

The atmosphere felt taut. Thick with life and moisture. Yet tense, waiting, like a great pair of lungs bloated with building breath.

“Hello?”

There was a smell in the air.

Hanging on the fringes of many other commonplace smells, this one was alluring somehow. Not even pleasant, in all honesty, but still. Bile fascination. Or idiocy.

You pushed this thought aside as you leaned a little further into the alleyway shadows, one hand resting loosely on the weathered bricks back behind. The clamminess of their rugged edges just felt like yet another aspect of the cool, heavy night that so many got lost in; lost thoroughly of their own accord, more and more commonly.

And you pushed *that* thought aside too. The idle glint of faint moonlight on puddles seemed to have clipped your pied wings. They were pretty to look at, sure, enough for a glance, maybe a detour, but for what else? Why did they hold your attention so long, and why these over any other watery offcast? Were you the only one who felt this way? Was the urge for someone else to solve your odd situation that great?

As well as your eyes continuing their lazy venture along the rain-soaked passage, even as your mind came alive with unease?

But what instead fanned away the reverie was an unnervingly close *clap*, empowered and bolstered in this enclosed area, and an assault on your frazzled nerves even after you recognised the culprit as your own lazily waving foot, tapping and scraping along the bumpy pavement. You leaned back, blowing air through your clenched teeth, feeling your chest ease up a little before promptly clutching again.

A pair of lights shone brighter, sharper than the others you'd seen, enough to grab your attention. One closer look only brought back half the image of a person: with an untidy mop of hair sloughing over his downcast face, the passing shower had been as kind to him as to the rest of this place. He was leaning out far enough to reveal a thick sweater--which looked just as uncared for--before the other inhabitants of the alley had swallowed up the remainder of his body. Bulging bags of trash surrounding dirty old dustbins, the swaying containers having mostly failed to keep down their load. One particularly fattened bag had long since split, and the rubbish did roam free.

Oh, really? Are we all out for an adventure tonight?

The man in the shadows stayed quiet. He glanced at you, gaze skittering visibly, then leaving yours, then returning and lingering, then leaving again. He then turned away, in what seemed like a very lazy manner.

--There was more to focus on here. Quite pointedly *not* hugging the opposite wall, and with rhythm to your respiration, and never even tripping once on scattered trash or particularly individualist paving slabs, you set course for the far side.

Quite calming, deep in the bowels of the city. Cold, sharp air filling your lungs; every little noise amplified.

Over what seemed like a pre-set path.

Evidently. *Can't get lost*. The air throbbed. You fell back against the wall. Pathways slithered through your brain. None of them clicked. *I don't know where I am*.

You could have been drunk. Would that have not felt the same? Dreamy and dreary in a whirlpool of half-thoughts. Just staying here and thinking about what had already happened seemed stupid. Should have kept walking, and resisted the allure of some *shiny* stuff. Never were too old for this shit, no matter what you said. And realising that for the umpteenth time didn't ever feel pleasant.

But that felt like more of an admission of defeat at this point. And you were too wiggled out to care.

All those words scrolled through your mind for the nth time in half-an-hour. They'd said *here*, hadn't they? Maybe if you believed hard enough, your quote-unquote *friends* would transmogrify from the alley walls themselves. Obviously they were just in hiding. They couldn't have changed their minds on you at all. No, you weren't dehydrating on the banks of Egypt's longest river.

Yes, you'd go through the magic passage and there they'd be, and there you'd go off to amass April's acorns. Festivities could be out of the way...or rather their entrances could be. Could need a password to get in, and you didn't know what they'd use. Some friends. Not beaming you the info now. Another scratch of your shoulders along the alley wall, and the thought of remaining immobile for another mental adventure.

But, well. Either don't go and never know, or do go and wind up with either nowt or at least a little to show. You know?

Taking a moment to get used to the change in lighting, leaning on the damp brick barrier, the next stretch of alley caught your eye. Errant sparks of light were visible glinting off puddles and metal pipes and the occasional wad of garbage. The whole view marinated in dank pressure and acrid piss-smell.

The far end faded into complete darkness.

Nope.

A clattering sound was audible somewhere down in the urban catacombs. Most likely a cat or confused pigeon.

Still nope.

Well, you knew what was there at least--more of the same. Figures. Who'd have thunk?

Gusting down the tunnels came a convoy of wind; trucking along after them came your laden condensation caravan. "Oh, yeah, 'this'll knock your block off', huh?" Fading into the muggy midnight air. "Can't walk me down there? Not even called me back. I'll give you blocks knocked off. Shithead."

The rustles of rubbish came from around you.

"Oh, no, not you, I didn't mean you. Don't worry." See, the excitement lies right *here* with our fellow voyager. There was no need to keep a surface at your back, was there? Nor any sense in those silly muscles of yours a-tensing? And surely not any purpose in inching...maybe a little way back down...across from him...

For the first time, you wondered if the line had been tapped.

He hadn't tried to start shit with you at all, and yet your brain was giving him *this*. Wasn't coming off remotely fair. Could ask him about any underground festivities...but if he wasn't on site, then...

Hell. He was living and breathing and so were you. The need to speak was overwhelming. Perhaps some good could come out of this debacle tonight. *Turn around a little, keep the exit in mind, put some space between you and him, ah, yeah, there we go*, seemed rude to say, paradoxically, but..."Need help at all?" *You insensitive fuck.*

No real response. From him, anyway: that trash bag was practically begging for mercy. And the wind seemed as lost as you felt. What was rotting? There was definitely the scent of rot.

For the first time in a while, you came to a decision. Namely, to undo all your hard work and head back out to the streets, and wait for this to all start ov--no, BLOW over. Straightening up and shaking yourself off, you made for the brightest light.

"Hey, coul--"

The moonlight washed over you as your pace slowed a touch; cool as a cobblestone cucumber, and just as alluring to any cumbersome cow that dared try you on. Verbally unresponsive, you cocked your head.

Silence. More on both ends.

You waited. Apparently this was one giant leap for alley-mankind.

"...you could get me that," was the finisher.

Gratifying. But whatever helps.

Walking back over to him, you had some difficulty balancing the desire to remain unthreatening with an emerging one to express the growing tumult in your mind verbally.

Those stinking garbage mounds stayed between you, oddly reassuring in their immediacy as you cast around for what could possibly have caught his eye. The fungeon you'd been seeking? Or a particularly large rock to hit you with? Did your bin bag buddy want to explore the secrets of shiny puddles together?

Pretty amazing how you'd only endeavoured *now* to keep a little sense in your head, by keeping the bags blocking *him*.

"Alright, spill. What is *that*? What is this *that*?"

The walls warped around you as you hoisted yourself up on tiptoe. All that jumped out at you were a matted mess of moist, heavy curls, and also some patches of swollen moss. The air felt a little less thin here, but this turned out welcoming in your current state.

"Sorry, *what*?" you asked, unable to look him in the eye for whatever reason. Oh, how the turntables.

"That," he clarified.

Resigned, you stuck out your tongue, uncaring as to whether he'd noticed.

Keeping what you could see on your right, you let first your right and then your more reluctant left foot stomp down the distance, before placing a firm veto on further movement. This random back alley didn't do the best job making one feel welcome. More spent gases seeped from you, through another seize of lungs.

Plenty of space laid out for your fellow scavengers. For those like yourself, the kind who otherwise ignores them, saving their sympathies for the odd one you'd see dragging a busted wing.

There was a stale taste in your mouth.

Time to yell out for your 'friends', now, maybe. This place seemed to be coming more alive by the second. Set to wend along the air, scents of cats and birds and dogs. Drenched, muddy fur. Soiled and sullied ground.

Cold air, whistling across the back of your neck.

Stiffening, you glanced sidelong at the moonlight-framed figure and saw his pupils glow, glowing with a light no human should possess.

The streetlights shining faint in your periphery quailed under the antic glow of those *tapeta lucida*, and as they dwindled so too did the remainder of your sympathy for him, in the face of proof of a little prowess.

Oh, figures. He was as well-off as could be. What a player! Impressive, if not competing with the biggest idyotte.

"...Sorry," you managed, feeling a little moist around the brow, and not from the rain. "I've got...uh, somewhere to be. I can help, you like..." L-later. Yeah? If you were in a suitable frame of mind?

You gave one last look around for 'that', not really knowing why. One slow, languid blink shadowed your eyes. Your fingers slipped into your pocket, brushed along the surface of your phone.

And...

The air just *bent*.

No other real way of describing how someone seemed to be trying to grab hold of you through oversized and leathery gloves, or how bubbly, fat cushions of air felt as if they were pushing on your neck and shoulders as you leapt away on instinct, or indeed any potential grasp on how to take a shot at the invisible, immutable, inert presences around you.

They were not, in fact, an immediate threat for you, but rather a deliberately pulled shot to send you whirling straight into the immaterial arms of the second blast.

One that struck you square in the chest, but any pain was trailing far behind as you fell down...down...

Whatever was pushing at you, pummeling your whole body as you fell? Thick enough to make both your head and body spin, yet thin enough that pushing back wasn't possible.

You were screaming, you felt so. But you couldn't hear a sound.

The forces funneling the bitter air around your plummeting self had soon plucked that worry away.

Pain. Lancing in deep, from the arm you'd landed on to the planes of your chest the floor had jammed said arm up into.

Feeling like the impact had jolted you out of your own body, you groaned. Shuddering and jittering, your lungs protested even this little action.

Looked dark down here.

Took you a moment to realise that this wasn't erroneous on the part of your eyesight. There was just darkness.

The surface had some give. Weirdly malleable darkness. Also weird how you'd thought instantaneously in terms of 'down' here despite still standing, but...

Bringing back your searching hands, you crossed them over your chest, face taut in scarcely-maintained calm. The heavy jolt of your latest exhale felt a little surprising, leisurely as the past few seconds had sauntered along. Lifting your head, you closed your eyes. Took a deep breath.

And were filled with regret.

Cloying and clinging and solid regret. You felt that shit in your throat, swollen and sickly, lodging like a hairball. Almost grateful for a solid problem to solve, you lurched away from the mystery stimulus, with futile hands on your nose and mouth.

Only to go careening right over the edge that you didn't know existed.

Right into a new realm of discomfort, for the true pain came upon meeting the ground fully for the first time, hard and wet and c o l d .

Yes, you'd hadn't been truly grounded at all, and no sooner did the previous uneven platforming register as some dirty bin liner than did said smelly surface promptly rip apart with a prolonged, screeching protest.

Your own protest was swallowed down behind a shuddering chest, jostling wild as you retreated under another mound of trash. Hands balled at your sides now, reaching over your ears, *calm down, calm DOWN!* This wasn't addressed to anyone and yet still yearned to be heard.

Unenthused on heading out there, yet more unenthused on meeting a messy end under pressure, you leapt free and bolted blind as the jaws came through again for another helping. Gnashing violent and loud in the small space, who-or-whatever may have possessed those fangs did not seem satisfied to hork down garbage.

The cold and solid sensation at your backside was almost enough to jolt free that scream, but one quick glance behind you proved sobering. Just a wall. Still imposing at your current height, but at the very least, no sharp assets.

At least this had woken you up some. Staying pressed against the wall, you made your way forwards, feeling your eyes adjust to the goings-on ahead of you. Enough to register puddles, and the stern edges of bricks, and a smattering of runaway shards and scraps and shrapnel, all in the manner of thinking like, 'why'.

In the mild light, you looked yourself over, tense in anticipation of the puncture wound you were sure would be there, but...none in sight, in lieu of immense bruises swallowing up almost your entire midsection and forearm. Enraptured by the hungry purple patchwork, you went in to explore with your more unfamiliar hand, hissing at the sharp stabs of pain shooting through you with every touch. Still didn't let this stop you, though, in what seemed like a re-staking of your claim over this body. At this point, whatever helped only halfway hindered.

With every breath, your lungs felt too large in your chest; every beat from a heart too big. You felt stiff and tight--trying not to lose hold of your flighty soul--and barely able to direct your limbs. Had you always felt this way?

Fumbling onto relative *terra firma*, the temperature hit a sudden drop. At these proportions, you *felt* the drop. Hugging yourself, you strained your eyes, paring away the darkness that seemed to rim the world all of a sudden..

And froze on the spot as you tried to make sense of what you were seeing.

The jury was out on whether your brain served a reliable witness, but the hazy remnants of your vision brought to you what looked like an enormous pair of slush-white paws with jet-black claws, and, stretching off into the distance from the furry blur above, a long and colourless tail. With what resembled gnarled knobs of exposed bone jutting at irregular intervals from beneath

the feathered-and-furred surface of said appendage. While the paw proper was half-concealed in the murk, those claws caught a degree of light. They shone.

I want to go home.

That deep, powerful shaking was felt through your chest again, heart seemingly shuddering under the antic onslaught, the emerging sights only amplifying such tension. In the 'new' light you looked back at the rent bodies of the bags, over their rotten, sagging, moist innards split and spilt every which way. Broken glass, a sweet-wrapper, okay, cans--and what resembled take-out, a medley of discarded cardboard, the occasional food remnant, meat stripped down to the bone. The sight was foreboding, very much so.

...Might be time to stop dwelling on what *could* happen, and start dealing with what was happening, and come to terms with what definitely *would* happen.

Heart throbbing in your ears, temples pounding, wrapper piece soggy in your hands, tongue clammy and skin clammy, you staggered over the slippery cobbles. Once a minor bother, now they were another set of obstacles between you and potential, momentary reprieve. One thousand pale eyes blinked at your efforts. Rippling seams in the whistling, velvety blur that you'd once lived in.

Just *blinking* seemed difficult. As if you'd fall asleep then and there; as if you could. As if the answer were that easy. Your whole body in the dust this time, trailing on just as absently.

The pain by now had dulled to a persistent, petulant ache. One footstep hit the ground aside of kilter, this being enough to throw your entire sense of balance astray, flimsy as that was and had ever been. Coming to an unwelcome stop, conscious of the swift-coming vision of death following every heavy breath--might has well have been spraying your own blood with every exhale. Spewing the guts from your quivering body.

You were still, swaying a little on your shuddering limbs. Oppressive and heavy, water droplets clung like thick honey on your skin.

Just don't dwell on this. Not the pain, not what your senses are telling you. There's shelter, right there. No need to think anymore for now.

Just go.

Your legs *launched* you. You were not ready for how this scale would make you fly. Wind battered your face as you leapt free from cover. Landing wasn't the daintiest--you hoped those crunches down below were only stone.

Don't--

You turned, and the air struck at your face again, likely tearing some tidy cuts. You choked down a gasp and peered into the 'distance'.

Everywhere at once, and yet so far away, the pale form of the predator loomed in menace.

A foot-paw dragged along the ground; claws tore and scattered the rubble.

That scent was back again, and this time two and two did not make five. Sour and strong, this was a warning. Bait and then a threat. An unbridled warning.

And that *tail*--

You hadn't seen the other tremors coming at all.

Unfortunately, however, the less visible threat was quickly proven the more urgent one, and as the wind stirred up from just one foot shunted your tiny form off on a new route...

Landing, on solid ground at least, you felt the already scant breath burst from your lungs--at least there was no chance of alerting him with noise.

But a more pressing issue existed at present.

Namely that lead weight around your ankle, submerged in the dark ocean. Each time you exhaled, a large part of yourself seemed to evaporate. Murines leaving the dying marine.

That's right. You were freezing. You were dying. In less than half-an-hour, most likely, this great wet rock's load would lighten the slightest smidgen.

Or even sooner...more motions there were behind the curtain of cold, more of an incomprehensible onslaught of sound.

Even though those immense, furred toes were, in a way, nowhere near, you still felt as if every inch of their baleful force were bearing down on your brain. As if your head were being squeezed in the playful grip of the heavy air, slowly, excruciatingly so, setting you swaying on your feet as shards of frost cut at your body.

This had been one arduous slog over the bumps and dips of five centimetres of ground, dragging the drier, tidier surplus of that sweet wrapper along with you in an attempt at protection--which worked out as well as a damp, heavy and rapidly-deteriorating wad of paper would against the trials of this land. How clever. How helpful. Fuck you, paper, you suck.

Every breath rocked your whole body. Set your head swimming, your limbs shaking. What kept you moving was the desire to accomplish what lay in reach, as pathetic as this would appear to any larger overseer. But your stubborn streak hadn't left you, not even here.

Tiny loose stones and grit crackled and crunched under that colossal foot with every motion he made. Every scrunch of toes, clench and settle of muscle. Every--

"Huh."

That single, deceptively disinterested sounding utterance cut through you like the sharpened tips of those almost beautiful-looking claws you'd seen earlier. The glistening curves of which shifted in your direction as the beast pivoted on his nearer foot. Your vision, having slowly grown accustomed to this new and terrifying state of affairs, would likely have given you a clearer image of your soon-to-be-murderer if the violent shuddering of your body and the sweat matting your forehead hadn't been making an effort to hinder that. Twisted crests of untidy white fur framed his arms, tangled in lines, growing back into masses that clung to his elbows like creeper vines.

His tail slid along behind him, stiff, a mountain range of bony arches and rods the length of his now-towering body. The spiny growths neared the wall. Fur and bone brushed the surface. Then--

SSHKKKRREEEERRRKKKK

Agony. Pure pain within a sound--

How were you on the floor all of a sudden?

Get up--

Rumbling in the distance was what you could only comprehend as an avalanche. Chaotic clatter piled upon clatter, an armada of heightening shockwaves--with every shaky step backwards, you could only await the crescendo.

And out went the light, simple as that.

As if shot through the head, you fell to the ground. The fragment of your mind that clung to coherence awaited the cascade of muscle and pain. Your senses only informed you, however, that this sensation had come from *above*, invisibly: the rumbling whoosh of a great wall of air whistling down under an even greater wall of white, with the immediacy of crackling cereal. Honestly horrific. At this point in time, you felt too familiar with fear.

The impact came...quietly.

Pressed into the ball of his foot, slowly but surely. This forcible meet-and-greet with his feet showed the expected degree of monstrosity. Thick toes showed their mossy heads from a carpet of hairy coils upon thinner-but-still-thick paws, the curves of his ankles and soles held close to the ground as opposed to riding high, swamping your already limited vision in the spectacle of his dirty, damp foot flesh, and this was the most notable and implausible aspect of tonight so far.

And then the *grinding* began anew, that rumble and crunch of the tiny cobblestones, all around you this time, the slow plateau of numbness in your chest the only indicator that the end had not come quite yet. Light flooded in once more. Searing through the dark. Painfully.

The pressure only grew. All you could see were deceptively soft-looking paw pads, errant fronds of off-white fur, and your own hands pushing out at the invading sensation on instinct.

“For a second I thought I’d lost you.”

They were warm, so...very...*warm*. You could feel your heart give a little hiccup. Standing idly by on the grasslands, volcanoes awakening not two miles away, feeling the hazy heat and lava rush past you, just before the smoke and gases roll on down and rip your windpipe to shreds.

The sensation of life, pulsing around you and keeping you grounded and pinned...the familiar sensation of your head swimming seemed a little more welcome now. You gazed at the great, padded paw, drunk in the warmth radiating off that rough surface, realising that you’d been rubbing them afterwards and trying to slow yourself down.

The toes stretched, clenched and relaxed.

He gave a crooked grin. “I didn’t say ‘stop’.”

With false calm, you sniffed, and balked at both the rush of musky air and at the daunting nature of your task before your hands were on those weathered pads again.

“If you’re good for me,” drawled that voice, “then maybe you’ll see your friends again.”

Fanning out your fingers as you brought your arms into the effort, you felt your fluttering heart begin to protest at the vigour. Oh, friends. You had been looking for your friends, hadn’t you? Or whatever they’d been calling themselves.

You rubbed with already-aching limbs, edging yourself back bit by bit, as best you could, through the firm pads and straggly fur, planning to maybe tug yourself free, to make tracks, to...

To...what? Run for the nearest pavement crack? Wait to suffocate, or starve? Assuming, of course, that you weren't stepped on first?

Now nestled between two toes, you were aware of how conspicuous you'd become, even as you transferred to scratching at the pads on said toes. Claws gleamed in your periphery. Any second now, your head would be in their grip. Aany second.

"...Won yourself two more minutes," came the slightly muffled tone from everywhere at once. "Heh..."

Or he felt merciful. Didn't feel brave enough to say, fresh in your mental tourniquet that you'd be good, you'd be kind, nevermind. Just pushing your hands into the spongy, clammy foot flesh, feeling the scent and heat of the feet washing over you, and thinking about staying alive.

Muzzled by your fear, in a shivering heap of skin riddled with galls and hives and sadness.

"First free snacks, and now a foot massage. I really don't deserve this."

His words cut into you like icy rain--painful in the moment and yet soon losing their touch, cast aside into the overarching feeling of numbness. Having felt the repetitive motions of your muscles fade into background bolster, awkwardly ducking your head to nuzzle into the warmth of that paw.

...Which had lifted away. And, in another jaw-rocking, tooth-shaking *THOOM*, had now settled balefully beside your shivering body.

Two minutes--

A pair of densely-furred hands thudded down on either side of you, flinging your already-disoriented form to the ground for what felt like the umpteenth time in a matter of minutes. The man's head followed soon after, those tired eyes boring into yours with a new focus. Long and twitching ears, borne aloft like curling horns, were held erect to focus on you, swiveling minutely with every weak movement you made.

Of course. There's the hook. Right through that quivering jaw of yours.

Maybe that *had* been two minutes?

The pressure was back. A blur of pale digits and dark ridges which didn't register as his hand instead of his foot until massive furry fingers were curling around and under you, lifting. So soft against you, so warm, and...

--Stop...thinking like that...RIGHT NOW--

You hadn't noticed his oddly bifurcated thumbs until one palm had slapped down on top of you--evidently with some restraint, as your body still looked mercifully(?) intact right now. A thick and powerful digit hooked deftly around your midsection with a smaller one in tow, the auxiliary thumb nestling up quite invasively against your chest.

The air screamed by, while the tainted-milk monoliths of fur and muscle rose past you more slowly--paws brought up as he lifted himself from that crouch...knees, thighs. Wreaths of white, matted with burs, dangling around a thick, ponderous sheath. All that fur gently swaying along his hips, over his stomach...his...

He was speaking, you realised, after a moment of momentous...monumentous noises, *see, that's not even a word, don't even try to think straight*, looming vibrations of drily warped tones. "Pointless," scoffed that still-tired voice, "idiotic, just bottom-of-the-barrel. But whatever gets results."

There was a glint in his eye as he stared at you.

If he said 'made you look', then you were jumping out of his hand.

"That's right. These are the depths of trash a yokai has descended to." *Scavenging from scavengers.*

"...you said," you got out. "You promised--"

"Then fight me," he purred. "Make me stop."

The pointer finger of his free hand pressed suddenly against your chest, the dual thumbs holding you having shifted apart the slightest bit. Following the movement down, his claw tore through your makeshift clothing with ease. His claw nudged up against your pseudo-undergarments, the tip hooking through the top where they met your quivering skin, and tore them free too, flicking them carelessly aside. No wonder you'd forgotten them completely.

Having those heavy eyes fixed on your body...bare and helpless...

A warm gout of air left his lips as he sighed.

"Bu-but," you managed, wrestling with a tongue that felt as if it had tasted the cobbles around you, "I won't...taste...good. I was...I was just in...that...just in the trash."

"I'll be the judge of that."

That last line was a little more audible. Perhaps because of his free hand moving languidly up to tug his mask down, revealing his drooling, grinning mouth.

Somehow, you felt colder.

And that was your internal justification for turning over, twisting, curling your body into his fur and trying to hide--

Warmth.

Breath, drawn over your bristling skin in one lazy, heavy motion.

And then, following another breath, his tongue.

You couldn't hold back a squeak as the tip drove up between your buttocks, bearing down hot and heavy over your back. Followed the curve of your spine, flattening a touch, pressing partway into your sides. Then pulled away, letting the liquid collect on your back, dripping down your body as you shook.

Whatever felt worse--the noise or the feeling--paled in comparison to what they meant. A simple, primal fear. And the knowledge of the end of the line. Several tracks leading to one stop.

With his drool already drying on your skin, there wasn't much else to do but anticipate.

The next one was a deep, languid drag up your legs, slippery tongue-flesh sliding across them, soaking them in saliva. Every curve and crease of that great, wet muscle, slithering over your naked flesh with the most prolonged of slurps.

First one pinned limb, and then the other, thoroughly. One mapped out by his tongue, following the curves of the prone limb in one lick, and then the other tasted bit by bit, calves, knees, thighs. One coiled gently within that lustful muscle, rolled and caressed and completely drenched before released with a sickly *pop*...and then the other taken in for the same lazy, hungry and oh-so-gradual treatment...

These were the slow and steady ministrations of a tongue that wanted to taste every inch of your naked body. These were the deep, soft growls and appraising hums of a predator who knew he could take his time. And these were the sickly, musky aromas of someone getting plenty of enjoyment from this fact.

See, *maaaybe*, *maaaybe*, the text was not intended for you?

Gratingly loud in the cramped way, a fat globule of fetid drool sluiced lazily across your chest, splitting into clingy runnels of moisture that laced your heaving stomach and thighs. You could

feel more of the sticky stuff pooling under said thighs. Many factors fueled the shiver that seized your sprawled self.

Your guts seemed to unwind slightly, but only slightly. Left to breathe for a moment, you tensed again. Knowing what you were heading into, your lungs emptied of their load, and, a curse resounding in your mind, you lowered your shoulder, looking up just in time for your view to drown in sopping wet red.

The obscene noises exploded in your ears as the tide of moisture did over your face.

Even as another stroke left your flank reddened and wet, you were fast trying to leave this place behind, and come to terms with what you'd walked into.

Stuck in a deep, dark labyrinth. Shaking, dazed in a body drenched with thick and clingy tresses of drool. Alone here with a hungry houndhawk and your two judging minds.

Catching his eye, you felt a pulse of some sort. Some thought flashed before you, some remnant of earlier. Didn't want him thinking ill of you. Could only imagine the impression you'd given.

"I'm not *drunk*," you whined, "I-I just--"

Slllrrrp.

Another lash of tongue across your face. You spluttered, feeling his thicker saliva in your mouth, down your throat...

Another throb. A rising warmth through your body, deeper than the vague warmth of that spit. A sudden shiver down your spine. Whatever was happening wasn't at the forefront of your worries. Breathing out, almost as an afterthought, you watched the ruffling of his fur.

Then came the flash of carnassials.

That hauntingly dark gaze shifted down a little.

And then his tongue was lapping lower, in broader, heavier strokes, forcing your prone form up against his palm with each hungry lick. His breaths tore through the air like baleful thunder; loomed heavy like the company of the thickest of storm clouds.

You wanted to cry, but couldn't. Your body was done. Arms limp, lying still, hands only clutching weakly at the air. Every lash of that tongue made your fingers tighten, your toes curl. Sent a spark of undeniable pleasure through your sweating, shivering form.

Now he was focused entirely on that center for your pleasure, his teeth showing between strokes of hungry tongue. His jaws thick with froth and slobber.

The wolf was hungry, and his wings were wide. They folded, killing the already-fading light. Sickly currents of air screamed through those parted jaws, faster and faster, louder and hotter...

And all you could do was writhe and cringe in his palm, under a thick, pebbled tongue and the smell of death on his breath.

His invasive tongue, a thick length as hot as fire, curling up against you, into you.

His hand jerking up, bringing you to his mouth, lips clamping around your lower body--only for a second or two, but that was time enough.

When you came, your whole body tensed, mind a hot mess still searching for escape.

Your head was thumping. You sprawled in the gargantuan palm, skin sweltering and rife with goosebumps. Through the haze of disconnected colours and lights, his profile still stood out, so imposing, a glistening string of saliva still linking your shaking body to the man's tongue. You felt like you were about to retch.

There was a brief reprieve. No tongue, no teeth. Just a merciful chance for air and space.

But soon enough, too soon, your gaze was travelling back up against your will.

That monstrous tongue was running over those fangs. The squelching of saliva with every little movement, barely noticeable as a facet of regular conversation, seemed so loud and so eerie. A sigh left his lips.

"Tch. Garnish."

Somewhere seemingly distant yet still, somehow, relatively close, an expanse of white tail waved along behind him. He didn't seem aware of the movements. An extension of bone arched up, nearing the wall again--

And you'd recoiled into his grasp, weary and wired, ready for your eardrums to be sliced into shreds, only coming back to yourself under his disdainful glare.

"You'll make a good appetiser, at least."

Twin thumbs had clamped on either side of your head now, forcing a meek, frantic gaze to meet a cold, calculating one.

“...heh.”

He was grinning again now, with glistening teeth, too many, too-sharp teeth.

Those fingers held with restraint, in order to impede as opposed to injure...some small mercy, you supposed, sensing the degree of power lying beneath that tangled fur. Less reassuring was whatever lay ahead, worse than the fate of those fingers squashing your soft self in the vein of the juiciest grape.

Trying again and again to push against that teasingly loose grip felt a necessity now, even as he was lifting you up.

Eerily slowly.

Higher and higher.

And grabbing at whatever part of his fingertips were in reach seemed like an ideal course of action now, the alternative being your head wrenched from your shoulders.

You stared through filmy vision at the cool gaze of the doghawk.

“Third alley down,” he murmured, almost to himself.

The time for rumination had descended upon you now. For some reason. With no real end in sight, given the thumping thunderstorm behind your eyes. Yet still despite this you carried on wondering what the hell you’d been doing, walking in here, and only recalling the presence of one noted Jack of the renowned Shit family line.

Before the penny dropped.

He’d told you that you’d see your friends again.

But he’d hadn’t been lying.

“Y-yuh...” Talking felt honestly painful, given how long you’d been quiet. “You...but, how. How long...”

“As long as snacks like yourself stay curious. And stupid.”

All you did was cough. Keeping your eyes open was getting harder.

His smile didn’t waver. “Huh...you’re worse off than I am.”

“Y-yea--uh...muh...maybe...”

“So, really, you should be thanking me.”

Maybe you would have, if you could.

“I’ll...fight...”

“Since you’ve been doing such a good job of that previously. How quaint. Down you go.”

And then those haunting drooling jaws snapped open and with that motion came visions, memories to be exact, thoughts of stumbling scared through cold and dark and sharp teeth coming for you and claws tearing voice bearing

hunger...

coming.

His breath blew over you, warm and rank.

You’d stopped fighting.

And all you did now was just stare, silent and still, into the cavernous maw gaping under you, the darkest, dampest depths waiting to swallow you yet. A deep, wet cavern framed in the sharpest and slickest of speleothems. Swollen-looking taste-buds coating a massive length of tongue, slick and ready.

...HAAAAHH..

Too warm to feel inviting.

...HUURRRHH...

And your last thought while outside that fell gateway played out along the lines of, *well, there’s probably more than a few diseases in me right now, from that dirty rainwater or from whatever the hell his power’s done to me or what, might not kill him but at the very least could give him cramps--*

Then you were falling, a toy for the turmoil of the air once more, your thoughts turned tail and your body thrown likewise, and the blur of wet fangs and flesh rushing towards you put any theories of planetary pathogens to reluctant rest.

His jaws snapped shut around you so fast that their impact sounded painful.

Thrumming up from somewhere down below came a gurgling, pained rumble--a hint as to why, but the suffocating warmth of that sinful tongue wrapping you up didn't leave much room for the niceties of thought.

You couldn't see. More silent cries clamoured in your throat as your raw skin was rubbed against wet flesh, grinding slippery saliva over your pained form. His tongue rolled you this way and that, swamping you in fluids and flesh and the thundering sounds of his own enjoyment. Exhausted and breathless, you let the discomfort roll over you. Which you knew still held one frail, flimsy candle to the fate you knew awaited below.

That...glimpse you'd been given earlier had now faded in impact. More basic, feral urges had shown their faces now: pain, trapped, bad. Fight, fly, freeze--no option would take full hold, steer you away from the base horror. All you saw fit to do was fawn, glean little comforts, craning your neck for snatches of air, cringing fruitlessly away from the relentless invasion of tongue. Overstimulation played, overarching.

Hard, unyielding structures pushed up against you, slick and smooth, and only the briefest flash of light through his sighing mouth granted you vision, enough to see that he'd got you between his teeth. They kept you pinned, soon starting to grind gently, hungrily before his tongue dragged you away again...soaked muscle squeezing and stroking at your body so intently he may have seen your fear as fair sustenance.

An absent rumble shook your whole body as the space tilted, sending you sliding the rest of the way down that soft, spongy surface. Drool pooled everywhere, smearing over your stomach, splattering against your sides, in your eyes...in your own mouth. Another blast of stinking breath sent you further reeling, weakened body flinching under the powerful blow.

Your feet were already being dragged down through the opening of his throat. This only appeared to be another addition to the baleful cloud of fear coalescing in your mind, one with no hope of quelling, and yet this didn't stop your heedless clutching at his tongue. Saliva saturated your hands still further, and the powerful muscles kept on claiming you.

You knew how fruitless this would be. And yet you still made a plaintive swipe at the uvula that rose tauntingly away while he swallowed. One more desperate lunge for the slick curves of his sectorial teeth, and with a sharp, painful jolt that seemed to cut right through the tide of nausea and pressure around you, your shoulder shook with the exertion and your arm...disagreed.

As the crushing, slimy grip reached your waist, a scream died in your own throat.

All you heard from him was a soft hum of contentment, even this being enough to rock your brain in your head. Of course the mercy of having your skull crushed was not afforded you, and

each and every sadistic squeeze of his innards was felt in full, agonising force. You were helpless, motionless of your own design, and swamped in more and more sticky saliva with every passing second. Under so much rippling flesh...

Were you still conscious? Were you still alive?

How many times had sights and sounds just...shorted out?

You were in his throat. Sinking. Slowly, so very slowly, as if the walls themselves knew they were free to indulge. As who would take on the beast? Even if they had an inkling of where you were, pulled further and further into your deep, dank tomb...there'd be no chance, no hope. Couldn't even cast your mind aside in the darkness, what with every sickening assault of muscle and saliva, resounding in your ears, folding intimately against your helpless form...

They pressed in from all over. Squeezed your quivering neck, crushed your ribs, your lungs. You could barely move your limbs, only stretch your arms a little where they stayed pinned above your head. They followed the rest of your shaking body down, sinking inch by agonising inch. Slightly muffled as the wet groans of peristalsis were, through the rolling waves of muscle bearing down on your ears, they still surrounded you, rocked you. Cradled you.

The walls clenched. Cataclysmic groans resounded around you as they mashed you down.

His lungs, a pair of titanic bellows.

A squeak from your own throat, breaths coming shallow, faster, again and again as you began to hyperventilate.

Only forced ever downward, down into the dizzying depths of the sour gyrcur.

However long you'd been slipping down through his velvety depths...the end of the line had come casually enough.

This being one last powerful clench from those slippery, rippling walls--followed by the *even stronger* grip of his sphincter, so strong that you swore you could hear your bones grinding under your skin...and, with a deep *sshhllloorp* of wet muscle, you'd been squeezed the rest of the way inside.

If the journey within hadn't already sapped your energy, dulled your senses and set your lip, then the impact with ridged muscle and swirling acid may have hurt more. Even as you slid, gasping, to an untidy halt, you felt the bubbling and rippling and churning around you and were took fast by terror.

Each wall only kept pulsing, and more acids oozed out over you. Even the air felt caustic, heated and thickened by the gurgling stomach juices below. Breathing already hurt.

His guts were as steamy and volatile as a volcano. Rumbling and churning. Air as harsh as ash. Oppressively warm. Sickeningly warm. And only building, on and on.

You weren't alone in here.

This uneven ground wasn't only due to the ever-moving walls...formless, sticky lumps came apart before your feet, bobbing lazily in the slime. The thoughts of what or *who* was under there sent a shiver down your spine. How many 'appetisers' had he had? This mess of acid and chyme felt so thick...even trying to steady yourself seemed a Herculean feat, dragging your limbs through the gastric soup.

Stumbling partway to your feet, and then promptly falling down again, you nudged against some coagulated clod of flesh on bone and shuddered. A lot was happening at once.

All this weighing on your mind, the reality of being digested had oddly danced aside, only now to re-emerge in full force. The fumes in your lungs were real. The dire rumbling of this gut was real. The walls churning you in and the acids...so very real.

The chyme had definitely risen. Enzymes steadily worked their way into you, slicing blackened wounds across your aching skin. An eerie hissing sound split the air--and not one from your throat.

Roasting alive. Suffocating and struggling in the oily depths.

A quake shook the stomach, the strongest quake yet.

Attempting to tread the fluids, the sudden motion tossed you as a storm would sodden trash. And the juices surged over your head.

Your whole body was marinated in the viscous mess. The acid burned everywhere, yet was only a catalyst: a harbinger for those diligent enzymes as they ate away at your sloughing flesh. Coughing and spluttering, you strived for air that you knew full well you wouldn't get, only gorging your throat and lungs with your own sludgy remains.

Muscular contractions wrenched and buried you further in the pit. There was no escaping the fluids. Your flesh burned and blistered, your nerves blazed with pain...sickening wounds split open across your skin almost as soon as they formed, more mouths to groan out your suffering, blood and sweat and sanies flooding the already messy mixture.

Nerves were exposed to the pain, engulfed in the biting warmth--then dissolved just as quickly, leaving only numbness in their wake.

There was a cradle. A cradle of quiet and numbness. Surrounding you.

Muscles so twitchy, but going numb. The pain was ebbing away. You, were going away. Far away. The froth and fumes almost felt soothing on...whatever remained of you now. Gas lodged inside. Trapped. Skin buckling under pressure...skin flayed and stripped.

The stench was all. The acidic steam, the cruor, all your exhumed and haggard breaths, your fluids.

You felt yourself sag as the fumes and fluids bit at your bones. Under the powerful clenches of muscle, they began to break. Snapping like toothpicks. Each pitiful little crunch sounded further away. One last haggard breath, loaded with bloody, meaty spume. From a broken body, a cage battered open, occupant flying heedless into a new prison of flesh. Your forever home of meat and slime...

And bones upon bones.