

## Falling doesn't feel so bad when I know you're falling this way too

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## Falling doesn't feel so bad when I know you're falling this way too

by [Scared\\_Rodent](#)

### Summary

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- Ash noticed how everything Red did seemed deliberate the moment he squinted, finding it unsettling how Red's actions seemed to have a strong goal of getting him to lower his guard.
- Ash knew he was trying something. He knew Red was trying to get him into a much more vulnerable spot.
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### Notes

LOL, guess who came back from COVID? Almost died a few weeks ago when I started writing this but at least it's done now so I get to mentally downgrades myself in other ways Yipeee?:')

Special thank you to Parrot and Cherny for helping me with beta-reading this. Absolutely adorable human beings indeed (\*^o^\*)

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Folklore held that before there was the universe, there was nothing. And when there was nothing, something was bound to happen from the nothingness it existed in. The start of all lives came from stars, and when stars were crushed, their dust created life.

They were known as "The Gods."

They arrived on Earth before everything else, since the galaxy granted them the freedom to construct. So when the Gods said land, it emerged, and when the Gods said sky, the universe cracked open.

Humans and animals followed, fashioned from dirt. Mythological creatures sprang from the shards of such stardusts, creatures much too powerful to be human, yet not quite enough so to be a God.

History went its way. The Gods contended, killed, and breathed. To exercise unchallenged leadership while ruling. To possess force. To be powerful. To be invincible. And so they reached it, exceeded it and became holy.

Though legends also had it about a human; One far greater than those of his kind. When the man became a God, Death drank his blood dry and made him young again. He sank his fangs deep into his veins, turning mortal blood golden, and glistening flesh with a sprinkle of silver.

For before Godhood, one exists under the name of human, and before immortality, all consents to the name of death.

He was one of them, once a mortal, currently a God. And so the creatures he once shared the name "mortal" with worshipped him. For he whose eyes are as blue as diamonds, he whose hair is as dark as oak, and he whose words are as mysterious as the sea was perhaps the fiercest of them all. A tyrant, a warrior, a God, painting his roads red with the blood of those who dared to go against him.

Red, they called him. Reddoons.

The God of Death, one whose steps brought along songs of goodbyes and tales of the afterlife. He was the subject of many mysteries, but despite that, all about him had been told before. Songs were sung and tales were written, making way for more to come. All that worship, all that prayer, flooded him just like that. And Ash, like many of his kinds, envied Red.

How could he not be?

He was born as one of the few different Banshees, and it didn't help that they were made to be weak.

The only special thing about them was the ability to weave death, a sign of demise, the sound of goodbyes. Not exactly the best ability when compared to others, and especially low compared to Gods.

It was not an understatement, for the only form of defence Banshees like him carried were their voices. They wouldn't even be able to hurt a fly if it made them slightly irritated. Which was, with no doubt, not the brightest thing to do, going against an already angry opponent.

However it went, weaving was what Banshees like him were born to do, and it sickened Ash sometimes do not even know the purpose of such endless life.

He would kill to be an Abhartach or a Dullahan instead of being the one getting attacked by them.

But that posed the question, how did it feel to be strong?

Ash couldn't be too sure of this, but deep inside, he knew instinctively. Heart, guts, and moxie had their places, but the overwhelming number of people who consistently took action did so because they had been trained properly.

Maybe some of them seemed to be predisposed towards trying to help, or save, others.

But he was probably not one of them. He was not that brave, though with the ability to move mountains, maybe he could do so much more, something extraordinary. Ash thought of this sometimes, if not most times, wandering with his pack through churches and cemeteries.

Though such a world was something too far from his reach, a world he could not breach from deep inside his weaving silence. Ash could still see himself in his dreams standing oh so tall. From where he stood, he could hear their stories. Stories of how a Mythic healed and rose above to where he was, crowned by an overture bold and beyond. Maybe Ash would have the ability to change everything. He wouldn't know, all he could do was dream.

He was not unique, he was not a God, and he would not be "strong."

He was born as a Banshee and there was no way people would worship his kind.

The reason this went especially hard could be how even in the folklore about their kind, the Banshees were so bland that the writer made them the side characters. In that leather-bound book with its title inscribed in gold across the cover, what other Mythic received such discrimination?

Mythical, Ancient, Phantasmal. In Ash's opinion, such phrases used to describe his kind and many others set such low bars. Which, perhaps, was not enough to comprehend the complexity of Mythics. The types under that name ranged from wandering war souls to floating dots of light.

The same went for Gods. Roaming the above, such phrases include despicable ones, those fallen from grace and lost in the mud and the likes of Reddoons, prideful Gods who were feared and worshipped by all across the nine realms. Just the thought of concluding them together brought a frown to Ash's face.

Red... Red is— how could he even begin to describe him?

Maybe he could start with his gorgeous build, tough and robust as a rock. Or could it be his silky oak hair, streaming down his back in a swift motion before being tied up in a loose windswept fashioned ponytail? Could it be the way he moved, light as clouds but deadly as thunder? Could it be his deep accent, one that brought with it the scents of sweet demise, sending shivers and fear down one's throat? Or how tension thickened around him like clogged wheels when he furrowed his eyebrows?

Ash couldn't be too sure.

Though at that moment, being only a few feet away from God himself, he was starting to regret his decision to stay. His pack was scared away by Red a few hours ago; They started with twenty, nagging and weeping on every one of his steps. At some point, the crying got on the God's nerves, so they got down to ten, then four, until there was only Ash left, still following him tightly like a little ghost lantern.

Silently following, the Banshee prided, in one way or another, on being a true survivor. Learning lessons from experience, he must stay low, backing up just enough to keep Red in his sight while also away from his grasp. Almost like observing an apex predator from afar, this wasn't what you would, or moreover, could choose to do, but rather the job being the only one for hire. Beggars can't be choosers.

Hold your breath, convince yourself you're invisible and maybe the other would buy it.

Simple tactic, especially since he was a Banshee.

It always worked. Just one problem. To a God, it wouldn't.

Each of his steps, how leaves ruffled lightly through his raven curls, how winds rushed through his torn nightgown, how his crystal eyes slightly closed at the sudden lights were in Red's eyesight. Ash's silence was deafening and maybe a part of him realized this too. It was just a fact that none could ever be safe this close to the God of Death.

Ash was, reasonably— not fond of the scene where his head got snapped off or crushed, or penetrated, or whatever Red could have done to kill him. Which, in itself, was way too many possibilities to think lightly about.

Oh, how he wondered the purpose of this. They were supposed to meet up at a graveyard about fifteen miles from here. A great priest had recently passed away, and Banshees must grieve for a man as holy as him.

It all could have been like every normal day.

But *nooo* , a certain God just had to have this liking for travelling for days on Earth, killing everything on his road.

One could not blame Red entirely, however.

Firstly, he was a God. Blaming him for problems was just an alternative way to say you were longing for death; good deduction, Sherlock. Secondly, it got lonely in the underworld. Most souls cried a lot, and they also screamed on occasions but it wasn't like anyone in their right mind would come so close to the characterization of Death himself. It wasn't like it got easier on Earth either. It turned out that killing people wouldn't make them love him, it just made them dead, and the process replays.

Now, Reddoons wouldn't call himself lonely. However, he couldn't deny that according to most encyclopedias, that is what he was; Completely alone, untouched and starved for warmth, sitting beside his hearth and still shivering from cold, his non-beating heart and himself.

Maybe that was why he didn't mind having Ash around.

Yes, he did scare the Banshee pack away. But in his defence, he didn't choose to kill all those people, he was not in the right mind then and had moved on ever since. Having a herd of wild animals constantly nagging him about it isn't actually that much of a pleasant experience.

They were far too annoying, whereas, on the contrary, the final Banshee of the pack seemed to only

cry during actually crucial moments.

Black-haired and honey skin. Red would describe him as pale, not the sickly death kind but rather the tarnish colour of spring melting snow off rocky dirt surface under the warm enchanted atmosphere of early spring.

His cries also somewhat represented a song, a type of alluring tune from the other side.

Sickening, deadly, and toxic.

Red loved it when Ash sang, moreover, he liked it when Ash was near, and Ash, trying his best to survive, was careful to keep it that way.

“So yesterday, when I was leaving for my stroll every five hundred years, you know how that goes, I passed through Clown and the dude looked seriously pissed. He was all ‘Can you please not’ this, ‘It will be a massacre on Earth’ that. And it was so damn annoying, like, it gets lonely in the underworld! He won’t know, he got the good spot and ruled over war and victory. So I told him to go suck it, and Clown was all pissed out and angry. Like fucking hell, get a job, dude.”

Red laughed, soft grass prickling at his palms as Ash pushed himself up from the ground, his face thrown in shadow by the trees on either side of him. Ash tilted his head. He was beginning to take notes on Red. How he moved excessively, how he was showing all his vulnerable spots, how he talked a little too much, and how Ash was getting used to it all somehow.

His mind worked furiously to try and gain space from Red. What was he talking about? Why is he talking? Is he in danger?

Ash’s heart raced, but from the way Red stood immobile under the charming afternoon, that didn’t appear to be the case.

The sun bled on him the final strings of lights, embering like crimson blood. He looked gentle, the fabricated imitation he wore falling off in chunks and Ash could still blurrily recall Red’s endless ranting through a layer of curiosity.

Ash noticed how everything Red did seemed deliberate the moment he squinted, finding it unsettling how Red’s actions seemed to have a strong goal of getting him to lower his guard.

Ash knew he was trying something. He knew Red was trying to get him into a much more vulnerable spot.

He wouldn’t fall for this, and he didn’t want to.

He couldn't if he wanted to keep his head attached.

Though maybe, just maybe, if Red was as human as he pretended to be, he wouldn't mind as much.

“Beautiful, isn't it? The wealth of Earth, and it's all handcrafted too, just so you know. Terrain spent way too much time building up these cliffs and mountains, might as well make a new planet from those rocks he kept around” Red hissed silently with his eyes still focused on the horizon. Chuckling, the God continued, practically whispering at the point “Oh, how it all pays off in the end.”

They moved during the day, creeping through the vast forests and steep hills, breathing in the smell of Earth the moment it shifted ever so slightly under Red's painted heels and Ash's barefoot.

Casual steps, steady speed. They didn't have to go too fast anyways.

Red never seemed to have a pinpointed location to head to. It was rather the sensations of feeling his steps hitting the road that kept him going, such things so human and strange lost in foggy memories he was reaching back to find hidden under the sand.

Taking in the scene of Rekrap's calming meadows and fields, Red caught glimpses of Ash through the corner of his eye. The Banshee let out a silent wheeze, ducking his head away from the furious glare of the sun and into thick bushes from the sides of the road. It was beyond hot outside. The ground far ahead danced with the illusion of water, sizzling and shiny. And to him, Red laughed.

“Zam gets mad pretty easily, he's always hot and bothered like a burning ball of fuel on feet. Like, dude, can you believe he scolded me for being gloomy?? Like, have you read my title? It's not that weird for Death to be gloomy sometimes. Maybe reflect on yourself first. He's always getting way too close to Earth and one day he'll not just burn off a forest or two.

Jesus Christ.

Oh yeah, he also has a brother, Leo. Was his name Leo? I never even speak to that guy that often, but he is much cooler than his brother. Real night owl, though I'll say I get on better terms with Zam, it's always easier to relate to a sunny shine get-go anyways.”

*Gods don't get tired, Gods don't have to sleep.*

They stopped when night fell. Red set up his camp and Ash watched from afar as the cosy little place got lit up with branches scattering all over the rusty ground.

“Thank you,” Red said, smiling at the sight of piled leaves stacking up where the fire would always be. And the nearest bush, as an instinct would start to shuffle at the movements of the creature

hidden under it.

“Appreciate it.”

*Gods don't need to take breaks, Gods never get hungry.*

A part of Ash knew it all too clearly. Why they would stop when night comes, why Red would talk for hours to nobody, why the God would stop on occasions when roads became too long, why Red would flutter his eyes close under the night sky despite never needing to sleep.

It was impossible.

Practically nonsense how his mind could come up with such conspiracies.

Such an obscure catastrophe of a thought to have, and even if the little part of him was true, Ash refused to believe someone would ever be so kind, moreover, someone like Reddoons.

Contrary to what Ash felt about having to follow a God, having a little ghost following him reminded Red how good it felt to be with somebody. Being one of his kind, the consensus was to watch your back. To not trust anyone except a chosen few.

Strength can be found in numbers, they'd always said.

They'd said it was more crucial to lead a large number of companions than to try battling alone.

It was a shame how difficult it was for Red to follow such advice when there was never anyone around to share the silence.

Days in summer were longer than night. Despite travelling for hours, the Sun didn't look like it would go down anytime soon. Even as Red stopped for the fifth time of the day, looking up through patches of leaves above his head, the blue sky was still clearer than ever.

“You know, you can see why Parrot devoted so much time to these accessories.” He pointed a finger at the clouds, with his back still turned against Ash.

“It's gorgeous when the Sun rises, and if you lower the opacity, they would still be beautiful as ever next to PlanetLord's creations. It'll be way less work for Oasis if it ever rains, too. That's like hitting three birds with one stone!”

Ash raised his face from its position knitted inside his hands, and he lightly tensed at the sound of Red. The God had been talking for the past weeks, ranting, continuously with such a mysteriously charming voice. It was silky, sweet, playful and venomous. Red's fangs felt so close to his skin. That's why Ash backed up every time. It was taunting. Hell, he had half a mind to turn all roads around and back out entirely. But the more it went on, the better it felt to just descend into the God's voice and slowly shift towards him.



The scariest part was perhaps how Red's voice was starting to be soothing.

Well—, at least when it was aimless rambling.

It enveloped him with a kind of safety he hadn't felt in decades. Basked in the warm glow of the God, absorbing the sound of Death around him like it was the sweetest toxin he had ever heard. It was traumatizing to lean into a death trap, especially when his body was going against his thoughts, especially when Ash couldn't find his strings. Even as he reached out, there was none attached to Red. And yet, the seeming truth he saw was faker than any fabricated words he could think of.

When Ash rolled up from his sleeping spot knitted tightly in dry leaves, Red was still packing up his tents. For a God, he was slow sometimes. Ash took a note from his safe space, or at least, as safe as it could get as Red tumbled around the setup camp, put out the raging fire and *finally* packed up his belongings to get ready for the day.

Weren't they supposed to head off a lot sooner?

Didn't they usually head off a lot sooner?

Ash looked up at the sky from his napping spot, the sun had already risen high and was on the verge to hang itself in the middle of the sky. They were supposed to set off before the Sun entirely rose. His sight settled on Red and as his posture stiffened. Red got back on his feet and threw back over his shoulder a carefully hidden look. Their eyes met for a moment before Red turned away instantly and his steps took on speed.

He was waiting.

Ash tilted his head.

*Red was waiting for him.*

Never demanding anything, never pulling tricks with both hands revealed ever so clear and bright, only offering patient and unwavering kindness.

It was stupid to ever think a God would ever be so human.

Fortunately, Ash had heard of tricks before.

He knew Gods were cruel and mischievous, how they toyed with fragile human minds until they broke apart like chalk. That's why he was so scared. He couldn't lean into such touch. Despite knowing how much he craved the warmth, it was suicidal and foolish to believe in words.

It was unsettling to Ash how no one ever learned from mistakes.

Just like how they would never understand.

Only humans would ever be that foolish, only they would wave such naive kindness around, and

only the creations of soil ever truly fell in love. It was just second nature how Mythics don't just "give" and animals only "take". Which, on its own, reflected Gods. How did they feel? What did they feel? What did anything even mean to them? Such ambitious questions, which quite frankly, it was impossible to truly answer. To try and view the world through the lens of its creator, adding onto never knowing the mind and process it took to create such a thing in the first place, is just simply a task far too out of reach for any, except the Gods themselves.

The fact that Red was being kind was the breaking straw. To be Death himself, he was the one to bring suffering to all. He was the end to beginnings and the final nail slammed against one's coffin. And yet, of all species Ash ever got to meet, it was Red who was kind.

He allowed Ash to hold his distance, he pretended to sleep so that Ash could rest, and he talked constantly to soothe Ash's nerves.

It was outrageously and weirdly fake.

That shouldn't have been what one of his kind would do...

It's just that...

Red was not one of them.

He used to be human himself, a mortal, a warrior, a king. He had built kingdoms from nothing and raised fallen from their ashes. He had slayed enough under his blade to paint it crimson. And more importantly, he had held Death by its neck like a little rag doll as its blood painted him in the blackness of the void. Which, thinking back, is not the wisest thing a mortal could have done. All he could still briefly recall from back then was how some guy in a Jester costume stabbed him in the chest and suddenly, all the time in the world was placed into his hands.

"Branzy."

His name was Branzy, not just Death. His name was Branzy.

It took them a while to get onto better terms, on the whole wounding him and holding him in the neck fiasco, but at least Branzy was normal enough about it. Or, as normal as a God could be at least. His conditions of forgiveness were for Red to take his place from then on so he could at least retire for the time being.

Naive as he was, Red had said yes

Maybe that's why he had been lonely ever since then.

That bastard Branzy had just needed someone to pin all his work on to run off with Rek.

Red always knew he was not fit for the Underworld. Genius how no one ever said, "Hey, how about the God of Wealth or Fortune? We're still lacking that guy." *Nooo*, they just had to push

Death onto his name.

But then the whole Branzzy incident had come rolling in and in his defence, he had stabbed that guy just once.

Red had been a human. He had made mistakes, similar to how he had known the way to be kind. On the contrary, Ash, along with many more, was too goddamn scared to accept even a glimpse of that kindness in case his worlds were as fabricated as all other of his kind.

Following tightly behind him with his bare feet dragging through the soil, a Banshee. Heading forward with his arched-up body silently softened at the quiet sound of movements behind his back, a God. No sounds were made between them as both leant into their comfortable silence. Red knew he would start his usual ranting anyways.

Day soon passed by, and there stood proudly what remained of the Sun, rendered in lights and memories. The rosy gleam of his light, the warm blue of the sky, his illuminating calmness. Shining in a calming motion, endearing and real as the blood red of his surroundings slowly flooded all senses.

“You know, it gets lonely in the underworld sometimes.”

Red sighed, shuffling in his seat. Ash did too, mentally.

His instinct told him to cover his ears. It told him to make a noise, muffle the senses, *do not listen*, *he's toying with your fragile mind*, *it's a tactic*.

*Cover your ears.*

It was tempting enough for Ash to consider it. Though, at the sight of Red's body physically tensed up, he couldn't bring the courage to muffle his words, even for a little bit.

Darkness formed below distant tree tops as the sun disappeared behind vast fields and hills. Night fell around corners, lurking and watching them from a safe distance as both stood with not a word spoken. Muffled sounds spread through the thick tensions, coming from the crackling campfire, the rustling of Ash's body pressed against dry leaves and Red's, though silently, not unnoticeable cautious breath. The God was... He sounded worried and cautious, something Ash never thought he would see. Not in Reddoons he wouldn't.

Not in the immortal God all have come to know, and especially not in the dangerous God all have come to accept.

This was something new.

It was unnatural.

*It was pathetic.*

A voice in him growled in annoyance. Who was this man trying to fool?

What sick act does Red think would be able to blind him?

He knew what Red was trying to do. Hell, Ash could see his casted web, shimmering like silver as he grew closer and in for the kill. His muscles strained upwards in caution, waiting for Death's fangs to finally sink into his throat and take away Life from his limp body.

And yet— Red continues with his ranting.

His posture, the posture previously heavily resembling one of a predator, was surprisingly calm with shoulders hanging down lazily and his head perking. Far from intimidating. Even from his point of view, Red looked like a human. Or at least, as human as he could get.

His breaths felt heavy. It was upsetting to try and listen, yet the remainder of Red's vocals still rang in the corner of his ears like church bells. There was an outburst of emotion Ash couldn't make sense of as he lowered his guard and kept his eye on the horizon.

"It's true... No one there is alive, most living people in the Underworld were only ever there if they had a task to perform. And they left as soon as they came, the moment they had what they wanted... There's an expression, 'my so-called life,'" he said, adding a wrench into Ash's aching heart.

"That's about the size of it. I sit on that throne all day. Used to have relatives, but they weren't even alive ever since I exceeded the role of a Knight, I'm the only one left. I had dear friends from school, we lost contact ever since we graduated. Then some from the army, I moved into the kingdom's dorm made for specially trained knights, or, to rephrase it, killing products. We lived, we trained, contented and satisfied with being raised like renewable war machines. And, would you believe it, I even made friends with a General once. I left the army soon after, and most of my friends passed away since then, laying their corpses on warfares for worthless conflicts. Others could hardly recognize me when I first started the quest of becoming King. I didn't get close to anyone genuinely during that whole process to see them as friends. Most are just scared while others despise me, it's their fabricated look that's trying to fool you. But other than that I'm the only one I know still alive at the moment, well, at least 'half-alive.'"

He sighed with his eyes focused on the sky and the rest of the story on a cliffhanger. What would happen to present Red? Ash wondered with the tiniest piece of his heart string strummed loudly.

Ash winced. Red had his hand behind his back, holding him up and away from his body like he usually does with fingers curled up, tensed, aching for any sort of warmth on his undead body.

How long ago was it since anyone responded to his touch and held his hand? Ash wondered.

He looked up, blue eyes unfocused, staying still, inches from surpassing the beauty of the sky. And Ash instinctively slunk forward until he was close enough to be in touch with the little thing he had left in life, with his hand in Red's. The God flinched. A little tremble of surprise sent sensations through the skin of his fingers, striking a match, and it lit up Ash's heart with a stick of dynamite. Red was fast, curling up his finger slightly, grasping for that freezing warmth resting against his. And Ash, thoroughly stunned by his motions, pulled back.

Gunpowder. It was the smell of tension, of lightning in Ash's eyes, of frictions on Red's joints, of something on the verge of erupting. It was close, enough to strike glimpses of light but not quite enough to burst into flame.

It was the weight of dark clouds rumbling above, swinging down from the horizon, dripping down heavy drops into Ash's head as he hesitantly backed away slightly from Red.

Fear.

What did he just do?— Red's posture stuffed up in an instant the moment Ash backed off entirely. He had just angered a God, and above all, he had just angered Reddoons.

Thoughts.

They weighed him down like anvils and his breathing felt tight. It was way too dangerous to approach and he would have nowhere else to run by now if Red decided to go after him. Ash trembled, the shaking reaching all the way to the core of his bones, so he shut his eyes, expecting the unknown to shatter down on him like bombshells.

Wind.

A breeze came through, easing all with a swift motion. And Red sighed, relaxing his grip as Ash, trembling, looked up. His death sentence never came.

Learning from his mistake, Red didn't move, didn't even signify he'd noticed if a hand were to slip back into his grips. At least, that's what Ash thought. The animal part of his brain was still screaming how foolish the circuit of Ash's actions was, ignorantly giving Red the ability to trap him in his grip, killing him just a second ago.

His actions had their consequences.

This was true. But it was also a fact how Red didn't choose to kill him despite the clear advantage and an invitation to do so. He was still alive, and at the moment, they were both standing together. What was his intention? What was Red trying to do? Why did Red do what he did? Was this a scheme again? Some kind of emotional build-up to lower his guard? The fighting in his brain stopped, however, when with a swift motion, Red turned his palm to face upwards, looking away, intentionally this time and it made Ash feel safe.

It reminded him how human Red sometimes appeared.

It reassured him a bit in that belief, and like before, Ash responded to his touch. Closing in, his palm in his, Red felt warm, genuine, real, almost as if he was way too close in the dripping distance Ash was putting up like an electric fence.

“Do you think anyone would mind if I held their hand?”

Red breathed out and Ash was startled. His breath hitched and words fell out, raspier than what he imagined.

“They wouldn’t mind.”

A light squeeze, and a silence that was good to hear as Ash fluttered his eyes shut. It felt good to lean into the naive side of his soul, one even strong enough to calm the raging animal in his head, if only for a little bit, for his strained muscles to finally relax.

Maybe it was true that none of them could recall how long they shared the moment before Ash finally came in touch with the world, realizing how close he sat and slowly retreating back to his silence.

Red did too, sinking back down onto his seat with both hands resting on his lap and the feeling of Ash’s touch, still lingering across his fingertips like crashing waves.

What kind of God would ramble for hours and hours just to make a lower Mythic feel safe? What kind of God would pretend to sleep so that the same Mythic could feel secure enough to close its eyes? What kind of God would sit on the ground facing away and waiting, ever so patiently, for the creature to creep close enough to touch?

Questions were asked and answers were soon to follow by.

The God of Death would answer.

And despite how many times Ash said it, the sound felt weird, slipping through his lips. Reddoons would answer, because he cared.

Funny how all those who walked the Earth put so much trust in each other, despite being betrayed just so they could break each other’s hearts again. What did they find in others to pull their hearts out for them? What was deemed worth it the moment they rolled back from graves to beg on the porches of those who stabbed them in the back just seconds ago? Ash wondered and by now he had an answer, a vague one, but one nonetheless, and he couldn’t brush off his thoughts about it.

Could it be how naiveness took over their brains and ate them up like parasites? Or could it be the dependence they put on one’s touch, one’s voice, one’s gaze, insisting them on coming back every time those cruel beauties were torn away by the same hand offering it in the first place? Such beauties they drank like alcohols, like drugs. And like addicts, they inject the toxins into their trembling veins, defending sinful leisure with poorly scraped-off excuses, and white lies.

Love... (or what they saw as it) was a tricky card to play and a hard one to discard.

Ash was fine with his weaving silence. But the sound of Red intruded his world and Ash couldn’t be too sure if his invasion would bring him diseases or not. It was just that Red... he was something special and every one of his light laughs sent sparks up into Ash’s brain, every move,

every breath. Red was genuine, spring and gold, he was true and he was wrong. And goddamn is he a handsome fella.

He had never had the luxury to be naive for as far as he remembered, and neither had Red. Though if he was given a chance, Ash would have relived how much he fell for every little thing just so he could adore them once again.

“You know, maybe I’ll give Spepticle a chance. He always insisted to me how being in love’s the best thing in life, either platonic or romantic. It’s still better to care than to not. Like hell, it’s not like the universe gave me a chance, or at least, time to fall in love... Or,— that’s what I thought.

Don used to be my best friend, all my life, he was there. Once a General ever since the title Knight, next a right-hand man when I exceeded King. I never really realized how much I appreciated him before Death took him away. And I realized, it wasn’t the universe that didn’t give me a chance. It was me who took it away from myself.

The pain, the guilt, and the devastation all led me to insanity. One second I was fighting Death, the next, I won. Not like that matters, you see. All things in life have a purpose and not even Gods can change how the universe operates. I fought for all that and what did I even get back from it? Don’s gone, forever. And I have eternity to whine about it.”

Red hissed out a laugh through his teeth. There was a secret he’d learned throughout his lifetime. Loving wasn’t the hard part; the absence of it was. And the absence wasn’t the hard part of it, the longing for it was. Once you pulled past that, the longing wasn’t the hard part, waiting was.

Waiting to be able to recreate every little moment from the past, wondering what course of action you’ll take to be able to recreate it again. Waiting for the universe, some otherworldly being, higher than Mythics, higher than God, higher than yourself or whatever might be in control, to take your hand and tell you it’s okay, that you can keep going forward now.

Sometimes he’d think he had a whole heart full of love ready to pour at any moment, willing to pass every drop of compassion until the drip finally stopped. Sometimes he’d think he had no love at all. Each time the others would speak at him with a voice full of something familiar, he could only give a gentle apology and a distraction. Sometimes he’d think he had just the perfect amount of love, enough to give to the people who mattered and enough to hold close to his chest, folded under his ribcage, just for him.

But who was there to kid about it? Gods don’t just “love.”

Similar to how Ash would say he loved his pack. He’d like to think it made him happy, but happiness is such a complicated feeling.

“What do you think the world says when you tell it how much you love it?”

Red asks out of a sudden, and Ash hums silently, expecting an answer to follow tightly with it how Red’s usual rantings would go.

“What kind of answer is that?” He chuckled and Ash looked up to see Red, staring back at him with those shiny cyan eyes clear as diamonds.

Red asks, Red waits, Red smiles.

“I—“ Ash mumbled, eyes glued to the ground below, too distracted to admit how good it felt when Red lifted his mind high, too scared of falling to admit how gentle his touches lingered on his numbing mind. “I don’t know,” he mutters.

Ash knew, he had known before, somehow he did, that the caring in Red’s voice, one so genuine, endearing; his motions were golden and the way his smiles are warmer than all could have all been a decoy all for this moment to crash down onto him. Even if it was fabricated, Ash would still come to him anyway.

He knew.

And he’d still come.

Thoughts flashed by him as fast as lightning and Ash fell limply. Why had he come? Why didn’t he run? Why? Why? Why? Where did it go wrong?

He could do nothing but think, his inner noise muffled out his senses; the animal, he could still hear it. It told him to move his feet, gain his space, and keep Red away from him. Maybe it was right, maybe he should’ve done what it said, but the way Red’s undead fingers lingered on his cheeks broke all hell to heaven.

“Are you scared of me?”

He asked; tender, endearing and Ash didn’t nod. The Banshee looked up into his eyes and shook his head.

“No,” he mutters.

“Thank you,” Red responded.

What happened? What changed?

Animal, powerless, animal.

He had heard it before, its voice was drowned out back then and louder than ever now. Why did you choose fear and loneliness over creatures, over those of your kind, over humans? Over those who *needed you*. Why did you choose to put yourself through all blades and nails over blood and heartbeats?

Look at him, he’s right in front of you. He’s looking for you, can’t you see? Not looking through you.



The first time Red ever felt so close, Ash couldn't breathe. It felt cold on his cheeks, ice and winter, more numbing than the snow pouring. More numbing than the pressure weighting his chest, then the freezing of Red's gloves on him.

Red was careful about it and that shocked Ash. He would've run right that moment, or at least, he hoped he will if given another chance. Not like he'll be able to when just then when the distance of Red's hand melts into warmth. Like life to death, water to electricity, everything was alive, and numbered, and still. Ash could've held this moment for eternity and tried to imagine what would happen next, it's not like he had to anyways. Cause like always, Red started

"If I say I adore you. What will you say?"

Ash hissed.

The scary part, you know? Is that despite his kindness, he was so very dangerous, and just because Red was kind to Ash, doesn't mean he suddenly wasn't the God of Death. Imagine having someone like that to try coaxing you into coming close. That's what Ash was dealing with, day after day of the same bait being offered to him, and he didn't know what trap was attached to it but he didn't dare spring it.

Animal, helpless, animal

Did anything even change at all?

Ash thought distantly as he flutters his eyes shut, and watches as the key slips into motion; click, in sync with the lock, the cage pushes its door open. It wasn't just made to keep things outside, it was also made to trap others in; others like him, others like Red. Isn't it just second-nature for Ash to build one around himself?

Beams he forged, doors he welded, frames he attached rivets to; all to lock himself in the calming silent Ash was so familiar with.

It was home, it was safe, it was where he was meant to be; and it's just another type of prison, Ash thought as he made his way through and out

It's true, a dull knife still hurts and if it crept in deep enough, it would still kill. Now, knowing all that, would he still want to take the risk?

Ash questioned as he took Red in his hands. I adore you too, he answered

Thank you, Red muttered with his voice cracking up ever so silently

Maybe just this once

Ash thought, Ash responded, Red smiled

## End Notes

We made a SwagDoons DC server BTW, check us out (\*ٲٲ\*)

<https://discord.gg/TYfQFEhsN7>

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