

## 1270

Jes and David shrugged, and got moving. They followed the path around the mountain, away from the canyon, and toward their little hideout.

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Jes took a few sniffs, a few more, and motioned for David and Acelina to follow.

"Yo, girls!" she yelled, and stepped into the opening of the cave the four of them had been hiding in before. "Girls, I can smell you. You here?"

A few clicks echoed in the silence. Then some clops. Four black horns, two of them curling back like big ram horns, stepped around the deep inner curve of the tunnel and into view.

Daoka unleashed a flurry of high-pitched clicks as she bound forward, hopping all too much like a deer as she closed the distance. She leapt at Jeskura, and Jeskura caught her, a full hug straight on, followed by a spin, and some more hugging. And kissing.

Chuckling, Caera stepped around the tunnel curve into view, and prowled up to them on all-fours. But before she could say anything, Dao clicked, chirped, and jumped at David.

"Dao, don't!" Jes said.

Too late. Dao crashed into David. David went down, and yelled. Almost screamed, but some dumb part of his brain insisted he yell instead. Screaming wasn't manly, and with four women around, it was important he sound manly. Man brain was dumb brain.

Dao got back up, covered her cheeks with her hands, and clicked rapid fire as she looked him up and down, panicking.

"Broken ribs. Broken everything," he said, and he forced himself up to sitting. Dao helped him back to his feet and rubbed her horns against his head and shaggy red hair as she gently pat his chest. "I'm okay, I'm okay. Healing."

"You're alive," Caera said, walking past Dao and Jes and up to David. "We saw you--" With a hiss, she jumped around him, and put herself between them and the newcomer. "Acelina? The fuck are you doing here?"

"She fell out of the spire when it tilted over," Jes said.

"We saw," Caera said. "Didn't realize it was Acelina." And from the snarling and growling, Caera wasn't happy it was her. "That doesn't explain why she's here with you two."

Jes laughed. "David wanted me to spare her."

"Why?"

"Because it's David. He saw a demon willing to talk, who just happened to have tits bigger than her head, horns included, so of course he thought we should spare her."

Acelina mirrored Caera's growls as she folded her arms across her stomach. She couldn't exactly fold them across her chest, due to the aforementioned boobs.

Dao clicked some more as she guided David to the back of their cave. With gentleness Acelina clearly hadn't ever seen a demon use, judging from her royal scoff, Dao set David down, back to the wall, and she sat beside him and nuzzled into him. She threw some glances at Acelina, aiming her eyeless gaze at the fellow eyeless demon, but with Caera playing guard dog, Dao relaxed, clicked softly, and rubbed her horn and cheek on David's head some more.

"I'm okay, really," he said. "How much did you guys see of the battle?"

"Quite a bit," Caera said, walking backward into the cave, body still aimed at Acelina. "We were trying to get closer to the spire while staying out of the battle, unlike you, fucking moron."

"Sorry."

The tiger laughed. "We went left. When the canyon ripped open and the spire got stuck on the right side, the three of us were pretty sad. Thought we'd never see you again."

"Oh... then I'm... very sorry."

"Yeah, well, the battle pretty much stopped. The giant hellbeast ran off, and the demons in aera armor all died. Everyone stopped and watched the canyon rip open; bunch of demons fell in, too. So we approached and watched. We saw you and Mia about to fall, and Dao begged Jes to do something."

"She did," Jes said, groaning and rubbing one of her shoulders as she sat down beside David on his other side.

Acelina grumbled and clicked once.

"What?" Jes said with a snap. "We told you that's what happened."

"I didn't believe this one stupid boy could earn such devotion from three demons so quickly."

Daoka clicked a few times, harsh sounds aimed at Acelina, before she leaned back into David and put a kiss on his cheek. And a hug, a gentler one.

"Dao loves her pet," Jes said with a shrug.

"You don't dive into a canyon over a void of... of something, risking death and perhaps worse, for a pet," Acelina said.

"Humans do," David said. "Sometimes." Not that he enjoyed being compared to a pet, but, maybe he did? A little part of him maybe did, at least. It was nice, knowing he had people who'd put themselves in harm's way to save him because they thought of him like that, and wanted to take care of him. And fuck him. That was pretty awesome, too.

"Whatever," Jes said. "What'd you guys see after I jumped in?"

Caera sat down between David and Acelina, half facing him, half facing her. Protective mode.

"We saw you catch Mia and David. We saw the rider fall in, grow a pair of wings of fire, and catch the canyon wall on our side. Then this other person who looked just like the rider jumped into the ravine after you, and did the same thing. We saw whoever that new person was save you guys from going down, and then we had to get out of there. Other demons were crowding around and recognizing Daoka." Caera looked around. "That reminds me. Where is your sister?"

"The woman who saved us took her across the canyon," David said. "She yanked Mia practically out of my arms and landed in a tunnel on the other side. Apparently Zel had a leash on Vinicius, now Mia has it, and she's going to have him as a guard dog."

Dao and Caera looked to each other before Dao let out a few weak chirps, and settled her chin on his shoulder.

"So all that work, for nothing?" Caera said. "Your sister's gone?"

"Other side of the canyon," Jes said. "Not gone. And she's got a fucking child of Belial on a leash. And..." She gestured to David.

After a deep breath, he swallowed down his nervousness, and spoke.

"My sister and I need to get to the Forgotten Place, or, uh, according to the stranger who saved us... we're all doomed."