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1.

Humans say that it's not the worst thing in the world to leave home, that it's natural to spread your wings and fly. But if home is hell and hell is all you've ever known, it's a much more complex situation.

Besides, what do humans know about wings anyway?

From my observations they are born entirely without wings or dignity, shitting all over themselves for literally no reason at all. Honestly, how are they the alpha species?

Even demons, as vile as we are, are much more evolved. When we're hatched, we go right to work eating the souls of the damned before naptime.

Well not me, but most do, my talents were more of the odd, useless sort - especially in hell. I had no torture skill and not a high tolerance for gore, and although the human anatomy was admittedly fascinating, I wasn't much use in the typical hell professions. The fiery portal to the underworld recoiled and sizzled in the sand when it snapped shut. It must not have liked the wetness, which is good. If only because it meant it was less likely to open here again. It was what I counted on, in fact.

It wasn't entirely necessary to summon the portal to a beach but since most demons, and apparently hell portals, are not that fond of water, it was safer that way.

See, my father, who is a patriot of hell, isn't all that keen on me living the earth life, so it's probably wise not to leave a trail of breadcrumbs they can follow.

As the soft waves crashed over the fading portal (the bonds took some time to dissolve), I heard a raging howl.

It was Gadreel, my betrothed. I suppose he wasn't happy that I moved the game of cat and mouse out of his arena. And for that matter, out of mine. But I was determined to win, and to stay on earth - I only had to keep out of his claws until the day of the dead had passed in this realm and I would be able to do just that.

The earth shook in a mighty quake then - a temper tantrum - Gadreel had tried to forcefully open the portal like the great brute he is. How attractive. And he wondered why I had no intention of ever being bound to him.

A binding is different from a marriage in the sense that it's unbreakable and the terms are unspeakable, drawn up to enslave the lesser ranked demon to the other's will.

Which is why I took the risk of gambling with my life in hell.

Because regardless of how this ends, nothing could ever go back to the way it was.

With all that said, I don't think I realized how different it would be here - how cold it would be.

I summoned the shadows that were swirling around me to my cupped hands and instructed them in the dark language "I want to know everything there is to know about being a human in this place. The language, the dialects, the ins and outs of fitting in for

someone my age.Go.” They slithered away into darkening skies with nothing more than a whisper.

The human-like skin on my arms crawled then and I caught a glimpse of my blueish green scales underneath.

I had to find coverings, what were those called again? Cloths, or something.

The rectangular cloth was called a towel, I recalled from my many sea spies that regularly told me tales of this world in exchange for me not enslaving them.

There was an abandoned one, a towel, by a giant hovering fabric circle attached to a pole in the sand, a bag and a see through bottle of liquid. I shook off the sand and wrapped the towel around me. Better.

But surely this isn't normal earthling wear? Not that there was much more to the cloths they wore on the beach but I was still cold.

Humans were yelling from the shore.

They're so odd, but I turned and waved at them like the book on human mannerisms said to do. That only made them yell more.

So I shrugged, setting off to find more of these things to warm me.

I was one of the smartest demons to ever graduate from Hella's Academy, I could, I *would* figure out earth.

It was such a strange world, though, so many colors and so many activities that didn't involve screaming or casually flaying skin from living bodies.

In fact, I didn't hear any sort of screaming at all. It was so quiet, apart from the near-hypnotic hush of the waves crashing to shore and the squawking of those white feathered birds above.

They have those in hell, but they are in fact, quite hideous. They have skewed beaks, deformed bodies, claws of iron, and their wings were certainly not fluffy and white.

Those birds were quite literally made from nightmares.

I crossed through a magnificent stone wall that seemed to encircle the entire city.

Disappointingly, it had no heads mounted upon it - no decorations whatsoever, not so much as a stray femur bone. But it was still lovely, in a human sort of way.

Once through I found roads that resembled the trenches from back home, except these weren't on fire and they are clearly meant for all people to go on, in their wheeled little tins - off to whatever mundane things they do.

There were groups of humans walking together as if they couldn't possibly do that on their own, but it really isn't as difficult as they make it seem.

But maybe I was the one who wasn't doing it right.

I checked another woman's walk and found that I was supposed to exaggerate the sway of my hips whilst walking. It seemed to expend an unnecessary amount of energy but I had to fit in somehow, since the towel certainly wasn't doing me any favors.

She soon joined four more women, all dressed in variations of tight and flowy cloths, dark and colorful skins on their butts, and one was wearing a pale robe that seemed to have shrunk too much in those machines of theirs that cleans their cloths.

Each of them had a slightly different walk and I trailed behind them, studying them in pace.

They were talking too, discussing the places they go and other humans that don't want to be alone. Someone named Seth. I wasn't actually listening though.

How did they make their casual existence seem so easy?

Then my heart stopped dead, so did my feet. When they laughed, it was such a beautiful, joyous and ordinary thing. But I had only ever heard of it, and now in this moment I simply couldn't stop looking at them.

In truth I should probably have been watching where I was walking instead of gawking at the human women because the next thing I knew my very mortal face hit the floor. Pain shattered through my face and I hissed. The human world may look cute but the floors are not to be fucked with.

"Oh God!" someone shouted in a squeaky sort of way and I wanted to tell them that my name definitely is not God, it's Morgen but the pain wouldn't let me and all that escaped me was an unintelligible groan that vaguely reminded me of an ork.

"Are you alright?" then arms wrapped underneath me and I was being dragged upright. I swore, forcing strength into my limbs and standing up. There was blood, dark red, pouring from my nose onto my now naked human body. I was grateful that my mortal form came with built in camouflage because demon blood is usually black.

The human who had helped me was a small woman with short greenish hair and many studs in her skin. I had no idea humans could be decorated that way.

"Come on honey" She said, hastily took off her jacket and covered me with it before ushering me into some sort of building.

It was an elaborate collection of clothing, a shop I believe. For commerce.

"This is incredible," I said as she handed me a towel and glass of water. Now that I thought about it, I was quite parched and I drank greedily before I got to work on stopping the bleeding. My understanding of the human body was above average, since human souls often manifest as human bodies and demons need to know all about possession, it's quite an important subject for us. Although in retrospect I should have done the bleeding thing first because all I could taste is blood.

It was amazing how humans have all these needs and are really so fragile and still live as long as they do.

Her sea blue eyes narrowed at me "what happened to you? Tilt your head back"

"I fell"

"no not that" she clicked her tongue "before that"

For a moment I said nothing, unsure of what to make of her. I really didn't want to scare her away so I said "I ran away from home."

"Without clothes?"

I shrugged "we don't wear clothes there"

"You're from a nudist colony?"

That made sense, so I nodded and said "I came here to learn"

"Oh you're going to Arcania University?" her eyes were more sparkly than they were before. Again I nodded, sipping on my water and taking in all the different types of cloths around me.

"Well if you want to stay here, you're going to need some clothes."

"What are clothes?" I frowned.

She tugged on the cloth she was wearing over her upper body "You know, clothes, for not being naked."

"Ohhhh" I marvelled at her "I thought those were called cloths"

"Close enough" she smiled, "let me get you some things. Come on" she led me to a collection of vertical boxes that had curtains instead of lids and stuffed me into one before closing the curtain behind her as she promised to return, with some *clothes* for me.

There was a really large mirror and a rude light that was near blinding from above.

"If I wanted to go to heaven, I'd not have come here first." I muttered.

I had never seen my mortal form, on account of me being hellbound since the beginning of my life but it wasn't half bad. Deep brown locks hung to my shoulders, framing my heart shaped face, I had a delicate nose that was currently stubbled, (broken, from the fall I presume) and sensual lips (as I had in demon form too). The eyes were the best though, they looked beautifully ordinary - tones of sage replaced the orange hues of my other form, and whites replaced the black spaces around it.

Something happened to my face then, my lips twisted upwards into an expression and it looked more joyous than the cruel sneers I had come accustomed to in the pit of hell. It was the same action though, but where those were filled with cold, cunning, and bloodlust, this was filled with warmth and also a fair amount of pain.

I lifted my hands to my face, and jerked the nose back into place as I bit back a yelp. I'm not going to lie, it hurt, a lot. As in I nearly wet myself a lot. The redness and swelling around my eyes subsided but I willed some of it to stay, so I could seem more human. Just then a hand holding different types of clothes popped in and the girl's voice said "I thought these would work for you"

It was a very bright blue top and some sort of pants with a ton of colorful shapes on them.

"Those hurt my eyes," I said.

"Mmmm" she mused, the hand withdrawing from beyond the curtain "Something darker?"

"Dark yes" I agreed "dark is good"

She threw 2 smaller pieces of clothing in announcing that I could put those on.

"What are they?"

"Undergarments." she said simply "We wear them underneath clothes"

"Of course you do" I frowned, picking up the tiny, delicate looking things with my fingers. Were those ear holes or something?

How does this work?

After tangling myself in countless possible ways into the undergarments, I felt hot and annoyed. I threw the undergarments at the mirror in a fit of anger.

My nostrils flared, painfully and I didn't care.

I called my shadows, and with half a thought the light above dimmed to a mere memory and they slithered into my waiting arms, twining around and around so their mouthless faces could talk to me.

"Not now" I said, arranging the scrappy fabric things on the little bench to my right "what do I do with these?"

My shadows whispered the instructions to me. If I had a heart, it would be racing.

"They're like bowls for my what?" I demanded.

I looked down at the boobs and my shadows shrugged.

"Why do the breasts need to go in there?" I picked up the bra, examining it with distaste, "what have they done to deserve this?" the shadows whispered some more, trying, and failing to explain the human's delusions to me. Eventually they said it's what's necessary to fit in as a human female and I caved.

I sighed, scrubbing the back of my neck "alright, you'd better tell me again, slower this time."

I followed their instructions as closely as possible and by the time the thing was attached to me, my boobs felt ridiculous and resembled swollen dragon testicles.

I also knew then as long as I was wearing this torture device, I would always feel like I had my own little piece of hell with me.

The other piece, the panties, was a much easier item to put on, although the inflated boobs made it much more difficult to move.

"Why would they do this to themselves?"

This time the shadows didn't speak but instead slithered away, the light flicked back on just as the hand with the clothes appeared through the curtain once more. This time, the selection was much more suited to my color palette.

"Sorry I took so long" she almost whispered "There's this rich bitch here who thinks I'm her personal slave"

"Oh" I frowned, taking the clothes over to the bench "th- thank you for your help"

"Oh sure honey" she said outside the curtain "it's my pleasure to help you. Let me know if you need anything else"

"I will"

I sighed, examining the pile of black, crimson and violet clothes.

"Okay" I pointed at the woman in the mirror "We can do this"



I was sure I was dying or something. I had to be. Yes, yes that's it. I was dying and I definitely could not do this.

How is it legal to be a female? Did the males have to go through the same shit because it's fucking exhausting.

My hair was soaked and my lungs burning as I collapsed on the bench of the tiny box. I had chosen a black pants made of smooth and shiny fabric with a black top that had strips of black sewn into the open chest area in x shapes all the way up to the collar bone.

It was honestly the most beautiful outfit to die in.

My shadows returned then and I cursed at them "now's the time to show up" I spat, "when I'm going back to hell"

They whispered to me to stop being dramatic and I hissed at them, sending them scurrying. To be fair, they'd checked in a couple of times, delivering lessons on dialect and curse words but I sent them off.

"Are you alright in there?"

"I think I may be dying" I said and the curtain flung open.

She smiled a bit "Did you fit all of those already?"

I nodded.

"Shit, that was fast"

"Was it not supposed to be?"

She shrugged sticking out her hand "come on let's get you some shoes"

"Will it hurt too?" I took her hand and she pulled me up.

"Not that much" she giggled then stopped "wait, what else hurt?"

"This thing" I yanked at the base of my bra with two fingers.

Her face softened "Yeah they suck, don't they?"

I nodded, wiping sweaty hair from my face "What about these?" I pointed to the pile of clothes that I had tried on but was not wearing.

"Do you like it?"

"Quite," I said.

"Then we'll put it on your account" she turned on her heels and walked out "come on"

"I'm Morgen," I said, following her out of the rooms with a pile of clothes in hand.

"Bridget," she said, without turning around.

2.

The shoes weren't that bad actually, Bridget found a few pairs for me and we added some more undergarments.

Being a human is more complicated than I thought it would be. There are all sorts of layers to earth life and I was trying to sort through them inch by inch by inch.

At the desk, Bridget was compiling a list of all the items I had, or rather still will purchase.

We were discussing this thing called university when she told me her roommate had recently died and there wasn't a replacement yet so I was welcome to that bed and we would figure out how to get me enrolled tomorrow.

Apparently, I needed something called an Identity document, which is odd. In hell we just had rollcall and half the time they never cared who you are anyway.

Bridget was busy adding all these items to her own account and I would pay her back, with money. Somehow.

Like I said - complicated.

I was studying the multiple piercings she had in her face and ears, and the vibrance of her chin-length hair when someone else approached. A woman wearing clothes that resembled undergarments and a pant that must have gotten eaten by something because it was much, much too short was sneering in our general direction.

Her hair was white and she had icy blue eyes - beautiful but something about her made me feel like she belonged in the torture chambers with a skinner in her hand and since she wasn't there, she'd make sure everyone around her experienced just how hellish *she* could be.

I frowned as Bridget stiffened.

The white-haired woman sneered and said, "is this a new stray of yours, Bridget?"

Was she referring to me?

Bridget smiled but it wasn't a warm gesture "I'll be right with you, Layna" she said.

The white one rolled her eyes, "By all means make sure the owner's daughter waits"

Bridget's swallowed and as her hands started shaking, something hot and violent and hungry rose in my stomach. And it only grew and grew and grew the more Layna spoke.

I wasn't hearing her anymore, my breath turned to flames in my mouth and it was all I could do not to spit them at her. How dare she?

Bridget is kind and good and *this* woman - she's, she's like a hell beast destroying everything it comes into contact with.

Calm, calm. I tried to coax myself but when I looked over at Bridget, water was filling her eyes.

Something snapped in me and I was no longer the human girl but the rageful demon who climbed out of hell and is now the punisher of this insufferable soul before me.

She sure was as cold as one.

The air stopped moving, so did everything else, almost as if time had stopped but I had no such power, I was simply moving too fast for the human world.

But as I stopped in front of Layna, ire filled my demon veins. I wasn't sure if my human body was still how I was being perceived and I didn't much care because this person could go to hell right now for all I cared.

I reached my hand forward and as I did, Bridget yelled "stop!" which I did. Her footsteps joined me a second later "please don't hurt her"

Layla's face had gone pale and her pupils had dilated, I knew if I checked her hands would be shaking just as Bridget's had a moment ago. She was afraid. Ha. I should laugh at that.

I looked at Bridget then "she is evil, she needs to be contained to hell

But Bridget shook her head "She's not evil she's just a brat."

I rolled my eyes. An evil brat, my family specialized in torturing those, and I didn't half mind it myself.

"Please" Bridget begged.

The book said humans would be able to sense what I am on a subconscious level, that they would fear me if showed even the slightest bit of who I am.

It wasn't their fault, and I felt enough regret about that that I indeed decided not to murder Layna.

"Layna" a voice called and two more women came running up to the white-haired witch. Was there an endless supply of women somewhere that I didn't know about?

"What's going on?" the one with the reddish hair asked.

Layla pulled a taught face like she ate something vile and turned from me, I noticed the sneer building on her face as she said "Bridget's new pet was just about to say something boring." The sneer was exactly the same as the ones I knew, "isn't that right?"

Then I realized I couldn't deal with her the way demons deal with people, up here I had to deal with her as women would deal with women, and like how demons deal with each other.

Very well then, I did have a few tricks up my sleeves that I used when dealing with a demon that is particularly vile.

So I sneered, "Yes," I said, stepping closer to her "it will be so uninteresting, so bland, that you won't even remember that it was me who said it"

I made direct contact with her eyes, emptying my mind and siphoning her senses into my snares.

Once my mental claws were well and truly sunk into her, I said "In fact, all you will remember of this experience is that you will never disrespect people around you ever again"



Layla's eyes were void but I could feel her mind respond to me, like clay in my warm hands. The room had gone quiet, which is a side-effect of my particular brand of mind control, the chemical reaction secretes a venom that numbs everyone around, confuses them to a point where they believe it's a hallucination.

"The only exception would be the people who you need to defend yourself against, is that clear?" I sighed, irritably, "Nod if you understand"

A slow nod followed and I smiled "Good, Layla"

But I wasn't done just yet "Now," I said, "Once I release you you will be overcome with remorse for your actions, and you will apologize to Bridget."

"Yes," she breathed.

"And then" I looked over my shoulder at the pile of clothes. "You will insist on paying for my purchase" and as I thought about it I added, "And any other purchases that Bridget or I make at this store." I lowered my gaze at her again "Is that clear?"

"Of course," she said, her blue eyes distant.

"Then I release you," I said, and let her mind return to itself.

Layna stumbled backward a step, blinked twice, and then ever so slowly turned to Bridget. Bridget who looked like her own mind was currently residing on a different planet.

"Bridget?" I said. She seemed to snap back to herself then, frowning.

"Layna?" she asked "What happened?"

Layna's face contorted in a weird way and her bottom lip wobbled ever so slightly before she threw her arm around Bridget "Oh Bridget I'm so sorry" she sobbed "I've been so terrible to you. Please, *please* forgive me" and Bridget as sweet and wide-eyed as she was, hesitantly, stiffly patted Layla's back. I'd have been careful too, some witches have thorns in unseemly places.

I hid my smirk, clearing my throat.

Layla peered at me from under her hair and Bridget took the opportunity to put some healthy distance between the white witch and herself.

"Please let me pay for that," Layla said, handing a silver card of some sort to Bridget, who had promptly returned to her table and the beeping thing that counted all the money owed to it.

It was sort of like a reaper in that way actually.

"Are" Bridget frowned "Are you sure?"

"Yes" Layna sniffed, now that I could really look at her she was just as hideous as any crying human. Well, almost. "Yes I insist. And if you or ...." she looked at me inquisitively "Morgen" I supplied

"If you or Morgen need anything from this store, ever, put it on my tab, please."

"O- Okay" Bridget said, "I'll just ring this up and then I will need you to sign some credit consent forms"

Layna wiped her nose on her and nodded "Of course."

It was good to know my control worked just as well on humans.

"Want me to ring those for you too?" Bridget gestured to a pair of very pointy shoes that Layna had dropped in the process of being under my influence.

"That would be great" Layna said and for the first time I realized the other two women were still staring into nothing. Drool was dripping from their mouths.

I sighed. Perhaps my mind-control worked a little too well.

"I'll be right back" I said to no one in particular, but Bridget murmured an OK.

I led both of the women to the vertical boxes by their eerily soft hands. I could feel or sense no scars, calluses or imperfections of any kind.

By Lillith, did these women not do anything for themselves?

I shoved both the bleary-eyed women, one red-haired and one black-haired, into a single box before I went to work on them.

If I *could* pray, I would be praying that the venom wouldn't get the chance to float off and affect the others before I was done.

One by one I took their minds into mine, and one by one, I was unsurprised that there was not much of a mind to speak of.

Which is probably why just the venom alone was enough to screw with them.

I told them to wake up and be as they were, and they waltzed off looking for their Alpha female.

I shook my head, glad that it was not as much of a big deal as I thought it would be, I could most likely have had the same result with a good hard slap.

Bridget had separated my clothes from the white witch's.

As I approached, the two tails that belong to Layna were surprised to find that she had already left and they rushed after her, both in different directions.

They regarded Layna like some sort of icon, like I myself regarded Katrin Grey. Katrin was a human soul bound to hell, her crimes were not the most terrible I'd ever come across but she was by far the most cunning.

So cunning, in fact that she conned her way to demon status and ended up, not in eternal torture, but tending to demon spawn in the most comfort hell had to offer. I happened to be one of the demons she raised and when I mentioned that I thought raising demon spawn was not much different than actual torture she'd nearly cackled her head off.

Needless to say, being raised by a human soul had an effect on me, which is why I never quite fit the description of an upstanding citizen of hell.

The green-haired woman was smiling at me suspiciously "What was that about?"

I took a deep breath, already hating the amount of lying I've had to do so far, but reluctantly I said "They seemed offended by their master's change of heart. So I had a talk with them"

"Did it help?" She handed me the huge plastic bag filled with my new wardrobe.

"You know I don't actually know" I half-chuckled.

She smiled "Well it's just about time to get home. So why don't you chill while I start locking up?"

"Alright," I said, frowning "chilling doesn't mean freezing though, right?"

She laughed from elsewhere, the sound floated through the air.

"Right?"

When she didn't answer I decided that that had to be metaphorical, otherwise frozen people would be everywhere.

Bridget finally announced it was time to go and I took a deep breath.

This is it. This is the start of my life on earth. It was finally happening.

While I waited outside the door for Bridget to set the alarm, I called to my shadows and told them to scour around us for any signs of demons or danger.

Since night had fallen outside they could move much more easily and I was not concerned about them being in danger. Not that there are many things that can hurt them. But still.

Bridget had moved from alarm-setting to locking several locks. The way she transitioned from motion to motion it looked almost ritualistic, as if her muscles could do this while her mind was otherwise engaged.

As she finished, her breathing changed and her aura lightened to a pale turquoise. I hadn't noticed what color it was before, perhaps it wasn't there at all. She could have been hiding her true self.

It was as if she locked the part of herself that works here up inside along with the many clothes and shoes and different things women wear for each of the many parts of their lives.



Bridget had a tiny tin on wheels, hers was shoddy and the color of a setting sun. A rusty one. I marveled at it when I got in.

It was actually much bigger than they seemed from the outside. And also surprisingly comfortable, it even had individual restraints for holding people in place.

I felt an odd sense of glee at that.

Until we started moving.

It was the weirdest feeling I have ever felt. My body was moving but my intestines still seemed to be waiting back there for me to come back and changed my mind.

My shadows were spazzing out too but I was feeling too sick to pay them any attention. What were they so worried about?

I had been wrong when I said tiny tins are cute, they are freaking evil. They're low key torture devices that make humans choose between walking or staying in one place forever.

*Calm, calm.* I said. I had to distract myself.

It wasn't a tin, it was called a car.

There were different kinds of them. There are huge ones and flat ones and ones with multiple parts and ones with more wheels than a spider demon.

So many colors, there were so many - "What is happening?" I yelled.

"It's just a turn" Bridget put a hand on my shoulder "You okay?"

I breathed through my mouth multiple times and managed a nod.

"We're almost there hun" she said calmly "it's just around the corner"

When we finally stopped, Bridget had to undo my restraining straps because I was pulling at them too hard.

I thought the outside air was the best thing I ever smelled. I never wanted to go into a car again. I'd rather ride on top of it or die trying.

Bridget helped me haul the huge bag to the elevator and we finally arrived at her dorm room, which is a name for shared prison cells without any bars or guards and with quite comfortable sleeping rectangles.

"Oh wow" I groaned, snuggling into a softer rectangle "What is this?"

"A bed?"

My eyes were drifting close "It's like I'm laying on a cloud" I mumbled.

"Let's take off your shoes" she said and I vaguely remember kicking them off as she yelped.

Muttering an apology, I fought to stay conscious.

She threw a large, padded towel over me "This is a blanket" she announced.

I could laugh at that, humans curl up on little man-made clouds and wrap themselves in pieces of cloth like bats while their souls roam the realms to allow their bodies to rest.

Because they can't rest without closing their eyes or they'll get distracted.

I smiled and as I was drifting off, I decided that humans are absolutely adorable.



I had woken in the middle of the night, not knowing why the lack of screams rendered me unable to sleep. My shadows came to me and 'uploaded' me with all of the information they'd found for me.

Words and images flashed in my mind, drilling through my skull and latching onto my subconscious. Essentially they were filling me with the information as if I had learned it all on my own. I had, technically ; my shadows are merely an extension of me.

The entire process though was not pleasant. In fact, it felt so much like torture that I drifted off to a blissful sleep.

When I woke next, I smelled the most delightful smells of my existence. I had no idea what they were but something was gnawing at my intestines all of a sudden because of it.

Muttering curses under my breath, I got up to a cheerful “Good morning” from the wild-haired Bridget, who was busy with food of some kind “did you sleep well?”

I winced, I hadn’t but I said “not too bad.”

“It was weird for me too when I first came here” Bridget said “I’d never been away from home. And then suddenly I got the urge to move to the other side of the country. Couldn’t sleep well for weeks.” she shrugged, flipping something in, in a pan. Yes that’s what it’s called.

Sometimes the words came ahead of time and other times I had to look for them. It was part of being human I suppose.

But I asked, “Do you regret it?”

She glanced over her shoulder at me, her green curls flopping in all directions “I used to” she sighed “but then I figured out this is where I really belong.”

I nodded quietly.

Would I regret leaving hell? Mentally I shook myself, who ever regrets leaving hell? Something small inside me answered ‘the ones that get caught’ and it took a lot of concentration to shrug off the fear that took hold of me then.

“Besides” Bridget said “my family are conservatives. I never really fit in with them anyway.”

“I know what you mean,” I said.

Something struck me then, a realization that must have been imprinted in me during the night. I wasn’t supposed to sit on my ass, doing nothing - especially if I wanted to be her roommate.

“Can I help with anything?” I asked “I mean I can’t prepare food but I could do something?”

“Uhhh” she chewed on a steel ball that protruded from the piercing in her lip “Yeah you can pour us something to drink. The glasses are in the top cabinet there” she explained and as I stood up she added “the juice is in the fridge”

Fridge, wait I knew this one.

A fridge keeps things that should be, protected from heat. Only opening the door proved I had indeed been right.

The cold air hit me and I quickly grabbed a bottle with orange liquid that looked like fruit juice and closed the door before my skin could get the chance to split open and reveal my scaly demon skin.

The glasses, a wonder of human inventions, were almost invisible but visible at the same time. It was fragile and could shatter from falling but it held massive amounts of liquid and never stopped being useful.

I searched the images in my head for how to , and when to stop pouring the juice. My shadows had thought of everything, I was delighted to find. The cap of the bottle was a little tricky but I figured it out in a second.

Once I started pouring the liquid into the two glasses, Bridget started moving around herself. She took out two colorful plates and put different foods in there.

I was focusing on the juice but in moving the food around it had released fresh new smells from it and that pain in my gut returned with an audible growl.

“Well someone’s hungry” bridget smiled as she opened a drawer and removed two sets of instruments from it, my mind immediately went to torture devices but luckily it was nothing as dramatic. Eating utensils called a fork and a knife. I knew knives but their uses to me have been far more nefarious than what I was about to participate in

“Let’s eat” she said and shuffled over to a small square table with two chairs.

I grabbed the glasses and little alarm bells went off in my head telling me that spilling the contents of the glasses is a very common error and to not do that, which I didn’t.

Proudly, I set Bridget’s glass in front of her before setting down my own.

I then sat down at the other chair where Bridget had put my food.

“Bon Appetit” she said as she took the utensils in either hand and started slicing into the strange food before us.

I recognized the pinkish strips as some sort of meat, on account of the fact that sizzling meat is quite a common occurrence down under.

The yellow curdy things I think were called eggs and then there was some sort of burned bread.

Slowly, carefully I mimicked the motions that bridget made, carving up the food into smaller pieces, collecting the smaller pieces together before spearing them with the fork and stuffing the entire thing into her mouth.

It was absolutely delicious and I think I said as much because Bridget beamed at me.

In hell I had lived off of drinking blood. The blood of lesser demons, creatures and sometimes even human blood if the bodies were really well manifested.

It wasn’t a pleasant experience, but this, this is why humans get enormously fat but smile all the time when they do.

I couldn’t eat enough, couldn’t chew fast enough it was just all so delicious. But that was to my own detriment.

Cursing, I spat out a mouthful of food.

“What now?”

“Ouch” I frowned.

“What is it?”

“I” something hurt “I think that food stabbed me”

“You probably just bit your tongue, you ninny ”She chuckled “Let me see”

When I frowned she said “Stick out your tongue.”

Oh. Right. So I did that, leaning over for her to see

She pulled at it and dug her nails into the tip. I tried to hiss at her but all that came out was a puff of air.

She laughed at that but let go of my tongue "See, it didn't come off, you should be fine. Drink some juice"

I did that and it did seem to ease the pain. Juice was delicious, better than water, it gave my a brain a sort of zap that usually only a small shock does to me

"Are you ok?"

I nodded "There are so many ways to injure yourself" I complained "how do hu-" uhm I couldn't say humans in casual conversations anymore, I'd need to unlearn that particular habit of mine " how people actually live to adulthood? It's astounding"

"Well parents help" she said, as if it explained everything.

Parents, biological caretakers of offspring. I had those, they checked in once every 10 years after I survived infancy.

If human parents did the same then I certainly did not understand how their children didn't die by the thousands.

But I couldn't tell her that so I shrugged, as if her answer could have been enough.

"What are you going to do about your documents?" Bridget asked "You'll need them to enroll and about a million other things beyond that"

"Yes it does seem to be a pressing issue, doesn't it?"

Bridget nodded with faux sincerity, and I immediately recognized that as sarcasm, so I rolled my eyes at her in return.

"I think I may know someone who can help though" bridget offered "He makes fake IDs, he made mine when I just moved her and he should be able to get you into the system too"

"Because the system is important?" I narrowed my eyes at her in question.

"Oh yeah" she nodded "a fake ID is worth nothing if you don't legally exist"

Was legally existing different from technically, physically being alive?

So I nodded before she said "but it won't be cheap"

I groaned, money again. Always money. Yet another obstacle to human existence.

Money did everything, caused everything and nothing could happen without it.

Or, the alternative to money which is venom and mind control.

It would be my next mission to figure out how to make my own money, but the identity situation needed to be sorted out. Quickly. ALong with the university registrations

And I suspected I would need to use my tricks quite a few more times before I could pack them away, save for special occasions. Like good cutlery.

See? I was getting the hang of this human thing.

Almost, anyways.

"I'll make a plan," I said, smiling stiffly.

Bridget nodded and said "I have an early class but after that I have a few hours off, I can drive you Toby then."

My stomach churned painfully at that. Not the car again. "Okay" I said in a small voice. "I'll get you some motion sickness tablets on the way back from class" she said, sipping on her juice "it will help you to not feel as sick."

"Thank you" I said, and meant it.

"Then tonight" she eyed me "You and I are going to sit down and you'll tell me your whole story."

I may have wet my undergarments ever so slightly. I managed a nod.

"Dont worry" she said "I'm not the judgemental type"

I took in her sea green eyes void of the heavy black liner she'd worn when we met. Her face was round and sweet underneath all those piercings, which I reckon is probably why she got them. To distract from her innocent-looking face.

She was telling the truth, I could tell, it was one of my many half-gifts that did absolutely nothing to help with torture. Which is why that wasn't my job in hell.

I was an assistant to the head of demon-relations, which is simply a blown-up term that meant he was responsible for keeping demon-on-demon slaughter to a minimum.

It was also how I learned to dissolve conflicts, although truthfully I'd never had many of those of my own. I was more of a loner, as humans say.

Perhaps I didn't need to be one here, on earth, perhaps I could be someone else entirely, just as Bridget was a different person at home than she was at work.

Bridget rose from the table, dumping her empty plate in the steel bucket attached to the cabinet. A sink.

"I need to get going" she said "Hey I should pick up application forms for you"

"That would be nice" I said partly because the forms sounded important but mostly because she was just really nice and she sounded so excited about it.

Basically, I was bullied by all the good vibes coming off of her.

I laughed at that, look at me using words like *vibes*.

"Did you say something?" she asked, fidgeting with her wild hair that refused to remain in one place.

I shook my head and stuffed more food into my mouth.

At that point Bridget sighed, slapping her hands against her thighs dramatically and shrugged up her shoulders "it is what it is" she declared before she grabbed some sort of bag, a satchel I think is what it was called and walked out the door, yelling back for me to chill and wait here for her to come back.

Frowning, I focused on my food again, sniffing at it. It still smelled delicious so that wasn't what I was smelling.

Human noses aren't as good as demon noses in detecting specific and intricate smells, but since my nose was a bit of both, I had the power to smell something immensely foul. It smelled like something was mildly rotten and sour.

Ugh.

Moving around, I tried to pinpoint it, but the more I moved the worse the smell became.



Oh no. Did that mean?

I pulled the shirt from my skin and a great big waft of the stench hit me.

If I hadn't been used to the smells of hell, I might have gagged.

Looking back to my food I no longer felt the need to eat any of it.

It should probably not come as any surprise that a human body comes with human smells, but I definitely hadn't expected the stench to come *this* soon.

Sighing, I called my shadows "Find me a place to bathe" I instructed them in the old language "there must be one in this building, correct?"

They were pretty sure I was right so they set off and I just hoped they could tell me how to properly scrub this *smell* away.

Human bodies, it seemed, are very high maintenance.

4. My human body had urges.

Different ones than my demon body, which wanted blood and violence and malice. My human body wanted, craved more than literally anything - sex.

It gave me all sorts of fantasies that made something wild and mischievous inside me stir. (And that was saying something because I have no idea what the hell I'm doing.)

It also made my groin ache, which was a complete contradiction to what I had learned sexual impulses should be.

Were they not supposed to feel good? Why was this borderline torture?

Sure the pain was teasing and stung in a way that was almost pleasurable but I'd not expected it to be so strong.

If I were less solid, the force of it would have knocked me to the ground.

I sent my shadows to collect intel on all things sex related just after that incident.

Because it was the one thing I wasn't well versed in, despite my extensive anatomy knowledge.

Pleasure wasn't something we experimented with in hell, apart from the most sadistic torture chambers, which I firmly avoided as far as I could help it.

These urges made their appearance very suddenly this morning as I stood naked under the rain of the shower. The force of the water tantalized my skin and hardened my nipples almost instantly. It took me a whole long while to realize what it was, after which I left the shower abruptly.

On the bright side though, I realized what towels are actually for today, when I walked out of the showers soaking wet and nearly broke my neck on the smooth floors of the hallway and my shadows vibrated in silent laughter, whilst repeatedly howling at me that they *told* me to bring a towel.

So now towels were on my list of things that I needed to buy, amongst other things. I also had to find some way to get money.

That was why I was getting ready to go out. My shadows had shown me the machines that gave people money from their bank accounts. The plan was to see if my manipulations could work on technology like it works on humans.

They couldn't really be that different, could they?

Once I'd gotten dried off and dressed, my shadows attached to me to do their uploading thing to update my vocabulary some more while I sat down and painted my face with Bridget's makeup.

I saw some basic things in my shadow visions and I decided one of those; a brown powdered eye, painted lashes and pink lips is what I would try first.

For an outfit I had decided on a crimson skirt and a white tank top with a raven printed on it. I paired that with my grungy (which is essentially a word I came to understand means demonish) black boots. Undergarments were still tricky but the process was a lot easier than yesterday.

The completed look was satisfactory humanish, perhaps a bit juvenile but humanish indeed.

My shadows reported that Bridget was still in class and would be for at least another hour, which gave me the time I needed to do what I needed.

There was a collection of shops, called a mall if I remember correctly just down the road and I decided to walk there, following my shadow's directions.

Human males shouted at me and whistled like moronic birds from their cars, from the street, and it was all I could do not to send them up in flames.

Like all high born demons, I could control fire, but that was just about where my similarities with them ended.

The walk was good, my human muscles savored the movement and warmed to increase my range of motion. I made a mental note that physical activity was really enjoyable.

The mall on the other hand, was not as good, it was huge and confusing at first. Not to mention bright, so fucking bright. There was hardly anywhere to hide my shadows but they somehow managed.

I found my way to an ATM and proceeded to wait in line. Humans were orderly that way. Sighing, I shifted my weight from foot to foot, like everyone else was doing. It eased the building tension in the weight-bearing leg by putting the weight on the other leg.

A human, I mean a man two spaces behind me was speaking loudly on his phone thing, cursing and yelling at someone.

"What do you mean you couldn't get sushi for the party?" he demanded "It's literally what I pay you for" he spat.

Some pleading ensued from the other end of the conversation, which I could hear thanks to my demon boosted senses. But the man's tone didn't soften at all.

Why was he so upset about sushi? Surely a man of his stature (what I could only assume is a rather inflated one) could afford to get a different food source for his

gathering. And if not then he can go catch a fish and serve it like that, since raw is what he seems to be into.

He kept yelling and I ground my teeth, willing my twitching fingers not to strangle him. The hardest part of being in the human world it seemed, is suppressing the urge to violently murder assholes.

Asshole is a fun new word for me. It could mean anything from being mildly dislikable to a homicidal maniac. Asshole. I had a feeling it would be one of my favorite terms yet. I had to focus, try and watch what people were doing, but to my eternal annoyance, they covered those screens like a baby's bare ass.

The shadows had shown me what to expect more or less but I still felt sweaty, nervous I mean.

My leg was bopping in place, what was this feeling? It was nervousness mingled with annoyedness and something else. I couldn't tell.

I made a mental note to convey it to my shadows so they could help me figure it out. Then before I knew it, it was my turn. Everyone else had approached the flat screens with slots holding one of those things, wallets - that they kept all their valuable money stuff in. It seemed convenient but I didn't have that.

In fact, apart from my shadows I only brought a full bladder here. Perhaps this plan was not as well thought out as I'd assumed.

Releasing a big breath, I stepped towards the ATM, which is an Automated Teller Machine and not to be confused with the slang that meant 'at the moment'.

There were many options on the glowing screen;

DRAW CASH

CHECK BALANCE

And finally CARDLESS SERVICES

Well, I shrugged, I am cardless - in literally every sense of the word. So I pressed that and it told me to enter some sort of code, which I didn't.

I laid my hand on the screen, standing closer and letting my hair fall over my shoulders to obscure anyone who may be looking. The lights of the machine dimmed.

My shadows curled into the little bit of darkness my body was giving them and I gave them an apologetic smile. Poor things.

The machine whired, a low rumble passing into my hands. I could feel it responding but only in the smallest of ways.

I stood there for a while not realizing I was releasing my venom.

Just as I thought this wasn't going to work, the machine spit out a single note.

Odd, I'd asked it for many more of those.

Frowning, I took the bill and turned it over in my hands. It was a 10 dollar bill.

"Is this enough?" I whispered to my shadows, they concluded it was definitely not.

The machine then went back to the first screen I saw, and I felt like ramming my fist right through it's stupid screen.

Sighing, I turned to face a very still line. It was super eerie actually. They stood stone faced, staring into nothing like zombies (those don't actually exist though).

The person who was next in line must be the woman standing at the atm next to the one I'd been using and the asshole who was on the phone was frozen with the phone stuck to his ear.

Something sparked in me and an invisible light bulb appeared above my head. (Sigh, I had to talk to the shadows about not watching so many cartoons.)

"Honey!" I called to the man in front who was now blinking wildly at me. I was willing all my mental energy into strengthening my influence, and I was just hoping it would still affect him from just a few feet away "there you are. Get over here!" I said, pocketing the hundred dollars.

He slowly, as if he were attached to a string that led straight to me, he started walking, his steps limp as if he were a wooden puppet and the puppeteer had given his feet too much slack. Again the shadows and their cartoons.

He didn't seem to see anything other than me.

"I've been waiting for you," I said, pulling him closer inch by inch with my mind.

"I'm here," he said, mechanically.

I took his hand and his hand covered mine. We approached the ATM.

"Get started" I said and added "act natural"

He blinked and his shoulders slouched ever so slightly. His face had relaxed but he wasn't smiling. I wasn't sure he ever did.

I stood facing his side, stroking his hair - ever the affectionate partner.

But I whispered to him was 100 percent demon "View your balance, and whisper it in my ear"

He pressed a few buttons and said under his breath, "forty five thousand in savings and hundred eighty thousand in chequing account " he said, as I faced the screen.

"Draw 10 000 and put it in your wallet" I purred into his ear while tracing my finger further and further down his back. People tended to shy away from others showing affection, especially the sexual kind, in public. Not that these idiots behind us were any threat at all but there were a lot of people here and I just wanted to be careful.

He did as I instructed while I laid my head down on his shoulder, waiting patiently

"Good" I whispered to him "Now be a gentleman and walk me to a store where I might buy a wallet and a purse, nothing fancy, just good quality."

"Alright" he said breathily

But when we turned I noticed the dumb faces of the people who would forever wait in line if I didn't do something to release them and I sighed. I really needed to learn how to minimize the venom.

"What's your name?" I asked the leashed asshole under my breath

"Edwin"

“Well, *Edwin*” I said his name as if it were the unofficial replacement for *asshole* “Go wait by that cellular phone shop for me.”

When he was well out of what I believed to be my range, I feigned a cough, closing my fist over my mouth as my left hand at my side, stretched towards them in secret.

“Go” I ordered them

But they just stood there.

Rolling my eyes I tried again, “be gone”

“Scram!” I said, a bit more loudly.

They twitched but didn’t move.

Am I going to have to do this like with those two women?

That’s it. I had to say what I said to them, it had worked so well it hardly took any concentration at all. Surely, as dazed as they were, it would work.

This time I bent to one knee, pretending the laces of my boots had come undone when in reality I was sending out the razored claws of my mind.

Allowing my hair to cover my face as I said “Be as you were. Remember nothing of seeing me.”

They blinked, and it was as if I had pressed the play button that released them. I had, and it certainly was good to know what it was but it was still creepy to see it work on such a big scale.

The next one in line took her place at the ATM and I stepped as I crouched, once, twice before rising fully into a walk.

Shaking off the magnitude of what I’d just done and the thoughts that wondered what could be possible in light of that, I straightened my spine and took a deep breath. It was time to meet up with the asshole. There was much to be done.

Bridget Taylor

Abpsyche used to be one of Bridget's least favorite subjects. Abnormal Psychology, that is. Cognitive Psychology, CoPsyche for short, was much more her speed.

That is until she saw a random naked girl drop ass over tits on the sidewalk of Fashionasia, the shop where she works on weekends.

And that same girl seems to have no idea what the hell was going on around her.

*Something is deeply strange about you, Morgen*, Bridget thought as she studied the index of her copy of Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders.

Bridget could hardly wait to get out of her room so she can start writing down the symptoms she’d observed. It was an afterthought that this girl, a stranger for all purposes, could steal literally everything she owns.

Shit, if she could find something worth value she sure as hell could keep it.

Morgen's behavior was all over the place, one minute she was charming and funny and the next she was ready to beat up Bridget's Boss' daughter.

*She could be bipolar.*

But that doesn't explain her pitching up without anything more than a bloody nose and an aversion to bright colors. *Or drugs?*

She had no visible track marks, no jitters, no discoloration, nothing to suggest she's an addict.

She crossed out the word she scribbled next to the symptoms in big black letters:  
ADDICT?

No, no that wasn't it.

Bridget sighed as her finger trailed down the endless list of mental disorders;

Anxiety

- Generalized Anxiety Disorder
- Social Phobias
- Physical and specific phobias
- Panic Disorder

Behavioral Disorders; she skipped that one entirely as Morgen is an adult and that mostly is children's behavioral disorders.

Bipolar Disorder

- Manic Bipolar Disorder
- Depressive Bipolar Disorder
- Bipolar Psychosis Disorder

Those were entirely possible and she circled them with a pencil. A few times just to be sure.

And on and on the list went, so she marked the possibilities one by one and from there checked symptoms with the ones she's observed in Morgan so far, but she knew she definitely had to spend more time with her because there was hardly anything concrete apart from a gut feeling.

"Miss Taylor" Professor White eyed Bridget over her slim oval glasses, with her great big blue eyes "are we bothering you?"

Bridget narrowed her eyes "No?" she said, looking sheepish.

“Then might I direct your attention to the screen at this time?”

Oh, shit, there had been a film playing and Bridget hadn’t even noticed.

She cleared her throat and smiled apologetically “Sorry, Professor” Bridget muttered, closing the book and setting down her pencil.

The scrawny grey-haired woman nodded with a slight smile and pointedly looked to the far left where the projector was spitting the documentary against the yellowing roll-out screen.

Bridget suppressed a groan, for every second of every minute of the rest of the class. The documentary was painfully boring. Historical discoveries of psychological disorders.

Instead, she gnawed through half of her fingernails, because that was a much healthier outlet than concentrating on the puzzle she needed to solve.

After class, Bridget shoved her stuff in her bag faster than she ever had and fought her way through the stream of people heading for the door.

“Professor” Bridget called and punctuated that with a few more excuse me’s as she was shoved against a steady current of students that gave zero shits about her talking to the professor.

“Professor White” she called a little louder.

A small but firm “Yes?” confirmed that she was heard.

Bridget smiled as she huffed for air at the bottom of the amphi-theatre-style classroom.

The older woman held herself with grace, she was dressed in fitted navy trousers and a flowy lilac blouse that had been tucked in at the waist.

“Professor I have a question” Bridget released a deep breath.

“Is it with regards to the film?”

“Er, no” Bridget winced “it’s, it’s actually about the disorders I read about in the handbook”

Professor white frowned slightly “Go on”

“How would one diagnose someone who has symptoms that could belong to more than one condition and there’s no obvious taker that like jumps out and owns them?”

When the Professor’s frown deepened, Bridget added “hypothetically”

“Well, it would take careful observation” the old woman licked her lips “and many hours of discussions. A full history. And trust. That is if the patient isn’t an immediate danger to themselves or others”

“I don’t think so” Bridget bit her lip “so you’re saying it takes a while?”

“That it does” she nodded “I hope you’re not diagnosing the cheerleaders again, Ms. Taylor”

She’d done that when they kept embarrassing her and she’d told them that only people with severe insecurities or abandonment issues treated people the way they’d been treating her. In front of the entire school. On a loudspeaker. She may have also gone into more detail about said issues and insecurities and nearly got expelled. They forced her to take additional ethics classes from then on. Bridget insisted that it was still worth it though.

She shook her head “No ma’am, I swear it.”

The professor seemed to relax at that. “Go on then, you’ll be late for your next class”

“Thanks, Professor” Bridget tried to smile but her head was already spinning at a million miles an hour.

As she turned on her heels, not to go to her next class but to the pharmacy, she could have sworn Professor White gave a heavy sigh.



The pharmacy had been a quick trip, she was in and out in under 10 minutes and it was only 10 because she ran into Layna who squeed and insisted they *must* catch up some time. To which Bridget smile and silently said 'not if I can help it'

Morgen was playing on a cellphone when Bridget came into the room.

Where had she gotten that?

And there were grocery bags filled with things on the little kitchen table.

"er hey," Bridget said. It was more of a question as in 'hey what the hell is going on?'

"Hello!" Morgen smiled "how was class?"

"It was interesting," Bridget said, fidgeting with one of the paper bags. There were 3 cartons of eggs in the nearest bag and quite a few bags of tampons "what's this?"



"I bought a few things for us." Morgen shrugged "Food and other things. I had no idea what I was doing though" Morgen huffed a chuckle at herself as she approached the table.

That much was painfully clear, but Bridget found herself smiling before the realization dawned on her "with what money?"

Morgen's green eyes looked pained and she swallowed hard as she said "there was a pool table at this disgusting-looking bar a few blocks from here" she traced her hand on the table, not making eye contact with Bridget at all "I hustled a few guys"

Well, at least she was ashamed of it, which meant she's not a full-on sociopath. And she'd thought to buy food instead of useless shit. Another sign of good judgment. She was trying.

Bridget smiled assuredly, remembering that judgments never helped anyone heal "come on let's get these packed away"

Morgen looked up at her and nodded once.

"We're going to have eggs for a good long while" Bridget chuckled

"They're so good, aren't they?" Morgen beamed

"They sure are," she said "hey your pills are in my bag over there. You should drink them now, they'll help a lot"

A perplexed look shadowed Morgen's face for a second but then it was gone, replaced by determination.

She headed over to Bridget's bag and rummaged around until she found the small bottle of pills. "That's it," Bridget said, unpacking the tampons in their tiny little toiletries cabinet "two of those"

So Morgen swallowed them, with no small amount of difficulty, down with a glass of water. The entire glass. For two small pills.

Bridget suppressed a laugh but couldn't stop the corners of her lips from curving up.

Morgen rolled her eyes at herself "You'd think they were some sort of spiteful creature, the way those pills refused to be swallowed down" she muttered as they continued to unpack the endless things Morgen had gotten for the room.

Well, that certainly proved Bridget's point that she wasn't some sort of pill popper.

They were hungry but decided they would eat after seeing Toby since their nerves were both fried because of it.

So they had some coffee and got ready to leave.

“Would you teach me to cook?” Morgen asked as they walked together down the endless halfway.

“Sure,” Bridget said uncertainty “I’m not exactly an expert tbh”

“What’s tbh?” Morgen frowned

“To be honest”

“Oh” she pulled a face that was almost like pouting “still, it has to be better than knowing nothing”

“Stellar point” Bridget supposed “we can start with something simple, like sandwiches and coffee”

Morgen chuckled almost nervously “it’ll be an adventure”

“Aces it will” Bridget agreed as they rounded the corner.

“You talk strange” Morgen noted “Does everyone around here talk like that?”

Bridget laughed “I doubt it, I’m originally from Britain”

“Oh,” Morgen said as they walked to the parking lot “how was living there?”

“It was-” Bridget frowned; there was a strange older guy in an expensive suit wandering around the cars. He had wavy short hair and looked like he was already doing too much botox “Who the actual shit is that?”

“Oh fuck,” Morgen said as her eyes found him “not him”

It was the first time Bridget had heard her curse at all “you know him?”

“Yes.” Morgen said, ducking behind Bridget “I’ll explain once we drive, just disguise me, please”

“*Disguise* you?” Bridget asked

“Hide me” Morgen sighed “whatever you call it. Just walk slowly to the car and let me know if he changes position”

So Bridget stepped onto the pavement, slowly to allow Morgen to literally shadow her.

The guy was moving around, clearly looking for someone when he spotted two girls across the parking lot. He bolted for them immediately waving his hands and screaming something about his sage-eyed love.

“Er he’s across the parking lot now”

Morgen poked her head out behind Bridget's back to take a look.

The girls were clearly feeling threatened by him, visibly recoiling from him as he was raving about something.

"He won't hurt them, will he?" Bridget asked.

"I don't think so." Morgen stepped out behind Bridget and turned to observe the guy "but they sure look scared" she added before leaping into the street yelling "hey, what do you want?"

Oh shit, she was trying to protect them.

When the guy spotted her he jumped, literally jumped for joy, and shouted at the top of his lungs, "my love! I've found you." at which point Morgen slapped him clear across his face, she said something to the girls and ran to their car.

Bridget moved then, she didn't like this. Not one bit.

As she got closer to Morgen and the guy she saw that the slap hadn't discouraged him at all. In fact, he seemed more eager to convince Morgen about something.

"What's going on?" Bridget demanded

Morgen's face was a picture of rage and annoyance "this asshole thinks I'm his true love"

The man frowned "but you said-"

"I told you to find a woman who is better than you and spend the rest of your life living up to her expectations of you-" Morgen seemed to realize something "ohhhh" she said "I see how you could have interpreted it like that"

The man nodded fervently "You see? You are amazing." he tried to take Morgen's hand but she swatted him away. She looked sidewise at Bridget and sighed.

"Listen to me you great idiot" Morgen seethed "I am not the one you are looking for. I *never* will be. Now go" she pointed at the road "And leave me be"

"Don't make me call the police," Bridget added.

Then Morgen turned on her heels, took Bridget by the hand, and said "come on, we have to go or we will be late."

"*How* do you know that prick?" Bridget asked

Morgen shrugged "pool" they reached the car and she said "I took him for all he's worth"

Then Morgen yelped and the guy had grabbed onto her arm just before she could get into the car.

Bridget rushed over, naturally, yelling at the creep to get the hell away but he wasn't deterred in the slightest.

Fury flashed in Morgen's eyes as she spewed long lines of curses at the guy and something icy cold ran down Bridget's spine. She had to find a way to stop this guy before her roommate could do it.

Bridget was fumbling for her phone in her bag when she heard a familiar male voice say "Is everything alright over here?"

It was Seth Whitlock, Bridget's late roommate's twin brother. Bridget had only seen him in passing and he hadn't wanted to talk to her, or anyone for that matter. Since it happened. And he never answered her texts about Vera's things that still needed to be collected.

The stranger dropped Morgen's arm then and stepped away. Different emotions flashed over his face in the span of seconds; confusion, repulsion and anger. He seemed to be fighting against himself for some reason. Perhaps he was fighting for self control.

"Are you deaf?" Seth walked closer to them, taking his hands out of the pockets of his dark grey hoodie and coming to a standstill right between Morgen and the guy "what's going on here?" he demanded.

It was Morgen who answered "Nothing" she seethed "Edwin here was just leaving"

So that was his name.

Yet it seemed to Bridget that she was more likely to attack the man than let him leave. But she was fighting for control herself.

"Well then" Seth cocked his head to the side and said "then I think it's time for you to go"

Edwin looked confused as all hell when he stumbled backwards into the street. A car nearly ran him over and honked at him as he scrambled to get up from the ground. After that he turned and ran until he was out of sight.



Bridget was shaking, and I could tell from her scent that it was out of fear and shock. I only slightly controlled my own shaking, but it was for an entirely different reason.

My demon self was raging to get out, clawing on the inside of my human shell and I had barely enough strength to keep it down or I'd have used my venom on that insufferable moron.

Had this guy not arrived when he did, I probably would have lost control entirely and ruined everything. Literally everything.

Even now my demon was raging, but I bent with my hands on my knees to take a few steadying breaths.

"You alright?" The guy asked

I couldn't speak yet. I might gag up my demon. So I nodded and breathed.

"Thank God you showed up, mate" Bridget said to him and Bridget trapped him in an awkward hug that I tried not to laugh at. Anything could let it out at this point.

Breathe in. Breathe out.

"I saw the commotion from the window" he said "I thought I'd come check if you were ok"

"Thanks," Bridget said "that guy was *relentless*"

Alright breathing helped. On the next exhale I stood up straight.

Then I really saw him. He was about a foot taller than me and had messy white hair and deep grey eyes and was pale like he'd not seen the sun in more than a year.

But sadness dampened the glow of his aura and something else lived in his eyes, a rage that looked like it never intended on leaving him.

"Hey" he said and as he took me in, I didn't notice a shift in his aura. There wasn't any fear.

So I tried to smile and said "thanks for intervening with that" then I looked at Bridget who seemed to be lost in thought but I cleared my throat in a subtle attempt to get her to focus.

"Oh sorry" she said, snapping back to earth "This is Seth and Seth this is my new roommate Morgen"

He held out his hand which completely swallowed up mine as I shook it.

Something powerful and untamed sparked where our skin touched it raged around us and through us both the calming and icy. Like the eye of the storm providing the only window of the outside calm while the raging winds destroy everything in sight.

It was so sudden and then gone. And if it was magic it wasn't any kind I knew.

But when I looked I could see it. In his eyes were the storm and in that moment I wanted nothing more than to be swept away into its exquisite wrath.

He swallowed audibly and I managed a weak smile. What was this person?

He was a person. I am not.

I dropped his hand too abruptly and cleared my throat as I said to Bridget, "should we go?"

"Sure, yeah" Bridget shook her head slightly, looking up at Seth she said "we have a thing" she pointed her thumb to the car over her shoulder "so we gotta get going"

Seth stepped back onto the sidewalk as he said "okay, see you around" he looked at me like I had ink on my face and I frowned as we got into the car.

Bridget sighed as she started the car and pulled out of the parking lot "what the bloody hell was that?"

"I don't know" I said, "I couldn't tell if he felt it too"

"Felt what too?" Bridget frowned, clearly confused.

"Nothing" I said quickly "er, did you mean crazy Edwin?"

"Obvi" she narrowed her gaze at me before returning her attention to the road.

"Oh that." I said, trying to ignore the heat that crept into my face "I think he's obsessed with me because I bested him."

"By taking him for all he's worth?"

I nodded.

"He seems to be worth a lot" Bridget pointed out

"That he is" I sighed "Don't worry he gets paid again next week, he'll be fine"

Bridget pulled out of the parking, "how in the shit did you hustle that guy for so much money"

"A little flirtation goes a long way," I said and hoped that would be sufficient for her.

"A little?" Bridget raised a brow at me.

I looked at her, deadpan, and said "Fine. A lot. Drive will you? I want to get this over with. "

"What the ID thing?"

"No" I muttered "the car thing"

6. I was ready.

The money was in my bag, and I was prepared for a mental challenge. Things had to go right. I was determined and focused and I hardly felt the sickness in my stomach.

Bridget had told me to take only two tablets, I took four. I wasn't sure if medication would affect me the same way since I'm not entirely, or even almost human.

It seemed to be working and I was grateful for that. It made the journey much more comfortable. So much so that I ended up asking Bridget more about where she was from.

"The United Kingdom is always cold and cloudy, like my nan actually," she said, "but it is beautiful, I gotta say."

"Colder than here?"

"Oh yeah. Tons." Bridget wrinkled her nose "This is like Texas compared to the UK"

"Where's Texas?" I asked

"It's hell, basically" Bridget laughed to herself. And for a moment I had to recall if there was in fact a sector of hell named Texas.

"It's just a different part of the states," said Bridget eventually.

I'd have asked her more things but we had arrived at this Toby person's house.

If you could call that a house.

The outside of the wooden hobble had been painted but the sickly green paint was peeling and there were more than several planks missing in the facade of the house.

There was grass taller than Bridget peeking over a shoddy wire fence and the entire thing smelled of sadness.

"This is where this person lives?"

"Not exactly," Bridget said "trust me, come on"

"In a minute, let me just grab my purse." I'd thrown it in the back seat for this specific purpose. I called my shadows and told them to scout this house from top to bottom. I want to know every threat, every secret, every inkling of anything that could be harmful to us. They set off, feeding off of or feeding my determination as they went.

Bridget had gotten out of the car and was waiting patiently for me outside on the sidewalk.

"Alright" she loosed a deep breath "let's do this already"

“Indeed” I concurred.

We found a pathway hidden in much environmental debris; leaves, grass, dirt and something brown that looked like an egg but clearly wasn't.

Bridget knocked four times which was strange. Why that specific number?

But a male voice called “coming”

When the door opened, I confessed that the guy was not what I expected. He was sharply dressed if somewhat dated by my information. With a checkered dress shirt with too long, too big short sleeves, neat yet unflattering black pants with a belt, and a clean, bright, handsome brown face.

“Bridget!” He smiled and wrapped his arms around her.

“How are ya Tobes?” Bridget beamed.

“I’m all good yeah,” he said as they detached from one another.

Was that a normal hug?

“Toby this is my roommate Morgen” Toby’s pupils dilated as he looked at me but he composed himself quickly.

He smiled politely as he said “Lovely to meet you” and held out a hand for me to greet him. A fine greeting for acquaintances, I’d say. Demons didn’t greet each other, apart from glaring at one another, so this is quite the improvement.

“Charmed,” I said and sent a tendril of my black magic to his hand, it instantly absorbed through his skin and created a bond between his psyche and mine.

I wasn’t sure my demon side was under control so I didn’t dare to do my mind-control.

And this wasn’t like mind-control, it was just a simple bit of black magic to gauge whether or not someone is being honest with you. Of course, in hell I’d long since given up on using it, finding an honest demon was about as rare as an actual, literal heart of gold. And there’s a certain bit of influence I can press upon him in that bond between us as well but I certainly couldn’t force him to do anything and someone with a really strong will could easily resist it.

As he invited us inside, his mind was telling me that he fears me and is cautious, but I already knew that.

Inside looked much better than the outside. The wooden floors were clean, polished, and gleaming. And the lounge furniture looked old yet properly maintained.

We walked through that room though, to a smaller one with many books and bookshelves and a sizable desk with two armchairs on one side and a more



bony-looking black chair on the other. He went to sit down in that one and motioned for us to join him on the others.

It was beyond me why humans had to sit and talk, it seemed a deplorable waste of time, but I sat without making myself too comfortable. I kept my back straight and my eyes alert.

My chair was closer to the window where the curtains were drawn and I bent to my right ever so slightly to let my shadows creep up. They twirled under my sleeves and nestled under my loose hair.

There were no threats to us beyond structural instability, two more exits which were surely meant for an emergency escape on his part. Nothing else to report except that no one lived here.

He must have been using it as an office then.

“So,” he said, his face a cool and casual mask. His business face I realized “what can I do for you two gorgeous ladies?”

Quite the flatterer. Bridget smiled “We have a bit of a situation”

That made Toby sit up straighter.

“She has no documents,” Bridget started “she’s not registered on the system here ”

“Or elsewhere” I added

“Right,” Bridget said “Or elsewhere. So we need the entire thing. Birth registration, social security number, ID. All of it”

Toby pulled a face that was in between a wince and a smile. “That’s not that easy to do. Do you realize that?”

“We do,” Bridget said and I nodded, for whatever it was worth.

“I could *possibly* ask my connection to do this for you” he was tapping a pen against the desk “But,” he said looking pointedly at me “Why don’t you exist? Miss Morgen”

“Just Morgen” I countered

He sat up straight, seeing my challenge “What I want to know is how it’s even possible for someone not to exist.”

“Is that your price then?” I asked, raising a brow at him. “My sad tale”

“No” he said “but you must have already known that. I’m simply curious” he said, splaying his hands open in a forced-looking casual gesture.

Nobody spoke for what seemed like the longest time. They were both looking at me expectantly.

“My story isn’t for display” level a glare at both of them in turn “and if that’s your condition to help me I think I’d rather go” and I made to get up.

“Wait,” Bridget said, pulling me down with her hand on my wrist “I’m sure there’s something we can do. Right Tobes?”

She was playing on his emotions as her friend and he knew it but he didn’t trust me either way.

“Well?” I challenged him, “Is there, *Tobes*?” the way I said his name translated that I would not be his friend if he said no.

I didn’t need to tug on the bond to negotiate, his fear was a far more effective tool to yield. It made him so incredibly vulnerable that my inner darkness reveled in it.

Toby nodded, slowly. Solemnly. He audibly swallowed and opened a drawer.

“Fill this out,” he said dabsently “I can get that in and done by the morning”

“This is the birth registration?”

“Not quite,” he said “This is a citizen’s registration. So it would just look like she’s become a citizen, but is originally from a different country”

Bridget nodded “are you alright with that?” she asked me.

I nodded “very”

“Alright,” Bridget said “let’s do this”

She filled out the forms while I presented the information. Toby gave his input and told us where to fill in what.

Apparently, I was from Argentina. And we decided that my surname is Soria.

The forms went on and on and Bridget threw herself into finishing them.

Toby looked at me and I took the opportunity to ask him “how is it that you can do all this?”

“I have someone who works at Home Affairs,” he said and smiled tightly in hopes that I wasn’t going to push any further.

But of course, I did “Who do you know that works there?”

“Just someone” he cleared his throat.

It was going to be like that, was it?

I yanked on the bond of my magic and he nearly hit his head on the table. He looked up at me but I threw up my hands - innocent.

But I really had to try not to do that again. I hid my laugh in a cough.

I tried again, tugging more than pulling, and asked “who do you know that works at home affairs and is willing to do this?”

“My brother,” he said blankly “we do this to support our mother in Nigeria. She’s unwell and we want to bring her here.”

Oh, that was definitely not what I expected “that’s very noble of you” I said with a small smile. I dropped the bond and it went slack.

“Thank you,” he said

“So tell me,” I said more seriously “what is all this going to cost”

He scratched his chin. “It’s quite a complicated procedure”

I waited for him to lay out his reasoning like a bear trap, trying to make me feel better about the fact that I had no choice but to step into it. He explained the entire process, which I’d not listened to at all.

But I said “It does sound cumbersome” I looked straight into his eyes “how much?”

“Two grand,” he said and Bridget gave a stunned gasp.

She cursed in some sort of British slang. What is a whopper?

“I’ll do the ID for free,” he offered.

“No,” I said, “absolutely not.”

He threw his hands up apologetically “it’s my best price”

“Oh I know,” I said, “But you’re not doing the ID for free.”

I didn’t need that type of undefined debt.

He looked at me with undiluted shock riddling his face.

“So how much,” I said, sitting up straight and crossing my leg over the other.

“Two hundred fifty for the ID”

“Deposit?” I asked.

“Half”

“Agreed,” I said, “But I want your brother here when the registration is done to prove that it worked.”

He opened his mouth to argue but I gave a firm tug on the bond and he nodded compliantly.

“Very well,” I said. “How long will the registration take?”

“Three days”

I stifled a groan. I’d hoped it would be much sooner than that.

Finally, Bridget announced that she was done and I had to do something called a signature. I then handed Toby the money at which Bridget’s eyes bulged but her mouth remained quiet.

I shook Toby’s hand and said “Do not betray me. tugging on the bond, I added, “my case is your only priority.”

Again he nodded blankly.

I decided not to take my magic back just yet. I need to be able to keep tabs on him if the situation arose.

“You ladies have a lovely day now,” he said

“We will” Bridget and I said together and then we laughed as we got back into her car.

“Now we can eat!” I said

Bridget concurred with a “Hells yes”

I couldn’t help but smile.

These humans are alright, I suppose.



On our way back to the dormroom, Bridget had declared that we were in need of something called ice-cream. Which I now determined to be a devastating pendulum between utter deliciousness and flat out frozen hell.

The trick was to walk the line between the two because the one extreme was always tied to the other.

We sat on her bed, each with a tub of ice-cream and an obscenely large spoon. She’d gotten strawberry chocolate and I got chocolate chip. I’d heard about it so many times in

the hell sphere, people who would give anything just to taste it again. And now I understood why.

"Mmm" I mumbled "This is the most horrible delicious thing I've ever tasted"

"Wait 'til you try dark chocolate. It's like..." Bridget licked her lips and looked into nothing as if the word she was searching for had been hidden there "beautiful sadness"

"Beautiful sadness?" I was doubtful "that doesn't sound very appealing"

She chuckled "well we'll get some and you can try it"

I nodded to that. I hoped I'd be here that long, I prayed to the Goddess that my plan would work. That I could stay.

As if sensing my shift in mood she said, "You know you were right today"

I cocked my head ever so slightly in question, attempting to round off another heaped spoon with my tongue. I was trying to make a perfect half circle of ice-cream on the spoon, but this tongue sure wasn't as amenable as you would think for something that has no bones.

Bridget seemed to understand the question "when you said your story isn't for show" she looked down, "I- I should have stopped him from prying before you wanted to leave. I'm sorry."

I put my hand on her arm and said "don't worry about it, I realize you must be curious and you have every right to be."

She looked at me then, her turquoise eyes shining, she nodded slightly "and when I'm ready to talk about it, you are the first person I would want to tell" I said, smiling.

"I'll be here for you when the time comes" she said.

I leaned over and hugged her, squishing our ice cream tubs together and she complained "Oh no! What a bloody mess."

I shrugged "oops"

She rolled her eyes at me and got up to get a kitchen towel. The bed squeaked when she moved.

"Why does your bed do that?" I chuckled, "It's like it's complaining."

"Oh it is" she wiped pink and brown smudges from her bright yellow shirt "it's old as shit"

"Mine doesn't do that"

A shadow crept into her eyes "that's because my late roommate hardly ever slept there"

I frowned "so where'd she sleep?"

Bridget seemed to not know what to do with her hands then "she uh," she scratched the back of her neck. I was sure it wasn't itchy "she slept in mine"

Oh. Oooohhh.

"She was your lover" I said as gently as I could.

Tears filled her eyes and her voice was hardly a whisper "She was my everything"

It was like someone else was moving my body because the next thing I knew I was hugging her as she sobbed into my hair. Her body shook as agony and loss wrecked its way through her body. Through her soul. And it was all I could do not to weep with her.

We stood there for the longest time and I don't know when she stopped crying but she eventually muttered into my hair that I was on the verge of crushing her and that's not how hugs work.

I apologized and stood back, giving her space to think, to tell me what she needed. And it was in that moment that I realized I had made a real friend. The kind you climb out of hell for.

"I've never told anyone that before," Bridget said in a small voice. "it's just that she and I used to do this. The ice-cream." she sighed shakily "her flavor was vanilla"

I took her hand and said, "do you want to talk about her?"

Bridget considered and finally nodded, wiping the snot from her nose with the back of her hand.

"Okay" I smiled gently "How about I make us some coffee and you can tell me all about...er"

"Vera" Bridget said in a voice so intimate that it threatened to make my heart shatter.

"Then you can tell me about your love, Vera" I pushed the curls of hair out of her face and she nodded, clambering onto her bed and under the covers this time as I moved to the kitchenette.

As I busied myself with making coffee she said "So you know Seth? The bloke from the parking lot?"

Bloke must mean guy and not some sort of uncatalogued animal.

My heart skipped a beat but I said "er, yeah?"

"He's Vera's twin"

I couldn't say anything.

Because -

Because that's why he is haunted by shadows, that's why, I felt like he was mine. He'd let the darkness become a part of him and it recognized my own.

"Morgen?" Bridget asked.

I blinked and hadn't realized I had paused doing whatever I was doing.

"Yeah, sorry. What were you saying?"

"He took it really hard" Bridget said and a small click signaled that the kettle had finished boiling then "he hasn't been the same since," she added.

She was sad for him. Sad for herself. They'd mourn her forever.

I swallowed "I can imagine"

Of course, my curiosity about Seth was reaching a new high but this wasn't about me and I could, I *would* be a human and be a good friend for a few hours to this person who has been nothing but good to me.

So I finished the coffee and said to her, as I brought over her sweet kitty mug "tell me everything"

And a small, sad smile bloomed on Bridget's face.

7.

I hadn't intended on going to class today but when Bridget stood over me with a mug full of hot coffee and screamed "Oi! You lazy bum, get up" and I nearly disemboweled her on instinct, I wasn't so sure I could convince her to let me stay home.

If I'd had my demon claws instead of hands it would have worked and she'd be severely injured right now.

The coffee spilled all over me and I hissed at her "Are you mad?" I demanded "I could've killed you"

She cursed at me, as she handed me the coffee "that's a little whack isn't it?" she rubbed her stomach. My human nails didn't so much as scratch her clothing. Pathetic things, how on earth do these people defend themselves?

"Is it?" I sipped on it, and it was just as good as the first time. The trick was plenty of sugar and cream "I don't know it just sort of happened"

"How does nearly gutting your roommate *just* happen?"

That was a good point. "Er, like it just did. I could do it again if you missed it"

Bridget leveled a blank stare at me and I eventually said with a sigh, "I'm sorry for intending to disembowel you when you woke me up incredibly rudely."

She rolled her eyes "If that's rude I don't know what would be polite"

"Not doing it at all" I leveled the same blank stare at her this time "Obvi" I added the slang for effect.

"Ohhh hoo hoo" Bridget whistled "look who's catching up with the common tongue of the new age" she mocked.

I rolled my eyes at her "You're incessant speaking of said common tongue is making my coffee taste sour"

She laughed and hurled a pillow at me.

"Hey!" I complained "coffee" I said, showing her my mug "how much more of it do you want to spill?"

She stuck her pierced tongue out at me and I glowered at her.

Bridget was right though, I'd had an entire night's worth of pure slang and sarcasm uploads from my shadows and I realized in that moment that sarcasm was my favorite new thing. It had even more of an effect than cursing. If cursing was a demon then sarcasm was the nicer cousin of that violent, blood thirsty demon that didn't have the education to use its words.

“Come on. Ya need to be getting dressed,” Bridget complained

And I threw her an annoyed look, “to do what, exactly?”

“We talked about this,” Bridget sighed “you can audit classes while you’re not officially enrolled yet.”

“Or while I officially don’t exist yet” I supplied.

“Exactly” Bridget smiled “all we need to do is get to the office and fill out a form with your name and number”

My head shot up “I have one of those!” I beamed.

“Ace” Bridget said “See? You’re fine” she got up “Now get ready, I’ll make us something to eat”

Well, I did gut punch her as a greeting this morning. And besides, what the hell else am I going to do today? I’m all caught up on demon errands.

I sighed, “fine, fine”

Grabbing my towel and shower cart (those are fancy and I felt so all important carrying it around), I hurried down the hallway for the fastest most uneventful shower of my short earth life.

Which is 1 out of 2 .But still. It was efficient, there were only two other women who were cackling like starving demongulls. I named them after seagulls, since they never had an official name apart from “duck, here it fucking comes!”

I found myself wondering about Seth during the shower and I couldn’t stop.

I shook myself mentally as I got dressed, why did I even care?

It wasn’t for lack of other options though, I’d had plenty of encounters with college guys since I first came here. They were just all... hollow, meaningless souls spouting empty words and sleepwalking through their lives.

And then I convinced myself I didn’t care.

Yes, I was getting ready for a day of earthly learning and I did not care about that guy.

The smell of whatever Bridget was cooking up was extraordinary and nearly made the demon me leap out of this skin and devour everything in sight.



After yesterday that was still a very real possibility. I had to be careful.

Yes, my human skin yielded to the human realm but I am a demon and not exactly housebroken yet. If I'd ever be.

That was probably why possession was only attempted by the strongest demons, because it meant not only fighting against the flesh that obeys the realm but the soul that yields to it as well.

I had spent decades working on crafting my own human form. From practicing the physical bindings, finding the rarest of ingredients for the rarest of spells. Which included but was not limited to bribing gravevurms to bring me the flesh of a dead virgin. I was particularly horrified by that addition to the ingredients list but it was necessary.

Then I'd practiced shifting to my human form thousands upon thousands of times, in order to physically mold it as I chose.

That level of magic was well above my everyday abilities and after each session I'd have to rest for months.

But finally I'd achieved the form perfectly, at which point I locked it away in the fragments of the pocket realm that I had access to in order to keep it safe from the physical harshness of hell, which could have damaged it beyond repair. Only when I climbed out of hell, did I hide in the salty water of the sighing ocean and repair the burns that the minute exposure to the hell realm had caused.

I have functioning organs, another use of in depth biology study, and my demon soul was hidden within and in between the complex layers of human existence.

I was getting used to dressing, so much so that I only vaguely noticed that I was wearing the leather pants I'd fallen so deeply in love with, along with a flowy shirt the color of dark blood - what I imagined my blood looks like, being mixed between human and demon.

Bridget had done my nails last night when we were talking about Vera and everything else under the sun until the early hours of the morning. The color was a similar shade as my shirt with a slightly more purple hue and I smiled at the perfection of it.

Then I put on those hideous things called flats, that looks like some sort of urchin is devouring precise areas of your foot.

They were plain black and even though I didn't like them, they were soft and functional for walking a lot. Which according to Bridget is exactly what I had to do to go from class to class. All the time.

It seemed a terrible waste of effort. Would it not simply be easier to delegate teachers instead of thousands of students?

"Grub is up!" Bridget declared brightly.

I gave a deep inhale "I like it already" I said, getting up from the bed.

Gathering the juice and glasses, I poured us some and we ate, or rather I ate and Bridget gulped down her food whilst keeping a wary eye on the clock.

We had no time to lose, it seems. But I ate slowly, savoring the taste of avocado toast topped with fried eggs while Bridget apparently preferred I didn't.

"Do you have to chew like an ass?" Bridget grumbled

I raised a brow and she explained "you're eating too slowly"

"I don't want to bite my tongue again" I shrugged "Would you not miss my bright and sunny disposition if I couldn't talk?"

She rolled her eyes at me and I grinned wryly at her as I took another bite.



Bridget had been right about how easy it was to get permission to audit classes.

The unfriendly, shrively old woman at the admissions office hardly gave my form a glance before she waved us off.

I'd sat through CoPsyche with Bridget and found it interesting enough that I didn't wander off in my head to wherever it is that I concoct my questionable ideas.

Next on her list was Ethics and then Biology. Those were the 3 classes of hers that piqued my interest. Or rather the psychology and biology classes but Bridget had convinced me to try ethics. She said it might be useful to me in adjusting properly. And I tried and failed not to take offense in that; I thought I was doing rather well for a demon.

There were many more classes that I wanted to check out. The list was endless but after Biology, Bridget and I would grab some lunch and I'd figure out where to go next.

I had so many class schedules it felt like someone from home had drawn them up and specifically calculated the exact amount of work that would drive young adults out of their damn minds. Just before and not after, they learned anything of actual value.

The ethics class was not what I'd expected; where the previous class had been conducted in a pit style classroom,(which reminded me only slightly of hell) this class, however, was unnervingly flat. The professor, who was a male with orange hair, bright brown eyes and a ridiculously chiseled jawline, was dressed in a black jeans and a pale blue dress shirt. He wore some sort of chain around his neck and from what I could tell it radiated slightly with religious energy.

Needless to say I was already sceptical about this *Ethics* thing.

Silently, the Professor - Professor Lincoln - waited for the students to file in and take their seats.

Amongst those, I realized with heart stopping shock, was Seth.

He was dressed in dark blue jeans and a dark grey t-shirt that fitted his shapely arms too snugly for my comfort. My groin's comfort, that is.

I nibbled my bottom lip to keep my attention off of the heat spreading between my legs.

He had a wooly hat on his head that sent his ashen blonde hair falling to his eyes, eyes that were currently watching me with no small amount of suspicion.

Somewhere behind that was just a sliver of curiosity and as he refused to drop his gaze first, I smiled at him. Hoping to Lilith that I didn't look as much as an idiot as I thought I did. He frowned deeply but a light pink color bloomed on his cheeks in spite of it.

I suppressed a satisfied grin, busying myself by rifling through Bridget's pencil case (which really was more of a pen and Bridget's junk case)

"What is this" I asked her in a low voice. It looked like a miniature rubbery wand of some sort

"Shhh" she grabbed it out of my hand, pointedly looking around to see if anyone had seen it.

The professor had and Bridget covered her face with her hand.

Vibrator. The word came to me then, but it was too late. I smiled apologetically at Bridget who glared at me through her fingers.

I looked at the professor then. He was apparently of the belief that a face was no place to display emotions.

Seth took his seat to my far left at the front of the class. I hadn't taken him for the teacher's pet type (my shadow's learned that expression from watching way too many teen dramas) but rather the type that had an aversion for human interaction when it came to this magnitude.

Finally, Lincoln spoke "Alright class, I hope you had a good weekend."

If you call climbing out of hell and learning all about how to be a human, good. Then sure.

"I apologize for not being here yesterday. I had family matters to attend to"

Oh, so he wasn't here either.

"Last time we discussed freedom of choice and religion," he said with a calm face "and I trust that we all came to the same conclusion "

He paused to make them think, I realized, but I narrowed my gaze on him.

What, exactly was the conclusion of *that* specific topic? The class was silent.

"That each of us has the right to choose our own religion."

That's such a human thing to assume. I rolled my eyes at him. He was in no position to teach religious bullshit.

That was one cluster-fuck that once you dive into it, you're more likely to unravel yourself than the truth.

"Today we're going to be discussing Religion in Medical environments."

You have got to be fucking kidding me.

Lincoln stepped away from his notes, setting them on his desks, he was bopping his fists on top of one another "Let me hear some thoughts"

There was movement in the room, arms lifting into the sky to signal their willingness to participate. But in truth it seemed like a religious statement in itself.

But my knee was doing that anxious shaking thing again and before I could stop it the words flung out of my mouth "What the hell does religion have to do with biology and science?"

His head snapped to me and he frowned "I don't believe I know you, Miss?"

Miss? Another useless title for human women to gauge their fuckability "just call me Morgen" I said, my face probably displaying the cold rage that was seeping through me.

"She's auditing" Bridget explained

"Well, Morgen" Lincoln said calmly, but I could tell by his aura that this type of conversation gave him life "since many people practice religion and since medicine is only theory without humans, I'd say the two are bound to have to learn to co-exists in some ways. Don't you?"

I sighed "In what way? It's not like Jesus can hold a scalpel in the Operating Room"

"Right you are" Lincoln said "Let's hear some examples of how religion and medicine can coincide"

"Many African tribes still believe that it's the spirit that causes sickness" a dark-skinned woman that I can only describe as a human goddess, said to my right "and that if you don't repair your spirit, your body will not heal from medicine. Or medical treatment like operations"

“But that isn’t coinciding. It’s separate” I argued “They have a ritual yes? ” I asked her and the goddess woman nodded “and they’d perform it before medical treatment or operations can begin. It’s not the same thing as using religion for or with medicine”

“So what you’re saying is that religion has no place with medicine?”

I thought about that “Yes. That’s what I’m saying.”

“And what if a doctor refuses to let you perform a cleansing or a ritual before an operation?” It was Seth who’d asked me that, I could feel my heart pump into its next gear.

I had to focus though, I couldn’t let those gorgeous grey eyes distract me “then it’s his choice” I folded my arms “he’s the doctor not you”

“But it isn’t the doctor’s body”

“That’s a good point, Seth” said Lincoln, something like surprise shone in his eyes when he looked at Seth. Was it the shadow thing?

“It may not be their body” I said “but it is his work and that religious bullshit could mess enough with a doctor’s confidence that it would put you in danger. Is that what you want?”

Seth thought about it and was about to answer when Lincoln said “How would it mess with a doctor’s confidence?”

I almost laughed but he was serious. I sighed “well essentially the patient is saying that without their god, the doctor won’t be able to do their job properly and that would cause some self-doubt.” I said

“Only if the doctor has tiny manhood syndrome” Seth said

“Well the doctor could be *female*,” I pointed out “and would therefore have much larger balls than you, Seth”

“I assure you she cannot” he said with a raised brow and a skewed smile.

My groin ached at that.

“Well,” I said with a purr, “I guess we’ll have to take your word for it since this isn’t show and tell” to my eternal disappointment.

Murmurs erupted in the class and Seth held my gaze. I couldn't tell what he was thinking. Lincoln himself had a smile on his face "Alright, alright" he said holding his hands up "that was some excellent reasoning" he said "from both sides" he looked from me to Seth and back again "Now let's play some scenarios..."

Lincoln was talking but Bridget nudged me with her elbow "what was that?" she whispered.

"what was what?"

"uhm. The flirting?"

"I didn't flirt" I said, feeling my face heat.

I would never flirt with an innocent human. And if I did, I probably needed to stop.

"oh you so definitely did, mate"

I rolled my eyes at her and pointedly looked ahead, at Lincoln.

She shoved me playfully and we chuckled. Then I noticed Seth's eyes on me and I felt like jumping Olympic style over these tables and doing unspeakable things to him but he looked away before I could think of just what those would be.

"Seth. Morgen. How about it?" Lincoln asked

To which Seth and I said in unison "what?"

"A scenario roleplay" Lincoln said, with half a chuckle "want to come up here and give it a go?"

"I'd like to give him a go" I muttered but not even Bridget heard me.

Seth, to Lincoln's surprise, nodded and said "yeah ok"

So I sighed, got up and walked to the front of the class.

I stood face to face with Seth and his deep grey eyes pulled me in like a dancing flame. (a hell ritual mating fire thing - it's gross)

"Now Morgen I want you to play the part of a patient who needs surgery and Seth you-"

"What kind of surgery?" I interrupted.

Lincoln looked intrigued "what kind of surgery is Morgen here having?"

“A surgery to fix her sharp tongue” Bridget offered, with a grin.

I rolled my eyes at her, “next”

The goddess spoke then and I turned to her “how about an aortic valve replacement?”

Hmm. “that could work” I nodded to Lincoln “I like that”

“We’re so happy” Seth smiled tightly at me and said to Lincoln “can we get on with it?”

“Right” Lincoln said “You’ll be the surgeon who doesn’t want to give her a bovine valve instead of a pig valve”

“Why would I prefer the cow valve” I asked blankly

“Because of your religion” the class said and laughed.

I rolled my eyes again, thinking that one of these days they may not come back down again.

“Ready?” Lincoln asked.

Seth nodded and I said, “this is ridiculous” which the professor apparently took as a ‘yes’

“Get over it,” Seth said smoothly.

“Let’s begin,” Lincoln said.

“I’m sorry Ma’am” Seth began “but the bovine valve is much more complex than the swine valve. I simply don’t think I can perform this surgery”

I felt an intense urge to say ‘well then don’t’ but this was a challenge and I could see it in Seth’s eyes. He wanted to win and for only that reason I couldn’t let him.

“I’m sure you say that when make ground beef instead of pork chops too”

That elicited a few chuckles from the class

“This is no laughing matter” Seth said “I’m afraid I will have to insist that we use the swine valve”

I stifled a groan but then something clicked and I had another invisible light bulb moment “And I’m going to insist that you refer another doctor to me because I have every right to say what can and cannot go” I lowered my voice a few octaves “*inside* my body”



Oooo's were murmured through the class. And Seth was seething although I didn't know if it was lust swimming in his eyes or temper.

He swallowed and licked his lips before he said "very well, if you insist" his eyes trailed down my body, I wasn't so sure it was a voluntary action and he said "I will refer a different doctor"

"Why thank you, puddin'" I purred. So the not flirting thing had gone to shit in just about five seconds flat.

But by Lilith my shadows were going to get one hell of a mouthful for their TV habits. Although Harley Quinn certainly wasn't the *most* brain-numbing character there was. But still.

Seth blushed a bit and turned on his heels before going to sit down.

"Well that was easy" I said

"And why do you think it shouldn't be?" Lincoln asked.

"I guess I thought it was about the doctor who held the power but I realized the power was in choice" I said to him and Lincoln nodded meaningfully.

"Indeed it is" he said "choice is our power"

And I mulled that over as I went to sit down.

"Since you were absent last week, Seth " Lincoln said "and since Morgen is soon to be joining us in class" he looked at me in question and I found myself nodding "I would like you two to partner up as official ethics partners for the year"

Seth's eyes bulged and he protested "sir please I don't want a partner there must be some other way."

"I'm sorry, there isn't. Working with others is most of your grade this term" Lincoln said, "besides I think this will be good for both of you"

"Yeah" I said, with my sexiest smile "I'll be good for you"

*Stop it! Stop with the flirting.* I chided myself.

Bridget hid her laugh in a cough and I struggled to keep a straight face because of it.

His face, however, went blank and he gave an audible gulp to which I couldn't help but smile.

Lincoln turned to the screen behind him and started his lecture.

Only half listening, I couldn't help but wonder why my heart was all of a sudden pattering around like a drunken imbecile.