

## 1368

David snapped out his other arm, and got a hand on Acelina's wrist. He had to reach down to do it, which meant getting a knee down onto the remnants underneath him. They glared up at him, a thousand emotions running through their wide, panicked eyes. Rage. Desperation. Misery. Whatever thoughts they had, it all boiled down to some simplistic, mindless need to grab, tear, and bite. Their teeth sank into his flesh, but the pain disappeared under the new tearing pain of his pectorals stretched to their limit, as Acelina's weight pulled on his arm.

She aimed her blank, onyx face up at him. A moment's hesitation?

"Come on!" He yelled, and looked back up to Dao. "Jes!" Poor Dao. She'd known what he was going to do, and she'd already squatted deep so the angle didn't pull her into the pit. But even a satyr couldn't handle his weight, Acelina's weight, and a dozen remnants latched onto them.

Roaring in frustration, Jes threw a remnant into the pit, ripped open another one about to climb up onto Dao's leg, and reached around Dao's waist. She pulled back, and Dao unleashed a roar of her own as every muscle in her body flexed.

David wanted to feel bad for her, but his mind was gone. Every muscle in him was flexing, too, but there was a direct line of searing agony from one hand to the other, straight across his chest, as he pulled on Acelina. And he pulled. He squeezed her huge wrist until he was shaking, until his fingers went white, until his insides burned. He fucking pulled.

Progress. Acelina still had three limbs to work with, and she used them, slashing wildly at the remnants underneath her, each nudging her upward with the help of David and the girls. Her hooves kicked and stomped, like someone trying to run up ice, but it was enough, and slowly but surely, she scaled the pit wall.

The remnants did not appreciate that, and five of the souls latched onto her legs. Weak and soft as they were, there were too many, and they slowed her ascent until Jes and Dao were both groaning with exhaustion. David was too, but all he could do was hold on for dear life and pull hard enough for Acelina to not rip his arm off. Even if he somehow could pull harder, all that'd do was pull Dao and Jes into the pit with him.

With Jes busy, and Caera off doing her own thing ahead of the group, no one was there to stop more remnants from climbing up onto the edge, and hobble their way toward the two busy demons.

"Las!" David yelled.

All four little ladies responded immediately. He didn't have to beg, or even guide them. They sat up straight on their perches, looked to him and what he was doing, and threw themselves onto the pit edge beside Dao and Jes. They may have been small, and even the remnants towered over them, but they had no trouble with damned souls. They slashed legs, stomachs, bludgeoned the remnants with the pieces of David's armor, and sent them back into the pit, where they tumbled down a few dozen feet and disappeared into the churning mess of bone and flesh below.

The gremla Latia squatted down beside Dao, got a hand around David's wrist, and pulled. Laria joined her on Dao's other side, and an array of fingers and claws squeezed David's wrist until he was half convinced they'd break bone. But his body held together, and the four demons pulled him up onto the edge.

The moment Acelina got her other hand onto the pit edge, she was free. Remnants couldn't stop her once she had something to grab, and the stone at the pit edge was more than enough anchor. The girls still helped, switching from David to Acelina, but Acelina mostly pulled herself up under her own strength, and slaughtered the remnants latched onto her legs and wings as she did.

A pause in the insanity was all they had before the remnants would fall on them again, enough for David and Acelina to trade a look. How someone with no facial features could share a look was a mystery. Maybe it was the body language. Maybe it was the fact she wasn't showing her mouth and scary teeth. Whatever it was, David smiled up at her, and Acelina didn't say a thing. She didn't have to.

Roars from ahead turned him around. Caera had pushed into the next area of the increasingly huge cavern, and stood between four of the death pits. Just like the lava rivers, the path between them was a maze, with some pits connecting, while others did not. Only Caera knew the path.

"Caera!" Jes yelled. "You bitch, hold up!"

"I'm clearing a path!"

"You're gonna get yourself killed!"

David gestured forward. "Dao, Las, can you take lead? Clear us a path. Don't let them gang up on you." A billion stories, movies, TV shows, and video games ran through his mind. Zombie apocalypse mode. He had experience in this area. The remnants didn't have any sort of infection they could spread, but getting swarmed to death was still a very real threat.

The satyr, two gremlas, and two impas didn't hesitate. They nodded, slipped past him on the narrow path, and tore ahead, the Las using his chunks of armor to knock remnants back into the pits, while Dao used her horns and his dagger. Zombies were, supposedly, a fear demons had, and between swings of their weapons and claws, he spotted fear in the Las' eyes, big and wide. Even Daoka grimaced hard enough he could see it on her nose and lips.

"Jes, your side okay?" he asked.

"Good enough."

"Take rear. Acelina, you good? Can you stay with me, and crush any remnant hands that get us?"

The huge demoness rumbled, took a quick peek down at her naked body and the dozens of scratch and bite marks, and nodded.

"I am fine. Let's go."

Fine. Sure. Her skin was mostly dark red and tough right now, but a desperate remnant willing to literally break their own jaw when biting someone meant half of the scratch marks on her body were bleeding. It was a lot of blood.

David wasn't much better off, and his skin was a lot softer.

He did a double take on Jes as she got behind Acelina and immediately got to work. She didn't resist his order or fight him on it, or even take the opportunity to let an errant remnant grab Acelina. With wing and tail and claws, she pushed back and sliced open the dying souls as they climbed out of the pit.

David followed the Las and Dao. The path to Caera was easy enough to follow, but every step they managed was like walking a tightrope. It pulled away from the wall as the cavern opened up, and as they passed the death pit they'd nearly died in, a dozen more waited for them, like giant whirlpools. To get to Caera, they had to follow a specific path, and it grew increasingly bloody with each passing moment. And the remnants were endless.

Hissing until David's ears hurt, Acelina slashed out with her hands, hard enough she had to flare her wings to keep her balance as the path shrank to only a couple feet wide. Remnant hands reached past the metal teeth of the pit edges, up onto the path, and grabbed at their ankles, but Acelina was quick to stomp them into oblivion. Crunch.

As much as Acelina and David had a coating of blood on them, they were nothing compared to Caera. The tiger continued to lead on, the Las and Daoka now at her back, and she shredded and tore up each remnant she could, even when she didn't have to. Some she skewered on her horns, taking advantage of how they pointed straight up and forward from the top of her head. Others, she eviscerated. One, she ripped their head off.

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