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"She is. Maybe we could have some fun with her if Diogo doesn't want her?" He leaned in close to her, close enough she felt his breath on her naked body, and he half purred, half growled as he locked eyes with her. Sure enough, Loria did the same, the two of them nudging shoulders as they stared down at her.

They were attracted to her. They wanted her. They wanted to do things to her, the things she'd just seen in the alcoves. And, if what she'd seen was any indication about Brennus... She looked down at his waist again, gulped, and took a step back.

"He'll want her, but so will Zel," Loria said. "He'll take her to Zel, and you know what Zel will do to him if she finds out he had a taste of her first."

Brennus stood up straight as if someone just slapped him.

"Good point." He pushed Mia along, the hunger and lust in his eyes gone in an instant. Whoever Zel was, he was terrified of her.

The tunnel grew larger, and darker, and ice shot up through Mia's veins as a familiar sound echoed along the stone. Screams. It was the screams she'd heard falling through the tunnel that'd taken her to Hell.

She froze.

"Forward," Brennus said.

"But... But..."

"It's just remnants, fresh meat," Loria said. "Don't worry about it."

"I don't understand."

Brennus didn't care she didn't understand. He pushed her forward, and she sucked in a harsh breath as they rounded a corner.

Just like in the tunnel, humans were growing out of the walls. The tunnel was bigger, but that didn't mean anything when it was now coated in human beings, all of them reaching out with desperate hands, many with broken fingers and bleeding from gaunt skin. Human eyes stared at her, dozens, and they all reached out for her, as if she could do something to help them.

"What... is this?" she said, taking a step back. She didn't mean to, but her body forced her, right into Brennus's waist and armor.

"Just remnants. Ignore them, and don't let them grab you." He pushed her again, but not hard enough she fell within reach of any of the screaming people. "Diogo will have my hide if you die or lose an eye before he sees you."

More ice shot up through her spine, but somehow she found the strength to walk. One bloody foot in front of the other, she followed the path on the cave floor, the stone smoothed out by what was probably hundreds of years of being walked by clawed feet. How could someone stomach walking this path frequently? One of the humans stuck out from the rock only enough for the side of their head and one arm to emerge. Another dangled overhead from their waist, and Mia had to duck to avoid getting caught.

"I got it," Loria said, swiped out with a claw, and caught the human... the remnant, in the throat.

Their eyes rolled up as blood gushed out of them onto the stone. The rocks, the caves, it all had a dark red tint to it, and as the remnant's blood flowed into the cracks and grooves off the side of the path, it slowly faded. It was like the stone itself absorbed the blood*www.nOvEl(w)©m.com*

She squeaked when the remnant, now silent, fell from the ceiling. Their half body splattered on the stones, and broke apart. It was like the autopsy again, a thousand times worse, and Mia covered her mouth as she looked away, but not before getting a glimpse of organs spilling out of the corpse's split-open gut.

"Oh god oh god oh god."

Loria chuckled as she squatted down in front of the splattered corpse.

"Like Brennus said, it's just a remnant. See?" She held up the body's head. Mia managed to peek at it, for half a second. "423. Now 422. This fucker must have been a nasty rapist or murderer."*W(w).NOvElwOrM.cOm*

"Or a CEO," Brennus said, snickering.

"422?" Mia asked.

The gargoyle nodded as she stood up, and swept the body parts aside. The nearby remnants grabbed them, like people drowning, desperate to find anything that'd help them float. They tore the flesh apart, but not with any malice or even awareness. The eyes looked at Loria and Brennus, but mostly at Mia, and they ripped up the flesh thrown their way with barely a thought, eventually pushing the chunks of gore aside and reaching out to try and grab Mia again, now with freshly bloody fingers.

The numbers on their foreheads. 142. 45. 252. They ticked down whenever they died?

"What happens when the number hits zero?"

"Never seen a remnant with a zero," Brennus said, pushing her forward again. The warm blood of the remnants coating her bleeding feet would have made her vomit if she could. "Probably returned to the Great Tower."

Great Tower. She almost asked, but a nearby remnant almost caught her ankle. And out of reflex, she kicked the remnant in the face, hard. The woman's face broke in, bones snapping and nose shattering, and Mia screamed as she pulled her foot away.

The remnant, just a head and arm sticking out of the stone, fell apart. The limbs broke apart at the joints, turning the woman into a soup of bits, as the number on her forehead changed from 308 to 307.

"She was... soft," Mia said, gulping down vomit she didn't have.

"That's remnants for you," Brennus said, and he swept the body parts aside with the tip of his tail as he pushed her along again. "Their bones never last. Only fresh meat's bones do." He grabbed one of the chains hanging from his chest strap, and bounced the skull dangling from it a few times.*©Ww.nOvElwOrM.COm*

Hell had its own ecosystem of violence and insanity.

They kept walking, and Mia did a better job avoiding the remnants. Some of them managed to speak, but the words were garbled nonsense. Mostly. She did her best to ignore the ones that called out names, or for their mom or dad, but underneath the half choked, half screamed noise, she heard them.