

When Erika had said *no, thanks, I'm gonna take it easy* to her bandmates just hours ago, there was so little she understood. How she might not live to play their show the next day, or if it even mattered. How small, truly, her life was. How that little life could be stolen from her, could become foreign. Familiarity was a luxury the cold had leached from her.

She'd just wanted some fresh air, to cleanse her stupid body. Isn't that how it always starts? She had escaped to the forest behind JJ's house, where everyone was presently getting high and mourning their youth, a great and constant reminiscing. Erika just wanted to breathe.

A pillar of blood-red light -- or was it shadow? The night was so dark and the moon so full, it was hard to say -- fell somewhere beyond the trees. It intrigued her; that's how she found the hotel, a simple thing seething with cold. *Don't even think about it*, she scolded herself. Of course, she knew. But something pulled her down. Something inexplicable and inevitable.

It was a woman. An enormous woman, who (somehow being able to speak her language) had told Erika she had come from hell. *That's actually kind of hot*, Erika bit her tongue in order not to say aloud. And if that weren't enough, she called herself Chaos.

"So you... *escaped* hell?" Erika followed her just slightly as they moved through murky, decaying hallways. They were not wanted here; she could feel it.

"I escaped my father."

Erika sighed. "Yeah, I get that."

Chaos turned around to appraise her, and Erika stilled, feeling like prey. The gargantuan body before her was superhuman, or subhuman; Erika wasn't quite sure. Chaos stood at two-and-a-half meters, her spine long and straight as a sword. When she approached, Erika felt how she towered over her, felt the shocking frivolity of human life.

"There is something here I seek," Chaos said simply.

"Yeah?"

"And the journey is not suitable for mortals," she continued.

Erika looked around her: nothing but broken lamps and crumbling yellow wallpaper. She wondered about a door. There must have been one, there, at the front of the building. How else could she have gotten into this place? Maybe Chaos could have teleported here using some immortal-psychic-hellbeing power, but *her*?

The cold was cruel. As she shivered, she felt as if she'd lost something.

"I don't think we can leave," Erika breathed.

"I do not intend to leave, until I find what I am looking for." Erika met Chaos's eyes: silvery-red, unblinking. They reflected the little light in the area, like a cat's. "Or --"

It was all so quick. In the first moment, Erika heard something: a child's whisper, the voice of a girl. She couldn't quite make it out. But the terrible sound crescendoed and multiplied and overlapped upon itself, a chorus of want. The hair on the back of her neck rose -- a primal thing, so useless -- and then Erika was launched into the air by Chaos herself. She was so small, then, smaller than she had ever been.

Chaos fought with a spear that flashed in streaks of blood. She moved swiftly and with purpose -- as if she had a life to protect. The hotel decomposed before their eyes: walls rattled, carpets froze and cracked, debris flew tumbling into an icy whirlwind.

But the real foe was immaterial. Erika could feel it. With every blink of her eyes, she could feel it, just there. In this way, even the intimate darkness of her own mind was taken from her. She knew it had a face, but she could not perceive it. Erika could clearly hear the sounds -- whispers, wailing, blood dripping from the trees -- and felt them laying claim to her head, her throat.

"O lost shade," Chaos boomed, "by my hand, you will return to your true home below the surface. You will leave this mortal realm."

*Not yet*, the voice stole through Erika's mind. *I still have songs to sing.*

The spear stopped just short of Erika's chin. "Let her go," Chaos growled. "This is not her fight."

Her body was violated and whole again. Those feelings, those fundamental states of being, circled each other in the pool of her mind. *What*, Erika thought. *What are you.*

*Round and round again, she sang. Round and round she goes. She falls, but she lives to fall again --*

“Erika, you must dissent! You must --”

*And the blood adorns her hair; she rises, once again, and round and round she goes.*

The body formerly belonging to Erika was weightless; it lifted easily into the air. The eyes, all black like two beetles, looked down upon Chaos. And she felt guilt. And she felt grief. For truly, the voice that illuminated those hallways was all-knowing, though young and pure in its sound. It was a voice that had known and loved the earth, a voice cursed by what had happened there. She wailed and wailed and it sounded like the bells of heaven. Chaos felt herself becoming lighter, entranced, *persuaded* by this terrible beauty.

But the weight of her trials overcame it. She knew what belonged where. This was no longer Erika, the mortal she'd just met. This body did not have a warm, round face, or such deep brown eyes of longing.

Steeling herself, Chaos plunged her spear through the abdomen of the floating body. It convulsed briefly, then fell to the floor like a shot bird.

Chaos went to her, against her better judgment, as if she were not a being of hell. As if she could give life back, let alone to a human.

“I...” she tried. The body was small, so terribly small, like a doll in her arms. “You should not have come here,” she murmured. Chaos felt another frightening wave of strange desire, the desire to protect -- until she remembered that she was gone. Erika was gone.

“I had to see you,” a voice answered.