



## 1320

"You tell us," Romakus said. "In fact, you can tell us everything, once we're out of sight. More angels will come."

"But, Vin, he's injured. And... really injured. I... I made it worse, and--"

Something she said made the giant demon laugh again, but it carried some surprise, too, and he raised an eyebrow as he looked at her. Only when she glared up at him did he stop laughing.

"Why do you care about a child of Belial?" Romakus came closer again, and squatted down only a foot from her this time. She held her ground. "That spire leash of yours--"

"It's not about the leash. Vin is helping me." *w@W.N0vEIlW0rM.C0m*

Romakus looked past her up at Vin. Vinicius rumbled, but said nothing, every breath a labored mess.

"Helping you--"

"I told you," Faust said. "She won't say."

"Then maybe I'll make her say." Romakus licked his big fangs, smiling at her. She held her glare. "Or maybe not. Either way, the ragarin will survive the trip, unmarked. He's survived worse."

Mia looked down at the ground, and the pooling blood that continued to grow. Guilt sucked. *wwW.0v0(1)W0rM.C0m*

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Mia sighed as she watched her bodyguard bleed. Twice now he'd gotten into a deadly fight because of her, and this second time his wounds were partly her fault, or at least made worse by her. Using the leash hurt Vin, a lot. Using the leash after he'd been stabbed through the hand, stabbed through his very thick shoulder, stabbed in the leg, and had his tail filleted like a fish, had fucked him up bad. Even with the ravine way behind them, the sensation of Vin's blood soaking her feet rubbed guilt into her skin with a cheese grater.

She looked up at him, but he ignored her. No need to say it. He was angry with her, and having to lean -- literally -- on Romakus as they walked was probably salt in his wounds. It didn't seem like they knew each other, or at least not well, but still, big demons had big egos, and needing a tetrad's help was probably worse than the wounds. If anything, Vinicius enjoyed the fight with the angels, wounds and all, and wanted to fight again.

The angels. He'd known the two men. And he hadn't hesitated to rip the wings off the third.

"Romakus," Mia said. "Can angels regrow their wings?"

"Yeah, with time. That angel won't be flying soon, though."

She sighed relief and sat down on the ground. They'd entered a big cave, something deep in a ravine, and from how smooth the ground and walls were, with no bloodgrip or remnants nearby, it was a cave demons used frequently. That would have been a bad thing, but Romakus and the four incubi had taken her and her bodyguard straight there, so hopefully it was safe. Not like they needed to bring Mia and Vin into a trap or anything, defenseless as they were.

"You know this cave?" she asked.

"I do. All Damall do." With a heavy groan, Romakus and the four incubi helped Vin sit down against the tunnel wall, not far from Mia. "Volarins, keep an eye on the Belial spawn."

"Sure thing," one incubus said. "Wanna send Julisa our way?"

"She's not going to fuck you, Locutus," Romakus said with a big grin.

The incubus grinned right back at him.

"I meant so Vinicius doesn't eat us while we keep an eye on the cave entrance," he said.

Romakus laughed as he gave a small hand wave, turned, and started further down the cave.

"Come with me, unmarked. I'll introduce you to my friends."

Oh no. She got up and looked Vin's way, but the child of Belial looked away, preferring to keep his eyes on the twist and turns that led back out of the cave. Or just, preferring to not look at her.

Much as she wanted to be strong and simply accept that Vin could -- and would -- be angry with her, she couldn't let it go. His job was to keep her alive, but the thought of crossing Hell with Vin hating her made her nauseous. She knew that was dumb, but damn it, she wanted cooperation. She wanted her and Vin to get along.

She wanted him to not be a horrible monster.

Romakus walked ahead, tail slithering behind him, and Mia forced herself to catch up. Think about Vinicius later.

"Who're we talking to?"

"Some members of the Damall are hanging out here for now."

"For now?"

"We don't stay in one place very long. The spire ruler usually catches wind and tries to have us killed. But I suppose with Zel out of the way, we're safe for now, at least in Death's Grip."

She gulped. "And, um, the Damall? What're they about? You didn't tell me much." *www.n0vEIlw0rM.c0M*

Romakus grinned over his shoulder at her and gave his wings a little flourish. Tail, too.

"You need to learn to control your tongue, you know. A lot of demons would kill you for speaking out of turn."

"I... got that, yeah. Can't help it." *@ww.n0rEIlw0rM.06M*

She did her best to ignore the skulls bouncing against his legs. Fail. Most of them were demon, tigers and brutes, and one of them was huge, maybe another tetrad. At least a dozen of them were human. It was a lot of skulls, dangling from black chains, with a few of them hanging from bits of his armor across his back or chest, or from the base of his wings at the shoulder.

David would have said he looked badass or awesome. Sure, he kinda did. He even looked hot, in that scary-but-sexy monster kinda way Adron did. Big teeth. But, at the moment, the only thing on Mia's mind was the big tetrad potentially taking her to a fate worse than death.

"The Damall are a group that likes things the way they are."

"The way they are? But--" She sucked in a breath as some sounds in the distance cut her off. Remnants. Sighing, she hugged her arms tight to her body, and made sure her ripped and borderline ruined silk wrap didn't drag too far behind her. Keeping it snug around her body was getting harder the more ruined it got, and threads trailed on the ground where a remnant might grab one.

The screams became a choir. Sure enough, the tunnel tightened until Romakus had to crouch, and a couple dozen... hundred... thousand remnants, emaciated and tortured souls, made it a million times worse. The demon didn't care. He used his claws, talons, and tail to carve a path through the poor people without so much as a glance for the bodies.

Mia did her best to avoid the gore, but it was pointless. A path of blood and organs followed behind Romakus, and she followed it, eyes on his tail and wings and the increasing blood spatter.

Remnants didn't just grow in random places. If there were so many of them here, something important had happened here. Or, something was happening?

The tunnel opened up, and Mia sucked in a breath as she looked up and around at the huge cavern. Remnants hung from the walls, from the ceiling, from everywhere, but the room was so ridiculously massive, their screams were distant. Giant stalactites and stalagmites decorated the cave, each maybe twenty or thirty feet tall, and they broke up the sound enough it didn't penetrate her ears so deeply. It was even quiet enough that the sounds of nearby talking reached her.

"Hey Livian, Julisa," Romakus said as he stepped around a stalagmite.

Mia followed him, and froze.

"Zell" Mia spun, and ran.

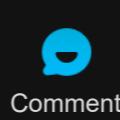
And got a whole two feet before a big set of claws grabbed her shoulder and pulled her down on her ass. Romakus. He was not gentle.

Mia rolled over and stared up at the bolstara tetrad, but after a few seconds of some awkward staring from the two of them, Mia relaxed, mostly. It wasn't Zel. Zel had long demon dreadlocks. Whoever this bolstara was, she kept her dreadlocks shorter, and she didn't have any piercings or jewelry.

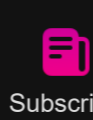
"A bolstara could take offense to that," the demon said as she reached down, picked Mia up, and set her on her feet. "Do we all look the same to you?"

"Um..."

The demon laughed and shook her head. Like Romakus, she wore bits of black armor, enough to cover both breasts and stomach, and a bit of her arms and legs. And just like Romakus, it wasn't fancy or polished or well structured. Someone had taken some meera metal, bent chunks of it into shape with a big hammer or rock, and figured out ways to attach leather straps to it and get it on the body.



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