

1143

"Strange things?" Mia asked. The harsh glare Diogo threw her was like a slap to the face. She wasn't to talk unless spoken to.

But Zel just laughed and shrugged. "Quite the tongue on you."

Mia gulped. Yeah, a stupid tongue, and it was probably going to get her killed if she didn't get control of it. The spikes outside were not a pleasant memory she was keen on revisiting.

Again Zel laughed, and guided Mia to turn around and follow her as Zel walked past her and Diogo, one hand and its long claws still on her shoulder.

"You may go, Diogo," Zel said. "You will be rewarded for your efforts, and may enjoy my comforts for a few days. I assume you'll wish to see Acelina before you leave?"

Diogo snorted, but nodded, posture relaxing as he followed behind.

"I do."

"You know she does not wish to speak with you."

"I'll be... careful."

Mia forced down the bubbling urge to ask. Acelina? Diogo's romantic interest? Did he have a romantic interest? Was he capable of romantic interest? Maybe just a friend? He seemed less likely to have friends than maybe a girlfriend.

Did demons have girlfriends and boyfriends?

Zel walked them out of the throne torture room and back out onto the inner balconies of the spire, but guided her into another archway, a metal one lined in black teeth. If anyone so much as nudged Mia into the archway's frame, it'd tear her arm open. Diogo didn't follow, choosing a different path.

She sucked in a hard breath as the archway took them out onto an outdoor balcony, one of the ones she'd seen from outside. It circled the spire, and its width was probably fifty feet across. She was right, the outer edge was tipped with giant, white, sharp teeth, and now that she was on the balcony she could see the teeth came out of chunks of pulsating flesh that grew over the metal, and connected to the spire.

"Is this spire alive?"

Zel grinned as she looked down at her. Shit, she talked again *Ww.novels.com*

"How long have you been in Hell, fresh meat?"

An insult, and no answer to her question, ugh. Don't frown. It was just a couple words demons often used to describe her, and probably any human.

"This is day four."

"You were lucky Diogo and his servants found you. Most fresh meat is dead within the first three days of their arrival. Many within the first three minutes."

She groaned and nodded, and followed the tall woman toward the edge of the balcony. She couldn't mention her brother, ask about him, anything, unless she wanted him to end up like her, captured. Whether that was better than being dead, she didn't know yet.

If Zel had two unmarked humans in her grip, the demon might think it worth sacrificing and eating one of them to see if she gained any power from it. Not good *Ww.novels.com*

"I guess. I..." Her voice trailed off, and she stared out from the balcony.

Holy shit she'd climbed high. It'd been horrible, going up those stairs, but now she was damn high, almost as high as some of the mountain tops, and some of those mountains were fucking colossal. Not Mount Everest colossal, but still. She could almost see over the mountains clockwise around Hell, and could easily see over them counter clockwise, to some place called The Black Valley. It was certainly black. She could even see over it, and to the horizon.

It wasn't a horizon. It was an endless, blurry distance, merging, gradients of red mixing with fire. It was beautiful, and horrifying.

She gulped and stepped back as she clutched her stomach. *Ww.novels.com*

"Tell me, unmarked one, how did you die?"

"I..." Oh god, what to do? How the fuck should she answer her questions? Fucking shit where was David. He'd know what to do. He'd have already had the conversation in his head a thousand times, and had come up with some 4D chess strategy to say the right thing and not get himself killed.

Lying was dangerous, and with Zel knowing Mia could create an aura, she couldn't just pretend to be a normal human anyway.

"I died randomly," she said. Fuck it, for all she knew this warlord of a ruler would be her strongest ally. "Just, randomly."

"Randomly?"

"Yeah. I was sitting at my table eating breakfast, and then I was in pain. Ten or twenty seconds later, I was dead. Doctors couldn't figure out what killed me, either." Dodging saying 'us' was proving difficult.

"That is quite strange. When was this?"

"Uh, almost three weeks ago? I guess twenty days, yeah."

Zel nodded as she came closer to the edge, and closer, before motioning for Mia to join her with one of her four hands. Wincing, Mia joined the ridiculously tall demon, and stared out over the balcony to the fall below. One of the big white teeth sticking up from the balcony proved to be her saving grace, and she pressed both hands against the tall fang, holding on as she looked down.

The spikes and burning skulls on the ground weren't placed randomly. They were spread out around the tower in a perfect circle pattern, dozens of circles that circled the spire, something you could only notice when looking straight down at it from above. It was beautiful and horrifying, like everything in Hell apparently was, Zel included.

"Something has been amiss, Mia. Something strange spreads through Hell. The angels visit frequently, flying high where I cannot reach them. They are worried. And they are looking for something." The demon smiled down at her, exposing some of her fangs in her small mouth. Small for her head, anyway, but considering how big she was, still more than big enough to bite Mia's face off.

"You think they're looking for me?" *Ww.novels.com*

"I do not know. Perhaps. Something is happening in Hell, fresh meat. Imps and grems have whispered of strange movement in the Black and Grave Valleys, no doubt stirred by the angels and their investigations. Whether that is because of you, or you are simply another symptom of these changes, I do not know, yet. The angels increased their activity about twenty days ago, which is when you died. But since you have only been in Hell for four, I assume you remained a ghost on the surface for some time?"

Thanks to her brother.

"Right. But..."

Zel looked down at her. "But?"

"Uh, when I went to Heaven, and tried to go in, the gate stopped me. And then, one of the angels said... 'not again'." She rubbed her arms. "And that's when the Hell portal swallowed me up." That was a lot of information, and for all she knew she was feeding it into someone who could turn out to be a deadly enemy. But what else was she supposed to do? Her best bet at finding David started with her staying alive, and making herself seem important was probably her best shot at doing that.

And, maybe she was important? The whole aura thing was very real.

"Not again?" Zel held her chin in one hand, the other three arms folded across her chest. "The angels grew active when you died, and your delay before accepting your death is perhaps the reason they spoke such a phrase, if others like you did not wait. Perhaps there are more of your kind then, out there, somewhere. Unmarked."