

*I have desired to go
Where springs not fail,
To fields where flies no sharp and sided hail,
And a few lilies blow.*

*And I have asked to be
Where no storms come,
Where the green swell is in the havens dumb,
And out of the swing of the sea.*

"Heaven-Haven" by Gerard Manley Hopkins

Domino learned he had to be adaptable.

He may have died sometime in the twentieth century, but the world still spun on above. New-fangled ideas, technology, and culture leaked into Hell's subterranean world. He'd noticed it before: the women sporting blue jeans, the short leather jackets, the abandoned picket signs with painted mantras calling to burn the bra alongside frack the Bloody, but it didn't truly hit him until he found a contained black box of glass. Something from the Brightside—the East-side. Nothing so fancy would be found in the West, on his side of the Dark and Bloody, no matter how much time passed.

That was the problem with adaptability. If you didn't do it, refused to, you ended up stranded in your own time. Locked in a whirlwind of denial, because life had moved on without you and you weren't ready to be forgotten.

It fractured his heart when he found people like that, like the young thing before him, sitting crossed-legged in the desert with her fleshless fingers curled in boned zen. His throat cracked as he called out to her, too long silent on this never-ending peregrination. Her long bleached hair swept across a face blistered and peeling from the sun. He snapped his fingers bare inches from her nose, but she didn't blink. Didn't move. Returned to dust.

He eyed her ripped jeans, her canvas tennis shoes worn through the soles, and the square black metal brick balanced on her bent knee. He took it, steadily working through the mechanics of a touch screen. Hellish burble cooed through the earpiece, but he ignored it. This was damnation, after all. What did you expect? This was how you survived in Hell. Stealing, hijacking, and fast-talking just to get what you needed.

His face remained passive as applications opened brightly colored hieroglyphic bubbles. He sat, hoping this wasn't a laid trap, and mimicked her crossed legs. Their kneecaps brushed. It might've been minutes or a whole year that he sat next to her, figuring out the black box. Time had conditioned him to approach things with childish glee, instead of like a frustrated fogey. Puzzles kept him sane. Taught him to accept new appliances that were only science fiction pulp in his time.

He tapped the glass with his fingernail and scrolled through her pictures: three smiling friends, a chocolate-colored puppy, and a rainbow cutting through the gray from far away. He stared at the picture until the screen blacked out. He thought about centuries of black skies full of peace, like the good book said. He thought about a horizon that wasn't red-lit with hellfire. He looked up. No rainbows here.

Pocketing the device, he patted the girl gently on her shoulder and wished her well on her journey.

Domino found his mother in a bar.

It was one of those self-proclaimed humanity plots where some tired group had clasped hands, made a vow, and built a one-story hovel complete with a tumbleweed thatched roof and a proclamation hammered on the door.

This is like Earth, it said. Blessed the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

Beneath it, scratched into the wood: Now God be praised, that to believing souls gives light in darkness, comfort in despair.

God doesn't exist was written underneath it.

And underneath that: Of course, He exists, you cocksucker. You're in Hell, for gGod's sake. How much proof do you need?

Dust covered Domino's body like a second skin as he stumbled inside. He slid on a barstool made of driftwood and femur bones. A bartender—hot young thing—dried a chipped whisky snifter and raised an eyebrow at him.

"I ain't got nothing," he breathed out, rusted. He licked his chapped lips, his tongue scooping up the tender ooze of blood from a particularly deep crack. Everything was dry here.

"Not like the economy's crashing," she answered, and put the glass on the scored table. She brought out a big bottle of Glenlivet and poured the amber liquid. He wanted to smile, but even his mouth felt exhausted. He wasn't sure if he should be happy that alcohol was the Devil's drink and therefore found in copious quantities throughout Hell, even the hundred-year-old golden stuff. He rinsed his mouth, wishing water was just as abundant, and watched a group of men play some version of pool with the balls smoothed white. He coughed and tipped his head down low, hunching his shoulders. He didn't want to talk to anyone, wasn't sure if he remembered how to anymore, but he entertained the idea of hustling the other sharks for a hardball win.

The square glass brick sat heavy in his pocket. He pulled it out and set it face up on the bar.

"You know what this is?" he asked the bartender.

She peered at it for a moment and then nodded once. "Looks like a fancy new cellphone."

"A cellphone?"

"Yeah, like a telephone? You know what that is?"

He nodded slowly. Rotary dials. Curlicued wires.

"It's a newer version. Compacted and mobile so you can take it on the go."

"Do you know how to use it?" he asked, even though he had a pretty good idea at this point. Never one to assume, though, better to ask questions now than pay for them later.

"Before my time, sweetheart," she said.

He mulled the word, cellphone, over in his head, always shocked at what came down the pipeline. He stretched his legs out, muscles taut from walking miles without rest, and his knees popped. His body ached in a multitude of ways.

"Looking a little worse for wear," he heard at his elbow.

His gaze slid over to see the dark-haired woman with a cocky smile and glossy eyes. In her early thirties when she died.

"Don't think I signed up for any beauty pageant," he chuckled, both on guard and delighted with the company. He'd sworn off people ever since a band of no-good friends tried to sell him

to the highest demon bidder, but too much solitary was lonely, on the verge of being dangerous. Sanity had to be cradled and cared for as carefully as a newborn.

“It would be nice to know you’re taking care of yourself, but that doesn’t appear to be the case.” The bartender set a drink in front of the woman and she added softly, “Hoped you wouldn’t end up down here.”

He looked at her full on and wondered how he hadn’t recognized her immediately. After all, it was one of the things his father hated and loved about him so much, the way he looked so much like her. “Mama?” he asked, nearly breathless.

“Hey, baby,” she said, putting the glass to her lips.

He felt like he might cry, but Hell was a dry place that sucked out any kind of moisture that wasn’t blood. A rough rasp ripped from his chest. “What are you doing here?”

“Should ask you the same,” she said and she crooked a smile. “Thought I raised you right.”

He laughed then, a rusted choke, and greedily watched her prop her elbow on the bar and lean back on her stool. “Nobody told me life gets harder when you grow up,” he said.

She grinned then, and she looked like she did the day before the fire, when she’d baked a cake just because it was Sunday and smeared frosting on his nose before chasing him through their house with a spatula. Wicasah, so small he couldn’t keep up, floundered behind them. His giggles became wails when they got too far away. He remembered her scooping Wicasah up, planting kisses up and down his neck while his little brother squealed from the attention. The grass had been high; it was a good but dry summer and he had watched the cottonwoods shed their pods. They’d floated in the air like clouds.

“You die at that age, or you just making yourself look like that?” she asked.

He swallowed hard. “Died,” he admitted. Some arrived in Hell with eighty-year-old bodies and had to buy and peddle spells to make them fit for a rough afterlife.

“Too young,” his mother noted, sorrow clogging her throat.

“Older than you,” he said, downing the rest of his drink in one smooth gulp. The bartender, bless her heart, was good at her job and filled it back up neat.

“And Wicasah?”

“Still up top from what I know,” he said. The look of relief crossing her face echoed his own. “Now that would have been too young,” he added.

“How have you been riding?” she asked after a pause.

“Alone, mostly.”

“Think you might want someone to ride shotgun?”

His heart climbed in his throat and he realized he didn’t want anything more. “As long as it’s just you.”

“Always has been, baby.”

They stole a car a few days after. A beautiful vintage Shelby Cobra straight from the Brightside, paint still shiny and red as the sun, parked in a concrete lot in the middle of nowhere. Domino didn’t think twice and shoved his bag in while Thessaly swung her legs over the open top and slid in the leather passenger seat. In the driver’s seat, Domino rested his twitching thighs for a moment before yanking the panels down to get at the wiring. Sparks shot out with the scent of electrical discharge. The metal-girl revved with a full tank. His mother laughed like she was sixteen and this was her first joyride.

They pulled out of the parking lot and rolled on broken sand, idling for a moment as Hell rearranged its punishment into a long stretch of blacktop extending into the horizon. Maybe dreams do exist in damnation, Domino thought as he shifted into third gear.

“Thank gGod ostentatiousness is a sin,” his mother said, lifting her hair and letting the wind take it up and ripple behind her like a dark wave.

“Thank gGod so is gluttony,” he said, breaking a smile. He didn’t think the car would ever run out of gas or that her tires would ever turn ragged. She was down here for another purpose entirely, but luckily, her punishment wasn’t for him.

It wasn’t no rainbow, but as Domino shifted into fifth, he felt like things might end up okay.

Domino huddled deeper into his jacket, his hands shoved so deep into his pockets he could rub his knuckles together through the fabric underneath the zipper.

“You know the first time your daddy asked me out proper,” Thessaly began, pulling her dark hair over her ears for warmth, “it was to the country fair. Biggest night of my life. I wore my prettiest blue dress, stiff and starched, and my mama said it brought out what color existed in my eyes. Said I looked like a proper Brightsider and not a half-breed, that I should be on the other side of the Bloody looking so posh.”

Her hazel eyes traced the ember sparks floating across the hellfire sky like stars. In the distance, a howl and immediate choked whimper made Domino cringe. He wondered what would bring him closer to a semblance of safety: relinquishing his pride to cower in his mother’s arms or preserve it to maintain the man he was.

“He walked me there with a flower in his buttonhole. I couldn’t stop shaking, being eighteen and desirable to a boy. He bought me cotton candy. That spun sugar tasted like strawberries.”

The cold night left frostbite in his marrow, especially with the Cobra’s blasted top down. He couldn’t feel his fingers. His legs trembled violently for hours until he ached, desperate for morning, only to have the daytime fire making him yearn for dusk.

Land of extremes, this Lady Hell. Bone-dry heat sucked him into a desiccated husk by noon and made him liable to shatter in the freezing dark by midnight.

“So naïve,” Thessaly barked. “So simple. To think those were the greatest moments of my life. The chaste kiss at the end and the promise to be called on the next afternoon. So fucking simple. But I wanted that. I wanted out.”

Thessaly wanted to talk about Daniel. She wanted to know, but she wouldn’t ask, too afraid Domino’s answers would confirm suspicions. Domino wouldn’t say anything unless she goddamn asked outright.

Because he couldn’t explain it right, either. Daniel was a beloved son of a bitch who hurt Domino in a hundred ways, who shaped Domino as a man, who put Hell’s document in front of Domino and told him to sign on the dotted line. Domino had a fucking list of vendettas against his sire. So, where was his father? If Daniel was that much of a bastard on earth, and Domino knew for a fact he was—full of suicidal tendencies and bloodied with witch-hunts—then where was he in this forsaken land? What grace did Daniel possess that made him Heaven-worthy?

Questions like these, Domino was sure they were there to torment him. He didn’t like to think about Daniel, let alone talk about him, because it brought about feeling cheated, feeling lost, knowing that something fundamental he saw as evil in his father God saw as pure.

He touched his breast pocket, half-expecting to feel the letters there