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"And I really like Dao and Caera, too, but holy shit it I am so much more in my comfort zone when talking to just one of you."

"Yeah yeah." Chuckling, she leaned down and gave his cheek a kiss. "You got three girls riding your dick, at the same fucking time, and you're complaining? Last I checked, that ain't exactly common on the surface."

"It... is not."

"And besides, Dao only bothers to talk in Hellian, so you're normally talking to what, two and a half girls?"

"I guess. Can Dao speak Estian, like actually talk with it?"

"All eyeless demon breeds can speak Estian, but they say the vibration fucks with their vision. Clicking and chirping are more like blinking to them, while talking Estian makes things constantly blurry. They prefer the clicks." She gave him a gentle headbutt, suspiciously similar to how cats often do. "So they say, anyway. Don't ask me, I got eyes."

"So, if I asked her to talk Estian, she might?" *W@.N@ve(t)w@r(m).Co(m)*

"Eh, she might, but most riiva prefer Hellian, Dao especially."

"Ever heard her speak Estian?" he asked.

"Nope. I never pushed her on it, either. She's got her reasons."

Reasons. And from the hesitation in Jes's eyes, those reasons were more than physical, and Jes didn't want to share them.

He suppressed the overwhelming urge to ask. Look at that, more growth. He could ask a little more about Jes, instead.

"And you worked for Zel?" *w@w.n0v@llw@r(m).coM*

"Work is a strong word for anything in Death's Grip. More like, her enforcers go around and kinda just randomly enforce her rule, you know? Ever since she put in that dueling rule, she wanted to make sure demons obeyed it. I was one of the demons that enforced those kinda rules."

"You impressed her? To get that role, I mean."

"Of course I impressed her. I'm awesome."

"Uh huh."

Jes put a hand on his shoulder. "That reminds me. If we run into other demons, you should probably avoid mentioning your sister killed Zel."

"What? Why? Kinda figured that'd earn me some clout, actually. Or at least Mia would earn some."

"It might. It might also get you killed. Plenty of demons were loyal to Zel. Plenty were looking to be the ones to kill her, and might just take their frustration over getting denied out on you."

"Wonderful."

The two of them crouched low. The ceiling made them. Much as Death's Grip had a lot of tunnels practically designed to be walked through, it also had some not so perfect ones. Bloodgrip vines showed up, and avoiding those was a pain in the ass, but it was the low dips in the ceiling that terrified him. On a couple occasions, he had to get on his stomach to keep going. Painful, and terrifying. Stories about spelunkers getting stuck and dying horrible deaths had been enough to give him a mild case of claustrophobia, and Hell was delighting in making it a full-blown debilitating condition.

"Sure we shouldn't go back?" he said between some grunts and groans. The pain of crawling on broken ribs had his eyes watering. *W@W.N@ve(t)w@r(m).com*

"Bloodgrip means the tunnel's connected to other tunnels. Bloodgrip goes where there's blood."

Because of course Hell's plants didn't drink water and sunlight. They survived on pain and suffering.

Watching the gargoyle crawl along on her belly from behind was weird, kinda like looking up the ass of a winged alligator. But she did have a great ass and legs. A decent distraction from his pain, and the ever-growing fear of the rocks only inches above his head, about to fall and crush him and doom him to dying of dehydration. No, down here in Hell, he'd die over many months of essence starvation. Months of squirming and screaming in pain while rocks crushed him and--

Jes reached down and pulled him up to his feet.

"Oh thank god," he said. "Felt like a remnant for a second, there."

The cave opened up, and resumed being an endless tunnel of thin amber veins, the occasional stalactite, and sneaky bloodgrip vines that demanded he pay attention every step.

"I think I recognize this tunnel." She gestured back at the section they had to crawl through. "Did that a few times, a few decades ago."

"Decades..."

"Got a problem with older women?" Grinning, she dragged her tail along his stomach a few times as she walked ahead.

"You sure you're older?"

"I am the spitting image of maturity, wisdom, and beauty. And--" She cut her voice off, whipped her head around, and pushed him back with a wing. If not for the way her eyes widened, he'd have cursed or yelled with the pain.

Silence.

He opened his mouth, Jes shot him a hard look, and he shut up. Silence for him, but she heard something.

She pushed forward. He followed, but at a distance, and drew his--oh, right, no more broken sword. That Adron vrat had taken it and stabbed the rider in the neck with it, a wound that apparently hadn't done a damn thing to the bastard. Good note for the future: the rider did not die easy.

So, his shoulder was fucked, his nose hurt like hell, he had broken ribs, and he didn't even have his useless, broken sword anymore. He'd grown attached to it, the ability to defend himself, if even only a little.

Noises in the distance sent his heart rate up, and he forced himself to take deep, slow breaths. Cainites? Demons? Imps and grems scavenging on remnants, or big demons on the hunt for prey? David probably looked like good prey right about now, helpless and already tenderized.

The curves of the tunnels, like veins through Hell's underside, made it easy to sneak up on people. A hellbeast could have been waiting around the corner to pounce them, and the only way they'd know was Jes's ears and nose. He was useless.

That time he'd helped Caera on a hunt, that'd been strange. His aura had changed and flared, grown angry, and violent. For a moment he'd been ready to do something he'd never done before, commit murder, and he had no idea if that was the aura's doing, or the aura was just putting out what he'd been feeling. Could it help now? What would it even do? Maybe do what the rider's did, and make everyone nearby go mad with bloodlust.

He felt nothing but anxiety, and fear. So much for that idea.

He closed his eyes, and shining symbols danced behind his eyelids. Potram, royam, batlam. All the strange runes Mia had sent into his mind, all incomplete, but not. They weren't missing pieces, his brain was, something he needed if he wanted to understand them the same way he understood the ancient language. But potram, royam, and batlam stuck out, almost like they were demanding his attention. He could almost read them, almost understand them.

His heart rate soared as the distant noises grew louder. The batlam rune flared in his mind. White wings. Gold glow. A sword and shield. A spear and a tower shield. A *boWW@.N@v@l@Or@.coM*

The noises grew closer. Clop, clop. Hooves? David pressed his back against the inside of the tunnel curve, and Jes did the same ahead of him, wings out and snug to the wall. Closer. Clop clop. Maybe a riiva? Maybe--

Amber veins beyond the curve out of sight cast shadows, and whoever came their way was much bigger than a riiva.

They came around the corner. Jes roared and pounced. The huge demon let out a shriek of her own as she fell back. Spindly, skeletal wings spread, but they couldn't stop Jes from knocking the tall demon to the ground.

That, was a lot of jiggle.

"Acelinal?!" Jes, straddling the demon's stomach and ready to tear her apart, froze, one hand in the air and claws out. "The fuck?"

"Jeskura?" The huge demon, knocked on her ass and back, stared up at Jes with a big, angry scowl. Or at least, probably stared up at her. She had no eyes. In fact, her whole face was black, her face and her horns and neck and chin, all of it. It made her big sharp white teeth stick out against the black canvas.

Damn, she was tall. And ridiculously busty. Made Dao look flat levels of busty. No matter how hard he tried, David couldn't help but notice the very naked demon and how her huge breasts squashed and flattened as they conformed to her chest with gravity. Even unaroused and with dark skin, her boobs were big enough they couldn't escape the pull of their weight. And her nipples were pierced with tiny bones. A lot of her was pierced with tiny bones, or little metal studs, and she wore several metal chain necklaces, and belly chains. More jewelry than on any demon he'd seen yet, by a lot.