

[Adam C. POV]

My boots whispered against the damp undergrowth as I trudged forward, my heart pounding in time with the quiet symphony of the night.

I smiled, letting out a breath of relief.

The forest, typically teeming with the sounds of wildlife, had fallen eerily silent, as though it was holding its breath along with me. The darkness was thick and relentless, broken only by the intermittent slivers of moonlight that filtered through the dense canopy overhead.

The moon, swollen and radiant, hung like a silver orb in the endless inkwell of the sky. It cast an ethereal glow over the forest, turning the mossy greens into hues of blue and the stark tree trunks into monolithic specters.

The stars appeared to wink at me from their lofty perches, their light twinkling in the glassy surface of my eyes. Each twinkle, each flicker of celestial light, seemed to guide my path, becoming my silent companions in this solitary journey.

Mavis had stayed home to finish a book she had started reading, and for this mission, I had decided to come alone, for multiple reasons.

I needed a brief time to... think, so to speak.

Taking a deep breath, I closed my eyes.

The scent of damp earth and pine-filled my nostrils, a raw, invigorating aroma that was unique to this forest.

My senses heightened, I could taste the sweet, crisp air on my tongue and feel the velvety darkness pressing against my closed eyelids. My heartbeat was a steady drumbeat in my ears, resonating with the gentle rustle of the unseen leaves.

I had a lot of things to do.

A lot of goals to accomplish before time became my enemy.

Perhaps I was letting what I knew about the future to affect me too much, but I couldn't help it.

It was stressful feeling like you were the only one capable of doing something if push came to shove.

Behind my closed eyes, I envisioned the path ahead, a trail unseen but not unfelt, I envisioned the future I wanted to live.

The twigs snapped under my boots, the uneven terrain pushing against my soles, guiding me along.

The thought of the future hung heavy in my mind, an invisible thread pulling me forward, but keeping me caged.

Pushing those thoughts aside, I shook my head, focusing on finishing the job I had taken. I had already finished the job, now all I had to do was reach the town, to complete the task that had been entrusted to me before I could return to the familiarity and comfort of Magnolia.

The quest had been... easy, too easy, to the point it had almost felt like a chore, seeing all I had to do was keep someone safe from one point to the other, which I had done, without encountering any enemies in the way.

"I wonder how long it will take me to get back home using Shunpo," I muttered, gazing at the sky with a sigh.

I really needed a drink.

Maybe a whiskey, or a couple hundred beers...

I stopped, my head snapping out of thought as I glared ahead, sensing a presence lurking around. Feeling the absurd amount of blood lust this unknown was giving off, I stepped forward and spoke in an icy tone. "Show yourself or else you'll regret it."

Emerging from the inky umbra of the forest, a strange entity of otherworldly malevolence manifested itself. Tall and menacing, towering over the dense undergrowth, its silhouette a nightmare against the backdrop of the moonlit trees.

"And what do you want?" I asked, tilting my head.

Its body seemed to be composed of the very essence of darkness itself, shimmering with a light obsidian hue that was woven from the shadows around it.

The entity carried an unnatural sense of fluidity, flowing and shifting with a hypnotic grace that belied the wickedness that seemed to embody.

Harsh, grotesque features gave the entity a monstrous visage, prominent horns that arched from its forehead, resembling twisted and gnarled branches, pointing towards the now starless sky in a grotesque mockery of a crown.

Its eyes were twin embers, gleaming with a hellish red glow, filled with an insatiable hunger and unending cruelty, two orbs of hellfire, abysses of despair, smoldering with the torment of lost souls.

A wicked grin splits its face, revealing rows of razor-sharp teeth that glint like daggers in the faint, spectral light. A

sinuous tail, tipped with a vicious barb, whipped restlessly behind it, carving dark grooves into the forest floor.

A palpable aura of malevolence radiated from the entity, causing the very air to curdle with dread. The ground beneath it appeared scarred, the flora, and everything around withering in its presence, as if nature itself was recoiling from its blight.

"What do... I want? I... want you..." The entity replied, its voice, a whisper that echoed through the trees, a grating cacophony that sounded like the grinding of stone on stone.

I chuckled.

I really have a strange kind of luck to get these... kinds of encounters on a monthly basis, at this point I'm pretty sure I am desensitized to anything horror related.

"You want me, my, oh my," I gasped, pretending to blush, "I never knew I had such an effect on creatures of the dark. I'm flattered, but I'm afraid I'm not interested in a one-night stand with a shadow creature."

The entity's grin twisted into a snarl, its eyes blazing with fury, and it lunged at me with lightning speed, at least twice as fast as Erza's current max.

Not bad, if this was a spar that is.

I sidestepped its attack with ease, the ground shaking under the entity's weight as it crashed into the ground, splintering it in half.

I shook my head with a sigh...

"I really don't have time for this," I muttered, unsheathing the sword at my waist.

The entity roared, and I charged toward it, my sword flashing in the moonlight as it clashed with the entity's barbed tail. The clash produced a deafening noise that echoed throughout the forest, causing the trees to sway and the leaves to fall as the earth around us cracked open.

It seemed the creature was more durable than I expected.

No...

That wasn't it...

It was something... different going on right now.

I hummed, dodging another attack from the entity, before delivering another strike, this time realizing what was happening, it wasn't that the demon was durable, it was the shadows his body seemed to be made out of were... bending around my blade, avoiding most if not all damage.

What an interesting technique, I wonder if that's how Logia powers work in One Piece...

Never mind that, questions for later.

"So, let's be real here, who sent you?" I asked, parrying the entity's attack with ease.

While being attacked wasn't something out of the ordinary, being attacked without reason was, and while I didn't care much for whatever vendettas some had against me, I was curious about why a demon of all things was attacking me.

I think it was a demon at least, I'm not sure, I don't have much of a reference to compare, seeing Deliora was an artificial one, so I'm basing my opinion on his looks...

Wait... am I being racist?

Before I could ponder on that thought for much luck, the entity hissed in response, its eyes narrowing in anger. "No one sent me," it spat. "I come for my own purpose."

I raised an eyebrow, skeptical of its answer. "And what purpose might that be?" I inquired, twirling my sword in anticipation.

The entity chuckled, a sound that seemed to grate on my nerves like nails on a chalkboard. "You are an interesting one, mortal," it said, circling around me like a predator stalking its prey. "You possess a power that I rarely come across. A power that could be of great use to me."

I frowned, not liking where this was going. "Don't tell me you're one of those demons that want to possess others and stuff..."

The entity grinned wickedly, its eyes gleaming with anticipation. "Oh, I do more than just possess, mortal," it hissed. "I consume the very essence of those I enter. And with your power, I could become stronger than ever before, strong enough to rival the Gods!"

Great, an Orochimaru type of demon, that like his name gives out, wants to wear my skin and shit, hurray. "Sorry to disappoint you, but I'm not interested in getting the Orochimaru treatment, I'm not that edgy," I retorted, my eyes locked onto the demon's. "Now, if you don't mind, I have better things to do than chat with a demon."

With that, I lunged forward, blurring out of sight with a single step, my sword slicing through the air towards the demon's midsection, cutting the demon in half.

However, instead of dying, the demon's body shattered into thousands of pieces before reforming itself again.

"You can't kill me, little human... you'd have to destroy my entire being in order to do so!"

Huh...

Well, thanks for telling me.

Honestly, sometimes I get the best kind of bad guys, the incredibly stupid ones.

Taking a step forward, I brought my blade down releasing a massive arc of energy that cut through the demon's body, causing it to scream in agony as it dissipated into nothingness.

I sighed, wiping the non-existent sweat off my forehead. "Note to self: stop taking enthusiastic walks through the dark magical forests with warning signs at night, demons now want to wear your skin."

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There's another magical presence ahead...

Twenty... no... fifty miles to the north.

Another demonic presence...

Could it... a coincidence? Or...

It wasn't in the direction I was heading towards, meaning that if I went that way I would have to take a detour...

I sighed.

"Fuck it, I will go ahead and investigate," It wasn't like I had much to do, besides, I wouldn't feel good about myself if I knew I left a demon running rampant just because I felt lazy.