

~~David~~

“Did you two come here looking for me?” he asked.

The male angel shook his head. “We came here looking for—”

The woman snarled. “Stop talking to the unmarked.”

“Give it up, Yosepha. Romakus was right.”

So, her name was Yosepha. David held up a finger.

“I—” He shut up quick when the dark-skinned woman tore through him with a hard gaze.

Angels had human eyes, far as he could tell, but they definitely had a shine and intensity to them human eyes didn't. The guy had bronze irises, she had obsidian, and both had an almost reflective quality to them, like metal. It made it hard to not stare into them, to get lost in their beauty. But then, the Yosepha angel had a sword planted to Caera's throat, and the guy had an arrow pointed straight at Jeskura and him, with a boot on Daoka's throat. It put a damper on the awe and majesty he would have otherwise felt.

“I saw Romakus a few years ago,” Caera said, growling quietly. “Haven't seen him since.”

“I don't care what you saw, demon.”

“Then the fuck is this about?” Jes asked, flaring her wings. “A couple of angels drop out of the sky and ambush a few demons and their pet? The fuck?” If she was trying to look imposing, it wasn't working. Much as Jes was taller than Yosepha, and almost as tall as the male angel, it didn't matter. They were radiant, with bigger wingspans, and dripped with enough confidence they might as well have been twenty feet tall.

The male angel smiled. “It looked very suspicious from where we were watching. I'm Galon, by the way.”

Yosepha rolled her eyes. She didn't like her partner's attitude. So much for angels being monolithic beings of pure goodness, eternal righteous warriors, or the forever guards of the Gates of Heaven. They seemed like people right now, just very dangerous people who'd kicked three demon asses in a matter of seconds without breaking a sweat, if they even could sweat.

He'd kind of expected them to be more impressive though, honestly, like maybe they could have come out of the fire sky in giant beacons of gold light, spoke in a booming voice, and shook the

mountains? Maybe they could have said ‘be not afraid’ or something? But, nope, these two angels looked pretty typical, dangerous, awe inspiring, and unbelievably confident, but typical. Maybe the giant angel he’d seen before the portal to Hell sucked him up would fit the fantasy better?

But, if they weren’t crazy monolithic god-like entities, then maybe he could talk to them? Knowing him, that’d make things worse.

“You haven’t killed us yet,” he said, “haven’t killed me yet. Can I ask why?”

“Angels don’t go around killing demons randomly,” Yosepha said. “This isn’t the First War.”

“But... you’re here. And, uh, holding me and my friends at knife point.”

Galon spoke next. “A few demons and a soul, wandering around in twilight hours, spying on the Death’s Grip spire? The spire’s alive with activity? Imps and grems, running around, talking about the redheaded girl with no mark?” The angel nodded David’s way. “Every angel in Heaven knows about the ginger pair that showed up later than the others.”

“Others?”

“Galon!” Yosepha said, voice only kept from hitting yelling volume by her clenched teeth.

But the man just chuckled and shook his head. “Romakus was right, Sepha. Even without the aura, I can tell.”

Yosepha ground her teeth. “Just because you are gabriem does not mean—”

Galon lowered the bow, and stepped off Daoka. Dao hopped to her feet and back to Jes in an instant, and Jes took a step forward, only to freeze when Galon raised the bow back up.

“Peace,” the angel said.

Jes pointed a claw at Yosepha. “We can have peace when your asshole bitch friend lets her up.”

“Sepha,” Galon said. “Romakus was right, and you know it.”

“I...” Hesitation crossed the woman’s face. Or was that sorrow? She sighed, and stepped back, shield up and sword ready to stab the much, much larger tiger woman. Afraid of triggering the angel’s reflexes, Caera slowly got back to four feet, and came back over to David’s side.

It was a strange sight, watching a huge tiger slink away from a much smaller woman, and a little bit more of that awe and majesty showed through. Whatever these two had done while he’d been blinded, they’d easily beaten his protectors. Power in — relatively — small packages.

“If you’re not going to kill us,” David asked, “then why did you ambush us?”

“Angels don’t go around killing demons randomly, like I said,” Yosepha said. “But any fool could guess there was something unusual about your group, and the unmarked are to be dealt with.” Yeesh, he thought Jeskura was the angry sort. This angel woman looked ready to cut in him in half if he said the wrong thing.

“But... someone named Romakus said you shouldn’t?” A possible member of the Damall, according to Caera.

Galon and Yosepha traded a look. They knew something, and they weren’t going to share it. Judging from Galon’s playful attitude, him not willing to share something meant it was important, and probably something David very much needed to know.

“I wanted to see you for myself,” Galon said. “You, your sister, the others. You’re the first we’ve found, and... we have a problem.”

“Problem?”

“Not every angel out there is as talkative as Sepha and me. And you seem like a nice guy, David.” And of course the angel knew his name. Double shit. “You should stay out of the way until things settle down.”

“Settle down? But... But...”

“Be happy we’re not sending you to the Great Tower,” Yosepha said, and she took a step back as she turned, getting ready to take off.

“Wait!” He stomped his foot down. Both angels stopped and stared at him. “Fucking wait! Jesus fucking christ, please at least tell me something! Anything! A week ago my sister and I were sucked into Hell, and we don’t know why. We’re unmarked, and we don’t know why. Crazy shit is happening, and we don’t know why! I have an aura, my body isn’t normal, and... and...” He came very close to spilling every secret he had. But if they weren’t willing to tell him anything, then he shouldn’t tell them anything.

Yosepha was unmoved. She walked away, but stopped short of taking to the sky. Galon remained, frowning as he looked down, and un-nocked his arrow.

“We came here to confirm what Romakus told us, David, not to help you.

“Why not!? What did I do to deserve any of this!?”

“We don’t know.”

“You... don’t know?”

The angel shook his head. “We don’t know. But if you want to keep your head, just stay out of the way. Or not. You’re unmarked. You can die and return to the Great Tower without having to spend any cycles in Hell. Probably.”

David ground his teeth and glared daggers into the angel.

“I’m not going to do either of those things. I’m not going to just sit around and hide.” Much as that idea was growing more and more appealing, despite his obsessive need for answers. “I need to know what’s happening. I need to find out what’s going on. And... Can’t you just take me and my sister back up to Heaven, with the other unmarked souls? Away from here?”

“No. You’re different from them, I know that much. I don’t even know if you’re human, David.”

David stood there, while the weight of Galon’s words threatened to drag him back down to the ground.

“Can... Can you at least find a way to tell Mia I’m alive?”

The angel sighed, met eyes with David, and silence fell on their strange little group for far too long.

“Maybe,” he said. “Maybe. As for you, if you’re sure you have to get involved, then find Romakus and the Damall. They might help you.” He raised a finger. “Might. They might also decide to eat you, or throw you into lava.”

Wonderful.

“They have a group in Death’s Grip?” Caera asked. “Where are they?”

“On the Death’s Grip and Black Valley border,” Yosepha said, looking over her shoulder. “War brews. We were investigating that, as well.”

Angels investigating demon activity. Finally, a little information he could use for some context.

“Thanks, for... for telling me at least something.”

Galon chuckled. “I don’t envy you, David. Something big is coming, and useless as this hilarious warning is, all I can risk telling you is the only reason we didn’t kill you is because Romakus told us not to. Any other angel is probably going to kill you on sight.”

He gulped. “Me, but not demons?”

Galon nodded, but smiled and gestured to the three demons with a wing.

“How’d you make friends with three demons, anyway?”

The three ladies looked between each other before scowling and growling at the angel.

“Fuck you,” Jes said, and she held up a middle finger.

Galon laughed yet again, waved, and backed off to join Yosepha. A hard flap of their wings was all they needed to get into the air, and Jeskura’s jaw dropped. Hovering, Galon turned to face them again, and the bow in his hands popped out of existence in a small puff of gold light.

“The soldiers of Avinoam and Ravid are a lot nicer than many of the Heavenly Islands, David, and few engage with the Damall like we do. I’m not kidding. If you see other angels, avoid them.” He offered a casual salute. “Good luck.”

Both angels took to the air, and despite the radiance of their wings and armor, it was only seconds before their bodies mostly blended into the settling embers of the fire sky. A minute later, they were borderline invisible.

David and his three protectors stood in stunned silence. No need to check around for any eavesdropping demons. The angels wouldn’t have ambushed them like they did without being sure they were safe to do so.

“That... was scary,” Caera said.

Jes and Dao both nodded, and pat each other on the shoulders as they checked each other for wounds. The fight must have been worse than he’d figured.

“I can’t believe it,” David said. “They just... showed up out of nowhere. Dropped on us from the sky.”

The tiger lady nodded as she prowled back toward the mountain wall, away from the cliff edge. “They were playing nice. I’ve never seen an angel fight, but some demons have. The stories are horrifying. These two were being very... gentle.”

Dao clicked a few times as she gestured to the tregeera.

“Yeah, I know,” Caera said. “But even if they hadn’t ambushed us, that mikalim would have easily killed the three of us.”

“Mikalim? The woman?” David said. “She’d called the other guy a... gabriem?”

Caera nodded. “I don’t know anything about the higher angels, no one does. But the foot soldiers, there’s mikalim the warriors, rapholem the defenders, and gabriem the caretakers. That woman didn’t need the other’s help to take us down, if she’d wanted to.”

Oh, damn. Seeing Caera, an eight-foot-tall tiger lady of muscle and claw, being afraid of a small — relatively speaking — angel, only as tall as Daoka, was numbing. Words were words, but Caera legitimately looked scared, and she dragged a claw on the stone as she shivered a few times.

“I guess... we got really lucky,” he said. “And—”

Dao walked past him, gave him a harsh slap against the back of the arm, and began the trek back down the mountain.

He stared at her back, blinking. “Uh...”

Sighing, Jes came up beside him and slapped him in the back of the other arm.

“Ow! Hey! The fuck did I do?”

“Oh I dunno, basically begged the angels to get you out of here because it’s a horrible place and you’d happily leave everyone here behind except your sister the first moment you can?”

“I... I...” Ah shit. His head slumped, shoulders too, and a new silence fell on them. “I didn’t even... I mean...”

Jes rolled her eyes and walked after Dao, but not before whacking him in the back with her tail with a little more force than was probably necessary. Double ow.

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They traveled in silence back to their hole, Caera in lead as usual. They needed to hide again, since the sudden — and very fucking random — appearance of the two angels meant other demons might come investigate, despite the twilight hours. Much as the angels seemed to fade into the fire sky easily enough, when they were on the ground there was no mistaking the giant white feather wings and the gleaming, shiny armor and weapons. Demons could come looking, or the rider, or that invisible monster, or maybe other angels.

He looked at Daoka’s back. Unlike Jes or Caera, she had no tail, and her bits of armor didn’t hide the shape of her body, her hourglass figure, or her very large ass. But, much as he enjoyed watching her back, the painful silence ruined it. They weren’t just being quiet because they needed to avoid detection, he didn’t need Mia to tell him that. Not once did Dao look back to him, check on him, rub a horn on him, anything.

Once they got back down into the ravines between the mountains, and the darkness of night fell on them, Caera spoke up.

“That bitch took me down in an instant. Hit me hard, knocked me down, and I had a sword to my throat before I knew what happened.”

“Same,” Jes said. “That Galon fucker whacked me with the bow. Might as well have hit me with a huge rock.” Groaning, she rubbed the side of her shoulder. “I could tell, if he’d hit me any harder, he’d have broken bone.”

“I got flashbanged,” David said. “No idea how. Got some feathers in the face and then I couldn’t see shit.”

Dao said nothing.

“My first real run-in with angels,” Caera said. “I... expected a little more, honestly.”

Jes laughed. “Uh, they kicked our asses? We’re lucky to be alive.”

“Yeah, I get that. But I expected, I don’t know, grand majesty? I expected shining rays of gold, called from the sky, like the in stories I’ve read. I expected... to be smited, I guess.”

“Same,” David said. “I get the impression they could have done that, but they were being stealthy, hiding, judging from what they said.”

The tregeera sighed as she nodded, body looking heavier than usual. She was disappointed in herself. Another failed attempt to defend her friends from a surprise battle? No way she should blame herself for that. But, she was, just like David probably would, no matter how much he knew it wasn’t his fault.

Demons were surprisingly human.

He winced. They were surprisingly human. The satyr walking in front of him wasn’t some evil demon who feasted on hearts. She was basically a human, who just happened to need to eat human hearts, had horns and red skin, and a very fucked up childhood. Considering the hatching pit they’d told him about, it was a wonder the three demons with him were as nice as they were, even Jeskura. They had their own motivations, their own desires, their own lives. The demons of Hell weren’t anything like any religion depicted them as.

He took a step closer to Dao. Took a step back. Took a step closer. Back again. Okay, now he really did need Mia.

Jes came up to him from behind, and leaned in close.

“I told you earlier,” she whispered, “I was going to stick around, keep you around, keep you safe, Dao and me, all that shit. And I get it, this is Hell and you don’t deserve to be here.”

He looked back to her. Jes, the voice of reason?

“But...”

“But, you’re an asshole. Daoka was excited. Fuck me, so was I.” She shrugged, and took up the rear guard again.

He winced. God damn it.

They continued on in silence for the rest of the journey.

“What do you think?” Caera asked as they slipped back into their cave. “Those angels did show up really randomly, like you said. I get the impression they were doing more than just investigating the brewing war between Death’s Grip and the Black Valley.”

“They sounded like they were convinced I’d be some sort of evil asshole,” David said. “And I... I guess they felt my aura when they got close.”

“We all feel it,” Jes said, “all the time, but it’s always this tiny little thing, barely noticeable. Unless you’re horny.”

Caera chuckled. “Figures the angels would notice the nicer aura more easily, the so called empathy Galon said he felt from you. But not us demons. Nope. We’d never pick up on that. We’re just demons, right? Not worth caring about.”

Ah fuck, not her too.

He stood in the middle of the cave, and looked to the three ladies. Caera sat around the curve close to the entrance. Dao and Jes sat in the back beside each other. All three avoided eye contact, even Dao, somehow.

He looked around for a couch, or the doghouse he was apparently sleeping in tonight. No such luck.

Sighing, he sat down against a wall, away from the others, and ran through the scenario in his head a million times, looking for a way he could have handled it better. A million came to mind, but hindsight was twenty-twenty.

He closed his eyes, and slept.



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~~Mia~~

She was officially corrupted.

She tried to sit up. Didn't work. Her muscles trembled and quivered, and even panting in a desperate attempt to get air back in her lungs, she couldn't get them to settle. Her insides ached, but even as the sore, tender muscles within pulsed with what almost felt like a bruise, her whole body shivered with tingling waves that followed. 'Hurts so good', she'd heard online from some ladies before. They probably didn't mean getting thoroughly fucked by inhumanly massive tongues and dicks, but still.

It hadn't been a fluke. That first time, she'd cum so hard, so many times, it was a haze in her memory. A dream she had trouble thinking was true. But just ten minutes ago they'd finished doing it again. Her, her tiny little body, stretched wide and deep by two massive demons, their tongues, their cocks, and somehow her melting into it just like in her favorite erotica stories. Maybe she'd been corrupted all along?

After a minute, she managed to push herself up onto her elbows and lift her head. She looked down at her naked body, utterly covered in cum. Her poor blankets. Sure it'd fade away soon, but in the meantime, what a mess. She looked over at Kas, who crouched beside her in his classic 'ready to pounce, ready to fight' pose, like a beast guarding his meal. She looked over at Adron and Hannah, and smiled.

"Aren't you guys done yet? It's almost night."

Adron shrugged, grinned at her, and didn't stop. He lay on Hannah's back, the young woman underneath him on her belly, and head turned to face Mia. But, even looking straight at Mia, Hannah was off in space, eyes glazed. She'd been pinned under Adron for a while now, with the big vrat fucking her ass in a slow, sensual, massaging way, keeping every inch inside her and grinding his pelvis on her butt. It was deliciously sweet.

He'd been fucking her pussy like a jackhammer before, and Mia had been genuinely concerned the girl was going to break in half. But, nope, Hannah liked it rough. At one point, both Kas and Adron had fucked her, way harder than they did with Mia, and only now that the girl was borderline passing

out did Adron decide to get gentle with her. It worked well. Hannah's body was probably singing with sensitivity, and loving the feel of her master grinding on her.

What would it feel like to get roughed up like that? They'd choked Hannah, spanked her, passed her back and forth like a toy, and then thrust into her together hard and fast until Mia had been left staring at the girl's bulging belly, worried she'd pop. It'd looked amazing. But, Mia was already sore from a decidedly gentler stuffing. She had no idea if she could even handle getting pounded like that by a human man, let alone from two huge demons at the same time.

But damn, it had looked amazing.

Corrupted. She was utterly corrupted, just laying here, covered in cum, again, watching one of her bodyguards fuck his pet into a coma one foot away from her. And for some reason, it felt comfortable. Comfortable compared to everything else in Hell, at least. So comfortable, she rolled over toward Hannah, eventually managed to sit up again, and watched the way the girl's tight little butt spread around Adron's thick girth when he took a moment to lift his pelvis. Then he was back balls deep inside her again.

Fucking god. Yesterday she'd had herself a little mini orgy. Earlier today she'd given a giant monster demon with two dicks a blowjob. Now she was finishing up a foursome. The fuck happened to her? Even her aura, the unusual tingling in her center that she felt pour out of her into the air and blankets, wasn't done. It kept going, happy to keep Adron and Hannah horny out of their minds. If Kas hadn't just dumped a gallon of cum into Mia, thrice, her aura would have likely had him coming back for more. And, much as she liked the sound of that, she was just too damn tired to go again. But there was always tomorrow.

"I'm surprised Zel didn't join us," Mia said. "She thinks of me like Adron thinks of Hannah, I think."

Kas clicked once and slowly looked behind him to the door.

"She's probably worried," Adron said. "Some bad things have happened, and she's trying to do damage control. If she came in here and got lost in your aura, she'd spend all night fucking."

Mia blushed and squirmed. "It can't be that strong... can it?"

"It's definitely a strange aura. It's hard to describe it. A sin aura is direct, and easy to resist, or at least try to resist. Yours is... different. I can't fight it. It's there, and I'm in it, and it's..." After a quiet growl, Adron closed his eyes for a moment, and looked back down at his slave. Mia recognized the sound at this point. He'd made it every time he'd cum inside her, and Hannah.

Mia lay on her stomach beside Hannah, almost close enough to kiss her. She wouldn't. Much as Hannah was pretty and sexy, and Hannah thought the same of Mia, they were both more into men. But that didn't mean Mia didn't want a nice place to watch Hannah's expression, and look over her shoulder, down her back, and watch the way her ass flattened under Adron's pelvis as he ground into her and filled her with cum.

Hannah moaned, and her eyes drifted closed. She wasn't going to cum from such soft sex, but considering how many times she'd orgasmed already, that was probably fine with her. Never in Mia's life had she ever cum this many times, and now she knew what it meant to have her toes curl to the point it hurt, and muscles cramp. If this were Earth, she'd think she'd need some electrolytes, and Hannah probably felt the same way. They could use the break.

Adron sat back, turned Hannah over without pulling out, lifted her, and hugged her to his chest. The girl was completely limp, legs spread and dangling around his hips and thighs, her arms dangling at her sides. The new position let Mia watch how the demon's thick cock pulsed with each wave of cum he poured into the girl's guts, before a lot of it leaked out of her. A lot of it didn't.

He grinned over his pet's head at Mia, put his hands on Hannah's ass, and worked her up and down a single inch, milking his orgasm.

"You know," Mia said, sitting up again and glaring at Adron, "I should be mad at you."

"Mad? At me?" Cue cocky, arrogant smile, full of faux surprise. "Why?"

"Because Zel told you to get ready for me, yesterday. For using that sin aura on me. For... you know..." She squirmed and blushed all the more. "For taking my virginity without my permission!"

He tilted his head to the side, grinning at her. "But I really, really wanted to fuck you. Hannah too."

She frowned harder, and put her hands on her hips as she knelt up straight.

"It still wasn't fair."

"And Zel would have gutted me like a surface fish if I'd disobeyed her orders. You saw the spikes outside."

"That..." Okay that was a better excuse. "And if she hadn't ordered you?"

"Then I still would have tried to seduce you." Grinning at her, he pushed Hannah away from him a little so her body arched backward. She didn't even try to resist, still limp, eyes half closed. With one

of his hands behind the small of her back, Hannah bent backward, flexible, beautiful, and the way she bent made the bulge of Adron's cock, and her cum-filled insides, bulge all the more.

Mia stared at the glorious sight, before snapping her eyes back up to Adron. Bastard was trying to distract her.

"But?" she asked, frowning her hardest frown.

"But I wouldn't have forced you." He shrugged again, and with his free hand, ran claws down Hannah's naked skin teasingly, including over the distension along her stretched belly. "Would I have needed to? You're a horny little thing, and who are we kidding? I'm gorgeous."

"I'm not—"

Kas clicked once, shook his head, rumbled something that almost sounded like a chuckle.

"I'm not!" No translator needed to know what her jerk bodyguard said. "I'm a young university woman. It's hardly unusual to have a healthy sex drive."

"Whatever you say."

Sighing, she forced herself to look away from Hannah. Her aura was dying down, slowly but surely, and talking helped. A cold shower would have helped even more, but she doubted Hell knew the meaning of the word cold.

With a few more minutes, Adron and Hannah were done, and the tingling vibration in Mia's heart settled to almost nothing. It was still there, something in her chest, the tiniest little buzzing sensation that seemed to change when her emotional state changed. That wasn't how it worked with demons. They grabbed hold of something inside called sin, and made it push out an aura, something they forced on others. Whatever was up with Mia, she wasn't a demon.

"Kas, Adron, do you two know about Zel's... prisoner?" The first true target of Mia's aura.

Kas nodded once, clicked twice, and gestured to Adron.

"We know about him," Adron said. "Everyone does. Much as Zel is giving you a lot of freedom, I don't think she's going to let you in on any meaningful secrets just yet."

"What do you know about him? Zel said she's had him locked up for a long time."

Adron used one of the blankets to wipe Hannah off before himself, lay on his side beside his pet, and faced Mia's way.

“Is that why you were so horny tonight? Zel had you working your magic on the child of the Old Ones?”

Mia scrunched up her nose. “That’s none of your business.”

“Uh huh.” He winked at her. “Vinicius, probably the only living ragarin in Hell, wanted the spire at some point. This was after the Spires War, and Zel was already in charge. He underestimated Zel. She’s a crafty bitch, as you may have noticed.”

“I have.”

“Agreed,” Hannah said, and she nudged her back into Adron’s chest, on her side and facing Mia as well.

“I’m not sure how she did it,” Adron said, “but she beat him. Cost her a lot of demons to do it, but she did. And instead of killing him, she planned for the future. She locked him up, and everyone assumes it’s so she can break him and make him a servant.”

“She hasn’t been able to yet, though.”

“Right. So, he’s a bit of a ghost story, the deadly beast locked in the depths of the tower that, some day, Zel might be able to unleash on Hell.”

“That... is scary. How long ago did she capture him?”

Adron shrugged. “A century or two? Before I hatched.”

Mia froze. “He’s been locked up this whole time?”

The vrak and shark nodded. Hannah shivered.

“Does... time hit demons differently than humans?” Mia asked, gesturing to Hannah and herself. “Cause, I mean, a century locked up in a dungeon, chained to a wall, sounds like... Hell. I’d go insane after a while.”

“Yeah,” Hannah said. “That sort of shit will break a person’s brain.”

“It does hit us differently,” Adron said. “Not like anyone’s ever sat down and tried to figure it out, but yeah, time does seem to feel different to us. Lock me up for a century? Yeap, I’ll be fucking pissed, but I wouldn’t go insane.”

Mia tilted her head, and checked on Kas again. He offered the same, apathetic shrug. Much as demons had a lot of similarities to humans, not really being affected by the passage of time was a big difference.

“Do you know anything about him? About Vinicius.”

“Not really. I’ve never seen him, and the stories about him only say he’s a mean fucker.”

Mia gulped. “How mean?”

“Not like what you’re thinking. He didn’t go around raping and torturing souls, far as the stories say. But he was brutal in his wars. Made a showing of ripping demons in half, literally, or any souls that got in his way. The sort of demon who gives himself over to the fighting half of his sin completely, and doesn’t stop slaughtering until everyone’s dead.”

That sounded better and worse than what she thought. If he’d been a cruel, disgusting, vile demon, that was one thing, and she might not feel so bad about using her aura to try and ‘break’ him. Him being a hyper aggressive barbaric raging animal was a different sort of horrible she didn’t know how to process. It was scary in a different kind of way, not creepy, but terrifying. And she’d given that gigantic, deadly creature a blowjob.

Adron grinned at her. “Zel used you on him, didn’t she? Really used you on him.”

“I... I uh...” She looked away. Yeap, she was blushing, and even if she hadn’t been, Adron was smart enough to read her expressions. Plus, that aura buzzed a little harder inside her. “I don’t think Zel wants me to talk about it.”

“Did she say that?”

“No...”

Grinning, Hannah reached out, and pulled on Mia’s wrist until she almost fell onto the blankets beside her.

“What was he like? What’d Zel make you do?”

She shouldn’t have brought him up.

“He... He was... Had to be at least twelve feet tall.”

Adron raised a brow, and stood up. He towered over Mia and Hannah.

“I’m just shy of eight feet tall. Zel and Saldavin are ten feet tall, and they make me look tiny.” He got back down and snuggled into Hannah’s back.

“I know!” Mia threw up her hands. “My head didn’t even reach his crotch. It was ridiculous.”

Hannah shivered again. “Sounds hot.” Her words earned her a quick slap on the ass. That’d have earned a hit back from Hannah in the past, but lately she’d been less angry. Mia wasn’t sure why, yet.

“He had a dragon-like face, kinda like Kas, but with eyes. He stood up straighter too, and he had four arms. Each as big as me! Just being near him had me shaking.”

“Damn.” Hannah liked what she heard.

“And uh... Zel, she had me... um...” Mia peeked back at Kas. Would he be offended or get jealous? In one of her romance stories, yes Kas would get jealous about what’d happened, and that’d lead to some ridiculous drama that was a delicious guilty pleasure. Maybe he’d get angry, and get into an argument with Vinicius? Maybe he’d get into a fight with Mia, yell at her, and then they’d have great makeup sex?

Or, Kas was her bodyguard, and his interest in her went as far as liking her great butt.

“What, what?” Hannah asked, smile growing.

“She... got me to use my aura on him. And, it worked.” It was Mia’s turn to shiver. “He had two.”

“Two?”

“Two...” Mia held out her hands in front of her, and indicated a pretty ridiculous length, and then a ridiculous girth. “Two of them.”

“Jesus,” Hannah said. She looked over her shoulder back at Adron. “Why don’t you have two dicks? That’d be awesome.”

“Because I’m a lowly vratorin.”

“Uh huh.” Chuckling, Hannah snuggled into Adron’s chest some more, and set her hungry gaze back on Mia. “Did you fuck him?”

“What? Hannah!” Again, Mia indicated the sizes of Vinicius’s dicks with her hands.

“Sounds like a challenge.”

“Sounds like a painful way to die.”

“Pfft.” Hannah dismissed Mia with a wave of the hand. “Did Zel fuck him?”

“No, no she didn’t. But... we did...” Blood flooded Mia’s face. “We gave him a blowjob. Er, well... I did... best as I could. Zel used her hands.”

“Fuuuuuuck.” Hannah rubbed her face in the blankets. “I can just imagine it. You and Zel, standing in front of this chained up, absolutely fucking massive demon, and—”

Adron slapped her ass again. “Keep talking and I’ll punish you.”

Laughing, Hannah turned around and faced her attacker. Adron responded by pinning her down on her back, leaning in, and kissing her.

Hannah's eyes drift closed. They didn't do this often, kiss, and Mia wasn't sure she'd ever seen a demon actually kiss a human, not romantically like this at least. If they hadn't just had a mountain of sex, it would have led to more, but instead they continued to kiss, and snuggle.

Mia pulled her knees up to her chest, and watched. Part of her thought maybe she should look away and give them privacy, but then, it hadn't even been an hour since both Adron and Kas had their dicks inside Mia, and Hannah had had her lips and hands all over her. Privacy at this point seemed pointless. And it was nice, watching, seeing that the woman with 666 on her forehead was capable of romance, and Adron too, a demon.

Maybe Mia should spend some time getting to know Kas?

"Ka—" She looked back, but he'd moved back to the doorway, and stood in his usual half crouch half standing position his short-ish legs and long-ish arms allowed. A shark dinosaur dragon... gargoyle beast, guarding her, but only because he'd been told to. Alas, no cuddling for her.

Watching Adron and Hannah's weird, twisted romance was putting her in a romantic mood. Maybe they were being so lovey dovey with each other because Mia's aura was changing, too? She felt it, the weird tingling in her chest alter and shift, and there no was denying it. It'd changed to be... romantic. Still gentle, subtle, not screaming powerful like when she was horny. But, romantic.

Her emotional state affected her aura, and Zel wanted her to master it. So, if Zel wanted her to break someone like Vinicius, and make him work for her, how would that work? Would she need to become some sort of queenly figure? An army's general? Someone that would convey an aura of 'obey me', which didn't really sound like something she could 'emotionally align with' anyway?

Mia sighed, cuddled into her blankets, closed her eyes, and let her afterlife body switch off for the night. And she did her best to ignore the growing hunger in her stomach.

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~~Day 24~~

~~David~~



He woke up last. No dreams, as usual. No flood of groggy memories that he needed to work through to understand yesterday. A strange quirk of Hell, and one he was thankful for.

Dao and Jes both looked his way for a moment. They sat beside each other against a nearby cave wall, shoulder to shoulder, and checked their armor. How they kept the pile of black metal chunks and leather straps organized, he couldn't see, but they had them in a pile in front of them, and both ladies plucked on the straps and ran claws over the dented, warped metal. Maybe they shared some parts, since they were only six inches different in height. Not doable for Caera, big as she was.

David sat up, hugged his legs, and stared at the floor. One of the girls, usually Dao, was near him when he woke up, intent on snuggling him or some such. No such luck this morning.

This wasn't the first time David pissed off other people by not considering their feelings. He considered himself to be an empathetic guy, and always tried to help other people when the situation allowed. But doing things to help others and using words that considered people's feelings were two different things. He absolutely, utterly fucking sucked at considering people's feelings when it came to the whole talking and communications thing.

But he had three people with him now, twenty-four-seven. Time to practice what came to Mia so naturally.

He got up, and sat down in front of Dao and Jes, with their pile of armor between him and them.

Dao clicked a few times, but with how quiet they were, she was probably still talking to Jes about whatever she had been before. She was ignoring him. Jes did the same, and she nodded as she held up a bit of a metal.

"Think this mark was from that bitch Scilla we killed." She tried to buff a scratch out with her palm. No luck.

David stared down at the small pile for a little while, struggling to find words. It'd be easier if they were chatting online or something, and he could just type words out. Actually forming them with his lips and tongue, and having to actually say the words out loud was a hundred times harder.

'I'm sorry?' That didn't really cover it. 'I wasn't thinking about you when I said I wanted to leave?' That was half apology half insult. No good. 'I'm an asshole?' Well they knew that. 'You're awesome and I appreciate everything you do for me?' Just the word 'appreciate' was bound to piss them off, and didn't really cover what he was trying to say, either.

All he'd told the angels was he wanted to leave Hell. He didn't tell them he wanted to leave the girls behind. He didn't want to! He didn't...

“I would have taken you with me,” he said.

The girls looked up from their armor bits, and Jes raised a brow.

“What?” she asked, at the same time Dao clicked once.

“When I asked the angels if they could take me back to Heaven. I... I mean, I guess it can't work and it was stupid of me to think it. But, when I asked them, the image in my head was, if they agreed, that you and Dao and Caera would be coming with me? Or something like that?” Sighing, he stared down at the ground. “Like, for one second there, I pictured the angels holding out a hand to us. Not me. Us.” He threw up his hands. “Which I realize now was really stupid, because I'm guessing there's no way they'd take demons to Heaven. But... I didn't... I wouldn't...”

The two ladies stared at him. A peek back over his shoulder showed Caera had come closer and was staring at him, too. It took a few seconds, but Jes broke into a laugh, and shook her head hard enough her long hair tendrils bounced around.

“You're a fucking moron.”

Dao giggled, clicked and chirped, and gestured to David as she nodded.

“True,” Caera said. She prowled closer, and sat beside him, facing the other two demons. “I guess we were being stupid, thinking this little pipsqueak with a heart of gold would just... suddenly be a jackass.”

The girls all smiled at him. He squirmed, and blushed.

“I mean, I am a jackass, but...”

“But not by Hell standards,” Jes said. “Jesus fucking christ, David, you fucking... stupid...” No good. Jes leaned back and laughed some more, until Dao reached out and covered her mouth with some claws. Too loud. They were supposed to be hiding.

“You know we've only known you for a week, right?” Caera asked. “No need to get all dramatic and shit about it.”

“W-What? You got upset that I wanted to leave!”

The tiger shook her head. “I didn't get upset. Girls, did you get upset?”

Jes and Dao shook their heads.

David's jaw dropped, but before he could launch into a rant explaining in vivid detail the exact things they'd done that'd make even a socially blind person realize they were upset, Caera hugged him.

It hurt a bit, since she still had armor on, and the fact she had two-and-a-half feet of height on him. She was a big lady.

She didn't have him for long. After a few more chirps, Dao pulled him off Caera's lap and into a hug. She wasn't red and aroused, but at least she wasn't wearing armor, and she squashed his face against her huge breasts as she giggled and smiled down at him.

All he had to do to get them to stop being angry with him, was talk? Explain? Communicate? It took a lot of effort for him to do that on a good day. No wonder men and women argued so often.

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~~Mia~~

She couldn't ignore the discomfort anymore. Her stomach ached, her energy was low, and her limbs felt heavy. She needed food, or essence.

"Kas," she said. "I... need to eat something."

Her bodyguard snorted once, and clicked another. He stood by the door as always, and did his best to pretend to be a stone gargoyle. Part of her had hoped she'd wake up to him being closer, maybe crouched beside her, being all protective like a big dog, or maybe like a beastly lover who wanted to watch her while she slept?

Nope. Whatever weird fantasies Mia had running through her head, Kas wasn't picking up on any of them. Apparently her weird aura thing wasn't capable of something as complex as 'Kas you're kinda hot and took my anal virginity and made me love it and you protect me which is great but I'm not sure about you just yet so please kinda act like you like me but don't want to admit it and you don't want me to know you like me and also be very big and scary and hot and protect me some more'. Maybe she'd be better off asking Adron about Kas, to learn what sort of buttons he had to push. Then again, why was she so interested in seeing if Kas could fit into that Beauty and the Beast role?

Because he was absolutely fucking gorgeous, and big, and scary, and hot in a monster kinda way, and she was horny and it was clouding her damn fucking judgment! She slapped herself a few times — gently — before sitting up, and banished her stupid thoughts. Stop thinking about dumb romance shit. You're just running away from your current circumstances into a silly fantasy.

Current circumstances, as David would put it, were not good.

She got up, put on her silk toga thing, and walked over to Kas. Hannah and Adron weren't around, which left her alone with her asshole bodyguard, and that meant she had to be a bit careful with him. Not that Hannah and Adron would stop Kas if he decided to pounce Mia and do things to her, but Mia still felt a little more comfortable with them around. Now, it was just tiny her and a nine-foot-tall dinosaur dragon shark.

"Can you help me get something to eat?" she asked again.

"Humans don't need to eat often, unless injured."

She frowned as she looked down. "How often, usually?"

"Once a month."

"A month? It's been a week since I arrived. A week since Caera gave me a forbidden fruit. I haven't had any real injury, either. And... I'm starving." Groaning, she pat her belly a few times. "That's not good, is it?"

Kas clicked once, a heavy cluk sound in his throat, and shrugged.

She continued. "I mean, we know I'm not exactly normal. Unmarked, sure, and the aura thing is super not human, right? Maybe... Maybe using it is making me hungry?"

"Using our sin makes demons hungry."

"But I don't have that."

He shrugged again, and said nothing.

So she said nothing, folded her arms, and tapped her foot loud enough it made a quiet slap sound each time on the metal floor. And she added a good glare, too.

After a few moments, Kas sighed, grunted, and looked to the door.

"I'll go hunting, then."

She froze. "Hunting? W-Wait, I thought... I figured there'd be a way to get a fruit."

He shook his horned head. "There is no forbidden tree near the spire. Fruit are rare, and fought over."

"Demons don't find some and hide them?"

"Some do." He shrugged yet again. "I don't."

Right, right, because struggling to kill humans — or demons — for their heart probably wasn't something Kas needed to worry about, especially considering what his old job had been. How often did he eat the demons he policed and killed? Not as much lately, since he'd been guarding her.

“Are you getting hungry?” she asked.

He tilted his head like a curious dog as he — probably — looked at her.

“I... am.”

“Then, I guess we should go hunting.”

“You should stay here.”

She shook her head. “If I'm... going to eat something, I should see where it came from.”

After a heavy snort, he nodded, and gestured to the door. Time for a hunt, then.

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They didn't go on a hunt, not really. Once they were out her door, she realized there was no way Kas would take her out of the spire to go on a hunting trip. Zel didn't want her outside, or in any kind of danger. Even this little walk around the tower was probably more than Zel would appreciate. But, hey, if Mia was going to be Zel's 'pet', she had to get out and about a little bit, right? Or she'd go stir crazy. Zel wouldn't have given her a key, otherwise.

Adron and Hannah joined them. Scary strong as Kas was, there were too many demons in the spire, and every one of them looked at Mia like they wanted to eat or rape her. None of them looked at Hannah, despite the fact the betrayer wore absolutely nothing, and was absolutely gorgeous. Lean and mean, with a tight little butt and bigger breasts than Mia's, and short blond hair, Mia thought Hannah was prettier than her. If the demons did, too, she couldn't tell. Maybe they thought less of her because she was a betrayer, with 666 etched on her forehead. Maybe they only cared about Mia because she had nothing on her forehead. Whatever the reason, Adron walked behind, Kas walked in front, and more than once Kas pushed aside a curious tiger woman, or hulking brute like Diogo.

“No wonder Zel picked Kas,” Hannah said. “Everyone's looking at you like they're gonna jam a tongue up your cunt and then rip out your heart just to find out what it tastes like.”

Mia groaned. “Thanks. Maybe it's the clothes? Maybe I should... go naked, like you?”

Laughing, Hannah shook her head. “Nah. Everyone knows you’re Zel’s. Nothing to do with the clothes, I don’t think.” She pointed at her forehead. “More to do with this, and your lack of one, I’m guessing. It’s why Zel picked Kas. He’ll keep you safe.”

“You sure?”

“He’s killed hundreds, maybe thousands of demons in his lifetime. It’s what he’s good at.”

“Thousands?” Mia gulped as her eyes ran up and down the dinosaur’s spiky back. That was a lot of killing, over what must have been decades.

Kasimiro walked on all fours at the moment, which fit him well with his short-ish legs and long-ish, giant arms. Combined with the enormous torso and equally enormous tail, he really did move like some sort of dinosaur. Maybe she could ride him? He had a lot of spikes, but they were big and spread out, easy to sit between.

Maybe later.

“So, um, how does this usually work?” Mia asked. “Hunts, I mean.”

“We leave the spire,” Adron said. “Sometimes at night, sometimes during the day, but yeah usually we leave. All the humans in the spire are either claimed betrayers, claimed meals, or dead.”

“But...”

“But we’re not doing that today. We’re going to the dens.”

“The dens?”

He came up beside her. “Most demons live out in the different corners of Death’s Grip. Normally I’m with Diogo in the Gorzen Mountains, while Tacitus rules the Gazra Crag, and Domicela rules the Geeraz Tombs. Gotta spread out and keep the province under our rule, right? In case Alessio attacks again. In case anyone attacks again.” He gestured to the wall beside them, implying the Hell beyond it. They walked one of the balconies, following Kas to a big door nearby, and since they’d descended the tower a ways, they were maybe thirty or fifty feet below the ground.

“But a lot of demons live in the dens,” he continued, “young ones in particular. They guard the spire, keep the local soul and hellbeast population under control, but mostly they all stick around hoping to get on Zel’s good side.”

“Like you,” Mia said.

Adron grinned down at her and winked. “Like me. And Kas. And Diogo.”

“Speak of the devil,” Hannah said, nodding to the other side of the circular balcony.

Diogo. The giant devorjin brute, bigger than any other brute in the spire, stood with someone of equal height. A zotiva, a spire mother. She had a couple pieces of silk dangling around her shoulders, enough to cover her giant breasts, but not enough Mia didn't recognize the array of piercings, chains, and other jewelry. That was Acelina.

Hannah leaned in close to Mia. “How does she walk around with those things?”

Mia managed a slow shrug as she stared at the woman. Zel had an alien beauty to her, with her almost mask-like face, her slim physique, and her four arms. But Acelina and the other spire mothers were different, with their horrifying faces that lacked any features at all, pure obsidian blackness that only showed one thing: a big wide mouth full of very big very scary teeth, but only when they smiled. When they weren't smiling, it was like looking into a void.

She was strangely beautiful though, and the pure black head and her giant royal horns only added to it, almost like a woman wearing a mourning veil. Beautiful, and eerie. Of course, Acelina had a super tiny waist, long limbs, curvy legs with an ass to match, hoof feet that made her walk like she wore high heels, and naturally, ridiculously massive tits, each considerably bigger than her own head. Her tail was tiny, long and thin, not unlike a succubus or incubus tail, and basically didn't exist compared to her other proportions.

Diogo, in contrast, was a hulking brute of pure muscle with no spikes, no horns, no tail, nothing. His skull-like face and its small, angry eyes inside large eye sockets were terrifying in their own way. With Acelina, Mia thought the woman might cut her throat open at any moment. With Diogo, she felt like he might spontaneously erupt into a frothing-at-the-mouth rage, and crush her head like a grape.

Maybe that's why the two seemed interested in each other? Both were very mean people.

Maybe interested was the wrong word. They were yelling at each other. A lot of the noise was lost in the screams of nearby remnants, the roars of hungry demons fighting among themselves, and the fact Acelina and Diogo spoke with a lot of clicks. Not completely though, kinda like some Canadians Mia had met who slipped between English and French seamlessly.

Whatever they said, it ended with Diogo roaring at her like a tiger, Acelina shrieking at him like a banshee, and the two of them storming off away from each other. Diogo jumped up onto the balconies above, while Acelina went down, probably back to the hatching pit.

Apparently demons weren't immune to drama. Of course, for all Mia knew, that drama entailed who tried to kill whom, literally, rather than something silly like who was flirting with some other guy or girl.

"You said Diogo's on Zel's good side, Adron?" Mia asked. "I got the impression she didn't like him." Like Acelina, apparently.

"Ha. Yeah well, no one really likes Diogo, but he impressed her. When she did her rounds and checked out the Gorzen Mountains, she remembered him, and he'd done work. Only reason she didn't rip his head off for the trouble he caused at the Gorzen Eye." Shrugging, he slowed down a couple steps so he walked behind Mia and Hannah again. "Younger demons often stick around until they feel comfortable going out on their own, often with some ambition."

Mia laughed. "I have a hard time imagining Zel taking care of demons here, like some sort of... nursery babysitter. She feels more like a queen and army general, recruiting soldiers."

"Every demon in Death's Grip is in her army," Kas said, and he growled as he slowed his walk. "And they need to be brought in line."

After a heavy gulp, Mia followed Kas into the cave. Yet another hall, this one with walls of bone and stone. No metal, but there were plenty of amber veins along the rock walls, and as the hall grew larger and spread out, a few burning bushes appeared. As did remnants.

It was just like Diogo's HQ the Gorzen Eye, a huge cave, high walls, with big holes in them that led into tunnels. No metal cages dangled from chains, though. Instead, giant bone teeth grew from the walls and ceiling, some skewering remnants, and enormous rib bones covered the floor. Much as the spire seemed to have a consistent motif of metal, stones, flesh, and bones, it did seem to use them differently in different places, and the dens were no different.

Dozens of demons walked through the paths, and with the tunnels also being variously shaped, she got to see plenty of different kinds. Vrats like Adron, bat ladies who had wings attached to the undersides of their arms like bats did, gargoyle ladies, tiger ladies, big brute boys like Diogo, a couple satyr ladies who chirped and clicked, and a few minotaur boys. The minotaurs were very brutish, with big horns and big long tails, and the same proportions as brutes, but they walked hunched forward with lumbering movement.

A few had betrayers with them, men and women, all in great shape. If Hannah was right, anyone not in great shape either quickly got in good shape to survive Hell, or didn't survive.



Wait. They were going to get food. Why come to the dens? Maybe some demons had some fruit hidden? Or... Mia forced down the rising panic surging through her, and looked around at the nearby demons as they all set eyes on her.

So many alcoves, a sprawling network of tunnels, with dozens, maybe hundreds of remnants growing from and trapped between the stones. They squealed and screamed, and Mia looked away as a group of imps and grems, maybe ten, swarmed over a bunch of remnants and ripped them apart. Blood and guts and bones rained onto the stones. No one cared.

“What’s this?” a stranger said. A demon approached, a big brute almost as big as Diogo. If Kas stood up straight, he might be a few inches taller, but Kas remained in his comfortable half crouched half squatted position, one hand to the floor, one forearm resting on a knee.

“Darrilius,” Kas said, a quiet growl rumbling through his throat.

Mia looked around at the nearby demons. Kas and them were in a big room, with a dozen tunnels connecting, some at ground height, some above. Each filled with demons of various sizes, more and more gathering, every one with interested eyes — if they had eyes.

A vrat joined Darrilius’s side, and then a tiger woman. They grinned as they met eyes with Kas’s eyeless shark face, and they licked their teeth with the same sort of innate hunger all demons seemed to have all the time. The tiger and vrat wore bits of black armor and leather, and carried more than a few scars. The brute had scars, but with skin that dark and thick, he didn’t bother with the armor.

“Kasimiro, come to join us down in the dens?” The brute snorted on a chuckle, and looked to Mia. “And the unmarked girl comes, too. Why’s that?”

Mia opened her mouth, but a quick tap of Kas’s tail on the ground shut her up.

“Fixing a problem.”

“Ha, a problem? You Lilith fucker.” The brute made fists and punched his palms. Those were some big muscles, on a big scary body. Brutes were the most human shaped of the demons except for the incubi and succubi, but their bodies had weird indents and protrusions along the muscles and bones, making them look a little more monster-y than the other demons. And like they were always in the mood for a brawl.

The atmosphere changed. Heat pulsed through it, and Mia’s skin broke out in goosebumps as she took a small step back. Adron nudged her butt with his tail, but when she glanced up and back at him, his eyes were on the nearby demons, his usual grin gone. Hannah’s hands tightened into fists. Demon talons gently scratched the stone ground as they flexed, ready to brace for a pounce.

Darrilius was using his sin aura. All the times Mia had felt the effects of an aura, it was sexual, but this aura surged through her and lit her insides on fire. Adrenaline pumped through her, her breathing and heart rate quickened, and she clenched her teeth together as she looked at the brute. An aura of violence. It was enough to have her looking for a weapon she could use to bash in some skulls. Her fear faded, replaced with more heat, and mental images of her biting into a demon's neck while she clawed out their eyes. She wanted to rip out skulls. She wanted to break bones. She wanted to fight. And more than just her, but every nearby demon in the cave looked ready for a fight.

Kas thudded his tail against the rock. "I told you if you stepped out of line again, I'd make you pay."

The brute came forward and glared down at Kas. His two buddies came up, too.

"I don't owe you anything."

Kas growled and clicked a couple times, less like a dolphin and more like a crocodile clucking their tongue.

"You killed two demons," Kas said.

"So?"

"You know the rules."

Darrilius shrugged. "They attacked me. I defended myself."

"You have no proof of that."

"And you have no proof I attacked them first."

The shark shook his head, and his long, big horns almost hit Darrilius in the stomach.

"Seven other demons fingered you," Kas said, and he gestured to the group watching using his giant tail. "Considering your history, good enough for me."

That crossed a line. Darrilius snarled, and snarl turned into roar. He leaned forward and unleashed a wave of sound that almost knocked Mia over as it crashed into her, a roar that shook the walls and every demon and human in the cave. But it was his vratorin and tregeera friends that dove forward, past the big brute, and straight at Kas.

Kas didn't flinch, not to the roar, and not to the pouncing demons. The tiger lady was the fastest, and the first to die. Without even a grunt of exertion, Kas twisted his shark head and slammed it straight

forward, directly at the leaping tiger. One of his horns pierced her open mouth, and went through the back of her skull. She twitched a few times, and died.

The vrat managed to reach Kas, but Kas was already in the motion of charging forward and standing up. Darrilius backed off enough to avoid the other horn, and the vrat jumping toward Kas didn't have any horns pointed at him. But Kas lifted up his closer arm at the same time, and the vrat crashed into an open palm throat first.

Then Kas stood up.

Darrilius stepped back again, growling and snarling, but hesitating. The dinosaur in front of him came up to his full height, and he was taller than even Mia guessed, almost reaching Zel's height as he straightened out. He held the vrat in his left hand at arm's length, and the seven-foot demon grasped Kas's much thicker wrist in desperation as Kas tightened his grip. Tighter, and tighter, until a quiet, muted crack filled the sudden silence.

The vrat dangling in his raised hand went limp. The tiger demon dangling from his horn already was, the talons of her feet not able to reach the floor. Kas rumbled in his chest and throat, and stood there, saying and doing nothing, as the vrat's talons twitched a few times in his final moments. The tiger lady's open mouth soaked Kas's huge horn in blood. The only reason blood didn't pour out of her like a flood was her heart had stopped, and the gravity kept it inside below the wound.

Kas let the now dead vratorin fall. Adron snorted, and pulled Mia and Hannah back and away. A vratorin like Adron, a bit smaller, but still, vrats weren't exactly helpless, humanoids with tails, raptor feet, and a pair of horns. Kas had killed him almost instantly. And the tiger lady was even bigger, stronger, heavier, and Kas stood there with her corpse hanging off him like she weighed nothing.

After a few more quiet seconds, he pushed her corpse off. The eight-foot creature landed with a much heavier thud than the vrat. With another growl, Kas took a step forward toward the brute, and Mia half squinted as she braced for more violence. But she didn't close her eyes, because whoever was pushing out that aura had her wanting to see more.

For all Darrilius's sudden hesitation, he threw himself at Kas anyway, undeterred by the death of his companions. That made no sense. Kas had brutally proven his complete and total superiority, at least where physical violence was concerned, but the huge brute didn't seem to care. If anything, the hesitation was just time for him to find an opening.

He found one. Kas eventually leaned forward, and adopted his usual, more dinosaur posture. That was when Darrilius struck out, standing up tall and slamming both fists down like hammers, straight for

Kas's shoulders. That was a lot of meat, hundreds of pounds of muscles and flesh and bone. Maybe Kas had expected the brute to hesitate longer, because Darrilius didn't miss.

Heavy as Kas was, even bigger and heavier than the brute, the hit was enough to push him down, but Kas was comfortable on all fours. His giant arms braced against the stone, and he threw himself forward, straight into the brute's guts. Darrilius managed to angle himself back enough Kas didn't skewer him with his horns, but Kas was the bigger demon. The fight quickly shifted from a matter of reflexes and skill, to a savage brawl on the ground.

Kas started on top. The air filled with roars and screams of pain and rage as the two huge monsters tore into each other. Darrilius had short enough claws he could make fists, and he used them, cracking the dinosaur in the jaw, before grabbing his neck and pulling him tight. He was trying to roll on top, and using his more human-like proportions to do it.

But Kas didn't let him. He opened his mouth wide, wider than someone with a more human-shaped head like Darrilius could. Teeth found the brute's neck, and just as Darrilius managed to roll Kas over, the dinosaur bit down. The wrestling quickly turned into a desperate attempt from the brute to dislodge himself from Kas, but just like a crocodile, Kas's bite was firm. And his strength was immense.

Everyone held their breath as the brute beat his fists down on Kas, but Kas held on. More than held on, he got his hands between him and the brute, and pushed with all his might, even as the brute grabbed onto Kas's horns and tried to hold on. But he couldn't. Kas was stronger, and he pushed and pushed, each inch between them a struggle, each inch earning roars of pain from Darrilius as his throat tore apart.

Mia wanted to look away, but the aura was everywhere. Violence. Rip and tear. Stab. Break. Don't stop until the blood flows. The aura poured over the room, and she couldn't tell who it was coming from no matter how hard she tried. It wasn't coming just from Darrilius anymore. It was coming from everyone. All the demons, the several dozen small ones perched on high tunnels, others on the ground floor, every one of them released small vibrations in the nether that flowed into Mia, each a small thing but almost overwhelming combined like that.

Kas pushed the brute's body off him and stood up, a huge chunk of flesh and dark skin dangling from his mouth and bleeding everywhere. Darrilius lay on the floor, one hand clutching where his throat used to be, the other clawing at Kas's leg. Even a dying, gargling mess, the brute managed to strike Kas's leg hard enough to draw blood, and the dinosaur had to step away before Darrilius drew any more.

Kas spit the meat out, growled down at the dying, dying, dead brute, before turning toward the rest of the group.

“I claim kill rights,” he said. “I’ll be taking their things. And if any of you want revenge, you know Zel’s rule. Duel me. Now get out of my sight.” With another rumble, he slammed his giant tail down.

Like someone poured ice water on everyone, the aura of violence died. The demons all crept away into their many tunnels of rock and bone, more than a few with lingering eyes, staring at the blood and corpses. Every one of them took a second look at Kas before they disappeared.

They were afraid of him.

“Good job Kas,” Adron said, and he gave Hannah and Mia both a quick pat on their shoulders before he joined his friend.

“You could have helped. They had no right to attack me like that, three on one.”

“True, true.” The vrat nodded, and looked back at Mia and Hannah for a quick wink. “But I had to keep an eye on the girls, keep them safe. Besiiiiides, you were fine, and I knew you were capable.”

With a heavy grunt, Kas got down on all fours, and ripped open the brute’s chest. A gory bloodfest, full of cracking bones and tearing skin. Adron got started on his fellow vrat, which was all sorts of weird to watch, the vrat ripping open the chest of an almost identical demon; was it speciest to think demons of the same kind looked really similar? He wasn’t as fast, or as brutal as Kas though, and Kas moved onto ripping the armor off and heart out of the tiger lady next. His already bloody body now wore a crimson dress.

Growling to no one but himself, Kas put the brute’s huge heart into his mouth, and ate it with all the fanfare of a crocodile. Chomp chomp swallow, no chewing, nothing. His big throat bulged with the giant chunk of meat as it went down his gullet, and Mia touched her much, much tinier throat in response. Good god.

Kas handed Adron the other heart, and got moving deep into the dens. They followed, stepping over the corpses. A few clicks and chirps announced the arrival of imps and grems, ready to snack on the corpses for trace resonance in the bodies. They’d probably keep some of the bones, too, for trophies. Why didn’t Kas?

Mia and Hannah stayed nice and close to Kas’s tail, and peeked left and right at the observing demons. Kas’s demonstration had left an impression, and many disappeared into tunnels and alcoves when they spotted him.

“Where we going?” Mia asked.

Adron munched on the tiger heart, and casually handed her the vrat’s heart. A big hunk of bloody muscle, weighty in her hand. There was no eating this thing easily, not unless she cut it into little bits. Judging from how demons and even betrayers ate hearts, using a fork and knife was not an option.

“Kas claimed kill rights,” Adron said, “so we’re going to see what they have worth taking. Not sure why those idiots picked a fight, though.”

“Darrilius brought trouble wherever he went,” Kas said. “It was only a matter of time before his ego got the best of him.” Kas didn’t normally use long sentences. The only reason he used words at all was for Mia and Hannah’s benefit. Maybe he was the sort of guy who liked talking about his job, or liked talking about ripping demons apart. He was friends with Adron, so maybe they found something to talk about that way, like work buddies. But, far as Mia could tell, Kas just preferred not talking at all.

“Eat,” Hannah said, gesturing to Mia’s meal.

“I uh... I think... I’ll wait, until I’m back in my room.”

“Suit yourself. I’m still fine from that heart a week ago, but I wouldn’t mind a bite.”

Mia smiled. Hannah had a bluntness to her David would have liked.

The tunnel continued on, weaving left and right, sometimes going up sometimes going down, breaking into forks that Kas knew how to navigate. After a minute, he stepped into an alcove big enough for a few demons, and waited for the rest of them.

“I doubt Darrilius had anything,” Adron said. “Bunch of trophies. Typical.” He gestured around at the skulls everywhere. No blankets or anything comfy, just bones, bones, more bones, and skulls, all probably from kills. One giant bone grew out of the wall, one of Hell’s, and from it dangled some pieces of armor, more dented and scratched black plates with leather straps.

Kas shook his head as he sat down in his dog-like pose, hands down on the ground between his knees, arms straight, and his bassy rumble echoed through the cave.

“That moron,” Kas said, and he swiped his tail into the pile of skulls someone had probably spent many hours perfectly stacking. He wasn’t gentle. Bones cracked and shattered, only to shatter twice over when they hit the wall.

Mia and Hannah both stepped back, and both looked to Adron with raised eyebrows. The vrat nodded, and gently stepped between the girls and the big angry shark dinosaur.

“Didn’t expect you to get so upset about killing Darrilius. Or was it Emalei and Fulvio?”

Kas shook his head again, slow and subtle motions, but his muscles flexed and his claws grated on the rock. Judging from the way his jaw flexed, he'd be grinding his teeth together if they weren't big and pointy and interlocked, like a crocodile's teeth.

"It's nothing," Kas said, pretty much waving a big flag over his head saying it very much wasn't nothing.

Adron wiped off some of the blood on his hands from his meal, and looked around at the cave some more. Nothing but the bones of the dead, probably all kills Darrilius and his two buddies racked up. Plenty of them were demons, some weren't.

"Nothing. Mhmm." Adron looked back at Mia and Hannah, rolled his eyes, and gestured down at the bones. "Was it because of those demons Darrilius killed? You never told me their names."

Kas didn't respond, but didn't tighten up either. Those other dead demons weren't the reason.

"It doesn't matter," Kas said after a few more seconds of uneasy silence. "Let's head back." He stood up on all fours again, and waited until everyone else was out of the room. Only when they were clear did the shark dinosaur spin his body halfway, and swing his tail around hard enough it destroyed every trophy bone in the cave. Bits of white exploded like a shattered porcelain pot, hundreds of pieces that hit the stone ground so smoothly it almost sounded like rain.

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"I... didn't expect the hunt to go that way," Mia said. "I thought, I mean... I guess I didn't think."

Up on the raised side of her bedroom, with the big table and chairs, she sat on the huge table, legs dangling, uneaten heart sitting beside her. Adron sat in one of the bone chairs. Hannah stood by the closed window, and peeked through its teeth out at the fire sky. Kas sat in his usual semi-crouched position, this time on the ramp near the table. Even without eyes, it was easy to see he was angry about something.

The uneasy silence returned. She hated those. Time to fix it.

"I should have stayed here," she said. "I... kinda expected you to resist when I said I wanted to come, Kas. You could have told me to stay. You could have gone on one of your usual hunts, instead of... whatever that was."

She braced for a roar or angry comment from her bodyguard, but none came. The eyeless dinosaur did not move, did not respond, only crouched nearby, and licked a single fang to wipe some of the blood away. It'd be a while before Hell herself absorbed it, leaving everyone with bloody hands and limbs for a few hours or more, but considering Mia had literally walked through entrails on her first day in Hell, a little blood barely registered.

“Kas is one of Zel’s enforcers,” Adron said. “She has others, but Kas has been doing this for a while, and he’s good at it. There’s a lot of demons he knows are good for killing, and make for a source of food when needed.”

“Good for killing?” Mia asked.

“Yeah. Darrilius and his friends are just a few of the dozens of demons in the spire alone who are trying to weasel their way up the ladder.”

“Really? You don’t go... I don’t know, arrest them or something?”

Adron laughed. “The only people who get arrested are people Zel plans to torture so she can learn something. And right now there’s no one she’s concerned about. The bailiffs are doing their thing. No one here in tower is a threat to her.”

“But you just said—”

“Not a threat, and useful. Keep your enemies close, and all that. And it helps the demons in the tower hone our skills.” Adron gestured toward Kas. “Be it physical skill and strength.” He gestured to himself. “Or a good eye, ear, and a smart mouth.”

“Smart mouth,” Hannah said, nodding casually without looking away from the window.

Nodding, Mia looked back down the ramp of the raised area, down to Kas again. With the way his head was aimed, he was probably staring off at nothing, and maybe thinking about stuff. He had acted a little odd, after the fight, more closed off than usual, and for someone as naturally closed-off as Kas, that was pretty much becoming a statue. And in typical stoic man fashion, he wasn’t going to tell them what was bothering him.

“Mia, eat,” Hannah said.

“Oh, right.” Mia picked the heart up, and spent far too long holding it in her palm. Far as she could tell, it looked like a heart, fleshy and firm and still wet, and a bit bigger than a human’s. It smelled like blood, uncooked meat, and... something else. “Do I have to?”



“Zel will have our heads if you don’t,” Adron said. “Besides, Kas risked his life for you. You wouldn’t want that to have gone to waste, right?”

Oh that bastard. Adron gave her one of his playful grins, and she returned it with her best frown, but it was useless. The demon was impervious to her glare, and gestured at the heart in her hands. It felt all too similar to the fruit Caera had give her a week ago. Or rather, the fruit had felt all too similar to the chunk of bloody flesh now in her hand.

A week. All of this had happened in a week. Was David even still alive, or at least as alive as someone could be in the afterlife? Did he have the same strange abilities she did?

Sighing, she closed her eyes, and took a bite. The disgust of biting into a raw heart, a demon heart at that, lasted only a few seconds before the same delicious taste and tingling warmth of the forbidden fruit hit her. It tasted good. Why did it have to taste good? Groaning, she chewed the heart, and it broke under her teeth like a nice piece of meat cooked in a slow cooker all day. It was too damn good.

She swallowed it down, and white and red flashed in her eyes. She froze, sucked in a hard breath, and grabbed the table edge with her free hand. More lights cut through her eyes. The table underneath her disappeared. The heart in her hand, the people in her room, the room itself, it all vanished.

Violence. Teeth. Sharp teeth, biting flesh. Hands, ripping and tearing. Horns, skewering.

Sex. An enormous cock, plunging into women, some human, some demon. Screaming, mewls, whimpers, pleasure or terror, Mia couldn’t tell. Chaos.

Names. Fulvio, and friends Darrilius and Emalei. More violence. Mia’s eyes, Fulvio’s eyes, staring out at her—as his big hands reached out and killed. And killed. And killed.

And then it was gone. Her room came back, along with the people in it. Adron and Hannah both stared at her, Kas had his head pointed at her, and all of them held their breath as they watched and waited.

“Uh...” Mia stared down at the heart. It was a big thing, with plenty of bites left, and now it felt a thousand times heavier. “I... I uh...” Slowly, she looked to the others, waiting for the ‘yeah yeah that happens every time’ speech. But they didn’t say a thing. “Why’s everyone staring at me?”

“That was a pretty weird reaction,” Hannah said. “Your eyes went wide and you froze. You okay?”

“Yeah, I think so. But holy shit, those images were visceral. Thought I really was Fulvio for a second there.”

Hannah blinked, looked to Adron, who also blinked, and they both looked to Kas, who might as well have blinked with the way he tilted his head.

“Images?” Adron asked.

“Yeah. Yeah you... you... don’t see images when you eat a heart, do you?”

“No. No one does.” He leaned in closer. “Do tell.”

Oh no, not another thing on her list of quirks. She looked back down at the heart, half expecting it to explode in her palm, or ooze new blood, or maybe start talking. But, nope, it was just a hunk of meat that had sent weird images through her brain.

“I saw... I saw things, through someone else’s eyes. Fulvio’s, I think...” She put the heart down, and picked it back up. Put it down. Picked it back up, and put it down. David would have probably taken another bite, determined to understand and figure out what happened. She was fucking terrified.

Kas clicked once, and sauntered up the ramp to stand closer to her.

“Unusual,” he said.

“Very,” Adron said. “No one sees things when they eat hearts, Mia. Demons absorb the resonance. Humans absorb the essence. That’s it.” Adron took her hand, scooped the heart up like it hadn’t just assaulted her with visions of violence and sex, and set it in her palm. “You seem fine, though. Keep eating, see what happens?”

“Keep eating...” Easier said than done. “You know if something bad happens to me, like, if I die or something, I’m going to blame you, right? And Zel will put you out on one of those spikes outside?”

That did give Adron pause, for a whole two seconds, before he shrugged.

“No risk no reward.”

After a very exaggerated eye roll, she lifted the heart up to her mouth, and bit into it again. She swallowed the meat down, and sure enough, more images flooded her. Fangs. Claws. Talons. Bones breaking. Skin tearing. Rape.

And then it was gone. Like watching a scary movie, the images hit her, poured over her eyes from the inside, and then fled. She took another bite. The images grew brighter, there were more of them, and they zipped through her mind with speed and power. For just a fraction of a second, she knew what it was like to rip open someone’s chest. For a whole half a second, she knew what it felt like to have a giant dick, and use it to stretch open what looked like a gremla’s comparatively very tiny slit. For a whole second, she knew—

Blackness pulled her down.

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Her eyes snapped open. She sat up with a jolt, flung herself to the side, and her forehead nearly collided with Hannah's.

"Oh thank fucking god," Hannah said, hand to her chest. "Fucking christ you scared the shit out of me. Twice."

"What happened?" Mia tried to push herself off the table she was sitting on, except, she wasn't on the table anymore. Stumbling while sitting was a first, and the only reason she didn't crack her lip falling over was her pile of blankets she was apparently sitting on.

Adron and Kas stood over her. The shark demon took a slow, deep breath, and lowered himself into his usual crouch, while Adron sighed relief as he squatted down in front of her.

"You fainted," Adron said. "About ten minutes ago. We were about ready to go get Zel." He tapped his horn with a claw. "You had me worried you were right, and Zel was going to rip me a new one."

"I fainted? I..." She licked her lips. The taste of the heart was still there, but no more visions hit her. The memories were still there, though, someone else's memories, separate from her own but accessible. "I guess the strange images I was seeing... overloaded my brain?"

"Mia," Hannah said, "we're in the afterlife. I don't think neurology is going to explain shit."

"Well I don't know! All I know is, I ate most of that demon heart, I'm no longer hungry, and each time I gulped a bit down I saw visions of things the demon had done."

"I took a bite," Hannah said, shrugging. "I didn't see any visions."

"Visions of things Fulvio had done? What kind of things?" Adron asked.

"What kind? I... I guess anything that was... intense? I saw a lot of sex, and a lot of violence."

Hannah leaned back in. "Saw it?"

"Saw it. Felt it. It's... weird. It's like someone recorded memories in my skull, but... put them in a book and set them aside. Like, I can remember what I saw, but they don't feel like my memories."

"Something to tell Zel, then," Adron said. "She wants to know everything she can about you."

“I guess, yeah.” Another thing for Zel, another thing to haunt Mia. She wasn’t human. That was terrifying.

She held up her hand in front of her, the one that’d held the big demon heart, and she squeezed it experimentally. Those were some disturbing memories, and thank god whatever made her special could also put the memories in a box off to the side in her mind. And she did it without thinking about it, like a reflex, like something she just knew how to do as easy as flexing her fingers. Just like how she knew how to read the ancient language.

She felt good, too. Not hungry anymore, feeling alive, feeling... powerful.

“I can feel that,” Adron said, and he grinned as his tail came around and poked her in the sternum. “Your aura, I mean. Just a little tingle, but it feels... I don’t know. Feels good.”

“It does,” Mia said, and she squeezed her hand into a fist. She felt really good.