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"Daoka was throwing a fucking fit, watching shit from this side of the canyon. I couldn't just let you fall. She'd never forgive me." She squirmed a little as her eyes fell, and she flicked her tail on the floor a few times before gesturing down at the tunnel edge, and the thing waiting below. "Christ, what is that?"

"I don't know. It has to be that thing that chased us earlier, but..."

"But this thing is... trying to... I don't fucking know." She looked left. She looked right. "Right to the fucking ends, I think. We could walk this canyon and all we'd do is reach the inner and outer edges of Hell. There's no getting across."

David mirrored her. Yeap, the canyon went from one end to the other, and again vertigo hit him as the part of his brain that looked for a horizon couldn't find it. The colors blurred together, and red met black and stone in the far distance.

He didn't bother asking if the sea in the center of Hell could run out of water. It couldn't. The same way the stone they stood on couldn't hover or float, but there it was, an empty blackness far far below them, waiting to devour them but unable because Hell floated above it. Jes and David both stared down into it for a while, and both of them shivered.

Black holes were scary, from a scientific perspective, but an existential one, too. Anyone who spent enough time learning about astrophysics eventually developed a deep fear of them, kinda like the fear many people had of deep ocean water. The same fear ran through him now, and cold shivers pulsed down his spine as he gazed into the endless black below. A black hole, except with no edges. An obsidian, endless ocean. A void. And something swam inside it.

Whatever was down there, it didn't look back up at him anymore. It was still there, but couldn't see him? Something had changed.

Mia wasn't with him anymore. That's what'd changed.

"There's something down there," he said. "There's something... in that... nothingness. It wants me, and my sister."

"Yeah."

"Any idea wh--"

"Not a single fucking one."

He sighed. Why the fuck were so many strange things happening to him?

Movement across the canyon grabbed his vision, and a tiny burst of quiet, high-pitched noise. He squinted and put his hands up to his ears.

Mia stood at the very edge of her tunnel, and some part of her was moving. Jumping up and down and waving, maybe? Shouting, too, but by the time the sound reached him it was a whisper, and buried under the noises of the demons above.

He jumped -- holy fucking god ow -- and waved with his good arm, but said nothing back. No point in adding to the confusion.

After a little while, Mia disappeared into the tunnel with the giant demon and the gold armored woman.

"Come on, we gotta figure out where this tunnel goes," Jes said. "Gotta get up and find Dao and Caera. Climbing the canyon wall would be too risky."

"You don't know the tunnel?"

"There aren't too many tunnels near the spire, except for the hatching pit tunnels. This isn't one of them, but--holy fuck I just realized the hatching pit tunnels might be exposed. Oh fucking god if those little fuckers can scale the canyon wall, Death's Grip is going to turn into a shit show real fast." She threw up her hands. "Fuck. Maybe the spire can repair Death's Grip?"

"Repair a canyon that looks thousands of kilometers long?" Maybe tens of thousands.

"Maybe. I fucking hope so."

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~~Mia~~

"Let me go! Let me go!"

The gold stranger let her go, and Mia collapsed on her ass when her ankles hit the stone.

Groaning, Mia got back up, and looked back to the canyon. Oh god, it'd grown so huge. So ridiculously, utterly huge. The void below waited, no longer ripping Hell apart, but the damage had been done. And this bitch beside her had put her on the wrong side.

"How the fuck am I supposed to get back to my brother now?"

"You're not. You saw what happened." The stranger gestured to the canyon. Despite how scary she looked, especially with her black bone wings all covered in flame poofing out of existence and crumbling into soot, the woman sounded perfectly normal. Almost boringly normal.

"You can't believe David and I..." With a heavy sigh, Mia leaned against the tunnel wall, and stared out across the canyon to the two dots in the distance. David, and his demon friend Jes, stood in their tunnel entrance, same as Mia, and didn't go anywhere.

It was so far. So close, and so damn far.

"We are safe for now," the stranger said, and she stepped up to the edge of the tunnel. "Vinicius, faster!" Even the way she raised her voice was hollow, completely at odds with the burning cold of her aura. Murder was the only word Mia could find to describe it. Murder, and something underneath it the rider didn't have, something subtle, but warm, and almost inviting.

"Vinicius knew you were coming?"

"No."

"Then, uh, what makes you think--"

The stranger reached around and down the edge of the tunnel, and grabbed hold of Vinicius. Mia, eyes locked on her brother, squeaked and jumped back as the gold and bronze woman yanked the giant demon up into the tunnel with them. Vinicius helped her, claws digging into the stone as he pulled himself up, but there was no doubt the woman, tiny compared to the titan, helped. More than helped. She got a hand on one of the massive horns on the demon's head, another around an elbow spike, and pulled him forward hard enough he hit the tunnel ground hard.