

Have a Drink on Me

Introduction

Deep in the heart of the world between dimensions, the place where gods older than gods roam endlessly, lie the Origins of All. It was here that infinite realities were born, their ties still holding strong no matter how distant they grew.

The Origins of All consist of three realms, known to their denizens as Paradise, Punished Lands, and Purgatory and it is these realms that which the dead are taken, given their due, and recycled back to their birthplace. As one would expect, Paradise is where souls are rewarded for being decent beings while the Punished Lands both punishes the wicked and keeps them from giving the good any trouble. One is beautiful, full of light, and rests upon the clouds while the other is nothing but smoggy skies, infernal factories, and terrible cities full of looming skyscrapers scattered along dry, rocky lands and seas of fire. Friendly Angels hold one and cruel demons have the other. It's all a fairly simple deal.

While Angels stay in their dwelling to avoid the risk of falling, it's not uncommon for a demon to leave their dark realm to cause a bit of trouble. However, this is the tale of the exiled one and her ventures in the realm of humans.

I

The City of MarShall, the third greatest city across the rocky, flame-riddled expanse of what mortals consider Hell. Within its thick towering walls, a field of factories grumble and groan among the towering buildings. Everyday the cogs of industry twisted and turned, clinked and clanked, producing the much-needed goods that kept the city and its military running at peak efficiency as decreed. This was made sure by the eternally difficult work of the enslaved souls damned to run the diabolical machines till their sentences were up.

All the while, the demons who called the city home did what most demons did, torture the damned and revel in both fight and drink, song and dance. The demonic denizens took joy in their favorite pastimes in the streets, not caring about any laws and rules in place. As long as they didn't upset the Lord and Baroness, they were free to do as they pleased.

And at the very center of Nar'Shaluk was the castle of the hellish royalty and its most powerful forces. Standing over six hundred miles tall, the building loomed over the urban tract of skyscrapers and factories in an amalgamation of towers; almost as if an entire city pressed tightly together to make a single building. The architect who designed it had a sense of style when he sat down at the drawing

table, making a castle built of geometric shapes, curved ornamental elements forming tortured faces and portraits of war, and sinister looking windows puncturing its tall, brimstone skin in rows; all topped with fearsome spires. If one were to look at it from the roof the Barrelstone's Arms factory, the second tallest structure in all of Nar'Shaluk, it would've looked like an office building from a roaring twenties hell.

Like all cities of the Punished Lands, Nar'Shaluk was littered with thousands of taverns and eateries and among the top twenty-five was the Molten Sins Six. Like all taverns of that title, it was a riot all huddled into one big room. Along with the ravenous drinking and eating, there was a non-stop flurry of fists, feet, and cursing of mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, and cats. The enslaved souls of the damned did their best to serve the rowdy patrons, but more often than not, ended up on the receiving end of a drunken punch if they were lucky or dwelling in the confines of a stomach alongside a beaten demon if they weren't. That wasn't even mentioning the pain of cleaning demon blood from nearly every square inch of the building when the mob cleared out for battle.

Among the usual rabble, Hyrsea sat among friends with a mug larger than a house to her lips and chugging the sin-filled whiskey until it was all sloshing around her insides. Letting out a contented sigh among the quarreling demons and crashing glass, she slammed the mug down. Her friends followed in quick succession.

“Hot damn, drink up everyone!” Hyrsea bellowed. “Any moment now we're gonna be kicking so much ass, the damned are gonna take years to buff the shit off our boots!”

Her friends laughed and cheered, along with some demons who manage to hear her.

“I heard they aren't even lead by Lord or Baroness! Just a bunch of rebels thinkin' they can take on us!” Xeclev slammed his fists on the counter, looking to his friends. “They got sticks and stones and we have cannons and war machines! They aren't even worth the mole on my arse!”

They all laughed again.

“Well, I for one enjoy the break.” remarked Fyrlisa, fixing her round glasses and grinning. “Nothing more relaxing than spending an afternoon squashing a few rats.”

“Ha! That's an insult to rats, sis!” said Hyrsea, grabbing a drink from an enslaved soul and holding it up. “I wouldn't even call them bugs! Maybe even nothing at all!”

“Yes, I guess you're right, sister.” Fyrlisa giggled, sipped her ale, and checked her watch. “Oh dear, Hyr. Mother and father will be expecting us on the front lines soon.”

“Already?” groaned the demon after finishing another round. “Guess we shouldn't keep mom pops waitin' then. We'll see you guys later.”

“Heh-ha! To battle Viv!” replied Xeclev, slapping Hyrsea on the back.

With the send off of their friends, Hyrsea and Fyrlisa took their leave; bobbing and weaving through the battling crowd with Hyr only occasionally protecting her twin sister by throwing a fist or two. After surviving the battle inside, they hopped in the elder twin's ride, a long, sleek vehicle like a missile turned into a car. The exposed collection of engines roared and thick black smoke came flooding out of the various exhaust pipes swooping out the engine towards the back of the automobile. Tires spun and screeched in place before sending the car speeding down the street.

“Hyr, you know we have a ball to attend after this right?” asked Fyrlisa, the wind whipping through her silver long locks.

“Yeah, I know.” Hyrsea rolled her eyes, her solid black hair wavering in the breeze as well. “Seriously, fuck those things. I don't know how you and mom can deal with that boring ass shit.”

“We don't, we just keep our cool and make conversation.”

“You make it sound so easy.” grumbled the elder twin.

“Besides, why are you complaining? You end up wandering off and having sex with someone anyway.”

“How else is that fancy ball stuff going to be any fun? Might as well empty some balls into a hottie or two.”

Fyrlisa let out a disgusted groan and fixed her glasses.

“Mom told me to warn you about that.”

“Ha! She did, did she?” Hyrsea chuckled. “I'm surprised she finally caught me then. I lost count of the 'how many demons Hyr fucked before Mom finds out' record.”

“Gross.” muttered the younger twin. “Look, could you be on your best behavior, Hyr? Not for mom, but for me?”

Hyrsea took a deep breath of Nar'Shaluk's sin-diesel air, sighed, and smiled at her sister.

“Fine, I promise I'll be a good girl for you Fyrlisa.”

Fyrlisa smiled back. “Thank you, Hyr.”

The elder demon twin turned her eyes to the road, her heart, as it always did, fluttering at the image of Fyrlisa's warm smile. While she knew her twin sister could be as cruel as her mother, at least she had her father's friendliness.

Turning one of the four main roads leading from castle Nar'Shaluk to the main gates, Hyrsea sped past factories, clubs, and taverns towards the waiting battlefield ahead.

Hyrsea stood on a small outcropping looking over the fields of rock and fire, dressed in thick charred steel armor while her long, blackened hair drifted in the passing breeze. It was always dry and hot, but more so when two armies lined up to meet one another in a glorious clash of steel and so thick with tension, it would choke a lesser demon. She let it out a breath through a tightly clenched grin. Her blood was boiling, her hands itching to tear something apart. This was what she lived for, to rip and tear! Slaughter and bloodshed in the name family and home. She had to hold herself back from leaping into the fray right this very moment.

She might have been bloodthirsty, but she wasn't stupid.

Xeclev was right. After scanning the opposition, she realized that all they had cobbled together weapons that would hardly kill the mire beasts let alone a soldier under her banner. The other side was vastly different. From under a roar of engines and clouds of pollution, Nar'Shaluk's troops lined up alongside heavily armored war machines, which trembled in place as they too couldn't wait to unleash hell upon the fools that challenged them. Every soldier lining the front was dressed in thick trench coats over sturdy metal armor while gas masks covered their faces just in case some of the more *dirtier* methods were employed. While they didn't have a choice in the armor they wore, they had it in weaponry. Some carried guns and others old-fashion tools of death, but all knew just how to wreck ultimate havoc.

Hyrsea was a little surprised her mother wasn't breaking out the flying machine this time.

"There you are!" Bellowed a familiar voice.

The demoness turned to find her father coming up the hill. While she was gigantic as the next demon, Zasuhr Vadxihr was giant of a man, his body full of so much muscle, the skin was barely keeping it all packed inside. Stuck to his chiseled face was some short, slicked back silver hair joined by thick horns and a pair of mutton chops joining to form a fine mustache. Unlike everyone else, he was dressed in his nicest suit and a pair of iron knuckles; one of which was going to last a lot longer than the other.

"Hey, Pops." Hyrsea replied with a smirk as her old man came to a stop beside and slapped her across the back. Even in armor, it hurt like someone flog her with a spiked flyswatter.

"Fine day for battle, I say!" he shouted, pointed up to the red sun shining behind a thick wall of

burnt clouds. "Oh, you can just smell the fighting just waiting to be done!"

"I just smell diseased sin." she chuckled. "Mom send you to fetch me?"

"I would be lying if I said no." he replied, grinning and twirling his fine facial hair. "Your mother says the fight starts in five minutes and she wants you to boost morale walking among the troops. You know how riled up all of them get when they see you grinning like that!"

"That soon, huh?" said Hyrsea inquisitively, then slapped her forehead. "Right, that shitty ball. Guess she wants to get this over with so she can suck off the King and Queen."

Zasuhr laughed so thunderously that it echoed across the field and found its way into the demon mother's ear, prompting her to glance at the hill where Hyrsea and her husband stood.

"Now, now Hyr." He said after finally calming down and, despite all the armor she was dressed in, lifted his daughter on his shoulder. "Now, you know she has all our best interests in mind. Even if she does..."

His voice suddenly whispered behind his hand and his daughter giggled.

"Kiss some ass along the way, but if that's how she wants to do things, so be it! We'll just try to have all the fun and drink we can!"

"Yeah!"

They shared a quick high five as they continued down the hill and approached the tent the commander-in-chief waited. Where Zasuhr went, everyone quickly moved out of the way; each one fearing some memory they had of witnessing the Demon Lord crush all who challenged him. Soon they were both standing before Syddihr Searkoibal, the Baroness of Nar'Shaluk, and Fyrlisa. While the missus wasn't standing as tall as her husband, she had the same intimidating aura as he did, especially in the dressing fitting of a demon horde's commander. Instead of fine formal wear, she donned thick leather, chain mail, and metal spires jutting up from her shoulders and curling towards her horned head; almost as if pointing out who to fear. This package was all tied together in a foul bow by her ever hateful gaze behind glasses reflecting the poor souls standing before her.

"Syddihr, my love!" announced Zasuhr "Look who I-"

"About time, Hyrsea." She coldly interrupted, standing upright with arms folded behind her back. If that wasn't dramatic enough, the foul wind blowing caressed the long skirt hanging from her waist. "I assume you saw enough of the enemy to know what your dealing with."

"Yeah."

"What was that?" Syddihr asked in that voice of someone fed up with someone's attitude,

fixing her glass.

“Yes, mother.” Hyrsea repeated. “Nothing but a bunch assholes with sticks and stones. Shouldn't be too much trouble. Just plow 'em over and be back in home for dinner.”

“Indeed, and that's exactly what we're going to do. Zasuhr, Hyrsea. Rush forward and make a smear across the land. Don't even ring the bell, just charge and leave none standing. Maybe it'll deter *further* interruptions while the King and Queen are here.” She almost turned away, then stopped. “Zasuhr, for the love of everything, keep that suit *intact*.”

Zasuhr laughed and threw up a quick salute.

“I'll do my best, dear!”

Syddihr rolled her eyes and departed. Fyrlisa followed, but not before waving to her sister and father. Zasuhr tuned to Hyrsea and folded his arms across his massive chest.

“I'm ready whenever you are!”

“Ha! I'm always ready you ol' blowhard!”

“Well!” He shouted jovially and motioned to the troops. “After you, my child!”

“Elders, first.” responded Hyrsea with a cheeky grin.

There was a brief moment of silence before they both charged forward, breaking their lines and rushing towards the unsuspecting enemy. Hyrsea raised her mighty hammer and Zasuhr his fist and upon letting out a powerful battle cry, the hundreds of demons under their commands all ran forward; ready to sate their endless lust for blood.

After finding their bearings, the rebel forces charged as well and met Nar'Shaluk's forces head on in a clatter of steel, rapid gunfire, and death cries. While troops met face-to-face, Cannons from both sides blasted off volleys in quick succession, raining lead and bursts of fire upon the field. In just a manner of minutes, all hell had broken loose; something that was the usual in the Punished Lands.

In the thick of it all, father and daughter fought back to back; crushing any and all that dared raise a weapon towards them. Even some of their own. Pushing her body to the limits, Hyrsea swung her heavy hammer with some amount of grace, every swing moving as smoothly as a river from crunching one skull to another. The only time her relentless assault paused was to raise her thick iron shield to block blows and cannon fire that just happened to find her in the midst of bodies. On the other hand, Zasuhr was simply boxing one tiny ant after other and hurl captured cannonballs as if he were playing with the kids again. One thing they were sharing was the adrenaline pumping through their veins and the joy they took in busting skulls and rending flesh.

With such an overwhelming force engulfing their ranks, the enemy started to flee. While death wasn't exactly permanent in the Punished Lands, that didn't mean it came without an immense amount of trouble and shame that gave enough reason to avoid dying. After all, the demon's eternal soul would have to pick up the piece and dragged it all the way back to where they called home, this while being witnessed by friends and family along the way. Additional shame came with how they died. Nothing was more inglorious than telling their dear old mothers they were pissed on by a blaze sheep.

The forces of Nar'Shaluk wasn't about to let their annoying little attack go without complete and utter punishment, however. While a few soldier chased the survivors and bludgeoned them, the tanks and two-legged cannons gave chase, blasting to smithereens all who thought they could escape unharmed. Those who stayed behind watched and cheered, celebrating another victory over the puny fools.

One of the war machine commanders, dressed a sharp cap and leather button jacket, brought his bipedal tank to a stop beside Zasuhr and Hyrsea and saluted.

“We'll take it from here Lord!”

“Leave not one of them standing.” ordered Zasuhr.

The commander nodded and pointed forward, prompting the machine to run forward. Zasuhr turned to his daughter and slapped her on the back again.

“Another fine battle, Hyr!”

“Yeah, it was pops! Though uh, mom's not gonna be happy with you.” said Hyrsea, pointing at her father's wardrobe. Or at least what was left of it.

“Huh?” The massive man looked down at his muscular form covered in sweat, blood, and the shreds of suit still clinging on. “Ah, crap. Your mother isn't going to be happy indeed. Neither will the tailors. Ha! I wonder which one will be angrier! Haha!”

Zasuhr tapped the shoulder of one the cheering soldier, nearly knocking the minion of his feet.

“Excuse me, fetch us a ride post-haste. You wouldn't want to make Syddihr angry would you?”

The soldier, struck down with the deepest fear imaginable, saluted and bolted. Zasuhr and Hyrsea chuckled as the poor bastard tripped over himself along the way.

“Well, now that this is over, you know what that means?” Said the father, putting on that smile that was bracing itself for the inevitable.

“You *had* to go and remind me.” the daughter shot back.

“Well, if it makes you feel better.” Zasuhr raised an informative finger. “There'll probably

another battle tomorrow, or the next day, or the day after that and this occasion will only be for a few hours.”

“Heh, yeah. Guess you're right about that.”

“That's the spirit.” Zasuhr tussled Hyrsea's hair and looked out across the battlefield, rubbing mustache. “Now, if I recall correctly...I killed of ninety-six of the buggers. You?”

“A hundred and eight.” Hyrsea replied smugly.

“Ha! A hundred and of the weaklings I see? Well, most of the ones *I* slew had a bit more fight in 'em than yours! Unlike the minnows you crushed, they were real warriors!”

“You need glasses too if you think all these pigs are some *real* warriors!”

And so, almost as if tradition, they quarreled over who did better until the car came rumbling across the rocky landscape covered in the bodies of the defeated.

II

Hours after the battle passed and the armies of Nar'sshaluk had returned from whence they came, the heart of the city was all lit up. Within the castle's massive Heartfire Hall, the King and Queen of the Punished Lands sat over a party of Lords, Baronesses, and tables of hearty food reeking with the mouthwatering sin of damned souls. In one corner of the room, a band struck up a song that sounded like a bunch of notes forced to bunch up together in a musical car to form something resembled a melody. To demons, this was nice, pleasant background noise while to the souls wandering with little plates dotted with small, fanciful drinks, it was the most horrific thing they ever heard with loud, ear-splitting screeches and hellish whines.

This was the picture of a demon ball and while the backdrop changed and demons royalty came and went with whoever replaced the ousted, it generally looked about the same. Most of the time, it was all just discussion of varying topics like methods of torture and inflicting pain as well as nefarious schemes to take the throne of King and Queen. They didn't keep these plans under the hush of whispers of course, for it was likely the royal's sharp hearing could listen no matter how quiet the voices got. In fact, conversations of that sort were often encouraged. It showed one had initiative and strove to get something instead kick back and laze about! Even if one didn't have the spine to actually go through with it, it did make for some interesting talk.

Demon's balls were a popular thing, but no one hated them more than Hyrsea. Standing as far as she could from any one person, the eldest daughter of Zasuhr and Syddihr stood alone with goblet of

whiskey she sneaked in. She had a long list of why she despised the occasions, even if they were few and far between. First and foremost, there was all the ass kissing with lords and baronesses cozying up to both the monarchy and each other in hopes that they could garner enough trust to hide their real intentions. Even her father was doing it at the behest of her mother, together standing in a long line to converse with the demons who ruled all. It was repulsive.

Then there was the dress, which came very close to tying with the first thing.

"Sister, I hope you're enjoying yourself." said Fyrlisa, stopping beside her.

"Does it look like it, Fyr?" Hyrsea grumbled, throwing back some whiskey. "This dress is such shit and the corset choking the life out of my gut. I'd rather walk around this place naked than wear this damn thing any longer!"

Fyrlisa raised a hand to her delicate lips and giggled. "Now, now. You remember what happened the last time you did that?"

"How can I forget, Mom chained me to wall and beat my ass raw." the demon begrudgingly answered, remembering the moment like it was yesterday. She drank to forget again. "So what're you gonna do, sis?"

"Probably the usual."

"How to slice a soul into a billion pieces? Maybe shove a hot iron up their ass while you're at it?"

Fyrlisa snorted, just like her mother did whenever something, by some incredible luck, made her laugh. Or when she had to fake a laugh.

"It's funny you should mention hot irons and asses." Hyrsea only rolled her eyes and finished her drink. "You know, sister. There's plenty here who'd love to talk to you if you weren't staring viciously at them from the corner."

"They wanna talk, they can talk to me in the battlefield." Hyrsea retorted, folding her arms and flexing them just a bit. "I'd rather make conversation while trading blows, not dancing in one another's arms."

"Oh, come now Hyr. It's not all bad, why I learned fifteen ways to remove someone's entrails with toothpick talking with Lord Vilfehr. I think you'd really like him."

Hyrsea was reaching the peak of boredom now and after scanning the room for her overbearing mother, she started for the door.

"I'm outta here."

“V-Hyr? Where are you going?”

“Anywhere but here, sis. Anywhere but here.”

It was late into the night as Hyrsea trekked down deserted streets with only trash wavering in the breeze to accompany her. A blood red moon tried to shine in the blackened mist rolling over the city and crawled into nearly every crevice like tendrils of curious beasts. It was cold and damp, red waters soaking asphalt signaling it had rain just moments ago, but the lack of its presence meant it was on break for the time being. Hyr's boots splattered crimson puddles as she looked for a place to drink at, however, thanks to the royal welcoming party, nearly every place was closed for the night.

She stopped at her last option, desperately hoping it was still open. Unfortunately...

“Shit, even the Sin 6?” Hyr muttered a few curses as she turned, kicked a can, and looked around, reaching into the pocket of her leather coat for a cig. The long tail fluttered in the passing breeze, bloody droplets sliding down its smooth surface. The rain suddenly decided it wasn't on break anymore just as the demon snapped a flame at the end of her cigarette. “Just my luck.”

Hyrsea glanced at her pocket watch.

“Guess I'll just head on home then.” she grumbled. “Can't believe nothing's open.”

Defeated, she started back towards the castle looming over the entire city until something caught her ear and stopped Hyrsea in her tracks. In the shadows of an alley there came the cackling of demons and the oddest music. Demon laughter was nothing new, especially at night when most were wandering drunk until collapsing in the gutter. The music, *that* was something far different than anything she ever heard. Curious, she walked quietly down the hall between Sin 6 and an armory, stumbling on a group of punks standing around tear in reality. They didn't notice as she leaned against the wall and sucked on the sin herb wrapped in paper, taking in the music coming through.

“Whoa, man. Listen to shit man!” exclaimed one, bobbing his head to the beat of the song.

“I know, right?” replied another. “Better than anything we have in this dump.”

“What is it, man? What is it! I can't get enough!”

“What do we have here.” She announced as she tossed the dog end away. The three demons quickly spun on their heels with varying expressions of fear plastered on their crimson faces.

“Shite, that isn't who I think that is, is it?”

“Hey, uh...how's it hangin' Lady Hyrsea?”

“We weren't doin' anything! At least uh, nothing the Baroness wouldn't get pissy over,

y'know?"

Hyrsea shifted her weight to her left and put on that smirk one had when the lie was obvious. The three imps fidgeted and looked to another uncomfortably until they simultaneously fell to their knees babbling like babes.

"Please don't crush us, Lady Hyrsea! We were only just curious about that rift!" Cried the head of the bunch, pointing at the tear in reality. "Just formed you see, playing some strange noise that sounds so catchy!"

"I won't deny that." Hyrsea whispered to herself, rubbing her chin. "Piss off and I won't tell anyone what happened here, got it?"

The demons nodded and scrambled to their feet, escaping the alleyway as Hyrsea drew closer to the shred between worlds. A myriad of dimensions connected to the Punished Lands, funneling souls from their worlds to the demon's realm. In this process, it wasn't uncommon for tears to open with links to other worlds, bringing in souls from very specific places. Every soul had a unique scent that went with staying in their home realm and Hyrsea, having lived for over twenty-three hundred years, knew quite a lot.

"Human. Same kind as Mom's witch." she muttered, taking a few whiffs of the portal. She looked over her shoulders, then grinned. "Well, wouldn't hurt to see where these sweet tunes are comin' from."

Australia, March 27, 1976...

The biggest pain about those rifts was you didn't know exactly what way the exit was facing. The moment Hyrsea stepped out of the rift's other side, she fell five feet to a dirty smooth floor. She cursed as she picked herself up and brushed off whatever filth stuck to her coat, then looked around the room she was standing in. It was quickly apparent this was a human bathroom and that she wasn't alone. Two women were looking over their make-up while another, who was a few drinks from alcohol poisoning, stumbled into one of the stalls. No one seemed to notice the horned, scarlet-skinned woman in the middle of the room. For a moment, Hyrsea had forgotten why.

Humans were one of many dimensional denizens of lesser minds. They lacked the comprehension to see things of other worlds unless those things wanted to be seen, though not so much that they couldn't sense an unsettling presence. Humans always knew demon's existed, just couldn't see them. This made possessions a common prank demon's played on the hapless mortals, at least until a

robed man came shouting with those spooky cross things.

Witches were the exception of this law, for their vows gave them the eyes to see them and the minds to comprehend them.

The sober women stopped what they were doing as Hyrsea passed them by, feeling chills shoot down their spines and goosebumps form across their skins. Upon following the source of the thunderous music muffled by concrete and steel, she was greeted with a rambunctious sight. Hordes of hundreds, maybe even thousands, gathered around a stage where a band played what the demon considered the most kickass thing her pointed ears had ever heard, piercing her wretched soul and filling it with something. She didn't have a word until she heard a man shout while throwing up a hand shaped like horns.

“Rock on AC/DC!”

Rock. That fit exactly what the music was doing to her, rocking her body so hard that she was bobbing her head to the beat. Along with that, she was completely engulfed in the energy packed into the massive building. The crowds, fueled by the music and drugs, were jumping, head banging, waving signs and hands, drinking, and just having a damn good time in general. It left Hyrsea in complete and utter awe, to see these puny humans having as much fun as a demon! She was tempted to take on a human form and join them in the partying, drinking, and reveling in the jams booming with almost deafening sound.

Unfortunately, before she could, a thought finally occurred to her. She didn't know when that tear opened, which meant she didn't when it was closing. All tears eventually closed, like a wound healing over time. It varied depending on the size and while a part of her was sure she had time to spare, she shook her head.

“If I get stuck here, Mom's gonna fuckin' kill me.”

She stared at them a moment longer. All the lights were on them, the singer's hoarse voice belted out an anthem for people like them and the crowds sung in unison. Another man, prancing about like he was possessed, looked like he was having the time of his while playing some instrument that looked like those damnable lutes at the ball. Then came the chorus of the song and the music peaked.

It's a long way to the top, if you wanna rock 'n' roll!

Hyrsea grinned, then turned and started out the stadium exit back to the bathroom, her coattails wavering in the high voltage rock.

“AC...DC, huh? I'll keep that in mind.”

III

A week had passed since the demon's venture into the human realm and in that time, there were battles galore and drinking to be had. However, as entertaining as they were, it didn't strike the same cord as that rock thing. Sure, plowing a hammer into a few skulls got the blood pumping and the adrenaline running, but now that Hyrsea had a taste of what humans could do, she had to have more.

In the depths of the castle halls, Hyrsea waited in the shadows and listened to the sounds of heels on stone echoing down the stairwell. She peeked over the edge at the height of the noise and found just who she was looking for, her mother's witch. When she'd taken a whiff of the portal, Hyr recognized the scent so easily thanks to the fact that her mother took in a powerful witch from that very same plane of existence. Despite living here for almost three centuries, she still reeked of her home world.

Hyrsea turned the corner and stopped the ancient witch.

"Myrna, we need to talk."

"I'm listening." Myrna said, fixing her crow-feathered cloak.

"I..." Hyrsea paused, realizing she didn't really plan this far. Myrna watched as her master's eldest daughter scratch her head and rub her chin.

"I don't wish to speak out of line, Lady Hyrsea, but if I don't see to your mother's orders, she'll ha--"

"Wait, just wait. Uh...Ok." The Demon took a deep breath and composed herself. "I need a way to get the human world, specifically *your* human world. Can you uh, do something that can make that happen?"

Myrna stared silently at Hyrsea, considering the request.

"I could, but why?"

"Oh, uh..." It was now one of her smarter ideas popped in for a quick visit. "I was just thinking about visiting that daughter of yours, cut her a pretty good deal y'know?"

"You mean, Wi-Willow?" Myrna asked, something deep within longing to see her adoptive daughter again. "My, it's been so long since I've seen her."

The Witch reached into her coat and produced a knife, placing it in Hyrsea's hand. It looked shoddily made, just a rusted chunk of metal with a wooden grip tied to it with twine. However, as cheap as it appeared, it vibrated in her hand with intense power.

“I was planning on using this myself, but with your mother always having a task for me, I...I never found the time. Just cut stab the plane of reality and rend.” Myrna sighed sadly and continued down the hallway. “Tell Willow I said hello.”

“Hey, don't go telling mom!” Hyrsea shouted over her shoulder, not breaking her gaze on the knife. The Witch didn't reply, but Sybil didn't care. She slunk back into the shadow, where a bright flash of light burst from the darkness and for a brief moment, the stale, cold air was filled with sounds of rock 'n' roll.

And thus began Hyrsea adventures in the human world. Between the battles and balls, the demon sneaked into their realm to relish in the amazing world they inhabited, even going as far as to possess one of their kind to physically enjoy every show and every party along the way. At first, no one seemed to notice thanks to taking great caution, but the more the experience became intoxicating, the more often she went without care.

Fyrlisa had gotten curious about her sister lately. She didn't seem quite like herself, never complaining about the balls welcoming the royalty like she did so long ago and disappearing just moments after the festivities began. She didn't even stay to feast and drink, whether it was the gathering of lords or just time with friends. Something was off and as she caught her oldest twin sister slinking into an exit nearby, she set out to find it.

Syddihr had raised her daughter to be her spymaster when she took to the throne someday and the skills her mother taught sharpened her like a fine blade. The demon followed her sister through the winding corridors of Castle Nar'Shaluk while keeping to the shadows, never worrying about being caught. Hyrsea was being careful not to be spotted by the guards and enslaved working souls, but Fyrlisa knew that following her father's path honed nothing but the bloodlust. Even when they played as children, Hyr could never find her sneaky sister and that was especially true to do this day.

Hyrsea stopped and looked around one more time before quickly ducking into what was usually a larder. Sensing she was about to find the answer to her sister's mystery, Fyrlisa rushed down the hall and burst through the larder door. She let out a gasp. Hyrsea was looking back at her, startled and clutching a crude dagger while a rift shimmer beside her.

“Fyr, what the shit?!” Hyrsea growled, a fist clenching like a bullet eager to fire.

“What...what are you doing, Hyr?” She asked fearfully as she closed the door, imagining what

would happen if Syddihr walked in on them now. “Is this what you've been doing, entering other realms without the king's consent? O-Or even a Witch's!?”

“Yeah, it's exactly what it looks like sis.” answered Hyrsea, not beating around the burning bush.

“Why, Hyrsea!?” the concerned sister slowly stepped closer, the worry being so great that she could feel tears trying to form. “Do you know what's going to happen if anyone finds out you've been leaving the realm without permission!?”

“Care to remind me?” The twin snidely shot back. “I know you're just gonna tell me anyways.”

“Yes, I am because what you're doing won't just get you punished, but all of us will suffer for this! If anyone discovers this, all of our souls will be torn and cast into the fiery abyss! Mom, Dad, even our little brothers and sisters!”

“Yeah, I know that.”

“Don't you care then!?”

Hyrsea stepped forward and firmly pressed her horned head against Fyrlisa's, muttering through clenched teeth.

“You bet your ass I do, Fyr.” the elder twin stabbed her finger into Fyrlisa chest. “But as long as you don't go blathering to anyone, we'll all be perfectly fine and dandy, got it?”

Fyrlisa didn't say anything.

“Got it!?” her voice dipped into demonic tone, reflecting the building rage. “I swear, if you don't say something, I'm eating you right fuckin' and now.”

Gasping sharply, Fyrlisa stepped back in horror and struck even more speechless than before. It just took a moment before Hyrsea regretted those words. There was an awkward silence.

“Fyr, look. I'm sorry.” Hyrsea tried to say before her sister turned away and left the larder. She reached out to stop her, but the door slammed shut with an echoing *thump*. Hyrsea looked on in sorrow, then stepped inside the rift.

This trip wasn't as fun as the others. Hyrsea, in the body of some random woman, sat in a small pub in England. It was a nice little place, nearly made of polished wood, green velvet, shelves lined with a plethora of different alcohols from all over Europe. The air smelled of ginger and barely held a sound save for some idle chit-chat and clinking glasses. She thought that in a place like this, she should've been at peace yet as she down one shot after another, her mind was haunted. That brief,

utterly terrified look in Fyrlisa's face when she threatened her. No matter how many pints she drowned herself in, it just didn't leave.

It wouldn't leave then.

It didn't leave during the concert.

And it didn't leave when she returned home.

Hyrsea shuffled through the corridors of the castle depths and returned to the main hall where all that remained of the grand ball being held was just the scraps of food and spilled drink. She noticed something different this time. Normally the chandlers were put out until tomorrow morn, but not this time. However, the flames burning upside above were still lit, flooding the chamber with flickering light. Then she heard a voice that made a chill bolt down her spine like lightning.

“Hyrsea.”

The demoness heeded the call and turned. Sitting on her throne with one leg over the other, Syddihr stared her daughter down with a cold, abominable gaze. Zasuhr and Fyrlisa sat beside her, disheartened and looking to the Witch lying almost lifelessly on the floor. Though lying face down, Hyrsea knew when someone had been beaten damn near to a pulp and made an example of.

When Syddihr rose from her golden chair and strut towards her troublesome daughter, the Lord and Heiress did the same.

“You cannot fathom how disappointed nor enraged I am with you.” she spoke with the cold, hateful tone her voice always carried. “I never, *ever* thought for a second that *you* would so damnably stupid to break one of the Ancient Laws, one that wouldn't only result in punishment for you, but the entire family name.”

For some terrifying reason, whenever Syddihr was angry with anyone, her presence seemed to match her fury and right about now, she loomed over Hyrsea like the tallest spire of castle Nar'Shaluk. Despite the things she said about her mother, despite knowing full where she was likely listening, Syddihr's frigid expression of seething hatred and malice made real was enough to swallow her in fear and helplessness.

”You know this, do you not?”

Hyrsea only nodded.

“Answer me, damn you!”

“Yes, I do.” she spat out, terrified.

“Then what should I do with you.” Syddihr began to pace back and forth. “It must be severe. Severe enough you *won't* be seeing the light of day ever again.”

She stopped and looked from the corner of her eye, the reflective lenses no longer high her furious gaze.

“Should I shrink you down to an ant and lock you away in my bowels to forever wander? How about locking you away in the torture chamber to be torn to pieces for all eternity? Then again, if you like this human realm so much, I could exile you.” She turned to face Hyrsea. “It wouldn't be as fun, but at least you won't ever be a thorn in my side.”

There was a cold silence as Mother stared daughter down like a puppy that had pissed on the new carpet. It was then that Fyrlisa and Zasuhr stood up in her defense.

“Syddihr, my sweet, is this all so necessary? She only did one thing.”

“Don't you dare my sweet me, Zasuhr Vadxih!” She shouted, suddenly turning to her fury on the much taller demon she called a husband. “This one thing will ruin us! Ruin all we've worked for this entire millennia! I won't let anything take that away from us, not even my own flesh and blood.”

“Mother please, father's right.” She stepped between her raging mother and Hyrsea. “You're taking thi-”

“Fyrlisa, keep out of this!” Syddihr spun instantly, unnaturally, to face Fyrlisa. “While I appreciate you and Myrna telling me of this, these matters are not of your concern!”

Hyrsea suddenly felt her blood boil as anger's flames raged hotter than hell.

“Fyrlisa, you fucking told her!?”

Fyrlisa turned to Hyrsea, that same fearful look in her eyes as before, but she was far too furious to care now.

“Hy-Hyr, I'm sorry.” She stuttered, recalling what her sister would do. “I-I thought if I told Mother, she would let you off easier. D-Discuss possible options.”

“Are you serious, Fyr!? You think this cold-hearted, uncaring, selfish *bitch* would even give an ounce of a damn!?” With every word that came out of her mouth, Hyrsea's temperature rose to a molten pitch until finally exploding. She took hold of Fyrlisa's arms, pinning them to her side in a bone-crushing grasp.

“Hyr, wha-what are you doing!?”

“I trusted you.” she snarled and look to her Mother, who was watching intently and almost nervously. “Fuck you, Syddihr! Let's see how you feel after this!”

"No, Hyr don't!" cried Zasuhr and Fyrlisa as Hyrsea opened wide with pops and cracks, giving her twin sister a view into oblivion before shoving her head and shoulders deep inside. There was a brief shriek turned into muffled whimpering as the stronger sister worked her weaker sibling down her throat. Being an experienced predator from a thousand battles, she swiftly gulped down her sister's breasts and forcibly downing her stomach; taking it all down the tight passage to raging stomach.

Fyrlisa, stuck frozen with fear, stared down the esophagus. Never in her entire life did she ever think Hyrsea would swallow her whole. She knew exactly what would happen next, she knew the pain and shame many felt after a tour in Hyrsea's insides. Two thoughts were going through her mind: the screams of those being digested alive and memories of her and her sister through the years; playing together, learning together, sticking with one another in the toughest of times. The latter of those memories turned to a gaping maw now devouring her alive.

Finally, the other side opened to reveal Hyrsea's stomach, already half-full with crimson stomach juices. While the stomach walls shifted vigorously, its grumbles and growls sounded like bestial roars rivaling the Punished Lands fiercest beasts. She tried to keep herself from going down any further, but like guard dealing with an unwilling prisoner, it forced her into the hellishly humid cell and dunked her head in the acids below as the rest of her body started to join her.

Outside, Hyrsea quickly down her sister's hips before throwing her body back and lifting Fyrlisa's flailing legs in the air. Thighs, knees, ankles vanished with heavy, powerful gulps and all that was left were the twin's wiggling feet. The defiant older sister shot her mother a sly glare, like a child about to reach for the cookie jar despite protest.

"Hyrsea, don't you dare." threatened Syddihr through teeth clenched so tight, there almost about to break.

But she did. Snapping her jaws shut with an audible *clack!* Hyrsea swallowed what remained of her twin sister. The rest of the unfortunate demon was forced into the cramped, acidic embrace of her stomach. Her clothes, a simple dress she wore for the Ball, immediately started to sizzle and burn in the juices. She could feel the tingling sensation turn to a burning pain across her crimson skin. Immediately, she started to kick and scream; splashing in the painful caustic waters as she pushed the walls out.

"Hyr, please! Don't do this!" she started to cry. "W-We're sisters! D-Doesn't that mean anything to you anymore!?"

But in Hyrsea's rage-filled eyes, not anymore. Instead, she only locked eyes with her mother

and father as the digestive process took its toll. It didn't care who was contained within. To it, all was food for digestion, to process and make part of the body as a whole, and until it was done, there was no way out.

Syddihr watched as the crying and squirming grew weaker and Fyrlisa's definition softened into a round ball of a stomach that proceeded to shrink back into a six pack. Moments later, Hyrsea let a belch go into her hand and out came Fyrlisa's soul. She only stood there and stared at her sister. She slowly shook her head, tears filling ethereal eyes before running to Syddihr and digging her face in her bosom.

“Mother, why did it have to come this? Why!?”

Syddihr, for the first time Hyrsea ever saw her, did something only a loving mother would do: cradling her weeping child.

“Go.” She muttered disdainfully. “From now to forever on Hyrsea, you are hereby exiled. Take that knife, go back to the human's realm you value so much, and never, ever return or so help me I *will* end you.”

Hyrsea angrily huffed and turned around, walking until a large familiar hand stopped her. She looked up to find her father. Surprisingly, he looked sympathetic.

“Sweetie, I...I still love you.” He started, whispering as if Syddihr couldn't hear him. “I know it wouldn't work now, but I'll try to convince her to let you come back someday. Don't you think all your little brothers and sisters would want you around? I certainly think so.”

Hyrsea still had a few ticking time bombs full of pure rage, but her father's words managed to diffuse one of them. She placed a hand on his and managed a weak smile.

“I won't forget you pops. Or everyone else.”

After his hand slid off, the exiled demon continued her way out. Along the way, she felt something come back up and spat out Fyrlisa's glasses. Their round frames were soaked in spit and digestive juices, but they managed to survive the digestive process that melted her sister down. With a sad sigh, she set them down before ripping a hole in the wall between realities and took her last leave.

IV

And ever since Hyrsea set foot on the other side of that rift, she never looked back. For the years that followed, she wandered the world, drifting from place to place, job to job, and party to party. For a time, she had her fill of fun, food, and booze by simply taking the minds and bodies of every man

and woman she could find. When the possession became boring, she took to her own body from a magazine in South America and from there, things got a lot more exciting. Nothing beat fucking, drinking, fighting with a physical form Hyrsea always thought.

However, things were only nothing but fun at first. As the years went on and the 80's turned to nineties, which then turned to the next century over, Hyrsea often found herself sitting in a quiet bar and despondently staring at the bottom of a glass. It started with small thoughts and memories, then grew into questions.

How was the family doing?

Was Mom still mad?

Did Fyrlisa resent her for what she did?

All of them weighed on her mind and it only grew heavier as time went on. Eventually, it dulled her love of parties and concert, booze and thrills like she was laying in a blanket someone barfed on the night before. As she stared despondently at shot glasses until the world became clearer at the bottom, a realization started to dawn that maybe the parties weren't really doing it anymore. Maybe a wild time wasn't she needed to think things over, but instead, someplace nice and quiet, a small town to live for a while and relax. That was what lead her to a little place in Pennsylvania.

May 14, 2002...

After wandering for miles and miles, Hyrsea came to a stop before a large, old fashion sign with the words *Welcome to Wolfpine* written in an old fashion font, along with *Established in 1910*. Looking behind it, she found the town proper lying before her. Surrounded by a patched quilt of farms on rolling hills and a thick forest with the occasional house here and there, the town was closely huddled together and made up of all kinds of buildings big and small. Being in the middle of spring, the weather was rather pleasant while the singing birds soared through the air; which only added to the small town charm.

Hyrsea, feeling a warm sensation engulf her heart, smiled and nodded.

“Yeah, this'll do.”

And with that, she started down the road and gave a wave to an Amish buggy trotting up the road.

Hyrsea had come to Wolfpine from its densely wooded western side and, deciding it would just

be quicker to cut through, was now trekking through the Woods. Though she wasn't too much of a forest fan, she didn't really mind it. In fact, she often woke up in the woods after a night of hard drinking, so she was pretty well experienced through venturing into seas of trees and fauna.

She chuckled as she recalled the time she wrestled a bear in Russia.

There was something off about these parts, though. She'd been here for an almost an hour, yet Hyrsea was felt as if she was going in circles; a thought confirmed by the sight of a familiar stump.

"Are you kidding me?" She exclaimed, rubbing the sweat from her brow. "I swear I was walking a straight fuckin line, dude."

Something then caught her eye as she looked around for answer: a small charm dangling from the branches high above.

"Oh, so that's what this is. Some Blair Witch shit, huh?" She cupped her hands around her mouth and shouted. "Yo, if there's a hag out here, come on out!"

She promptly sat down on the stump and waited, killing time with a tune and studying her nails. Moments later, she heard leaves crackling behind her.

"Are you a quick one or were you follow me the whole time?" Hyrsea stood up and turned to find a Witch clad in orange behind her and looked like she hadn't slept her entire life, which the demon wouldn't have been surprised what with the night terrors every witch had. Unlike most witches, this one struck a familiar chord. "Huh, do I know you from somewhere?"

"I don't know." she replied wearily, scratching an itch on her derriere. "Who are you."

Hyrsea chuckled and, grabbing both sides of her head, tore the mask in half to reveal her true self. The Witch gasped, knowing exactly who she was at a single glance, and bowed.

"Hyrsea Vadxihr, the lost daughter of Syddihr Searkoibal and Zasuhr Vadxihr." She stuttered and lifted her head back up, revealing a face of deranged obsession. "The most powerful of all their children, even to this day I sense. What an honor it is to be before you, lady Hyrsea."

"Eh, you can can the Lady crap now." muttered the demon, allowing her facade to come back together like to waves of glue slowly colliding. Guilty pangs stung her heart. "Anyway, who're you?"

"Marrow Malloway, a humble servant of your family."

"Bet you don't have to worry about souls with that town next do-Wait, did you say Malloway?"

The Witch nodded, that unnerving smile still on her face while the demon's seal spun in her eyes.

"As in...*Myrna* Malloway?"

"Ye-Yes, she was my mentor." she replied, excited like a child who just heard they found a puppy. "Did Syddihr...did she keep her promise? Is Mo-I mean, Myrna serving her in the Punished Lands?"

Hyrsea remembered Myrna's unconscious body lying on the red carpeted floor. She didn't know if she was still alive, but the witch was as powerful as she was immensely loyal. She wasn't a pawn Syddihr would throw away without a *very* good reason.

"Last time I checked, yeah." She said, telling a half-truth that was enough to turn that creepy smile into one slightly more friendly. Recalling tales Myrna told of her adopted daughter, this was certainly the apprentice named Willow. "Before I left, she even told me to tell ya hello."

"Thank Saelon and thank you, lady Hyrsea." She removed her pointed hat and put it to her chest. "Is there anything you need? I am your loyal servant."

"Heh, don't tell my mom that." Hyrsea chuckled before pointing the Witch's attention to the charm above.

"Oh, yes." She hastily pulled out a charm and placed in Hyrsea's hand before pointing in the town's direction. "Just keep heading that way, you'll find the campsite nearby. You won't miss it. I know I haven't."

There was devilish chuckle as she turned around and returned from whence she came. The demoness quickly went on her own way, wanting to get as far away as possible before she grew hungry again.

Almost an hour later, Hyrsea was finally in the town of Wolfpine. As she always did when she had not a penny to her name and walking the streets of a new place, the first goal was to find a job. She got quite good at that over the years, scouring the streets like a bloodhound on a criminal's trail until finding something simple that paid well. Then came finding a motel that didn't mind someone staying as long as they had a wad of cash ready to go every month. That was the routine she went through the past twenty years, but something about this place made her feel she was going to stay a little while more than a month.

Hyrsea's search eventually lead to a gas station near the heart of main street, a help wanted sign plastered on the automated doors. She smirked, not because she thought this was the one, but because working here meant she was just down the street from the local bar. Knowing just what was needed to get hired, she straightened up and walked in with the perfect amount of confidence that just shouted

Yeah, I'm the one you should hire right at this very moment.

Much to her surprise, the place was empty.

"You here for the job?" came a stern voice that almost reminded Hyrsea of her mother. She turned to find a woman in her late thirties dressed in a fine suit that, once again, reminded her of mother dearest. The woman looked down at the clothes Hyrsea wore, an AC/DC jacket, tank top, jeans, and old pair of sneakers that all weathered the elements a thousand times over. She let a humored huff. "Jesus, you're like me when I was a kid. Are you a drifter or something?"

"Yep." Hyrsea said cocksure. "I've been up and down the country, taking work where I find it."

"It shows." the business woman replied before offering her hand. "Allie O'Connors, you got a name drifter?"

"Uh..."

In Hyrsea's life journey on the human plane, she went through without ever needing a name. She barely worked longer than two months before she either ducked out for something a bit more permanent or was fired for a long list of reasons. Any name she got was from someone who just took a guess and she went with it, but this time was going to be different. Despite being here for only an hour or two, she liked it here enough that maybe it was time to settle down, kick back, take in the country suburban scene for awhile. That meant she needed a name and one came to mind, which she'd come to like. Besides it was about time she dropped that long ass one.

"Sybil." She answered, taking Allie's hand and giving a shake. "Sybil Pyres."

"Well Sybil, it's a pleasure to meet you. As you can tell, Allie O's isn't open yet." As she went on, the drifting demoness had a look around while adjusting her cap. Outside, the place appeared to be a gas station, but inside it was another world taking shape as a grocery store. Albeit an *empty* one. "Grand opening's schedule in three days and I'll be having everything shipped in from other chains before then."

"You mean this isn't your first one?"

"Fifth." Sybil's eyes lit up, briefly impressed. "Now, today's your lucky day. Since you're the first person to actually come in here, I'm willing to make you a deal."

Sybil chuckled. "I'm one for deals, so I'm listening."

"I need a manager, think you're up to snuff?"

"Yes, ma'am." she lied gleefully. In reality, she'd never been a manager, but she was always

willing to tackle a new challenge.

“Then consider yourself hired. Since you just drifted into town, I'll pay you upfront today if you help the first truck unload. Think you could handle that?”

Sybil pulled back her right sleeve and flexed her thick, toned muscle, a cheeky grin on her face. Surprisingly, Allie grinned.

“I like your confidence, miss Pyres. I think we're going to get along just fine.”

“I aim to please, ma'am. Hey, you know a cheap motel anywhere around here?”

The demoness closed the door let her duffle bag slide off her shoulder. She never felt so happy to take that damn thing off more than now. It was almost pleasurable in the relief it brought. The Motel room wasn't too much than any she stayed in before. Two beds, a TV (with cable), a bathroom, four blue walls and a plush floor all for a decent price. Sybil flipped the television on and sat down at the edge of her bed, letting out a sigh as she finally took the load off. She glanced at the screen to see a bearded guy dressed in a nice suit and working for some random law firm in town.

“Remember, if you or someone you love has been diagnosed with Lynks Disease, you're entitled to compensation. Call now.”

Sybil shook her head

“Now it's really like the other motels.” she moaned and fell back on the back. “Today's the end of Hyrsea and the beginning of Sybil. No more worries, no more thinking of home. I'm totally turning a new leaf today.”

It sounded easier said.

V

It had been a several years since Sybil scored the job. So far it was nothing but tiresome work, a little annoying compared to human parties, but it what she had to do to make human money and pay for her hotel. Along with every other thing she had to do around here, she had to sit in a cramped room and go over endless piles of papers ranging from pay to restocks.

She found it made for a good time to sneak a few drinks to help get her through the day.

As for the strange town, Sybil had gotten used to its quirky nature, pulling things from one place and pasting it within Wolfpine's boundaries as if it fit. It reminded of her home actually and that was both a good thing and a bad thing for many reasons. After calling this plane of existence home for

over twenty years, homesickness was beginning to crawl into her heart; clawing and biting here and there with memories of her family and Nar'Shaluk.

As if that weren't enough, there was another burden weighing on her conscious. She didn't have a friend in all this world. Sure there were people she hung out with at parties, but they didn't share the same bonds as the friends she had back home. They were together for a few parties here and there, but nothing else. For the past two decades, Sybil had been alone. A disparaging thought that drove her to drink for a reason she never imagined she would: sorrow.

The demoness in disguise heaved a heavy sigh as she restocked the cereal aisle. She wondered how her family was doing, how the city was doing, how everything was back home.

And then there was a girl. Sybil noticed her from the corner of her eye approach, dressed in a sweater decorated with a band she had a vague memory of opening for KISS back in the day and a skirt, sneakers too with baggy socks hiked up to her knees. Standing in timid posture, Sybil couldn't see her face under her bangs when she spoke.

"U-Um, I-I'd like to purchase these." she stuttered and pointed at her bag. "B-But um, the cashier isn't um..."

Sybil looked over the young woman and noticed that her co-workers were indeed on break.

"Alright, hang on a sec." she said before quickly stashing everything on the shelves and heading to the counter. As she walked down the aisle of various cereals, chips, and candies, her ears picked up the opening riff of a song from the band she was trying to remember and it wasn't just coming from the intercom. Upon closer inspection, Sybil could hear the meek woman hum it as well, even singing quietly to herself.

A few minutes later, they were both standing divided by the counter.

"Haven't seen you around here before. New girl in town?" Sybil asked, doing what she always did to kill the silence. The woman shook her head.

"I-I lived here all m-my life." she mumbled. "I-I moved close b-by recently, fi-figured I should sh-shop here now."

"Well, as an employee of this fine establishment." Sybil started, trying to sound proud of working here while she scanned several bags of chips. "I think you made an excellent choice."

This little gag got a meek chuckle, then nothing but the girl's humming. As the silence between loomed like a thick smog, the first song ended and its wake came one she knew all too well: AC/DC.

The moment the rock kicked off with a bang, she noticed the girl sing that softly as well. Sybil's heart fluttered, finally something they had in common. At least, she hoped it was.

“Love some AC/DC d'ya?” She said with a sly grin.

The girl immediately looked up, a shade of red in her cheeks. Sybil gasped, just as stunned as she was but not for the same reason. This young woman looked almost exactly like her long lost sister, of course, with some tired circles under her eyes and pale skin.

“Fyrlisa?” she whispered in shock.

“Wha-What?”

Sybil shook it off and continued.

“You like AC/DC too?”

“Ye-Yeah!” She replied, a smile growing on her face and stuttering getting stronger like every word was being thrown around a powerball lottery. “M-My dad, an-and I guess my mom too. The-they're big fans. I-I even went to a concert too when I was little, m-my dad won tickets. Ca-Can't remember the name of it.”

The girl eyes shifted every which way, avoiding Sybil's gaze.

“D-Do you li-like rock n' roll in ge-general o-or um...ju-just A-AC/DC?” She quickly grew frantic. “No-Not that the-there's anything wr-wrong with that! It's perfectly f-fine!”

“I do actually.” Sybil answered, grinning widely. “That stuff's perfect for a party girl like me, can't stop listening to it, man.”

She giggled.

“Ye-Yeah, I-I do too.” She nodded. “But lately, I-I listened to a lot of Rush. I-I actually went to their Clockwork Angels tour last week! I-It was the best thing e-ever!”

“Oh yeah, that's it!” Sybil exclaimed with a snap of her fingers, the memory colliding with her brain like an out of control freight train. “Rush! Yeah, saw 'em play a show with AC/DC and Rolling Stones up in Canada. Pretty good music, lotta story stuff.”

“Yo-You like Rush?” she asked with stars twinkling brightly in her eyes.

“Sure.” Sybil shrugged. “I think I have a few Rock's Greatest Hits tapes with a few of their songs on 'em I like.”

There was another silence between them, but this time, it was a small break from a fun conversation. Sybil offered her hand.

“Sybil. Sybil Pyres.”

The young woman's gaze shifted from face to hand before smiling and accepting the gesture.

“Cha-Charlotte I-Isley.”

There were three shakes before handshake broke and Sybil finished bagging Charlotte's groceries.

“Alright, that'll be twenty-one dollars and twelve cents.” Sybil waited for a beat and Charlotte chuckled as she reached for her wallet.

“Really?”

“Nah, it's actually fifty-five, forty-two.” Sybil winked. “Come back soon, alright? I'm always workin' here.”

Charlotte nodded as she handed over the money and took her things.

“O-Ok. U-Uhm...” The longer she tried to speak, the more frazzled she got until eventually, it exploded. “U-Uh, um! I-I'll se-see you la-later!”

And out the door she went, darting like a bullet out of a gun. Sybil raised a hand, telling her she still had change, but it was far too late. Chuckling weakly, she relaxed and went about her business; stashing the money in the register before slamming the busted thing shut. She couldn't believe how much that Charlotte girl looked like her sister. The soft hair, friendly eyes, warm smile. If only the glasses were round instead of rectangular, then she'd be a spitting image of her. This only made the guilty knife dig deeper in her soul.

“I wonder if Fyr hates me.” She muttered, staring longingly at the young woman walking down the distant sidewalk. She snapped out of it eventually and put on her smile again. “Well, at least I finally found a friend around here. Hopefully.”

A Year Later...

With a chuckle, Sybil snuck a bottle of Jack Daniels in her jacket pocket. There was no worry of a camera catching her because, as moderator of the security cameras, she always shut off the one of looking over the alcohol section when she needed a drink. However, that wasn't what caught her this time.

“Miss Pyres, are you sure you should be doing that?” Charlotte asked nervously, restocking the milk section.

“Don't worry babe.” She assured, giving the new employee a thumbs up. “I've done this for a while and haven't been caught yet. Anyway, how's your fourth-”

“Third.”

“-Third day of work going, all settled in?”

“We-Well enough.” Charlotte answered, then lowered her head. “I-I still um...can't get the cash register right.”

“Really?” Sybil smirked and folded her arms. “You never worked a register before?”

Charlotte nodded. “I worked on computers before this. Ta-Taking them apart, re-repairing them, a-and putting them b-back together.”

Sybil looked as if someone surprised her a fine aged whiskey.

“No kidding?”

“Nope, an-and I never worked a register. Ju-Just stayed in the back and fixed computers all day.” There was a sad breath leaving her lips. “I miss that job.”

“Really liked that kind of stuff huh?” Sybil asked, sympathy coming out to give the poor girl a pat on the back.

Charlotte nodded.

“I like computers as much as I do writing and not only was it a perfect job, it paid really well and kept me from worrying about my rent...at least not until it moved all the way to Manheim.” Charlotte looked to Sybil with eyes like that of a recently kicked puppy. “I-I don't know what I'm gonna do now. Mom and my older sisters say I should get a roommate to help with the bills, but...I dunno if I could handle another person living with me. I can barely function when I have *neighbors* over for a minute or two, let alone someone living with me twenty-four, seven.”

“Aww, come on Charlotte, it's not that bad is it?”

Charlotte just glared at her before getting back to work.

“Jeeze, sorry dude. Just sayin'.”

“I-It's alright.” Charlotte resigned. “You're n-not the only one to question my anxieties.”

“Wait, I wasn't tryin' to-” Sybil sighed and patted Charlotte on the shoulder. “Look, if you ever wanna hang out, The Wasted Wolf is just down the road. I promise a few drinks and talking to an ear willing to listen will help you unwind.”

Charlotte looked like she was considering it.

“I-I....I'll think about it.” She said before putting in the last jug of milk and standing up, rubbing her hands to warm them up. “Tha-Thanks Sybil.”

“Anytime, Char.” Sybil said with a wink. “Now, if you promise not to tell the boss lady, I'll

put the classic rock station on the intercoms.”

Charlotte lit up like the fourth of July. "O-Ok, p-promise!"

“Atta girl.” chuckled Sybil. “I’ll catch ya later, babe.”

As Sybil walked into the back, she could feel Charlotte's gleeful gaze at her back.

The clock on her phone read 9:42 when Sybil got off her motorcycle and started down the row of doors that lead up the Parker's Motel's fourteen rooms. The demoness could hear everything going on with each one. Felice was seeing another customer in room 3 and The Martins were fighting again judging by the muffled and very angry yelling in room 4, which was probably going to lead grouchy old Randall to come banging on their door at some point. Ignoring all the noise, she slipped back into her pocket and pulled out the key to room number 7, swinging it on her finger as she got closer to her room.

“Miss Pyres, miss Pyres!” Came a squeaky, pitchy voice. The demon tenant turned to find the motel owner Andrew Parker hobbling towards her. Her was short, round man with beady eyes, a small nose, and scruffy five o'clock shadow surrounding a mouth that never seemed to close all the way. He slowed to a stop and pulled out an inhaler, took a hit, and continued. “Miss Pyres, you really crossed the line this time!”

“Alright, what did I do?” said Sybil with a smile and shrug.

“I had a word with the cleaning staff today and they've had it! They said your room's a complete utter mess and when I had a look inside I was appalled at what I found.”

“Oh please, man. They always complain.” She unlocked the door and let it swing open. Her tone changed as she looked inside. “It can be that ba-Oh...”

It was that bad. Sybil's room was a complete and utter mess, the floor was covered in empty bags of food and dead beer cans. The carpets were stained as much as the walls, splattered with splotches of dried booze and holes punched in from drunken rages. Remarkably, the only thing that remained devoid of trash were the beds. At least, those would *look* clean if someone didn't come in with a black light.

Sybil slipped a hand under her cap and scratched her head as she turned back to Parker.

“Oh god, I'm so, so, so sorry. I was having a rough couple of nights lately and I must've went wild, holy shit.” Sybil started to explain as the motel's face turned red and his foot tapped faster. She didn't want to reveal that this was all because of a guilty conscious, so she went on to the next best

thing to say. "Look, I'll uh...I'll pay for this."

"No, no more chances! I already, on good faith, gave you three before and seeing as this happened *again*, that was three too many! Out want you out now, Miss Pyres!"

"Aw, come on dude! You can't let me go now, there's nowhere else to go out here." She pointed to the dark world to her left. "You're seriously going to let an innocent girl like me go out there in the dark!"

Andrew Parker continued to glare, but inside his balding dome, his mind was thinking it over.

"Fine. You can stay for one more night." He said finally, calming down. "But you're leaving tomorrow and paying *triple* the usual price for damages."

"Fair enough." replied Sybil.

"Well, if we're done here Miss Pyres, good night. I expect you gone in the morning."

"Yeah, good night."

He turned around and headed down the sidewalk leading back to the main office. Sybil just flipped him off before heading inside and nearly slamming the door off its hinges. She looked around at the mess around her.

"You really fucking did this time, Sybil." She muttered, sliding a cigarette out of her pocket and lighting it up. She took a deep breath from it, then let out a cloud of acrid smoke. "Whatever I'm gonna do, I guess I better pack."

After digging up her old duffle bag, she grabbed the clothes all litter around and packed them away; along with the mementos, she gathered over the years. It wasn't that much and it wasn't long after she was sitting down beside her bag.

"Do I really wanna leave Wolfpine after all these years?" She wondered to herself, cupping her mouth and gripping her smoke in two fingers. "Let's see...It's nice, its quiet, everyone's pretty nice, I have a stable job, a surprising amount of parties at the college up north, and it's right between two cities that frequently pull in those old bastards for some sweet rock concerts."

Sybil stood up and nodded.

"Yeah, I'm gonna stay. No more drifting for Sybil." She started to pace. "Can't stay here anymore and I don't have money to buy a house or apartment or whatever. What the shit am I gonna do?"

She took another long breath and let another smoke billow before sitting on the bed. Flicking the dead dog end in the trash, she rested her head against her knuckles.

"I guess...maybe I could check the paper and look for someone searching for-wait a second." She lifted her head up with a grin, an image from the day flashing in her mind. "Charlotte! She said she was thinking about a roommate, I could ask her! Yeah, that's it!"

She smiled one moment, then sulked the next.

"Yeah, right." she mumbled. "Poor thing looked she was going to fall apart the seems even considering that. Hmm...Well, maybe. Maybe if I'm smart about this, I can make it work. Just gotta bring it up at work, maybe invite her for a drink or a bite to eat, get to know her, then pop the question."

Sybil thought it over, then chuckled.

"Jesus, I sound like I'm asking her to marry me." She sighed. "Well, I guess I should hit the hay. Gotta get up before Parker does."

She flopped back on the bed and relaxed, letting herself fall into peaceful slumber.

It was near the end of Charlotte's shift and peeking from the tiny, tiny crack of the office door, Sybil watched as Charlotte shambled into the back room, went to her locker to collect her things, and clock out; humming a little tune under her breath.

All right, Sybil. She thought to herself all the while. How're we gonna do this? I need an ice breaker, but what? Hmm...well I only got one option considering there's only one thing we like at all. Heh, hope she doesn't want to actually see the tickets.

As Charlotte started for the time punch clock, Sybil burst from her office and wrapped an arm around her. Charlotte, like a deer in headlights, froze up.

"Heya Charlotte! How's it goin'?" She jubilantly greeted.

"Uh, mmm... C-Could be better." The ever nervous young woman replied.

"I got two tickets to an AC/DC concert in Pittsburgh, wanna come with?"

Charlotte shook her head. "N-No thanks. I-I have um...things to do."

"Aw, come on. You always say that." She said, her voice tinged with disappointment. "Well, there's a party bein' held at the friend of a friend of a friend's place. Why don't you come along? "

"So-Sorry, I-I'm not good with parties."

Sybil sighed sadly. "Do you wanna at least hang out sometime?"

"Ha-Hang out? Why? Th-The only thing we have in common is that we both like AC/DC."

"Good enough for me!" Sybil heartily laughed. "Friendships gotta start somewhere right?"

"I-I'm sorry, Sybil. I'm gonna be busy."

"Busy huh?" she pouted. "Whatever you say, Char. One of these days though, we *have* to hang out."

Charlotte shrugged as she slid her punch-out card in and out of the machine. "Yeah, sure. I'll see you later, Sybil."

Sybil watched as Charlotte Isley took her leave with a stride like a Zombie that wasn't only dead, but suffering from an intense bout of depression. When the metal door squeaked to a close, Sybil smirked and produced a folded piece of paper and opened it to reveal Charlotte's resume. A quick scan and Sybil knew exactly where she lived.

"Oh, Carter Homes Apartment Complex huh?" Sybil chuckled as she pocketed the resume. "Well, Charlotte ol' pal. If you not gonna come to Sybil, Sybil's gonna come to you."

VI

Present Day...

Sybil and Charlotte flopped down on the sofa at once with long, weary sighs. After a busier day than usual, there was nothing better than coming home to a soft, if albeit worn, sofa and a bottle of beer. She popped the cap of hers with a fang and greedily sucked down its contents.

"Thank goodness it's Friday." Charlotte said softly, her nervousness unraveling as she turned on the television.

"Agreed." Sybil followed before a sudden belch blasting from her lips. "Phew, damn. Got any plans this weekend."

"N-Not really." Charlotte replied. "Patty's out of town and I can only pray Aunt Marrow isn't bored."

"Heh, prey." chuckled Sybil and got a playful nudge to the sides in response.

"Shut up." she giggled. "Who knows what'll make her come knocking on the window."

"Oh yeah, right. Sorry Char." she said before starting a bit a chit-chat.

At least until Sybil looked to Charlotte and something hit her, making her usually jovial grin shrink to a frown.

While it was mostly all a good time, there was a downside to this living arrangement and that was Sybil's guilty conscious. Despite getting to know Charlotte so well, the human still reminded her of Fyrlisa and anything that did that, reminded Sybil of what she did in her blind fury. In fact, her guilt

had gotten even deeper upon discovering that they had even *more* similarities! Both were reclusive souls, both cared more for their friends and family more than themselves, and both like to read and write all the time among several other things. There was once a time Charlotte thought of getting circular frame glasses to replace her current pair, but Sybil shot that down in a split second. At this point, the glasses were just about the only thing they didn't shared. Well, that and the dark circles under Charlotte's eyes.

While the demoness was able to fend off most of her memory's assault, there were times where it took her by surprise and struck her in the heart with a very lucky arrow.

"Huh? Hey, what's wrong Sybil?" Charlotte asked worryingly

"Oh, uh nothing." She quickly took a drink.

"No, that wasn't nothing." Charlotte countered. "You looked really, really sad."

Sybil shook her head, still drinking.

"Y'know, I've been noticing that more and more lately and it always seems to happen when you're looking at me." Charlotte folded her arms. "I'd like to know why."

Sybil lowered her glass and sighed. Guess it was time now.

"Y'know how I told you about how I got here; exiled by my mother, wandered the earth, and whatnot. Some bits of my life while I was back at home here and there?"

"Yeah."

"Well, um." She chuckled and scratched the back of her red-tinged black head. "I uh, never told you that you look almost exactly like my sister. The uh, one I ate cuz I was super pissed at my mom."

"Oh." Charlotte replied sullenly.

"Yeah." Sybil added to the silence. "I mean, nothing against you Charlotte. You're an awesome person, it's just uh..."

"Makes you think of home?"

Sybil snapped her fingers. "Exactly."

"Sybil, have you been feeling homesick lately?"

"Oh sister, you don't even know." Sybil laughed softly. "But yeah, I've been thinking of my family, friends, pulverizing the shit out of whoever attacked my home."

"Why don't you go back? I-I mean i-it's been what, over twenty years? M-Maybe things changed?"

“Didn't I say my Mom can *really* hold a grudge?”

“Oh yeah, well...How about calling them then?”

“I thought about it, especially with your aunt out there in the woods.” Sybil took a sip. “But I dunno. One of these days I'll have the guts to go and have her call my dad up, but it's not this night or this whole damn month.”

With a sad sigh, a heavy with depression hung over them both. While Sybil just stared at the bottle of her glass like she always did whenever thinking of home, Charlotte looked idly around her apartment until her eyes fell on the stereo behind them.

“Oh! I-I know what'll cheer you up!” Charlotte turned to the small shipping crate of records and pulled one out, threw it on the record player, and picked a song she knew always got Sybil back in good spirits: *Big Balls*. The intro started and Sybil almost spat out her beer, hand over her mouth to hold back from bursting out laughing as a smile twisted into form. Her resistance started to dwindle as Charlotte started to sing and put on a show, speaking like a posh British man.

“I'm upper, upper-class high society. God's gift to ballroom notoriety and I always fill my ballroom. The event is never small. All the social papers say I've got the biggest balls of all.”

Sybil was nearly bursting at the seams as Charlotte started pointing to herself, Sybil, and people that didn't exist.

“I've got big balls, I've got big balls, And they're such big balls, Dirty big balls, And he's got big balls, And she's got big balls, But we've got the biggest balls of them all!”

Tears started filling her eyes while Charlotte went from overly excited for big balls back to posh bragging.

“And my balls are always bouncing. My ballroom always full and everybody comes and comes again. If your name is on the guest list, No one can take you higher. Everybody says I've got great balls of fire!”

And Sybil couldn't hold back any longer, exploding with a fit of laughter that always made one gripped their sides and kicking the air while bellowing out a joy for all to hear. While song went on, Charlotte's job was done. Flopping down on the couch with her laughter, she was immediately met with Sybil's hard, one-arm embrace.

“Ah, Charlotte. You're the best, babe.”

“I-I try.” Charlotte replied and rested her head on Sybil's shoulder. “Hey, if you need moral support when you do call you dad, I-I'll be there f-for you. Emotional s-support y'know?”

“Heh, heh. Thanks, Charlotte.” she tussled Charlotte's short hair and turned her gaze to the television. She gave that some thought. It had been over twenty years since she was booted here and she was surprised to learn over the years that things, whether it was technology, art, or thoughts, changed in the winding river that was time. Sure, twenty years wasn't a lot to a demon considering they were eternal beings, but that rule still applied. Especially if there were certain parties trying hard to convince other certain parties that Sybil wasn't all that bad and that what happened occurred because everyone was angry at one another. She knew well her mother was stubborn like a volcano about to explode, but she wondered if she still felt the same about the exile now as she did back then.

Still, Sybil was fearful of making that call, but with Charlotte on her side, she was much less so than before. Hugging her just a little more warmly, Sybil grinned again and kicked back for a movie marathon of 80's action flicks.