

“DENNIS!!”

The young man in question tried and failed to stifle a giggle as he called back. “Hm? What happened, Terry?”

An extremely angry man stomped into the room, hair soaking wet but eyes blazing with the fire of a thousand suns. “A bucket on the door? Are you *five*?!”

“BAHAHAHAHA!” Said Dennis, his facade immediately cracking. “Oh, man, your face.... But what’s so childish about having a little fun at my older brother’s expense?”

“It’s *Terence*, you brat. I’m the heir to this family. The one who’s next in line for the fortune and our company. Show some respect.”

Dennis couldn’t help but roll his eyes. “Ugh, like that means anything to me. I never wanted any of that anyway. You’re the golden boy mom and dad always wanted.”

“And you’re just the spare,” Terence spat, “the leech suckling off the trust fund.”

“I’d leech less if I’d been given any responsibilities whatsoever rather than just being left on my own half my life while you got handed everything you ever asked for.”

“ENOUGH! You’re nothing but a pathetic, annoying goblin. And as soon as I’m in charge of it all—and with mother and father as old as they are, that won’t be long—you’re out on the streets. I’ll see to it personally.” He stomped towards the door, then paused before smirking cruelly. “Who knows? Maybe you’ll find other goblins in the gutter where you belong.”

The door slammed just in time for an angrily thrown mug of coffee to shatter against it. Putting his head in his hands and sighing, Dennis groaned. *He means it, too. And he’s right. The clock’s ticking, and I’ve got literally nowhere else to go. Not to mention, Terry will make sure I couldn’t find a job or a place to live no matter what, just to be petty.* Grabbing a jacket from his closet—one that looked as rugged and not-rich as possible, something he’d purchased long ago partly to annoy his brother for not living up to family standards of dress—Dennis climbed out the window and walked off into the night. He’d done this thousands of times, and the twists and turns of every street of their old New England town were mapped out perfectly in his mind. All around, other families were getting ready for Halloween. Families that, while poorer (and in some cases, destitute), at least shared love and smiles with each other instead of cold politics and practiced niceties.

Thinking on the subject of warmer families, Dennis recalled an old man who hailed from Ireland and would frequently watch over him during his roving. The wrinkled former ginger would regale him with stories of faeries and goblins and other such tricksters who would have great fun at the expense of snobbish and rude people. It was these sorts of tales that inspired Dennis’ own mischievous nature, a means of striking back. His brother called it ungrateful; his parents didn’t seem to notice he existed either way. Until, of course, they found out that their second son was associating with “Irish riff-raff” and, through their influence, had him run out of town. All to protect the appearance of the family at the expense of a senior citizen whose only crime was to give a neglected child a better father figure.

As Dennis passed a vacant lot—where the old man’s house once stood—he noticed a scarecrow with a jack-o-lantern on top roughly shoved into the dirt alongside other simple Halloween decorations

donated by the neighborhood. Walking up to it and putting a gentle hand on the side of the pumpkin, he stared at the ghoulish grin, and returned it with a smile of his own. "Heh, you get the joke, don't you? Of course you do, that's why you're laughing. Laughing at all the jerks like my so-called 'family'. I'd fit in more with your kind than with them. What I wouldn't give to be a real trickster and put them in their place..."

For a moment, the light in the jack-o-lantern flickered oddly. Dennis blinked, then turned away... only to hear a strange voice behind him. It sounded like it was coming and going with the wind, groaning and creaking like an old tree. There was a sense of dirt and rock to it as well, somehow; he couldn't quite place it. But whatever other qualities it may have had, the one that Dennis *could* describe was that it sent chills down his spine.

"A REAL TRICKSTER, EH?"

Dennis slowly turned to look at the Jack-o-Lantern; it was physically unchanged, but somehow, it seemed more... alive. "Wh-who are you?"

"FAR DARRIG'S THE NAME, AND TRICKERY IS MY GAME. BUT YOU CAN JUST CONSIDER ME A KINDRED SPIRIT."

"The old man's stories... you're a goblin from them! A red cap!" Dennis realized. By all rights, he should have been terrified... but instead, his smile came back and grew wide. "Yeah, definitely more a kindred spirit than my actual family. Hopefully my jokes at their expense amuse you."

"OH, THEY DO," replied the ancient fae. ***"THEY ARE A BIT SIMPLE, THOUGH. COULD BE BETTER. A LOT BETTER. I COULD TEACH YOU A THING OR TWO ABOUT THAT, IF YOU LIKE..."***

Dennis chuckled. "Oh, I'd *definitely* like that. Terry always called me a goblin. Sorry I haven't quite matched up to the label, but I'm only human."

A maniacal, though genuine laugh, echoed from the pumpkin. ***"OH, YOU'VE GOT POTENTIAL, LAD! DON'T THINK I DON'T SEE IT. BUT YOU'RE RIGHT: YOU'RE HUMAN. AND TO TRULY LIVE UP TO THAT POTENTIAL... WELL, A FEW CHANGES WOULD BE NECESSARY."***

"Changes?" replied Dennis; instinct, and understanding of the stories of entities such as this one, told him to be cautious about any sort of offer made by this sort of being. But something about this particular being felt genuine. Truly kindred. So he remained open... and even a little bit eager. "What sorts of changes?"

"A LITTLE HEIGHT HERE, A LITTLE POINTY EAR THERE, A LITTLE GREEN AND BROWN ALL OVER. MAYBE A BIT OF RED ON TOP, HEHEHEH." Darrig chuckled; Dennis chuckled as well, something which seemed to delight and satisfy the legendary trickster. ***"ALL YOU'LL BE GIVING UP ARE YOUR HUMANITY AND YOUR NAME. AND YOU'RE NOT THAT ATTACHED TO EITHER, ARE YOU?"***

A few moments of thinking passed as Dennis weighed the offer... then he nodded, grinning as widely and mischievously as possible, doing his best to put every ounce of his genuine desire for trickery on display. "Not remotely!"

The wildest, most utterly insane maniacal laughter imaginable howled from the jack-o-lantern and the goblin who currently inhabited it. ***"WA-HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA! HEEHEE! HOOHOOHAHAHAHA! I LIKE YOU, KID! KEEP UP THAT ATTITUDE AND YOU'LL FIT RIGHT IN!"*** The scarecrow and its jack-o-lantern suddenly grew tall and gangly, its arms lengthening and encircling Dennis as the head loomed directly over him like a grinning orange moon. ***"CLEAS, CLEAS, GÁIRE AGUS AOIBH GHÁIRE! MÍ-ÁDH AGUS CÍRÉIB I GCORP AGUS IN INTINN!"***

Dennis felt... odd. He couldn't remotely describe the sensations that seemed to be poured onto the top of his head and cascading over the rest of his body from there. There were no words for it. But it did feel good. Quite good, in fact, bringing a warmth to his heart and an urge to giggle like a small child preparing to jump out of hiding and scare someone. Then the physical changes began, starting with his nose, growing thick and wide; his shoes and socks became briefly painful, but then suddenly exploded off with a loud bang to reveal that they had nearly doubled in size, curly and tangled red hair growing over the instep and on top of each bulbous toe. His hands underwent a similar transformation, becoming almost cartoonishly large, with the same kind of comically ginger fur-like hair on the backs. The back of his pants exploded similarly to reveal a long, thin tail with a bright red tuft of fur on the very end. His eyes grew bigger, and he felt his ears grow outward, becoming longer and pointier. Speaking of pointy, his teeth began to sharpen and become almost needle-like; additional teeth joined them as his mouth grew wider and wider, allowing his smile to widen as well. Perfect. It matched the gleeful and ghoulish delight filling his heart. His hair billowed out and curled into fiery red locks that draped down to his middle back, ratty and tangled and unkempt. An equally red tuft popped into being on the tip of his chin, which sharpened into a point and grew out a bit. Dennis couldn't hold his giggling in any longer, letting out a long string of utterly childish laughter that was every bit as maniacal as that of his new patron. "HEE-HEE! HEHEHEHEHHAHAHAHAHAHAHA! HOHOHAHAHAHA!" His voice sounded higher, much higher, as if it were on helium, and was scratchy and creaky like a rusty hinge. This only served to spark further giggles and chuckles and guffaws from.... From.... What was his name? What was he called?

It didn't matter. That was the old him. The new him was getting shorter and shorter and shorter and shorter still, shrinking and shrinking and shrinking, smaller and smaller as his skin turned into the brown of dirt with spots that were green like pumpkin stalks. At last, he ceased to lose height... and found himself roughly the size of an apple. His clothes had vanished, replaced with a dirty, moth-eaten gray rag loosely draped over him like a tunic with a tiny rope belt. Beyond that, nothing. He looked up at Far, who now seemed to be the size of a skyscraper... but who also seemed a veritable deity as well as almost a father. Indeed, he couldn't think of a better word. "Geh-heeheehee! So, Dad, what's my new name?"

"HMM... HOW ABOUT PUCK? THAT'S A PROPER NAME FOR A TRICKSTER!"

Puck grinned, wider than he ever could have as a human, as the name filled his very being and soul until his own memories seemed to only recall ever having had it. "Haha! Thanks a bunch!" Suddenly, his grin grew wider still as he thought of something. "Buh-heheheheh... I should probably re-introduce myself to Terry. And I have a few... heheheh, hahaha, heehee... *ideas!*"