

## Death is Part of Life

"Ugh, I miss the city."

Zac thought as he felt the pine needles sticking to his mass. There were no bare floors here. He couldn't just go all soft and watery to get rid of them here or he'd pick up even more. Pine needles are so itchy... Several arms formed on his body and scratched at the protruding spines.

It was just pushing them deeper, so he gave up. Still, it was peaceful here. He felt the contentment of the woodland creatures. The simplicity. There was something special about just... living. It was a very foreign sensation after the hustle and bustle of Zaun, where everyone always had some place to be. Zaun was home though, he felt something akin to pride at the thought. He was getting better at feeling his own emotions.

That's why he was here after all. People had been dying out here, killed by some jerk in a sheep costume and their dog.

That made him mad, so he decided to go put a stop to it. He felt mad - on his own! No need to absorb the emotions of others, no sir! The thought made him feel glad, which made him feel even gladder! What a beautiful cycle. It almost made him forget he was here to stop a murderer.

He felt the resignation from far away. It was a cold, tired feeling, but there was no pain, so that was good. Zac stretched his long legs and began to lope through the forest with long, elastic strides.

Hang on, friend.

He arrived just as the pain flashed. It was not a cruel pain – it happened in an instant. One moment there was fear, and the next, relief. He looked down on the scene with anger - and he had to admit, curiosity.

They weren't human, that's for sure.

A lean, agile sheep with a mask and a bow crouched reverently over a peaceful body, with masked, wispy wolf head floating sporadically around like an excited puppy.

"What are you?" Zac asked cautiously.

The couple turned abruptly, as if they had not detected the intruder. The sheep's eyes glowed coolly as she studied his gelatinous mass.

"We are Kindred." She said at last, and turned to the dog head. "What is it, dear wolf?"

"It is alive, but not!" Wolf said, perplexed. "Tell me Lamb, is it ours to take?"

"I do not know." Lamb stood slowly and reached a tentative hand toward Zac.

He eyed her hand and scratched at his needles.

"Ok Kindred. Why are you killing people?" Zac asked pointedly.

Kindred cocked their heads as one before Lamb spoke. "We do not kill. They die."

Zac stared at her with limpid eyes. "Yeah? Well what's that bow for? Knitting?"

"For helping them die." Lamb said simply.

"What *is* it little Lamb? Can I chase it?" Wolf grew more agitated as he stared at Zac.

Zac pushed hard mass into his arms and thudded them down in front of himself menacingly. "Stop killing people!"

"We do not--"

"Yeah right, you don't kill. But if you 'help any more people die' around here, you'll have to help me die first."

"Can you die? Are you alive?" Lamb asked sincerely.

"Of course I'm alive! I have feelings! I just... Well, I don't know if I can die."

"All things that live must die. Perhaps you will dance with us one day."

Zac studied the strange couple, abruptly aware that he could feel no emotions from them at all. Were *they* alive? Maybe this was something new.

"You're serious. You help people die? What are you?"

"We are Kin--"

"Kindred, yeah. So you help people die?"

"Yes."

"Chatty. So people wouldn't die without you?"

"Yes."

"Huh."

Zac considered this, the thoughts bringing all sorts of emotions to the surface. If he killed these things, would there be no more death? Would everyone live forever? The thought made a nervous ripple form on his surface. It felt wrong.

His parents taught him that death was part of life. People were supposed to die, they just ought to put it off as long as possible. He thought back to the resignation he felt, and the peace that came afterward. Frowning, he looked down at the dead man. It didn't *feel* like he was murdered. To his own surprise, he actually believed this 'Kindred.'

He held out a gooey appendage to the couple. "Alright, maybe we *will* dance one day." As he spoke, he was surprised to realize that the thought was very comforting to him.

Lamb held out her hand and touched Zac's appendage. For a moment, it shimmered gold, and Lamb nodded.

"One day." She said, and they vanished into the trees.

Zac retracted his 'hand' and pondered the experience as he traveled back to the city. What was that golden shimmer? Did it have something to do with his feelings? Did feelings mean he was alive? Does everything with feelings have to die at some point? What about trees? Trees die, so do they have feelings?

He couldn't remember not being awake, and they say death was like sleep. It was a scary thought. He didn't want to die, but for some reason he was glad to know that he would someday. It made him feel more... alive.