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She glared up at him, knowing damn well she probably looked ridiculous with soaked, swollen eyes. She didn't care. It mattered that she get this across to him, that he take her seriously, that he understand.

But, he didn't understand. He stared down at her, like a statue. A bleeding statue.

Heavy silence followed, and the painful realization she wasn't angry at him, but at Hell. Okay, not entirely true, but mostly true.

"C... Come on. Let's keep going, and maybe find you something to eat." She wiped her tears and nose again, and marched on.

Vinicius rumbled, and set a hand on her shoulder. She froze like someone had just stabbed her in the spine with a giant icicle. Leash? Hello, leash, save her please?

But Vinicius didn't hurt her. He held her still until he was ahead of her, and took the lead.

She took a deep breath and did her best to slow her heart rate. That felt dangerously close to dying. She wasn't even sure the necklace worked if she was the one using it, and not Zel.

Vinicius marched on, leaning forward slightly with that dinosaur posture, giant tail behind him gently swaying with each step. A few drops of blood hit the stone.

Mia sighed and jogged up to his side, or at least beside his tail. Still a bit behind him, in case any demons jumped around a corner.

"Okay, I feel better. I can talk now."

Vinicius said nothing. He did grumble again, though.

"Not about... about empathy and stuff. I mean, about what we're gonna do." She waited for a response. None. "That woman in the armor, you believed her, and after everything that just happened, I guess I have to believe her, too. That means I have to get across Hell to the Forgotten Place. And of course, that woman didn't give me any hints on how to do that."

"If I tell you, will you release me?" Finally, dialog.

"Um, sorry, but not until we actually get there. I need to get to my brother, and apparently save the world." *Ww.Nove@W@Rm.com*

The strangest sound came out of Vinicius, one she never expected. A quiet chuckle.

"You should have lied to me."

"Lied? About releasing you?"

"Yes. Lied and tricked me."

"I... probably should have done that." She squirmed and stared down at a spot of Vinicius's blood on the ground as she walked over it. "I suck at this."

"You do. But you killed Zel. And freed me. I will help you, for now."

She frowned at the big bastard's back. Damn, that was a huge back, absolutely covered in giant spikes.

"Not because of the leash?"

"I am bound to you. I cannot walk away from you. I cannot attack you. You can hurt me whenever you wish." He glanced over his shoulder at her. "You think that's enough to break me? I resisted Zel for centuries."

"So... what? You'll sandbag in protest?"

"Sand... bag?"

The cultural disconnect was going to be a problem *Ww.Nove@W@Rm.com*

"It means you'll sit down and do nothing. You can't walk away from me, but we saw with how far away I got from you when you were on the other side of the ravine. So apparently, I can walk away from you without setting off the leash. And you're saying even if I use the leash and hurt you, you'll resist and keep sandbagging anyway."

A slow nod. *Ww.Nove@W@Rm.Com*

"Well, I don't want to use the leash. Please don't make me."

A rumble.

"But," she said, "I once I get to the Forgotten Place, meet up with my brother, and... save the world. Ugh." Just saying it was enough to make her want to puke. "Then, I'll release you. And this won't be like Aladdin. I'm not gonna--right, you have no idea what that is. I'm not gonna back out on my word, because as far as I'm concerned, demons do what demons do, and just because you have a very demony, violent history doesn't mean I should use that as an excuse to make you a slave." She didn't bother waiting for a response this time. "So, how do we get to the Forgotten Place?"

"Unless Hell has changed, False Gate."

"False Gate? You mean, where the vortex is?" *Ww.Nove@W@Rm.com*

Vinicius nodded. Even the nods were subtle, like a big nod might shatter his stoic demeanor.

"How far is that?"

"We journey counter-clockwise." Well, at least he knew what a clock was. "We cross the Black Valley, and Angel's Spine. Then we deal with False Gate."

"The Black Valley, then to Heaven's Tears, and then to the Unholy Lands."

Vinicius stopped and looked down at her. "What?"

"It's the real names. Black Valley's right, but Angel's Spine used to be Heaven's Tears. False Gate used to be the Unholy Lands." She smiled up at the beast. He tilted his head to the side slightly. "I wasn't lying. I can read the ancient language, and Zel showed me Lucifer's book and it showed me all these symbols and runes and stuff. The real names for the provinces were one of the things it showed. The Forgotten Place is really Frozen Heart."

He rumbled slowly, digesting the information, before resuming the march.

"If your brother is to meet us, he must cross the Grave Valley, the Scar, the Red Pits, and the Navameere Fields."

"That... sounds further."

"Almost twice as far."

"Oh god." She threw up her hands. "Oh god! He might not make it! I might get there before him, and have to do this without him! I might--"

Vinicius snapped a hand out, and she jumped back. His palm collided with the wall, and the beast stumbled forward. Each step earned a drop of blood, and one of his raptor feet left a big bloody footprint.

"Oh god. You okay? Sit down. We start the trip tomorrow."

Shaking his head, Vinicius pushed himself off the wall, and kept walking.

"I will heal."

"Yeah, and you'll heal faster if you sit down."

"I need food."

"Yeah, I know. But you ate a few hours ago, so you should still have some of that in the gut, right? It'll heal you over the next few days, from what Adron told me."

He rumbled, but sure enough, he only got a few more steps before stopping.

"Twilight will be here soon."

Twilight meant hellbeasts on the hunt. Would goorts move around in the tunnels? Or maybe some really scary stuff?

"Alright, let's keep moving until we find a good place to stop?"

After a few seconds, she got a nod out of him.

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They didn't find a good place.

Vinicius confirmed they weren't in a hatching pit tunnel, and based on the bloodgrip vines and the upward tilt, he figured they'd run into some forks that'd eventually lead up. The tunnels were networks, intersecting with each other and creating a maze. The only way to figure out how to get around was to either memorize the maze, or follow a combination of the bloodgrip, and your nose. She couldn't smell anything other than rocks and blood. Naturally, Vinicius refused to elaborate.

The best place to rest they found was a sort of dip in the wall, a shallow alcove maybe twenty feet deep and wide. No bottleneck, which was bad. A bottleneck was easy to protect.