



# *A Bad Day*

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Humor

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“I mean, what’s it all for, when you get right, erm, down to it?” said the Lord of Darkness.

It hadn’t been a good day for Him Whose Name May Not Be Spoken. His morning alarm gong had been sounded. He had arisen. He had gruffly given the Armies of Evil orders, fed a couple of innocents to the cerberus and generally lurked in the shadows that lie in the souls of men, but His heart, or lack thereof, wasn’t in it.

The Dark One wasn’t familiar with self-doubt. It didn’t come easily to Him, but it seemed that it had found a comfortable spot in the void where His soul would have been and it stubbornly refused to leave.

It was all because of that small-time son of a duke or some such from a couple of days before, down in the torture chambers. Inbetween pleas for mercy and threats, he had screamed, as they always did, “Why are you doing this?”. Usually, The One did not take much heed of heroes’ cliched mumblings, but, somehow, this time those five words had remained lodged in His mind. Why was He bothering with it all? Why? Why was He putting up with the life under volcanoes or in tall impenetrable towers surrounded by landscapes of jagged barren rock? Or the supernaturally stupid minions? And don’t even get started on the gross, rotten, sulfurous, yucky smells. What had evil ever done for Him? When you got right down to it, why bother emerging from the Ninth Circle in the morning at all?

He grimaced at the memory. It was all that random hero’s fault, curse him!

Well, He had cursed him. It hadn't helped His mood.

"I mean, look 'ere, I mean, when you think about it, I'm 6000 years old, right? And what've I got to show for it, right? What, unending armies of damned souls and demons who do my every bidding? Entire realms covered in darkness and decay? Bah!"

Evil Himself peered at the mustachioed man in front of Him and nodded sulkily. "Yes, do poor me another one, if you'd be so kind."

The barman refilled the yet again empty mug, giving his customer a sympathetic look from beneath bushy eyebrows better suited for scowling. You got them here from time to time, people who'd grabbed the short stick, who by misfortune or merit found themselves at a low point in life, seeking whatever solace one could find at the bottom of a bottle. They generally kept themselves to themselves, sometimes punctuating their gloomy silences with rants aimed at the world at large. They came here to resolutely drink their way to oblivion. They didn't usually have names like Morgoriroth, Lord of the Damned, The Incarnation of Evil, but business was business.

Besides, He was a regular, and He always paid well, albeit in unmarked gold coins, and never made trouble. Even pure evil needs a break. Admittedly, He emerged from a scintillating eldritch circle, trailing flames and smoke, instead of using the door like regular folk, but everybody has their quirks. At least he wasn't an elf.

"I've never seen Him like this." said the barman, under his breath, to his wife. "He's always all flowing robes cloaked in misty shadow and deep echoing voice... always so full of fizz. He'd be almost pleasant, if it weren't for the whole, you know, lord of inferno thing. Err..." He looked embarrassed for a moment. "It worries me."

"Never you mind Him. He'll be fine. You remember what me old dad used to say about me mum."

"'Evil finds a way', yeah."

"You just go and tend to the dwarves over there, there's a good man!" she said with a gentle push.

The folks present never knew this, but they were witnesses to a fork in the road of history. That night, in that dingy bar, the world could have been changed for ever. Under that starry summer's sky, evil could have been

vanquished from the Earth. Gone, not with a bang, or the traditional multi-volume quest, but with a soft sigh and a sob.

With complete disregard to tearful narrative elegance and the betterment of mankind (and dwarfkind and centaurkind and...), it was this moment that the taxman picked to kick the door open and step inside with the swagger of self-important bureaucrats everywhere and land sharply on the nearest available chair.

He signalled to the barman to pour him a pint, and then his gaze fell on the Dark Lord sitting at the bar, His back turned to him, the door, and everything not contained within His mug in general.

“What in Goddess’s name is this vile wretch doing here again?” the taxman yapped, undiluted disgust in his voice. It should be mentioned he made a point of being a militant god-feminist. Nobody knew why, let alone whether gods even had genders, but then again, such matters never stopped a certain kind of person.

“Now, now, He’s a client just like you, Mr. Bunt. He’s got every right to be here as long as He is civil.” said the barman, approaching with the man’s drink.

“Just like me?” shrieked the aforementioned Bunt, visibly offended. “He tortures adventurers and covers empires in millenia of darkness! He’s literally the embodiment of evil!”

“Come, now, that’s no reason to go calling people names.”

“No reason? No, Benjamin, I told you last time I will not be having with this... this putrid thing drinking alongside us hardworking honest people!” yelled Bunt. There were a few scoffs from the crowd at that last part. Nobody on any world is all that big on tax collectors. There were quite a few ayes too. Not very loud, though, as slanting the Unmentionable One could prove a rather terminal decision. “I told you, if you don’t kick this demon out for good, I’m going to make trouble! You think I won’t? You think I don’t know you sell more than you declare? Or that you water some of ‘em down? I know people in high places, I do! I’ll bury you in so many overtaxes and fines you’ll be bankrupt by the end of the week!” Benjamin, the barman, frowned. “Now get this scum out!”

The barkeep, who was also the owner, didn’t move a muscle. His eyes glinted, his bushy eyebrows still frowning, his massive hands across his wide chest. He breathed slowly. He didn’t like Bunt. He was nasty, and

rude, and took pleasure in humiliating his staff in small ways. He also knew Bunt was right. He could put him out of business if he made a bit of an effort. On the other hand, Morgoriroth was the Lord of Evil.

The Dark One, who had not hitherto deigned to react in any way, raised his head, his back still turned to the rest of the establishment. The usual background hum, already dwindling, evaporated altogether. The tension in the air was so tangible it could have probably made a cat's fur stand on end. Benjamin winced. Morgoriroth cleared his throat. It sounded like distant thunder in the sudden silence.

"Ben?"

The barkeep's heart stopped.

"Yes?"

"Do you have any more of that sherry from last year?"

"Sorry?"

"You know, the one with the pretty label?"

"Er, I can go check."

"Please do, and bring me a small glass if there's any."

There were a few sniggers from the crowd. The Dark One returned to his mug. The barkeep shuffled awkwardly toward the door to the cellar. The din resumed.

But Bunt was not the kind to stomach this, which he saw as blatant defiance. He wasn't the kind to know when to let go, either.

"Don't you dare dismiss me, you abberation of nature!" The words lashed through the room like searing lightning. The taxman turned to the crowd and stood up. "Are you serious, you lot? Just because He dresses all nice and keeps Himself to Himself, suddenly it's acceptable that He sit here as if He were equal to humans?" The group of dwarves stirred. "Or dwarves. Of course. Dwarves are practically shorter people. Er. People, they're people." He felt this was not enough, but he was getting derailed. "He is not people. He's subpeople, a...

a leech upon our realm, and I will not stand for this!”

He was, in fact, standing, but that’s beside the point.

“Get out of here, you devilish filth!”, he spat.

Morgoriroth turned around abruptly, narrowing eyes pinned to the bureaucrat’s chubby face. The clock pendulum in the corner swung a few times, each its private eternity.

The barman, stock still in the doorframe, closed his eyes. Why couldn’t the little tit keep his mouth shut?

Behind the counter, the barmaid started taking the more valuable bottles off the shelves, ‘maid’ being a purely honorary title. A few more wary customers in the background were trying very hard to give off the impression of standing still, while at the same time discreetly sliding towards the exit.

In a movement so swift it seemed to have no inbetween, Morgoriroth was suddenly a few inches from the taxman’s nose.

“Those are some very hurtful words you used, Mr. Bunt.” He said, quietly.

The collector didn’t feel all that chatty any more. And while he couldn’t muster a retort, he was damned if he was going to back down.

This assessment might have been a bit more exact than he would have liked.

“Thank you.” said Evil Embodied, a twinkle in his glowing red eyes.

Bunt looked nonplussed, but Morgoriroth continued.

“I was really feeling rather under the weather today. You know how life is sometimes, of course.” He turned around, as if he’d suddenly forgotten about the man. “I think I’d really fallen into one of those, what do you call them,... depressive states, I think! Episodes? I don’t know, doesn’t matter.” He said, making a few measured steps around the room. “Point is, I was feeling very... existential. You know, you look around and you wonder, why do you bother? How did you even get to this point? But you, my friend, you really brought me home! Your words transported me back to my youth, to my ideals and hopes and dreams and they are vivid and alight!” And

Evil stood still. “And I remember why I am.”

Swiftly, Morgoriroth swiveled around to face the man, billowing dark robes swirling around him, and in a deeper, suddenly echoing voice, he said “I remember, and it is because of people like you, Mr. Bunt. Petty, mean, conceited little people like you who think they’re better than everyone else simply because they’re not a demon from the World Under, as if we choose how we’re born. People such as you, Mr. Bunt, lacking the tiniest sliver of compassion, to whom people like me aren’t worth spit, aren’t even people, to whom the occupation of ‘Lord of the Damned’ isn’t a real contribution to society, but instead, somehow, a personal slant. But I am the Demon Overlord, because anything less would be betrayal to my own and myself, and because giving up would make people such as you right, Mr. Bunt, and if I were gone, Mr. Bunt, all that would be left in the World would be people like you, Mis-ter Bunt.”

Morgoriroth’s steps clicked on the rough wooden floor as he once again approached the taxman.

“I must confess I do believe you, though, when you say you know people in high places.” the Dark Lord said in a more conversational tone. “Oh yes, indeed.” His eyes flared. “Because from where we’re going, you and I, you can’t go further down.” Morgoriroth grabbed the man’s arm. There was fire, and smoke, and a glowing circle on the floor, and they were gone.

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It was later that evening. There were only a few people still populating the pub. The Dark Lord was once again sitting at the bar, having a quiet drink, the barkeep behind it, rubbing into submission a more stubborn dirty bowl.

“Ben?”

The barkeep raised his eyes from his work.

“I’m sorry for making trouble earlier. I know I promised not to make trouble.”

“That’s alright.”

“Really?” He said, looking genuinely cheered up.

“Yeah. We all have bad days.”

“Amen to that!”

The Dark Lord sipped from his drink. The barkeep went back to his work, but then seemed to remember something.

“I must ask... what did you do to Bunt?”

Morgoriroth hesitated.

“He is having a very bad day as well.”

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