

**AN:**

**I almost titled this chapter “I’m amazing” again. But thankfully, I came up with a different very original chapter name. Haell is just that great.**

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“Alright. I’ll sell your materials. Luine will know how to collect on your payment,” Ozara said. We were finalizing our deal with her for the sale of the materials we’d harvested over the many years. There was a *lot* leftover despite how the other Piss Hunters had already sold a lot whenever they came by for our regular supply drops. “Still. I wasn’t expecting this much, even if their levels are nothing too crazy.”

"Hey!" I protested. "Those are perfectly good materials. If you don't want 'em, then I'll go find someone who appreciates the work that went into gathering it all!"

“Oh, sorry Haell. That’s not what I meant. I’m sure it took you a lot of work to get this all.” Ozara smiled. “I only speak in relative terms. Level 20 stuff is already impressive, and not a risk most people would be willing to take, certainly not in those quantities. I just assumed someone who can do this would have something even higher level to sell. But I suppose they also wouldn’t be willing to sell such a catch.”

“Is that so? Well, that’s not even half of our remaining stores! So you’ve seen nothing yet!” *Although it is true that I did hit my limit for the strength of my prey.* No matter how talented and special, I couldn’t punch up *that* far. The gap between evolutions only widened the higher you went.

Ozara snorted, but Luine facepalmed.

“What?”

“It’s nothing,” Luine waved me off. “Anyway, Ozara, as Haell *mentioned*, I want to have you do the same deal for our remaining stock. Can you do that for me?”

*Why do I feel like Luine is kinda pissed off at me? I did nothing wrong!*

“Hmm... It might be difficult,” Ozara answered. “People might start asking questions if you truly have that much product left.”

“How so?” I asked. “It’s not like we’re doing anything illegal.” *At least in this case.*

Ozara looked at me questioningly, while Luine stared at me like I was an idiot.

*Okay seriously. What the fuck did I do!?*

"It's the destination that's the problem," Ozara was the one to answer. "We're selling to certain... movements within the empire, and having eyes on the transaction could be prove detrimental, or even catastrophic."

"I see..."

I just now remembered that we're selling to various resistance groups around the empire in secret. It wasn't the most efficient way to do it right now, but Luine did mention years before how it was a good idea in order to better hide our secret base, *and* because she wanted to help those nice rebels out.

I just shrugged and agreed at the time, not really caring much. I found that I still felt the same way today. It was nice to at least help Luine with this thing of hers, when she'd already done so fucking much for me.

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"Hey. What gives?" I asked Luine once we'd gotten our stay at an inn sorted and were in private. "You seemed pissed off earlier about something. What did I do? It's not fair!!"

Luine sighed, but couldn't help a chuckle from escaping. "Okay. What I was... *annoyed* about was how you just revealed information about the secret base and *what you are.*"

"I did what!?" *This is news to me!*

"Yes! You revealed that we have more stores of monster materials, and that you were the one to slay them all!"

"Uhh... I did say that, I think..." I agreed, still unconvinced, "But that's not revealing the location of our secret base nor that we even have one at all. Neither is it me shouting out into the world that I'm a bloody demon!"

My voice rose at the end there, but thankfully we were in one of those fancy suites with proper soundproofing enchantments. Luine sighed and sat on a very comfortable looking couch. I took a seat beside her and melted into the soft cushions, though I kept a pouting face on my friend. *She was being so unreasonable!*

"Haell..." Luine finally spoke. "Where would our stores of material be located if not somewhere secret then? We're in the middle of bumfuck nowhere!"

“Oh.” I stopped to think about it. “Is that really enough to conclude that we’ve got a secret base? And does it matter, when they’ve no idea where it is?”

“Yes, Haell. It’s enough. Unless if Ozara is as oblivious as you, but I doubt it.”

“Hey!”

“Shut up, it’s true. She knows most if not all of what’s going on in town, *and* the area around it. She’s a noble who is in charge after all. The existence of some sort of secret place is the obvious conclusion. As for pinpointing the location... she *might* be able to guess that it’s at least near The Endless Dive wonderzone since that’s the only place she’s ever met you or Moonwash before, and it’s an obvious hotspot of sorts. Actually, I think we sold some stuff harvested from there too...”

“...Damn. I think you might be right.”

“I *am*.”

“Probably, yeah,” I agreed. “But does it really matter anymore if we’re found out?”

“Uhh, yes? It’s a secret base, Haell. It has to be secret!”

“Yes, yes. I get that. I would’ve totally agreed with you some months ago. But we’re leaving and torching the place on our way out, remember? There’d be nothing to find! It’s hilarious to think about so many people poking around and wasting so much time searching for something that is long gone!”

“That’s... huh.” Luine sat back on her chair, disbelieving. “That’s actually not a bad idea.”

“You don’t have to be that surprised!” I complained at her face that looked like it just had an epiphany.

We both laughed.

“Since we’re talking about all this bullshit anyway, what did you mean earlier about me revealing that I’m a bloody demon? Because I most certainly did not do that.” I brought the subject back to her other complaint.

“Okay, you didn’t *literally* do that,” Luine admitted. “I don’t think they’d conclude that you’re a yet unknown and brand new species either.”

“Okay... so I’m right?”

“I didn’t say *that*,” she snarked. “You just admitted that you killed so many level 20s at level 10, which would typically be brushed off as pointless boasting—”

“It’s not!”

“--But if someone *did* believe you,” Luine continued, glaring at me for the interruption, “then you’ve just demonstrated yourself to be very *very* abnormal!”

I stared at her for a few seconds of silence. “It’s far too late to worry about me being abnormal. That ship has fucking *sailed*.”

“Wha... so you didn’t even try to hide it? What the fuck, Haell?”

“Why would I hide it? *How*? You can’t disguise the radiance of the sun.”

“Oh my world, you’re not the sun, Haell.” Luine groaned. Her following *serious* frown silenced whatever witty retort I had in mind. “You are not the sun. There were definitely things you could have done to at least remain marginally hidden. Not bragging like a common adventurer would have been a good start!”

I winced. I had to admit that she was probably right about me just wanting to brag. Ozara wasn’t my friend, I definitely didn’t *trust* her, yet I yapped away without thought.

I could try and blame it on her passive mental influence, but I didn’t truly believe that. I would be unbelievably *furious* if I did. But Ozara was too weak, and I was too strong, for that to be the case.

“Why did we even spend all that time in hiding, if you weren’t going to put in the barest minimum of effort into blending in?” Luine asked after I failed to respond. She looked sad, frustrated, and endlessly annoyed. “We were there for years, Haell. I missed so many of my children’s lives. Salaire was left to take care of them all by herself. We barely got to see each other!”

That... hit me right in the heart. Only now did I realize that I fucked up. I felt my throat tighten as tears threatened to fall out. I imagined how much trouble I must have caused for my friend, and the tears did come. She was the one who was wronged here, but I couldn’t help but be the one to cry. “I... I’m sorry, Luine. I know just how much you did for me. I never meant to take any of that away from you...”

“Haell, no...” Luine sighed and grabbed my shoulder. She pulled me into a hug after only a moment of hesitation, ready to comfort me even when I was the one who *ripped her away from her life*.

That just made me cry harder. I really didn’t intend to do that to her. I *thought* I knew just how much trouble I was causing for them, but I myself was perfectly fine with my time in isolation. I enjoyed it, even.

I didn’t truly understand how it might have affected my friends.

“That isn’t what I meant at all,” Luine gently continued as I cried and got my snot all over her. “It wasn’t a miserable time. I actually did enjoy myself. It was a unique experience, and one I’m glad I had.”

“B-but you said—”

“Shush. Let me explain, okay?”

“Alright...’

“The time we spent there, from my perspective, was something that had a purpose. You were a demon, a whole new species, and a terrible fate might befall you if captured. *I* don’t want you to go through whatever that is, so I helped you out, and I got to see some of the most interesting things because of it.

“But then why... why do you not *care* at all about being potentially discovered? Why do you not care enough to at least *try*? That is what I was upset about.”

Luine waited patiently, after saying her piece. The silence somehow felt comforting. Even after I’d been a total asshole, she was still trying to be considerate of me.

I really didn’t deserve her. But selfishly, I was so glad that she was here.

“I do care,” I sniffled, finally separating from my friend. “That’s precisely why I hid myself away. I knew that there was no way I could keep the secret otherwise.”

Luine looked at me for a few long seconds, before she broke into the hardest fit of laughter I’d ever seen.

I blinked. My mind, which was far faster than what I had back on Earth, struggled to keep up. I didn’t know how to react at all, so I just stood there, the tears and snot on my face beginning to dry. I really should do something about that.

“Oh... oh fuck.” Luine devolved into giggles again until she finally got ahold of herself. “That makes so much sense,” she wiped a tear away. “You *could* have stayed closer to civilization if you just *tried*, but instead you decided that it was beyond you, and went for the most drastic of options instead. Literally hiding under a fucking rock! In the middle of nowhere!” She cackled again, clutching her belly and damaging the couch. I scooted a few paces away. It was bizarre to see the cool and collected woman act this way, and the sight was contagious enough to at least make me smile.

Luine eventually stopped, finally calming down for real. Maybe. “Thank you, Haell. I understand now.”

“Uhhh... you’re welcome?”

“Yes. I am.” She grabbed me into another hug and stroked my back. “Sorry for getting heated back there. I misunderstood you. But now I’ve learned more. You’re amazing.”

“I...” I choked. “It’s fine. And I’m honestly sorry about how much it affected you. I really wasn’t considering it enough, even when I was convinced that I did.”

“Shh. No need to be sorry. It was my choice, and I don’t regret a thing. I almost *did* regret it earlier, because I *would* be frustrated if all that effort was for nothing. But I see now that no other option would have worked for you. You’re too much of a dumbass to pull off anything else. Said lovingly, of course.”

“Hey...” I protested weakly. “You just said I was amazing.”

“I did. Amazing, amazing. So amazing. Best plan ever. Glad to have been part of it.”

“Thank you for the heartfelt and genuine feedback.”

“Anytime.”