

## 1262

~~Mia~~

The hellquakes had done more than rip a canyon through Death's Grip. They ruined the tunnels, filled them with big rocks, and made the journey a gigantic pain. Mia had been concerned maybe they'd winded up in the hatching pit tunnels, but a lack of demons -- and skeletons -- suggested they had not.

Vinicius walked ahead of her, still holding the hole in his side, but no longer bleeding from his wounds. Zel's heart probably helped heal him, but he was still pretty fucked up. He needed to eat again, and they both needed rest. Her brother definitely needed to eat, too, to heal all his injuries.

Poor guy. She'd never seen him hurt so bad, and even with all those wounds, he'd managed to keep holding her. Would he see things when he ate a heart? Probably. Whatever was strange about them, they both seemed to have what the other had.

That gargoyle Jes was pretty, though. Angry and loud, too, something David probably appreciated. He hated indirect, subtle women. Was he fucking her? Probably, if he had the same aura issue Mia had.

She cringed and wiped the mental image of her brother having sex from her mind. What she needed was a talking topic, to distract herself. Anything to get her mind off Hannah.

"Think the hatching pit tunnels got exposed to that canyon? The spire mothers told me about how the spires birth too many eggs, so they put good eggs into the pit and let them fight to survive." She shivered and rubbed her arms. "I can imagine how bad that'd be, if they're strong enough to climb the canyon wall. There are lots of demons around in Death's Grip, but not so many you can't avoid them. Imagine if it was just... swarm of demons, everywhere, all the time?"

Vinicius said nothing.

"Think Adron or Kas survived? You burned Adron pretty bad, but I think he'll survive. Think he'll heal? I don't know how much demons can heal from their wounds. Like, your shoulder spike. Will that heal?"

Vinicius said nothing.

"Kas though, he was fighting the rider, and after seeing what the rider did to Diogo, and to you"--she gestured to his arms--"I'm terrified he might have... died. God, I hope not. He and Adron, they..." If she'd been back on the surface, back in her normal boring awesome life, losing her virginity the way she had would have been so ridiculous, so unbelievable, so dreamlike, she'd have spent a month trying to accept that it'd actually happened. Plus, lots of angry yelling at them for doing that to her without her permission. Plus, lots of feeling very torn about it, and the two men.

She'd spent sixteen days as a ghost before coming to Hell, and now had over a week in Hell herself. Maybe she'd just become desensitize to absurdity, with all the orgies she'd seen and other craziness. Even so, she wanted Adron and Kas to be alright. They'd been nice to her in their own ways, even Kas. And now Adron didn't have Hannah anymore, so he'd be super sad, and... and...

She sniffed, shook her head, and wiped her nose. The look in Hannah's eyes lodged itself in her mind and refused to go away, the confusion on her face, the moment of realization. She hadn't expected to get hit. She didn't mean to die. She didn't... She didn't...

Mia stopped walking, clenched her hands into little fists at her sides, and bit down a sob. But another one followed it, and another. Soon, she was crying, and she stared down at the cruel rocks beneath her feet as her vision blurred.

Vinicius said nothing.

"Asshole," she said, and she sat against the tunnel wall. Hannah's eyes met hers, filled with surprise before looking for Adron's. Only at the last second did the poor girl understand what was happening. And then she died. Died, and fell next to Mia.

Vinicius stopped. No way he cared about her. He was just stopping because he couldn't go far 'of his own will', according to the stranger. Whatever. He wasn't allowed to attack Mia, so she could sit down and cry her damn heart out if she wanted.

"Hannah didn't deserve this. Any of this." She gestured around at the dark tunnel and its few amber veins as if it represented all of Hell. "Yeah, she did some bad things, but no one deserves to get tortured like remnants do! And Hannah didn't deserve 666! Now she's going to be a remnant, and die so many more times! Horrible, painful lives and deaths, and she didn't deserve that! No one deserves that!"

She planted her forehead against her forearms, arms draped across her raised knees, and cried. She heard no demons, no remnants. The tunnel was nothing but stone and rock, and might not even take them topside. How would they get out? Go back to the canyon wall and climb? Could Vinicius even make that huge climb back up?

She didn't care about any of that right now.

"Hannah wasn't the same person anymore! She'd changed. But Hell doesn't care about any of that. That's not fair! She shouldn't have to suffer! This place is stupid! I hate it!"

Vinicius said something.

"Why do you care?"

She lifted her head from her arms and stared up at the enormous monster.

"What?"

He shook his head slightly, hand still on his gut.

"Why do you care about a betrayer?"

"You saw what she did! She saved my life! She saved my life, and she didn't think she'd die doing it. It was a horrible accident. And now she's got to die so many times, just because she drank some of Adron's blood! Because she was scared and didn't want to die in Hell! And she died anyway!" Mia covered her eyes with her palms. "That's not fair!"

She hadn't cried, properly just sobbed her eyes out, since she'd died. Since before she died. She'd cried a little since arriving, a few times too, but not like this. The last time she'd cried this hard was because of a sad movie a few months ago, a full on wailing noise that made her sound like a firetruck.

Vinicius said nothing. She didn't know if that was a nice or bad thing about him. Other demons would probably make fun or her for doing something as crazy as getting emotionally wrecked by someone else dying. If she herself died, sure, that'd be worth crying about, but other people? Who in their right mind would care about someone else dying?

She would. She fucking would and she couldn't help it, god damn it.

"Now she's got to die a whole bunch of times, just to... to... to what? Go back to this tower or whatever? This thing no one even understands?" She wiped her eyes, but new tears drenched them and she gave up. "I just... I can't... It's not fair."

A quiet, long, heavy rumble flowed out of the colossus beside her.

"I've been locked in a spire dungeon for... I don't know how long."

"Probably a couple centuries," she said between sobs.

His next rumble was a lot louder.

"And the surface has grown this soft in that time?"

She got up, marched up to the giant, and reached up so she could poke him in the bottom of his stomach, the highest part she could reach.

"It's called empathy! What would a murdering asshole know about it? Nothing!" Clenching her fists tight, she took a deep sniff and wiped her eyes again. Not so quick to get blurry again, this time. "I don't belong here, in Hell! I care about people! And I'm not going to let this horrible place change that!" She poked him again, harder. "And I'm not going to let you change that, either! I'm sad because two guys who liked me might be dead, and are both at least very hurt. I'm sad because me and my brother are separated again and I don't know if he'll be okay. I'm sad because my friend died saving me, and... and... fuck off! Fuck off and fuck you!"