellion demon.

Yours in friendship,

Edna