

## 1234

--David--

The inside of the spire was scarier than the outside, walls of metal and flesh, bone and teeth and everything between. Remnants grew out of them, poor souls trapped in unending pain, and they screamed as they reached out for him. He could never tell if they wanted his help pulling them out of whatever surface they were attached to or growing out of, or if they wanted him to kill them. And right now, all he could do was ignore them.

There were a lot more balconies on the inside of the tower, and a big hole between them that went up and up, and down and down. The spire looked to be as deep as it was tall.

"Fuck fuck fuck." He walked to the edge, and his eyes locked onto the dangling chains and cages inside the hole. Remnants sat within, bound to the cages, some with metal bars penetrating their entire bodies without killing them, leaving them in agony. Their cries were quiet compared to the raging battle outside.

Doorways sat nearby. Some were made of metal. Some of flesh, like exposed muscle, ready to be cut open by a huge scalpel. A few looked like open mouths of big sharp teeth, complete with a giant skull and open jaw around them.

There were demons, but few. Most of them were outside, and the ones inside ran around, either on the way out, or up or down the tower. They didn't take any stairs, if there were any. They jumped up the hole in the center, going from balcony to balcony, using chains and cages for landing points. Others jumped down, hopping from floor to floor. How the fuck would he get around?

One archway of flesh and bone showed stairs of white. A bone stairway. A few humans ran up it, a few ran down, each with 666 written on their forehead and every one of them in a panic. Betrayers, many followed by succubi and incubi. Okay, if he wanted to fit in, he had to hide his forehead. Thankfully, he had shaggy red hair.

He lifted his arm and--

"Fuck!" He fell to a knee, and that only made the pain worse as his dislocated arm flexed and pulled at the joint. All that did was grind the bone in the wrong spot, not in the socket.

What to do what to do? He could grab one of the betrayers, and ask them about Mia. With how much panic was going on, they might just answer him. But he could barely move. Every breath was burning agony, and being on his knees for even just a few seconds was Heaven.

He pushed himself back up to his feet and backed up toward a wall. Sweat dripped down his body, and he slipped his broken weapon back into the waist of his leather skirt. How to fix your own dislocated shoulder? He'd looked it up once, on one of his random internet information rabbit holes. One method needed a table. No such luck. One needed him to lie on the floor on his back. Not a good idea. If he was strong enough, he could yank on the arm, forward away from his chest. That might work?

A demon in black armor ran past him, a brute. They ignored him. A few more vrats joined the brute, wearing more black armor than the demons outside. Honor guard, or elite soldiers, or something? Whoever they were, if they didn't give a shit about a random human, even one apparently audacious enough to wear clothes, then maybe he could move around the tower without being bothered. Maybe--

The ground disappeared, sucked out from under him, and the wall he leaned back against lifted him up. No, wait, that was a gigantic hand lifting him by the throat, choking him, and pinning him against the wall a little too close to a remnant that grew from the ceiling.

"Who. Are. You?"wWw.novél(ó)órM.com

The demon came into view. Whoever they were, they'd been smart enough to grab David from the side around the entrance corner, and only now stepped into David's line of sight. It was the shark dinosaur demon, the eyeless one with the flat head, dragon snout, and the two big horns that came out sideways. Whoever he was, he was drenched in blood, more than when David had run past him a whole two minutes ago.

"Uck... uck..." Yeap, choking, not good. The demon loosened his grip. "I'm David! Just a... just... um..."

The nine-foot shark dinosaur clicked a few times in his throat. He sounded like Dao, except instead of sharp, pleasant clicks, it sounded more like a bass drum.

"You're... unmarked."

Shit.

"I uh... I'm..."

"You're here looking for Mia." He lowered David down to eye level, or snout to eye level, which still left David's feet dangling high. "You smell like her. Look like her. Unmarked." He snorted, and a hot gush of air smacked David in the face. "Brother."

"I..." Oh shit what to say what to say. "Everyone outside is too caught up to notice or care that the rider's in the spire! He's here for her!" Probably here for her, but no point in muddying the point now.

The demon snarled, a few clicks slipping into an animal sorta sound.

"You approach the spire now, of all times?"

"I've been trying to figure out a way in for the past week! I--" David caught his throat halfway through a yelp as pain shot up from his arm.uWw.novél(ó)órM.com

The demon grunted, clicked once, grabbed David's wrist, and yanked it forward, away from David's chest. And just like the time Jes had fixed it, the bone went forward, slipped around the outer groove of the socket, and back into place. Relief flooded David, and he relaxed in the grip still borderline choking him.

"Thanks."

The demon tilted his head at the word. The girls had done that a few times, whenever David said it. They weren't used to hearing it.

"The rider is in the spire?"

"Yes! Did no one notice when the dragon stood up?"

Again the shark dinosaur growled, and tightened his grip a little more than was comfortable. Okay, don't poke the bear.

"Auras. Distracting."

"Okay!" He patted the demon's wrist with his good hand. "Okay, I get it!" After a few more painful seconds, the demon loosened his grip again. "The rider is here, and probably for Mia! I--"

"How do you know?"

"Because a whole bunch of crazy shit has happened to me! I've had run-ins with an invisible monster trying to kill me, angels, and the rider, too. He's here for unmarked souls, me or Mia, to kill us or kidnap us, and I can't let that happen!"

It really would have been nice if whoever this demon was had had eyes. His shark dragon snout thing didn't have lips, and any facial expressions David managed to pick up on were just frowns the demon made with his cheek muscles at the base of his mouth. He could read an alligator's facial expressions better.

"Mia and Zelandariel are deep in the spire, in the dungeon."

"Dungeon?" Because of course the scary spire would have a dungeon.

"If you go down there, Zel might capture you, too."

Slowly, wincing and groaning as his shoulder screamed at him, he lifted his injured arm and squeezed the demons' wrists with both hands as best he could. Might as well have been squeezing a steel beam.

"If I don't, the rider is going to get her. And I saw the rider kill a korgejin and a bunch of other demons, by himself, like they were nothing."

Mentioning the korgejin was enough to earn another grunt from the demon, and he put David down. Or rather, let David fall to the floor, and David slumped to his ass with the impact.

"Alright." And with that, the shark dinosaur walked to the edge of the balcony.

"Wait, what? Alright?"

"I'll go to her."

"Wait!"

The demon turned his head and aimed it over his shoulder at David, clicked once, and turned back toward the hole in the center of the spire. He had no intention of

waiting.Www.NOVÉl(ó)órM.com

David forced himself to his feet, and threw himself at the demon's back. Spiky, but he was used to dealing with spikes now, and he quickly found a groove between them where he could hold on to the giant demon by a couple of his shoulder spikes. And the demon had already been in the process of jumping down. Risky, jumping him like this. If the demon had fallen straight down the hole, it'd have probably spelled the death of both of them, but this demon knew where Mia was. By the sounds he'd made, he probably knew Mia herself. He was David's only hope of finding her.

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