

The heavy door to her room creaked, and Ashanti looked up from her book, relieved that, finally, someone had made it through her dungeon to her lair. It had been ages since the last time an adventurer had made it all the way to her. Her guest was huge, masculine, and every bit the hero type in their body-encasing steel. Despite that, they smelled far more mystical than martial. Not even the tang of rust or blood wafted to her nose as they approached. Just what kind of visitor was she about to play host to? The immortal sat up on her chaise, her interest now piqued. She let her gaze wander, then grinned when she saw how they glowed like a star. Everything about them was bolstered in some respect by a magical item. Every ounce of their incredible physical presence was enchanted.

"Well met, hero," she said, trying to keep her tone solemn yet welcoming.

Her guest seemed taken aback by her civility, for they paused before bowing towards her with their own greeting. "Well met, my Dark Lady."

"You speak an old phrase, brave warrior. For what purpose have you come?"

"I was hoping you could kill me."

The words were a thunderclap which left Ashanti with none of her own.

The hero shook their hands as if to dispel some curse. "Well, okay not "me" but the concept of me. The memory of me. I wish to be erased, and only you can grant that boon, my lady."

"I know that the life of a champion of the people is hardly easy, but why do you wish for oblivion? One such as yourself surely wants for nothing--or has the world beyond my halls changed yet again?"

"No, it is as you say, my lady. Every want of mine, save the one I ask of you, is fulfilled at the merest utterance. Yet I tire of it. I have spent my life trying to be the hero people expected, but it has not brought me happiness--just further discomfort.

"I have grown into my father's expectations," they continued. "I have exceeded my liege lord's as well. For a time, that praise was enough to numb the doubts I had. Then, when that praise was no longer a balm, I sought out ever greater challenges. I had thought that if I did so, that if accomplished something no other man had, it would bring me peace of mind, sense of purpose. Each successive victory did neither. All they did was make me aware of how hard I was trying to be someone I never could be. Do you understand what it is I mean and why I have come to you, Daemon Queen Ashanti?"

"Oh, traveler, I understand all too well," the woman turned deity turned villain said as she rose and stepped down from her dais. "And I think I know what you are asking of me, but know that I cannot undo this favor should you change your mind..."

"I'm sure, my lady."

"So mote it be then, hero," she intoned as she raised a clawed hand to their armor. Her ichor-black nails cut through the steel like it was foil and the shredded metal fell to the floor with a ringing thud. The mortal flesh beneath made her breath catch. The traveler's physique was even more impressive with nothing of their upper body left to the imagination. Even stripped of their protective pauldrons, her guest's shoulders were broader than she could have reached. Their shoulder and arm muscles rivaled those of her Minotaur guardians. Their mighty fists could likely have encircled her neck with ease. In all her long years, Ashanti had never met a human with such a musculature.

Their broad chest and thick torso were covered in dense black hair which was soft to the touch as she began to strip them of their magical defenses. The first few came off without an issue, and she drank in their power like she was tasting a fine wine. It was not long though before the immortal's claws met resistance they could not easily overcome. Muttering a cantrip of empowerment, she yanked at the edge of the spell and was rewarded with a satisfying crack

as the enchantment shattered in her grasp. However, as the mana swirled around her, she noticed that her guest had lost a couple inches of height. Another broken spell reduced their physique, and a third thinned their body hair.

Between the high of absorbing so much energy and the eagerness to see what awaited her beneath everything, it did not take long for Ashanti to reach metaphorical bone. Standing there now, was not a towering example of hypermanliness, but one of tall and slight androgyny. Their thick hair had retreated, for the most part, lightening into a charming fuzz which promised to be quite pleasant to snuggle.

"Well then, warrior, this is it. Your last chance to--."

"Please, my lady," they said over her. "I have no regrets about what I am asking of you. So, please, do what you see fit."

Ashanti inhaled and then spoke words so old they cracked on her lips. "Close your eyes, hero, and dream of things that never got to be."

After that, she took their face in her hands and pulled them into a kiss which lingered on even as their hands grabbed her arms and heat rose in her face. Their tongue was so soft in her mouth, so eager to be embraced. Excited for the first time in an age, the blacklisted diety pushed much of her pilfered energy back into the well it had come from. They began to shudder while the end they sought overtook them. The first indication that the spell had succeeded was the feeling of horns on her forehead as her neonate began to mimic her appearance. Their face changed ever so slightly beneath her fingers. Their lips grew ever so slightly more plump.

Then, the hero stepped back. They were, seemingly, the same as they had been a moment ago outside of the two little horns at their temples.

"Are you satisfied, hero?" Ashanti asked the transformed mortal.

"If I said no, would you kiss me like that again?"

“You have but to ask...” (1049)