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"Of course. But while we sit here and figure out how to deal with this absurd situation that has never, in the history of existence, ever occurred, we must relax." Julisa leaned in closer again, and with how tall she was, she loomed over Mia. "You have to understand, little soul. Vinicius is the last child of the Old Ones that we're aware of. Perhaps there are more, hiding, or on the other side of Hell, but as far as the Damall are aware, there are no children of the Old Ones alive in Death's Grip, or the Black Valley or Grave Valley. Rare beyond rare. And you have one under your thumb." It was a good thing the fujara tetrad was wearing armor, or she'd have touched herself, given the sighs she made. "How can you not indulge?"

"Mia," Yosepha said, "may have the sex drive of a succubus, but she is no succubus. She would not debase herself by using the leash so."

"Ha! Any human girl would love to have Vin's tongue inside them. And if they could handle it, his--"

Mia put up her hands. "As much as Vin... is pretty hot, he's also a killer. The really big, bad, wipe-out-an-entire-country-for-fun kind of bad. There's bad boy, and then there's that."

"It's Hell," Julisa said. "It's not as if he went on a rampage killing innocent souls on the surface."

"What if he somehow got to the surface? What would he do? What would you do?"

Julisa opened her mouth, and closed it as she looked down. She furrowed her eyebrows and tapped some claws with her four hands on the stone ground as she thought about it. Getting to the surface was not something she'd ever considered. Did demons never daydream or fantasize?

"I... do not know what I'd do."

"No demon would know," Yosepha said. "Many are convinced if they got to the surface, or to Heaven, they would have a feast. But I do not think so. These creatures"--she gestured to Julisa with a wing--"have spent their entire existence surrounded by only the worst humanity has to offer. To them, humans with sympathy, empathy, and compassion, are merely images in a scrying pool."

Julisa growled at the angel, but she didn't retort, either. The angel had her.

"I dunno," Mia said. "I... I knew a girl, here in Hell. Hannah. A betrayer. She had a horrible past, yeah, and she definitely had some dark edges to her. But she... she saved me, when the rider attacked. I don't think she knew doing that would... get her killed, but she saved me anyway. A reflex. Yanked me out of the path of his axe. Not all souls in Hell are scumbags. Or maybe, they don't stay scumbags? Maybe they can change?"

Yosepha looked down in thought, too, and her wings settled as she pondered.

"I cannot say I have ever heard of a human changing their colors while in Hell," the angel said before looking to Julisa.

"Me neither," the demon said.

Mia frowned and hugged her knees up to her chest. The fun was gone, sucked out of the room, and that blew. Fun was hard to find in Hell.

"I'm not surprised," Mia said. "Hell is mean. The demons are mean. The angels offer no help. All the souls sent here just... die, and get tortured, and..." She shook her head. "What's the Great Tower like?"

"I don't understand the question," Yosepha said.

"When people die in Hell or Heaven, they go to the Great Tower, right? Uh, here in Hell it's different. They have to die as remnants until their number hits zero, right?"

"You would have to ask the council about remnants, but, yes, that is what we believe."

The fact Yosepha didn't know for sure was infuriating. No wonder she was trying to figure out what was going on, and didn't trust the council anymore.

"So, they go to the Great Tower, and... what? What happens?"

"They are reborn on the surface. It is a cycle. On the surface, they gain resonance."

"Then they die, and bring the resonance to the afterlife."

"Yes."

Mia shook her head. "Only people on the surface can acquire resonance, but that doesn't mean that only people on the surface can change. So if someone who's a horrible person comes to Hell, and manages to change, then... what? They still have to die, and die hundreds of times more, painfully, horribly, until they're purged clean of all the bad resonance before they go to the Great Tower? Like, someone cleansing seeds before planting them? That's fucked up!"

Julisa and Yosepha looked at each other like Mia had just lost her mind.

The demon spoke first. "You think you can create a better system than God?"

"What God?" Mia jumped up and gestured up around at the rock and amber veins that surrounded them. "Where is God?"

Again, the demon and angel shared a glance.

"I didn't join this conversation to question reality," Julisa said, "or be sad -- ha -- about damned souls suffering their due punishment." With an annoyed growl, the tetrad got back to her feet, and walked away. "I think I will try to seduce Vinicius once more." She didn't even wave.

Alone again, Yosepha and Mia shared glances before looking back down at the stone.

"Sorry," Mia said.

"Don't be."

"But, I was enjoying the girl talk. Especially with someone who isn't an asshole."

"Yes, well, you remind me of gabriem quite a bit, little soul. And some of my closest friends are gabriem."

Mia perked up. "Do gabriem talk about boys? Do angels?"

"They do. Though, it is generally discouraged for angels to become romantically attached to a soul. They never stay forever."

"Aw, that's sad."

"Yes, it can be. Some angels become romantically entangled with each other, as well, but in Heaven, souls outnumber us by many fold. The gabriem have their hands full, and often the rapholem and mikalim find themselves socializing with the souls, as well." She leaned forward a little and poked Mia in the forehead with a wing feather. "And they talk about more than boys and sex."

"Sorry! Sorry. But hey, I'm nineteen years old. I should be hanging out with girls and talking about sex, right?"

Yosepha laughed. "If you were in Heaven, yes, that is what you would be doing, both with angels and other souls."

They smiled. Both knew they were avoiding the topic Mia had brought up, about the distinct lack of God's presence, but either Yosepha didn't want to talk about it, or she didn't know. Probably both.

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--David--

The death pits was an apt description.

Death's Grip was a province of rock and bone, with veins of lava. Mountains, jagged and harsh, with only bloodgrip vines and the occasional burning bush to remind him that plant life was a thing in Hell. The tunnels weren't much different. Hell also occasionally grew some artful statues and stuff, but mostly, Death's Grip was a barren wasteland.

The death pits were a stark reminder that Hell wasn't just some rocky desert from Earth's surface.

David and the eight demons with him all stared down into the whirlpool of limbs. The remnants screamed, tore at each other, ripped off clumps of hair, chunks of skin, jaw bones, and killed each other. But the moment a remnant died, another grew into their place.

A giant hole in the ground in the shape of a funnel fifty feet wide and deep, filled with remnants, and at the bottom, remnants were jammed face to face, endlessly tearing each other to death.

David forced down the rock in his throat and looked around at the cavern. No remnants on the walls, as if Hell wanted to save every nearby one for the death pit. It was dark, with only a few amber veins. Around the pit, metal poles grew from the upper edge horizontally over it, maybe five feet long and pointing inward, like black teeth. It was oddly similar to a sarlacc pit.

"What the fuck," David said.

"Don't fall in," Caera said. She kept her body pressed to the wall, and began the trek around the pit. An exit waited for them, large, and far as David could see, another pit awaited, and beyond that, a bunch more. It was the death pits, not pit, and the distant screams confirmed.

There was only a few feet of space around the pit at their feet.

"I've never seen this," Jes said, and she walked up to the edge of the pit. With one of the black metal teeth sticking out and over the pit in front of her, chances were good if she fell in, she'd grab the metal and pull herself to safety. But that didn't mean it was a good idea, and Daoka pulled on her lover's tail.

But the Las didn't care. All four of them hopped out onto the metal poles, and perched on them like birds as they looked down at the pit below. The remnants reached up for them, but couldn't reach.

"Las!" David said. "Be careful."

Lasca looked at him, tilted her head to the side, looked at her kin, who all tilted their heads too, before they shrugged and glided back to him.

"We were fine," Lasca said.

"Yeah, you probably were. But what if a Cainite showed up and threw a rock at you and you fell in? What if an earthquake or hellquake knocked you in? What if--" Sighing, he shook his head and gestured down at the pit. "Be careful, okay?"

All four of the little ladies looked between each other again, and traded raised eyebrows. They didn't understand his concern. Or, they didn't understand concern in general.