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Vinicius rumbled a few times, but as everyone went silent and watched him, the big demon relented. First, Callius. He let the incubus go, and the tall man, barely half Vin's height, rubbed his sides where he'd been held. For some reason though, Vinicius took a little longer with Julisa, leaning in so he could glare into her eyes. After some sort of psychic conversation, he let her go, and Julisa rubbed her throat as she stepped back.

Fujara tetrads like Julisa looked oddly similar to the children of Belial. Four arms, big horns, a tail, raptor feet, no wings. She was like a mini-Vinicius. Maybe there was a connection there? Something in Hell's weird evolution or biology rules?

The fact a ten-foot-tall demon was small enough to be a mini-other demon was ludicrous, and even after having been around Vin for so long, seeing him tower over a tetrad struck Mia still. After a few seconds of staring, she wiped the shivers away, turned, and stood beside him as she faced the rest of the demons.

"Thank you, for saving us. I nearly got Vin and me killed. And, uh, now that we're here, is there a place we can rest?"

"Together?" Julisa asked, and she rubbed her throat as she squatted down in front of Mia.

"Ye--oh, not like that. I mean, uh, just the same room. He's my protector. I need him nearby."

The mini-Vinicius demoness smiled down at her, then up at Vin, and gestured for them to follow. They did, and Mia snuck a few glances up at her bodyguard between his heavy, lumbering steps. He didn't look at her, not once. He was angry. *Ww.n@vêOwOrM.COm*

She'd make it up to him. Or Julisa would, considering the hungry glances she gave the giant.

The thought of the tetrad having sex with Vin sent a spark through Mia's body, and she squashed it quick before it could turn into a brushfire.

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--David--

Twilight came. The amber veins on the cave walls pulsed as they grew dimmer, and the invisible weight of night tugged at his mind. Some strange rustling sounds moved along the ground underneath their alcove, and Caera prepared to kill anything that tried to get up the hole into their little hideaway. But whatever hellbeast it was, it moved on, either unaware or uncaring of their presence.

The blood that soaked them faded, too, like shower steam. All gone in a few hours, as if Hell wanted to make it clear killing twelve people didn't even warrant thinking about.

Caera remained by the alcove's entrance, a small hole at one end of the tiny cave, the only way in or out. Back on Earth, oxygen would have been a concern, especially with this many people breathing the air, but Hell didn't seem to do oxygen. It did do needing to breathe, but not oxygen specifically, as if only certain circumstances could actually lead to asphyxiation. Just another quirk on Hell's list of strangeness.

The spire mother, the gargoyle, the satyr, and the two imps and two grems were all asleep. Caera took first watch, and it was soon time for her to switch off, but she remained where she was, half sitting, half lying and looking at the hole. Even looking at her back, with only her spikes and giant tail visible, the tiger lady looked upset.

David got up, careful to not bump Dao or Jes, and tiptoed over to Caera. Sure enough, her eyes were hard, glaring, and set on the exit hole. Whatever unlucky fool poked their head up was going to get a pair of claws through the eyes.

"Caera," he whispered. "You okay?"

"Fine."

"Fucked up, insecure, neurotic, and emotional?"

She lifted her head up and aimed a cocked eyebrow at him.

"What?"

"Nothing, never mind. Seriously though, you okay? We got twelve of the Cainites, only got minor injuries, and everyone got fed. I even learned some more runes... I think. I thought today went well, angel attack aside."

"It did go well."

He sat down beside Caera's head as she looked back at the exit in front of her. Part of him wanted to put a hand on her back and rub it, like he might if he had the mystical upgrade known as boyfriend status. Maybe even scratch her back between her spikes like she liked. But he didn't. He pulled his knees up to his chest, and watched the exit with her.

"But?" he asked.

"But..." Sighing, she looked back at the group of demons sleeping quietly behind them. Maybe it was a special demon evolution, but not a single one of them snored, and even their breathing was quiet. "You were a pretty boring guy when you were alive, David."

He touched his chest. "Ouch."

That managed to get a smile out of her, a small one, but her tail did wag for a half second. *@(w).n@V.LWOrM.Ċ(v)m*

"I'm just repeating what you told me. And you said you didn't have close friends, or lovers."

"I did not, nope. Ouch, again."

Another smile.

"Kia and Marquez were my companions, my friends, and sometimes, my lovers. We had sex all the time, but sometimes, we got... comfortable with each other, and... romantic." She gestured back to Dao and Jes, who were sleeping shoulder-to-shoulder. "You have any idea how rare that is in Hell?"

"No, I don't. I'm guessing very."

"It is. And coming back here where they died... died because I made a mistake, is..."

Fuck it. He slid a little closer and set a hand on her back between her big shoulders. No response, which was a lot better than the hiss or dismissal he half expected. He pushed his fingers against the firm muscle beneath her scapula and between her spine spikes, and Caera sighed with relaxation as she lowered her head until her chin rested on the back of her hands, very cat-like.

"I could give you some empty platitudes, if you like?" he said.

"Oh?" *@wW.N@vêlW6R@.com*

"Yeah, like in the scrying pool, I bet you've seen people say things like 'I'm sorry for your loss' and stuff like that."

"I have. A lot."

"But, that shit just rings hollow, right? I don't know what it's like to lose someone. I don't know what it's like to have close, true friends, or what it's like to have a girlfriend or wife. I definitely don't know what it's like to lose them. I can't say shit that means anything. So..." He shared a somber look with her, and resumed massaging her back. Purrs made him bolder, and he slipped his hand up into her shoulder-length black dreadlocks. They were smooth, each a single strand of hair half an inch thick, and he combed them with his fingers, earning more gentle sighs from the tiger.

"So you'll say nothing?"

"Yeah. Just, sit by, be with you, and say nothing. Sound good?"

Her smile grew. "It does. But don't let Daoka hear you say that you don't have friends. She's getting attached to you."

"As a pet."

"A pet, sure, and a friend."

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