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"It is a wonder a tiny creature like her did not pop, taking both those men within her together at once." *W@.N0e!W0m.c0m*

David put up his hands. "Okay, okay. Thanks, yep, got it." He knew Mia had a big sex drive like him, and who knew what weird things her afterlife body was doing if his was giving him a giant dick. Thinking about her having sex hit his sex drive harder than an ice-cold shower.

Acelina chuckled. Even Jes laughed.

"Finally, some relief from that aura," the gargoyle said. "Okay bitch face, keep going."

"I cannot."

"And why not?"

"I do not know which way to go."

Grumbling, Jes walked past Acelina into the curving tunnel ahead. They'd already taken the turn at where Acelina had said she'd come from, so now they had to go on Jes's skills. She took a deep breath of the air, squatted down over various bloodgrip vines, and poked her head around each tunnel corner for a few minutes.

"This way," Jes said, and she gestured for Acelina to go first.

The huge demon grumbled, but went ahead.

"I should be--"

"I'm not letting you walk behind us. We run into trouble, you're the first to get screwed. And I don't trust you to not stab us in the back."

"I would not stab you in the back." Shrugging, Acelina marched on. "I would arrange for you to be crushed by a boulder, or I would send a host of demons to do my bidding and rip you asunder."

"Listen to this bitch. 'Rip us asunder'." Jes chuckled as she made literal air quotes with her claws.

David sighed and followed behind them. Maybe it would be a good idea to just leave Acelina behind once they were out of the tunnels? At first he'd thought maybe she needed help, and because she seemed willing to talk, he was willing to give it. Now he was getting serious evil vibes. Evil queen dominatrix vibes. Which, sure, were hot, but now that he was thinking with his brain and not his dick, evil queen vibes were probably not vibes he wanted to keep around. *w@.nove!W0m.c0m*

But she knew the bailiff Domicela, someone they might have to deal with. And she was a spire mother, someone important, or at least wanted. Jes was right. Let Caera decide.

The tunnel grew dark. Twisting and turning, it grew low, too, and Acelina frequently had to duck to keep her huge horns from hitting the ceiling. Jes walked with a forward leaning posture counter-balanced by her tail. Not as much as Caera when she stood upright, but enough to give her a bit of that dinosaur look. Acelina walked like Daoka, completely upright, with her thin tail hanging straight down behind her. Unlike Dao, she also made sure each step was a full-on catwalk. And from the increasingly haughty attitude, he had to assume it was on purpose.

She was going to trip and break her ankle, at this rate. And each step was announced. Clop. Clop.

"Acelina," Jes said, "walk quieter. If you don't learn how to live outside the spire, you're going to--"

"I fully intend to make it back to the spire, eventually."

"Ha, yeah well, that's a nice thought and all. But you saw that ravine when it was done growing, right?"

"I... did not."

Jes snorted. "It's fucking huge. Cuts clear across Hell, and I can't glide across it, let alone you. So unless the spire can repair Death's Grip somehow, you're fucked unless you make the trip around the donut."

"If what you say is true about the ravine, and Zelandariel truly is dead"--David did his best to not flinch at the weight in her voice--"then perhaps I will find a new home with Azailia."

"Dump Zel and go for Azailia instead? Rich."

"Are you implying I--"

"You never really loved Zel. You just wanted more power, and--"

Acelina spun around, flared her wings, and took a swing at Jeskura with her claws. She did not go for a backhand or a punch. She tried to claw out Jeskura's throat.

Say one thing about Jes, she was great at fighting. She jumped back instantly, leapt back in after the swing was over, and went for Acelina's gut.

"Jes!" David yelled.

Jes stopped mid swing, claws inches away from raking Acelina down her exposed side. Acelina knew it, too. With a slow, deep snarl, Acelina slowly stood back up straight, eyeless face aimed down at the gargoyle, wings flared until they hit the tunnel walls.

"You're lucky David's an unmarked," Jes said.

"Am I?"

"Yeah, you are. He's nice, and fuck me, for some reason I kinda like keeping him happy." Jes stepped away from Acelina and gestured ahead. "Keep walking."

Acelina aimed her obsidian, blank face at David, mouth closed so her whole head was a black void.

"He wants to keep me alive because I can prove useful. Nothing more." *W@.nove!W0m.c0m*

"Nah. He wants to keep you alive because he feels bad for you. You fell out of your precious spire, can't get back, your so-called love is dead, and you can't survive on your own out here. Sure, you're useful, and that's why I didn't kill you before, at least until Caera says so. But right now? Yeah, David just feels sorry for you. Poor dumbass just can't help it." Jes stepped back, stood beside David, and gestured ahead down the path again. "Get walking."

Acelina half turned, looked back to David again, and stood there for a couple seconds longer than necessary. She was thinking, but her mask-like face was impossible to read, even for Mia. An opaque black mourning veil would have let him see more.

But, after some unknown internal debate, Acelina clicked a few times in her throat, and resumed the march.

"Yeah yeah," Jes said, half chuckling *W@.nove!W0m.c0m*

"What'd she say?" David asked.

"Nothing."