

1323

"True. I bet she'll ask Mia to help her out, then." Livian leaned forward as she walked, two lower hands on her legs, higher two on her hips, as she looked at Mia. "Or maybe I should just take the leash? I wonder if Vinicius would be happier with someone else having it?"

Mia clutched the necklace and glared at the Zel look-alike.

"Vinicius might be bound by the leash," Mia said, "but he resisted Zel for centuries, leash included. He's helping me by his own choice."

The two tetrads shared glances. They didn't believe her. Well, she was right, and they were going to learn that eventually when Vin didn't screw Mia over by asking the Damall to take her leash. Hopefully.

Ugh, she was screwed. After using the leash on him to stop him from killing the angels, three angels who'd nearly killed him, and had seriously injured him? Screwed. Completely screwed.

Please, Vin, please. Don't fuck her over. Don't get her killed. Don't let the world end.

~~~~~

--David--

So far, so good. The two impas and two gremlas hadn't led them into any ambushes, despite taking them past perfect locations to do so. They'd even found some more impas and grems, a dozen of them, a mix of male and females hiding out in some alcoves with entrances too small for anyone larger than David to get through. But the little demons had no trouble, and more than a few of them came out, spoke to La, La, La, and La, about what was up in the tunnels.

They didn't follow, though. David even suggested it, but the other impas and grems had no interest in fighting Cainites, or maybe just thought David and his crew wouldn't be able to. Considering how torn up David's crew were, he didn't blame them. But the Las, apparently the more adventurous of the bunch, marched on, and Caera and the crew followed.

Or at least, tried to follow. David hissed and yanked a foot away from another bit of bloodgrip, and Acelina mirrored it as she jerked her shoulder away from some vine dangling from the low ceiling.

"Doing okay back there?" he asked in a whisper@ww.N(c)ve1worm.©σm

"No."

He looked back and raised a brow. Much as Acelina was the haughty, queenly type, she was also perfectly happy to bitch and complain when something bothered her. Not always a good thing, but it was better than someone who never complained, and then over kilometers of walking, the grain of sand in their shoe wore a hole straight through their heel flesh. But with her, she complained about everything. So, maybe less a haughty queen, and more a spoiled princess.

Daoka clicked a few times as she reached down and lifted one of Acelina's wings over a patch of bloodgrip. Acelina clicked back. Could a click sound be annoyed but grateful? It kinda did.

"How much longer," Caera asked, "before we're past this tunnel?"

"Not long," Lasca said. It'd taken a while, but David managed to pick Lasca out of the group easily now. She was a tad taller than the other impa, and had a few scars. Given how impas and grems worked, she probably became the leader because of her size.

He almost asked how long was not long, but stopped himself. There'd be no point. Impas and grems didn't think much beyond five minutes, so Jes had drilled into his head, and Caera and the others never asked them much except 'which way'. Their guides were goldfish.

But, with time, the tunnel opened up, and they all sighed relief as bloodgrip stopped cutting their ankles every ten minutes.

That was, of course, when the tunnel took a hard turn, and the group of them walked into a dozen Cainites. Hidden in the dark, the men and women sprang up out of cracks in the ground, grooves in the walls, from behind boulders, and one fell from a rock in the ceiling.

David froze. Twelve souls, dressed in the same sort of gear David was, but more of it, some metal bits strapped to shoulders and legs and forearms and chests. They had meera weapons, too, but from the few weapons David could completely see, they didn't have any red veins.

Not true. One of them did. A sword@W(w).©ovclwóRm.©Om

Chaos erupted. The impas and grems shrieked and jumped up onto the walls, out of the way. Caera roared. Jes snarled. Dao hopped in right behind her. Acelina unleashed an aura of violence that almost bowled David over, and she let out a banshee scream before charging into the madness. No hesitation. No delay.

What happened? How'd they get ambushed? The impas and grems betrayed them? No, the little demons had thrown themselves back into the fray, and Lasca had already jumped one of the Cainites' backs and was ripping their throat open. In just seconds, blood was everywhere, and guts followed.

Guts?

David took a small step back and forced down the urge to wretch. The humans were covered in guts, and skin, and everything between. They'd been covered in it before the fight had even begun.ŴŴw.©Ovel(w)óOM.coM

The only thing that kept him from reeling back, was the heat surging through his veins as Acelina drowned them in her aura. If the others were using their sin auras, he couldn't tell. It was a wall of blinding sensation, waves that smashed against the stones and drowned him, boiling in his limbs that demanded he pick up a something, anything, and join the fightww@w.n©veOWo©Mi.com

He picked up a rock, took a step toward the fight, and took a breath. The aura. Acelina's aura. Zotivas created ludicrously powerful auras according to the girls, and the heat surging through him told him to abandon all sense of self preservation and just throw himself into the middle of the fight. Don't worry about living, just kill, kill, kill. But he took another breath, and stopped.

The part of him inside that plucked the strings, the strange part of himself that hadn't been there when he'd been alive, it pulsed, not drowned by the aura, not buried by it, and David latched onto it. A barrier. It came with no rune, no symbol, no way for him to wrap his mind around it and understand it logically, it was just something in him that was there. It let him block the aura drowning everyone else, and he clenched his eyes shut for a tenth of a second as he re-summoned his thoughts.

Instead of running into the fight, he threw his rock at one of the Cainites, the closest one. They were swinging a big axe at Acelina, and the huge demon was having trouble avoiding it; big as the tunnel had grown, it wasn't big enough for her to maneuver easily. The rock hit the man in the side hard, and they turned and faced David with enough rage and bloodlust in their eyes, it struck David still.

They wore intestines around their throat, like a necklace.

Acelina took advantage and got the Cainite in the side of the face with the entire set of her right hand's claws. The man went down, dropped their axe, and screamed, clutching their face as they fell to their knees. But Acelina didn't finish him. With a snake-like hiss, she turned back toward the chaos, and joined the others in the fight once more.

David grabbed another rock, let a little bit of Acelina's aura in, and threw the rock down on the Cainite's skull. He could feel horrible about it later. For now, the aura wiped away guilt, worry, doubt, all of that, and a single drop of it was more than enough.