

1298

~~Day 36~~

~~Mia~~

Vinicius healed fast, damn fast. It made sense, considering his history. If a proper child of one of the ancient ones took forever to heal, they wouldn't last, not in a world where demons had little sense of self preservation and did everything they could to get more power, or food. A ragarin's heart would probably do more than just give a demon a full stomach, according to Vin, but also strengthen them permanently. Every demon who saw him probably either feared him enough to stay away, or would try to kill him for that power.

She'd almost made a comment about kills earning experience points, and Vin was a boss monster. But, no point. He wouldn't have gotten it.

They prowled along, Vin crouching so low he occasionally used his lower two arms to help him crawl over or around big rocks, bloodgrip vines, and the occasional ditch.

"The last time I did this," Mia whispered, following behind close enough she could have grabbed his tail, "Diogo was escorting me to the spire. That's how I met Adron and Hannah." Saying the girl's name didn't hurt so much anymore. Time healed all wounds, and whatnot. Good to know that was still true in Hell. "We laid an ambush for some Cainites. It wasn't pretty, but at least we didn't torture them or anything." That was a question she hadn't asked, whether Vin did the torturing thing, partly because Vin probably wouldn't answer, and partly because he might. *Ww.NoOelwvM.com*

She didn't want to know if her bodyguard delighted in more than just violence, carnage, murder, and battle. If he also indulged in rape and torture the way Valzanal did, that'd be too much. Hell was Hell, sure, but there was a limit. *Ww(w).novelwv(r)M.c@M*

Vinicius rumbled softly and said nothing.

"I'd appreciate it if we didn't use that technique for hunting, by the way. Using me as bait, I mean. I get the impression one little girl sitting out on her own as bait for Cainites might end badly. I might just get shot by an arrow. Do Cainites have arrows? Or demons? *Ww@.NôVêlworm.com*

The demon clicked once. From the pitch, she knew it as no.

"That's good. I bet it'd probably be too hard for a human to draw a bow, anyway, if the weight of that vrat's sword was any indication. Meera metal is so damn heavy. Is aera metal heavy, too?"

Another cluck deep in his throat, this time for yes. Unfortunately for her unknowing victim, Vinicius, he gave her yet another piece of information that slowly allowed her to piece together the child of Belial's life puzzle.

So far she knew: he knew how heavy aera was; he was super old, maybe thousands of years old; he'd gone on giant massacres across Hell; he and the rider didn't like each other; he and the woman in aera armor, who was suspiciously similar to the rider, knew each other, and Vin trusted her; and he'd tried to take the Death's Grip spire from Zel, and lost. Summarized, she knew jack shit.

"You're sure there's food this way?"

He nodded upward, toward a curve in the mountain they headed toward.

"I recognize that tunnel," he said. "Humans often hide inside."

"I thought you said the tunnels change over the centuries."

"They do."

Sighing, she nodded, crouched low, and followed Vin down into a big ditch that led toward the mountain. Up and down, up and down, the Hell landscape of Death's Grip was a mess of the vertical forever blocking the horizontal. You couldn't just walk anywhere. You climbed everywhere.

They came to a steep cliff edge, and Vinicius began the climb. His black claws found grooves in the stone, as did his talons, and the giant began to -- slowly -- work his way up the surface. Any faster and he'd rip his wounds open again. *Ww.W.noVêOw(o)rM.čOМ*

It wasn't a scalable surface for Mia, and she had enough rock climbing experience to know. So she did the only reasonable thing: she grabbed onto some spikes on Vinicius's giant tail and stood on the ones closer to the tip. It was big, thick, and sturdy enough the spikes coming out of it easily held her weight.

Vinicius growled down at her. She finger-waved up at him, and smiled. Not like her weight affected him at all, so no reason to not jump on. And sure enough, he climbed the surface and up over the edge onto new ground, big and wide enough for Vinicius to crouch down, and again begin the prowl toward their target.

Mia hopped off, followed behind, and looked up.

The fire sky opened up. Vinicius froze in his tracks and looked up as well, and all of Hell grew quiet, as a ring of metal ripped through reality and into existence. It started small, edges thick but radius tiny, spinning in place. It opened wider and wider over a few seconds, revealing the dark teeth along its inner edge. Wider, and wider, until a large building could have fallen through.

It was the portal to Hell, and it was opening right overtop the mountain they headed toward.

"Fortunate," he said, and he marched forward.

"Fortunate?" she asked. "What--oh god."

The screams were a choir, and they cut through the persistent, distant sound of the burning sky, until Mia covered her ears. Bodies fell from the hole, naked, twisting, crying, and they plummeted toward the mountaintop.

"People! Those people!" She sprinted and caught up to Vinicius. "We have to--"

"What?" he said with a snap and glared down at her.

"We have... to..." She gulped, and looked back up at the giant ring in the sky. Far as she could tell from what must have been a kilometer away, the people didn't fall as fast as they should have. They'd land on the mountaintop, alive, confused, and desperate.

And unless there were any unmarked up there, every one of those people falling down into Hell deserved their fate. Supposedly. After three weeks in Hell, she wasn't entirely convinced the afterlife was a good authority on morality, or that the way it did things was justified.

"Food," Vinicius said, and he resumed the march.

"They're--" She bit her tongue and shut up. She'd told Vin he was free to do demony things. That meant going up there and indulging in a slaughter.

Vinicius needed to eat. A lot. He was like a transport truck, a massive beast that needed massive amounts of fuel to function. And unfortunately for the people entering Hell, Mia had a mission, a big one, that relied on her transport truck-sized bodyguard keeping her alive.

More bodies poured out of the giant ring. It fucked with her brain seeing a ring that, from the side, didn't have anything behind it, but where she could see through it, it showed the horrible rock and stone and spikes and death she'd seen on the way down when she'd fallen through. More bodies fell, screaming, crying, flailing, and disappearing over the lip of the mountain's flat top still above Vin and Mia. She didn't want to get closer to the screams, but Vin didn't so much as hesitate.

The ring didn't stay open long. In a short amount of time, it tightened, spinning faster and faster until it closed, and poofed out of existence.