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She tilted her head, red eyes still wide and forever riding that knife's edge between cute, and predator-ready-to-attack look.

"Can't go back way you came?"

"No, we're sealed in."

"Cave collapse?"

David looked back at the girls, and they all shrugged. None of them thought this mattered, and he could tell the little demons anything and it wouldn't matter. He wasn't about to tell them everything, but no point in lying to them, either.

"Some angels attacked, and destroyed the cave."

The two gremlas and remaining impa in the back hopped forward, and all of them faced each other as they gasped.

"Angels?" one of them asked, mouth open in awe.

"Angels?" another asked.

"Angels!" The first impa squeaked, shivered, and pulled her tail in front of her. Like a girl who chewed on her hair when nervous, she tugged on it a few times and twisted it around a finger. "After you?"

"After the unmarked," he said. "But, seems like they're done chasing me for now."

The girls all nodded to each other. Maybe they knew each other well? He couldn't tell. Mia probably could have.

"We're hungry," the first impa said. "Haven't found much. Just remnants. Help us hunt?"

David looked back to Caera, earning a groan and eye roll from the tiger.

"They're just as likely to eat your heart as they are to wait for us to help them get food," she said, prowling up to him. *www.NoVeLworm.coM*

"Not true!" the impa said, and she gave Caera a big chipmunk frown. "Not true."

Not so easily convinced, Caera groaned and shook her head.

"It's up to you, David."

"Me? You're the leader."

"You're the one with angels after you."

He scratched his head. "But, you know... what sort of decisions will or won't get us all killed."

She grinned at him and gave his back a gentle slap with her huge tail.

"This is a fifty-fifty. We'll have to keep an eye on them, and you just know there's a bunch of imps and grems hiding around. Sometimes they work together, get a swarm going, and it'd be a tough fight trying to kill thirty of the little critters at once."

Thirty? The piranha metaphor was too apt.

The first impa came closer, close enough Caera could have cut her open with a quick slash, and the little creature stood up tall and proud. Barely four feet tall. David had never felt tall in his life, barely five and a half feet tall, but the little woman in front of him made him feel like a literal giant. She wasn't just short, but proportional, too, in the same way Acelina was proportional, despite how tall she was. Was this how Acelina felt every time she looked at him?

"We're... scared, to hunt," the impa said.

Daoka clicked a few times as she came up beside David.

"Because of the angels?" Caera asked.

The impa shook her head. "No. Cainites!"

Caera stood up on all-fours and growled. The impa dashed away on all-fours too, skittering and clicking, and the other three girls followed her. They didn't go too far, disappearing around some huge rocks only to poke their heads out a moment later.

"Cainites are in these tunnels?"

"Y-Yes!" the first impa said, still half hiding. "They... They swarmed. Dangerous to hunt Cainites."

Well, that settled it. No need to even ask. Caera looked back, but Jes was already up and heading her way, and Acelina followed behind, sighing and scoffing but coming, regardless.

"We'll help," Caera said. "These Cainian fucks might be the ones I'm looking for. We're close enough." *www.NoVeLworm.coM*

"Help us hunt?" the impa asked.

"We're going to kill some Cainites. A lot, if we're lucky. You guide us to them, a good place to ambush them from, help us kill them, and you'll have plenty to eat."

The four little devil critters looked between themselves, leaned in, and whispered to each other. David bit down the urge to laugh. Their movements, their facial expressions, even the feminine and playful pitch of their voices, all of it was exaggerated and comical.

"Deal!" the apparent leader of the group said. "I'm Lasca!" She came up to them again, stood as tall as her raptor feet let her, and saluted, a legit military salute at that. Another one who'd watched the scrying pool too much. That made things easier for David, though, and he sighed relief. *www.NoVeLworm.coM*

"Latia!" one of the gremlas said, and she stood tall on her hooves as she saluted.

"Laria!" the other gremla said.

"Laara!" the other impa said.

David stopped, forcing everyone but Caera to stop behind him.

"You're all... uh... Those are similar names." For all his intelligence and ego to go with it, one thing David knew about himself was his utter shit memory for things like names. Not good not good.

"Hatchmates!" Lasca said, and she giggled as she pulled on the nearest gremla's horn. Latia? Laara? One of them, and she kissed her. Which earned some more giggles, and more kiss trading, and not sisterly kisses. Full-on, romantic kisses. "Come, come!" And she and her three companions dashed down the tunnel without brushing against a single bloodgrip vine.

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