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"Attacking first?" Noah said, and he took a step closer. "Deplorable behavior, but I had no choice. I knew you wouldn't listen to reason." Eight feet tall in his armor at least, his massive wings spread wide, and he pointed his mirror sword at Vin, shield at his side. The shield was half the size of the angel with the spear's shield, but it seemed to match his sword better. "As Shir said, leave the unmarked, and you may go." [Ww.Nov@Lw@rM.\(c\)0\(m\)](#)

Vinicius said nothing. He thumped his giant tail on the ground, glanced around, and half growled, half chuckled. Were there other angels? It didn't look like it, an empty sky save for its unending maelstrom of flame.

Vin wanted to fight. Vin thought he could take on three angels by himself, surrounded, injured, and with a passenger.

Mia stood up on his back spikes enough to wave her hands in the air.

"Wait! Why're you attacking me? I haven't done anything!"

"The unmarked must die," the woman angel said, and she came closer. The angel with the big shield followed beside her, and each step of his boots make a loud clink clank, like he was wearing a couple hundred kilos of metal. The woman's armor wasn't so ridiculously thick or heavy, and her helmet left her face exposed enough for her emerald eyes to shine through.

Noah wore the same sort of armor as the woman, slightly lighter, with face exposed, revealing his silver eyes. No, not silver, some other shade and mix of whites and grays, some mineral Mia didn't know the name of. The color had subtle dark lines cutting through it, mesmerizing, and she stared into the angel's eyes, lost, as the man came closer with full intent to kill her.

"But, why? Please, tell me!"

"It is the will of the council," Noah said, and he winced as he met Mia's eyes. "I am sorry."

He winced! That was a hundred times more than the angel in the vision had done. But before Mia could so much as comment, beg, say anything more, Noah's face hardened into a cold, ruthless mask just like the angel in the vision.

"How did you escape Zelandriel's prison?" Noah asked.

Of course, Vinicius didn't answer. He slowly turned in place, tail dragging lightly behind him, and he did a slow pan of Noah before doing the same of the angel Shir and her big-shielded friend. Blood dripped from his hand, but also neck and shoulder, deep wounds that would have killed any other human and probably any other demon. And Vin had only just gotten enough food to really get back on his feet earlier today. He needed more time to heal.

But that didn't register in the damn demon's skull. He wanted to fight.

"You cannot defeat me with a single scouting party," Vinicius said.

Shir scoffed and came closer. "You are injured."

With a deep, hearty chuckle, and a sinister smile on his short, demony dragon snout, Vinicius stood up straighter, and dragged a hand's claws down from his bleeding shoulder, across his chest, and down his stomach. Mia couldn't see, not able to stick her head out far enough to look down at her bodyguard's chest, but from the look Shir gave him, he'd just painted a challenge across his chest.

Vinicius dug his talons into the ground and unleashed his aura. Heat poured over Mia, unfelt but all too real, and her blood boiled in her chest and out into her limbs. She squeezed her guard's back spikes until her fingers ached, and glared out at the angels as adrenaline -- or the Hell equivalent -- shot through her. The music in her soul didn't play. This wasn't her song. This was Vinicius's battle song, his war cry, and it flooded the ravine.

This wasn't like the aura he'd used before, that all the demons had used when they'd fought in the tunnel five days ago. This was so much stronger. It was thick and heavy, and every breath Mia took forced her to swim above the currents of the surge, or she'd sink and be swept away. Fight. Battle. Rip. Tear. Bathe in the blood of your enemies. Kill.

"We are not demons," Noah said, coming closer. "Your sin cannot break us."

Vin rumbled, and it sounded much closer to a purr.

"And yet you come, without aid." [Ww.Nov@Lw@rM.\(c\)0\(m\)](#)

"Without aid?" Shir asked. "There are three of us."

Vinicius spun toward her, and the spikes on his body glowed as he rumbled deep in his chest.

"There's only three of you."

Shir's eyes opened wide, and she froze as the child of Belial opened his mouth.

The glow came out a thousand times faster than the last time Mia had seen it. Maybe he could use his hellfire breath quickly if he had a stomach full of hearts. Maybe he was more healed than he looked. Maybe--

Vinicius unleashed Hell upon Shir and her friend, and she snapped her wings to send her back away from him. Too late. Flames poured from Vinicius's mouth, and half the ravine disappeared under red and amber colors that roared with power and danced with delight. The flames wanted to destroy. The flames wanted to have fun doing it.

Mia pressed her face down against Vin's shoulder as the heat washed back toward her. Hot air burned her eyes, and her vision blurred. She almost jumped off. The faster she got away from the giant fire-breathing demon dragon and his sin aura, the better, but if she did that, she'd be easy pickings for one of the three angels. Could Vin fight three angels?

Yes, he could. They could. They could fight them. She could--

Mia squeezed her eyes shut tight until the pain went away, and until the voice in her head shut up. That was Vin's aura talking. Don't listen to it. You're not a demon, and you don't have a weapon. Just hold on, and wait.

Her soul listened. Just like she could mute her inner fingers and the strings they plucked, she muted the waves of the aura that poured over her from her bodyguard. Muted was the wrong word. More like, her soul bunkered down, and put up a shield against the waves so they crashed around and past her.

The angels did similar against Vin's flames. Again, the angel with the big shield bunkered down on a knee, held up the huge slab of gold and silver, and yellow light erupted from it as a wall. It blocked off the ravine, and the flames crashed against it, the only thing protecting the woman angel from Vinicius's flames. The stone crackled like pebbles tossed into a campfire, and bits of rock crumbled and fell from the ravine walls as the flames smashed into the gold barrier, and splashed outward up onto the cliff sides until it licked the sky.

This wasn't like the breath he'd used on the rider and Adron. This breath would have killed Adron instantly. Heat buried them, and Mia pressed herself snug to Vin's back as tight as she could as it flowed over them. She couldn't even open her eyes anymore. [Ww.Nov@Lw@rM.\(c\)0\(m\)](#)

Clank clank from behind punched through the sound. Noah was coming.

"Vin!" [Ww.Nov@Lw@rM.\(c\)0\(m\)](#)