

1387

~~Mia~~

"Don't kill that one?" Julisa asked. "Why? It's a cannam egg."

"Yeah, but... but it came out when I approached. Was, er, birthed." Mia patted the egg. Yeap, moist. Gross. It was over a foot tall, bigger than the other cannam eggs, and its leathery skin had bumps and grooves along it, like veins. The red blemishes on the nearly black skin were slightly see-through, just enough for her to see that there was something inside the egg.

"And?" Shrugging, Julisa approached, each step making a squashing sound as her gore-soaked T-Rex feet pressed down against the muscly floor. *Ww.NóvelwoꝛM.côm*

"I don't know. I was... I don't want to say I was called, but... there's something about the nest that I can feel. It responded to me." Mia gestured around at the flesh walls and the orifices they held. None of them were moving, as if afraid to lay any eggs while demons were around, or maybe unable to, drained, and with time they'd birth a new swarm of hellbeasts to replace the recently dead. Probably the latter, if the history of this mountain was true.

All the demons looked between each other, confused. Even Vinicius raised a brow, though with his demony dragony face, he couldn't raise it very much.

"I don't know!" Mia said. "I don't know what's going on, okay? I don't know shit. All I know is, when I was in the spire, I didn't really feel much, but down here, I... kinda... do? It's so subtle, but it's there, and it took me here. I can still feel it."

"From the egg?" Faust asked.

"No! From the walls! From the... flesh." She reached out and pressed a hand against it. Just like the egg, it had the slightest bit of wetness, like a weeping wound, and was just as warm. "You don't feel anything?" The demons shook their heads. "Well, I feel something! And now there's this egg, and... and... I wanna see it hatch."

"No you do not," Julisa said, and she came closer. "Cannams are not goorts. Some provinces raise goorts to be ridden, but even then, that is a difficult process, and demons often die trying. But tamed cannams are beyond rare." *wWW.NoveLw(ó)rm.co@*

"Really? I mean, they're dogs, right? Sounds like they'd be easier to tame."

"They are not. Did you not see their ferocity mere hours ago?" *www.NóVELwoꝛM.(c)o(m)*

"I suppose." Frowning, Mia squatted down by the egg again and patted it again. "I can't just ignore this, though. It has to mean, something, right? I... wanna take the egg back with me."

Julisa snorted, like an annoyed bull. Every incubus winced.

"You sure?" Oudoceus asked. "It's not going to hatch a puppy."

"How big would it be when it hatches?"

"Smaller than the ones you've seen," Gallius said, "but demons and hellbeasts aren't born children. More like, half children, half adult?"

"Teenagers?"

"Ha, something like that." He and Faust both joined her at the egg, and they poked it with their tails and their devil spade tips. "It'll hatch and the hellhound will start at least as big as a... uh... what's that breed of dog people in the scrying pool say belongs to a queen?"

"Belongs to a queen? What--oh! A corgi! A Pembroke Welsh corgi!" Mia jumped up and clapped. "That's--"

"Not what it'll look like," Faust said. "It'll look like one of those ferocious giant beasts that almost ate you an hour ago. Black spikes, huge teeth, wolf-like?"

"But," Gallius said, "it'll start off as big as a, uh, corgi, judging from the size of the egg. And it will grow quickly."

Faust gently backhanded Gallius in the shoulder.

"When did you see a cannam hatch?"

"Remember Trissa?"

"I do."

"Remember she showed up missing an arm one day, and refused to tell anyone what happened?"

"Oh. I didn't think--"

Julisa snarled and marched up to the egg. Mia put herself between the egg and the giant demoness and glared up at her, which apparently caught the fujara tetrad off guard. It wasn't the first time the demons had been surprised a harmless little soul had had the gal to stand up to them. And if it wasn't for the child of Belial directly behind Julisa, Mia wouldn't have.

Vin reached out, grabbed Julisa by her shoulder, and yanked her back. Yank was a generous word, considering the tetrad crashed into the muscle floor and slid across it a good fifty feet, right across a pile of the gore she'd made. She hopped back to her feet, marched up to Vin, and roared right up into his face. He glared back down at her, rumbling, hands at the ready.

After a few uncomfortable seconds, Mia's leg muscles ready to bolt, Julisa grinned up at the colossus, licked her lips, and stepped back.

"It's your life, little soul," she said, peeking past Vin to smile at Mia. "Romakus won't like this."

"Maybe," Locutus said, "maybe not. He does like to see--"

"Chaos?" Oudoceus asked, laughing.

Julisa laughed, too, and joined the other two incubi as she wiped blood and chunks of flesh off her armor and spikes.

"If she insists on keeping the egg," the tetrad said, "then I suppose we should let her. We let her keep the ragarin's leash, after all. She's the Damall's favorite."

That sounded a little close to envy. It was kinda true that Mia had basically showed up one day and became the center of attention, but Julisa was a tetrad! A badass! She was in full control of everyone and everything around her. Mia felt like a rubber duck someone had thrown into whitewater rapids.

Vin rumbled softly, squatted down in front of the egg, and slid a hand toward it. Mia braced to use the leash, but a quick glance into her bodyguard's eyes settled her nerves. He scooped the egg up. Oh, maybe he was going to carry it and--

And then he put it in her arms. So much for helping her. It was heavy, and gross, and big, and unwieldy, and gross, and heavy. She fell, straight onto her ass, and squeaked as she clutched the egg to her chest. It'd probably survive falling, given its leathery texture, but she wasn't about to risk hurting the thing inside.

Why did she care about the thing inside? Dumb question. Show her anything young with a heartbeat and she'd care, care until it hurt, especially animals. Nature documentaries with predators and prey were enough to make her angry and sad as an adult, and enough to make her weep as a child. But even that wasn't enough reason for her to risk her life hatching a hellhound's egg.

And yet here she was, on her ass on a floor made of muscle, cradling a giant egg on her lap with something alive in it that would likely try to kill her the moment it hatched. It was stupid. She was stupid.

She got back up, glared up at Vin, hugged the egg close, stroked it, and gave each other demon a warning glare, too.

"I'm not going to ignore what happened. I felt something. I followed it down here. And then an egg gets birthed right in front of me? A big one? You can't tell me you're not curious."

The two big demons traded quick glances. They weren't convinced *WWW.novelwo©m.com*

Faust raised a hand. "I'm curious."