

## 1162

"Oh boohoo. Fuck you, I died! I died and I'm in Hell and I shouldn't be here and now every day is just a giant fucking mess that I don't deserve!" She walked up to him and poked him in the chest again. Why her confidence had skyrocketed, she wasn't entirely sure. Maybe she'd hit the point of gave-no-shits no return? Zel had made it clear she was to be protected, maybe that was it? Maybe it was finally getting a night's sleep in a place that felt at least partially like she could get her feet grounded. Whatever it was, she was fucking done being confused about everything.

Kas clicked a couple times, but didn't explain. Asshole.

"I want to know how demons reproduce. I keep hearing talk about different breeds, and hatchlings, but no one's explained. The imps, grems, and incubus and succubus seem to have different sexes too, but not other breeds? Like you?" She gestured to him.

After another heavy rumble, Kas sighed, walked toward the inner edge of the balcony, and held out one of his big arms. They were going on a trip.

"You can't just tell me?" she asked.

He clicked once, and didn't move. Double asshole.

She walked up to him, and he scooped her up. He jumped down, and she choked down the sudden desire to scream as gravity went poof. There was a giant hole beneath her, and it went down and down and down. Cages dangled from chains, some connected to chains that hung from the top of the tower she'd yet seen, but most dangled from chains hooked on the edges of the balconies. Smaller demons landed on the cages, ignored the remnants inside that grabbed at them, and hopped onto whatever balcony they were stopping on.

Kas didn't bother with the cages. He landed on the next floor below, raptor feet hitting the metal before his free big arm did. And before she could ask where they were going, he jumped down to the next floor. It took him a few seconds, but soon he found a rhythm and hopped down from balcony to balcony in a seamless bouncing pattern. What would have taken her minutes, he did in seconds.

The fact it took him an entire three minutes to get down to the floor he was heading toward terrified her. If she tried to get back up to her room without him, she'd burn off her quads. Demons, on the other hand, had no trouble jumping up and down, catching cages and chains, or jumping up and landing straight onto the balcony edges without them. Pure strength.

At some point they descended lower than the spire entrance, and went underground. No more big archways of bones and metal leading outside onto outdoor balconies. Now it was a black pit of darkness lit by flames burning inside metal braziers shaped like skulls, and the deeper they went, the louder it got. Not demon sounds though. Screams. Human screams

They stopped. Kas let her off, and she slipped out of the nook of his arm, shoulder, and chest. Much as Kas was attractive, in that sexy scary monster beast kinda way, she couldn't even think about sex anymore. Down here, deep inside the spire, the remnants were everywhere. They tried to climb out of the walls from slabs of flesh and bone, with the stones of the walls jammed up against their guts. They tried to get out of the cages they were trapped inside, packed together like sardines. They tried to reach down from the ceiling they hung from, from the giant rib bones that reached overhead holding up the balcony above.

"How can you stand this?" she said, gesturing around at the remnants. Their gaunt faces, their torn and bleeding skin, the terror and pain in their eyes. 341, 231, 54, 535. So many more, dangling from the balcony above, from the wall, or trying to climb out of the floor they were trapped inside of.

"Remnants," Kas said. Fucker barely used enough volume to warrant using his vocal cords.

"I know they're remnants, but they're still people. They... were, still people." She came closer to one of the remnants sticking out of the floor. A woman, old, with only her head, neck, and one arm protruding from the floor. She scraped her nails along the metal, leaving a trail of blood under her ruined fingertips. "Is there anything of the person left?"

"Probably. Otherwise the torture would be pointless."

She ground her teeth. "So they have to remember who they were, or all these deaths wouldn't matter? That is fucking sick. No one deserves that."

Kas looked at her, saying nothing. Even without eyes, he had a habit of pointing his head directly at whatever he was looking at, probably, making it easy for her to tell what he was thinking about. He didn't understand why this bothered her.

"Then kill her, and lower her number." He managed a tiny shrug, tail dead still on the floor.

"I..." Sighing, Mia took a step back from the remnant and looked away. It didn't take much for her to get sucked into a cause that she had no chance of even putting a dent in. One random article on the internet, and Mia threw money at a charity, or started distributing pamphlets, anything

David had told her if she didn't learn how to guard her emotions and passion against random things scooping it up, she'd burn herself out. 'The brightest flame burns quickest' he quoted. She and her brother were empathetic, too empathetic. Much as people thought of her brother as a robot sometimes, it was because he was so much better at guarding himself against other people leeching his emotions out of him. And he was smarter than her, and better at not throwing his mental energy away into pointless causes.

She couldn't fucking help it. Every time she saw a remnant, all she wanted to do was help. The only way she could do that, was to kill them, and what was she going to do, slaughter remnants by the millions? For what? To help them deal with a punishment more quickly, punishment Hell itself -- herself -- thought they deserved? And Hannah had killed--

Mia sucked in a breath. Stop it. This is Hell. The people down here deserve it. And even if they didn't deserve years, or decades, or centuries of being tortured and slowly killed as a remnant over and over, there was fuck all she could do about it. She had to do what David told her to do, a thousand thousand times: self first, others second. You can't do shit for others if you're dead.

"So," she said, forcing her eyes away from the remnant. "What're we doing down here?"

Kas nodded toward a big door archway, the only one on this floor, and slowly walked toward it on all fours. She hesitated to follow, until he looked back over his shoulder at her, and clicked once in his throat.

"I uh... kinda regret asking to learn about this." She gestured to the huge archway. "That looks pretty spooky."

The eyeless dragon grumbled, and thudded his huge tail on the metal.

"Come on. I'll keep you safe."

"So... it's... not safe in there, normally?"

"Nothing is."

She did her best to match his grumble, failed miserably, folded her arms on her chest, and followed.

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