

1382

Ww.N(o)veLwôrm.côm

"Nope, not even a little bit, far as Yosepha can tell. I don't have grace or any of that." She came closer. Not easy to do, considering the brute Yulia rode stared straight at Mia and her body. "Where're you off to? You look like you're trying to get somewhere fast... which I'm slowing down."Www.noVéWoRm.cOm

"It's okay. Romakus is there already."

"There? What's going on? It's not the other angels, is it?"

"No. Hellbeasts."

"Hellbeasts?"

The bat girl waved her wing-arms a few times.

"Hellbeasts! Lots of them live deep underground. They don't normally bother us, but sometimes they do. We have to cull them when that happens."

"Eep." Mia stuck her head back into her alcove. "Vinicius! We should help them."

The dragon rumbled, said nothing, and didn't move.

"Come on," she said. "I know you're healing, but you can deal with some... what kind of hellbeasts?" she asked Yulia.

"Some goorts mostly, some fallos, and some cannams."

"Cannams?"

"Hellhounds."

Eep again. Hannah had warned her about hellhounds before, and Mia remembered what the goorts had been like when they'd nearly killed Adron. And then, of course, there was the big wurm Vinicius had dealt with.

Mia poked her head back into her alcove.

"Come on!"

He snorted and said nothing.

"Oh come on, please? The Damall are helping us, and so's Yosepha. We should help them. I know you're healing, but just be careful and work with the other demons, and you should be fine, right? Cooperation." She realized the mistake as soon as she made it. The dreaded C word.

Vin growled at her, but she stood her ground and glared up at him. After a long staring match, the beast relented, rumbling and grumbling but standing up, anyway. Wow. She'd expected to have to yell at him or something, or leave him so she could go see what was happening herself.

Yulia's friend resumed his brisk walk, and Mia had to borderline jog to keep up. Vinicius didn't, long legs and all, and each step made a quiet impact rumble, like she had a mini T-Rex following her. Doing double duty, Yulia also killed any remnants they came across, but didn't take the time to clean off the ground. Mia jumped over, sidestepped, and avoided the gore and blood, but the little she touched stained the bottom of her sandals, not her feet.

She had sandals. Holy shit, she'd forgotten she had sandals now.

Other demons joined them as they went deeper into the mountain. Every so often they found a big batch of remnants, and the cruel history of the mountain became all too obvious as every ten or twenty feet they descended, they found increasingly odd arrays of them. Odd, epic, and disturbing.

One cavern had its entire ceiling covered in them, thousands of them, but the ceiling was also covered in vines, and the remnants tore themselves apart. Another cavern had a small lava river cutting along it, and remnants grew around its edges, cooking alive. Another had remnants growing only up to their necks, so only their heads were free, and fallo spiders feasted on them.

And there was Mia, wearing sexy clothes, all dolled up with makeup, walking along with other demons around the tortures of Hell. It was so dissonant, it made her sick. She clenched her eyes shut and blocked out their screams as best she could, and swallowed down the nausea pulsing in her stomach. Maybe she shouldn't have agreed to help with this.

The next cavern struck her cold. Statues lined the walls, demons of all kinds, and many held statues of humans. Mia had seen a lot of statues in Hell, but they were always of demons. The slaughter Faust told her about had apparently left such an impression on Hell, she'd grown statues honoring the event, and she didn't hold back. Each human statue, a naked man or woman, was in a state of pure terror, as a demon ripped them apart.

It was a memory. A nasty, horrible, god awful memory, something Hell wouldn't forget.

An awful lot like the memories Mia picked up, eating demon hearts, and apparently human hearts.

"This is horrible," she said, gesturing around.

The demons with them didn't agree. Yulia looked at Mia, confused, while the few vrats, brutes, and gargoyles they'd picked up along the way laughed.

Vinicius rumbled at them, and they all shut up. Good.

"Hell honors the terrible," Vin said.

"Hell is a bitch, then."

"Yes, she is."

She looked back at her bodyguard, scanning for any signs of a joke. He was serious.

Many of the statues were covered in spiderwebs, big thick strands -- compared to surface spiders anyway -- that'd give even a human trouble if they stumbled onto a bunch of them.

"Lots of silk down here," Yulia said back to Mia. "We should harvest it!"Ww.N(o)VéWoRm.com

"How does that work?"

She shrugged. "I don't know. The succubi and incubi know how."

There wasn't any sign of Faust, Gallius, or the others. Maybe they were already ahead, dealing with the hellbeast threat? Hard to imagine that. But then again, maybe Faust would surprise her.WWW.novelwôrm.côm

Mia stopped jogging long enough to check out one statue that wasn't in the middle of ripping a human apart. A twelve-foot-tall goliath of muscle, with a short dragon snout, and four arms. No wings, either. Another child of Belial.

"Anyone you know?" Mia asked back at Vin.