

## Epilogue I

The Elsings had been considering the idea for about three weeks after a well-wisher at the funeral brought it up to Mr. Elsing. The man was not all that close to the Elsings on a personal level, only there as a formality and a sign of good will from his company to his. At some point in their conversation, some kind of pity formed in his heart, seeing two parents who had just outlived their only child at their most devastated. He originally planned to use their grief to gain leverage on his company's pending negotiations while the Elsings were still not in the right state of mind, but chose instead to offer them a mutually beneficial opportunity.

Mrs. Elsing was immediately in favor of the idea. The moment her husband put the strange business card into her hands and told her what it could do for them, she wanted to go through with it at once. Mr. Elsing decided it would be best if they sat on it for a month to think it over.

Tonight, they decided they'd both waited long enough.

Tonight, they would have the house staff go home early, they would clear the parlor, and they would draw the circle on the card with its runes and glyphs inside. Tonight, they would make a deal with the devil to bring their beloved daughter back to them.

Well, it would be more accurate to say; Tonight they would have all but the head butler, Jeffry take the night off because they didn't want to move all the furniture out of the way themselves. Plus, ol' Jeffy-Pop's the one person who knew the Elsings had been keeping their daughter's corpse locked up in her room. It was kept preserved with formaldehyde and whatever else Jeffry could get from the drugstore when he finished lugging her coffin upstairs while the Elsings went out on a griefily sabbatical.

Also actually, they wouldn't be making a deal with *the* devil, just a devil. The Elsings expected a slick-talking, human-like man with red skin, horns, tail, and a beard to appear from a roaring inferno of hellfire, like the fellow on the cinnamon candy box. Instead, they got a completely different demon, who stepped out of a swirling pillar of electric gas rising out of the summoning circle and greeted them with a hearty,

"Whats up, long nuts?"

This devil was shaped like a man, but everything else was wrong. Instead of horns, he had spikes on his back. Instead of a tail, he had wings like a bee, but folded like a bird's. He did have a suit, but instead of red skin and a beard, he was a greasy yellow and black, and wore a business-flavored bandanna over the lower half of his face.

"Noss'xx of Kumo'Douga Vise and Practices. Thank you for getting me involved in whatever the fuck... all this is." The devil gestured to the dead human girl, the hastily piled furniture, the WASPs clutching each other in fear, and the extremely sweaty man dressed like a penguin. His

crackling, vibrating voice showed little interest in the situation and seemed annoyed to be involved. Mr. Elsing took it upon himself to be the one to steer negotiations.

“Hello, Mr. Nosk, I’m Gerald Elsing. I got your card from Devon Patterson.” He said with a hand held forward and fear stuffed behind him.

“I don’t know who that is, but I like your get-to-the-pointitude.” The demon eagerly clutched Mr. Elsing’s wrist and gripped it tight. An uncomfortably warm, slick feeling shot up Gerald’s arm and into his heart as Noss’xx began to recite the Kumo’Douga Vise and Practices slogan,

***“A wish fulfilled - Infernal debt; The knots to tie the tightest net.”***

Gust as quickly as he started, Noss’xx let go and got straight to business. “Alright, I’ve already been briefed on the terms of the contract: You two will become the leaders of this city’s chapter of Kumo’Douga’s cult, and upon death, his firm lays claim to both of your souls. It’s a standard, brisk, and crunchy cult setup package, nothing to worry about-So!... What’re we having tonight? Am I turning the old lady into the dead lady, or vise-versa?”

“No, no, not at all!” Mr. Elsing got in-between the devil and his wife.

“Is it verse-visa? I brought my Negoti-Knife. I can make it quick and painless. Or long and public.” He drew a curved dagger and began tracing butchering lines on Mrs. Elsing with his eyes.”

“Absolutely not!”

“... Am I killing the penguin guy?”

“What!?” Jeffry yelped from the corner.

“Is he immortal or something? ‘Cause I’m pretty sure even you gumdrops could take him, and it wouldn’t even be illegal. Penguins ain’t got no rights.”

“We need you to bring back our daughter!” Mrs. Elsing cried behind upset tears.

“Bitch, she’s right there.”

“No, you-!! We want you to bring her back to life!” Mr. Elsing had thought he might regret this deal, but not like this.

“OH. Why didn’t you say so!?” Noss’xx stabbed the negoti-knife into his briefcase and turned it to open the latches. “Yeah, I can make that happen. I got some zombie work in my portfolio you can look over.”

The demon’s lack of decor might have been insulting and disrespectful in a negligent way if it wasn’t insulting in an obnoxious and overbearing way. Mrs. Elsing didn’t know if this was actually part of the price they had to pay for the resurrection of their daughter and if it was too late to consider other options.

Noss'xx handed the Elsings a binder with color-coded tabs, opened to a section with his necromantic profile. The plastic, sleeved pages held polaroids of heinous ghouls made from the corpses of humans. Each photo had an accompanying list of features written in the white space below them in marker, detailing features and add-ons as if they were cars to be purchased. He was charging extra to prevent the skin and eyes from turning blue or green with necrosis, and offered three kinds of gruesome, metal bindings to adorn the body with.

"Usually, I'd be hiking your trust funded pants as high as your buttcheeks would allow, but the cult values your potential membership, so I'm ready to ghoulify your kid up pro-bono." Noss'xx said, confident this would wrap the deal up quickly.

"We were hoping you could bring Jessica back to life without making her into a monster." Mrs. Elsing attempted to hide the disgust in her voice from coming out any more than it already had.

"What the fuck is a Jessacle?"

"Our **DAUGHTER!**"

"Ah. Have you perhaps considered Jemsicles would be better as a ghoul? Sure, you *COULD* have her back to normal and boring, oooooorr you could have a daughter who can fly.

With rocket feet.

You people like rocket feet?"

"Oh...! Hmmm..." The Elsings gave each other looks of like-minded consideration of the offer. They had never considered such a thought.

"Rocket feet would give her an edge on the tennis circuit." Mr. Elsing said.

"She was always a slouch when it came to chasing." Mrs. Elsing noted.

Ever the dealmaker, Mr. Elsing asked Noss'xx, "Could we have both? Normal daughter, and rocket feet?"

Noss'xx didn't even hesitate to answer, "No. What if I threw in- and I never do this so appreciate it- what if I threw in a bulletproof exoskeleton? I read your file, assassinations run in the family. How 'bout it?"

"Well..." Mr. Elsing thought about how every Elsing man had been shot at a minimum of two times in their lives. "No, no, we'll just take the rocket feet and a normal daughter."

"Can't do both."

"Well why not?" Mrs. Elsing pushed forward to give the demon a piece of her mind, "We're joining your little club like you wanted, the least you could do is meet us halfway and give us everything we ask for."

Noss'xx stood still. Motionless and silent, save for the ambient humming his throat made naturally.

This is a strategy that sometimes works in a pinch with humans. Sometimes if you start looking at them in silence, they get freaked out and do what you want. Not this time, unfortunately. The Elsings were too rich and used to getting what *they* wanted to impatiently agree to something just because they didn't know what was happening.

The demon gripped his long, blackened fingers and grunted angrily,  
“**NNNNNGGGHHH**-okay, look. I *CAN'T* make your thing alive *AND* not a zombie. *I* can't, but a specialist could. A specialist who's also a demon.”

“That's fine. Bring them here.”

“**FUCK.**” Noss'xx hoped he had been obnoxious enough that the humans would be just as reluctant to interact with another of his kind as he was. Especially since the only specialist Kumo'Douga Vice & Practices had on call was an absolute shitter he knew before Kumo'Douga Vice & Practices absorbed the business he quit to join Kumo'Douga Vice & Practices.

One angry phone call with more vitriol and yelling than even Mr. Elsing was capable of throwing at his underlings, and a trio of new demons emerged from the wet bushel of tentacles sprouting from the second circle Jeffry was forced to draw. The severe physical disparity between what stepped room was an unsettling surprise to Gerald. He expected to see more Noss'xx-es, not what currently occupied his living room.

The specialist devil went by *Formossa*, feminine in stature, sleek and thin with a moist gleam to her pale-purple skin. Her arms faded into a ghastly white at the hands, where her fingers converted into black, pointed claws at the third joint. She cocked her faceless head to the side with the longer of her two horns, and addressed the room with a cold greeting

“What's poppin', front-butts? Who'm I jamming the life back into tonight?”

“Our... daughter, Jessica.” Mr. Elsing answered on behalf of his tired and distraught wife. He made sure to gesture to the preserved corpse to make sure Formossa wouldn't require further clarification.

“How long she been dead?”

“About three weeks.”

“Has anything bit her, and/or laid eggs in her after, or two days before death?”

“No?”

“Easy.” She snatched a hair from the head of the corpse, then turned back to her associate.

“What's my cut?”

“Nothing. You work for me, you do the assignments I mentsign to you.”

“Okay. Counter offer: Me and the imps leave, you puke up all over this account, Kumo'Douga demotes you, and then tears your head off five times. I work for him, not you.”

“Um, excuse me, Miss, who or what are those?” Mrs. Elsing pointed to the other two demons that appeared with Formossa. The *‘imps’*, as the demoness referred to them, were not small goblinoids as any human would think them to be. They were demons the size of adult men, one with sunken dents forming its face and gangly arms that ballooned at the end, and the other a head like a fleshy cow’s skull with limbs hanging from the jaw.

The Elsings recoiled in disgust as the dent-faced one suddenly animated and came towards them with a business card outstretched in one of its swollen hands.

“Hey how’re ya. My name is-” It started before Formossa stopped it by grabbing it by the eye sockets and throwing it into a bookshelf.

“Their names are *‘Shut Up’* and *‘Shut Up’*. Don’t talk to the imps. They’re not here for that.” Formossa once again went back to negotiations with Noss’xx “Spill the terms or I squidulate myself back to the office.”

“Both these crinklemyers lives bound to the cult and their souls acquired at death. I get twelve percent of each geezer’s current value upon fulfillment.” Noss’xx said reluctantly.

“Ooh, that is a big deal. Alright, I want the lady’s twelve percent. Final offer. Take it or leave it.”

“I’m leaving it. They’re fine with a zombie kid anyway.”

“We most certainly are not, bring our Jessica back properly!” Mr Elsings shouted right before a rage-propelled chair flew past his head.

Noss’xx grunted in frustration, “Parry offer: No share of the bonus, but your name’ll be filed under the acquisition for the woman’s life. Everyone’ll think you did something of value and you’ll get a little something from that.”

“Don’t try to sell me a frosting without cake up under it. We both know my name on the acquisition doesn’t guarantee a promotion or a bonus. Offer changed to halvesies on the Mother, 60/40 split on the father.”

“You’re dumb. I’d never agree to that.”

“I’m open to negotiations.”

“... I accept negotiations.”

The Elsings were puzzled by this turn of events, believing they had been watching them negotiate this whole time. By human definition, yes, they had been negotiating the acquisitions of human life in unsettlingly cold business terms. By demon standards, this was merely setting the terms for what they would be negotiating (in the demonic style) for.

The bulbous imp began setting up a camera, while the skull-headed one opened and presented a briefcase to her boss. She pulled her own negoti-knife from the velvet cushion inside as Noss’xx brought his back out.

“What is this?” Mrs. Elsings asked.

“Negotiations.” Noss’xx answered. “Watch me rock this shit.”

The bulbous imp started recording his superiors on the camera, the other tied the devils’ arms together with their necktie. The sound of a whistle signaled the opening of negotiations, and Noss’xx and Formossa began stabbing each other repeatedly in the stomach.

“Ow. Ow. Ow. Ow. Ow. Ow. Ow. Ow. Ow.” Noss’xx took being repeatedly stabbed in the stomach by a colleague with all the dry adrenaline of pouring his morning bowl of mixed breakfast nails.

“Ow. Ow. Ow. Ow. Ow. Ow. Ow. Ow. Ow. Just a little longer, I got him on the ropes. Ow. Ow.” Formosa couldn’t display the brief twinges of pain on her face like Noss’xx could, but her voice did quickly hop up in pitch just a little on every sharp, metal, puncturing of her intestines.

The Elsings and Jeffry watched the devils stick each other for a good minute and a half before both of their suits and abdomens tore open and dumped all of their guts on the floor.

“OH MY LORD.” Mrs. Elsing almost fainted at the sight.

Formossa and Noss’xx stood up straight after the imps unbound them and the knives were put away safely. Noss’xx stretched out his back and let the last of his lower organs fall out before growing new guts and a stomach to hold them in.

“Okay call it.” He said to the imp with the camera.

It reviewed the footage, then after receiving a featureless glare from its superior, called a victor. “Uh... her.”

“Welp. That’s what I get for not bringing my own imps.” Noss’xx shrugged. “Alright, let’s get’er done.”

Formossa approached the Elsings with her arm outstretched. Just as Noss’xx did, she began to recite a slogan,

***“When a human’s dead and gone, We’ll have them back before the dawn.”***

“Use the Kumo’Douga slogan!” Noss’xx yelled from the back. “You don’t work for Merksinn no more!”

“It’s stupid! And it works all the same anyway.” Formossa impatiently gestured at the terrified Elsings to shake her hand and get this over with.

“Oh yeah sure, and the old one’s hot fuck on the street- **SHAKE HER HAND, YOU COWARDS!**” Noss’xx managed to both scare and pressure both of the Elsings into grabbing Formossa’s forearm. She reciprocated by bending three of her fingers backwards to grip both arms and shake. The deal had been extended.

The imps wasted little time setting up an unidentified, rectangular apparatus for their superior while the Elsings and Jeffry watched, completely unsure of what each dongle and flipped switch did.

Formossa shooed her imps away and undid or redid a few of their preparations, either done incorrectly, or to make her mess up. “We’re ready to start. I’m gonna need a tether to follow into the Dead Dimension if y’all wanna put down a tarp or something.”

Mrs. Elsing had had quite enough. She stamped her foot in anger, “I think we’ve spent enough time lollygagging with you devils. Just start the seance or whatever it is your little box does and bring our Jessica back to us!”

“I mean, the bitch ain’t getting any deader.” Formossa accurately pointed out.

“BRING HER BACK! NOW!” Ms. Elsing shouted as hard as she could.

“It’s your floor, Filth-House Frumpy.” Noss’xx said from the summoning circle he had finished adjusting “Bringin’ ‘em in.”

Through an electric cloud not unlike the one he arrived in, Noss’xx summoned not another demon, but a human. A man dressed in robes with a hood that obscured his face. Noss’xx gripped him by the collar and brought him in front of Formossa.

With arms outstretched and head thrown back, the robed man shouted to the ceiling. “I live for the glory of The Snare Demon. MY LIFE FOR KUMO’DOUGA!!”

“It sure is.” Noss’xx casually said as he just as casually plunged a dagger into the robed man’s chest. A gush of crimson hit the floor as the dagger tore downward through flesh and bone before their lifeless body splashed down and leaked more from its new opening.

The Elsings and Jeffry screamed in terror. They didn’t think this night could be any more disturbing, but only because they’re not very imaginative. Even the imps expected someone to die, and not even that cultist, necessarily. Even non-necromantic devilry has a high chance of someone getting eviscerated, or exploded.

Formossa urgently and impatiently shushed the remaining humans. There was no time to scream at the fragility of life, the tether had to be established. Noss’xx attempted to expedite the shushing process by neatly folding napkins into bad triangles and fitting them into the humans’ mouths.

Calculated swings and shifts in her hands allowed Formossa to follow the dispatched life of the cultist into the Dead Dimension. She held the hair she plucked from Jessica’s corpse in-between her index and thumb claws, using it to find its owner amidst the billions and billions of humans crammed all up in there. The hair sizzled away in the necrotic field of the palingenstra, giving her only so much time to find Jessica.

Palingenstra certification is an extremely difficult accreditation to earn, making whole-cloth necromancer one of those jobs your boss can’t afford to fire you from. Most demons, like

Noss'xx, don't have the patience to accurately sift through every caveman ever just to find just one specific human. Which is why he asked Formossa, "So did'ja do it or-"

Formossa shushed her co-worker, with even more frustration than before.

The wailing of the palingenstra, and Formossa's arm movements brought Mr. Elsing to ask a burning question, "Is that a theremin?"

Formossa shushed him too. She almost took her hands out of the necromantic field to hurl an imp at the man.

"Are you even trying to bring Jessica back? Are you trying to hoodwink us!?" Mrs. Elsing complained.

"SHUT. THE FUCK." Formossa said loudly, unintentionally setting herself further back than any other interruption had. She made hurried clawing motions in the field as the hair sizzled away into nothingness between her claws.

"Umm... Nope, lost it. Y'all talked too much."

Jeffry wasn't able to return with his bedsheets to use as a tarp as the Elsings instructed before the demons had summoned another cultist.

"MY LIFE FOR KUMO'D-"

"That's great, I'll tell him you said hi." Noss'xx cut the cultist off by cutting into his throat, adding even more blood to the growing puddle on the floor and some to the walls.

It's not an exact process, navigating the Dead Dimension. It's more like peering with your mind's eye into a suggestion of a space that every dead human is in. They're all in the same place, at the same time, but each one exists in their own version of that space and time. Formosa had to seek out the specific version of that space occupied by the very concept of Jessica Elsing, in both a physical and mental sense, in reference to herself, the people who knew her, and her role within the entirety of the universe.

Thankfully you don't have to actually learn about the person you're looking for. A strand of hair is good enough for reasons you'd have to be palingenstra certified to understand.

"Alright, I can't look away right now. Someone check the corpse and tell me what her least favorite texture is."

"I'm sorry?" Mr Elsing did a double take.

"How would we- I'm supposed to look at her to know that?" Mrs. Elsing tried her hardest to find what on her daughter's body even came close to telling her anything about textures.

"It's like..." Noss'xx leaned in over the body of Jessica. "I think it's salves, specifically on her face."

"What?" The Elsings and Jeffry said in unison.

“Okay... Okay, what was her skill level for swallowing pills measured in degrees?”

“What does that even mean?” Jeffry asked.

“Angle-degrees, or temperature-degrees?” Noss’xx crouched down and pulled the corpse’s arm up so he could look at the underside.

“Angle. Hurry.” Formossa said quickly.

“Twenty-sssssix. Twenty-six.”

“Perfect. That’s her. I got ’er.” A waving in circular motions with the left hand, and a balling motion with the claws on the right. Jessica Elsing began to manifest in the necrotic field as a growing ball of hazy luminescence. With time, this young woman, who had been undone and dispersed throughout an imperceivable, intangible, non-existent version of existence, was wound into a baseball-sized sphere in-between Formossa’s claws.

“Is that her!? Is that our daughter?” Mr. Elsing said, clutching his wife’s hands.

“Yerp.” Formosa treated the reclaiming of life from death just as casually as Noss’xx treated killing two guys. She pushed it down into the space two inches above the corpse’s abdomen. Dusting her hands off afterward, she told the Elsings, “Now keep in mind, I can’t put her back *exactly* the way she used to fit in her physical form. I’m not your baby machine, so it’s not in there the way the factory assembled it.” Formosa pointed towards Mrs. Elsing, specifically her lower half, as she said this.

“Are you talking about my womb?” She asked the demon.

“I’m also not an organgeiner, so excuse me for not knowing the technical terms, okay? Anyway your thing’s comin’ back.”

The Elsings moved to either side of the bed Jessica was lying on. They expected her to begin slowly breathing again, or to take one deep breath as she opened her eyes suddenly. Instead, her first signs of relife started with sudden twitches in the face. Her eyelids parted in a mechanical, binary fashion as if forced open by an exterior influence. Her face stained and convulsed to convey a confused distraught agony no living being could ever imagine.

“Small.” She said with a throatfull of whispered air. Her parents were overjoyed to see her animated once more, unable or unwilling to imagine what kind of perplexing discomfort she was experiencing. “It’s... it’s all so small. I can’t fit, I can’t... I’m suffocating... It’s too SMALL!!” Jessica shrieked in horror.

“Aw shit, we forgot to blindfold her.” Formossa said.

“That’s on you. I did my part and read the arm.” Noss’xx replied while smushing the dead cultists down into a garbage pail.

“Jessica, it’s us. It’s your father and your mother!” Mr. Elsings said to his daughter. Not seeking to comfort her, but to get her attention.

“I can’t see...” In a panic, Jessica’s eyes darted around the room. She began breathing deeply through her open mouth and flared nostrils, began gripping inaccurately at the bedsheets, turning her head to different angles. “I can-I can see, but I can’t see enough... I can’t feel enough of anything!!”

“We brought you back to life, dearest! Aren’t you excited!?” Mrs.Elsing was already thinking of the party she would throw for the occasion.

Tears of cosmic torment leaked from beneath Jessica’s eyes, the inferior receptors she was now cursed with so she may perceive only a negligible fraction of an infinite expanse she knew was still there. “I was so much MORE THAN LIFE!! WHY WOULD YOU TAKE EVERYTHING I AM AND MAKE ME ONLY MY LIMIT!?”

“Hmm. Are you sure you did this right? I don’t remember her being this much of a pill.” Mr. Elsings asked the demons.

“She was an infinite expanse of consciousness and capable of not only sensing, but comprehending in a way the living could never begin to dream of. So there’s gonna be an adjustment period where she deals with losing all that, and downgrading to only... this.” Formosa waved her hand around the consistent shape of the human body, as well as the miniscule sliver of existence this reality has. Meanwhile her imps disassembled and packed up the palingenstra behind them.

Mrs. Elsing’s face twisted with discontent watching her daughter weeping with her pupils retreating to the back of her head, trying to spare herself from the torment of seeing only three dimensions.

“Um. Is there any chance you could make her a little bit of a- what do you call them? Ghouls? Just enough to make her calm down?”

“Maybe make her about 20 percent ghoulish? And are the rocket feet still on the table?” Mr. Elsings covered the ear closest to the guttural wails of his daughter.

“Hmm. I dunno, you think it’ll fit?” Noss’xx asked Formossa.

“Twenty percent with rocket feet? It’ll be snug, but you could probably make it happen with a little elbow grease.”

“Yeah, fuck it! She’s already all wonked out, let’s smush it up som’more!” Noss’xx approached the girl, donning the long, rubber glove and putting in his mouthguard.

Later that week, the Elsings would host a splendid party for the return of their daughter. Those not present at the resurrection were told that she did not in fact die, but was simply experiencing “*the vapors*.” Those who attended the funeral were told that it was for someone else, and handed an extra gift basket of overpriced crap.

Their guests happily accepted the explanation just as the warlock who walked them through the on-boarding process of demonic affairs said they would. Those in attendance were more

interested in the festivities and celebrity appearances than the status of Jessica. However, they did say she looked “*radiant*” that afternoon. She even caught the eye of many potential suitors with her constant drifting between near-consciousness and remaining hyper consciousness, as well as her fabulous new rocket feet.

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A job well done and a monumental acquisition for the Cult of Kumo’Douga, Noss’xx and Formossa returned to the office where they would surely be promoted, or later file a lawsuit against their superiors for bein’ a buncha’ stingy fucks. The many underlings and associates of the Elsings will make and lead to heaping piles of initiates that could be used in the name of profit for The Snare Demon and his shareholders.

Formossa folded her arms in contentment, “You know Noss’xx, you may be terrible at your job. On an unrelated note, you sure did something a little bit at the end there.”

“And you may have also participated somewhat.” Noss’xx put his hand on her shoulder. “And to show my appreciation, I’mma blow ya’.” He dropped to his knees and began slobbin’ knob, and that boy put his whole damn bussy into it.

**“AAAUUGHGHHGHHBBBUURUGGGGMMUGGUBLUIUUGGGMMMAAGUUUU  
GGGUYHHMBUHHUHLUGGGGGUGUGUUHHHHHUGUGUGUHHUGGHHUGHG  
UGHGGUGHHGHUHAMABLUGAFLORBBORPAGORPAGUGHHUFUGUMNUGLAY  
URGUGMABUGGAMURGHLEMORHHHHOHOHGORGGOUGHMUGGUUGGHHUG  
GHHUHHBBUBLOORRGUG.”**

Formossa was pleasantly surprised at this bountiful basket of brain. Only the finest of devils can garner enough gratitude from their peers to get felated in the middle of the office. Perhaps she would get that promotion after all.