

[Rum] Audition

Original doc

We met where you'd expect us to meet, a graveyard.

The old widow placing flowers at the foot of her husband's grave is such a trope. Few ever notice me, and those who do are immediately frightened, but she was a rare exception. I asked about her day, she asked about mine, and from there, we just started talking.

It was nice to have a friend. I would tell her the tale of kings and peasants, heroes and villains, and all the rest in the last moments, welcomed into my arms as equals. She would tell me about the husband she lost, the son she sadly outlived, and the grandchildren who don't call anymore. An uneventful life for the most part, but one far too often taken for granted.

I never got to give my final goodbye. Someone else was probably tasked with being her guide. Not that I can complain. I was too emotionally compromised by then. However, she left me with a bizarre set of instructions.

I made my way to her apartment, where I found two envelopes left on the table. I don't need to explain your red envelope. The white one was more cryptic. She made me promise that I wouldn't open it if and unless I won, and if I couldn't win, pass it on to whomever beats me. It's supposed to contain her wish.

The featureless shinigami finished telling his tale to the indescribable figure, this so-called 'God Eater'. Her skin, hair, and everything else glowed too bright to make out any details. The silhouette and voice were the only indicator that the divine being was even a "her" at all.

"So you plan on joining on behalf of the old lady?" Asked the shady figure cloaked in radiance.

"Haha, not quite." the death spirit admitted "My duty is to protect the cycle of life and death, and a mortal with the power of a wish is a major threat to the status quo, regardless of their intent. If her wish was something selfless and harmless, I'll grant it, but my main objective is to prevent anyone else from getting their hands on the prize, if you would allow me."

"Interesting." The lack of words in her response felt very intentional. One doesn't earn the title of 'God Eater' by telegraphing their thoughts or any extra information. She walked up to him and reached forward, her hand passing through him empty visage like a vacant gust of wind. "You can do whatever you want with the wish if you can win it fair and square, but this is a bigger problem." A small chuckle passed through her lips. "I'm not matching up my contestants of my tournament against a depressed fart cloud. If you're going to compete in my tournament, you'll have to slip

into something more corporeal... if you would allow me.”

“By all means,” he invited, “let the games begin.”

Behind the burning bright light, the shinigami could just barely make out a mischievous grind on the God Eater’s face as she raised her fingers and...

*snap

Darkness, darkness, and yet more darkness...

...and then...

Unimaginable discomfort!

Wet organs wriggled from within, skin wrapped around like latex. The shinigami felt nauseous simply because he had a stomach capable of the sensation. By mortal standards, he was perfectly healthy, and yet he felt anything but.

Then came the first sensation of touch. It was, wood followed by a warm breeze against his cheek. There was a welcoming aura around him that eased the burden of flesh slightly. He finally mustered up the courage to open up his eyes. The blurred shapes of what looked like a tavern shifted into view along with the bar he was propped up against. He turned to see an amber glass next to him. His newfound arms scrambled clumsily as one tried to lift himself up while the other raised it. As his eyes grew focused and the liquid within the glass settled, he could make out his reflection. A relatively young man with raccoon ears stared back at him. He didn’t need the reflection to feel the matching tail behind him. Clearly, this was the God Eater’s idea of humor.

“Are you planning on drinking that or are you just admiring the color?” A gruff voice asked nonchalantly.

The shinigami could barely make out the oni bartender who posed the question from the corner of his eye, his sight finally clear, but he remained fixated on the glass. “...Is this me?” he inquired, still perplexed by his new form.

“Not unless your name is rum.” She joked in an attempt to break the awkward tension. “My name’s Saki. The boss already told me your story, so we can skip all that flowery stuff about kings, peasants, and tropes or whatnot. Do you have a name I can call ya?”

The shinigami broke his trance and realized he had stumbled into a conversation. “Uh, no. My people don’t normally have names.”

“Of course you don’t.” Saki rolled her eyes. “Do you have one you’d want to go by?”

“Rum will do”

“...Rum?” Her eyes narrowed

“That’s what you called me a moment ago, isn’t it?”

“As a joke!” Saki protested, “Look, I get that you reaper folk are all anti-materialistic with that whole ‘it all returns to ash’ mumbo jumbo sentiment, but you can’t take something as a name so lightly. It’s what the world uses to recognize you as... well you.”

“I can’t think of anything better at the moment, and by the time I do, the name ‘Rum’ will probably stick by then. Besides, I like names with fewer syllables. It helps to speed up conversation.”

“If you say so.” Saki shrugged, “It definitely has fewer syllables than ‘Hana’s replacement’, I guess.”

Rum, now with better control over his arms, carefully placed the glass down before looking back at Saki, his head tilted inquisitively. “Who?...”

“Hana, she’s the last one invited to the tournament that hasn’t shown up. I figured, by process of elimination, that you were her substitute.”

“That has to be a mistake then. The name of the old lady who gave me the invitation was Eliza.”

“I don’t know what to tell ya. There’s no mistakes on the roster.”

Rum slowly turned away, pulled out the white envelope, and stared blankly. It had never occurred to him to ask why a seemingly ordinary old lady had an invite to the tournament, and then all of a sudden, the name of the invitation’s original owner, Hana, waltz into the story, only creating more questions. His first and only friends had been keeping secrets from him

It was at that moment, Rum had inherited all the essential ingredients of a mortal: a body, a name, and a deep sense of worry.

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