

# Stay Down. Keep Quiet.

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By Seiu

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Abyss slowly gave form into cruel awareness as whatever haze had overtaken my mind faded. One sense at a time came back to me, and I was surprised vision was the first; but only just, with how little clarity it offered. Darkness gave way to sudden light—no form, no color, but pure radiance. I think I winced, but there was no way to know. In that moment, I barely recognized the concept of wincing.

I heard something echoing in a place both distant and near. Any sense of spatiality that I possessed had not clicked back in. The rumbling I heard, but could not feel, may have been next to my head or clear across on the other side of...

*Where am I?*

The question rang in my mind and it took a moment to realize it was not the only voice. There was another from someone nearby.

"I said stay down."

I couldn't recognize it. The voice was deep, but it struck my ears in a harsh whisper.

The air was acrid, tinged with the scent of rotten food or sulfur. Something metallic threatened to overwhelm them both, but then there was fur, fabric and a familiar pheromone—not of someone I knew, but I could at least recognize it as *someone* like me.

The dust-covered, wooden floorboards came into clarity. My vision revealed the light that had overwhelmed me before was nothing more than a dim glow through gaps in the wooden walls of whatever shack I found myself in. Outside, shadowy silhouettes that threatened formlessness flitted by, only detectable by the way they blocked the light and spared my eyes.

The rumble sounded again, distant at once but the tremor it sent through my body felt infinitely near. Touch returned and made itself known when I began to twist so I could lay on my back instead of my side. My cheek was barely off the floor before I could feel it. It was like a thousand burning needles suddenly scraped across the side of my chest and I could hear my own cracked, strained cry.

"I said *stay down*," the unfamiliar voice sounded again in that harsh whisper. "Keep quiet."

I had already surrendered my attempt to get up, but my claws scraped across the floor. My hand reached forward, searching. "Where is my..." is all I managed as my voice strained against the pain blooming inside of me.

"Behind you," the voice whispered again. Then I felt a hand grip my shoulder and prevent my reflexive attempt to move. "It won't do you any good. You're in no shape to use it."

The leonine face of one of my people came into view. Unlike mine, his was ringed with a mussed, half-tended mane. He smelled of smoke and the crimson on the hand he was using to prop himself up with. I was sure it was mine.

"Silence," he interrupted when I tried to speak, "for both our sake. I don't know who they are, why they're here, or if they're looking for you—but the less noise, the less attention."

I made no response. He moved away from me, satisfied.