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"Yeah really. You probably didn't get along with people much, did you?"

Jes pulled no punches. The fact she was a demon and talked to him like she knew humans intimately made it very weird, and every time she opened her mouth, he was surprised by how familiar the way she talked sounded. For just a single, weird second, he thought he was being teased by one of the girls he worked with in class in university.

He was tempted to make a jab about her watching the scrying pool too much.

"No. I didn't."

"Course not, cocky ass. You think humans like talking straight? Humans, at least the ones who end up here, are almost always lying, sniveling little shits who can't go three seconds without trying to trick other people, and more often, themselves. Bunch of cowards." Laughing again, she gave him a gentle headbutt with her forehead, and took lead of their little hiking group again. "You seem like you're honest with yourself. Demons are honest with themselves. Humans aren't."

He smiled after her, watching her tail sway from side to side. Okay, so, Jes and Dao weren't smart, but maybe they were wise? He never subscribed to the whole intelligence versus wisdom thing, but maybe he should have.

"You and Mia would get along," he said.

"Why's that?"

"She wanted to be a psychologist. Figure people out. Help them." And unlike him, Mia had no trouble wearing her empathy openly. David had lots of empathy, and it made him uncomfortable as hell. He was happier keeping it inside, in a nice box only he could open.

Mia was right. He could not stop analyzing shit, his own thoughts included.

"Hell could use a few shrinks," Jeskura said. "Lots of fucked up demons down here that could use a little help."

He laughed. "For a second, I thought you were gonna say she could help the souls down here. I... I keep forgetting where I am."

"I'd say you'll get used to it, but most fresh meat are dead in the first day, or only last a few weeks. Some can go a few months. Betrayers can go decades."

"Before they die of old age?"

She grinned back at him. "Nobody ages in the afterlife, fresh meat."

~~~~~(w)@w.n0v6Lw6R(m).com

Beads of sweat dripped down his body, and he ignored them. The heat of Hell was relentless, and the breeze did nothing to settle it, but it never crossed the point of too hot. Uncomfortable, but not unlivable. He expected to reek with all the sweat eventually, but it didn't happen, either. All he could smell, was hints of rock, fire, and minerals on the breeze, and he was pretty sure the mineral smell was blood. @w @.n0v6Lw6R(m).com

Jes and Dao didn't sweat a drop.

The closer they got to the Gorzen Eye cave, the more demons there were, and it wasn't long before David gave up on trying to study Hell. Every moment, every step, his eyes snapped around to the various boulders, ditches, and jagged small mountains and ravines that decorated their path, scanning for movement. Supposedly, deeper in the valley, there was a big cave, Gorzen Eye, where Diogo and hundreds of the demons in this part of Death's Grip, Gorzen Mountains, called home.

Who the fuck was Gorzen? Jes didn't know. Neither did Daoka. Jes said to ask Caera, which of course led to him asking who that was, and her just laughing and telling him he'd meet her later. Why was the mountain they'd just left called Adam's Back? Why was the river the portal had dropped him off over called Adam's Blood? Ask Caera, she might know. Who the fuck was Caera!

Jes and Dao crouched low, and he crouched doubly low. If they were worried about the path ahead, it was probably a good idea he'd be doubly worried. He only poked his head up enough to get a glimpse over the rocks, and spot the demons moving in the distance. Lots of imps and grems flying through the air, clicking and screeching. No, not flying. Gliding. They climbed the cliffs and threw themselves off before opening their wings and catching the air, and did enormous circles in the sky.

David crouched lower. Maybe his red hair and freckles would blend him into the environment? A lot of the stones were black, but a lot of them were also red, or stained red by blood, hard to tell. Not many glowing amber veins were out there either, so as long David stayed close to rocks, he wouldn't be easy to spot.

The air shimmered with heat, blurring things, hopefully enough to make it harder to spot them.

Dao and Jes never looked up.

"Are we not avoiding imps and grems?" he asked.

Dao shook her head, clicking as she gestured to herself and Jes.

"Yeah, imps and grems aren't much of a worry," Jes said. "Just a bunch of chatterboxes only interested in spotting a meal. They don't listen to orders. Usually."

"They don't?"(w)W.n0v6Lw6R(m).Com

"Nah. They're like squirrels."

"Squ--right, the scrying pools."

She grinned back at him. "Ever try and train a squirrel army and make it do your bidding?"wuw.n0V@()@6rM.com

"No one's ever tried that. I think."

"Same thing. Best you can really get with imps and grems is coexistence. They do their own thing. And for some reason, Hell births more of them the more you kill." She shrugged, still crouching low and still heading down the valley.

"Hell births?"

"Jesus christ you never stop."

"Nope."

She laughed, quieter than usual, and grinned back at him before looking back up at the sky.

"Just, don't make any loud noises. I know this path well, and the demons who stay in Gorzen Eye don't usually take it."

"What about other demons?"

"Oh other demons take it all the time." She smirked. Sarcasm? He had no idea. "Dao will protect you while I'm gone. Unless it's a tregeera or devorjin, then she'll take you to safety."

He breathed deep, wiped the sweat from his brow, and--

"Wait. Jesus Christ. Did he exist?"

"Fuck me I don't know, fresh meat. Ask Caera. The only human I know of that was in the bible and in Hell was Cain, and nobody's seen him in fucking forever, long before I hatched."

"How long ago was that?" he asked, a billion questions rapid firing in his head. She eyed him, and snapped him in the thigh with her tail. "Ow! Hey!"

"Never ask a woman her age!"

"I... I... what the fuck?"

Daoka burst into laughter, failing to keep it suppressed, before slipping an arm around his shoulders and hugging him to her side again. He didn't mind.

Jes laughed too, of course.

"Hard to count the years down here, fresh meat. We don't have seasons."

"Oh. No way to count the years?"

"Just the scrying pools, or literally counting the days if you care enough. Most demons don't bother. But I must have been, I dunno, a few hundred days old when I saw my first scrying pool. That was the 60s, on the surface."