

Chapter 104: Hello, I'm the Villain

Doldimar

The woman in front of me was making a noise I refused to acknowledge. I'd gotten used to their screams so long ago that I couldn't remember when it had happened. If I was to cling to a modicum of sanity, I'd had to.

Instead, I'd learned to hear that awful noise as music.

So, when I once more sent a sliver of Daevetch through a split in her skin, I only heard her sing a note of Pain. As I guided it toward her head, that note changed pitch, heading toward a tone I hated, but no matter how much I fought against this, the slide tipped over into the silence of Death.

Growling, I fed her more Daevetch, hoping to resume the song, but it did nothing, *nothing*, NOTHING.

"Stop, silly man," said a despised voice. "She was too weak. Unfortunate but unchangeable."

Spinning, I roared in Corruption's face, but this didn't faze them.

With a slow blink, they said, "I don't know why you're so upset. Lindow's Harvest yielded many of your 'Kiraak'. Was that not your goal?"

Maybe. I found it difficult to remember what that was at times.

"I don't care about that," I said. "I want the nightmare to stop, and this task helps with that, unlike you. You said you'd make it stop."

"That's not true," Corruption said. "I only promised you'd forget your *nightmares*, not that they'd stop or that your life would change."

While I might sometimes forget my purpose, I'd never forget how much I wanted to destroy this asshole.

Sighing, they inspected their fingernails.

“As always, I’ve kept my promise,” they said. “For your sake, I hope you keep yours.”

The black heat building inside of me transformed into something bright and bubbly, and throwing my head back, I attuned myself to it, howling with laughter.

“Two beings of... Daevetch... quibbling about... *promises*.”

Within heartbeats, my laughing fit grew fierce enough that I fell to the floor, beating a fist against it, and after a while, Corruption clicked their tongue.

“Get up,” they said. “You have a visitor.”

As if a gate had slammed into place, I cut off my laughter, leaping to my feet with shadows coating my hands, but the invader to my sanctum was just a kid, shivering in his boots.

He was right to do that, of course. I was the villain in this story.

When he refused to say anything for several moments, I growled, “The *fuck* do you want?”

To my great amusement, this snapped the kid to attention.

“Forgive me, great one,” he said. “I bring news from the Outskirts.”

The Outskirts? Who was managing that pointless place right now?

When I remember, I said, “What is Teron doing, bothering me *again*? I swear! That idiot gets startled over the smallest things.”

The kid said nothing, and rolling my eyes, I beckoned at him.

“Well? The report?”

“For-forgive me, great one, but...”

Licking his lips, the kid had to gather his courage before he could continue, all while I impatiently waited. He’d better hurry it up. I needed something new to amuse myself with.

“Enforcer Teron is dead,” he eventually said.

Now, *that* was a surprise. Much as I might complain about that man’s constant vigilance for danger, it had served him well. He’d been one of the first Enforcers that I’d created after conquering this silly kingdom, and with him dead, only one of them remained.

“All right,” I said. “Who’s the Outskirt’s new Enforcer, then?”

I couldn’t wait to hear this bit of news.

No really. Didn’t every villain enjoy hearing about how his minions fought amongst themselves?

In case it hadn't been obvious, I was being sarcastic.

"Forgive me again, great one, but... no one has taken over."

For a moment, my heart skipped a beat while I circled this anomaly. Could it be...?

"Interesting," I said, suddenly serious. "Continue."

Nervously, the kid swallowed.

"There was a battle. We were defending against invaders from across the sea," he said. "Our victory was assured, but the enemy leader... he drew Enforcer Teron away from the battle. I noticed this and followed them, hoping to help if I could. I watched the fight, watched my Enforcer snare the enemy leader in a Vice-"

Here, the kid hiccupped to a stop, as well he should. The Vice was mine and mine alone, an important part of creating Kiraak, and I couldn't have any of my ambitious Enforcers making their own soldiers.

In this case, Teron's ability to wield a Vice was immaterial. He was dead, so I flicked my fingers for the kid to continue.

"Some time after Enforcer Teron captured the enemy leader, one of his allies came to the rescue. They fought, and while my Enforcer was distracted, the enemy leader... broke his Vice."

"Broke it?" I interrupted. "You're sure?"

When the kid nodded, I frowned, ignoring the kid's resulting cringe. This kept getting more fascinating.

"Understandably, Enforcer Teron refocused on the enemy leader," the kid continued. "He tried to kill the leader, but that man's ally moved in front of the blow, which I don't understand. Why would anyone do that?"

His confusion didn't matter, not with cold certainty settling in my gut.

"Stepping over the body, Enforcer Teron meant to finish the job when-"

"White light flashed from out of nowhere, the leader's ally got up, and with seeming ease, he killed Teron," I softly said.

After a pause, the kid said, "Yes."

Silence reigned in my sanctum, but this one didn't belong to Death. It could be accredited to something else entirely.

"Finally," I whispered.

Spinning away from the kid, I meant to start making new plans when the kid cleared his throat, making me shoot a glare his way.

“The ally...” he said, “he gave me something for you.”

...He had? That was unusual.

With a huff, I said, “Well, why didn’t you say so? Give it here.”

Extending a hand, I tapped my foot while the kid retrieved an envelope from his breast pocket, giving it to me with a shaking hand, but his insignificant presence dropped from my awareness as I unfolded the letter.

With eager eyes, I read:

A,

I may have found a way out.

-E

And in a hastily scribbled postscript.

Don't hurt the kid. He was smart enough to stick with Teron, follow me after the bastard's death, and attack me once my guard was down. When knocking him unconscious, I almost had to try. Kid's got potential.

My breath trembled as it rushed from me, the real me, and I lowered the letter. A way out? Could my old friend have actually done it? If he had...

Corruption could never know what I'd read.

Storming to a nearby fire, I stuck the letter into it, never minding how it was also licking at my flesh. Once the paper was ash, I withdrew a blackened husk with a giggle, and as I pattered my hands together, char dusted the air around me.

“Oooo! This'll be so *exciting!*” I shouted. “We have our hero once more! I wonder what his first move will be.”

With a sigh, Corruption said, “Don’t get distracted yet. You still have a visitor to deal with.”

That was right!

Turning on the kid, I said, “Seems I have an opening among my Enforcers. How’d you like to have the position?”

And as terror took root in the boy, I could only cackle, long and loud and perfectly in tune with Madness’ pitch.

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