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He looked back to Diogo and the shark. They were both still alive, but the shark's right arm bled, and now Diogo was on the defensive again, stepping back and back as the rider came at him. The only reason Diogo was still alive was the rider wasn't exactly a bullet train. He didn't need to be, with an aura like that, demanding all inside it fight. All he had to do was slowly walk toward his target -- or jog -- and they'd throw themselves at him.

Not Diogo, though. He had enough presence of mind to keep from getting butchered, at least so far. No wonder Jes feared him.

David bolted for the stairs, and didn't look back. Thirty floors down? The shark demon had assumed Mia was down there, but she hadn't been. Maybe now, on the way down, she was going to where the shark demon thought she'd been?

And once he got to her, the fuck did he do? He had to find a way back to Jes, Dao, and Caera, and they were going to kill him for running off like that. Mia was with a demon, and the wratorin might get in his way. Then, of course, there was Zel, and if she was down there, the fuck could David do about her?

Fucking christ, what did he even run into this tower to do? To stop the rider from getting to Mia. And now that he wasn't staring a giant battlefield in the face, and had a half second to think as his feet slapped the bone stairs underneath him, the stupidity of what he'd done sunk in. Yeap, running into the spire was the most idiotic thing he'd ever done.

The battle raged on above, both of them, and the giant dragon lizard's roars penetrated the depths of the tower. A few demons jumped up and down the hole, and souls ran up and down the stairs, but almost all the noise he heard either came from outside, or from the two demons and the rider fighting only several floors above his head.

The rider was coming for Mia. And now maybe for him. The fuck did he hope to accomplish?

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--Mia--w@()..N|OvêLwoR@.()om

"Was that David!?"

"What?"

She squeezed Adron's neck and shoulders tight and leaned in to his ear. Hard to do with him hopping down from floor to floor, chain to chain.

"My brother, David. I thought I saw him."

"I saw another soul with red hair."

"That might have been him!"

"He was on the same layer as the rider."

"Oh fuck, I didn't see that."

"The rider was fighting Kas and Diogo."

Mia squeezed harder. "What!?"

Adron paused on a dangling cage and took deep breaths. Even he was getting tired, going as fast as he was.

"I don't know what they were doing there, or why, but they were fighting the rider." Another deep breath. "Big guy, looked human, completely covered in aera armor, wielding two axes."

"Oh god oh god."

"What do you want to do?"

"Me!?"www.NovêLwoRm.c()m

He turned his head enough to look back over his shoulder at her. Never had the confident, playful, mischievous demon looked so lost.

"I don't know what to do. Zel's dead!" His voice grew louder.

"L..."

"Zel's dead!"

She yanked her head back. "L..."

"You have no idea what you've done, do you? The battle outside, however many demons the rider and his troupe kill, it's nothing compared to what's going to happen when word gets out Zel's dead."

Adron was right. Little as Mia knew about Hell's politics, Death's Grip seemed to have some sort of tribal, barbarian system, or some cliché version of it. Three districts, whose leaders reported to Zel, and in those three districts, lots of demons formed their own groups. It was unorganized, full of in-fighting, and at the same time, a great way to keep everyone in Death's Grip strong and ready to fight at a moment's notice, without Zel having to spend every moment ruling like a micromanaging totalitarian.

It also meant if Zel died, the whole province would devolve into an orgy of violence with different groups each trying to secure the tower. And Zel had died.

Adron resumed the trip down, and Mia said nothing. What could she say? She'd killed Zel in self defense? Basically true. Besides, it wasn't like Adron was blaming her, just upset that now his entire world was shattered, his home was going to drown in violence and maybe get him and Hannah killed, and who knew what else.

"That's why you should come with me," she said, once they stopped at the floor with the dungeon. "And maybe even Kas, too, if we can convince him."

"Assuming he's alive."wWw.()oV@Worm.com

She sucked in a breath between her teeth.

"I'll make things right, okay? I'm going to get Vinicius, and he'll protect me. I'll make him protect you, and David! And... and Kas. If he's alive." It took everything she had to not run upstairs to see if that really was David, or if Kas had died, but she needed Vinicius first.

Once they reached the dungeon, some demons gasped at the sight of her with the keys. A few of them groaned at her, eyes wide, desperate.

"I'll get you in a second! I have to get Vinicius first!" It took effort to not throw herself at them and try and free them.

Adron looked down at her, at the keys, at the nearby demons and souls that still drew breath, and rolled his eyes. If she'd been in a better frame of mind, she might have tried stabbing him with the keys for silently making fun of her and her empathy. Right now, all she could do was run past him, try and not look at the dead and the dying, and run through the vast hall that led to Vinicius's cell.

"Let's just get this done," he said as he jogged after her, "before the rider finds you. You're sure Zel's dead?"

"When I stabbed her, the amber horn stopped glowing," she said, half looking back over her shoulder. "She stopped moving, stopped breathing, and--www.()ove(l)w@rm.COM"

Mia froze. Zel's body was still there, unmoving, horn still un-glowing. Vinicius was still bound to the wall, but someone else stood over Zel's body.

Acelina.