

An Infernal Assignment

This hardly ever goes over well, but something about this place tells me that this time will be easier. For one, the apartment is pretty dim, especially for two in the afternoon, which I could prove to you because I tripped over a goddamn charging cable on the way in, and that incident almost completely dirtied my cloak (we call the color of it “matte black” down where I’m from, which is in some ways a joke, but it also sounds super cool). Additionally, I can’t seem to find any pictures of kids, and there’s hardly any jewelry in the bathroom, so either she doesn’t have any family, or she has a family that doesn’t buy her earrings, and I’m not really sure which is more tragic. She’s sloppy, I mean -- I’m not really in any room to judge, I just have a job to do, but when you find yourself breaking into these places all day long, you build a certain extent of homemaking instinct. I don’t really want to be that guy, I *hate* to have to judge, but she could, at the very least, cut down on the dirt by taking her shoes off when she comes in the front door, and maybe also keeping the attacking charging cables to a minimum.

Do I look like an idiot? I always feel like an idiot doing this. It’s not like anyone else but the assignment can see me, and my bosses do a pretty good job of concealing all that for me, but I swear I’m looking through her mirror and I feel like the cloak might just overdo it. I’m not monotone, you have to understand, I do have charisma when I do this, which is why I get to wear matte black cloaks and not *grandpa’s-getting-older* light gray, but isn’t it shocking enough to hear you’re coming with me, and you have no choice, and you can’t even take your powdered donuts in the pantry with you? The cloak just seems extraneous, I think. What if she saw me? What if she walked in right now? I’m supposed to be by the front door, *at* the front door, *in* the front door? I can’t blow this, seriously, I can’t. I haven’t reached my quota.

Besides, an older woman with no family is an easy assignment. The older ones want to go with me, most times. All the shit they have to do -- AARP meetings, town hall events, fighting with kids over their inheritance, and driving’s a whole thing too -- sometimes I don’t even say the words! They see my cloak and mumble *Leviticus* or some shit and they’re sold. One guy I work with down where I’m from had an assignment who was having some book club, and he came to take the guy, and all the others begged him, *begged* him to tag along! I get that those people love to live out retirement in Florida or Arizona, but do they even understand how hot it gets in Hell?

One of the things we’re told is to get into character, which I always thought was really stupid, because if you see me, you’re sort of dead already. I don’t think I need to give any Golden-Globe performance for my assignments to figure out what’s going to happen, I really just have a job to do. It’s two-fifteen when she finally comes in, and I’m thinking of new opening lines. I always thought “*Come with me.*” was really *really* stupid, because then they ask more

questions than I can afford to answer, especially because I'm behind on my goddamn quota. Recently, I've gone with "*I'm Death, and you're my soulmate,*" just to lighten the mood, and one time I opened with "*I'm from Hell, and I've come to invite you to the party down there. Hurry, though! Stalin and Kim Jong-il just started playing darts!*" The poor guy was so frightened, especially because a stranger in a cloak was just losing it with laughter. Not a good image for the Hell brand, but I can't say I'm against doing it again someday. Maybe if I opened with --

"Not today."

She spoke first! She can't... do that! Nowhere in our manuals did it say anything about that, but then again, our manuals all burned down some time ago because of, you know, the endless fire and eternal burning and such. I'm in the middle of thinking about how my Alanis Morissette CD burned down a few weeks ago and how much I wanted to cry through the heat when I realize that I've seen this woman before. As if my bosses really couldn't tell me I'm bad at my job enough, they've sent me on a goddamn loop, to pick up the scraps I lost in the wind. Corporate management is some amount of bullshit, let me tell you.

"Brenda, you have to come with me this time, I mean it. Last time I was nice, but now I have a job to do. I need to reach my quota."

"I respectfully refuse, sir. Bingo is tomorrow and I will surely be attending; the fortune cookie I had last night told me it's my lucky week. And I doubt you have quotas, anyway."

"Of course we have quotas, Brenda! The underworld is NOT some fucking mom-and-pop shop! We have rules, employees of the month, even career pathways! My buddy Sven started in the warehouse ten months ago, and he's already in line for Chief Torture Officer of Ward F! And your fortune cookie is wrong. It's anything *but* your lucky week."

"Go to Hell."

She spits at me, which is just completely uncalled for no matter *what* matter I broke in over, but I have a job to do. I rush towards her as she floats away — I'm not sure how someone her age could move any faster —

— and the goddamn charging cable just *drenches* my cloak in dust and debris.

Now my authority is shot, as is frankly my motivation, because I'm not about to ruin the matte black any further, and Brenda has fled out of the door, probably to eat more fortune

cookies and float to the retirement home to see the gals. Do I look stupid? I'm standing here, I look like I live underground, beside the point, and all I hear are footsteps, growing further and further from me as Brenda gets farther away from my goddamn quota. I just had a job to do.

God, I need a change of pace. Enough Brendas running from their apartments, and I'll get sent to Ward G, where all you do is chase down Alec Baldwin, but he never obeys. I just need a new break, a place where there's several assignments, a place just bubbling over with people that really, really want to go to Hell. Momma, I'm heading to Wall Street!