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No wonder Zel got her a bodyguard.

The balconies weren't as wide higher up, and the hole between them smaller, as the tower tapered. But even in the skinnier top half, the tower was still plenty wide, and the rooms inside plenty large. Case in point, the room Zel took them into was huge.

The door wasn't like other doors. This one had a giant black skull with an open mouth for its entrance, same as her throne room. And it had white teeth stabbing up and down in front of it covering the maybe twelve-foot-tall doorway, with only a few inches of space between each tooth.

The strange amber horn on Zel's head glowed, and the teeth moved up and down, and disappeared into huge metal grooves above and below Mia, like the huge metal skull was absorbing the teeth. *WwV.noveℓw©m.(c)ðm*

"Come," Zel said, giggling softly as she gestured around *wW(w).nôw©lworm.com*

It wasn't nearly as horrific and brutal as Mia figured it'd be. No remnants, no corpses, no freshly skewered dying demons or souls on wall spikes. It was a pleasant, huge room, with a giant pile of leather blankets on the side, a big open area of smooth metal in the center, and dangling chains above. The chains were, predictably, decorated with skulls of all sorts, but at this point in her four days in Hell, skulls looked less like dead bodies and more like a decorating choice. *WwV.©.VÉLwoℓ.M.com*

The ground curved up along the right wall, and bones stuck out over it to create a stairway that led up to a sort of small platform that hung over the room, almost like a mini cliff. Zel walked up it, and Mia followed, eyes on the big bone stairs her feet much preferred to the stone and metal. Kas stayed by the door.

There was a stone table, too big for Mia, and around it sat four huge chairs made of bones, with backs made of rib cages. Like in the throne room, the bones couldn't have been taken from a corpse. They were bones meant for this purpose. On the table, a small statue of a bolstara like Zel stood, made of metal, but a different color. Bronze? In its four hands, it held a burning bush, like the dozens Mia had seen before, but much smaller.

Just a little ways past the table was a window, about as big as the entrance to the room, with the same sort of teeth covering it. Zel approached, the amber horn on her head glowed, and the teeth pulled up and down, disappearing into the metal and stone that surrounded them.

Zel stood by the window, or more like giant hole in the wall, and motioned for Mia. She came, wincing against the hotter air, and sucked in a hard breath as she peeked down over the edge of the stone. The closest outdoor balcony was probably a hundred-foot drop. Blinking away some tears from the heat, she forced herself to look up, and to the mountaintops in the distance.

The window faced the center of Hell.

"What the..." Mia squinted as she stared out to the red sea. Even high up as they were, and the fact Hell was apparently completely flat, trying to see something hundreds of kilometers in the distance was borderline pointless. But even as a blurry mess, she could still see the sea, the center of the Hell donut, and the raging black clouds that hovered over it even closer to the water than the sky of fire over her right now. And not black like Earth clouds were. Black like obsidian wished it could be, and even so far away, she could see the lightning flashes.

"The Forgotten Place," Zel said. "Somewhere within that unending storm, in the center of all of Hell, lies the ninth spire, lost to us since the Spires War. Felezar had somehow managed to cross the sea, and indeed had come to control the spire. But he was not the first child of the Old Ones to rule a spire and die regardless. And not the last."

"How... How long ago was that?"

"No one knows. The Third Age and the Nine Spires war ended two thousand years ago, with the death of Belor. Felezar's death came long before then."

The time scale of Hell's history was massive. And it wasn't like anyone was writing this shit down, at least not in the detail someone would need to have an accurate understanding of when shit had happened. Demons had more of a hard time understanding their past than even humans did.

"Is that what you want? To get to this, uh, Forgotten Place?"

Zel chuckled and idly plucked at her nipple chain. "Perhaps. I have many goals, and with time, they may be revealed to you. You have a role to play in this upcoming war, and I must learn what it is before the knowledge can be used against me."

"Upcoming war?"

Nodding, Zel gestured out to the right of the sea, toward some weird vertical line in the distance. It looked kinda purple, a bit red, a bit blue, and it swirled. So far, it was just a hazy blur, but there was only one thing it could be.

"I assume you know what that is?"

"The vortex," Mia said. It was barely visible past the right edge of the middle sea and the black storm, and over the mountains past it. Something that far, and she could still see it? It had to be beyond massive. "I don't know much about it."

"Lucifer ripped open a hole to Heaven, in the First War. Forever it has twisted and turned in the sky over False Gate. It is the False Gate. And from there, angels come and go in greater numbers than they ever have before."

"It's so far away."

"And yet, the angels cross the skies at great speeds, forever above us, forever out of reach." Sighing, Zel gestured back to the pile of blankets. "This room is yours."

"Mine?"

Nodding, Zel sat at the table, and motioned for Mia to do the same. Not exactly easy, considering the chair was made for people at least a couple feet taller than Mia, and she had to climb the damn thing.

A necklace was on the table. Mia hadn't seen it before because of how high the table was, but there it was, a simple chain of black. Not a sleek piece of jewelry from the surface, no no, this was a proper chain, with thick inch-long links. One part of the chain held a crystal, something in the shape of a sharp tooth or claw, maybe two inches long.

Zel scooped up the necklace, and touched a long claw to the small crystal. Her extra amber horn glowed, the same sort of glow Mia had seen in the amber veins, and the same glow rolled down her claw and onto the crystal. And into the crystal. Mia blinked twice. It'd been so subtle, just a tiny motion, and now the crystal on the necklace glowed with a very subtle amber hue, like Zel's horn.

"This will open and close your door," Zel said, and she slid the necklace across the table to her. "But not the window." And with a gentle flick of the wrist, she pointed some claws back at the window behind her, and the teeth closed, leaving only a couple inches between the huge white things. "It wouldn't be safe to let you open and close it at your whim."

Mia picked up the necklace.

"You're giving me a room, and a key?"

"Indeed."

Mia squinted at the demoness. "Uh, why?"

"Would you rather I bind you in chains and leave you in my throne room, in pain, for potentially the rest of eternity?" Grinning, the demon queen leaned forward and tapped a claw on the stone table. "If that is what you'd prefer, I do have a dungeon just waiting for more occupants."

That was half the reason why Zel was so scary. With demons like Diogo, it was obvious they'd just kill anyone they thought would be a problem. Zel had the foresight and patience to think past her desires, and plan for the future.

"I uh, I think I'd prefer the bedroom."

"Good. Though of course Kas will be staying with you, inside your bedroom. Can't risk leaving you alone, can I?"

Mia looked behind her, down the small sloping stairway to the big demon standing -- on all fours now -- by the open door. He'd heard Zel, but didn't even so much as look their way. One hundred percent just didn't give a shit. She could respect that, but that didn't necessarily mean she wanted that kind of person around her twenty-four seven.

"We can... trust him?" Mia whispered.

Zel giggled, nodding as she gestured to the necklace. "Put it on."

Sighing, Mia slipped on the heavy chain. The little crystal dangled down to her sternum.

"How does it work?"

"Touch it when near the door. It will respond to your essence, with a little of your will to tell it to obey."

A magic door-opening necklace. Mia would have been ecstatic in a different circumstance.

"I still don't know why you're being so nice to me. I mean, I'm glad you are, but it's not like I have any knowledge or anything to give you."

"No, you don't. But you are more inclined to follow my requests from now on, aren't you? And, my orders?" Zel leaned over the table, and her nipple chain clinked quietly over the hard surface, while her big necklace and huge demon skull hanging from it clanked much more loudly. "I already have at least one thing I would like to test, Mia. Something I would have you do. And I believe it will be easier to coax cooperation out of a pet, than a prisoner."

"Something you want me to do? Will... it hurt?"

Again the demon queen laughed, sitting back and shaking her head.

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