

He was just a crow, a mere bird with a horn on his head, but to the King of Hell, he was far more. Since the King was a child, that very bird was his caretaker. That bird was his seer, his eye in the sky, his doctor, his shoulder, his best friend, his whole heart. One will never see the Crow without the large opalescent orb in his talons; that was how he performed his work as a seer in service of the King of Hell. The orb had never been touched by any other hand; it held unpredictable powers that only the Crow could both understand and handle.

It was a cold night when the Crow gained a new prediction that would become his worst nightmare. In his orb, he saw the King's sword implanted into the ground, blade first, with astragalus growing from underneath. In this prediction, the King of Hell's fate has been revealed. With the orb in talons and a heart barely holding together, the Crow flew from the depths of his cove to warn his King of his upcoming fate. Though it was never said who would be the one to kill the King, the Crow could name several demons who would care to do so from the top of his head. Such thoughts were enough to keep him on edge, but considering the situation he had just predicted, it nearly paralyzed him in fear.

"Oh, your Royal Majesty. Oh, my dear King," the Crow squawked as he flew into the King's chambers, "I saw your fate, my King. You are to die soon." The King of Hell, in his bed, awoken from his sleep, could only respond with open eyes, but not a single sound had left him. His own fate did not bother him anywhere near as much as the sight of his dear, distressed friend panicking before him. So when the King held his hand out, the Crow flew in closer, perched on his hand, and let him run his fingers from the top of his head to the back of his neck. Though the King had never spoken a single word in his entire life, muter than the calmest and emptiest of nights, his gesture spoke millions to the Crow, with them saying, "It will be okay." The child he had to comfort many times before was now comforting him.

Since that night, the Crow could never stand to be far from the King of Hell, not even for a moment. Anyone could come in and kill him at any given moment, and even being a King, he was still a human who was vulnerable to any attack a demon could make. Once the Crow has a prediction, any attempts to change the fate would be futile as it was something not even he, the Crow, could adjust to his liking. He at least wanted to be there to say goodbye to the beloved human he had spent so many years caring for.

That was when he heard the King cough. And again, he would cough but more violently to where droplets of blood were present. For the past several days, he has worried about someone attacking the King; the Crow then realized it wasn't *who* would kill him, but *what* will. It was worse than having someone try to harm the King because at least it was more predictable, and there was even the very thinnest of slightest of chances that it could be stopped, but this wasn't something that could be physically stopped no matter if they had the strongest of guards in Hell. This was the fate of the King. He was to die a slow and painful death, and the thought of that tore the Crow apart within.

"Oh, my dearest King..." the Crow murmured against the King's head. He would then feel the fingers run down from his head to his neck again.

As the King grew weaker, to the point where he could no longer leave his bed, the Crow, though swearing to never leave his side, could never muster the courage to face his pale face. Every cough was met with a painful wince. Every shaky finger he felt on his head to his neck would nearly make him weep on the spot, but he would only keep the pain within.

Whenever the King of Hell was asleep, the Crow would make his way back to his cove, and there, he would race through every medical book there was possible for a cure. Medical books, spell books, whatever book there was, he would burn through it, desperate for an answer,

a tiny bit of hope that this fate *could* be changed. But the medical and spell books meant for demons like him would be futile for humans like his King. It truly was futile to change his fate.

But the Crow searched deeper than ever before. He traveled far for many days and nights throughout Hell to find a cure. It may have been useless, but the thought of letting his King fall from him and giving up so soon made his eyes swell and his heart ache terribly. It wasn't until the Crow found a cure. There, in the deepest heart of a forgotten forest, was a seed theorized to be from the human realm. He of read it in a human medical book but was told that the plant was beyond rarer than the rarest of gems to where it could have been extinct, but it was right there in front of him. The Crow's hope had been restored. This seed, however, was unlike any other. Rather than requiring soil and water, it required a demon's flesh, blood, and love to grow. It wasn't until then that the Crow knew why the attempts to change the King's fate were so fruitless.

And so, upon his return, the Crow snuck into the King's chamber unannounced to retrieve the King's sword, the only weapon known to kill a demon. He did not wish to wake the King of Hell in his chamber because he knew that the King's own attempts to change the Crow's fate would be futile. It had always been futile from the very beginning. With the orb in one talon and his beloved King's sword in the other, the Crow flew down into the center of the King's garden, just below the window of the King's chamber. The seed to save the King was already held in the Crow's beak, and upon putting his orb down and the sword in position, he looked up to the King's window and screamed as loudly as he ever possibly could.

"Oh, my beloved child, I give my blood and body to you." He screamed, "Use me for your cure. Your health- your safety guaranteed means more to me than my own life ever will. My presence may be gone, but my soul will be with you always and forever." And with his

unconditional love and eternal gratitude declared, the Crow, with the King of Hell's sword in his talons, forced the blade through his chest, willing and unhesitatingly. His body fell with the sword in his chest and orb in talon, sinking into the soil of the King's garden.

The King awoke to a pain in his chest, and it was that pain that kept him from falling asleep. The morning was on the rise, and as the King looked through the window of his chamber, hoping to see the Crow, he looked down and saw something else instead. There, in his most loveliest garden, was his sword implanted into the ground, blade first, and underneath was astragalus blooming from the ground with something shimmering in its stems and leaves.

Weak as he may have been, he rushed into his garden to inspect the plant even closer. Upon studying the shimmering object in the steams and leaves was the Crow's opalescent orb. No one had once ever touched that orb, but as the King reached out to it, it was almost as if the plant was giving it to him personally. With the orb in hand, more precious than anything that could ever exist, the King of Hell raised it to the sun and watched it shimmer brilliantly as much as the star itself, making the astragalus below grow more and more to match the height. Its vines and leaves gently wrapped themselves around the King's hands and against his face as he held the orb. And as the plant grew, with his hand, he let his finger run from the plant's leaves down its stem. He could feel the leaves of the plant brush against his face, upon his cheeks and eyes, as he leaned his head against it. And upon lifting his face off the gentle plant, the leaves were wet.