

How long has it been? A fiery inferno of death and despair everywhere I looked. Screams of torture, wails of pain. I didn't deserve this. I don't deserve any of this. Death and greed may have been my crop, yes, but it should've never been the harvest awaiting me in those final moments. Yes... I should've been allowed to revel in splendor forever. It's my right.

"So you agree?" a voice whispered in my ear.

"Who's there?" I looked around but all that was found was hellfire and brimstone.

"You were always an entertaining one to watch, Chikara," the voice laughed. The laugh echoed around me, the voice dancing across the countless bridges of obsidian that went on for eternity.

"How do you know my name? Reveal yourself or I will kill you with my bare hands," I threatened. The voice turned silent. For a second I feared I'd be alone again.

"You know me already." It seemed so certain in its statement.

"If you're someone I killed when I was still alive, don't remember you and don't care. Go wallow in your shame somewhere else."

"Oh but you see, Chikara, I am not someone I am *something*."

"Something?" I wondered what "something" could entail. I'd hurt a lot of someones, not many somethings in my time. It'd be foolish to try, spirits lingered in everything and upsetting them was a surefire way to get killed. I wasn't such a fool, but some of my subordinates had been.

"I am your avarice, your fear, your killing blade. All that is wrong in your spoiled soul I am, for I am your *hunger*."

"My hunger? Don't think I have any intention of eating with the whole being dead thing and all, so why don't you go and bother someone else, alright?"

"Not for food, foolish little child," the voice chastised me. "A hunger for life, for sorrow, for suffering. You still feel it in your breast do you not? You still feel those pangs in your marrow, no?"

I took a moment to look inward, to feel if this desire the voice was born from was true. I felt no heartbeat, no blood in veins, no warmth in my chest. It was hollow, as empty as the last cup of tea I drank. Why? Why did this happen to me? That thought kept echoing in my mind. I don't deserve this. Of all people who have been judged and died. *I* don't deserve this. My empire, my wealth, my *life* gone, ripped from me by a single cup of tea. How could they betray me? How could they take everything I'd worked for from me? They should die. Several stabs to the chest, one for every second I spent drinking that wretched cup of tea, one for every second I spent writhing on the floor while they smirked above me. The voice was right. I should have life, they should have sorrow, they should have suffering. Yet a new question lingered upon the tip of my tongue.

"Why?" It had finally escaped. "Why are you asking me this? Why are you here? To remind me of my failure?" My blood was boiling now. I would rip this mocking voice into two if only it would show itself.

“To make an offer,” it succulently whispered. It was like it was right next to my ear, ready to tear it off if I took so much as a step.

“What’s the offer?” I asked.

“You may leave this Hell of your own making... of *our* making. In doing so, you will embrace me fully, embrace me in my entirety, fulfilling my one desire once I demand it. A simple deal. Become who you’re meant to be and live forever free.”

A simple deal. These deals were never so simple. But... it was the only deal. My hands were tied, but they didn’t have to be. Forever free. A delight that sounded like. My mind was made.

“I accept your deal, I’ll be who you need me to be and you will get me out of here.”

“So be it young Chikara. Your words are binding forevermore. Freedom in servitude you shall have.”

“Servitude? How can I be free and a servant?” I asked angrily. Had I been tricked? No, I don’t get tricked.

“Free in spirit, slave to *hunger*!” the voice yelled. The declaration was piercing to my ears, like the death wail of the dead themselves. Then I felt a welling of feeling in my body, of emotion, turmoil, and pain. I looked at my hand, my flesh grew hot and as red as fire, my body burning in searing pain as I fell to the ground. My muscles tightened, my limbs lengthened, bones breaking as restructuring themselves to this my new form. My teeth grew to sharp points, like needles, some like knives, two tusk-like protrusions coming from my mouth. My hair thrashed about as I rolled on the ground in immense pain, the obsidian darkness of it turning to snow white. I screamed, but nothing came out. Pain immeasurable. A final punishment I hoped.

Yet, when it was all done, a new feeling emerged. Hunger. A desire for bloodshed, to feast, to live life to its fullest potential to the detriment of all. I got up from the ground, finding myself immeasurably tall, several feet larger than I was before. What had I become? An oni? How fitting I thought. The nastiest people I had known weren’t people at all when I thought about it. They were monsters who wore their cruelty like a badge, a badge I had now donned. Despite it all, I still remained here in this Hell. Had the voice simply sought to torture me then bless me with beauty, strength, and the will to take what I wanted, then nothing to use it on? Had I been played?

I looked at a nearby rock, an unquenchable anger surged within me. I lumbered over to it and crushed it with my bare hands, turning the immense boulder into squabbling pebbles. Yet nothing felt right, my anger still stirred, I needed something else, anything else. I dragged myself across the bridge of eternity, listening to the screams of torture, the cries of pain, but this time it brought me a small joy. To hear such pitiful creatures suffer felt... good. One right in a world of wrongs. A soothing melody that almost felt like it could drag me to a deep slumber as I walked miles and miles in a world that listened not to time’s demands. A sleep that felt just right. I fell to the ground like felled timber, the bridge shaking beneath my towering size.

I heard one last whisper as my eyes dragged me away from the waking world. “The preparations are complete, do not fail me Chikara, or you will know worse fates than this realm.”

When I had awakened I was in a chair. Not a particularly comfortable chair, barely fit my ass. Around me was chatter and people staring at me wide eyed in discomfort. “Stop staring or I’ll rip your flesh off your bones!” I roared. Everyone went immediately silent. Oh? I could get used to this. I got up and stretched, flexing my arms, admiring the defined musculature this new form came with. Guess the voice did keep its end of the bargain. I was home. I think? It was the world of the living. Good enough for me. I walked over to the barkeep and slammed my fist on the bar.

“W-What may I get you... ma'am?” he mumbled.

“It’s Chikara you groveling swine,” I growled.

“C-Chikara,” he smiled.

“Barrel of your finest wine, now, and I may consider not using your spine as a toothpick,” I smiled.

“O-On the house for you!” he groveled. He motioned to a few waiters and called them over, and a few moments later they rolled over a whole barrel of wine. “A-As you asked!” he tried to smile. The fear was palpable, however.

“Good,” I said, as I picked up the barrel of wine and chugged it down. Once I finished, I took the barrel and threw it across the tavern at a wall, causing it to shatter into splinters. By this point, the tavern had emptied, leaving just me and a sniveling barkeep to serve me. “Gods, don’t even feel tipsy after that. Going to need a few more I guess. Get them. NOW!” I demanded and the barkeep fled again. “I could get used to this,” I laughed. Then I wondered about my subordinate again, “What am I going to do about the treacherous ingrate? Stabbing feels too nice now. Think I’ll cut off his fingers, then drown him in ale, that’d be suitable.”

For once, everything felt right. I was truly free, and the voice in the back of my mind was only eager to show me how free I really was. Oh how free it wanted us to be, and that was a hunger I would indulge for the rest of my neverending life.