

Chapter 2 - The Queen Summons

This was unfair.

This was unacceptable.

In the face of her opponent, the story about David and Goliath taunted Solene and she couldn't help but laugh.

Damn it. This was cruel.

This was more than that ancient story.

The monster in front of her was more than Goliath. Indeed, fucking more than that.

All five tusk-like legs as thick as a drum and as long as a bus told her that. It stood at a height that was staggering. She had to strain her neck so that she could see its face and when she did, she almost gagged.

The monster's head was deformed. Ugly. And very much dangerous.

Supported with a single thorax that housed six human-like arms, its serrated teeth in rows and rows snapped at her. Slithering fork-like tongue tested the air and picked up the fear swirling in it. The monster—whatever it was called—didn't have eyes but it was certain it just caught its prey.

Delighted, it produced a hissing, gurgling sound likely saying 'hi' to Solene, but it wasn't for friendship. It was to establish dominance over its meal.

Solene's throat dried up. Her feet, still attached to her trembling body, shuffled back. It wanted to run. It wanted to retreat. Hell, it wanted to even fly as far away from the monster as possible but knew it couldn't.

A disgusting smell of rotting flesh and cyanide reached Solene's nose and this time she really did gag. No wonder why the three hoodlums retreated, she thought.

This was beyond anything anyone could stand.

Repulsive was a lackluster word. There was none to describe how revolting this monster was in smell and in looks.

But she figured this was Gehenna. If anything, monsters here could all look like this and possibly even more...

Two of its limbs started to move, attacking Solene at an average speed. She was able to dodge it easily. The sand to her left now disturbed when she leaped to it.

The monster was everything but speed. Good. At least, Solene's agility was an advantage.

She pranced and ran behind the behemoth's blindside—or at least she believed it was. Summoning her spells, she cast an energy blast to its head. Directly to its head.

"Aim for the head, milady!" she recalled a woman in her memories advising her during her training. "Demons whether monstrous or midget always have a weak spot and it's their heads."

But the blast Solene delivered only scratched her opponent. Was this even a demon in the first place or an unknown being?

Damn, it had a thick skull, she cried out.

In retaliation, the monster jumped to face her and spat out a reddish neon green liquid. Bile possibly.

And acidic when Solene—able to dodge it again just in time—stared at the sand it contacted.

Her mind screamed in increasing alarm.

Could this caustic material actually affect her? She was a soul right? She didn't have a physical body, right? However, her bodily responses for water, for air, and for rest informed her otherwise. She was as fragile as the sand on her feet and that wasn't good.

Returning her attention to her opponent, to her surprise, it had already released more bile and it had locked in on her direction.

“Shit!” she cursed, jumping at the same time to dodge it. She also summoned her energy shield but not fast enough to deflect one acidic attack towards her knee.

“Ahhhhh!”

Solene’s painful shout finally filled Gehenna’s air. It ultimately fitted the hopelessness of the place.

Solene tried to nurse the baseball-sized wound but it stung her fingers too. The affected area showed flesh and clotted blood and a bit of bone.

Bone, she thought, wasn’t good but it was not the right time to worry about it.

In front of her was still the monster and it was now attacking her with its six fucked up arms.

Solene couldn’t run even if she wanted to. Instead, she cast an even thicker barrier around her to keep her safe.

Wincing and gritting, she jerked back as the monster pounded against her barrier again and again.

“Oh, g...od,” she stuttered, “A death...after *death*? Is this even pos...sible?”

The roars of the monster deafened her ears. It was hurting her eardrums. Promising its inner linings scars for a lifetime.

Solene, deciding this was enough, scanned the spells she could remember in her mind. When she found one that was very promising, her heart leaped in happiness.

Of course!

Blows upon blows for minutes gave way to cracks on her shield. Solene gasped at the change, but she figured, it was just the right time to unleash her trump card.

Just as the monster breached her barrier, Solene so did summon her familiar using a conjurer’s tongue.

“You who guards the gates of Sattus! You who wields four heads! You who sends fear among the souls of the Land of the Dead! Listen to your master! Hear me! Come to me!”

A resounding growl four times the strength of the first monster heralded her familiar’s arrival from the dull sky. Lightning cracked. Thunder followed. A beam of neon purple sliced through the sky towards where Solene sat. It was visible from all over Gehenna; reached even the underground caves and artificial walls in the north and south regions.

This purplish beam morphed into the Oratongi, its massive body standing in between Solene and the five-legged monster. Comparing the two, they were in equal height but not in equal size. Solene’s familiar was bigger, with more scales and more flesh than the tarantula-like creature.

The Oratongi growled again, sending a warning, but this didn’t discourage the latter.

In response, it twisted its head towards the meaty neck of the Oratongi. Sharp, jagged enamels latched onto the flesh the next second. Dark, slimy blood followed.

Solene cried out, worry leaping from her thoughts, but her familiar looked unaffected. Insensitive.

Instead of howling in pain, the Oratongi’s two heads locked onto the monster’s trunk. The third on its skull while the fourth on its neck. It rammed it down the sand with the force that moved the ground. Flat sand gave way to a depression.

Solene watched with bated breath as the two fought. Muscle to muscle. Fangs to fangs. Savagery to barbarity.

She had seen glimpses of the Oratongi in her memory, but none of it showed the killer instinct it was displaying now. It was lethal. It was destructive. And definitely, she didn’t want to mess with it whatever the reason may be.

One hind leg got detached from its body and then another and another. Cries of pain and anger rumbled through Solene’s ears and she was happy to know it wasn’t from her familiar.

The fight was tipping to the Oratongi's advantage as she observed, that was true until the monster clamped down on one of its head and with the assistance of its many hands, severed it with one pull.

Solene's heart threatened to jump out of her throat after seeing this.

"No!" she cried out with a hand stretched towards her familiar.

More inky blood splashed onto the golden sand. One of the Orantongi's head howled a painful howl while the others continued to massacre the monster.

Four arms were detached thereafter from the body leaving the latter almost incapacitated. What really brought the monster down was a forceful bite onto its neck.

The Oratongi thrashed side to side with the squealing form of its opponent in between its mouth. A fountain of more black followed, but this time, Solene knew it wasn't from her familiar.

To finalize their fight, the Oratongi sprouted its obsidian wings—all six of them scaly and pointed—and flew off into the sky with the monster's neck still jailed in between its teeth.

How strong her familiar was, Solene couldn't gauge but seeing it lift possibly a fifty ton Goliath into the air like it was pancake made her realize she was lucky to have this beast on her side.

The Oratongi flew and flew until it hit the dark clouds. The monster reacted by prying its mouth open with its remaining arms and kick the wings with its remaining legs but all were in vain.

Two spiny wings stabbed the monster's body like meat on skewers. Acid blood rained down on the ground and luckily, it averted where Solene sat gaping.

Shouting the last of its tired vocal cords, the monster's neck cracked and twisted. The Oratongi pulled its barbecued body away from its head, stretching its spine to its limit until this detached.

Soon, one body became two. All limp and bloody and dead.

Solene watched as her familiar tossed the corpse to the sand, consciously away from her, while the monster's skull, well, it was dined voraciously by the three remaining heads.

Seeing this, her appetite, however hungry she was, vanished into thin air. All that macabre sight—the entrails splitting, the gut spilling, the bones crackling—destroyed her tastebuds for the remainder of the day.

Silently, Solene celebrated their victory. She was safe now, but safe was only a transitory word for far into the distance, three shadows still remained. The three hoodlums were still present just observing. Possibly in awe of the earlier morbid spectacle or probably hatching a new plan on how to capture her. They didn't look likely to attack her for now however since her familiar was still nearby.

Despite this though, she decided to stay cautious. Standing up with great effort due to her wound, she ambled forward towards the well again. A splash of water hopefully would do the trick and clean the residual acid from her affected knee. The promise of a healing though was far-fetched. She was sure as hell Gehenna—offering only suffering to all the dwellers—would flip the tables and use this wound against her.

Not without difficulty, she reached the well or what remained of it. Bricks upon bricks stacked haphazardly on top of the other—the result of her fight with Maniac number one.

The water inside was untouched though, so using the bucket, Solene filled it to the brim. She sat against the bricks and then poured the water on her wound.

“Urgh!” The sound of a suppressed cry emerged from her throat the moment the cold liquid contacted with the acid. She tossed her head back against the bricks, gritted her teeth, and squeezed her lids.

The heightened pain was definitely the works of Gehenna—damn it—and so were the tears that escaped from her eyes.

Hopelessness.

Fear.

Anxiety.

And a promise of misery.

All these, Solene knew she'd battle over and over again while in this land.

What could she possibly have done in her previous life to warrant such a punishment? Was this all just a freak mistake? Was King of the Underworld—whoever he was—went into a vacation that such a grave mistake could happen? Or was he playing a game with her?

Conjurers were known to be tested by the elements sometimes. Was this his way of testing her?

She didn't know the answer, but she wanted to find out. Heck, as she huffed and huffed at the stinging pain brought by her wound, she finalized one thing.

She was going to see this damned king whatever it takes, give him the best sermon she could possibly make, and she was going to get the hell out of this place maybe not soon, but *soon*.

With a few spells and her familiar on her side, hope was behind her back.

And *Hope* was coming.