

## 1130

--Mia--

"This is a scrying pool?" she asked.

Adron chuckled, and leaned over the big bowl as casually as any human checked their smart phone.

"It is."

She expected something a little more epic, honestly, but a big wide bowl sitting on top of some rocks in Hell would have to do.

"Where it'd come from?" She already knew the answer [www.m0veL0or.com](#)

"Hell."

"Uh huh." Groaning, she peeked down over the cliff edge at the rest of the group. [Ww.n0v2lwor.M.c0m](#)

They were taking an early break, a short one. Much as Diogo tried to pass it off as nothing important, she could see the demon didn't like doing this trek, and he'd taken Adron's suggestion to let Mia check out a scrying pool as an opportunity for a breather. Considering how massive he was, it was no wonder he struggled with hiking twelve hours a day. Even the gorgala and two vrats hated it, and they were much smaller. But, much as a little part of Mia wanted to tease them about it, Hannah told her not to unless she wanted pain.

They'd stopped by a big cliff wall with a huge alcove cut into its side. Not deep enough to really be a cave, but deep enough they parked their butts inside it and took a breather. Beside it was a steep, semi-natural semi-Hell-grew-this stairway in the mountainside that went up to a small ledge that reached out over the alcove. On it was the bowl, sitting innocently on some rocks at about hip height. The bowl was three feet wide, only about six inches deep, and the liquid inside was very reflective and silvery. Mercury?

"Mirror mirror on the wall," Adron said, tapping the side of one of his big horns as he considered, "show me... the inside of a random Starbucks."

"What?" Mia stared at him. But before she could laugh at him or express disbelief, the shimmering image in the liquid changed.

That, was a Starbucks, with people inside drinking coffee and checking out news on their smart phones. The camera, or whatever it was Hell used to spy, flowed around naturally, never quick cutting but seamlessly sliding into new perspectives to show Adron, Mia, and Hannah new angles. It was as if Hell herself, or whoever piloted the invisible camera, wanted to make sure the scrying pool's viewers got exactly what they wanted [www.nov2lwor.M.c0m](#)

"Holy shit," Mia said.

"God I miss coffee," Hannah said. With a nod, she leaned over the bowl. "Show me that blond woman's coffee."

No need to finagle or convince, or be hyper specific. The bowl happily did exactly as requested, zooming in on the blond woman, and then her coffee. And then, her sipping the coffee, as if the bowl knew exactly what Hannah wanted without her having to say it.

Hannah groaned and walked away. "Fuck me that was dumb."

"Kinda, yeah," Mia said, laughing. "So, it can show me whatever I want?"

"Whatever you want," Adron said. "As long as it exists and it's on the surface right now."

"As long as it exists..." Oh. That did make things a little more problematic. What could she ask it to show her? The home she never really had, could never find, but always wanted? The close friends she'd never managed to make, despite the dozens of kinda-sorta friends she had?

Maybe some of the hot dudes at her university? Nah. She'd gotten her fill of being a peeping tom, and with the threat Diogo gave her not long ago, it was probably best she not think about sex. Whatever the weird aura thing she gave off was, it apparently got a lot stronger when she was horny, and a lot stronger again if she gave into that horniness.

"Show me... show me... Wow, this is hard."

"What?" Hannah asked, stepping up beside her again. "It's not hard. What, you don't miss anything from the surface?"

"I mean I do. I miss cereal and chocolate, and TV, and music, but... You said this is a torture device, Adron?"

"Mhmm. Every so often you'll find a soul or two, hanging out, staring into the bowl, crying over the things they don't have anymore. Sometimes they watch till they starve, and for a human not getting injured, that takes months."

"Months..." Months of watching the things they missed? She couldn't even think of a thing to watch. It wasn't like she didn't miss the surface, she very much did, and Hell and all its horrors and implied future agonies scared the shit out of her. But, fuck, why couldn't she think of anything she really wanted to see? Something she genuinely missed?

Whatever. Make something up.

"Show me my old university. Oh, do I--"

No, she didn't need to specify. The bowl shimmered, and then she was there. The view flowed over the concrete paths along the grass that would have guided her to the different buildings. It didn't go into any of the buildings, but it did circle around them, at one point going up into the air and doing a drone flyby.

"Wow," Hannah said. "Sometimes it surprises me just how good a camerawoman Hell is."

"We're sure it's Hell doing this?" Mia asked. "'Cause, I mean, that's so very... smooth, and nice, and... not things I think of when I think of Hell."

Adron shrugged, and gently rain a claw through the image. The waves turned to silver, and the image shimmered and vanished.

"Hell is cruel," he said, "but not some clumsy oaf. She'll finesse you, if she wants to."

No point in asking why they kept referring to Hell as her. 'Ask Caera', he'd say, followed by 'but she won't know, either'.

"I kind of expected the pool to lie to me."

"Not really the point of the pool," Adron said. "And--"

A quiet, distant rumbling grabbed their eyes and ears. Back the way they came, along the same mountain but on its other side and higher up, rocks fell, cracking and roaring with impact. Avalanche? Not a big one, but even a small avalanche was pretty damn scary, and noisy. Big rocks, enormous rocks, large enough she could see some of them even kilometers away. Clang, crash, crunch, and underneath it all a thick thundering rumble that vibrated and filled the mountains. [www.n0v2lwor.M.c0m](#)

"That happen often?" Mia asked.

The vrat shook his head as he walked back down the unusually nice little curving stairway, back down to the area the demons rested in.

"They happen, but not often. Sometimes an amber vein bursts, the lava pressure getting too much."

"All these amber veins are filled with lava?" Slowly, Mia stuck out a hand and waved it over one of the amber veins along a rock beside her. The rock wasn't fully disconnected from the ground, but a part of the mountain. The idea that lava was flowing up into it, right beside, was disconcerting.

"Hell's blood."

She rolled her eyes. "Oh come on. That is a shitty metaphor. Lava for blood?"

He laughed, shrugging. "It's not exactly lava. Caera once told me there's a lot of similarities between it and hellfire, but it's not like demons are going around doing experiments to find out. Maybe in False Gate. Maybe once upon a time."

Once upon a time. What a strange sentence to hear in Hell.

Hannah patted Mia on the shoulder. "We're only a few hours out from the spire, far as I know."

"When's the last time you saw it?" Mia asked.

"Long time ago, not long after Adron first gave me some of his blood. I'm... pretty scared."

"Yeah? Of Zel?"

"Sure, of Zel, and of... the place, really."

Mia raised a brow. "The place?"

"You'll see soon."

Wonderful.