

1206

"He's killed hundreds, maybe thousands of demons in his lifetime. It's what he's good at."

"Thousands?" Mia gulped as her eyes ran up and down the dinosaur's spiky back. That was a lot of killing, over what must have been decades.

Kasimiro walked on all fours at the moment, which fit him well with his short-ish legs and long-ish, giant arms. Combined with the enormous torso and equally enormous tail, he really did move like some sort of dinosaur. Maybe she could ride him? He had a lot of spikes, but they were big and spread out, easy to sit between.

Maybe later.

"So, um, how does this usually work?" Mia asked. "Hunts, I mean."

"We leave the spire," Adron said. "Sometimes at night, sometimes during the day, but yeah usually we leave. All the humans in the spire are either claimed betrayers, claimed meals, or dead."*www.novelworm.com*

"But..."

"But we're not doing that today. We're going to the dens."

"The dens?"

He came up beside her. "Most demons live out in the different corners of Death's Grip. Normally I'm with Diogo in the Gorzen Mountains, while Tacitus rules the Gazra Crag, and Domicela rules the Geeraz Tombs. Gotta spread out and keep the province under our rule, right? In case Alessio attacks again. In case anyone attacks again." He gestured to the wall beside them, implying the Hell beyond it. They walked one of the balconies, following Kas to a big door nearby, and since they'd descended the tower a ways, they were maybe thirty or fifty feet below the ground.

"But a lot of demons live in the dens," he continued, "young ones in particular. They guard the spire, keep the local soul and hellbeast population under control, but mostly they all stick around hoping to get on Zel's good side."

"Like you," Mia said.

Adron grinned down at her and winked. "Like me. And Kas. And Diogo."

"Speak of the devil," Hannah said, nodding to the other side of the circular balcony.

Diogo. The giant devorjin brute, bigger than any other brute in the spire, stood with someone of equal height. A zotiva, a spire mother. She had a couple pieces of silk dangling around her shoulders, enough to cover her giant breasts, but not enough Mia didn't recognize the array of piercings, chains, and other jewelry. That was Acelina*www.tumblr.com*

Hannah leaned in close to Mia. "How does she walk around with those things?"

Mia managed a slow shrug as she stared at the woman. Zel had an alien beauty to her, with her almost mask-like face, her slim physique, and her four arms. But Acelina and the other spire mothers were different, with their horrifying faces that lacked any features at all, pure obsidian blackness that only showed one thing: a big wide mouth full of very big very scary teeth, but only when they smiled. When they weren't smiling, it was like looking into a void.

She was strangely beautiful though, and the pure black head and her giant royal horns only added to it, almost like a woman wearing a mourning veil. Beautiful, and eerie. Of course, Acelina had a super tiny waist, long limbs, curvy legs with an ass to match, hoof feet that made her walk like she wore high heels, and naturally, ridiculously massive tits, each considerably bigger than her own head. Her tail was tiny, long and thin, not unlike a succubus or incubus tail, and basically didn't exist compared to her other proportions.*www.novelworm.com*

Diogo, in contrast, was a hulking brute of pure muscle with no spikes, no horns, no tail, nothing. His skull-like face and its small, angry eyes inside large eye sockets were terrifying in their own way. With Acelina, Mia thought the woman might cut her throat open at any moment. With Diogo, she felt like he might spontaneously erupt into a frothing-at-the-mouth rage, and crush her head like a grape.

Maybe that's why the two seemed interested in each other? Both were very mean people.

Maybe interested was the wrong word. They were yelling at each other. A lot of the noise was lost in the screams of nearby remnants, the roars of hungry demons fighting among themselves, and the fact Acelina and Diogo spoke with a lot of clicks. Not completely though, kinda like some Canadians Mia had met who slipped between English and French seamlessly.

Whatever they said, it ended with Diogo roaring at her like a tiger, Acelina shrieking at him like a banshee, and the two of them storming off away from each other. Diogo jumped up onto the balconies above, while Acelina went down, probably back to the hatching pit.*www.novelworm.com*

Apparently demons weren't immune to drama. Of course, for all Mia knew, that drama entailed who tried to kill whom, literally, rather than something silly like who was flirting with some other guy or girl.

"You said Diogo's on Zel's good side, Adron?" Mia asked. "I got the impression she didn't like him." Like Acelina, apparently.

"Ha. Yeah well, no one really likes Diogo, but he impressed her. When she did her rounds and checked out the Gorzen Mountains, she remembered him, and he'd done work. Only reason she didn't rip his head off for the trouble he caused at the Gorzen Eye." Shrugging, he slowed down a couple steps so he walked behind Mia and Hannah again. "Younger demons often stick around until they feel comfortable going out on their own, often with some ambition."

Mia laughed. "I have a hard time imagining Zel taking care of demons here, like some sort of... nursery babysitter. She feels more like a queen and army general, recruiting soldiers."

"Every demon in Death's Grip is in her army," Kas said, and he growled as he slowed his walk. "And they need to be brought in line."

After a heavy gulp, Mia followed Kas into the cave. Yet another hall, this one with walls of bone and stone. No metal, but there were plenty of amber veins along the rock walls, and as the hall grew larger and spread out, a few burning bushes appeared. As did remnants.

It was just like Diogo's HQ the Gorzen Eye, a huge cave, high walls, with big holes in them that led into tunnels. No metal cages dangled from chains, though. Instead, giant bone teeth grew from the walls and ceiling, some skewering remnants, and enormous rib bones covered the floor. Much as the spire seemed to have a consistent motif of metal, stones, flesh, and bones, it did seem to use them differently in different places, and the dens were no different.

Dozens of demons walked through the paths, and with the tunnels also being variously shaped, she got to see plenty of different kinds. Vrats like Adron, bat ladies who had wings attached to the undersides of their arms like bats did, gargoyle ladies, tiger ladies, big brute boys like Diogo, a couple satyr ladies who chirped and clicked, and a few minotaur boys. The minotaurs were very brutish, with big horns and big long tails, and the same proportions as brutes, but they walked hunched forward with lumbering movement.

A few had betrayers with them, men and women, all in great shape. If Hannah was right, anyone not in great shape either quickly got in good shape to survive Hell, or didn't survive.