

Usagoo

It was dark, as it usually is on nights like this. The stars were just a touch dimmer, and the moon was hiding behind the earth's shadow, as if unwilling to see the events about to unfold.

Our scene takes place in a modest suburban home. It could be any house, on any street; nothing in particular stood out, save for the flickering light behind the curtains of the second-floor window.

Black candles were lit, so black they were emptiness; endless voids from which ill things crawled out of. Beneath them, strange, silvery markings shifted and danced on creaky floorboards. The symbols had been drawn with wizard's chalk and covered by a dusty rug a week ago, but tonight, tonight they would shine. Uncovered, they were lit beacons that drew light into a starless universe.

Nimhaway studied her arm, unsure of where to cut. Her sunset hair draped across her face and hid the uncertainty in her eyes. She had gone to a discreet butcher's shop yesterday to collect all the blood she could purchase, but she knew she needed more. Demon summoning always required pain or sacrifice. It had taken her months to work up the nerve to do this, but she could not bring herself to kill an animal herself—not yet, anyway. So, hoping to find a workaround, she supplied blood from the butcher's shop and decided to inflict pain on herself. She hoped for the best and convinced herself she was ready to deal with any consequences.

The young witch gulped, averted her eyes, and dragged the blade across the underside of her arm. She winced as she felt the sharp burn and then let out a shaky breath. The cut was not deep, but she had carved out a much larger slice than she had intended. It was a good thing she typically wore long sleeves. No one would ask questions. The only person she would have to lie to was Eramos and that would be hard enough.

Without delay, she held the wound over a copper singing bowl at the center of star patterns and symbols she'd drawn on the floor.

"Yuck," she said to the shadows as she bled into the bowl.

Once finished, she quickly bandaged her arm and grabbed a spoon to stir the crimson liquid. She grimaced, disgusted with herself.

When the blood was blended to satisfaction, Nimhaway picked up a raven's feather from beside her. Using the feather's calamus as a pen tip, she dipped it into the liquid and then drew one last symbol on the floorboard in front of her. What started out red, soon shimmered, then bubbled, and turned black.

The burning blood was rancid, causing Nimh to cough and sputter as she tried to fan it away from herself. Once the smell dissipated, she resumed her ritual.

There was a pause, and a long drawn out breath as the girl questioned her resolve, but she finally picked up the singing bowl and the small wooden mallet that had lain beside it. As she brought the mallet nearer, it tapped lightly against the side, causing the blood to glisten and ripple. Her hands were shaking.

Another deep breath.

Nimhaway pressed the mallet firmly against the side of the bowl this time and slowly drew it along the circumference. The even, slow strokes were silent at first. The stillness was unnerving; the shadows in her room watched with bated breath.

A delicate, ethereal hum slowly came into being, and it grew until it was a haunting ring. Nimhaway's nerves hardened and her heart raced. Her spell was working.

A smile crept its way across her lips, despite the blood and the ache of her wound.

Once the ringing reached a crescendo, Nimhaway spoke the spell which would open the door and pull a distant soul onto her plane. The words were guttural and sharp, and more like animal noises than recognizable sound, but I assure, they were the poetry of an ancient language.

With the last syllable, the ringing stopped. There was a thunderous crack, a roar like the wake of lightning.

When the candles blew out, Nimhaway froze. She was tense and alert, like prey stepping into a clearing.

One by one the candles re-lit themselves. The now black flames danced and created an alien light.

A child-like demon sat across from the summoner. Its skin was the color of the night as the dawn approaches, with interesting textures and symbols all along its body. Its hair was ebony and its eyes equally so. Horns crowned its forehead, its ears were pointed, and a stub of a tail sprouted from its bare bottom. If a cherub had a shadow-self, this little demon would be it.

The two regarded one another, the candlelight causing an unnatural shimmer to the demon's eyes.

"Demon, by my life's blood and the power of this ritual, I bind you to me. You are bound in service and therefore unable to hurt or kill me. You will do no harm to any living thing on this plane, unless I instruct you to otherwise. Do you understand?"

It blinked and tilted its head.

Just when Nimh was about to question whether she bound the demon properly, it nodded.

"Good," she said, eying it warily. "What should I call you?"

It had taken an interest in her room and didn't respond.

Nimh stood up, towering over it, but the demon continued to ignore her. Its eyes were fixated on her swirling screen saver. She'd forgotten to turn her laptop off.

"Okay, if you won't tell me your name, then I shall give you one. I'll call you...Pudge. Are you listening to me, Pudge?"

The demon turned and scowled in distaste.

Nimh smiled. She'd finally made an impression. "Now then, my little usagoo, I need you to find something for me."

I listened on with mild interest as she described to my lesser kindred what she needed, but I've been here before and I am not about to spoil things. She did not know it at the time, but I found her little cheat with the animal blood endearing, and it had been most useful in allowing me to piggy-backed onto the lesser demon's summoning. I will be sure to thank her next time I see her, but first—I need to visit a dear old friend.

See you soon, my sweet sorceress.