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Vinicius tried to be silent, but as he sat down, more rumbles escaped him. And blood.

"Are... Are you sure you'll heal? That hole--"

"Will heal." He glared at her for a few seconds before his gaze settled on the large alcove opening. "Two hours. Then sleep."

"Two hours? Until twilight is gone?"

He nodded, and his eyes flickered to the amber veins on the rock walls. The spire had them, too, and they dimmed and pulsed gently during twilight hours. They stopped pulsing at night.

Sleep in Hell was oddly mechanical. Once it was officially night, all she had to do was close her eyes and flip a switch in her head that said 'sleep'. She could do it for eight hours, or ten, or even twelve. It wasn't possible to do during the daytime.

Around two hours of twilight at the beginning and the end of each day, halfway through each marking the beginning or end of a day or night cycle. Strange how Hell, the afterlife, a place where emotion and intent had real impact, had such an inorganic approach to day and night, sleep and waking.

"Why is it like that?"

Vinicius, dragon snout still pointed toward the alcove exit and the big tunnel path, aimed his one visible eye toward her. And said nothing. Of course.

"No one knows why people in Hell don't dream, right? Fine, I get that, that's a surface-only thing. But, why does Hell follow this strict day and night cycle? Day and night on the surface is just a function of a spinning planet rotating around a star. And depending on where you are on the planet, the whole day and night thing stops existing entirely for big chunks of the year." She gestured up to the gently pulsing amber veins along the cave walls. "But here, it's a perfect twenty-four hours or something, and the day and night come at the exact same time, every day? It never changes?"

Vinicius rumbled.

"So, what's up with that? Why does the afterlife even have night and day?" Symbols flowed up from her memory and danced along her eyes. Day and night, and something else, something her brain couldn't grasp. Off, and on? Ebb and flow? Back and forth? Action and inaction?

Chains connected the symbols to something else, some sort of bedrock at the base of her thoughts. Other symbols were connected to it, too, things like life and death, and causality. Causality? What'd that have to do with the others?

Vinicius said nothing. Thankfully, there was a pebble nearby, and she chucked it at him. At least that got a noise out of it.*wvw.0n.0t1W.R0.c0(m)*

"I don't know why."

"But you're a child of Belial. A, uh, ragarin. You've been around for a long time, right?" She waited. No response. "Hundreds of years, I bet." No response. "More? Thousands?" No response. "Tens of thousands?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know how old you are?"

"No."

Sighing, she got up and stood beside the demon.

"And you're not gonna tell me, are you?" And of course, all she got was more rumbles. "Alright, fine. Let me see."

Head still aimed at the tunnel, his dragon eye flicked to her.

"What?"

"Let me see the wounds, you god damn idiot."

"Why?"

"So I can see if I can do anything. You might get infected, or--infections aren't a thing in Hell, are they?"

"No."

"No, of course not. People might actually die in weeks instead of months if infections were a thing. Gotta make sure people suffer as long as possible." Standing beside the sitting beast, she backhanded one of his four arms. He probably barely felt it. "Whatever, let me see anyway."

Vinicius neither responded, nor moved his arm. So she did what all women knew how to do. She folded her arms across her chest, tapped her foot, and glared.

Unfortunately, that only worked on boys. Vinicius continued to ignore and defy her, eyes ahead, one hand clutching his gut, the other arms hanging at angles that conveniently allowed him to avoid pressing their cuts against things.

God, he was huge. Even sitting on his ass, he was taller than her. Adron was big, three feet taller than her. Kas was a foot taller than him, an absolute goliath of muscle that Mia had disappeared into when he'd buried her with his arms. But Vinicius was so big, even standing beside him, she struggled to wrap her mind around it. Twelve feet tall, he had to be! His leg was bigger than her entire body.

She looked for the part of her that'd enjoyed that. The part of her that'd been lost to her desire, and had given this colossal beast, this gargantuan demon of power and strength, a blowjob. The heat. The tingles. She looked for the thrill and excitement she'd felt when she'd been this asshole's target of desire, and had felt his huge cocks in her hands and on her lips.

Nothing. All she found was a cold ache in her guts that made her want to collapse and cry and scream.

"Enough," Vinicius said.

"I'm not--"

"The aura. Enough. It is cold and unwanted."

"Oh." She took a step back and tugged at the white silk still wrapped around her. "Can't help it."*w@W.0dvzLW.rtm.c0)m*

"Demons control their sin aura."*wvw.0dvEL(w)0rm.00(m)*

"Yeah but this isn't that. Adron told me about sin auras and how they work, how demons have to spend energy to make them. Like, flexing a muscle, right? Mine is... it's like... some part of me starts plucking strings, playing music, and the instrument is... the world around me. I can't control it! Not well, anyway. It just happens."

"It's annoying."

"Well fuck you, I can't help it. Like I said, empathy. But so much for getting any of mine! I hope you bleed out and die." With a loud rumble of her own, a failed attempt at mimicking his, she sat down on the opposite side of the alcove.

"If I die, you'll die."

"Then let me help!"

Yelling was not a good idea. It echoed through the tunnel. Anyone within a kilometer probably heard it.

Vinicius shot his glare at her and lifted a hand, but didn't get a foot toward her before his body went rigid, his head snapped up, and a shot of blood gushed from his stomach wound. Amber light shot through the air from Mia's necklace, straight to the small chain wrapped around the monster's throat, and the beast trembled. A heavy, deep rumble cut through his chest, and a gargled snarl caught in his throat.

It stopped. The amber line that cut across the air vanished, and the gentle tugging it made on Mia's insides stopped with it. Mia sat there, staring, and her eyes slid down the now panting, growning beast, and the blood that leaked from his side onto the stones.*w@W.(n)0vELW0rtm.00m*

"You... were going to hurt me."

The dragon glared at her, and slowly flexed and unflexed his hands and their claws. But, he said nothing. He put his hand back over the hole in his gut and leaned against the wall.

She curled up into a ball, hugged her knees to her chest, and glared at the beast.

"I guess I thought..." She waved a hand. "Fuck it. No point. That woman in the armor was right. You're just a bloodthirsty monster. You ever do anything other than slaughter and rape? I thought 'cause, hey, Adron and Kas and Caera, they all surprised me, maybe you'd surprise me, too. Nope. I got a rabid animal on a leash and I should treat you as such."

And of course she got no response. There'd been a sliver of hope there, much as it hurt to admit, that Vinicius would be better than Adron suggested or the stranger in armor did. Maybe that was just because of the sexual encounter. Or maybe it was because she was now forced to go on a journey across Hell and she had to rely on this monster to be her companion. Maybe, just maybe, she wanted that companion to not be a horrible demon!

Maybe, if Kas or Adron were alive, and she found them, maybe they'd come with her? Maybe?

Maybe.