

## hide-and-peek with tied eyes

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## hide-and-peek with tied eyes

by [Felix\\_J](#)

### Summary

Air catches in Red's throat again, just for a second, too on point and out there. "Someone put a hit out, on *Ashswag*?"

### Notes

#ashsweep

had this lil snapshot of a "vampire" (<- fantasy biology may differ) au of mine in the works for a while, and promised i'd finish it right up if ash won the ashvbranzzy part of The Baddest Bitch Poll TM. so you can guess how that ended

"Ashswag, you've heard of him, haven't you?" Clown drawls with his cold confidence to the point Red has goosebumps running up his spine from that wrong name dropping from his lips. It's just that it can't be *good*. Reddoons isn't *scared* of him. Never truly was.

He fights it down and makes his shoulders sag, maybe too harshly. But he's fine, he's calm.

"I do that, I know 'bout that one." He nods lightly.

"Him."

Clown's mask jerks slightly in place, like from a quick grin. There's a slight glint in his eyes, curious maybe, not quite cruel or wishing to hurt. He doesn't know Ashswag personally, he's truly just a name to him. And too many words dancing on paper attached on top if he's already done his research.

Well. *Ashswag* is. Not the-person-Ashswag-was-before.

He doesn't think about that, because there's not quite a point.

"And what *exactly* did the... client want with that man?" He asks and keeps his voice just as light and curious, but he thinks Clown notes just that.

Clown chuckles slightly. "What'd you think, Red, why would anyone willingly give off *information* to *the* Clownpierce, in exchange for what?"

Red's laugh back is somewhat nervous and he can't hold it. He *still* feels like he's the only one who's playing with his cards in the open, and it's somehow gotten way, way worse than a typical conversation with Clown. He has no idea how he could do it before because right now the air around him is so heavy he tugs on his collar, unthinking motion before he catches himself.

Clown might be enjoying this, that he needs no power to influence even the non-human.

In the next second, the atmosphere snaps right back to neutral, and Red knows how to handle himself again.

"Let me think, revenge? Greed? A bit of everything?" He drawls, turning to straightening his tie smoothly so his hands on his neck at least *try* to seem like a casual gesture.

"Oh no, of course... I'd say..." Clown tsks and puts up a hand to his face but stills, touching his mask. It breaks the image for a second, and Red wants to laugh but holds and grits his teeth on his lower lip but doesn't *quite* bite it, sharp prints too close helping him keep his concentration.

Clown's hand drops sharply, and he snaps his fingers of it. "It's *murder*, of course. That's the most important bit. You're talking *reasons*, Red. That's valuable." He turns fully at him slowly, on his heels. "That's not quite something you should know."

"Murder as a..." Air catches in Red's throat again, just for a second, too on point and out there.

"Someone put a hit out, on *Ashswag*?"

"Yeah." Clown shrugs. "Is there... *Oh*, is there any problem with that, Red? Pray tell." The fingers of his right hand still on the balcony drum on it smoothly, and Red can't quite tell but he knows he's grinning again behind the mask that's too loose, him not used to wearing a physical one.

It helps remind Red Clown is only as powerful as he is.

"I know... I do know that Ashswag..." He stalls slightly, thoughts beating in his head in a panicked mess, he *can't* say there's more to Ash that Clown doesn't see that makes him dangerous, he can't say he only knows something *of* him, that's not enough, but he needs to, *needs* to... "Me and him have been working together for a while." He offers lazily. "He's pretty useful."

Clown snorts.

For a second Red thinks he cracked the code.

The hitch in Clown's voice as he tries to answer grows into full-blown laughter, and he leans against the balcony with strain applied, hand up to his face like he's trying to pretend he's hiding the curt, hysteric noises. He stops sharply then and takes half a step to the side, away from the pillar.

"Listen. Listen, *Red*." His tone borders on derisive. "I'm sorry, but this one's not from a first-time client, this one knows their price. I'll find you a better one, you know what? What was that you were doing toge..." He pauses, and Red can *see* the second his eyes go just too wide and his eyes glisten slightly. "Of *course*. Of course, of course, of course, how could I... That's truly so rude of me." He laughs, raspy and strangely nervous. "Truly rude of me to forget." He adds a light sigh and continues in a mutter. "I could only find that on *you*, and completely forgot to connect the dots, I should really get out in public more..."

"What, what exactly?" Red tilts his head to the side, too strained. He may be getting himself caught right in the web Clown is setting up, but denying whatever the fact is is simply impossible. He can only play off it.

"Red, Red, I can allow you having a fling with a civ." Clown cackles. "You know that's alright, that's *fine*, I *will* have you still with having *secrets* from me even, but. But. You aren't getting your hands into any of my deals, is that understood?"

"I'm not *trying* to... Yes, sure, I have an interest in him." Red swings his hands into the air, palms open. "I'm *not* trying to push you to do or not to do anything, Clown, you *know* me, I'm not an idiot. That's just not the point. We have a business, and he's genuinely a *helpful* contact to have in the human world. *Very* helpful." He nods. "Anything else you've heard, sure, but that's just a bonus."

Clown barks out a long, wheezing laugh like a gunshot hurting his ears.

"Helpful contact, Red, are you *hearing* yourself, that guy is literally... Like you don't fucking know, oh, you *don't* even know what your little rebound is? Genuinely?"

"I'm afraid I don't." Red's voice turns *too* careful but it's best if Clown knows he's stressed but doesn't know *how*.

"He's COMIS, he's fucking COMIS, Red. He's *just* been assigned group leader. Won't you *love* it when he's gonna come right for your throat because that's just his rightful job? Huh?" Clown pushes him in the shoulder with two fingers, sharply.

"That's not..." Red is pretty sure he's gone pale as death and is glad, for almost the first time, for the mask covering his face because his natural poker face is not quite helping him now.

He really just wants to sag against the balcony and *maybe* accidentally slip right off into the crowd of people, too many of them, down there and pass out for a couple hours.

"He's not, he's *not*, he's..." He shakes his head. "You got that... Who supplied you that, that's impossible, he's... He can't be an investigator, that's just..." He wheezes in a laugh, then another, broken sound, and stills, and something under his skin that *can't* be him makes him shrink in on himself, as if expecting Clown to hurt him.

"The information..." Clown sighs. "The info I've been given on him is from someone I *know a lot* about. And I'd rather trust in what they told me. But..." Clown's eyes are on right him, curious again with just a slight tone of amusement, and in that Red sees a chance he might be offering. "I know you want to say something, Red. Drop it. See if I reconsider."

Red breathes in in a wheeze. "He's, he's a..." His mind draws a blank. "He's a vampire." He lets out, simple and even. "He's been for a long time, he *wanted* to be turned, he can't work with the..." His tongue is numb and heavy.

"He *is*?" Clown drawls in a voice just a little too high. "That's not... That's *not* something they mentioned, are you... Sure, I'll, I can work from that."

Red notes it through the bile in his throat that Clown seems more distraught at his lack of *knowledge* than the fact itself, and that's... that's helpful, for a second.

"And is there *anything* you're not telling me about this, Reddoons?" Clown's voice is emotionless and insinuating at the same time, and Red can't read anything in it except a promise for bloodshed.

"Nothing that would help, no." Red answers evenly.

"And you *are* aware I will find out?" Clown lets a sneer slip. Red knows it's nowhere close to a brag.

He gives him a long look. "What can I say, Clownpierce." He shrugs, and his posture is sharp and strained. "We all deserve our little secrets."

Clown's hand on display clenches into a fist. "I'll dig it out and find..."

Red sighs. "We'll talk about it, just not today. Someday, maybe. One will see."

Clown throws his head back. "What?"

"I don't know much myself." Red admits, spreading his hands. "I can ask questions, you can't. If you put the case on hold, we can figure it out."

"You need that more than me."

"We'll figure that out as well." Red allows himself a little smile.

"I see." Clown rasps. "We can... I *will* hold you to that, Reddoons."

"Of course, Clown." Red gives him a slight imitation of a bow and adds as Clown's heels click against one another. "Was nice seeing you."

Clown cackles harshly. "See you around then."

He walks off as soon as Reddoons lets his eyes roam off him, retreating footsteps on the carpets being the only indication as he blurs in with the dark walls.

Red takes a few staggering steps of his own to an opening of a hallway, away from any knowing and unsuspecting eyes, he hopes, so the wall is a smooth solid surface against his back.

He counts off too many loud and slow beats of his heart that feels too wrong, heavy in his chest, and he has an empty thought he's really been neglecting himself as far as it goes with keeping himself intact and... some sort of *alive*, he guesses.

An idea immediately makes its way into his head, half a spook and half a cold calculation, how long it'd take him to end up the way that known boogeyman of a vampire did, but he knows he's not *actually* following in PrinceZam's footsteps anytime soon.

He just needs a bit of time to recollect himself. That is *all*.

He catches a faint shuffle to the side and then a turn of heels and knows it can't be Clownpierce but doesn't really want it to be anyone in particular.

He thinks he could slash a human open in this empty corridor and it's not like Clown would care. He wouldn't even try to rip an IOU for it. Just shrug and maybe complain about cleaning the mess, but that's *later*.

"Reddoons. Reddoons?" It's a light drop of his name, and he freezes where he stands, too affectedly relaxed against the wall.

Ash always deals in touches, and it seems more point on for him to *touch* than see and speak, more important, when truly the way he notes out Red is with hands crawling under his jacket behind his back and a grin that's right against his face.

Red would love it every other single second of his life.

In this one, Ash hisses slightly and snaps the soft feathery red off his face, leaving the mask to fall and his hair a slight mess. He stills then the same way Red is unmoving, as if caught up, surprised by the clear empty expression on Red's open face, but the spark in his eyes is excited, marvelling more than *guilty* in any way.

Red stares back at him and feels pretty darn powerless in whatever he's going to say.

Ash catches it too well, the hesitance. It's a second to the full force push and then pull back for him, then, where he digs his fingers against Red's waist too harshly and instantly lets go, like it never happened, like nothing did, leaning back with just the breath still warm on Red's face. It doesn't feel good. Doesn't feel like much at all.

Ash stands back next to him, against the wall, too casual.

"You're not wearing a mask." Red points out, raspy, staring off at anywhere other than him.

Ash cackles. "What's the need? I dropped it, dropped it off, alright." His voice is just slightly hitched, not stressed but pushing down the happy notes in it, now. "What, d'you think the clown would care?"

Red turns his head at him sharply. The lack of glasses leaves him too open, and he thinks there's something uncomfortably damp in his eyes at it.

"Ash." He says. It's a start. A shitty one at that.

He wants to laugh it away, and there's something stuck in his throat and he can't.

"Ash, for how long... have you been working for the company you have?" The tongue is heavy in his mouth, and he hates to talk to Ash that way like he has to fight him. *Question* his words.

Ash snorts. His eyes go just slightly wider, caught off guard, for Reddoons, an advantage.

He doesn't *want this to be a fight*.

"Why you... Why would you... A couple... a few years?" Ash's voice grows back to not quite normal by the last words, but the first it rings out high.

Red's hand falls and grips his against the wall, pressing it by the wrist. Ash doesn't budge. He's just breathing loudly, deep, like he's trying to calm himself. He's not.

"Ash." He drawls. "I just need you to tell me one thing. One more thing. Why?"

"Why *what*, Red? You're not making *that* much sense."

Ash's hand gets jerked forward when Red turns at him, full force, and he wishes he could play it smart now but he's just slowly fraying at the edges. Ash is a killer. He knows that, he is himself. He reshaped his morals a long, long time ago and simply threw most of them out the window, and he would even more for Ash. But, there's an issue.

"Ash, when they tell you to come right for me, what are you gonna do?" He rasps, and he sounds dead to himself.

A short noise's ripped from Ash's throat. He's too close, again, and his look's jumpy like he expected anything but that from Red, like he had an answer but not for this.

"I... I'll..." He gulps. "Red, *Red*, I'm literally..." He laughs, high and hysterical notes again. "A side job of mine never bothered you this much before."

"You guessed it first time." Red says, apathetically. "You know how important it is. Ash, do you want to know how much of a bodycount I have in investigators?" He grins, although it's just his lips twitching, widening into a smile he can't hold, nowhere close to happy, just fucking *bitter*. "You wouldn't just sell that out to them, would you?"

Ash rips his hand from him. His both go somewhere on Red's collar instead, and Red feels them shake even though the knuckles go white with the harsh grip.

"You *don't* tell me that... I thought you'd know me better than that, Reddoons. I... If *you were given the chance, would you refuse?*" The words sound rehearsed, something wired into his memory from repeating them for too long.

"Refuse what, Ash." His voice is flat. "Tangling up with, you *know* who they are, you *know* how they think of..."

"*You're* the last person who should talk trash of others there, Red, who knows how many times *you've* gotten your own hands dirty." Ash keeps breathing in and out, full chest, but his hands are just limp on Red's shoulders now. Any of his insults can't hit with it.

"For years, you've been working *as an investigator*." Red settles it.

The image of Ash doesn't click with it. Ash, panicked. Ash, scarred face, promising he's never meddling with the people *up on the food chain*, that he gets it he's not invulnerable.

"You never told me a thing."

Ash, swinging the door open two days after he comes up to Red to tell him he's not dead, with his empty scent that's not exactly a human's but that he'd never put as a vampire's, anymore.

Ash, *before*. Ash could always be a bitch, a liar, a killer, but he *never thought* he could be...

"I did it for..."

"*Ash*." The word seems to have no meaning anymore. "Ash, did you really think you could just fit in seamlessly, that you wanted to, to be human again? That you'd go to these lengths?"

Ah, Red knew he never truly knew him enough. He never does, anyone, why's he not on top of the

world? That's why. Not even Clownpierce is, really.

"Shut the fuck up, Red." Ash whispers. "You really think you found your perfect explanation and you can just stick with it?"

Red shrugs brokenly. "Explain then."

Ash barks out a laugh.

"Lie about it. Think up something." Red tilts his head back and then sideways on the wall, away from him. "It doesn't matter, does it? You've just done something, something worse than murder, *hah*, worse than all I've known you do."

He thinks lightly he should feel sorry to Ash he betrayed one of the secrets of his, one of the strings in the web. That made Ash weaker.

That's just how it goes. Information for information.

"I really hope you'll think twice, then." He mutters. "When they send you to kill me."

"They're scared of you." Ash tells him in the back already, when he takes one uneven step away, back to the hum of the crowd outside the clean cramped corridor.

"Okay." He doesn't turn. "Okay."

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