

## 1069

"What demons eat." She pulled out the leather bag Dao had set aside, and pulled out one of the imp or grem hearts. "Flesh isn't like it is on the surface. It all just melts away in a day or two. It's the resonance inside we want."

"Melts away?"

"Questions questions. You may have noticed you're dead and the rules have changed, right?"

"I... did."

"Cause now you're in the shadow of the Great Tower--no, I'm not explaining the tower. Anyway, life is different here. You still breathe, but it's not oxygen you're breathing, it's air."

"... what?" *Www.norrelworm.com*

"And you still need to eat. But it's not food you're eating, it's essence. Demons need resonance, and humans need essence."

"... what?"

She burst out laughing again as she put the heart away. The satyr laughed too, lightly bumped her head and face bone plate visor thing against the side of his head, stood up, and joined Jeskura on the bed.

"Don't worry about it for now. Just know you don't need to need to piss or shit anymore, but you will need to eat, if you do anything to drain yourself, like that hike did, and the fucked shoulder." The gargoyle motioned to his aching feet. "You'll feel the hunger as those heal. You'll be fine in a day or two, ready to walk again, feet toughened up, but you'll be starving."

"That... doesn't make--"

"It's the afterlife, fresh meat. You'll get used to it." Shrugging, she leaned in toward Daoka, gave her another very romantic kiss, and laid back on the bed. "Now sleep."

He almost asked her why he slept as a ghost, or as someone in the afterlife or whatever, and why sleeping no longer gave him dreams. But no, just another thing for the mental list. Maybe he could ask later.

"Thanks, for... for telling me all this," he said eventually.

Jeskura stuck her head up. "Yeah well, if you don't cooperate with my plan, I'll find out what a unicorn's heart tastes like. Got it?"

He gulped, hard. "Got it."

The two demons in bed cozied up with each other, hugging, and finding positions to lay flat on the leathery blankets, while not puncturing it with their spikes or horns; the satyr was particularly spiky. And as the cave grew quiet, it also grew darker. The amber veins weren't as bright anymore, softening over the minutes until they weren't any brighter than a weak night light. Timed? However it worked, it worked well, and he felt a need to sleep begin to pull him under.

Good. The moment the two demons stopped talking to him and he was left alone with his thoughts, the urge to cry came up again. He didn't want to cry. He wanted to be back in Heaven with his sister. He wanted to be anywhere but here, even lucky as he was to get rescued by Jeskura and Daoka, if rescue was even the right word.

Sleeping was better than crying. So, even trapped in the awkward position, he slept. *www.norrelworm.com*

Tomorrow, they were going to figure out how to kill Diogo. At least, that was their plan. His plan was saving his sister, no matter what.

~~~~~ *Www.norrelworm.com* ~~~~~

~~Mia~~

At first, she'd been happy the big demon man had put her down instead of carrying her like a bag of sand. Now she wasn't. Her feet screamed at her to stop walking, and she ignored them. They'd kill her if she didn't do exactly what they said. Kill her the same way they, and other demons, had killed all those people. The same way they'd probably killed her brother.

She sniffled as tears welled up again. She'd already cried, and the two demons Brennus and Loria had barely reacted. She thought they might laugh at her, but they hadn't done that either. They were too interested in their own conversation and their plan to care about her.

Honestly, that was a big step up from how she imagined demons. She'd always figured demons didn't exist, but if they did, they'd be horribly vile, cruel, and do everything they could to inflict as much pain as possible. And it might have still been true, but so far it wasn't. The demons were more like... animals. They'd ripped people apart and tore out their hearts to eat them on the shore of the river, but they hadn't tortured them, either. Some of them had made a game of it, though, like a cat might with a mouse. So, capable of extreme cruelty, but didn't seem to lust for it?

It was a small comfort. They'd probably killed David, and they were going to kill her. But at least she wouldn't spend a thousand millennia being tortured. Then again, how did you die in Hell? How'd that even work?

She looked up at the metal pillars jutting up from the stone path. They were smooth and curving, almost like trees, and they came up from the hard ground with a strange naturalism to them, as if they'd grown. On top of them, giant black skulls of the same metal sat, with burning bushes inside them. The bushes should have burned up in seconds, but they kept burning and didn't stop. *www.norrelworm.com*

Above her, the sky burned, too. Around her were miles and miles of harsh, jagged mountains of dark stone. The path they walked was lined with more pillars with burning bushes on top of them, with plenty of burning bushes along the stone walls without a pillar. There were bones everywhere. Not as many as the shore, but still, thousands of bones sat along the edges of the path, many of them human skulls, arranged so they all pointed toward the path. Someone had a sick sense of decor.

The path took them down, a gentle slope in a vicious land that tore at her feet with each step. Ahead waited a huge cave, with more demons standing around the entrance. Dozens of small demons about four feet tall perched on the top of the cave, all of them with bat wings, all of them wearing some degree of armor. Leather, bits of bent black metal, some had human skulls attached to them either as armor or trophies, and each and every one of them looked like they built the armor in a basement out of scrap. These were not the angels she'd seen, wearing armor beyond beautiful, shining and pristine. Instead of a well-funded army, the demons looked like ragtag militia, if militia liked chaos and violence and looking the part.

Half of the little demons above walked on hooves and had no tail, and the other half walked on raptor feet and had tails, and they all stared at her with their red and black eyes, some of them idly plucking at their horns, or their big sharp teeth inside their too-large evil smiles. A couple of them hopped off, and glided back into the tunnel's mouth, disappearing inside.

"Probably telling Diogo," the male demon with her said to his gargoyle friend. Mia still didn't have a good term for him. The gargoyle was obviously a gargoyle, a sexy one but still a gargoyle. The small ones she'd seen she'd heard Brennus call imps, and grems. Actually, he'd called them impas, and gremlas, and impins and gremlins. Weird species names, if that's what they were, but they did look impish, and like gremlins. Brennus, she couldn't easily classify. He was eight feet tall, walked on raptor feet, had a tail and some small spikes on his back, and had giant black horns. A mostly human body, with no wings. So just... demon, then?