“There is no such thing as evil,” said Oliver, “only shades of gray.”

“Oliver?” I asked, not expecting such a name, “That’s not a very demon-y name.”

“well, what would you prefer, Hayden?” Oliver asked rather civilly.

I thought for a moment and replied, “Well I don’t know, something like Beelzebub, or Bagul or something.”

Oliver scoffs and says, “Those names are just stereotypical. That’s like if I told you your name should be Ashley or Christina just because you’re a white girl.”

His point being absolutely right, I had nothing to say in return and he begins again saying, “And for the record, demon names can’t be spoken by human tongue. Our real names anyways. That’s why we have to give the English translations and they always come out sounding stupid.”

“We can’t say your names? Why, because it’s taboo or cursed or something?” I reply.

Oliver wipes his hand down his pale face and sighs, “No, it’s because you literally can’t say them. You don’t have the vocal cords for it. Just like you can’t bark like a dog or moo like a cow, you also can’t speak as a demon.”

This answer being perfectly acceptable to me, I nod my head and drop the subject and begin to look around, “So,” I trail off, “Where are we, anyways?”

Circles of Hell

1. Suicides/ those who died young and wasted

* Damned to live out the rest of their lifespan surviving in conditions much worse than the ones they lived on earth. They survive in groups to avoid being eaten by hell hounds.

1. Lust

* Damned to be blown by constant fierce storms without shelter for all of eternity on a rather small cliff. If they are blown off the cliff they suffer unimaginable pain and then are eaten by the abyss.

1. Sloth

- Damned to have constant thoughts and aspirations and drive to do all the things they never did, but forced to do nothing but run from hell hounds for all of eternity.

1. Gluttony

* Damned to live within a landscape made of human organs, only allowed to drink bile and eat feces for all of eternity in order to survive. If they refuse to eat, their soul will slowly be consumed by the creatures of hell.

1. Greed

* Damned to pull the weight of all they coveted for eternity while death birds pick and peck away their soul. If they stop walking, soul grabbers reach from the ground and consume them.

1. Deceit

* Damned to be slit all over their body for every lie they ever told with bad intentions and no regret. They are then hooked through the neck and dipped in a pool of acid for all of eternity.

1. Wrath

* Damned to live in a pool of boiling blood fighting one another for all of eternity. If one loses and falls below the surface, their soul will be eaten by bottom dwellers. If they try to escape from the lake, they will be shot down by arrows.

1. Bigots

* Damned to be born over and over again in a cycle as all the other people they ever ridiculed or bullied, then be tortured in the same way they were tortured. Once all of these lives have been lived, they will live out the rest of eternity as a slave to Lucifer, constantly being beaten, tortured and mocked for the creatures of hell’s entertainment. There is no escape from this.

1. Murderers

* Damned to be stalked and murdered ceaselessly in torturous ways, experiencing all the fear, regret, and pain their victim(s) did while alive. Once they are killed, this cycle repeats for all of eternity. There is no escape from this.

I was a child of maybe six or seven.

My family was never particularly religious, but I certainly knew of gods, demons and hell.

People don’t usually believe things unless they see it with their own eyes.

And what I saw, once I grew up, I didn’t even believe myself.

So I just forgot.

I thought it was a dream.

It was a cool autumn morning and the leaves were falling like rain from the sky.

My mother told me I could go play outside, but only if I brought our dog, Lindy.

“She’ll keep you safe,” my mother said as she pet the huge German Shepard. “Just stay off the roads and don’t talk to strangers.”

But of course, I was a child, and not a very good listening child at that.

So I took Lindy and left.

I burst out the door and through the crunching leaves, out into the forest just a block away from my home.

I ran after Lindy, throwing sticks for her as we chased squirrels together. Just having fun.

But, you see, this wasn’t a very deep forest, in fact, it wasn’t deep at all. Just having about a block of space with the roads surrounding it on all sides, it was easy to get out. Way too easy.

So when lindy chased one of the squirrels into the road and promptly got hit and splattered by a passing car, no one could really be surprised.

But I was only six or seven after all, so I had no clue.

I ran out to the road and by now the car was already gone. A hit and run.

Lindy’s body was everywhere, her beat and smeared guts sprayed across the pavement.

The worst part was, she was still alive. She was still breathing.

I started to cry and scream for help. Screaming for some nice grown up to come and make her all better. To make her boo boos go away. To fix her all up.

I screamed and screamed and suddenly, from what seemed to appear out of nowhere, was a man, standing across the street.

He stood about seven feet tall, dressed all in black in a suit and tie, with black spiked hair and pale skin, wearing sun glasses over his eyes. Calmly, he walked over to me and kneeled down.

I was crying so hard that the advice of my mother not to talk to strangers flew out of my head and I screamed, “Please, help me! Please!”

The man just looked at me with no expression and then back at Lindy and said, “You want her to live?”

I nodded my head quickly and panicked, begging, “Yes, yes, please help her!”

The man stayed quiet as he stared at Lindy, the light in her eyes quickly fading as half her bowels continued to leak out.

“Please mister, I’ll do anything!”

The man just stared for a moment more before stating, “If I help you, one day you’ll have to help me.”

Desperate, I nodded my head forcefully, and cried, “Okay, Okay! Just please fix her, please!”

I didn’t realize those stupid words were going to change the rest of my life.

The man nodded back and opened his mouth to speak, baring razor sharp teeth I had not noticed before as he said, “I have your word, Hayden.”

He then calmly turned back to Lindy’s almost lifeless body and put his hand on her head.

Suddenly, all around us, the leaves began to rise and the cold autumn air became warm. When I looked back to lindy and the man, her whole body was glowing.

Right before my eyes, I watched her spewed bowels sunk into the pavement and her wound closed up. Seamlessly, any mark of harm faded away and her fur grew back over the spot where she was ripped open.

The light slowly faded and the leaves begun to fall as the warm air dissipated and was replaced with the cold and then suddenly:

Lindy opened her eyes.

As if from a deep sleep, she got to her paws and stretched, just as she always did. She then turned to me and licked my dirty, tear stricken face, and immediately I began to smile and laugh.

I looked back up to the man as if he did what all grownups were supposed to do: fix and make things better.

I said, “Thank you mister!” as if raising my dog from the dead was no harder than fixing a broken toy, and with that, I ran off with Lindy back home.

When I got back, I told my mother what had happened, but as you can expect, she didn’t believe me. She said, “Oh what an imagination!” and then went back to cooking dinner.

Her response didn’t faze me though and eventually neither did the event.

In time I just forgot that it actually happened and wrote it all off as a day dream or pretend.

But then one day he came back.

**Chapter One**

Every day is the same. You wake up, eat, go to school, eat, go home, eat, then you go to sleep.

Wash, rinse, repeat.

This was my life as was it for many others.

I had a boyfriend named Eric and my best friend Emily, as well as other acquaintances.

Typical.

You know, people always ask for adventure. To break away from the normal routine of things. Once they get it though, once it is thrown on them like a brick where they have to break from their pleasant lives, nobody wants it. People only want what they can’t have. People only want what they think they want, not what they actually want.

I was one of those people.

It was the twelfth of Decemberand I was fifteen years old, a sophomore in high school, and I had just been released for winter break. The snow was falling and the common seasonal music was playing in department stores all over the country.

It was Christmas time.

I left home that morning to go meet up with Eric before he departed with his family to spend the holidays down south.

Luckily, Eric wasn’t far from home, in fact, he was practically next door. Just diagonal from my house, with our back yards touching, I jumped over the snow covered wooden fence, and plopped down into a foot deep of more snow.

Trudging my way through his back yard, everything was quiet and peaceful. I remember I was so excited to see him. After knowing him practically from birth, then growing up next to each other for fifteen years, and dating for three, we built up quite a bond.

I got to his porch and opened up the rickety, wooden screen door that led inside to a much nicer sliding glass door.

I knocked that little jingle everyone does when they are knocking on the door of someone they know and almost as quickly as I had knocked, his mother let me in.

“Oh, Hayden! It’s wonderful to see you!” she exclaimed. “How are you? Here, let me take your scarf and I’ll make you some hot chocolate!”

Agreeing, I smiled and handed over my scarf for the hot chocolate trade, and before I could say any more, I felt someone grab me from behind and squeeze me tight.

“Eric!” I squealed, giggling and laughing as he spun me around and kissed me.

“Hi sweetie! Did I startle you with my ninja hug?” he asked with a smile that could light up the whole world.

“Psh,” I scoffed. “No one can scare me! I am prepared for anything at any time!” I lied, as my heart raced a mile a minute from his unexpected hug.

“Oh, yeah right, I can tell when you’re lying, Hayden. How long have I known you again?” He laughed as he released me and fell back to a normal standing position with his hands on his hips.

“Shut up!” I giggled, instantly giving myself away.

Eric smiled in return and gently tapped me on the arm. “Hey, I’ve got something to show you!”

“Oh, something to show me, huh?” I replied mischievously, smirking at him and raising an eyebrow.

He rolled his eyes and replied, “Yea, I do. Come on you bugger!” as he grabbed my arm and pulled me in after him.

Smiling brightly, I followed him into his bedroom that wasn’t far from the entrance of his small house. Eric wasn’t poor, but he wasn’t rich either, and either way I didn’t care. You can’t take money with you when you die anyways.

We walked into his bedroom when instantly, I saw the only thing in his room that had changed.

“A telescope!” I exclaimed, as I ran up to the large lensed object. “Oh my God, it’s really a telescope!”

I touch the base and run my fingers along the smooth metal body, leading up to the glass end.

“I knew you’d like it!” Eric laughed. “Unfortunately, we can’t use it now though, we have to wait until it’s dark.”

I turned to him with a half pouty, half smiling look, and he responded, “Aw, don’t look too disappointed now! Night time isn’t that far away. Plus, enjoy the day while you still have me, you goober!” Before I could even react, he ran up and grabbed me, tickling me everywhere.

“H-hey!” I giggled. “S-stop!”

I was laughing so hard I couldn’t even breathe.

“That’s what you get for making that face you goosemonkey!” He laughed as he slowly let off on the tickling.

Still laughing and panting, doing my best to catch my breath, I dropped to the ground with a smile plastered on my face. Falling directly after, Eric came down with me, plopping in front of me.

“Alright,” Eric began, “since this is the last day I’ll be home, I wanted to do something special.”

“Special?” I giggled, my skin still tingling and tickling from moments earlier, “Like what?”

“Well, I’ve already unveiled what we will be doing tonight, so that is no surprise, but I’ve got some other stuff planned.” He smiled. “To start, we are going to need to get out of the house.”

“Aw, but it’s cold out there.” I playfully frowned as I pointed outside the window to the falling snow.

“It’ll be worth it, I promise,” he chuckled, “but first, I got something for you.”

“A present?!” I gasped, when immediately I was pinned to the floor with his warm lips are on mine.

For a moment, I fought it, being taken off guard by his sudden movements, but as soon as I registered what was happening, I quickly melted into his kiss, shutting my eyes and relaxing in his warmth.

That moment felt like the longest in my life. I’m sure that at the time it felt like nothing more than the usual kiss. The usual spontaneous times we shared that happened as they did and continued on without a second thought.

When you look back on things that happened in the past, you are almost always looking through rose colored glasses. Nothing in the past is ever as good as we make it seem in the future.

We immortalize the things that are dead.

~\*~

We spent the day in each other’s company, wandering through the freshly fallen, snow covered woods. We talked and laughed about trivial things that didn’t matter, but regardless, they made us happy. We made mention of our past that was forever over and our future that little did we know was never going to come.

Everything seemed perfect.

And on that snow covered day, it really was.

As the sky grew dark and the wind chill worsened, we returned home.

Upon walking through the back gate, we could see the colorful Christmas lights that decorated the house and the Christmas tree that sat just through the frost covered window.

I remember he looked at me, saying how he missed me already.

We walked out of the snow and into his warm and inviting home, fireplace burning freshly chopped wood and the smell of fresh baked cookies in the air.

I was giggling and laughing at some joke he told as we made our way into his bedroom, and the moment that door shut, he grabbed my body and began to kiss me.

Little by little our clothes came off and the room filled with body heat, as the one and only person I had ever loved held me close.

We kept quiet, as we had to so his parents wouldn’t hear, and in our silence we felt the most amazing pleasure that I would want to feel with no other than him and him alone.

I was his and he was mine, and at that time, that was all that mattered.

We laid there in bed for some time, wrapped in one another’s arms, just passing the time by taking turns listening to each other’s heart beats. Our bodies cooled and the chill of the air became a bother, so we dressed again.

“It got so dark out,” he whispered, with his arm around me, encompassed in the cold night that crept upon us. “I think now is the perfect time to see the stars, don’t you think?”

I smiled and nodded and he smiled back, as we got up and quietly walked to the telescope.

I remember stopping the moment I stepped into the starlight and just staring out of the frosted window. The snow was falling so peacefully, illuminated by the stars and the moon.

I felt so fragile in that moment, staring outside into the world beyond the warmth of his home.

I felt fragile, yet I felt nothing could hurt me.

I felt safe.

Eric made me feel safe.

“Whoa, check it out!” I remember him exclaiming, as he waved me over to the telescope that he was peering through.

I walked over as he moved out of the way, letting me lean down and view into the stars. I could see them, sparking like diamonds, shimmering white light onto this earth.

“Wow…” I whispered, as I turned the magnifying pole towards the moon, seeing every little crater and crevice.

“It’s pretty amazing isn’t it?” I felt Eric’s warm words against my neck. “The stars shine for you, Hayden.”

I smiled, staring into the tiny glass hole that led to the heavens up above.

I don’t remember what I was thinking at that time, in fact, most of the night got blurred from that point on. All I remember was that I was happy, and really, in the end, that was all that mattered.

I went home later that night, beaming the flashlight Eric gave me as I walked, shining it on the ground to illuminate my path. I got home, got ready for bed and called Eric just to say goodbye to him before he left for his trip.

He laughed when I said it would feel like forever till I saw him again, and I just remember he replied, “It’s just a few days, it’ll be over in no time!”

We talked for quite a while, yet those few words were the only ones my memory held on to.

It’s strange what your mind chooses to keep and throw out.

By time we got off the phone, it was already late into the night. Talking in the dark had made me tired, and I was already drifting in and out of slumber.

As I laid there in a daze of being half awake and half asleep, suddenly, I heard a noise coming from the corner of the room.

A small shot of adrenaline fueled my body and I became fully awake, widening my eyes in alert.

It was pitch black and I couldn’t see, but I knew I had heard something.

Carefully, I reached for the tassel that was connected to the lamp to turn the lights on, but when I pulled, nothing happened.

My heart dropped and I could feel cold sweat dripping down the back of my neck and it was just then when I heard it again.

A footstep.

I wasn’t imagining things.

Slowly, I turned my head towards the corner of the room where the noise had emitted from and focused my eyes as hard as possible.

Seething through the lack of light, my eyes strenuously focused on the darkness until I noticed something.

A glimmer of light, small and bleak, reflecting the moonlight out from my window.

Chills ran down my spine, and it was then that I suddenly remembered the flashlight Eric gave me to walk home with.

With every ounce of courage in me, I leaned over the side of the bed and slid my fingertips left and right until I touched it.

This small feat uplifted me just for a moment, until I was immediately brought back to earth in the realization of how terrifying the situation was.

Silently, I lifted myself back up to a sitting position, and taking in a deep breath and biting my lip in complete fear, I pointed the flashlight at the corner of the room and turned it on.

Sharp, white, smiling fangs.

I began to scream insanely, holding the light on the creature like a weapon, shaking and trembling in complete horror.

Pale white skin, seven feet tall, all in black; he was staring at me and I just screamed and screamed and screamed.

“Hello, Hayden,” The creature spoke.

I could barely hear his words over my petrified shrieks.

“There’s no use in screaming, dolly, no one can hear you. I have you all to myself,” he replied.

In hearing this, my volume only increased, when suddenly, I felt my lips shut tight; As if they were zippered together, I could not get them open again.

“That’s much better!” the creature laughed.

Shaking and shivering, I stared at the being in my room, only illuminated by my flashlight. He spoke again and a slithery tone, “I’ve cut off the sound waves that both enter and exit this room, so just be quiet. We need to talk.”

Silently, I just gazed the creature, watching as his smile widened in just the slightest as he continued, “You gave me your word, remember?”

Not being able to open my mouth, I tearfully shook my head as I gaped into his huge black eyes.

“Oh, Hayden, Hayden, Hayden. It hasn’t been that long, has it?” he replied with a gleaming smile.

I kept my vision forward, just noticing then that what I thought were eyes were actually sunglasses.

“You made me a promise that you would help me one day, or did you forget about how I helped your family dog all those years ago?”

Suddenly, my mind shot back to my childhood, and a strike of panic ran through me, realizing that what I saw back then was actually real. With all my might, I ripped my mouth open and peeped, “I thought that was a dream!”

Slowly, I watched as the creature’s mouth unfurled from a smile to an unsure frown, as he murmured, “You broke my spell.”

I stared at him, not knowing what to say, when suddenly, his snarky smile returned and he sneered, “Just what I would expect from a half-blood. Already learning the trade.”

“Wh-what?” I muttered in response, having no idea what he was talking about.

The creature just smiled as he slowly walked over to my bedside. With every step he took, I retracted, inching as far away from him as possible.

For only a moment, he passed through the moonlight and I could see him fully, looking exactly how I remembered him all those years ago.

“Hayden,” the creatures voice cooed with a wicked smile, “I’m not going to hurt you, so why are you afraid? There would be no point in harming you when I need your help. That would be absolutely pointless.”

“What,” I choked, still attempting to move further away, “what do you need my help with?”

The being smiled again, only this time not one of cockiness, but one of slight defeat, as he sighed, “I need you to help me save my sister.”

I just stared at him through the darkness, immersed in silence, and nobody said a word until I spoke. “Your… sister?”

The being just nodded, his smile now gone and replaced with a serious expression as he replied, “Yes, and we don’t have any time to waste.”

Without a moment’s notice, he reached out for me as I instinctually retracted and screamed, “Don’t touch me!” but that didn’t stop him.

I felt his cold, pale hand grasp my wrist with more strength than I ever could have imagined, as he ripped me up from bed to just inches away from his face whispering, “I’ll do what I want with you.” His smile stretched far and wide.

“You’re mine now.”

I felt my body being torn from the bed as I stumbled to land on the wood floor he tossed me onto. Quickly, I turned to see what he was doing and, my God, what I saw completely shook me to my core.

As if dragging his nail on a chalkboard, the being traced his long fingertip down the empty space in the room with a horrible screech. A rip in the fabric of space appeared from the area his fingertip drug down and a blazing heat seared through the room.

“W-what are you doing!?” I peeped in horrified fear.

I stared into the rip, watching as the flames licked and lapped into my room.

The creature slowly turned his head back to me. “What am I doing?” the creature asked.

“I’m taking you to Hell.”

Suddenly, he grabbed my wrist once again in super human speed, I was ripped from where I was standing and I was pulled in. I screamed and shut my eyes tight when all of a sudden my body was engulfed in insufferable heat. I instantly burst into a sweat as I felt my skin being seared by the flames when suddenly it all just stops.

There, sitting on the warm, heated ground, I slowly opened my eyes to see we were no longer in my bedroom.

All around us were dead trees and cracked, water thirsty grounds engulfed by a gray sky with not a single cloud.

I looked down at my seared skin to see that I was in fact, not seared at all.

“Wha-”, I began to question when suddenly I heard the creature right beside me say, “Welcome home.”

I looked up at the tall being, staring off into the barren land as I sat in complete shock having no idea what just happened.

Suddenly the creature looked down to me, his sunglasses just tilted enough for me to see his piercing red eyes and he said, “Well come on, we don’t have all day, you know.”

Slowly, still in shock and shivering in fear, I got to my feet, doing my best to take in all the scenery around me. Everything was decimated and destroyed. A complete wasteland.

“Where are we?” I muttered without even realizing I spoke.

“I already told you, we’re in hell.” The creature replied.

I turned, staring at him with eyes that I can only imagine looked like ones that were once worn on a beaten animal as I uttered, “What *are* you?”

The creature just smiled, wide and stretched, baring his many sharp teeth as he said, “A demon.”

I stared into him, taking in all his physical attributes. Long sharp teeth, pale grey face, looming tall demeanor, as well as sharp fingernails and spiked hair, dressed all in black wearing the same suit and tie I remembered him in as a child. Not even aged a bit.

I looked away from him and stared into the wasteland I was now in as I began to shiver in fear.

“This is impossible.” I uttered to myself.

“Oh no, it’s na-awt!” Oliver sang.

“I can’t be in Hell, Hell doesn’t exist!” I muttered to myself in frustrated disbelief.

“Oh yes it, is!” He replied rather animated.

“I have to be dreaming, I have to!” I repeated as I collapsed to the ground in a ball muttering, “Please wake up, please wake up, please wake up.”

“Hayden.” The demon spoke.

“Please wake up, please wake up, please wake up.”

“Hay. Den.” The demon said again.

“Please, please, please-“

“**Hayden**.”

Suddenly, I felt a foot push me off balance and onto the ground. I caught myself by planting my hands onto the dry, rocky ground, only to retract back in a yelp due to the ground’s heat burning them. I held my injured hands close to my chest as I looked up at him with hurt and fearful eyes. Slowly his cocky smile disappeared as he sneered, “I didn’t choose you because you’re weak. I chose you because you have the potential to be strong. Now let’s go.”

The demon turned and began to walk away as I quickly got to my feet yelling, “Wait! I’m not following you! I want to go home! Take me home!”

The demon turned only for a moment, his black sunglasses hiding the piercing stare of his eyes as he said, “I saved your dog when she was dying. You promised to help me one day when I needed you. I now need you and this is you following through with your deal.”

“Lindy’s been dead for seven years! I don’t owe you anything! Take me home!” I cried.

Suddenly, the demon teleported in front of me and grabbed my face with his cold bony hand, pulling me close to his and in a very slithery tone he spoke, “Listen here, you little brat. Just because your dog is dead now, doesn’t mean you don’t owe me anymore. Because of me, your pet lived out its entire lifespan till its natural death and you agreed to pay me back one day for doing so. Now shut up and stop whining, time is running out.”

He released my face and turned away, walking back in the direction that he already was going before, when I couldn’t help but call out, “But I was a **child.** I didn’t know what I was agreeing to!”

The demon turned once more, this time his face sullen and exhausted and he just said, “You at least had a choice. Do you think any of the children through time chose to be slaves or abortions? You may have been young, but you, unlike millions of others, still had a choice and you chose. Now let’s go Hayden.” And with that, he turned back around and continued on his way.

I just stared at him, watching him leave along with all my hope of escaping from this place as I called out, “Wait! Don’t go! Don’t leave me here!”

The demon continued on, walking ahead, ignoring my pleas.

“Demon! Please! Come back!”

Still getting no response, I began to panic.

I looked all around me seeing not a soul in sight, surrounded by trees and plants that have long since lost all life.

I thought to myself: *If I am left here, there’s no chance I’ll survive.*

So I decided to run.

I ran after the demon, as he was my only hope of ever going home again.

Because if there was anything I knew, it’s that I didn’t know how to make portals out of hell.

**Chapter Two**

I caught up to the demon and we walked in silence for quite some time.

Tears and sweat stained my face and I had walked so long that my legs ached and my body needed rest.

I didn’t say anything though, for I was afraid of the powerful creature at my side.

We continued on, into the barren land, seeing no change in scenery. The landscape seemed as if it would continue on forever.

Eventually I felt that if I was going to be held captive, I should at least know some details, like how things worked or exactly what it is I needed to do to get out of this place.

I looked up to the being, who was staring straight ahead completely emotionless, without a single drop of sweat anywhere on his body. “So… What’s your name..?” I asked.

The being looked down at me, his red eyes hidden behind his dark shades as he simply said, “Oliver.”

“Oliver?” I asked, not expecting such a name, “That’s not a very demon-y name.”

“Well, what would you prefer, Hayden?” Oliver asked rather civilly.

I thought for a moment and replied, “Well I don’t know, something like Beelzebub, or Bagul or something.”

Oliver scoffed and said, “Those names are just stereotypical. That’s like if I told you your name should be Ashley or Christina just because you’re an American white girl.”

His point being absolutely right, I had nothing to say in return and he began again saying, “And for the record, demon names can’t be spoken by human tongue. Our real names anyways. That’s why we have the English translations and they always come out sounding stupid, so I just named myself something human to make it easier on everyone.”

“We can’t say your names? Why, because it’s taboo or cursed or something?” I replied.

Oliver wiped his hand down his pale face and sighed, “No, it’s because you literally can’t say them. You don’t have the vocal cords for it. Just like you can’t bark like a dog or chirp like a bird, you also can’t speak as a demon can.”

This answer being perfectly acceptable to me, I nodded my head and dropped the subject as we continued on. “So this is hell?” I asked.

“The first level of it. Hell has many different layers. We had to come to the first one because you still have your body. Transporting souls to any level of hell is a relatively easy task, even for a demon like myself, though transporting humans with a body, well that’s a different story. We had to start from this first level and we will descend on through the rest by foot.”

“So, it’s kinda like Dante’s inferno?” I replied.

“Ugh,” Oliver groaned, “Kind of. Sort of. Dante came here a long time ago and a lot of things have changed since then. Not to mention his descriptions of the different levels weren’t even completely accurate. He was half right, but as you’ll see, things are not as fire-and-brimstone as everyone portrays this place as.”

I looked all around me at everything dead, not a single splash of green anywhere in sight and I questioned, “So this first level… What kind of people are sent here?”

“Suicides or those who died young without their life mission fulfilled.” He said in return. “You see, when a human soul is sent to earth to live out its life span, there are certain lessons that soul is meant to learn. For whatever reason, if they die before most of that lesson is learned because of their own actions, for example: suicides or drunk driving, then they are sent here to survive out the rest of their days in order to deserve a second chance to start over again.”

I stared out into the barren land and mumbled, “Huh.” As very quickly we begin to approach a cliff.

“So…” I trailed off, quickly changing the subject to our fast approaching destination, “where are we going?”

“We are going to a test.” Oliver said stoically.

“A test?” I replied, with a stroke of anxiety running through my body, “A test for what?”

We neared the edge of the cliff, only twenty yards away when Oliver replied, “A test to see if you are ready.”

Suddenly Oliver stopped mid step and looked down at the ground, completely still. I turned after walking a few steps ahead of him and mumbled, “Uh, hey, um what’s wrong?”

Oliver didn’t respond as he stood with his head hung low as if in a trance.

Fear began to dwell in me as I began to panic. “Oliver?”

Suddenly, the ground began to shake and black smoke started to emit from the rocky dirt.

“Oliver!” I screamed, now encompassed with uncertainty and panic, “Oliver, what’s going on!?”

Slowly the black smoke formed shapes and shadows. Creatures, tiny little beasts, began to form, and all at once they opened their piercing red eyes and bared their sharp gleaming fangs, all staring at me.

“O-Oliver?” I stuttered in fear when suddenly, one of the creatures lashed out at me, latching onto my arm and biting in with its razor sharp teeth. I screamed and grabbed its skull, trying to squeeze it hard enough so it would let go, but it just smiled at me and bit harder. Suddenly, I felt a piercing rip at my leg, then one on my side, my back, and my neck. I screamed uncontrollably trashing my arms and legs, swatting and smashing whatever I could. “Make it stop! Oliver! Stop!” I screeched as I stared at him through blurred and watery eyes, “OLIVER!”

Suddenly, through all the chaos and pain, Oliver looked up at me with a cold and hateful gaze and through my screams all I could hear him say was, “Do something about it.”

The knawing latch of the beasts tore into me as my blood began to flow out of my wounds, “Help!” I screamed, “Please help!”

Oliver looked at me with a face no other than complete frustration when suddenly he stomped the ground and with that, all the creatures melted off of me and dissolved into the barren dirt.

I collapsed into the dusty ground below me, bawling my eyes out, the stress of all this being too much to take in. I wailed and wailed, grasping my bleeding wounds, seeing the thousands of tiny pin sized holes in my body, bleeding out in miniature streams. I just screamed and cried as if I would never stop when suddenly, I felt my hair being pulled directly up. I screamed in pain as my body was lifted from the ground by my long blonde hair.

When I opened my eyes to see, I was met with Oliver’s piercing stare, eye to eye. I grabbed my hair in torment, trying to pull it closer to my scalp, feeling the tiny strands being ripped from their follicles. “Ow that hurts!” I screamed, “Let go! Let go!” I wailed, when suddenly, I felt a cold hard slap across my face.

I shut up and stared at him with shocked and broken eyes, grasping my yanked hair to hold myself up from my scalp being ripped off when Oliver shouts, “Are you really so weak!?”

I stared at him, mouth agape, having no idea what to say. “Are you really this fucking pathetic!? Your father would be ashamed of you!”

“I never met my father!” I screeched as I began to struggle from his grasp, ripping and tearing at his single hand that was lifting me up by my hair.

“That’s because your father is here, you dimwit! He’s a demon, Hayden. A demon!”

Suddenly, I stopped struggling, staring through his sunglasses into his eyes and I whimpered, “W-what?”

“Your father is a demon, that’s why you never met him. He got your mother pregnant at a party and she gave birth to your pathetic ass. That’s why you are able to keep your body in hell and why you were able to break my spell. You’re half demon, Hayden.”

I stayed completely still, my mind empty of all fear or anxiety and I uttered, “Mom said he died in a car crash.”

“No.” Oliver replied sternly, “‘Mom’ didn’t want you to know she was sluttin’ it out at a party and givin’ up ass for some random stranger. Your dad was an incubus. An incubus is a male demon whose entire job is to impregnate human women so they give birth to their spawn. Your mommy never knew that though, she just thought she got drunk and knocked up with a guy that ran away, and she certainly never wanted to tell you that!”

I stared at him in disbelief and shook my head uttering, “No…”

“Yes, Hayden, yes. Now, escape from my grasp.” He sneered at me.

I stared at him with tearful and shocked eyes when suddenly he yelled, “Now!”

Quickly, I panicked and began to claw at his hand, ripping and tearing at his skin as I thrashed about. Oliver made no movement, completely unaffected by my attacks as he shouted, “That’s human shit! Fight like a demon!”

“I don’t know how to fight like a demon! I’ve never even met a demon before you!” I screeched as I continued to claw into him.

“You are a demon, you little shit, now do something about it!”

Suddenly, a boiling rage built in me from his treatment and I stopped my scratching and ripping and just grasped his wrist. I stared into his tinted, covered eyes, looking at him with the most piercing hate for what he was doing to me, when suddenly I began to feel my hand heat up. I continued this gaze, not knowing how to fight him off but wanting to let him know with all I was that I absolutely and completely hated him for this when suddenly I picked up the faintest scent of smoke.

Slowly, Oliver’s expression turned from disgust to a snarky smirk as he whispered, “See?”

I tightened my grasp on his wrist as I heard a crackling burning sound and once I broke from my trance enough to realize what I was doing, I looked up to see my grasped hand on Oliver’s wrist was searing his flesh.

With his gray skin crisped black under my smoking hand, I suddenly lost my nerve and retracted back, staring at it in shock. I then immediately turned back seeing that, I myself, was not injured or burned in any way. I looked back up at Oliver’s wrist, completely seared as I heard him say, “I told you.”

I looked to him with eyes filled with shock and disbelief at what I just did and he whispered, “You really are a demon, Hayden.”

Quietly, I stared in silence at him trying to mentally grasp all that just happened when suddenly, Oliver released his grasp and I dropped to the ground in a hard thud.

Pain struck through my body, but I didn’t whimper or cry out. I kept it in and immediately stared back up to him, staring down at me with a blank expression that I don’t know what to make of, when he said, “You’ll need to survive here for three days. If you can do that, I will train you. If not, you will die here in hell.”

My heart dropped as I stared up at him brokenly when he finished by saying, “And if you die in hell, you won’t even exist anymore, so chin up.”

With that, Oliver began to turn around and walk away. Panic ran through me and I yelled, “Wait! Where do I go!? What will I eat!? I don’t know how to survive here!”

Oliver didn’t make any motion to turn back to me, as he only raised his hand and waved me off when suddenly, he disappeared into thin air.

Laying on the ground, still bleeding out, completely broken, I stared into the empty space where Oliver just was.

I remember murmuring things to myself like a crazy person, trying to get some feeling of comfort out of it.

Eventually, I got up and tried to walk, every step killing me, as the blood flooded out of the thousands of needle sized holes. “Damn it.” I choked, grasping one of my legs with my hand, pressing tightly trying to keep the blood in.

Suddenly, the thought occurred to me that if I could harm with my so called “demon” ability by thinking of hateful things, maybe I could heal myself by thinking of good things.

I held my hand over my leg and shut my eyes, thinking warm and loving thoughts. Thinking of comfortable things, soft things, bright, white, light.

When I opened my eyes back up again, I looked down to see my leg still bleeding, with absolutely nothing changed. I looked down in frustration and desperation, releasing a small grunt of displeasure when suddenly, I heard a small croaky voice say, “You’re doin’ it wrong ma’am.”

I turned around to see no one around when I heard the voice say again, “Down here!”

I followed the origin of the voice down to my feet to see a small, black, dirty toad looking creature smiling with razor sharp teeth. “Hello,” He waved, “My name is Baugaugh. I see you are trying to conjure a healing, are you ma’am?”

I stared down at the creature, no larger than a cat and I replied, “Oh, um, yes I am. Could you help me please?”

“Why certainly, dolly! Just give me a moment.” He spoke in a raspy voice.

Baugaugh placed his tiny rugged claws on my injured leg, closing his eyes as he began to chant a strange incantation in a language I couldn’t understand.

Slowly, I watched as purple smoke began to emit from my leg and the wounds began to close up.

Softly, Baugaugh released his claw and underneath was perfectly healthy and healed skin. “See ma’am? All better now!” He smiled with triumph.

“Oh wow.” I gasped as I stared at the healed portion of my body, “That’s incredible! Can you please teach me how to do that for the rest of my body?”

“Already done ma’am!” The tiny creature croaked as he took a bow.

I looked all up and down my arms to see, that in fact, I was completely healed. “Dang, that’s awesome.” I mumbled as I looked back down at the small beast, “Thank you so much.”

“My pleasure, dolly. Now where abouts you staying tonight? An awful hell flurry will be upon us by nightfall, do you got a place to stay?” The creature asked.

“A hell flurry?” I responded, “There are storms in hell?”

“Oh, why yes, but of course there are! Very nasty ones at that, far worse than in the upper world.” Baugaugh said.

“The upper world?” I questioned further.

“Your home, my love. As, that is where you are from, is it not? You know, living earth?” He asked.

“Oh. Oh yes, That is where I am from, yea.” I responded as I looked about the scenery encompassing me, “So where can I get shelter from hell storms? There is nothing around here.”

“Oh, no worries at all darling, I know just the place! Not to mention that it is filled with humans just like you!” He smiled enthusiastically.

“Oh, really?” I replied, my eyes widening in hope, “Could you- could you take me there?”

“Certainly madam, just follow me!” Baugaugh said as he turned and began to hop away.

I followed after, passing the dead and hollowed trees, seeing nothing but barren land for miles in every direction. “Right this way!” The helpful creature shouted from ahead, “It’ll be closer than you think!”

I walked behind, keeping up pace with his quick hops, going on for what seemed like an eternity.

Slowly, fatigue began to come over me and my body grew sore and weak. My quick paced steps became sluggish and my eyes began to droop. My gaze began to fall towards the ground as I took every increasingly slow step, when I noticed something strange.

There, beyond the haze my mind was falling into, I could see the part of my leg that Baugaugh healed, except the skin in that area was no longer flawless. In its place were putrid purple and green splotches, bubbling boils and puss.

My mind could hardly register this as I began to lose consciousness. “What the…” I trailed off as I looked up and down my arms to see the same plague covering me everywhere.

I remember looking back up and trying to call out to Baugaugh for help, but not a word coming out.

Baugaugh turned to me with a wicked little smile, his sharp pointed teeth bearing as he said, “Something the matter, ma’am? Not feeling so well, are you?”

Those were the last words I heard before hitting the ground.

**Chapter Two**

I remember I awoke because I felt digging into my back. Bumps and bruises with dirty dusty itching everywhere. I opened my eyes to see the gray sky around me as the trees passed me by.

I didn’t realize what was happening until my head ran over a rock.

I was being dragged.

Quickly, I snapped out of my haze and shot my head up to see a much larger black skinned, scaly toad looking creature to be dragging me by my purple and green splotched legs across the barren ground.

“Hey!” I screamed, as I tried to struggle out of its grasp, “Let go of me!”

The beast turned around, showing its hideously disgusting face as it snorted at me like a pig, then turned back around and continued to drag me.

“I was talking to you! Let me g-!” I began to shout, when suddenly Baugaugh jumped on my chest, and croaked, “Oh my, looks like you’re awake!” He sneered cheekily as he began to place his claws around my neck, “We didn’t mean to wake you up now, maybe you should go back to sle-“ But before he could finish, I had my hands around his putrid little body, squeezing the life out of him.

“Glach!” He choked, “Stop, stop! Okay, okay, no sleepy, let me go, I won’t make you go sleepy, promise!”

I stared hatefully at the creature, slowly loosening my grip but it was no use. My anger for his trickery began to boil and I slowly watched his flesh began to sear.

Baugaugh began to scream in pain, “What are you doing!? You can’t be doing this, you’re just a human!”

With every foul word that exited his mouth, my anger only rose. More and more, I watched as the smoke from his skin emitted into the air along with his pleas.

Suddenly, the creature dragging me noticed what was going on and turned its pig-like, horned head and snorted a furious grunt at me, before dropping my legs and smashing the ground next to me.

Quickly, I panicked and released Baugaugh, shuffling against the dusty ground to get up, when the creature started to try and smash me with its huge fists. “Shit!” I uttered, as I got to my feet and began to run, but quicker than I wanted to find out, my diseased and plagued legs started to give out on me. “No!” I choked out as I plummeted to the ground.

With the creature right behind me, taking step by huge sluggish step, I began to panic.

“No, I can’t die here!” I told myself, “I have my whole life ahead of me!”

I tried to raise my hands in defense, only to find that my arms too were almost completely immobilized by the blight.

“No, no, no!” I screamed as I attempted to crawl away, when suddenly I saw rocks flying through the air. One by one, they began to pelt the creature in the head when I heard in a thick Irish accent, “Hey, leave the girl alone!”

Both the creature and I turned our heads to see a man, about forty years old, hurling the stones.

One too many had hit the beast and it began to roar, snarling and smashing in a fit of furry. “Run!” The man yelled as he began to dart away.

I followed suit as fast as I could, doing my best to get to my legs and run, but the disease had gotten to me. With all my might, I picked myself up and ran in stumbling steps, as the beast roared after me, not able to match my speed.

I was running as efficiently as I could after the man, when suddenly, Baugaugh hops after me croaking, “Wait! You can’t go! We were just trying to help you madam, I swear!”

I didn’t respond, keeping all my energy focused on getting away, on surviving, when suddenly something strange happened.

I felt a burst of energy and I looked down at my blighted legs to see that they were no longer as blighted, and my arms in front of me beginning to clear up as well.

I remember having no idea what was happening until I head Baugaugh yell, “No! My enchantment! You’re ruining my enchantment, stop that!”

The burst of energy and healed body gave me the ability to run faster, and within just seconds, Baugaugh could no longer keep up with me and the sluggish creature from before was already a long ways gone.

I could still see the man’s silhouette in the distance and I ran as fast as I could to get to him. “Hey!” I yelled out, “Hey, wait up!”

The man slowed to a stop, looking all around him then turning to me in wait until I finally caught up to him.

“Th-thanks!” I panted, trying to catch my breath, “Thank you so much for saving m-!” My voice suddenly cut off by the man shoving me to the ground.

I slammed into the barren dusty rock, skidding and scratching my newly healed skin on the way down. I looked up who I thought was my savior in confused terror at this sudden attack when he said, “I’m sorry, I just had to make sure you weren’t a demon.”

The thought ran through my mind to tell him that I was, half was, at least, but something about his last few words made me feel demons weren’t so welcomed in his book so I kept my mouth shut.

The man extended his arm out towards me as he said, “Reynolds. My name is Reynolds. What is yours?”

“Uh,” I stammered as I grasped his hand and was pulled up, “I’m Hayden.”

“Well Hayden, it’s a pleasure to meet you. You’re new here aren’t you? When was your deathday?” he responded, shaking my hand that was already in his.

“Deathday?” I asked, never having heard that term before.

“Oh no,” Reynolds gasped. “Don’t tell me you’re one of the ones that weren’t aware they died.”

Suddenly, it clicked in my mind what he was saying and I replied, “Oh, deathday, birthday, I get it now, okay. Um, well I guess just a few hours ago. Those creatures put a spell on me though so I don’t know how long I was knocked out for, but-” Before I could finish, Reynolds suddenly cut me off saying, “Those bastard demons, they tricked you didn’t they? Offering help then dragging you off. You’re lucky you got away, if you hadn’t they would have taken your soul and eaten it.”

“Eaten it!?” I gasped, as my eyes went wide at what could have been my fate.

“Mm, yes, that’s how demons survive in this world, you know, they eat human souls. Anyways, come on now, it isn’t safe here, let’s head back to the village.”

“The village? “ I replied. “Where’s that?”

Reynolds had already turned back and began to walk away as he said, “It’s where the rest of the human souls stay for shelter. Just follow me, I’ll take you there.”

I stood a little uneasy, remembering how Baugaugh said the same exact thing to me to entice me into following him, as I stared at Reynolds trying to determine whether or not I could really trust him.

In the end, I decided to go. He didn’t look like a demon, and he was even suspicious of me being one as well, so I didn’t think he would be tricking me. Not to even mention that staying out in the open was clearly not an option.

I caught up to Reynolds and asked, “Hey, so, um, could you tell me a little more about this place and this world? I’m not too sure I understand much of it and it seems really dangerous.”

Reynolds turned to me and said, “Sure, what is it exactly you want to know?”

I stared down at the ground, trying to sort out which of my questions were most important and needed to be addressed first when I picked one and asked, “So why exactly do demons need to eat souls to survive?”

Reynolds looked up and said, “Demons aren’t like humans. See, humans have a soul of their own, the vessel that makes it possible to transcend dimensions such as earth, heaven and hell. Some even say there is a fourth dimension, but I’ve never been there. Anyways, as I was saying, demons don’t have souls, so in order for them to survive, they feed off of human souls. This energy is what makes demons live for hundreds of thousands of years. If they didn’t, they would starve and unlike humans who have souls to survive them, demons would cease to exist.”

I stared at Reynolds, completely enticed by what I was learning and I asked, “Wow, so what about humans? What do they eat in hell to survive?”  
“Ah,” Reynolds sighed, “you’ll learn that one rather quickly. See, we don’t eat anything to survive. We are in a constant state of starvation. We are also in a constant state of thirst, fatigue, and overheating. The only thing we have any kind of release over is sex, and even that is incredibly difficult to preform given the constant state of our bodies, not to mention many say it is a grave sin that only puts more karma on our charts since, in hell, no children can be born so there is no point besides guilty pleasure. Some even say if you get pregnant down here, the child will be born a demon and rip the mother’s womb open, completely obliterating her soul, then eating the father to survive.”

I stared at Reynolds in complete and utter horror.

Reynolds saw my expression and stammered, “Oh, um, well you see, I’ve never seen it. That’s just what people say. Anyways as I was saying, you basically have all the cravings as you did on earth, just without release. You cannot die from lack of food or water, as those are earthly needs, though you are in a constant state of craving them, which you will soon learn, is complete torture. The only way you can die here is if a demon eats you.”

I looked to him, trying to wipe away some of the shock from his previous story as I said, “So, what happens to us if we get eaten then?”

Reynolds looked to the ground with eyes as hopeless and solemn as any I had ever seen as he somberly chuckled, “Ah, see no one really knows. They say you get sent to The Void. There is a legend that two lovers were separated in hell. One got eaten by a demon and sent to The Void while the other managed to survive their earthly life span out in hell and was reincarnated on earth. For the next thousand years, that soul spent being reincarnated over and over again, eliminating all their karma in order to reach Heaven. The day finally came and when reaching the pearly gates, the soul asked the permission of God to grant their lovers way out of the void and back to a life in existence. They say God granted this wish and the soul was release back into hell, once again allowed to climb the spiritual ladder back to Heaven to see their lover who worked so hard to release them. When other souls asked the one who escaped The Void what it was like, he said, ‘nothing.’”

“Nothing?” I replied, confused by this answer.

“Yes, nothing. He said that when you are consumed by the void, you become nothing but a floating ball of existence, with no one to talk to, no goals to reach, absolutely nothing but your own mind alone with itself for all of eternity.”

I stared at Reynolds in shock at this maddening idea when he finished by saying, “It is a punishment more grave and torturous than any kind of pain imaginable. It is a torture that makes you wish you were burning alive in a pit of fire, just to simply feel again. It is a hell far worse than hell could ever be.”

I stare down at the ground realizing that could have been my fate just now if I hadn’t gotten away, when Reynolds said, “But anyways, as long as you can survive it out here, you’ll be fine and reborn on earth.”

I nodded, taking some security in that, but at the same time not knowing how much truth there was to it since I not only still had my body, but also that I was supposedly half demon.

We walked in silence for a while as I contemplated my new existence in Hell, when Reynolds asked, “So… How did you get here?”

“What?” I replied, not understanding the random question.

“You know,” Reynolds said a bit awkwardly, “how did you die?”

The thought ran across my mind to tell the truth. To tell him I didn’t really die and that I was actually dragged to hell by a demon, but very quickly I figured it would be best to blend in instead of stand out.

“Oh, um,” I stammered, “I don’t remember actually.”

“You don’t remember?” Reynolds said in response.

I just nodded my head, feeling as if I just said something stupid. As if everyone that dies is supposed to remember their death and I just blew my cover, when Reynolds spoke, “Don’t worry, that happens sometimes. You just got here. In time you will probably remember.”

Relieved at this, I nodded my head and stared at Reynolds, actually taking in his appearance for the first time. Standing at about six feet tall, with already graying black hair and a very worn and dirty face, he was dressed in a ripped and torn suit and tie. He stared ahead with the look of an army general that has seen far too many deaths.

I debated asking him how he died, not knowing if that is against proper etiquette down in Hell or not, when Reynolds answered that question for me by saying, “You’re probably wondering how I died, aren’t you?”

I looked up at him and nodded, relieved that I didn’t have to ask, as I stared into his cold and distant eyes. He said, “When I was thirty-six, I was going through severe financial troubles. I had made a bad investment in a private business, and lost most of the money I had saved up. Debt began to accumulate as I did my best to pay bills and eventually I was faced with losing my home. My wife had left to live with her parents till I got myself together and was already threatening divorce. Everything seemed so bleak. . . .” Reynolds trailed off reliving those horrible memories, then continued saying, “I didn’t know what to do. At that rate, I was never going to get out of debt and my wife was already on her way out, so I just. . . . I just gave up. I bought some rope and learned how to tie some fancy knots, and here I am, ten years later.”

I stared at him with such deep sympathy, never knowing what happened to people after they killed themselves and certainly never having spoken to one. Reynolds continued, “I wish I hadn’t done it. See, when you go to Heaven, you can watch over the ones you love. Down here, you have no idea. I haven’t seen my wife in ten years. I broke my elderly parent’s hearts. I threw away a perfectly good life over money. I didn’t know it would come to this. I didn’t know this would happen. I thought I would just disappear, feel nothing, cease to exist. That isn’t how it goes.” Reynolds sighed. “Even worse, if I do end up surviving down here till the natural age I was meant to die at, When I’m reborn, I’ll only be born into a life much worse than the one I was previously given. This is the lesson you are taught for committing suicide. That is the lesson your soul is meant to learn so when you are reborn and lose your memory, your soul will at least remember to never do it again.”

I gazed around at the barren ground and all the lifeless, hollowed trees, thinking how horrible it must be to constantly starve, to constantly thirst. To always be tired and hot without rest. To never know what happened to your family and friends.

Then I began to wonder if that would all happen to me.

I stared at the ground for some time in thought. Walking in silence and contemplation over the things Reynolds had said.

Was I going to constantly starve and thirst? Am I going to be stuck down here till my natural death.

Oliver said he would train me if I could survive for three days, but what if he’s lying?

I would be stuck down here in suffering for all that time, and I don’t even know what happens to demon hybrids.

I might never return to earth again.

These thoughts plagued my mind for some time until I heard Reynolds voice break my train of thought saying, “Here we are.”

I looked up to see tiny huts in the distance, circled and surrounded by what looked like a ring of people holding hands.

“What is that?” I asked timidly.

“It’s a prayer ring,” Reynolds said, still staring ahead. “Every member of the village takes turns, switching out every few hours to pray.”

“What, to get back into Heaven one day?” I responded inquisitively.

Reynolds looked at me with a surprised and peculiar face as he said, “Oh, no Hayden. We pray to keep the demons out. We pray to survive. God can’t hear our cries down here. God doesn’t listen to those who forsook the life The Almighty gave them. Do you know anything about how demons work, Hayden?”

I shook my head, feeling very ironic for the fact that I am somewhat of one, myself, as he said, “Well you see, on earth, demons cannot infest your home unless you invite them in. This is because on earth, demons to not have as much influence. Now compared to Hell, we are in their territory, so things are a bit different. Demons in hell can come and go as they please, and we can do little to fight them off, unless. . . . ” He paused as he looked back up at the prayer circle, “Unless we actively pray to keep them out.”

This sounding a bit silly to me, I asked, “How do just words keep them out? They are huge giant beasts.”

“Ah, Hayden.” Reynolds said, “On earth, did you ever see priests exorcising demons by beating them up?”

His words hit me and I realized how silly it would seem for a priest to be swinging at the midair with a bat, trying to hit something they couldn’t see. “But, here in hell,” I replied, “we can see them, and feel them. They are physical. So why can’t we attack them?”

Reynolds sighed, “This is not a physical world like earth so physical rules do not apply. Here, souls cannot even touch demons unless the demon wills it. This is why we must resort to throwing stick and rocks in defense, and other than that, all we have is prayer.”

We quickly approached the circle, with all holding hands and eyes shut and I whispered, “Who are they praying to?”

Reynolds touched one on the shoulder, who opened their eyes and let go of the person’s hand they were holding just long enough for Reynolds and I to get through. “They’re praying to God.” He said.

“Of what religion though? Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Jewish-” He cuts me off and said, “They’re all real, Hayden. No single one is more real than the other.”

“But how?” I replied, “In each of those beliefs, they teach their own belief is true and not the others.”

“Because people wrote the books to each of those religions, not God himself. Just because a human has written in a book that their religion is the only truth, does not mean God agrees it so.” Reynolds finished as he walked a bit ahead.

I broke from my firm concentration on the conversation to take a look at all that was around me. No longer surrounded by dead and rotted trees, there were instead tiny huts no larger than the size of a closet, scattered throughout the village.

I remember everyone in the village looked so miserable. Their clothing tattered and torn. People of all ages, from all different cultures. Everyone all in the same situation in the same place.

I caught back up to Reynolds and he turned to me and said, “This is the village. This is where we survive until the day our rebirth comes.”

I looked back around and saw everyone solemn and silent. No laughing, and even not a single smile. Nobody was even talking save Reynolds and I.

“How do people communicate? If everyone is from a different culture, doesn’t everyone speak a different language?” I asked.

Reynolds nodded, “They do. See in Heaven, souls can speak with their intention, needing no language to translate their thoughts. Here in hell, the language barrier is steep, making most of us unable to communicate with one another.”

I stared back around at everyone and before I could think another thought, Reynolds said, “And if you are wondering about their appearance, they all appear just the way they did from the moment their soul left their body, showing all their death scars and all.” Reynolds then took his collar and rolled it back to reveal a dark purple bruised ring around his neck. “This is something that will never go away for as long as you are here, and some even say when you are reborn again, a birthmark will take the place of your death scars.”

Intrigued by this concept, I looked to upper arm to see my birthmark, splotched and spread about the size of a quarter, and I wondered how it was that I died in a life before.

Suddenly, I heard a young man yelling in muffled tones, “Reynawlds, Reynawlds!”

I looked ahead to see a young man with a disfigured face wearing a ripped and torn jersey with basketball shorts running towards us. “Yes, Jeremy?” Reynolds replied.

The young man’s mouth was so swollen and distorted that I could hardly understand him when he said, “newf comer! Weef gawt a newf comer!”

“New comer?” Reynolds replied, “Another one so soon?”

Jeremy nodded his beaten and busied face, the side of his skull completely smashed in, as he says, “In tha wes. Just on tha ouskirs of tha villash!”

Reynolds nodded and said, “Thank you Jeremy.” As Jeremy ran away.

I looked up to Reynolds and asked, “What was that all about?”

Reynolds sighed and said, “A new soul has just entered nearby. Jeremy is a watchman like many others in the village. When a freshly died soul enters Hell nearby our settlement, a watchman will let a retriever, like myself, know where they materialized so we can bring them to safety here in the village.”

“Huh.” I uttered, doing my best to keep up with all the information he had been telling me that whole time, when he asked, “Would you like to come with me, Miss Hayden?”

Not exactly wanting to be left alone among others I did not know, I agreed, knowing as long as I helped out they would probably let me stay here until my three days of survival were up.

“Come on then,” Reynolds yelled, already jogging off ahead of me “We don’t have much time, a soul can be demoned away very quickly, we need to get to them as soon as possible!”

I jolted from my place and ran after Reynolds, passing the dirt shacks and distorted locals, all miserably carrying on their torturous existence.

Reynolds, already so far ahead of me, had the prayer circle grant exit to us, as we both ran through the city bounds and into the wastelands. “Jeremy said they aren’t far from here, so keep your eyes peeled!”

I looked from left to right seeing nothing else than the average dead space, scanning the barren ground when suddenly I heard Reynolds yell, “Found them!”

I turned to where Reynolds was running to see a body, strewn on the ground with bloodstains and bruises covering all over him.

Reynolds leaned down and rolled the man over to see his bloodied face. Still in a daze and not aware of his surroundings, the man slowly opened his eyes, sticky with blood and uttered, “I’m- I’m alive. . . .?”

Reynolds lowered his head in pain, hearing the man’s confused and mistaken words as he said, “No sir. Unfortunately, you did not make it.”

I will never forget the look on the man’s face. Bewildered and wide eyed, he stared at Reynolds and muffled, “But, I-I am! Look, I’m awake!” The man began to chuckle deliriously. “I’m alive! I’m alive! Oh my God, I’ll never do that again! My wife, my kids, they’ll be so happy that I’m alright!”

Reynold’s face became distorted in anguish, hearing this man’s joy and knowing he would have to convince him of the terrible truth. He opened his mouth just about to tell him when suddenly, a white flash of light beamed into our vision. I turned to see the source as the light slowly faded. There on the ground curled in a ball was a girl.

“Another one?” Reynolds gasped, “So soon?”

We both stared at the unmoving girl when Reynolds said, “Hayden, you take care of her, I’ll take care of him.”

I nodded, saying, “Yes, sir!” as I darted over to the fallen girl.

Kneeling down to her, I do just as Reynolds did and roll her onto her back. The girl must’ve been no more than a year or two older than me, only wearing a plain, loosely fitted shirt and underwear. Staring at her, I try to find out how she died, when suddenly, she flutters her eyes open and looks to me. Like a child, scared and alone, she speaks in a timid voice, “Wh-where am I?”

This was the part I wasn’t ready for. Nobody wants to tell someone they’ve come to hell.

I look into her sky blue eyes with as much compassion and sorrow as possible and I say, “You’re in the afterlife, dear.”

As if my words went right through her, she sits up and stares around in a daze and mumbles, “What happened, why…” When suddenly she looks to her wrists and her eyes go wide.

She stared at her skin in complete horror and realization, and I lean over to get a glance at what she is peering at.

There on her wrists were hundreds of tiny scars, all beneath three large slashes going all the way to her elbow. “Oh my God…” She muttered, “Oh my- Did, did I really…?”

I look down in remorse and nod as I solemnly utter, “Yes, you are dead.”

Her eyes glaze over hearing those words as she just sits and stares in silence. Suddenly, I hear Reynolds yell, “Hayden, let’s get moving! It isn’t safe out here!” I turn to see Reynolds standing next to the man who has clearly heard the bad news, his head hung low and staring remorsefully at the ground.

“Okay!” I yell, as I turn back to the girl, still staring at her wrists in a trance. “Hey.” I say to her softly, “Hey, we need to go. You’re not safe here. Please come with us, we are here to help you.”

The girl stares up at me with the eyes of a beaten animal as she nods her head. I grab her hand and help her up, and we both follow behind Reynolds who is already ahead of us, explaining this world to the man.

The girl and I walk in silence for some time, not knowing what to say exactly. When I turn to her, she is still staring quietly at her slit wrists.

“Hey…” I begin, trying to start a conversation, “What is your name?”

She jolts her head up and looks at me as if she did not realize I was speaking to her and she timidly says, “Oh, um, I’m Miranda.”

“It’s nice to meet you Miranda. My name is Hayden.” I say in return, “I’m guessing you already know why you are here.”

Miranda just nods her head and stares back at her wrists saying, “So… is this heaven?”

Her optimistic words throwing me off guard, I don’t know how to break it to her besides just telling her the ugly truth. “No,” I shake my head, “This is hell, Miranda.”

Miranda’s eyes go wide in horror as she stares at me with her mouth agape. “H-hell? I went to Hell?”

I remorsefully nod as I explain, “Yes, those who died at their own hands are sent to this level of hell. I’m sorry, Miranda.”

With eyes too tired to cry, Miranda looks forward as we enter back into the village, gaining entrance by the temporary break in the prayer circle.

Miranda doesn’t say a word, so I feel the need to tell her, “This is the village. It’s where the souls that are sent here go for shelter. You’re safe here.”

“Safe from what?” She worriedly asks.

“Safe from demons.” I tell her. “Apparently if you get eaten here, your soul gets obliterated and you go to a hell far worse than this.”

Her eyes go wide as if all hope just flooded out when suddenly I hear screaming.

Horrific, painfully hysterical screams coming from the prayer circle we just entered and I turn to see the woman who just let us in, on the ground in a fit.

“Oh, my God!” I gasp as I run over to see why. There on her leg was a tiny demon, very similar to the ones Oliver sent after me when I first arrived.

The small creature was biting and knawing into her leg and with every moment that passed, the woman became more and more transparent.

“Help!” She screamed, “Somebody, help me!”

Suddenly, villagers began to hurl sticks and rocks at the demon, which showed no sign of being harmed by any of it.

I couldn’t just let this soul be devoured. I had to do something.

Immediately, I ran up to the screaming woman on the ground and ripped the demon off her leg. The vile creature, not expecting this to happen, became stunned in fear as I imagined as many hateful things as possible. With every rapid thought, the creature grew more and more bloated and ballooned up until suddenly it exploded in a loud boom.

I watched at the pieces of its body rained to the ground, then shriveled up and disintegrated upon touching the barren dust.

Slowly, I turned around to see everyone staring at me in complete silence. I hear a panicked gasp from below me to see the injured woman looking at me in horror as she did her best to crawl away from me.

I look back up to see Reynolds, staring at me in shock as he utters, “Hayden, you’re… a demon?”

I didn’t know what to say, but at this point I was caught. “Yes, I’m half demon.”

Suddenly the crowds begin to mutter and whisper to one another in hushed judgment when Reynolds yells above all of them, “Silence!”

I stare at Reynolds in fear of what is going to become of me when he spoke, “The reason why that woman was attacked was because you entered into the protective circle through her. Because of your demon blood, this left a doorway for other demons to come through.”

Reynolds then turns to a group of villagers and yells, “You three, this girl also entered in through the east end. Erica was the one who let us in, please have her removed and taken to safety in the center of the village so there are no more breaches.”

The three men nod and hurry away to deal with that matter as Reynolds returns his attention to me and sighs, “Hayden, we appreciate your heroism of saving that woman, but we cannot keep you here. As long as you remain within our village, our circle will be weakened and vulnerable to attack. You must leave.”

A dooming feeling comes over me as my heart drops into the pit of my stomach, when suddenly I hear someone start to scream again,

We all swing our heads behind us, and look to the direction Reynolds sent the boys running in. There in the distance was Erica, already on the ground being mauled by a demon twice the size of the last.

Everyone began to scream in pandemonium, as some ran towards her, while others ran away. “Dear, God!” Reynolds shouted, as I shoved passed him and darted to the other side of the city to save her.

I ran as fast as I could, staring ahead of the quickly fading life when suddenly, the ground began to rumble. I looked passed the woman and in the distance behind her was a black cloud on the ground, moving at rapid speeds closer and closer.

“They’re coming!” Someone screamed, and then everyone began to scream with them, shouting and yelling things in all different languages.

I stopped dead in my tracks as I watched the villagers run passed me in a stampede and stared at the huge black cloud only to see that it was covered in little red glowing dots.

Eyes.

“Those are demons.” I utter to myself as I quickly watch Erica screaming for help, screaming to not be abandoned, and just like that, she is run over by the hoard of creatures till her screams disappeared beneath them.

I knew when I was in over my head. This was one of those times.

I sprinted away, darting for the other exit only to see another cloud in the distance that way too. I looked to the north, and to the south. We were surrounded.

Suddenly I felt someone grab me by the shoulders and shout in my face, “Hayden, what have you done!?” It was Reynolds, his face beet red and in a furry screaming, “You’ve ruined everything! We’re all doomed!”

With everything I had been through for the past few hours and now realizing I have just basically killed off an entire village, it was all too much for me. I broke from Reynolds grasp and darted away full speed ahead at the first direction I could find.

Reynolds continued to scream words of hate to me as his voice quickly became consumed by everyone else’s screams and shouts, and very quickly I began to lose control and panic.

All around me, the creatures were coming in, the white sharp teeth now baring and the fear of getting eaten alive was maddening me.

In my panic, I stumbled to the ground, trying to catch myself on the way down. My palms hit the rocky dust and I rip my head behind me to see everyone being decimated all their bodies becoming transparent, then fading into thin air. Suddenly, from back in front of me, I feel a cold chill, blowing from underneath my face. I turn back and there below me, is a rip in the ground.

Icy frigid winds emit from this rip, and it only occurs to me now that when I swung my head around to look at all the chaos, I tore my finger across the barren earth.

I made a rip like Oliver did that got me here.

I stare into the icy blue cavern beneath me, with frigid winds blustering through.

I turn back once more to see the creatures coming from behind me, then I look forward and see they are coming at me too.

I panicked. I didn’t have a choice.

I put my hands flat together in prayer formation, and just like they taught in swimming class, I put them over my head and just let my body fall forward, diving into the vast unknown.

**Chapter 3**

I came pouring down in a torrent of rain, its icy winds chilling me to the bone. I didn’t expect that when I dove into the ripped space that I would actually fall into water, but that is exactly what happened.

I plunged into the icy cold blue, and immediately swung my head up for a gasp of air to see where I was, but before I could even open my eyes, a strong wind plunged me back under.

Suddenly, I could feel nibbling, bites and tiny tears along my legs. In horror I began to scream as the bubbles poured out of my mouth under the frigid ocean. I tore back up from the waters a second time, this time managing to stay afloat and see what surrounded me.

Through blustering winds and ripping currents, I could see swamp trees everywhere with souls clinging to them for dear life against the storm. Moaning and sorrow filled the blue place, and I trashed around in panic, trying to get whatever was hurting me, off.

I ripped and tore as I thrashed over to the nearest tree on a small island no larger than a dinner table.

I flopped onto the land like a wet fish and as soon as I hit the slushed sand, I tore my vision to my legs to see worms, parasites, leeches, all sucking the life in small increments out of me. “Get off!” I screamed as I ripped them away, tearing my flesh with them as they were thrown back to sea.

I ripped and tore, but luckily there weren’t so many, so the job was done quickly and I was there left with my bleeding legs as the torrents whipped into me.

Suddenly, a huge gust of wind came and almost blew me back to sea, if it wasn’t for a hand grabbing my own, and pulling me back. “Hold on!” The woman’s voice yelled.

I swung my head around to see a beautiful woman in her mid-twenties with long flowing red hair down to her back. Her fair white skin was lighter than ivory and her eyes filled with sorrow and anguish.

She pulled me to shore where I was able to grasp onto the tree she was already holding on to for support. I hung tight as the winds battered me and she yelled over the howling winds, “My name is Alora. What is yours?”

“Hayden!” I shout back, as a sudden gust slams my head against the tree, “What is this place!?”

“This is hell, my love, the level in which the lustful are punished.” Her melodious voice yelled over the torrents, “Those who died without regret for the consequences to others that their lust caused. This is where they are sent.”

Too battered and frigid from the physical conditions I lose a bit of my social etiquette and I blurt out, “What did you do?”

Alora lowers her head in pain and wails above the blustering wind, “I was in love, Hayden. I was in love with a man named John. He was everything to me and I was to him. The problem was, I had a husband. One who was only good and loving to me. I had become bored with him, his love too sweet and by time I found John, I had been longing for what seemed like eternity. The moment I met John, I knew he was my soul mate and I had made a mistake by marrying the wrong man.”

I stared into Alora’s sorrowful eyes, worn and beaten for God know how long by the merciless winds. “John had a cabin in the snowy mountains, everything was perfect, everything was beautiful. We would go and make love there everyday, and then I would return home to my loving husband who I gave nothing to. I was so happy with John, I didn’t even care what I was doing to my husband, I only cared for John.” A sudden torrent blew through, dislodging one of my hands which I quickly did my best to reattach to the tree as Alora continued, “One day, one of the townspeople noticed my leavings with John and let him know where I was going late at nights. He thought I was just taking a midnight stroll, can you believe that? He believed me when I told him that. He believed every last word that ever came from my mouth and gave me nothing but love and I betrayed him! It pains me to just think about it, but I will continue for you. What hurts more than telling is keeping it in, after all, for it is a monster that is ceaselessly trying to escape from underneath my skin.” She grasps the flesh of her arm and shuts her eyes tight before continuing, “The night before I died, I told my husband horrible words. How I didn’t love him anymore and that he was nothing more than an obstacle keeping me away from my true love. The tears in his eyes, Hayden, oh the tears in his eyes! He had no idea any of that was going on and his expression proved it, he had always believed everything I had ever said. At the time, I felt no remorse, only release. I felt selfishly glad to finally be rid of him. I ran to John’s cabin immediately, trudging through the heavy snow in the middle of winter, already so late at night. Nothing mattered though,” Alora solemnly and deliriously laughed, “because I was about to be with my one true love.”

The winds ripped and tore into me even harsher than before, when suddenly, a body came hurling violently through the air, it’s back colliding with a tree and snapping back in an unnatural state. I almost screamed in horror when suddenly Alora let out a loud wail, “Oh, the misery, Hayden, oh the irony! I made my way up the mountain when suddenly an avalanche happened. The rushing snow crushed my body and I was consumed. I never saw John again, and now I am damned here in hell for my sins against my husband.”

The wind tore through once more in a horrible rip and I yelled, “I’m so sorry!”, although she couldn’t hear me, she was too taken by her own grief, and there she cried in her own personal hell.

I tried to yell to her again, to give her some kind of words of comfort, when suddenly a blast of wind and hail rips me from the tree I was latching too and sends me flying through the midair, slamming into another tree. I grip tight as tears from the pain roll down my cheek, mixing with the pelting storm, when slowly I hear a creeping voice from beside me, “Hello, doll.”

I twist my head to the side and am met with the sight of a rather creepy, pale skinned man. I stare as very quickly, his hands begin to move over to me as his slithery voice whispers, “Looks like this storm brought me a catch!”

“No!” I scream, as I try and swat him off of me, but his hands continue creeping onto my skin.

I worm and tear away from him, shifting and shoving as much as I can without releasing my only form of support, but it’s no use. His hands crawl onto me, hands that have crawled onto so many others and touched them in ways they never wanted to be. I screamed and shouted for help, but all others were in their own misery too busy to hear or help me.

The man’s putrid hands went under the cloth of my shirt where he laughed, “It’s been so long! I might as well just help myself, it’s not like I’m going anywhere, right little one?”

Hearing his words. His horrible, slithery filth coming from his mouth, anger begins to boil in me and I stare into him with hateful eyes. Suddenly, the hand that was just on me, inching its way under my shirt, is transparent, no longer physically on my, but passing through me like a phantom.

“What!?” He screamed, “What’s going on, bitch!?”

The winds and storm blows and batters against my cold pale skin, but none of it matters. All that matters is making this horrible piece of filth suffer.

I pry one of my hands off the tree and immediately snap it around his neck. I clench my fist and with the intention of wanting him to suffer every last bit, slowly watch as he doesn’t burn, but becomes more and more transparent.

“Wh-what!? No! You didn’t tell me you were a demon you whore!”

My gaze intensifies as I slowly watch his miserable existence fade away. With every passing moment, my body begins to feel more and more powerful, and when I look to my hand I can see a faint blue light flowing through my veins.

The man continues screaming, shouting horrible derogatory slurs, but it didn’t matter. He was under my control now and was going to die at the hands of a “bitch”, something I was sure he would have never imagined nor wanted.

Suddenly, with the last fading imprint of his being vanishing into thin air, a rush of power comes over me and the torrents begin to subside.

I feel the energy flooding through my veins as I release the tree I was holding for support on. It was only then that I looked up and saw that, in fact, the torrent had not subsided, but instead it was simply passing through me.

It was then that I learned how demons were able to have power, and I now knew how to retrieve it for myself then on.

I remember stepping into the ocean of soul eating parasites, only to find myself instead walking upon the water. Step by step I walked through the torrents, now able to see with eyes unclouded all the miserable souls being held here. Hundreds of thousands of trees spanned out for miles, each having at least one soul clinging onto each, wailing in sorrowful tears.

Seeing this suffering, this pain, no longer took me by surprise and I realized very quickly that there was nothing here for me.

I extended my arm out in front of my vision and with a swipe of my fingers, a rip in hell became existent. In this rip was deep purple fog and calm air, just welcoming me in and away from the torrents. I stared forward, not sure of what horrors awaited me, but I could not stay here, for I didn’t know when my power would wear off and I did not want to be subjected to the torrents again.

With that last thought, I step forward into the opening and am quickly consumed by the misted abyss.

**Chapter 4:**

The moment I passed through the barrier, the ripping winds immediately ceased. I turned to no longer see the rip in space, but instead, vast dry purple wastelands spanning for miles in each direction, completely void of any trees or debris.

I take a step forward and suddenly, I feel rumbling.

“Wh-what?” I mumbled to myself, as I stared at the ground watching the tiny pebbles and stones vibrate violently, “An earthquake?”

Off in the distance, I begin to hear a wicked snarling, reverberating and echoing from a thousand different sources. I squint my eyes, trying to peer through the dust, when very quickly, a huge black cloud appears off along the horizon, bearing sharp white fangs.

I begin to panic, looking all around and seeing nowhere to hide, when I turn back to see that the black cloud is not the only beings coming straight towards me, nor was the snarling the only sounds.

There, coming from the snarling black cloud, I could hear tiny screams, faded yelps, and nearly inaudible shouts, all coming from the faded souls that were running as fast as they could away from the stampede.

Immediately, I turn around and try to form a rip in space, but nothing happened. “Come on, come on!” I mumbled, beginning to sweat as I continued to swipe and swipe and swipe.

I turned back to see the hoard was almost among me, and I had no more time to waste, so I ran.

Darting away from the beasts, slowly I notice my body being consumed by transparent souls that are running all the same as I am. I look at their pained faces, no longer screaming or in fear, nothing left but an empty shell, so worn from running for God knows how long.

As the faded, more worn souls passed me, more and more solid ones came into my view. These souls appeared more fearful, more panicked, with more life in their eyes not yet ready to be consumed by the beasts.

In my running panic, I turned my head to get a glimpse of what exactly it was we were fleeing from when I see.

Hell hounds. Hundreds of thousands, spanning as far as the eye can see, all in a mad dash after the terrified souls. In the brief second I was turned around, I watched as one of them tripped and screamed as a small portion of the pack stopped running to promptly devour them.

I shot of adrenaline ran through my veins at seeing this and I began to run faster.

“Hey!” I screamed out to those around me, “How do we escape these things?!”

Nobody said a word, or if they did, then it was not audible enough to hear over the solid souls screams and the hell hounds snarling.

I continue running in wait for a response when suddenly, I hear a soft whisper beside me say, “You don’t. This is your punishment.”

I turn to see an older man, about in his sixties, with a worn and painful expression and I say, “What is this punishment for?!”

The old man looking at me in a debate with himself if he even wanted to waste the energy by telling me, softly hissed, “For being lazy. This is where you go if you were given all the opportunities to grow, but instead you chose to ignore them. This is the hell you will decay in.”

With that, the old man began to fall behind among the more solid souls, losing pace and being pulled in towards the beasts. “Wait!” I scream, as I reach for his hand to pull him back among the faster, but it’s no use. My hand grasps nothing but air and fades through his transparent hand as he disappears among the crowd.

It was about this time that I too was losing stamina, and could not keep this up for much longer. Unlike the souls here who need not rely on physical strength, I still had a body that was quickly growing tired.

“There has to be a way out of here!” I yelled. “Someone, please! Help me, I’m not supposed to be here!”

Half of the chorus of screams and shouts turned to jeering laughter as one of them barked out, “That’s what they all say, lassie!”

I would have felt anger for that if it wasn’t for the perilous situation I was in, but I had no time to be anything else but fearful when suddenly, it hit me.

If I consumed another soul, I could escape.

I could have enough power to form a rip and get out of here!

I turn side to side and look for a soul worth taking, one that deserves to be devoured, but when I look, I could only see their pained, worn look. Their exhausted face from running for so long, and doing their very best to survive.

Suddenly, a pang of guilt runs through me and I don’t want to do it. I don’t want to take the lives of any of these people. None of them seem evil. None of them look as if they deserve to be demoned away.

My guilt begins to mix with my fear, with the reminder of my lacking stamina beginning to creep on me and I begin to lose it.

If I don’t take someone else’s life, I’m going to lose my own. I can’t. I can’t let that happen! I have to, I just have to! It’s survival, Hayden, just do it!

With that final push of advice, I reach out to the nearest and most solid soul, ripping into their chest with my hand and draining their energy as I hear them scream, “No! Please, stop! Please don’t do this to me! I want to come back and live again! I want to exist in the world again! Please have mercy on me, please!”

I refuse to look at the soul, the guilt writing through me like a disgusting worm, making me feel putrid for what I am doing, but I don’t stop. I need this.

“Please, ma’am, I have a family back home! I need to make things right with them. I need to go back! Please, I love them!”

Hearing the last words the elderly woman said. Hearing her talk of love, my eyes move on their own and dart to her painstaking, terrified, aged face. Her crystal blue eyes tearing in fear and her white curly hair slowly whisping away.

Suddenly, I just couldn’t do it anymore. I released her body and retracted my hand in complete horror for what I just did, but it was too late. The faint woman’s fragile body faded into the air, with her last words not even audible enough to be heard.

Shock ran through me for this horrible action I just committed when the realities of the stampede come back to my attention and I quickly realize I’ve fallen far behind in the crowd.

I turn to see that the hell hounds are just yards away from me, their snarls and roars filling the air. Despite my guilt and horror for what I had just done, my will to live breaches through again, and I ignore the actions I just committed and look forward, taking my finger and making a sudden sweep in the air.

Before I could even realize what had just happened, my running feet stepped onto something warm, soft, and squishy, quickly leading to a sudden slip and fall into warm, wet, foul smelling bile.

Still in a panic thinking the hounds are behind me, I scream, ready to be devoured when I turn to see nothing was there but a vast wasteland of red, slimy plat forms.

I panted in shock and fear, not comprehending what had just happened, when I look up and see a rip in space that I had made, the faint purple haze slowly being swallowed up by the space where I now am.

“I- I made it.” I mumbled in panting breaths, “I got away.”

Once I take a moment to gather myself, I look all around at the slimy wet plat forms, then at myself and the horrible smelling slime I am covered in.

“What is this stuff?” I utter to myself as I try to hold my breath away from the putrid stench. I place my hand on the moist surface I am sitting upon when suddenly, it pulses.

In shock I retract my hand and stare at the flabby ground to feel it pulse again. In the sequence of a heartbeat.

“Oh my god.” I murmured as I realized what I was on top of.

A beating heart.

I got up as quickly as I could, slipping and losing my balance until I was finally on my own two feet.

In disgust, in horror, I stare at my bile covered hands in front of me and then out forward across the putrid wastelands, watching the faint pulses beat within the toadstools of organs.

Carefully, I begin to walk forward to see over the edge, taking every step with extreme caution as not to slip. Once I reach as far as I feel safe enough standing at, I stop and peer over the edge to see more pulsing mushroom caps with a dark endless abyss below all of them.

I didn’t want to know what was beyond there and I wasn’t planning to find out.

I turned back the other way to see if there was anything more than vast nothingness when suddenly, I see a figure.

Huge and fat, with fair peach skin, I see a man sitting on the other end of the toadstool. Step by bracing step, I made my way towards the man to ask if there was any shelter nearby. “Hey!” I call out, “Hey, I need some help!”

The man turns his bald head to me to reveal a very ugly and profusely fat face. He stares at me and says nothing, so I took that as acceptance that he was listening and waiting for me to tell him what I needed help with. “Hey, I’m lost and I need a place to stay. Do you know where I can go?”

The man stays silent, his dull dark eyes staring at me, when slowly, he gets to his feet and stands.

I continue to step forward, grateful that someone seemed ready and willing to help me, when slowly the horizon becomes lower and lower. Over the lumps of beating slimy flesh, I watch as more of the man’s naked body comes into view, when I finally see that it isn’t a man.

There, below the torso, right at his profusely fat hips, his waist conjoined into the body of an enormous pig, standing on all fours.

I stop in my tracks and stare in horror at the man-creature as it stares back at me when suddenly it roars with the most foul and demented roar I have ever heard, baring it’s blunt teeth in fury.

In a split second, it begin darting at me full speed ahead, making horrible sloshing noises with every rapid step roaring at the top of its lungs. Adrenaline shot through me and I turned back around to see the lower platforms squirming and pulsing as I bet my chances of jumping far enough to miss the abyss. Without looking, I know the creature is almost upon me and I’m running out of time so in the most automatic, panicked reaction I have ever had, my legs run on their own and leap off the toadstool.

Soaring through the air, I fly over the darkened abyss and land on the soft squishy organ below, only for the slime to carry me farther than I had wanted and almost off the edge.

I sprawled out my limbs to stabilize myself best I could, when suddenly, I hear a horrible noise the I would imagine sounded just like a dinosaur. I shoot my eyes up to the noise to see the giant man-pig barreling through the air towards me and I scramble out of the way as quickly as possible to avoid its enormous body. The creature lands like a cannonball onto the flesh, but without the proper limbs and balance to stabilize it as I did, it shoots across the slimy bile and right off of the toadstool into the abyss, making a terrible groan on its way down.

I crawl to the edge to see what happened to it, but by time I crawled over there, It had already disappeared into the unknown.

My heart was pounding faster than it ever had from that last encounter, never seeing something so horrifyingly putrid in my life.

I turn around to make sure there are no other man-pigs, or any other monsters for that matter, currently on the toadstool I am on. When the coast is clear, I collapse back down into the putrid bile and I let my heart beat fall back to normal.

Surprisingly, the warmth and moisture of the pumping organs wasn’t so unpleasant. If it weren’t for the horrible scent and obviously already knowing what it was I was laying in, I could of easily fallen asleep.

“disgusting.” I mutter, as I sit back up and look at my lap, completely soaked in bile, when suddenly I hear a deep bellowing voice say, “Well, at least you’ve still got your mobility, you know.”

I look all around to hear where it came from when slowly my eyes notice a toadstool much higher than the one I am on, and I see a giant amount of fleshy flab hanging off the side. “You won’t have those legs for long though. Prepare yourself, newcomer.” I hear it speak again.

“Hello?” I ask, calling up to the taller toadstool, “Who are you?”

“Harold.” The voice responds, as I hear it let out a terrible cough, “I’m Harold, new one.”

“How do I get up there, Harold?” I ask, looking all around me for some way up.

“You know, child, it’s very rude to not introduce yourself when someone has introduced themselves to you.” Harold bellows.

“Oh, I’m sorry! My name is Hayden.”

“Hayden,” Harold coughs, “Hayden, do you see any, erm, vines hanging from the underbelly of this toadstool?”

I look underneath the meaty cap to see intestines pumping out spurts of blood, dangling in whatever direction the blood propel it in.

“Oh god.” I repulsively utter. Harold hears this and responds, “I know it ain’t the most pleasant, but it’s somethin’. Grab on and crawl up. It’s the only way up.”

Disgusted but determined, I lean over the edge and wait for one of the pumping vessels to swing it’s way towards me. Suddenly, in a whipped maneuver, one of the squirming pipes shoots out a pump of blood that splatters all over me, soaking my dirty pale nightgown to a deep red.

I let out a small scream and Harold yells, “Don’t be a sissy. Grab on.”

This pissed me off.

I’ve been working so freakin’ hard trying to survive in this world and nothing is ever good enough! I’ve been whipped by storms, cursed by demons, and running from monsters, and now I’m covered with some kind of underworldly blood, and I’m told not to be a ‘sissy’?

My anger boils as I reach towards one of the pumping vessels, spitting and spurting blood in whichever direction when slowly, it begins to gravitate towards my hand.

Keeping this focus, I stare intently at it, squinting my eyes in a mixture of determination and anger, when just so very slightly, the intestine places itself in my hand. I grip it tightly and pull, the whole worm like structure stretching and becoming thinner and taut, as the blood begins to build up within the thin vessel.

I take my other hand and grasp it, pulling myself up as the blood from my previous hand was released. Hand by hand, I worm my way up to the underbelly of the toadstool, doing my very best not to slip or lose my grip.

Once I reach the underbelly, there is no way to get to the actual top of the toadstool. “Harold, what now?” I call out.

I hear a bit of sloshing and movement as the whole toadstool bounces back and forth when he gurgles, “Hold on.”

I keep my grip not knowing what I was waiting for when suddenly at an incredible speed, I am ripped through pulsing bloody organs and then without another second, back into midair dangling.

Slowly I open my eyes and look down as I see a giant profusely fat set of feet, so covered In rolls of weight, you could not see the rest of the legs.

I look back up to eye level and I am met eye to eye with a man the size of an elephant, holding me up in midair by the vessel. “There you go.” The man says, as he gently places me down. “You’re a tiny one.” He says, “How did someone as young as you get sent to the pit of hell for gluttony?”

I figured as much that this was the layer of hell for that, and I respond “I didn’t, you see, I was brought here by a demon. I’m not even dead yet.”

Harold laughs a blubbering bellow, “You wench, of course you’re here for a reason! Don’t tell lies! Now what got your pretty little ass in here, eh?”

Disgusted by his mannerisms, I protest again, “I meant that, I really was taken here by a demon! I have to survive here for three days or I’ll be dead!”

Once again, Harold begins to laugh again in his own horrid way as he booms, “I betcha you’re just ashamed that you were a bulimic! That’s probably why you’re so young! You died of bulimia, you sick little bitch!”

Harold began to laugh louder and louder, his huge rolls of fat vibrating with every gurgled breath in. His entire naked body shaking the bloody toadstool violently.

My patience was quickly growing thin and I was beginning to realize that not all of the souls in hell deserved sympathy.

“I wasn’t Bulimic!” I yell, but it’s no use, he is laughing so hard at me that he can’t hear a single word I say.

I hated being mocked. I hated being mocked more than anything in the world, especially for things that I didn’t do. Quickly, I plant my hands on his jiggling body and think the most hateful things I possibly can when suddenly, Harold’s demeanor changes. “Ow, Ow! What is that you’re doing you lil’ bitch!? Get off me!” Harold goes to swipe me away with one of his fat hands but I evade.

“Now that I’ve got your attention, I’ll repeat myself: I wasn’t lying, I really was taken here by a demon.” I stare up to him as he stares down to me, his eyes so covered by fat I’m surprised he can even see.

As if completely ignoring my last few words he just says, “How’d you burn me like that? What did you do?”

My patience nearly gone I snap, “I’m half demon, Harold, so you better give me some respect here or I’ll suck your soul right out of your disgusting body!”

Harold becomes quiet at this as he stares down at me in uncertainty.

I continue my gaze up when I ask, “So, since we’ve got that clear, mind telling me why you are here? Or are *you* too ashamed?”

“Hmph.” Harold Scoffs, “I ain’t ashamed for anything I did in life. I lived it just the way I wanted and I’d do it again if I could!”

I continue my glare into his dark eyes as he continues, “I loved to indulge. Food, drink, drugs, everything. I did everything I could get my hands on. See, women didn’t like me much, so I found the finer thing in life than cunts like you.”

Disgusted by his words I sneer at him, which I only get a cheeky smile in return as he blurts, “you women hate being called cunts, but that’s what you are. Nothin’ but a bunch of picky cunts that pass up great guys like me. Serves you right to be in hell with us wench!” He laughs.

Finally, I lose my temper and yell, “If you hate women so much, then why did you help me!?”

Harold just smirks his fat, flabby huge cheeks as he says, “So I could trash you, just like I did while I was alive. It’s been so long since I had someone to treat like shit.”

“You’re disgusting.” I state.

Harold begins to bellow again, “Yea, what are you gonna do about it? This is the only safe toadstool there is. Anywhere else you go and you’ll get eated right up! You have no choice but to stay here with me!” His horrid laughter continues and I decide that I’ve had enough.

I place my hands back on his putrid blubber as I do exactly as I did with the pervert in the circle of lust. I focus all my energy into taking his when slowly I see my hands begin to illuminate and I feel his energy flow through them to me.

Harold continues laughing, not even noticing what is becoming of him. Little by little, his body fades, becoming more transparent by the second. Every little bit that flows through me causes my skin to tingle and my body to feel fresh, and as I look back down at my arms, I notice the bile evaporating off of my body into thin air. Within only moments, I am completely cleaned off and it was then that I heard Harold yell, “W-what!? What’s wrong with me!? Why am I see-through!?” He then looks back down to me sucking out his energy when he roars, “You!” Suddenly, he slams down his huge hand, the shock wave bouncing me off of him and twenty feet away onto the sloshy toadstool. “What have you done to me!? What have you done!?” His voice putrid and distorted, he slams the ground again, bouncing me even higher and closer to the edge. “You little bitch, I’ll kill you!”

With the energy still running through me, I put all my focus and faith into myself as I fly through the air, splashing back into the ground, then up in the air again, now just yards away from the edge. “I’ll teach you not to mess with me, bitch! See how you like it in the abyss!” And with that, he smashes once more and I go flying over the ledge.

I could hear Harold and his sick laughter just bellowing on, but suddenly it stops when he sees me levitating above the empty space beyond the toadstool.

“W-what!?” He chokes, “What the-!?”

Gently, I place my hands onto the edge of the toadstool and with as much focus I could give with still giving enough to keep me in the air, I imagine the horrible man-pig that chased me before.

Suddenly, a tumor like bump rises up from the fleshy toadstool which quickly grows into a head. “W-what are you doing…?” Harold asks in concern.

“Giving you someone who won’t want to run away from you.” I say bitterly as the head putridly grows a neck and torso, then a huge pig body.

Harold begins to quiver in fear as he stutters, “N-no… I’ve survived here for so long, I can’t die now!”

The creature rips its newly grown hooves from the organs bloody tissue, standing on all fours when I say, “Harold, it’s a long time overdue.” And suddenly it darts towards Harold.

There was a fit of screams and cries as the creature ripped the flesh off of Harold’s body, devouring him as morbidly as one could imagine.

Not too inclined to see this horrific death, I turn and glide my finger down the empty space. Just as always, a rip appears showing a different dimension beyond the one I was already in. Hearing the chilling cries and screams coming from the devoured soul, I take my first steps out of the circle of gluttony and into the new beyond.

**Chapter 5**

Gravity immediately took over the moment I stepped into the rip as I came plummeting down to the ground. Suddenly, I slam into a bumpy mess of cloth covered metal objects, and I open my eyes to see what I’m on.

There below me was a giant burlap sack, carrying so many items that I could not see, and when I looked up I saw that it was not stationary either. It was being pulled.

In front of the bag was a tiny man, old and aged, pulling the sack, with about thirty men in front of him doing the same.

Some bags were larger than others, but no matter the size difference, no one could argue that any of it was an easy task to drag along.

I sit atop the burlap sack, when suddenly, the half-transparent man pulling it yells to me, “Ma’am, would you mind getting off? I don’t mean to be rude, but it is heavy enough without you!”

I nod my head and comply, as I yell, “Sorry!” and scoot to the edge. Sliding off into the dust, I brush past the neighboring sack and plant my feet on the ground, as the giant sacks continue to pass me by.

I catch up to the nearest person dragging along the bag and I ask, “Why are you pulling these things?”

The woman, old and aged, but no doubt a beauty back in her day with long blonde hair and crystal blue eyes, she utters, “Greed, dear. We are damned to carry all the things we coveted in life without end. We can never stop, and if we do, we will be drug under the ground by soul eaters.”

I turn and stare at the enormous bags, filled to the brim with objects that no doubt cost a fortune, but now are worth nothing but misery. I look around at all the lost souls drudging on, some solid while others clearly faded.

I didn’t even realize I had stopped walking to stare in amazement until one of the men pulling his bag bumped into me. He stopped and began to shake his empty fist at me, yelling words in a language I didn’t understand. Slowly, from the cracks below, I watch as a blackened hand reaches up and grasps his ankle. The man immediately stops his bickering at me and continues on, hurrying as fast as he can away from the soul eaters.

I stay still and watch in complete awe as they all carry on, pulling their punishment with them. Suddenly, one of the soul eaters grabs my ankle as well, but when it tries to drag me under, my foot only bumps back into the ground. The soul eater tried again and again to no avail, until finally I reached down and grasped it, ripping it from the cracks like a root vegetable.

The demon squirms and worms around in my hand as everyone who passes stares at me in amazement. Wanting to stop, but knowing if they did, they wouldn’t be as lucky as I.

I stare at the frantic, disembodied hand as I slowly focus my energy into making it explode, like I did with the demon in the first circle.

Just like before, the creature quickly ballooned up, then within just seconds, popped with its black fragments floating to the ground.

Suddenly at this, everyone around me does indeed stop. All their eyes staring into me, seeing someone do something that they, themselves, have never been capable of.

I hear a mutter of whispers uttering questions and statements trying to understand how I just did what I did when one finally speaks out in a thick Brazilian accent and asks, “You can do that, Lady?”

I turn to see a tan skinned man in his mid-forties, pulling a bag a few sizes smaller than most of the others. “How did you do that?” He asks again.

I stare at him, debating whether or not I should tell him when finally I just say, “I’m part demon.”

Suddenly, the whispers turn paranoid and everyone begins to move away from me faster, hurrying past me as quickly as possible. “Demon?” One of them whispers.

“She’s part demon? She’ll eat us!”, says another.

“I’m not going to eat any of you!” I call out, “I’m not a soul eater!”

“We don’t trust demons!” A voice from far ahead yells out beyond the crowd.

The hush of whispered voices continue as I stay still watching all the greedy souls judging me as they trudge on, when suddenly, I feel someone grasp my leg.

I look down to see another hazy black hand doing its best to drag me under. Just as the one before, I effortlessly rip it from the ground and blast its body away in an explosion.

This time when I look back up, some of the souls are stopped, staring at me with eyes not of fear, but amazement. “You can kill them?” One of the stopped women said as she pointed to me.

I nod my head when suddenly, I hear one of the stopped souls begin to scream. I turn to see an elderly man being grasped and dragged down by one of the soul eaters, and without a second thought, I rush over and rip it from the ground, blowing it up.

The man looks up at me in shock and disbelief. “You-you saved me!” The man stammers as he gets back up from the ground he was nearly dragged into. “My god, you saved me!”

Before I can say a word to the man, I hear a woman’s voice behind me say, “Please.”

I turn to see her black graying hair and wrinkled dark skin as she repeats, “Please, ma’am. We have been dragging these bags for an eternity without rest. You can kill the things that kill us. Can you please, oh please, keep us safe just for a little while to give us rest? We would be eternally grateful if you did.”

Taken off guard by her plea, after never in my life having anyone beg me for anything, I nod and say, “Sure. I don’t mind.”

The smile on her face was so beautiful, so grateful. So surprised and shocked and filled with complete wonderment that anyone at all would want to help her poor soul. It’s in that moment that I hear her gasp as her eyes shoot down to the ground. There grabbing her ankle was a soul eater. She looked back up to me with the eyes of a child looking to their mother for sanctuary and immediately, I do what I have to and rip the demon from the ground, killing it. “Come on,” I say and I begin to drag my heel in a huge circle around at least twenty peoples worth of space, “Stay inside this circle and I will keep you safe.”

Quickly, not only the woman, but other souls that had overheard the conversation began to enter, dragging their bags with them.

It was quickly obvious that the bags were far too large to enter and I yelled, “Stop, stop! You can’t bring those things in! No one will fit if you do!”

The souls stop dragging their huge sacks and stare at me with faces of confusion, fear, and judgment as one says, “But we have to take it where ever we go, it’s our punishment.”

“No, just leave them on the outside. In fact, barricade the outside of the circle with them so we won’t get trampled by the other souls.”

All the ones listening to me still stand staring, not sure if they should listen to me or not when I yell, “Do you want to get spirited away, or not? Come on people, move it or lose it!”

Immediately at that, everyone began to get to work, pushing their bags in a circle around the squiggly line I drew. Every few moments, I would hear a scream. A soul not working fast enough and a ghostly hand grasping them and dragging them down. As I promised, I rushed over and would save them, ripping the apparition apart and then onto the next that was tormenting another soul.

Eventually, all the souls did as they were told and barricaded the ground around us. A hush of whispers could be heard coming from the souls on the outside, questioning the large ring of bags in their path. None of them could see us, here on the inside, as the bags were far too tall and wide for sight to peer through. Although, regardless of this fact, the soul eaters still managed through.

Ripping and tearing, I pulled them from the ground, fragmenting their ghastly bodies in midair. With every explosion came a roar of cheers from the dozen or souls I was protecting, and the whispers on the outside only grew louder in curiosity.

“Help! It has me!” I heard a soul scream as I rush over to save them when I hear “Oh my God!” I turn to see another being drug under.

I rip the one closest away and destroy it as quickly as possible, then rush over to the other, when suddenly another scream emits.

Then another.

Then another.

Then another.

Suddenly, all the souls I promised to protect were all being drug under at a rate faster than I could save them and it occurs to me:

The soul eaters are endless.

And the fact that these souls aren’t pulling their punishments as they should be, is drawing the demons to them ceaselessly like sharks to blood.

They have to get back to pulling or they’ll be killed!

“Hey!” I attempt to yell over the petrified screams and shouts, “Hey, you have to get back to work! I can’t save you!”

Suddenly, I feel one at my leg smashing my foot against the barren dirt, trying to pull me with it. I shake it off and yell again, “Hurry! You’ll die if you don’t get to work!”

The souls scream in torment, struggling to get away, doing their best to shake off the demons, but they can’t. Some try to reach for their bag, knowing if they can just keep moving it, they can escape, but the soul eaters already have too good of a hold on them. Like quicksand, they all begin to descend into the ground, being drug down in horrible shrilling screams.

“You said you would protect us!” A voice shrieks.

“You lied to us!” another yells as they are being dragged under.

“Help! Don’t let me die!”

“Please, save me!”

“This can’t be happening!”

“What have you done!?”

Suddenly, it all becomes too much for me, watching all those who had hope in me, dying at my hands. All those I thought I could protect, just for a short while, being murdered right before my eyes. “Please!” I hear a voice cry out that stands out from the rest.

I turn to see the dark skinned woman from before, the one who asked me for help to begin with, her sorrowful eyes of betrayal staring into mine and she pleas, “You promised!”

Without a moment of hesitation, I rush to her, reaching to rip at the soul eater, but it’s too late. By time I get to her, the soul eater is already underground out of my reach and her body is too far in. Petrified tears roll down from my eyes as I watch her being drug under with nothing I could do, as the last words emit from her mouth, “You failed us.”

“No… No!” I scream into the barren ground where she was just drug into, “No, I didn’t mean to, no, I’m sorry!”

The voices of the other dozen souls continue to screech berated words of hatred and abandonment at me as they spend their last seconds of existence being pulled under.

All their eyes on me, all their hate on me, I back up and slam into one of the towering bags filled with greed and suddenly, a hand grabs me again.

I look down and see a black hand, just as all the rest, grasping my ankle, but this time when I shake it off, it doesn’t let go.

My whole body jolts and it is jammed into the ground, and when I look down, I can see in horror that I am being drug under.

“No! No, don’t take me!” I scream, as I reach down and do my best to rip the hand from the ground. The hand stays firm in its grip and continues to drag me under.

I scream and shout and rip and pull and when It finally hits me that I’m not strong enough to pull it up, I instantly resort to exploding it right there on my ankle.

With all the strength in my terrified bout, I slap my hand on the soul eater and blow it up with all the force I have. Dust and dirt flies everywhere and I begin to cough up choked terrified tears and when the dust settles just enough I can see that the hand is still there, unfazed.

I began flailing ripping tearing away from the creature when suddenly, its pace increased and like quicksand, all in one bout, I was ripped under.

In the boiling heat now surrounding my body with the voices of shouting screams filling my ears, a voice speaks out right next to me saying:

“Hello, Hayden.”

**Chapter Six**

Gravity was against me, as I was upside down, hanging by the entity’s grasp on my leg. I opened my eyes in the insufferable heat to be met with two sharp red eyes piercing directly into my own, eclipsed by a pair of dark sunglasses.

“O-Oliver?” I squeaked.

A wide smile stretches across his face as he says, “The one and only.”

I just stare at him, all the events that took place leading up to this very moment rushing through my head in utter confusion when I ask, “How-” But I am quickly cut off by him saying, “I’ve been watching you. This entire time I’ve kept an eye on you and I am very pleased to see you’ve stepped up your game, Hayden.”

I just blink, still dangling by my ankle in front of his face.

“I know, you’re in shock. You thought I was a soul eater, didn’t you? No, no. Just harmless little me. Although all those other souls that got drug down weren’t as lucky. You doomed those ones.”

Suddenly a huge pang of guilt runs through me as I remember all of what just happened. I stared at him with eyes that begged him to tell me differently. To tell me some kind of silver lining, that maybe they would be okay.

“You killed all of them, dear.” Oliver stated grimly, “Sorry to break it to ya, hun.” And with that, I was promptly dropped to the ground in a thud.

I screamed out in pain from landing directly on my neck, the reverberation of a snap echoing through my ears. I ground my teeth in agony as not to cry, when I hear Oliver from up above me say, “Oh my, that was not my intention. Let me help you.”

Before I could push him away or reject his possibly rigged help, Oliver gently touches the back of my neck and I feel a pop, like a small balloon bursting from inside me and suddenly the pain is completely gone.

I sit up in confusion, rubbing the back of my neck making sure there were no weird boils or bumps from his suspicious healing as I hear him say, “No, Hayden, I did not plague you. You are fine.”

I look back up to him, staring down at me and I ask, “How do you know what I am going to say?”

Oliver looks back up as he steps over me saying, “I don’t, your face simply gives it all away. You are precious though, darling, really.”

I turn behind me to see where it is that he is going, when suddenly the surroundings begin to soak in and I see where I am.

Vast volcanic earth and pools of red, boiling and bursting for as far as the eye can see and within them are human souls. Thrashing and screaming, drowning in the mix.