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Caera's skin was mostly black with some dark red where her skin was probably the softest, like her breasts, stomach, inner thighs, and her throat. Maybe it'd get all throbbly red and soft if she got aroused? That seemed to be the pattern. Her breasts might as well have been made of plastic for how little they moved as she tossed the last bit of armor aside, and lay on the floor, still blocking Mia from the exit. Or protecting her from demons who might try and sneak in.

"I... I saw the gates of Heaven, yeah."

"That is weird as fuck. That's... never happened, not far as I know. Not far as Diogo knows, either." Caera settled, lowering her head until it rested on the backs of her hands. Classic cat lying position.

"I don't suppose the demons will, uh, consider unmarked off limits?"

"Nope. They'll eat you or try to use you." Caera shrugged, like it was the most normal thing in the world. "And you said that like there's more than one of you." *Ww.noVeLwOrM.cOm*

"I mean, there could be, right? Right before the portal sucked me down, one of the angels said 'not again'. Maybe it happened before?"

"Sounds like. Not really my problem I guess. I just gotta keep you alive until tomorrow, and then it's fucking Diogo's problem."

"You... don't like Diogo?"

Snarling, she shrugged again and turned her head a bit to look at Mia more straight-on, body still perpendicular to her.

"No. I don't."

"You're pretty blunt about that. You won't get in trouble?"

"Demons kill each other all the time, fresh meat. Zel wants us to stop so she can bolster her forces, but that doesn't mean it doesn't happen. Diogo's got a giant target painted on his back, and the only reason he's not dead is he's strong enough to kill anyone who challenges him."

Well, fuck.

"Can I... ask some questions?"

Caera smiled at her. "Yeah sure. I like you."

"You do?"

"You got spunk. Lot of fresh meat can't handle Hell."

"I... I'm not handling it."

"Sure you are." The demon shrugged, her huge tail's tip slowly wagging. "Play your cards right and you could end up as one of Zel's betrayers." Despite her attempt to sound positive, for some reason Mia couldn't guess, Caera said Zel's name with even more bitterness than she said Diogo's.

"What's a betrayer? One of the people with 666 on their foreheads?"

"Yeap. A demon can lay claim to you, feed you a piece of themselves, but you have to accept it, hence the name. There's a lot of benefits to being a betrayer, but..."

"But it means the longest possible sentence in Hell. Six hundred and sixty-six deaths..."

Caera grinned. "You put things together quick. Useful trait to have. Good for making sure you don't get stabbed in the back, or your throat slit while you sleep."

Mia stared. "Does that happen a lot?"

"It does."

Wincing, Mia let herself fall back until she lay down. Legs spread, arms out, she took deep breaths, tasting the metal scent in the air, before eventually rolling onto her side, facing the beautiful, scary tiger lady beside her, parallel, head to head and only a few feet apart.

"I'm still hoping an angel will show up and take me back."

"There has been a lot of angel activity these past few years. Last time I got close to one though..." Growling, Caera looked down at her claws, hands on top of each other, her chin on top of them. She dug her claws against the stone underneath, leaving scratch marks against the dark rock.

"Something happen?" Why, the fuck, would she ask that?

Because so far, Caera was the only demon who didn't act like she was looking to eat her, or stab her in the back. Trusting her was a bad idea, but at least Mia could test the waters.

"You want to know what happened to me?"

"I mean... yes?" *Ww.noVeLwOrM.cOm*

Caera chuckled quietly. "Christ, you really don't belong in Hell, do you?"

"Because I asked what happened to you?"

"Fresh meat, you--" *Ww.NoVeLwOrM.cOm*

"Mia. I said... my name is Mia."

That stunned the giant demon, but she laughed a few seconds later, nodding.

"Mia. You're in Hell. You think any of the fresh meat we deal with down here aren't absolutely horrible people? Selfish fucks who'd do anything to survive? It doesn't even cross most fresh meat's minds to ask anything about other people, let alone a demon."

"I..." Mia looked down. Caera was right. On the river, the other humans hadn't just panicked, some of them had actively used each other as bait so they could get away. "I don't belong here."

"You don't. But if you're unmarked, I wouldn't be surprised if you only had to die once to go back to the Great Tower. Consider yourself lucky. And no, I don't know shit about the Great Tower, so don't ask." *Ww.NoVeLwOrM.cOm*

"Oh."

"And I lost my friends. Killed, by those Cainites or whatever they're calling themselves these days. Angel showed up, stirred a hornet's nest, lot of chaos."

"I'm sorry."

Caera shifted from confused to surprised to angry to depressed in a matter of seconds, and she nodded again as she resettled her chin on the back of her hands.

"I think you'll survive, if only because you're so unusual. Zel wants to get strong and get there quick, but she'll probably consider you more valuable as an asset than a meal. An angel might actually come and investigate, which Zel will no doubt try to capture and eat."

"She could eat an angel?"

"She's a tetrad demon, and a spire ruler. She could definitely manage it."

"Scary."

"Ha, you're telling me." Caera rotated her closer shoulder a couple times, drawing Mia's eyes to the burn mark there. It looked like a rune. "Night's here. Sleep."

"Night? I don't--"

The amber veins that gently lit the room dimmed, until the room was plenty dark, and her eyes had to adjust to see anything. The lines pulsed too, very slowly and consistently, like they were plugged into something's lungs or heart.