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# **DIABLESSE**

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*In the dense shadows of Carrigan Woods, the moonlight barely pierced through the thick canopy, casting an eerie glow on a small clearing near the road. Dia, a young idealist in her late teens, leaned against a tree, absentmindedly fiddling with a glass pendant. Her large hat cast a shadow over her delicate features, masking her inner turmoil.*

*From the depths of the woods emerged Nori, a woman in her late thirties with an air of authority and menace. She held another large hat in her hand, her every step towards Dia heavy with purpose.*

*With a swift motion, Nori yanked Dia's hat off, revealing a grotesque, hideous face beneath. Dia scrambled to retrieve her hat, desperate to hide her deformity.*



*"Leave it," Nori commanded. "I do not want you to get too used to that face."*

*"How can I attract a human if I don't look like one?" Dia protested.*

*"You want to attract a human for the wrong reason?" Nori shot back.*

*"My father was a human," Dia whispered.*

*"And he was more useful to you in my belly. You need to make your offering," Nori replied coldly.*

*"We were humans too," Dia said, a note of longing in her voice.*

*"Once upon a time. Long before we had a choice in the matter. Your cousins are circling, and they will devour you," Nori warned.*

*Dia heard her name being called from the field opposite them. She looked back at Nori, their eyes locking in a silent battle of wills.*

*"Let them come," Dia said defiantly.*

*With a flick of her wrist, Nori disintegrated the veil that separated their world from the human world. On the other side stood Hayden, a handsome and lean teenager, searching for Dia with his back turned to them.*

*"Humans are meant to be consumed, not cherished," Nori said, putting on her hat and storming off, disappearing behind the veil.*

*Dia quickly put her hat back on, her face returning to its angelic beauty. Hayden spotted her and smiled. She waved frantically, gesturing for him to turn back.*

*"Today is not a good day," she thought.*

*Ignoring her warning, Hayden continued toward her.*

*"Don't come any closer," Dia called out.*

*Hayden reached Dia, and the veil closed behind him.*

*"Well, hello to you too. I've missed you, beautiful," he said, hugging her.*

*"You can't go back that way," Dia said, stiffening in his embrace.*

*"Come with me," Hayden urged, taking her hand and heading back, only to bounce off the veil, his smile fading to confusion.*

*"Come on," Dia said, squeezing his hand and running deeper into the woods.*

*They plunged into the darkness, Dia pulling Hayden along. He snatched his hand back, confused and scared.*

*"Where are you taking me?" he demanded.*

*"Home. Don't make me regret this," Dia replied.*

*"Mine or yours?" Hayden chuckled, but Dia remained stern.*

*A rustle and the clinking of a chain echoed through the woods. A large, hairy Lagahoo, a lycan-like creature, crept toward them. Hayden moved closer to Dia, who pulled him behind her. She*



*removed her hat, her face turning grotesque, and growled low. The Lagahoo growled back but eventually sauntered off. Dia quickly put her hat back on, her face returning to its angelic beauty.*

*"What was that?" Hayden asked, his voice trembling.*

*Dia didn't answer, pulling him along as they ran once more.*

*They reached a hidden alcove and sat down. Hayden held Dia's hands, looking at her with a mixture of fear and love.*

*"I don't know if I'm dreaming or having a nightmare," he confessed.*

*"Such sweet lovers," came Nori's voice from the shadows. "Do you think he'd still look at you the same if he knew who you truly are?"*

*Dia pulled her hands back and stood, scanning the area. Hayden watched her, confused and concerned.*

*"He's like a lost puppy. Show him your face," Nori taunted from her hiding place.*

*She flicked her wrist, and Hayden stood, compelled by her magic, approaching Dia.*

*"You think a human could ever love your beautiful face without the mask you wear?" Nori sneered.*

*Hayden removed Dia's hat, revealing her grotesque face. He stumbled back, dropping the hat. Dia reached for him, but he recoiled.*



*Nori stepped out, closing in on Dia.*

*"Watch him. He can't even look at us. He knows his place. Do you finally see yours?" Nori said, her voice cold and cruel.*

*Hayden took off running at the sight of Nori and Dia. Nori drew him back with a flick of*

*her wrist, forcing him to kneel in front of Dia.*

*"Are you willing to give up your life and everything we have built for a human?" Nori asked Dia.*

*"I didn't ask for this. We should be able to live amongst them if we want to," Dia replied.*

*"We shouldn't have to hide our beauty to live with our chow," Nori said, caressing Dia's face.*

*Dia stooped in front of Hayden, who squeezed his eyes shut, noticing her hoof. She grabbed his face, examining it. He resisted, and she let go, standing.*

*"I can't watch this anymore. Your offering or my meal?" Nori demanded.*

*"But he's—" Dia began.*

*"But he's what?" Nori interrupted.*

*Dia looked away, torn.*



*Reluctantly, Dia led Hayden to the middle of a clearing. Nori positioned him to lie down, instructing Dia to straddle him.*

*Dia half-smiled at Hayden, but he grimaced at her grotesque appearance, recoiling. Her face stiffened. Nori encircled them with a ring of fire.*

*"I invoke my inner beast. My protector and my peace. I am she and she is me. Ancestors bless my offering," Dia chanted in her native tongue.*

*She leaned in and kissed Hayden, sucking the blue stream of life force from him. She ripped his shirt open, her eyes glowing blue. Her hand inched toward his chest, struggling to hold back. Finally, she plunged her hand through his chest, ripping out his heart. She raised it, examining it, then ate it, blood staining her face and hands.*

*Dia looked at Nori, her eyes returning to normal. She looked down at Hayden's lifeless body, grabbing her mouth and shaking*



*her head. She backed away, dropping to her knees and crying.*

*"I was like that my first time, too. It gets easier," Nori said, approaching and rubbing Dia's back.*

*The next night, Dia leaned against the tree, petting the Lagahoo. She held her hat in her other hand.*

*"I am not your enemy, Cousin," she whispered to the creature.*

*The Lagahoo's chain clinked.*

*Nori sauntered up to Dia.*



*"You are a glowing La Diabliesse. Are you ready?" she asked.*

*"Let's go hunting," Dia replied.*

*Dia and Nori put on their hats, their faces becoming angelic beauties once more. They strutted off, hearing the Lagahoo howl behind them. They glanced back toward Carrigan Woods, knowing their next adventure awaited.*

## **A MESSAGE FROM THE AUTHOR**

