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And somehow David ended up between them. Strange. A moment ago, he'd been doing his best to stay out of the way. Now he stood between them, hands up and playing referee. Clearly God had put him between the two ladies, because no way in hell he'd be stupid enough to do that himself. Ah well.

"Okay! Okay, we're all stressed. Shit has hit the fan and no one knows what to do. But so far, Acelina is one of the few demons we've run into actually willing to talk to us, Jes. That's worth something, right?"

Jes glared at him. Yeap, his life was now in danger.

"And?"

"And, we know she hit a fork in the tunnel somewhere that way"--he pointed down the way Jes and him had been walking--"and came this way. She'll know which way we shouldn't go, if we don't want to end up at the tunnel entrance she'd flown to, right?"

Jes folded her arms across her chest and tapped a foot on the stone as she narrowed her eyes at him.

"Yes."

"And Acelina is a spire mother. If we run into other demons down here on the way up, maybe she can convince them to leave us alone? Sounds like she was kind of important."

"Leave us alone!? She'll convince them to kill us! She'll..." Jes frowned as she looked up at Acelina and scratched her horns. "Now that I think about... Demons are stuck on this side of the ravine. No way back to the Spire. The rules are different, and I know a lot of demons want to kill this bitch."

Acelina folded her arms under her breasts -- wowza -- and closed her mouth, turning her entire face and head into an onyx mask he couldn't read at all.

"I am not that despised."

"You shitting me? You're that evil step mom everyone hates."

"I see you continue to watch the scrying pools with obsession."www.nOvELwOrM.com

Jes's tail swayed behind her at a frantic pace, like an agitated cat.

"Thing is, Acelina isn't just screwed because she can't take care of herself. She's screwed because other demons will see a spire mother and think free meal, with no repercussions because no one can even get to the Death's Grip spire anymore. Usually, zotiva are off limits because they're always in the spire, and under the spire ruler's protection." Jes laughed and pointed a claw at the spire mother again. "Lot of demons want a piece of that, for a whole lot of reasons, Acelina especially because she was such a bitch."

Acelina snarled, showing her big scary shark teeth again, but otherwise didn't retort. Jes had her.

"Okay," David said. "So, how about we don't be one of those assholes, and at least work with her until we're out of the tunnels?"

"Give me one good reason."

"Because--"

"And if you say giant tits, so help me god I'll fucking throw you into that void that wants you so much and lie to Daoka about how you died."

David winced, squirmed, winced and squirmed, and shrugged. Acelina tilted her head.

"She didn't attack us," he said. "She doesn't have Zel anymore. She lost her home. She knows the way out--"

"She knows whether to take a left or right at the next fork. That's it."

He shrugged again. "Okay, let's do that, and then we can figure out what to do after?" Slowly, he looked up at the ridiculously tall demon, and made a wide turn with his eyes to avoid looking at her breasts and pierced nipples. "How about it? Friends, for at least a little while?"

Acelina sighed, hooked her wings to her shoulders and neck, classic cape style, and let her arms droop.

"I have no choice."

"That... is true," Jes said, doing the same. "She doesn't have a choice. She's kind of... hopelessly fucked without us. Without me." The growing grin on the gargoyle's face was positively evil. "I admit, I kinda like that."

Acelina lifted a hand and showed some of her long claws. Damn long.

"I am not as weak and useless as you think I am."

"Sure, sure." Laughing, Jes gestured ahead, to the path Acelina had come from. "Fine, you can come, but you're going first. I'll use you as a shield if we get ambushed."

"You wouldn't."

"You think? 'Cause I'd love--"

"Ladies, ladies." David put up his hands. "I'll take any opportunity I can in Hell to find some demons willing to talk and not fight. Seems to be rare."

"It will be," Jes said, "now that half of Death's Grip is cut off from the spire, our half. The Gorzen Mountains are gonna turn into a clusterfuck with Diogo trapped on the other side of the ravine, if he's alive." She drew a cross over her heart and set both hands together for a second. Fake praying. David smiled. "Tacitus and his Gazra Crag on the other side of the canyon, counter-clockwise. We're stuck on the other side, clockwise from the spire, with the Gorzen Mountains now without a leader, and Domicela and the Geeraz Tombs in our way."

"In your way?" Acelina asked.

David opened his mouth. Jes covered it.

"None of your business, bitch," Jes said. With Jes covering his mouth, he didn't get to make a poking comment about how Jes was the one who brought it up in the first place, or how she'd given up the information that the void had come for David and Mia. Probably for the best.

"If you're leaving Death's Grip and heading toward the Grave Valley, you will have to deal with Domicela if you are caught."

"Yeah, and?" Jes askedwww.nOvELwOrM.com

"And, Domicela and I are friends."

Jes shook her head. "No one's your friend."

Which, of course, earned an annoyed growl from the tall demon, and an eyeless eye roll.©Ww.nOvELwOrM.cóM

"Regardless of what you think of me, I did my duty for the spire and did it well. I helped Zel when choosing a bailiff for the Geeraz Tombs, after all. I suggested Domicela. She owes me."

Sighing, Jes lowered her hand from David's mouth.

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