

Ore

Unsurprisingly, and without fail, Ishmael's alarm clock rang through the quiet. He grunted, pushing back his comforter to swing his legs over the bed and stand up, stretching once he did. This was how his mornings usually went. Boring, routine, preparing for the job that he loathed to return to. He washed up, got dressed, stared into the mirror, went on his way. Ishmael rarely had time to eat breakfast and this morning was not one of those times he could, having to rush out of his small home almost immediately.

The streets were empty, which was to be expected seeing as how it was four in the morning. The only people Ishmael ever saw walking around at this time were other miners, ambitious businessmen, and homeless people. He usually hurried straight to work, but something drew him to the newstand this one morning.

Detouring to the obnoxious, brightly colored newsstand, Ishmael stared at the bold title at the top of the newspaper: *Young Calloway allegedly murders his parents, inherits company*. Ishmael's face scrunched in disgust and he continued his way to work. He had no interest in the rich or their twisted affairs.

Ishmael arrived at the mines a little later than usual, walking in when most other workers were also showing up. Many of them were chatting amiably with each other. Ishmael brushed past those people--he had no interest in his coworkers' affairs either.

The sky was still dark and cast a somber mood over the bustle of workers. The wide space was disturbingly silent, save for the clanks and thuds of the workers preparing their tools. Ishmael, as usual, was the quickest to be ready. The whistle blew for work to begin.

Ishmael stepped into the dark, creaky lift, his shoulders jostling as the other miners shoved beside him. Once the small space was full and the workers were packed like sausages, the lift began to descend into the earth. It got dark briefly and then dingy lighting illuminated the workers' impassive faces. The metal gate of the door slid to the side and Ishmael pushed his way out; his mood immediately plunging as he stepped foot onto the uneven stone.

The soft purple and orange-ish glow of raw magic aided the weak lanterns and Ishmael hustled to his usual spot, already preparing his tools. The room shook all of a sudden, a low rumble from somewhere deeper within the earth. Dust and small rocks sifted onto Ishmael, coating him in fine powder. He exhaled heavily, shaking off as much of the dust as he could, and continued looking for a spot on the wall to begin working.

He had just placed the flat surface of the ore-breaker to the stone wall when his obnoxious coworkers bumped in, guffawing at a stupid joke, Ishmael could only presume.

One of them spoke, not to Ishmael, not bothering to keep his voice quiet. "But did you hear of the Calloways? The kid officially inherited the business--about time in my opinion, his parents were nightmares." The frown on Ishmael's face turned to a scowl at the mention of the Calloways. He would rather they talked about anything else in the world.

"He murdered them though!" The other man exclaimed, facetiously placing the back of his hand to his brow.

The first man shrugged. "What're you gonna do about it? His parents are dead, he can rightfully become CEO. It's not like anyone's gonna stop him."

Ishmael's scowl grew and he threw his tools down, spinning to face his coworkers; they looked at him with surprise.

“Doesn’t that bother you?” Ishmael snapped. “The boy killed his parents and hasn’t gone to jail. Why is that? He should be in jail right now-- not inheriting some stupid company that he hasn’t worked a day in his life for! What is the government doing right now that they can’t arrest him; the evidence is all there isn’t it? Our government is corrupt--it panders to the rich and leaves everyone else to rot.”

His coworkers gaped at him before they looked at each other and broke into peals of laughter.

“Man, he doesn’t speak to us for years and the first thing he does is lecture us about the government,” one said, already turning back to his side of the wall. He picked up the extractor and nestled it into the hole in the wall he’d made previously. His partner just leaned against the wall and watched.

A few moments later, a small pile of raw magic ore gathered at his feet and he knelt down to pick one up. The second man also knelt and picked from the pile, choosing an glowing orange one. They popped the ore into their mouths like it was rock candy and returned to working on the wall. Ishmael stared at their backs in disgust. He could already see the purple sheen across their forearms and the odd lumps reforming on their faces. The orange magic wasn’t even processed for the public and yet the workers believed they could just ingest it raw. One day the magic would kill them and Ishmael couldn’t wait for that day.

It was barely five minutes before Ishmael’s cave-mates were blabbering again; this time their words muffled by the magic ore in their mouths.

“I give it a week before the company falls apart,” one said, taking a rather large bite into the ore. Ishmael swore he heard a tooth break with it but it might’ve just been his imagination.

“Naw, you have to give him some credit,” the other responded, though he laughed. “I’ll give it two weeks, three at most. I doubt he hasn’t prepared for the position.”

The other man hooted with laughter. “If you think that preparation did anything to help, then you’ve been chewing too much magic, my friend.” Their chatter diminished to whispering again. Ishmael felt irritation ebbing in at the edges of his mind. No doubt they were talking about him now--they were always talking about others’ business; something Ishmael tried to avoid. And on this, he was adamant--he had no interest in the rich.

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Ishmael left early that day. He couldn’t bare to hear his coworkers talk about magic, the mines, or the Calloways. It was all drivel he had heard time and time again, spanning over years.

He arrived home, still covered in dust, and his limbs aching from exertion. He could feel his hands and face pulsing from the close proximity to raw magic; the sensation travelled up his arm and down his neck. He hated it as it reminded him of the place he worked, his position.

Ishmael washed, as he normally did after work. He settled onto his bed, grabbing a half-empty jar of cream from his bedside table. He pushed up his sleeves, slathering the cold cream everywhere he felt the pulsing. Ishmael laid on his bed, the pulse of magic subsiding. Once the feeling had dissipated to a dull throb, Ishmael turned onto his side, ready to rest.

This job is the bane of my existence, Ishmael thought before drifting off to sleep.