

## 1180

They all collapsed inside their little cave. It was a decent hiding spot, out of the way, somewhat deep between two mountains, and in their shadow. No one would notice it unless they came through the ravine randomly, like David and them had after the invisible monster attack. No sign of any demon activity yet, or giant invisible monsters, or Cainites, down in the little canyon. They felt safe in the cave, a little, enough they all pressed their backs to the back wall inside around the curve, out of view of the entrance.

"Holy fucking shit what the fuck was that," David asked.

"The rider," Jes said.

"I meant that... that... aura."

Caera managed to push off the wall, and lay on her stomach in front of the three of them, perpendicular.

"There's not much information out there about the rider, David. He's a ghost story demons like to tell each other sometimes, when sitting around a burning bush. No one knows shit about him. No one knows where he came from, why he does what he does, where he goes, what he's up to, nothing. He just shows up, and everything goes to shit. He slaughters demons, and moves on."

Dao clicked a few times and made some gestures.

"Dao's got a point," Jes said. "That aura, I've never felt an aura that strong, and I've been in Diogo's fight aura before. I almost bit my tail off."

Caera nodded. "It was intense. Every muscle in me was screaming I get up and... tear into something." Slowly, she held up a hand, flexed her individual fingers, and examined each big claw. "It was a little too similar to Zel's horde summons."

The horde summon, yeesh. Sure enough, Caera closed her eyes, and went still on the ground as she probably did her best to suppress the horrible memories. David had never asked about the sort of horrors she'd had to deal with while part of Zel's march against the Black Valley, because it didn't seem to be a personal issue, like Kia and Marquez's death had. Instead, it was a black mark on her past of nothing but pain and misery, and talking about it didn't seem like it'd do much for her.

Maybe she'd talk about it if she wanted to, someday. Not today.

"We know he's probably here for me or Mia," he said. "But, if we don't know anything about the rider, we have no way of figuring out why."

"We know one thing," Jes said. "He's been around for hundreds of years. Thousands."

"Yes," Caera said. "Some demons say he first showed up during the Spires War, and went around causing chaos. But always randomly, just to kill. And if he's been going around with an aura like that, it's no wonder. We were lucky, hiding like we were. If we'd gotten into a fight with him, that aura would have made it impossible to even think about stopping or running away." She shivered, and rotated her shoulder, the one with the burn scar hidden under a slab of leather strap. "Just like a horde summon, once sealed in."

They all took a deep breath, and let the silence sink in for a while. It was yet another problem they had to deal with, and at this point their problems were so random, a giant turtle falling out of the sky right onto David's head sounded perfectly reasonable. Fit right in with the invisible Godzilla.

Dao clicked a few times, gestured to Caera, and pushed David off the wall toward the tiger. He'd been sitting down, but the satyr was damn strong, and he stumbled forward before falling onto his hands and knees, palms against Caera's back.

Caera laughed, smiled at Daoka, closed her eyes, and let her chin rest on the back of her hands as she got comfortable lying half on her stomach, half on her side.

"Fine fine. David, I need another deep massage, and then some good sex."

"Foreplay this time," Jes said with a slap of the tail, right on David's ass. "No skipping the good stuff this time."

"Skipping? Last time I-"

Dao clicked twice, gave his butt a gentle kick with her good leg and hoof, and gestured to Caera again.

He rolled his eyes, and couldn't help but smile as he undid some of Caera's binding straps. The situation was a shit show, but if the girls were happy to use sex as a way to de-stress, he was happy to oblige.

He drilled a massaging elbow into Caera's back as his mind went back to the rider. The aura had felt unbelievably powerful, and it'd overwhelmed David's mind. Had the rider sensed David's aura? If that were true, why didn't he notice when he'd gotten so close? Had David's aura even been on during that, activated, or suppressed?

All he could gather from the memory, was fear.

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~~Day 22~~

~~Mia~~

She woke up with a jolt, runes dancing through her mind. A dream. A dream? She was in Hell. She didn't dream anymore.

She stared down at her fingers, and squeezed on nothing. It'd been a dream. Not the sort of dreams she'd had when alive, but something else, something that echoed in her skull and demanded she notice it. The exact opposite of what a dream would do, the way it'd do everything it could to fade away and be forgotten once she'd awaken. Not this dream. The symbols didn't fade. And somewhere in the mess of symbols, an evil smile gnashed its big scary teeth.

Belial.

Slowly, she looked to Kas. He came out of his sleep at the same time, the crack of dawn, or rekindling. Without missing a beat, he stretched out like a dog, one arm and one leg at the same time, then the others, before he found a crouched and casual posture in the corner by the door. He hadn't asked her what she and Zel had seen, and far as Mia could tell, he didn't really care.

"Hell is a scary place," she whispered.

Kas said nothing, not even a click.