

## 1233

She pushed off him and got back to looking. On the back of the throne? No. On the walls? Hundreds of big black spikes, and plenty of them held dangling tiny chains, some tipped with amber stones like the one around Mia's neck. No keys, though.

"You... what? You... Why?" *www.nove@worm.com*

"Why kill her? Because she was going to torture me, break me, turn me into a slave, anything and everything she could to turn me into a tool! She's worse than you know! Than Kas knows!" She ran around the throne twice. No luck. "Why leave? Because I have to find my brother! He's out there and I have to find him! And I'm going to use Vinicius to do it!"

"Brother?"

"Yes!" She threw up her hands and glared at him as hard as she could. Now would be the perfect time for her to be able to control her aura, to push out what she felt into the air, and get Adron on the same wavelength as her. That only happened when she was horny. Now, the panic she felt, the need she had to get Adron to help her, none of that resonated on the strings inside her. All she could do was communicate her desperation with her eyes and her voice.

Adron, his own eyes still wide and locked on her, slowly walked toward the side of the room, and reached into an alcove in the wall.

"This is normally covered in closed teeth, like your bedroom door."

"Oh. It's... yeah... I guess maybe she did want to protect the keys, from being stolen or something." With a heavy gulp, she held out her hand to Adron.

The look on his face said everything. He hadn't believed her at first, but seeing Zel's keys unguarded and unprotected sealed in the reality for him. His master was dead.

Slowly, he set the keys in her hand. That was a strange looking set of keys, very medieval, and heavy as hell. Each one was more like a big hammer, or axe, or something long with a square-ish blade at the end that, on closer inspection, wasn't sharp. They were attached at the end of a chain like Mia's necklace, each key as big as her whole hand, and one of them as big as her forearm. Definitely the key for Vinicius's lock.

Mia's gaze settled on the keys in her right hand before looking back up to Adron and his frozen expression. Nodding, she took her necklace off with her free hand, and threw it away as hard as she could, back toward the throne. It bounced off it and landed back on the floor with barely a noise. Not exactly the cathartic, climactic moment she wanted, but whatever, that could come later.

"Are you upset Zel's dead?" she asked.

"I don't know."

"Are you going to stop me?"

"I... don't know."

"We can talk about it later, okay? I have to get back down there, now. You still going to help me?"

He took a small step back, his tail dead weight between his legs. She didn't need her limited education in psychology to see the demon's world had been shattered. So much time working for Zel, to the point he was sort of her double agent, spying on the bailiff Diogo and his Gorzen Mountains district, and now all of that was gone. And not because of some big battle with a neighboring province.

She poked him in the stomach. "You could come with me, you know? You and Hannah, Kas too if he doesn't hate me too much."

"He won't hate you. He will be... confused. And... I don't..."

"Zel's dead. I stabbed her, with one of Vinicius's spikes. She's not here, and--"

"One of his spikes?" *www.nove@worm.com*

"He broke one off."

It was Adron's turn to gulp this time, and he rubbed one of the small spikes coming out of an elbow.

"She's really dead?" *www.nove@worm.com*

"Come with me and I'll show you. Come with me, out of this place, and we can find my brother and... and..." She punched him in the stomach. Of course it barely fazed him, but how else was she supposed to get across how she felt? Confession of attraction? Maybe a quick speech about how this asshole who'd taken her virginity owed it to her to help her? And maybe, just maybe, that she kind of liked him?

No, clearly not. Gut punching was better.

"I... don't know..."

"At least get me back down to the dungeon! I need to help Vinicius."

"I told you about him, Mia."

"I know. Zel's got a leash on him, and if I use that, I can at least... sorta... maybe... control him, a little?" If that'd been true, Zel wouldn't have needed Mia to break him, or Valzana's tools, or any of that. The leash would hopefully be enough to at least stop Vinicius from killing her, and anyone else as long as she kept an eye on him. It was a pain leash, and that was all.

Adron took another deep breath, a resetting breath, one Mia had taken many times.

"Okay. After we get Vinicius, we get Hannah, maybe find Kas if he's not dead out in that fight, and we... figure something out?"

"Kas is out there?"

"He is, fighting near the entrance with the other enforcers. But with that giant lizard thing, it got pretty hectic."

Oh god, Kas. If he died, she... she wasn't sure how she'd feel. Him and Adron, that first night, how much had it meant to Kas, compared to her? Probably not much. At least Adron seemed to have some emotional depth, enough that he liked Hannah more than he probably thought he did. And maybe Mia, too. Kas, she didn't know. She wanted to know, but now she might not get to.

She squeezed the keys, looked back at the empty throne, back to her huge demon protector, and nodded as confidently and courageously as she could. Not very, but better than nothing. *www.nove@worm.com*

"Let's go."