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The other incubi eventually raised their hands, but it was obvious Gallius's story of potential arm-losing had turned them off to the idea.

"We even sure it's a hellhound?" Locutus asked, gesturing to it. "Nests usually birth the same sort of hellbeasts, so sure, it's probably a hellhound, and there are probably other, further nests down here, birthing goorts and falloos. But it's not like we know that for sure. It could just be a goort. Big enough egg for it."

Vinicius spoke next. "I smell cannam." He took a deep sniff, not even bothering to lean in for a close one. "Cannam."

Mia smiled down at the egg and hugged it a little tighter. It had just enough give to its texture that it almost felt like a warm leather couch, but not enough give she could sink her fingers into it.

"I'll make sure it's not a problem," Mia said. "Okay?"

Julisa sighed and rolled her eyes, but relented with a four-arm shrugged, and gestured to the path they'd came from. Mia beamed up at her, hugged the egg snug, did her best to ignore the moistness of it, and headed back.*wW@.ñ@vé1w0rm.c0M*

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"The fuck is this?" Romakus asked. He sat with Livian in an alcove with some other demons, and the two tetrads both tossed a heart into their mouths. They'd come back from a hunt, and judging from the sizes of the hearts, they'd killed some souls. Mia hadn't even seen a soul in days. How'd they find some to eat in a matter of hours?

"A hellhound egg!" Mia said, and she hugged it tight as she looked around at all the demons. Might as well get this out of the way. "I'm gonna hatch it."

The two tetrads raised eyebrows.

"I'm sorry, what?" Livian asked.

"I'm gonna hatch it! I went down the tunnel on a hunch, and we found a big nest. There were probably more, but we stopped at the first one, full of hellhound eggs." She glared back over her shoulder at Julisa.

Of course, Julisa thought Mia's anger was funny, and she laughed as she sat down with her two tetrad buddies.

"I wiped them out," Julisa said. "Hell will probably just produce more, more quickly to compensate, but..." She shrugged.

"And you allowed this?" Romakus asked, looking past Mia to the incubi.

"Hey, you told us to keep her alive," Gallius said. "We did that."

Romakus laughed, shook out his wings, and leaned forward as he squatted down in front of Mia.

"You're sure that's a cannam egg?"

"We're pretty sure, yeah."*Ÿww.ŸóVè(!)w0Rm.com*

"And they told you how hard cannam are to tame?"

"They did, yeah."

"And they told you cannam have a habit of biting and tearing anything they can get their teeth on from a young age?"

"Pretty much, yeah."

"And they told you hellbeasts aren't surface animals? They get mean, very quickly."

She frowned down at the egg and hugged it again.

"There's a reason I found this egg. I don't know what it is yet, but I want to find out. I'll be careful. If it's a problem, I'll take care of it."

The gorujin tetrad laughed as he gestured past her to the colossus towering over them all.

"You mean your bodyguard will."*w@w.ñzVe!W0r@.c@)@*

"No, I will!"

Predictably, that got her more laughter, from all the tetrads.

"Mia, my dear little unmarked soul, you are the most harmless human to ever enter Hell. Literally. And you expect to murder a hellhound if needed? You didn't see how much trouble we had?"

"I... I saw."

"Not to mention a hellhound you hatched yourself. You think you can handle that?"

"I don't know. I just know that something drew me down into the tunnel, and when I visited, this thing came plopping out right in front of me." She waved the egg around, gently, careful to not jostle the deadly little puppy inside. "Maybe the nest responded to my presence?"

"Maybe," Livian said. "You know who else is running around with an unusual ability to tame hellbeasts?"

Mia froze, body going cold. "The... the rider."

"The rider," Romakus said with a big jackass grin. "Interesting, to say the least."

"I'm not the rider! The rider was... his aura was..." She stomped her foot, and marched out of the alcove. "I'm not like him!"

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She and the four incubi sat together in her alcove, while Vinicius sat back against the wall, far away enough he was free to ignore them, close enough he could reach out and crush an incubus if needed. He'd growled at the incubi earlier, too. Was he being protective of her? Because that was pretty awesome if true, but also, problematic. She needed a protector, but not one that made enemies.

Why he was being possessive of her, if he even was, was an entirely different question with a bunch of ramifications she didn't want to think about right now. She had a bigger problem! A problem she'd scooped up entirely of her own choice.

"How long will it take to hatch?" she asked, legs apart and egg sitting on the ground between her and her new friends.

"Not sure," Faust said. "In the Scar, there are fallo nests we keep under control. The spiders hatch about a month after birth."

"A month. But, for a spider. Mammals--well, hellbeasts aren't mammals, but, uh, probably longer?"

"Probably," Gallius said. "You're gonna drag it around with you everywhere?"

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