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Silence fell on them. Caera stared at him, eyes wide, and Dao's mouth fell open. Acelina took a step closer and frowned just enough for a sliver of one of her fangs to appear.

"You're... serious?" Caera asked.

"I am," he said.

"All doomed?" *Www.n0VcLw0©@.©0m*

"Yeap."

"Like, just the four of us or--"

"Everyone. Far as I could tell, she meant all of Hell, and maybe more."

"Fuck..." Caera looked down, eyes wide *w(w)w.noVc0rw@r1m.c0M*

"And the stranger, she sounded like she knew what she was doing. She took Mia away, and when she did, the quakes stopped, and the canyon stopped growing. *Ww@.(n)0v(e)lW(e)©m.(c)©@*

"Stopped growing?"

"Stopped growing," he said. "Within seconds of her taking Mia, the quakes stopped, and that void thing stopped trying to... do whatever it was trying to do. No idea why. It was almost like... it couldn't see me anymore. Couldn't see us anymore."

Caera shivered. "It did do a lot of damage."

"I'm just happy other demons can tell there's an 'it' down there. I thought maybe people would think I was nuts. It looks like, just, blackness, right?"

All the ladies nodded.

"There is something down there," Acelina said. She pulled one of her big wings around in front of her, and idly ran her claws along its inner edges between the bat fingers, cleaning it. "To think something that colossal and... unusual, is after the unmarked? Zel was right to assume Mia would be a useful tool."

"Hey," Jes said. "We're planning here. Shut up."

Acelina eyelessly eye rolled -- she was good at that -- as she softly paced, still cleaning her wings.

"There's more," David said. "I--should I say? With Acelina here."

"She already knows about the dream," Jes said. "What else is there?"

The crazy weird symbols flowing through his mind, for one. The electric shock he'd felt when he'd first touched Mia, and how he'd felt the same from that dream, for another. The strings he felt around him, for a third. They'd always been there, but now his brain, or maybe his soul, couldn't help but notice and feel them, and be aware he could pluck them. And aware that he was plucking them right now, all the time, even when he didn't want to. Tiny vibrations making sound he couldn't hear, but feel.

"True," he said. "I guess she knows we'll be heading, or at least, I'd like to head to the Forgotten Place. But about Caera's... you know, her thing. We can do that on the way, right?"

Caera stared at him, stared a little longer, and laughed. She prowled over to him on all-fours, leaned in, and kissed him, one hand pressed to his chest for support.

"Ow! Oh fuck." He clutched his chest, and Caera jumped back.

"You're really fucked up. Tell me about this dream thing later. You need to eat." *Ww.(n)0v0w0Rm.c0m*

"Fuck me yeah I do." He tilted over, intent on collapsing into a ball on his knees and forehead, but Dao grabbed his arm and helped him back up.

"We'd have hunted some food for you and held onto it, but flesh doesn't last, and we didn't know..."

Dao clicked deep in her throat, deeper than usual, and rubbed her closest horn against him as she reached across him. Jes took Dao's hand and squeezed it.

Acelina groaned.

"We'll go hunting later," Caera said. "The canyon really stirred the nest. Demons are out in droves, trying to figure out what's going on. I've seen souls running around in shadows, and souls are usually pretty good at hiding. Should be easy to get us some food."

David gestured to Acelina. "And... what do we do with her? Especially now that she knows so much."

"Sure you don't want to just kill her?" Caera asked.

Jes nodded. "I vote killing."

Acelina snapped around, spread her wings, and bared her teeth as she held her hands at her sides, claws out. Despite her supposed lack of combat ability, she looked more than ready to go down fighting.

"Whoa whoa," he said. "Kill her? We have to?"

Daoka chirped a few times, gesturing to Acelina.

"Don't side with David," Jes said. "Acelina is a horrible, evil--"

"Hardly," Acelina said.

Caera put up a hand as she sat down in front of David, cat style.

"We're playing babysitter to her?"

"Apparently," Jes said, "if David doesn't want to kill her, and Dao wants to do whatever David wants to do. Slut."

Dao chirped and smiled.

The tiger shook her head. "Doesn't mean we need to keep her around. Let her go off on her own."

"She'll probably die if she does that, right?" David said. "But she might have some use to us. She might be able to settle any issues if run into Domicela. Plus, she wants to get to the Grave Valley spire. If we go that way, she can get Azailia on our good side, right? Maybe?" He almost shrugged, but stopped himself before the pain kicked in.

Dao sighed, but clicked a few times as she nodded. She leaned in, kissed his cheek, and gestured to Acelina again as she clicked.

"She might die, might," Caera said. "But... fine, you make a good point. Zotivas are extremely rare, and no one's ever seen one out of a spire. As long as she keeps her head down, she might be useful."

"Of course I am useful," Acelina said, draping her wings across her shoulders again. "Domicela will listen to me, and Azailia and Zelandariel were close friends. Lovers, once upon a time. We are... friends, of a sort. If you are captured or some such, she will listen to me and allow the four of you to continue on your ridiculous journey."

"Ridiculous?" David asked. "I'm kinda hoping demons who learn about what's happening will... help? You know, help me maybe save the world?"

All four girls laughed. Damn it.