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"Because she's unmarked? Kinda breaking the rules Heaven and Hell have been following since the beginning? I, for one, am dying to see what happens to the unmarked, to her and others, too." Faust made a small salute. "I am in the 'mindlessly follow the unmarked into crazy situations' camp."(w)ww.noOElWor@.Com

Mia beamed. Faust was fun. Fun was dangerous, a great way to get someone to lower their guard. Probably a manipulation tactic he picked up in the Scar, but still, she liked it, and him.

The three other incubi all nodded and stepped around Faust. Four men, her new little army.

Julisa rolled her eyes, but she shifted from annoyed to amused in a few seconds, probably because of how Faust and the others were all smiling and nodding to each other like they'd just had a satisfying team meeting. They were cute, even to the tetrad.

"Alright," she said, and headed down the path Mia pointed to.

It happened a few times, more forks, and some caverns they found were utterly horrific. Remnants were growing, hundreds of them, dangling from the ceiling and tearing at the rock that held them as much as each other. Some were trapped in a big funnel-shaped pit on the ground, so wide it covered the entire cavern floor and they had to go around it. Some covered the walls so densely, they looked like a waterfall of flesh.

The demons were right, though. There were places where hellbeasts probably hung out, signs of claw marks, places where hooves ground the stone smooth and horns did the same against some bloodgrip vines; apparently goorts did that, according to Gallius.

Julisa held up a hand and took a deep breath.

"I smell... beasts," she said.

Vinicius took a deeper breath before nodding.

"Nests,"

Stunned, Julisa looked at the colossus beside her.

"You can smell the difference?"

"I can."

The tetrad grinned up at him and gestured for him to lead the way. Probably so she could stare at his ass. Whatever the reason, Vin took lead. Julisa stayed close. Mia and the incubi stayed in the back, and Mia did her best to ignore the increasingly fucked up remnants decor.wwW.nðv.elwoOm.com

Sighing, Mia covered her ears as they walked past the dying souls. Gallius spared her a quick glance before taking out his sword and ending the suffering of the closer remnants. She thanked him silently, he acknowledged silently, and he and the other incubi all used their swords to kill remnants that had the worst of it. A little empathy, from demons? She smiled.

"You said you feel something down here?" Faust asked. "We're still on the path to it?"

"I think so, yeah."

"Romakus probably guessed that. Otherwise, he'd have said no to this whole trip, I think. He wants to know what's unique about you as much as Yosepha does."

"Fuck. I should have guessed that. Everyone just wants to use me, or kill me."

The incubus smiled. "Of course."

"And--" She shut up as they round the next curve of the tunnel.

Holes in the walls. Red walls.

Vinicius grumbled as he continued his slow walk, and didn't bother stopping to analyze the wall of flesh.

"W-Wait," Mia said. "This is... it."

"What is?" Faust asked, putting away his sword.

"The feeling I was getting. Just a tiny... super very tiny feeling, but it's this..." She reached out and touched the wall of flesh. "This whole area. Do you guys feel anything?"

"No," Gallius, Oudoceus, and Locutus said. Faust shrugged.xW@.nðV(ε)l(w)orm.cOm

"It's a nest," Julisa said. "Hell's flesh where she births hellbeasts."

Mia gulped and looked up at the wall of flesh. She reached out, touched it, and shivered. Warm. Alive. She walked along its length, and the further she moved down the tunnel, the more the flesh growth covered the floor and ceiling. Muscle without skin. It pulsed with life.

Eventually, the tunnel opened up into a wide cavern, all coated in flesh. Maybe coated wasn't the right word? More like, the tunnel had connected to something made of flesh, a piece of Hell, like an organ with an interior that could be walked around in. There were plenty of holes in the walls, just like the holes in the spire. No, not exactly the same. These were closer together, so anyone with trypophobia would not like the room.

There were eggs, dozens of them. But unlike the eggs in the spire, all these were mostly of the same size. Big, leathery eggs, black with some red blemishes on them. Moist. They were grouped in clusters, someone having used the grooves in the muscle floor to keep them together, like a lizard might have with a mound of dirt. The idea of goorts or hellhounds pushing around eggs so they could hatch together made the slaughter that'd happened only a couple hours earlier really fucking sad.

"They're all the same size," Mia said.

"Of course," Julisa said, "they're of the same species. This isn't a spire. Hellbeasts of different species don't usually get along, so their nests usually only birth one species."

Julisa marched up to one cluster, and crushed its contents, each egg, without hesitation.

"H-Hey! What're you doing?"

"What do you think? Hellbeasts are a menace. Without them stealing our kills, there would be more souls for demons."

Gallius stepped closer. "And more remnants to deal with. And more Cainites. I hate hellbeasts as much as the next demon, but they serve a purpose."

Julisa didn't look convinced. She marched over to another nest, and did the same, crushing the foot-tall eggs under her talons. Mia looked away. There were weird fetus-like shapes in the remains of the eggs, and some twitched as they died without the egg to protect and provide for them. And much as Mia wanted to look away, she couldn't. They were hellhounds.

Movement yanked Mia's attention to the side, and she jumped back with a squeak. Everyone else froze as one of the larger holes on the wall pulsed, shook, and squeezed out another egg. It fell a foot onto the muscle ground, and sat there, waiting to be moved to join another cluster. It was a big one. Bigger than the other ones.

And the little compass in the corner of Mia's eye nudged her toward it. Or, not it, but the wall that'd birthed it.

The flesh wall had reacted to her?

Mia looked away from Julisa and the cruel woman's merciless slaughter of the unborn cannam, and approached the freshly birthed egg. She squatted in front of it and touched it.

Something inside shifted, and settled.

"Don't... Don't kill this one."