Dante Ven IV, was dying. He had always known that Death would eventually come for him, as the plague she was, like she came for everyone. He had given everything to stall Death’s arrival, but it still hadn’t been enough. As the light began to dim and shadows started to creep along the walls, Dante felt a chill sweep through him as Death appeared before him. The hair on the back of his neck stood up as Death towered over him, radiating fear.

Dante tried to make himself look unfazed. “So, you’ve finally arrived. I’ve been awaiting you for some time now.”

Death’s voice thundered as she spoke. “You speak as though you welcome me. If you’re trying to get me to let my guard down, it won’t work. I know better than to trust a necromancer.”

Dante laughed. “A necromancer? Is that what you think I am? How foolish of you to assume such a thing.”

Death was seething. “YOU DARE MOCK ME? I AM HERE TO END YOUR MISERABLE LIFE! YOU SHOULD FEAR ME!

“Please forgive me,” Dante said with false sincerity. “My intensions were not to anger you. I merely wished to inform you of the mistake you have made in coming here.”

“I made a mistake? You’re the one making a mistake, TRYING to anger me. But it won’t work, I know you’re just trying to stall me.

“Oh really? It appears to me that it is working.”

Death growled as she stepped forward. Dante grinned as she stepped onto the glyph, nearly invisible, and chains burst from the ground.

Death’s eyes widened as the chains wrapped around her arms, preventing her from moving.

“WHAT IS THIS?! WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?!”

Dante smirked. Everything was going according to plan.

“Poor, naïve Death. I’ve done nothing to you. You triggered alone the glyph.”

Death strained against the chains. “You’ll pay for this! No mortal has ever bested me! Once I break your spell, I’ll make you regret ever casting it!”

Dante observed her as she tried to break the chains. How pathetic. Doesn’t she know that you can’t break binding spells using brute force?

“No mortal has ever bested you? Well, fortunately for me, I’m not mortal. In fact, no one will be mortal with you trapped here.”

“What do you mean? You can’t hold me here forever. This spell will eventually wear off.”

“While it is correct that this particular spell is not permanent, I have other means of stopping your blight.”

“If you’re saying that you’ll kill me, it won’t work. You can’t kill an immortal.”

“Can you really be sure of that? Although it is certain that most things can’t kill an immortal, it’s most certainly not impossible.” Dante walked over to the carved throne and made to grab for his arcane staff.

“Even if you could kill me, what would you accomplish? Surely you know better than to kill a useful prisoner.”

Dante sighed. They always try to convince me they’re useful. Do they not know they aren’t?

“What possible use could I have with a minor deity such as you?” he spat. “You’re much more useful to me dead.”

“Please, if you wanted me dead, I’d be dead already. You want something from me, don’t you? I’ll tell you what, if you release me, you’ll never see or hear from me again. You have my word.”

“Do you take me for a fool? If I let you leave, you’ll most likely return in a few years, or kill me where I stand. Why would I risk my life on nothing more than your word?” He reached for his staff once more.

“There must be something else you want. I’ve dealt with humans before. There’s always something they want.”

Her voice was shaking slightly as she spoke. Dante smirked as he picked up his staff. He felt its power flow through him.

“Yes, there is something else I want.”

“What is it? A soul returned? A treasure recovered? A pact of strength?

“I want you dead.”

Death continued to struggle against the chains. Dante continued to smile smugly.

“This is quite entertaining. I almost don’t want to kill you. Almost.” He raised his staff, preparing to cast another spell.

“You should be honored. You’re about to play an integral role in the course of history. Your life will function as the catalyst for the return of my reign of power. A reign that will last for centuries to come.”

As he brought the staff down, a thunderous sound echoed throughout the cave. Glowing runes began to circle around Death, still restrained by the chains, and started to form into walls of illuminated text. There was a blinding flash as the energy from the spell was released.

Death’s eyes fluttered open. “W-what was that?”

The air around Dante was still glowing slightly. He stumbled backwards, falling onto the carved throne. “The spell must have failed. I must have done something wrong. Maybe I…. Never mind, it matters not. I have other ways of dealing with you.”

“Ha! Your spell failed? You had me believe you were an all-powerful wizard. Obviously, you were trying to frighten me.”

“Watch your tongue. Do you forget that I am the one who has you trapped?” Dante’s gaze shot daggers at Death. What insolence. She dared to mock him even though he had decided to spare her life.

Death had a look of satisfaction on her face. “You won’t be able to keep me trapped for much longer. Soon your chain spell will wear off and then there’s nothing to stop me from killing you.”

“I can promise you that by the time my spell ends you will be dead.”

“In your dreams. You already tried to kill me once. What makes you think that spell will work next time. It’s pointless, you’ll never be able to kill me. None of your pathetic spells will do anything.”

Dante sighed. Is she really trying to do this? He’d lived for thousands of years, and he had never met anyone as naïve, as self-centred, or as arrogant as her. Surely, she was just trying to trick him, right? There’s no chance that she is actually this oblivious.

“You’re trying my own tactic against me. Trying to goad me into coming forward so that you can reach me. You try in vain. Such a feeble attempt will not work on me. It seems that you have forgotten that it was I who used that tactic on you in the first place. I’m able to see it coming from several miles away.”

“Right, several miles away.” Death’s tone was obviously a mocking one. “You’re starting to get angry, so it seems like you’ve falling for your own trick.”

Dante’s face contorted into a snarl. “Do not mock me. My patience wanes, child.”

Death laughed. “That’s right, get angrier. Soon enough I’ll be free of your spell. Then you’ll pay for what you’re doing.”

Dante took a moment to regain his composure. “What I’m doing? But certainly Death, you must realise that what I am doing is for the good of all.”

Death’s eyes widened. “What? How is killing a god something good?”

“It is simple logic. If Death is dead, then no-one else will die. Surely you know this.”

Death stopped struggling for a moment. “All this, risking your eternal life, just so people you probably will never know won’t die?”

“Correct. My goal is to remove your blight from this land so that all may be free from the fear of Death.”

“It won’t work.”

“What?”

“I don’t cause Death, I only guide souls to the afterlife. Killing me would only cause an excess of wandering spirits.”

“NO! I refuse to believe it. This is only a ploy. You’re trying to convince me you’re worthless so that I’ll release you. I can’t believe I almost fell for it.”

“I’m not trying to convince you of anything. That is the truth, whether you choose to believe it or not.”

“ENOUGH! I am tired of your antics. I am going to end you, here and now.”

Dante once again raised his staff and began to chant. The chains that bound Death began to glow red and smoke started to rise from her arms. Gritting her teeth, Death tried again to break her constraints. Dante continued to chant, getting louder and louder with every passing second. In one final struggle, Death leapt forward. As she did, the chains shattered. She landed with a resounding thud before summoning her jagged scythe into her hand.

“Your time is up.”

Dante scrambled back, eyes wide. “Wait, please spare me. I never meant to kill you, I was simply strengthening my binding spell. Please have mercy.”

Death laughed. “Like I’m supposed to believe anything you say. No, old man, I’m not going to spare you.”

She swung her scythe, barely missing. Dante reached for his staff, his only chance of survival. Just as his fingers closed around it, Death knocked it out of his reach. However, that momentary grasp was all he needed. His eyes alight, he spoke in an ancient tongue, calling upon the gods of old for aid. He shot out a hand as blue fire erupted from it, bathing the cave in a cool light. Death screamed in pain, although she continued her assault. Dante stood up, and with what power he had left, willed his staff into his hand.

“You will rue the day you crossed me.” As he spoke his voice resonated around the cave.

“And you’ll regret crossing Death, idiotic human.” said Death through gritted teeth and laboured breaths.

“I’ve lived to regret many things, but this will not be one of them.”

“Oh, and why’s that?”

“Because you haven’t won yet.”

With a few more ancient words, a thunderous sound shook the cave. Death was momentarily unbalanced. Dante ran forwards and knocked her over. He began to cast yet another spell. Scrambling from the ground, Death swept his feet from under him, raising her scythe to deliver the final blow.

“It’s over.” she said, face grim.

“Don’t you realise? It’s never truly over. Even if you kill me here, I’ll come back. You’ll never be able to permanently stop me.”

“A temporary solution is good enough for me.”

“Fine, do what you will. But know that I will haunt you for the rest of eternity, living or dead.”

“If that’s what it takes to get rid of you, then so be it.”

Dante knew this was the end. He had tried everything he could, but in the end, Death had won. He supposed he should have seen this coming, but nonetheless, he would accept this outcome. He would miss this world, although he was certain that he would return one day, but until that day came, he would rest.

“Very well, before you kill me, I have something I wanted to say to you.”

“Why should I let you? You’ve already said enough.”

“Have you no sympathy for an old man about to die?”

“No, I have no sympathy for an old man who trapped me in a cave for the sole purpose of trying to kill me.”

“Surely you must realise that all this was only in defence of my own life, of which I am about to be deprived.”

“Fine. Don’t make it too long.”

“Well then, my fair Death, I believe that we have come to the end of our time together, for now at least. I am certain that one day we will meet again, whether it be a day, a year, or several millennia from now. But you can be sure that when we next cross paths, my life will not be so easily taken.”

Death raised her scythe once again. As she prepared to bring it down, Dante closed his eyes accepting his fate. Death was right. It was over. He had tried everything, but nothing had worked This was the end. Then, everything went dark. There was nothing. Then a light started to glow.

Dante watched Death fighting his illusory self. Everything was going according to plan. As Death dealt the finishing blow to the illusion, he started to clap. His plan had worked. She had no idea that she’d been deceived.

“Very impressive.”

Death spun around to face him. “Impossible! I just killed you!”

Dante looked down at his arms. “Are you sure? I’m fairly certain I’m alive.”

“How? This can’t be possible. Your body is lying here.” She indicated toward Dante’s now-headless body.

“My, isn’t that unusual. It’s almost as if I was in two places at once.” Dante snapped his fingers, and the false corpse began to fade away. “You fool, did you not realise it was a façade. Tell me, dearest Death, do you remember when my spell supposedly failed?”

Death paused for a moment. “Of course, I remember. Yes, you were trying to cast a spell to-.” She stopped suddenly.

“It seems you have realised that I never intended to kill you. Nor did my spell actually fail. In fact, it worked better than expected. It’s true purpose was to create an illusory duplicate of myself.”

“And I fell for it. I should have known that you wouldn’t have died that easily.” Death’s face looked grim.

“Yes, I couldn’t have hoped for a better outcome. In addition, you have failed to realise that I now have the upper hand. I’ve been able to observe your fighting technique, if you can even call running ahead recklessly as a technique. There’s no point trying to fight back. I’ve already won.”

“Not yet you haven’t,” growled Death as she started across that cave, eyes full of malice.

Dante grinned as Death ran towards him. Just as she reached him, scythe in hand, she was suddenly forced back.

“What?! Why can’t I reach you!?”

“Because while you were busy fighting a false duplicate of me, I was busy casting a spell to seal you here.”

“Ha! You’ve wasted your time. It will wear off in a few hours.”

“You are correct in thinking it will wear off, you are wrong regarding how long it will last. This spell is quite ancient indeed. In fact, I only recently became aware of its existence.”

“How long does it last? A few days? Weeks? Months?” Death was beginning to look around franticly, probably searching for an exit.

“Do not fret, my dear Death. This spell will wear off eventually. In ten thousand years.”

As he turned to walk away, he heard Death yell out.

“YOU’LL PAY FOR THIS! In the end, all mortal creatures will succumb to death.”

Dante turned back. “Well, luckily for me, I am not mortal.” He waved his hand, causing rocks to move and seal the entrance of the cave. He walked over to the edge of the cliff, surveying the city below. The time had finally come for Lord Dante Ven IV to return to his rule.