

# 1169

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"There's something else," Saldavin said. "I heard a few imps and grems talking about a large goort nearby, by itself, standing on a mountain clockwise from here."

"Which mountain?" Zel asked.

"Imps and grems couldn't remember each other's names, let alone the mountain's."

Groaning, Zel gestured at the table. There had to be a map on it or something.

"Did they at least note the color of the goort?"

Gorlus sucked in a heavy breath. "Pure obsidian."

The expression that cut across Zel's face knocked the wind out of Mia. She looked afraid? It lasted maybe a tenth of a second, before the demon's face hardened, and she idly plucked at one of the skulls hanging from her necklace.

"If the rider is here..."

Saldavin shook his head. "The rider will pass. He always does."

Zel slapped the huge beast in the back of the head, earning a growl and grunt from the titan, but no retaliation.

"An unmarked soul sits in this very room, with strange abilities, while angels haunt my horizons, the rider reveals himself in the shadow of my spire, and you're stupid enough to think he hasn't come here to investigate?" Without looking, another one of her many hands shot out, grabbed Saldavin by a horn, and pulled him closer to her before she turned to glare at him. "Gather the devorjins, and post them at every balcony. Gather the vratorins, and send them scouting. Gather the dilojas and gorgalas, and have them do gliding patrols. If the rider dares approach my spire, I will see him dead! You two may be foolish enough to repeat Damavior's mistakes, but I am not."

Not once had Mia ever seen Zel look this way, angry and ready to bite someone's head off, but wrapped in a cold exterior of pure ice. The two korgejin with her had, though, and they both nodded before leaving, heads slightly lowered. They were scared of Zel, and in more than just the obvious 'could kill me' kinda way.

Zel paced back and forth in front of the huge stone table, glaring down at it, both arms folded across her chest.

"I'm surprised," Mia said, testing the waters. Zel didn't respond. "Surprised you let me hear all that." wŴ(w).©Ovelw(o)Rm.C(o)m

"If there is a secret to hide, I will hide it. But you knowing the perils of Hell does little to harm me." Sighing, she looked Mia's way. "You think of me as some sort of cartoon villain, don't you?"

Hearing a giant demones say 'cartoon villain' was trippy as fuck.

"I uh, I just didn't expect you to be so open about it."

"Alessio wouldn't, the vile creature. She'd sew a web of lies and have you dancing to her tune. But I am not her."

No, she wasn't Alessio, ruler of the Black Valley. Mia remembered that much. Zel acted giggly and soft, and turned hard the moment she had to. First attempt at a psych profile for the demon queen: a cold cruel bitch who enjoyed acting pleasant, like the afterlife was a game to her, but under the mask she was all ice. ©uW.©n(v)Elw©M.C.©

Kas returned, Adron at his side. Mia stepped down from beside the throne, took a quick peek at Zel to make sure she wasn't going to get her head cut off for doing so, and walked up to smile up at the big guy. A hug would probably have been a bit too much.

"Hi," she said, a little higher pitched than usual. Damn it.

"Hello," Adron said, grinning down at her. "Making friends with Zel, I see."

Zel's cold expression vanished, and she put back on her happy, teasing, playful, feminine expression as she walked over to them.

"Adron. There has been a development. Diogo will be heading back to Gorzen Eye without you."

"Oh? Is Hannah staying?"

Zel rolled her eyes. "Of course, because I know it's the only way to guarantee your cooperation, you fool."

Adron shrugged, grin unrelenting. He knew Zel better than Mia thought.

"What's the mission?"

"Guard the unmarked."

"Isn't Kas already doing that?"

"Kas is not sufficient, considering what we only recently learned. Mia is to be kept alive and unharmed, and you and your devious little mind are to preempt any attempts to kill her."

"Preempt? You think someone's going to actually plan to kill her?"

"It is a possibility. You will learn why soon. And besides, I think you will enjoy the other plans I have in store for her and you." With a playful smile, Zel tugged at her nipple chain idly with one hand, while the three others reached down, two took Adron's shoulders, and the final one casually wrapped one of his horns. "If you fail to keep her alive, I will do far worse than kill you, and Hannah's screams will be all you hear until pain and misery sunder your mind into mulch."

Adron gulped, in that comically exaggerated way he loved, nodded, and looked to Kas.

"So you're not qualified to do this solo, buddy?"

Kas grunted, clicked once, and said nothing.

Zel released her demon. "Now, come. To the depths."

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Mia was going to puke. No, wait, she couldn't puke anymore. That didn't stop nausea from hitting her as they, yet again, did some rapid traversal, jumping from balcony to balcony, deep into the tower. Deeper than the balcony with the hatching room. So deep it got dark, and Mia's eyes had to adjust. Not many braziers down here.

There was a bottom. There was no stone down here, no metal save for the balcony over there heads. Just like the tunnel that led to the hatchery, it was all flesh and bone, with only a few tiny veins of amber that cut across the bones, and not enough for Mia to see clearly.

That made the screaming and crying a thousand times worse.

She'd half expected the bottom to be a lava pit or something, but nope, the spire loved flesh, and this deep, it also loved remnants. Hundreds, maybe thousands of them screamed and yelled, and reached out from the walls of muscle and bone. They tore at each other, at themselves, and some of them managed to say words, slurred and garbled, but 'help me' and 'kill me' bubbled up a few times in the chorus of pain and torture.

Mia covered her ears.

Adron walked on her right, Kas on her left, and Zel took lead. Mia managed to smile up at her two bodyguards, but a weak smile, and more than a few times she squealed and jumped up as a remnant reached up from the ground. She could only see a few feet in front of her, and the floor was muscle, sinew, and sometimes a long, wide slab of bone she had to carefully step over. Spotting the remnants wasn't always easy, and one managed to get a hand around her ankle.

Kas crushed the remnant with one fist. Splat. Mia squealed again and forced her eyes away, but not fast enough. The remnant practically exploded, and Mia yanked her ankle free as blood splattered over her legs, and a limb that went flying hit her shin. A remnant was much softer than a human, the exact opposite of what Zel described souls as, and if it weren't for how dark it was in the pit of the spire, Mia would have closed her eyes to avoid seeing the guts everywhere. wŴu.n©vElw.eTM.c©M

"Why's it so dark down here?" she half asked, half yelled to get over the screaming.

The two men shrugged, and Zel didn't answer. Even her small extra horn on her forehead, glowing a gentle amber, provided a lot of light compared to how much the nearby amber veins did. Still not enough light for Mia to see much. But thankfully all three demons started clearing Mia's path of remnants, after the scare.