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"You--"

"Just get me down there!"

Not like the demon had a choice, already on the way down. But when they arrived at the next floor, the big dinosaur didn't throw David off. Any other demon would have, but whoever this demon was, they definitely knew Mia.

Miraculously, they didn't go full speed, either. David had seen his girls jump and move around with some pretty extreme velocity, more than enough to fuck up David's bad shoulder holding on. This demon hopped onto a chain, held his titanic weight with one hand, hopped down onto a cage, ignored the remnants inside, and hopped down to the next balcony, all just barely slowly enough that David didn't fall.

They got down ten floors before the demon stopped, just as David was about to ask for his name. But David's throat closed up, his breathing stopped, and his eyes locked onto the man standing in front of them.

The rider. He stood before them, small compared to the demon David held onto, but giant compared to David himself. A towering man, his armor must have weighed a hundred pounds, more, thick and solid gold and bronze, with red tint all over. His skull-like helmet pointed straight at them, and even this close, David still couldn't see through the T-slit opening.

He held his axes out at his sides, and they dripped with blood that popped, sizzled, and burned. The surrounding corpses burned, too, several demons, and a few souls.

David hopped off the demon's back, stood beside him, and stared at the rider. The rider stared back at him, skull helmet pointed straight at him, as if the massive demon dinosaur beside David didn't exist.

It was like standing in front of raging rapids. It poured over David, heat, rage, an aura of pure hate and desire to destroy. It boiled his blood. His hands shook with fear, and excitement. Adrenaline, or whatever the afterlife had, coursed through his limbs. The rider, silent as death, might as well have been an erupting volcano, an endless flowing river of pure ruination, completely at odds with the cold body language. Even as the battle above went on, noises so loud the roars and thundering footsteps reached the depths of the tower, they were nothing compared to being only fifteen feet away from the rider. A monolith of murder, anger, hate, who didn't even bother showing it in his demeanor, as if the concepts were so deep and ingrained into him, simply existing was enough to exude them.

He wasn't human.

"Boy," the demon said, "you said you were here for Mia?"

"Y-Yeah." David forced his eyes toward the demon, if only for a second. He was struggling, too, whole body flexing, tail quivering, claws twitching. The aura this rider put out felt so different to David's, but it didn't feel quite like the aura of a demon, either; David was pretty familiar with those now, after having run past a thousand of them.

"Stairs, down thirty more layers." The demon nodded toward one of the nearby archways in the wall.

"What?"

"Go. Warn her and Zel."

"Uh..." With a heavy gulp, David took a step toward the big hole in the wall. The archway above it was made of bone, and getting a little closer exposed the bone stairs going up and down. Thirty more floors? Going up that'd have been pure pain. Going down, no problem.

But he couldn't go. The rider took one more step, and that was enough to put him in David's path.

The demon mirrored the rider. He came closer, one step forward too, and put his big arm between David and the rider.

"Be careful," David said. "Remember what I said this guy did to--"

"I remember," the demon said, and he clicked once in his throat before he thudded his tail on the floor.

David wasn't so sure the demon remembered. He was caught up in the rider's aura, and ready to suicide against him, fight to the death, what all demons apparently loved doing.

"Why are you chasing us?" David risked a question. He needed answers almost as much as he needed to rescue his sister.

The rider said nothing.

"What's going on? You have to know something! Why did Mia and me get sent to Hell?"

The rider said nothing.

"Why... just, why?"

Again, the rider said nothing. The rider didn't move, either. The silence went long past the appropriate amount of time for a classic movie dialog exchange, and dipped into awkward territory. Was the rider confused, or shocked? Zero body language of any kind to read, not with all that armor, his almost statuesque posture, and the two axes unmoving at his sides.

But David couldn't get to the stairway either.

A roar shattered the growing silence, and David covered his ears as the heavy sound ripped through the walls. It was enough to grab the nearby demon's attention, and David's, and even the riders.

A brute ran down the stairs, out from the archway opening, and straight toward the rider. A big brute. A big big brute, bigger than any brute David had seen yet, one with almost pure black skin. A juggernaut, no spikes or tail or wings, all claws and muscle, humanoid and almost grotesque with how thick, leathery, and demony his skin and face were.

Diogo. It had to be Diogo, the one Jes wanted dead. No wonder he was in charge of the Gorzen Mountains. The creature was as big as the demon David had just been riding, but the power that came out of him, the sheer aggression, it was enough to have even the rider shocked. For a whole half a second. But, half a second was enough time for the titan to charge into the rider straight on, and crash into him.

Big and heavy as the rider looked, Diogo's weight hit him hard enough to send him flying. The colossal man and his heavy armor smashed into the metal and flesh of the floor, rolled over the burning corpses, and collided hard with a distance bone wall. Diogo chased after him.

The rider got back up. He'd rolled hard enough David would have broken each limb, but the rider got up calmly and swiftly, and swung both axes down at the floor where Diogo's momentum was about to land him. But Diogo dug his talons in and jumped away at the last moment.

Jes was right. Brutes were absolute morons, but this Diogo demon, the biggest brute around, was smart enough to live where other brutes died. The rider came at him, swinging his big gold axes in almost an artful dance, and Diogo continued to back away, narrowly dodging each one as he looked for an opening. No need for David to explain, those axes set anything they hit on fire, and the burning corpses around them proved it.

"Go," the shark demon said.

"Wh--"

The demon leapt across the hole, a massive jump that almost smacked his head into the balcony above. Unlike Diogo, the shark dinosaur was perfectly comfortable moving on four limbs, and got behind the rider with the same sort of animal swiftness Caera used. He landed, used his momentum to keep going, pounced against the wall, and pounced off it straight at the rider's back.

The rider turned and swung an axe down, clean and fast, with zero hesitation. A giant demon much bigger than him jumping off walls didn't so much as warrant a flinch. And the only reason his axe didn't meet the shark on top of his flat, black bone head, was Diogo charging in again.

David didn't see what happened. Something new fell down the hole in the spire center, and a high-pitched squeak tore his eyes away from the fight.

"Mia?" He ran to the edge of the balcony and looked down. It couldn't have been Mia. The shark demon was sure she was already downstairs, and--

A woman, clutching a vrat's back, peeked up as the vrat took her down fast, hopping from chain to chain, balcony to balcony. Whoever she was, she was small, had long red hair, and wore some sort of white clothing. But the vrat went down multiple floors almost as fast as gravity would take him, and became a blur in a second.

But David recognized that squeak.