

The bat girl, a diloja, climbed up onto the brute's back, quickly killed some remnants dangling from the ceiling of the tunnel, used her arm wing to block the rain of gore, and tossed it all aside. And like she hadn't just slaughtered some poor souls, she smiled down at Mia.

Faust had mentioned earlier this particular mountain was once the sight of a really nasty slaughter. Not a battle, but a slaughter, where some demons found a nest of humans who'd been hiding out. The portal to Hell had opened nearby, and a particularly large group of souls had been dropped off, in the tens of thousands. And just like birds attracted to swarms of flies, demons had come from all around. He didn't know how long ago it'd happened, but it'd been at least a century, and Hell would take a lot longer than that to forget. So, remnants.

"Hi," the bat lady said.

The brute stopped and squatted down in front of Mia. Not as big as Diogo, and kinda tiny compared to a tetrad like Romakus, Livian, or Julisa, but compared to Mia, he was a giant.

"Um, hi," Mia said. "I'm Mia."

"Yulia." The bat girl's smile was very cute, even with two big fangs. No armor, so her ballerina body was on full display, with thinness to match. No tail, either. And her face looked pretty human, except for a slight chipmunk-ness to her nose. She wasn't much taller than Mia, either.

Mia nodded, looked at the brute, and waited. And... nothing. The brute looked at her, rumbled, but said no word, not even a click or cluck.

"You're killing remnants?" Mia asked, slowly moving her eyes off the brute to the bat lady.

"We try and keep them under control. Normally the imps and grems would be doing that, but we don't let them stick around." www.novellworm.com

"Worried about their gossip?"

Yulia nodded. "Just because they're dumb, doesn't mean they might not say something someone else can... can..." Scratching one of her tiny horns, she frowned as she looked at the ground.

"What's the word? Use their information to figure stuff out?"

"Infer?"

"Yes! Smart." Yulia smiled and waved one of her arm wings. "Tetrads like Zel were smart, too, and could infer things, even from the empty gossip of the imps and grems. Better we don't keep them around. And without them, remnants grow, and eventually get problematic." With a heavy gulp, the diloja, still sitting on the brute's shoulder, covered herself with her wings like a bat would. "Ever see remnants when they break free? It's a scary sight."

"Wait, what? Remnants can break free?"

"Sometimes! Sometimes, if things get really bad, or something really bad is happening, sometimes remnants can break free, like... like Hell can't hold them down any longer."

Mia hugged herself, same as the bat girl www.novellworm.com

"Is that dangerous?"

"A remnant isn't very strong. A dozen remnants though, they can rip an imp or grem to bits. A hundred could kill even some stronger demons like my buddy here." She patted the brute on his smooth head, and the brute slowly nodded and rumbled. No name, apparently.

"Are they... fast?"

"No. Slow. Like zombies." Another shiver worked through her. "Why humans on the surface make those zombies movies, I can't imagine. They're terrifying!"

Mia blinked at the diloja. Was she serious? Judging from the scared look in her demon eyes, very serious. And the thought of demons, who slaughtered humans like cattle, and killed each other in brawls and wars alike practically for fun, being afraid of zombies, a complete trope back in the living world, was hilarious. It took serious effort to not burst out laughing. www.novellworm.com

"Is it safe for me to explore this hideout?"

"Yeap. But you can't leave. We got guards on all the exits, and the other exits are super far away anyway, and--"

"Don't worry. I'm not going anywhere without Vinicius. Um, where's Romakus?" www.novellworm.com

Yulia gestured down the tunnel, deeper into the mountain.

"Two lefts. He's with Yosepha."

"Yosepha's back already?" That meant Galon stayed with the other angels.

"Yeap. Be careful with her. Bye." Yulia gave her a tiny wave with her wing claw, patted her nameless buddy on the head, and the two of them resumed cleanup duty.

How easily they dealt with something that, by any other standard, was a fate worse than death to most humans, growing out of the walls of a horrible place, trapped, emaciated, starving, tearing into themselves and into each other until someone merciful came along and put them out of their misery. All that, only for the remnant to be reborn somewhere else to suffer it again. Maybe they'd get reborn into a nest of bloodgrip, and spend who knew how long with every motion cutting open their skin. Maybe they'd get born into one of the cracks in the ground over lava, so they roasted over days, or weeks. Maybe--

She clapped her face on both sides a couple times and shook her head. It was that kind of thinking that nearly got her killed yesterday. She needed to harden herself, if she wanted to have a hope of achieving her mission.

Mission. Ugh. David was probably puking each time he thought about it. Mission. Quest! A fucking quest. Ugh.

The path was easy enough to follow. Yulia and her friend had cleared out the remnants, and walking around blood and guts was becoming second nature at this point. Even the smell of blood was barely noticeable anymore. Thankfully, the first left took her into a path with no gore, and with a little mental effort, she put them out of her mind.