

1353

"The Damall," she said, "are concerned with keeping the balance. But spire rulers fighting and killing each other is not a threat to that balance. Heaven allows it, and continues to allow it. What threatens the balance"--she flared out her wings hard enough hair and demon dreadlocks shifted-- "is anything that forces confrontation between Heaven and Hell, or allows Hell to affect the surface."

"Hell, but not Heaven?" Mia asked.

"Heaven can already affect the surface. But we do not. That would defeat the purpose."

Oh. Oh! Finally, an opportunity for answers!

"What--"

"I am not answering your questions about the purpose of life and death, unmarked. Regardless, that is a question for the council, and they would not answer you."

Double fuck. @W(w).n0veL@σrM.CoM

"Okay," Mia said, doing her best to look Yosepha in the eyes. Her onyx eyes were beautiful, and inhuman. "So, the Damall are interested in me because you think I'll do more than just... do things like kill a spire ruler?"

"Correct."

"Like cracking Hell like a piece of glass," Romakus said.

Mia sighed and shook her head. "I don't know anything about that." A half lie. "But I do know the rider showed up to kill me. We escaped."

"With the help of a woman in aera armor," Yosepha said. "The rider appears randomly and has for millennia. He brings destruction and slaughter whenever he appears, on a scale only... a child of the Old Ones could appreciate." Everyone looked at Vinicius. Vinicius made the tiniest little smile, and said nothing. Yosepha continued. "The woman, on the other hand, hasn't been seen for at least a thousand years."

"Jesus," Mia said, and snapped her hand up to her mouth. "Sorry." Yosepha raised a brow. Okay, using Jesus as a curse didn't bother the angel. Good to know. "Do... you know who they are?"

"We do not."

"Not even the council?"

Yosepha glared at her. "I do not know. And I do not know why the woman saved you."

"Do you know why they have flame wings? Like, wings of fire."

The angel sighed and shook her head. Apparently, the fact the two strangers in aera armor had fire wings bothered her. wWw.NoVeL@σrM.CoM

"You're supposed to answer our questions," Romakus said. "Why did she save you?"

"I..." Fuck. Fuck fuck fuck. What to do? What to say? She wanted to lie, but the Damall had not only saved her life, but if she told the truth, maybe the angel would help her. Angels could fly. Demons could only glide. Maybe Yosepha would take her straight to the Forgotten Place?

There was always the chance Yosepha was tricking them all so she could use Mia and find the other unmarked. Just because she seemed like a stalwart, ethical, simple angel didn't mean she was. wWw.NoVeL@σrM.CoM

Mia sucked in a breath. Time to risk it all.

"Whoever that woman was, she saved my life, and then she... she told me... I had to get to the Forgotten Place, or..." Mia forced herself to look Yosepha in the eyes. "Or everyone dies."

The demons laughed. Yosepha didn't. After a few seconds of pain, Mia squirming in place, Yosepha snapped out a wing and set her glare around the room. Every demon shut up on the spot.

"Everyone dies?" Yosepha asked.

"Y-Yeah. I couldn't see her face or anything, so I don't know if she was lying. But..." She gestured to Vinicius.

Every demon, still half smiling, obviously not believing her, all looked to Vinicius.

"I know her," he said, deep voice rumbling in the stones. "She's always serious."

"You know her?" Yosepha marched up to Vinicius, fearless, practically stomping her sandals with each step.

"Yes."

"What is her name?"

"I don't know."

Yosepha flared her wings as she got within several feet of the titan, glared up at him, and put her hands on her hips.

"You don't know her name?"

"No."

"But you know her?"

"She and the rider have fought many times," Vinicius said. "And you know my history with the rider."

"I do." Yosepha gave Mia a glare. "I assume you know of his history as well?"

"Um, only some vague stuff, that him and the rider used to go around on slaughtering sprees. But now they're enemies?" She jingled her chain necklace and the small amber stone hanging between her breasts. "I freed him because of the leash. I know Vinicius is a... a..." Careful. You have to work with Vin. Choose your words carefully. "A--"

"Bloodthirsty demon," Julisa said, chuckling. "A monster with a kill count in the hundreds of thousands? Perhaps millions? A mindless beast addicted to slaughter and murder?"

Vinicius rumbled and eyed the big demon lady who'd just milked him of a couple orgasms only moments before. Either that was a 'I'm going to kill you and eat you' rumble, or a 'I'm going to fuck you until you can't walk' rumble. Maybe both. They were too similar with Vin.

"How can you know so little about them?" Yosepha asked.

Vinicius shrugged with his one good shoulder. "Have you ever stood in the presence of the rider?"

"No."

With a sinister grin on his dragon snout, he nodded toward Mia. Everyone looked at her.

"The rider," Mia said, shivering, "he's... got this aura. I don't think it's like mine, but it's different from sin auras, too. It's just... just a constant thing around him. It's... not cold, or hot, but... violent. Violent in the murderous kinda way. Not violence for violence sake, but... but like, he actively wants to... I don't know, make sure everyone is dead, you know? He didn't delight in killing, like a certain someone." She glared up at Vin, only to get a teeth-lick back from him. That tongue... Mia scrunched up her nose. "There was no joy in the rider, or his aura. It was all just... death."

The demons looked between each other. They didn't understand. Violence for violence's sake was something they understood, and delighted in, but wanting everyone dead purely for the desire to spread death, was not.

"We used each other," Vinicius said. "Nothing more. W(w).n0vE1W(w).rM.c@M

Silence settled on the giant chamber, the only sound the distant walls of remnants.

"And the woman?" Yosepha asked.

"She and the rider avoid each other. Or they used to," Vin said. "We've talked before. She's warned me about angels in the past. I trust her."

Frowning, Yosepha paced in front of him, before setting her eyes on Mia again.

"She really told you everyone will die?"

"She did."

"Her exact words?"

"Exact words? She said 'or we're all doomed'. Scarred into my brain." Sighing, Mia hugged herself and looked down at her toes. "So now I'm doing all I can to get to the Froz... Forgotten Place."

Yosepha paused, eyed Mia for a moment, and continued pacing.

"That explains the direction you were heading," Livian said, and she tapped a hoof on the ground. "It's a good thing you told us. We'd planned to kill you if you refused to tell us the real reason you were heading to the Black Valley."

Well, gulp. But apparently Yosepha hadn't known that, because she turned and glared at Romakus with enough rage, the demon winced and put up his hands.

"Livian, you traitor," he said, earning a chuckle from the Zel look-alike. The other demons chuckled, too.

"The facts demand analysis," Yosepha said, and she flared her wings. "Be silent." Everyone shut up once again. The smaller demons might have looked up at the tetrads like they were the apex predators, and maybe role models, but they were directly afraid of angels. Afraid, or maybe respected them? After what Noah, Azreal, and Shir did to Vinicius, she didn't blame them. Giant holy beams and colossal walls of light that could block Vin's fire? No demons were doing that.

"Mia is unmarked," Yosepha said, "and there are others like her. The council wants them dead. So does the rider, if he truly came to you to kill you, Mia, and you do not know him."

"Never met him before, or did anything." Except for touch a book written by Lucifer. Hopefully, that had nothing to do with it.

"But the woman, the rider's counterpart, saved you."