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After a long pause and a heavy growl, Vinicius eventually nodded.

"True."

"And besides, I need your help to make sure Kas and Adron are still alive. The Forgotten Place can wait."

Vinicius grumbled, but said nothing.

Mia forced herself to smile, but a memory ripped it off her face hard enough she almost fell. Hannah. Mia gulped down a boulder, looked down, and kept walking as Hannah's dying eyes seared themselves into her mind.

~~David~~

"I can't believe she really said that," he said. "Fate of the world? Are you serious?"

"Everything about you is weird, David," Jes said between grunts, followed by the heavy crack of a rock rolling down over other rocks.

Moving big rocks was a pain, but they blocked their path in the tunnel, and try as David might, he couldn't move shit. Rocks were really heavy, and durable as David's feet and hands had grown over the past week and some, his fingers couldn't work stone nearly as well as Jes's strength and her claws. Plus, a bunch of broken ribs didn't agree with him trying to lift or move anything. He was useless.

"Any idea where we'll find Dao and Caera?" he asked.

"Assuming they're alive, back at the cave." *wwW.movE!w0r-m.c0m*

"Hey, come on, they're alive." *W@w.n0tr(e)/w0r@.c0m*

"Still optimistic after everything that's happened?" More rocks cracked, and a few broke apart as they landed on the hard stone. It was a dark tunnel, and few amber veins survived the hellquakes. Maybe Hell would grow new ones?

"I was falling to my death, and Mia's, straight down toward that weird nothingness, when suddenly a beautiful red angel swooped down from the sky and saved us. I'm feeling a little optimistic, yeah. A little lucky, too."

She stared at him, laughed, and shook her head as she tore a few more big rocks down from the tunnel path.

"And then a gold bitch showed up and took your sis away."

"Yeah, I'm trying to not think about that part."

"But hey, you got the beautiful part right."

David smiled. Maybe it was the drop in insanity, adrenaline plummeting, or maybe it was all the quiet now that the quakes were over, but he felt like talking. First time for everything. Plus, talking helped keep his mind off just how fucked he was, physically, and how hungry he was getting.

He didn't want to eat. Eating meant a dose of memories that weren't his. Easy to catalog and ignore, but last time they'd hit him like a baseball bat to the face and that's how he expected it to go a second time. It hadn't happened with a forbidden fruit, though. Maybe they could find one of those? The rider attacking the spire was unlucky. Getting saved by Jes was lucky. The stranger kidnapping Mia was unlucky. If the pattern held, they'd find a withered tree growing some forbidden fruit on the other side of the pile of rocks.

They did not. Just more tunnel. Better than a Cainite ambush.

They walked in silence for a bit. Jes sneaked a few glances David's way, prowling along beside him with her wings hooked around her shoulders like a cape. He snuck some glances up at her and smiled when she caught him.

"Stop smiling at me."

"Sorry."

"I know what you're thinking. That I flew down to save you because I like you."

"I mean--ow!"

She whipped him in the ass with her tail, and she was not gentle. Only his leather skirt kept it from drawing blood.

"I told you. Dao was throwing a fit and freaking out, ready to jump down herself like she had wings or something. Caera had to hold her back. I did it for her."

His smile only grew. "You love her."

"Yes, I love her, you asshole. Not sure why she's so into you, though. You're lucky, some sort of puppy dog that she's grown super attached to in a single week."

"I mean, I am adorable."

She rolled her eyes. "Uh huh."

"It's like that Rosa puppy meme."

"What?"

"Never mind." He couldn't help but laugh. Which stopped very quickly when pain ripped up through his body from his ribs.

"The fuck has gotten into you? Normally, you can't open your mouth without tripping over it. Now you sound like your sister; the whole two minutes I got to talk to her."

"I don't... okay, yeah. I guess seeing my sister again really settled my nerves. Helps me talk more normally. Plus, there's only one of you."

She raised her black-skin eyebrow. "One of me?"

"Yeah, one of you. One of anyone, really. Talking one on one is a thousand times easier than talking to a group."

"Why?"

He shrugged. "Guess I'm just a classic introvert. Talking one on one is fine. It's when there's a group, things get difficult. But, if I know the person, talking isn't so hard."

"You don't know me." After a small snarl, she stepped ahead of him, and matched pace a few feet ahead. That was a small burst of anger he hadn't seen coming, at all *!w(w)n(0)ve/(w)0R.m.c0M*

So much for mastering socializing.

"I... I didn't mean..." Sighing, he jumped ahead to catch up to her. "You're right." *@@w.n0vE()@.R.M.(c)0m*

"I know."

It took effort to not frown. Jes did not make it easy.