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"I guess what everyone was saying was right. You're soft."

She frowned harder, her hardest frown possible. But even she knew her chipmunk face couldn't be taken seriously, and sure enough, Faustinus chuckled. She couldn't hear it over the roars and crunching bone.

"I'm not supposed to be here. In Hell, I mean," she said. "But I'm not soft. Just because I have empathy, doesn't mean I'm soft."

"I guess you're right, if you managed to live all this time." He gestured to her forehead. "I remember when I saw you, I didn't think much of it."

"You were... kinda busy."

The smile he gave in response was positively smoldering. Inhumanly smoldering. Even without using his sin aura, just being around an incubus was problematic, every motion of his eyes, lips, and hands laced with sexiness. If it weren't for the slaughter, her mind would be wandering.

"Here for a meal?" he asked.

"No! No, but, aren't you? Why aren't you in there?"

"Because I'm an incubus, not a moron. Better to go after the souls that escape, and my friends and I will track them down and get our food that way." He tapped his temple and gestured down the cliff edge. They couldn't see the body from where they were, but from the sounds, there had to be more than a few souls who'd suffered a similar fate. "These feeding frenzies don't always end up with the demons just walking off after eating. Sometimes, they get a little crazy, and demons turn on each other. I might be able to take an imp or grem in a fight, but fighting isn't any vola's strong suit."@ww.nOveIwORM.Com

"Friends?"

"A few buddies of mine, hidden around here."

"The... the same buddies I saw you with last time?"

Oh that smile. That evil, dastardly, handsome smile. He even winked.

"And," he said, "that's Vinicius, actual Vinicius in there. Zel's... uh, what's the name? Bogeyman?"

"Yeah, Bogeyman."

"He knows he's a wanted demon. He might think of killing every demon who sees him. So, in the name of self preservation, I'm going to carefully avoid your new friend, and just wait for the frenzy to be over." Faustinus nodded with a quiet humph, before he peeked back up over the edge of rocks. "But, I think he's satisfied with just... a dozen human hearts, at least."

Mia gagged. "Please don't tell me that."

Faust squatted back down and tilted his head as he looked at her.

"It really bothers you."

"Yes, it does. I told you--"

"It just surprised me, that's all." He put up a couple hands, surrendering. "I can feel that aura of yours, getting angry. Strange thing, that aura."

"You're telling me." With a relaxed sigh, her crouch became a sit, back pressed to the wall of rocks they hid behind. "I'm surprised you're talking to me, then, if you're afraid of Vin."

"I am, but I'm also pretty good at running away screaming for my life, you know."

She laughed. Damn it, no laughing. She'd even told Vin her own naiveness might get her in trouble, and trusting an incubus who randomly showed up and introduced himself was a perfect example of trouble.

"If we're wanted, what about the other demons? Are they gonna jump Vinicius? Try to kill him?"

"Maybe. But like I said, normally demons leave each other alone during and after a feast. Usually."

"They won't report back to Diogo that we're out here?"

Faustinus gestured back toward the spire. The amber beam was gone, and mountains blocked sight of the huge tower.

"It'd take several days to report back. Several days to get back here. I only learned about what was going on from a gorgala gliding by and filling me in yesterday. You think you'll still be here in a week?"

"No, I suppose not." Sighing, she rubbed her eyes with her palms. "Hell is so... difficult. I'm spoiled by the internet. By the phone! Even radio would be a giant upgrade to this medieval world."

"Medieval world in your favor. If I could just call up Diogo and tell him you're here, I... still wouldn't, because fuck that asshole." He leaned in a little closer. "But there are plenty of demons who will try to kill you and Vinicius, and take your skulls back as proof. Just, not right now."

"Will Vin kill all the demons here to prevent that?"

"Maybe. But, if he lets some live, they might just hunt you down again, with friends. And to Vinicius, that's food coming right to him. Saves him the work of hunting down a meal."

She rubbed her face some more. That'd already happened, and it'd nearly gotten her and Vin both killed. But, then again, Vin had been injured and starved when that happened. If Adron's stories were true, Vinicius frequently fought demons by the dozens and came out on top. That was the Vinicius she needed, and if that meant she had to let him feast on dozens of souls and demons frequently, so be it. Demons doing demon things@ww.N@vElwOrM.Com

"Well, thank you, for telling me all this. We're going... we're going. I can't tell you where."

He shrugged. "Based on the direction, you're going to the Black Valley. Makes sense, if you're going to Alessio to get away from Death's Grip."

She sucked at lying, and she knew it, too. Better to just not say stuff and give things away.

"Maybe," she said, nodding and folding her arms across her chest.

"Maybe?"@ww.nOveIwORM.Com

"Maybe."@Ww.n@vElwOrM.Com

He raised an eyebrow. "And... what's that necklace you're wearing?"

"Nothing."

He switched which eyebrow he raised.

"Alright, keep your secrets." Laughing, his skinny tail reached out and waved at her with its spade tip. "Sounds like the slaughter is over."

With a heavy nod, she gulped, and forced herself back to standing. Both of them peeked over the rocks.

Corpses. Hundreds of them. Cut in half, torn open, ripped into pieces, everything and anything the demons could do to get their hands on the hearts of the souls, they did. There was enough blood, it coated the ground of the arena, creating just enough depth that each step the demons took sent small ripples along the red liquid.