

Vinicius aimed his red gaze at Mia, and rumbled again, a deep, pouring vibration that said one very specific thing: anger. He wasn't happy with the idea of Mia preventing him from becoming the ruler of Death's Grip. Well, too bad, that wasn't the deal.

"Do not touch her!" Acelina yelled, but her attempt to get up ended quick once Adron shoved her back down.

Hannah grinned down at the tall demon. From the look on her face, she would have happily killed Acelina and danced in her blood, a little too similar to the mental image Mia had of Zel giving into her own desires.

Mia gulped. "Vinicius, do it."

The titan nodded, and dragged himself along the wall toward the corpse of Zelandariel, queen of Death's Grip, spire ruler. She already had one of his spikes in her eye. If Mia hadn't been struggling to keep her growing nausea from making her pass out, she might have thought it fitting and poetic Vinicius got to rip open her chest and eat her heart.

Even the noises, the crunching bones and tearing flesh, were enough to put Mia between her need to vomit, and her unwanted desire to devour flesh, too. The taste of the demon heart Mia had eaten came back up, the memory of it, and it was delicious. Christ, she hated that. But worse was Acelina's scream that morphed into a tired whimper, as she watched Vinicius rip Zel open and eat her heart.

Hell was fucking horrible.

Vinicius's following rumble sounded downright pleasant, still incredibly deep and heavy, with a hit of a serpent's hiss, but with a sliding pitch like a human finishing a great meal. Mia forced herself to look at him, and found herself taking a step back as Vinicius's posture raised high. No longer supporting himself against the wall, one of his lower hands held the top half of Zel's corpse, one of his top hands held the lower half, and he licked his dragon snout as he admired his handiwork. One hand still held the hole in his gut, and the final, empty hand dripped with blood.

Acelina's rage was blatant. All she needed was her big, deadly set of sharp teeth bared against the backdrop of her obsidian, featureless face, to have Mia squirming. But Vinicius needed to eat.

"You didn't have to rip her in half," Mia said, and she forced herself to march up to him. Don't look at the body don't look at the body.

Vinicius looked back down at her and licked some of the blood off his huge teeth.

"She deserved it."

"I know, but that doesn't mean we should be horrible!" She didn't need her limited education in psychology to see Vinicius was going to be problematic.

He rumbled again, and the hint of darkness within the sound grew. But after a moment, his eyes fell on her necklace, and he let the two halves of Zel's body go.

Mia looked away in time to not see her insides splatter out of her.

"Okay, let's get out of here."

"And her?" Adron asked, gesturing to the spire mother.

"I said leave her."

Hannah raised a hand. "I don't think--"

"Just leave her!" In the past, Mia would have stomped her foot, scrunched up her nose, and utterly fail at being intimidating. Now, she did neither. She set her glare on Hannah and Adron, and held their gazes as she clenched her jaw.

Hannah relented first and lowered her gaze as she nodded and walked Mia's way. Adron followed a moment later, after giving Acelina one last hard glare and harder shove against the wall.

Acelina didn't see any of this as mercy. Why would she? Demons were raised in a merciless environment, and none of the souls that came to Hell ever had any to share, either. The concept was foreign to her, a fantasy seen only in scrying pools.

"Okay, plan. We need a plan," Mia said, and she headed back toward the dungeon. "I'm going to get out of here. Vinicius is going to protect me while I do that. And Adron and Hannah are invited. Kas, too."

"We are?" Hannah asked, eyes widening.

"Yes! Of course! I have no idea what I'm doing, just that I need to get out of here and find my brother."

"Brother?"

"Long story. Just, if you want to come with me, please do. I want you to come with me. Adron said things are going to get bad here, and... you're my friends."

Hannah and Adron traded looks. Seeing Adron shaken and unsure was doing a number on Hannah, and the poor girl was borderline panicking, same as Mia earlier. But be it because she trusted Adron, or ten years of being his slave had brainwashed her, Hannah waited for her master's word on the matter.

"Yeah, we're coming," he said, and pulled a grin out of the uncertainty painted on his face. "I think we're both getting attached to you."

"I would hope so!" This time, Mia did stomp a foot and scrunch up her nose. "After all the things you two did to me!"

Surprisingly enough, it was Hannah who spoke up first. She stepped up to Mia, squirmed a bit, and slowly reached out and put a hand on hers.

"I was hoping we'd get to, uh, know you better, you know? And--"

"No time. Talk later." Mia made for the cell exit, but managed a quick peek back at Hannah. The betrayer looked... excited? Happy? Terrified? All the panic emotions Mia had gone through five minutes ago. Whatever was going on in her head, she gave Mia's hand a quick squeeze before she let go and rejoined Adron.

The hand squeeze said a little more than Mia expected it to, especially when combined with the lingering gaze Hannah gave her. Did she like Mia more than Mia realized? Adron gave Mia lingering gazes all the time, and she'd always assumed they were just flirtatious gazes. Was there something else going on there? Adron and Hannah traded another quick look before smiling at Mia again, and Adron winked at her. Okay yeap, no need for subtlety when Adron could just confirm things with a wink.