

## 1141

~~David~~

He woke up in a cave. That was happening a lot. What wasn't happening a lot was doing that in the middle of the day, when the fire sky burned bright and even the depths of caves got some reflected light in them. Their cave wasn't all that deep, and even with the sky out of sight around its curving insides, the amber lights didn't have to fight hard to keep it well lit with all the ambient light. It felt weird waking up in the middle of the day in Hell, like waking up after a nap gone wrong in the real world.

Groaning, he pushed himself up to sitting. Tried to, anyway. Dao gently pushed his head back down, right onto her lap, and he blinked up at the eyeless demon as she smiled down at him. Her claws combed through his shaggy red hair, her other hand against his chest beside the half breastplate. She clicked at him a few times. Stay down.

"Feeling okay?" Caera asked. "We weren't sure you were gonna wake up." She lay a few feet away, long body aimed at the cave path out, but she turned her head to face him.

"I... yeah, I feel fine. How long was I out?"

"About an hour," Jes said. She sat beside Dao, and grinned down at him as she poked his forehead with a claw. "Wanna explain?"

"Explain?" He tried to sit up again. No go. Clicking softly, Dao shook her head as she pushed him back down.

"Yeah, explain," the gargoyle said. "You're unmarked. You have an aura--that Caera says changed for a second when you were fighting by the way. A giant invisible... thing, is out to kill you. You can read the ancient language no one can read, not even spire rulers. And apparently you pass out when eating human hearts?"

He blinked. Right, the human heart. Right, the flood of memories that hit him when the person's flesh... the person's resonance, had hit him.

"Caera," he said, turning his head to look at her, "you... said humans can't absorb resonance, right?"

"Only demons can absorb resonance. We turn it into essence, the fuel we -- and you -- use to do stuff."

"Like a digestive tract turning food into fuel for our bodies to burn off. [Ww.nov\(1\)w0rm.c0M](#)

She shrugged. "Close enough. But like I said, humans can't absorb resonance. You have your own resonance that you can never burn, so you need essence directly, which hearts have a lot of, too." After a big stretch that forced him to suppress the urge to say 'ooh big stretch', Caera sat up. "What's that go to do with you passing out?"

"You... fed me the heart of the woman I killed, didn't you?"

She raised a brow, and prowled closer. "How'd you know that?"

Fuck. Fucking fuck fucking fuckity fuck. Why? Why was all this weird shit happening to him? The fuck did he do? He was just a regular guy!

Apparently not.

"I saw... her sins, I guess. Took me so off guard, I guess I fainted. Fainted pretty hard, if it took me an hour to wake up."

The demons all blinked. Even Dao somehow managed it, despite the lack of eyes, and she clicked a few times, high pitched but soft.

"I don't know," he said. "I ate the heart Caera gave me, and then I was... I was her. The woman. I pushed someone into traffic. I saw some quick flashes of other things, too, other things she did. Noises. Scents and tastes. I remember what the person's shoulder felt like." He closed his eyes. "I'm guessing demons don't experience that when they eat the hearts of people, or demons."

"Uh, no, they don't," Caera said. From the sound of her voice, she'd leaned in and was now examining him from up close. He kept his eyes closed, and tried to focus on Dao's fingers combing his hair and caressing his head. "You're really not human."

"I'm starting to believe you. [wWw.NoVeWorm.com](#)

"That is pretty fucking weird," Jes said. "That... I mean, that does sound like you absorbed something about her. But even if you absorbed her resonance, that wouldn't make you see her past. Jesus fucking christ, why are you so... unique? What's going on? [wWw.NO©\(1\)W0rM.Com](#)

All he could say to that, was nothing. He just shrugged. Had he absorbed the woman's resonance, the thing about her that determined whether she went to Heaven or Hell? Considering the flashes had obviously been some of the really shitty things she'd done in her life, that made a little sense. Something about him allowed him to see why their resonance was the way it was? But humans didn't absorb resonance!

Fuck. Another nail in that coffin. He wasn't human. Double fuck.

"I don't have a clue," Caera said. "I've never read about anything like this. I mean, maybe there are runes in the deepest places in the spires that might know more? Or maybe at False Gate or the Forgotten Place?"

He opened his eyes. "Why those places?"

"Lots of old, important shit deep in the spires I've never seen, so who knows about those places. The Old Ones and Lucifer also did a lot of their shit in the Forgotten Place and False Gate. They were important places. False Gate for the vortex, but no one knows much about the Forgotten Place."

"Lucifer? The Old Ones? What do they have to do with me?"

"Fuck me, I don't know. But this is some weird shit, David, like breaking all the rules of Hell and Heaven weird shit. If anyone has any idea about what's going on, it's the Old Ones and Lucifer. And far as anyone knows, they're dead. The only idea I have, is maybe some of the lower areas of spires we're not allowed to go to, or False Gate or the Forgotten Place. Maybe they wrote something down, something... only you, and probably your sister, can read."

"That's a pretty wild shot in the dark."

"Got a better idea?"

He took a deep breath. "Then I guess when I get Mia, that's where I'm going."

Caera snorted. "I told you I've never entered the False Gate province, David. I like being alive. And no one knows how to cross the sea to the Forgotten Place. Not anymore."

"Then I guess I got a lot of work ahead of me." He pushed against the ground. The tone of his voice probably told Dao to let him up, and she did. He smiled at her. "'Cause, I mean, you're right. A lot of crazy shit is happening and I don't understand any of it and... and... I can't have that."

Jes raised a wing claw. "Can't have that?"

"Can't have that. I can't not know. Something is going on with me, and I can't not know. This has to do with how I died, right? The strange way I died, the strange thing that happened at the Gate of Heaven, the strange... everything! Something's happening, and I have to know! I have to figure out what's going on, so things can make sense!"

They slowly looked between each other before him again, Caera and Jes with raised eyebrows like he was a crazy person.

"David," Caera said. "You--" [Ww.NoVeWorm.coM](#)

"You can't tell me you don't want to know. You made me eat that heart to keep me alive at all costs, remember? You're desperate to read more of those runes."

"Not so desperate I'll die for it."

He squinted at her. She squinted right back.