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"Yes, it was Zel's." And she would not ask for another one. That'd be a blatant sign over her head announcing a weakness. And while most demons were physical predators, Romakus had the air of someone who delighted in being a psychological predator, too. She had to be careful. [Www.ov@om.com](#)

"That aura," Yosepha said, stepping up to her, wings partly spread, arms folded across her chest in a classic stand-off-ish way, "is powerful. And Romakus was correct. I couldn't resist it." Every word, every motion was made with confidence and pride, to the point it was almost comical. Romakus even chuckled. He liked her angry attitude, a lot, judging from the ways he was glancing down at the angel.

"It's... um, yeah. I don't know what it is, or why I have it."

Yosepha frowned, looked past her to Vin, but when Vin said nothing, she aimed her attention back at Mia. Interrogation time.

"We don't know why you have it, either. You or any of the other unmarked." [www.ov@om.com](#)

"Have you seen a lot of unmarked?"

"Seen, no. We've killed one, but we know there are more, more than you and your brother."

One dead. The one her vision had shown her.

"And... you're not going to kill me?"

"No. The council has decreed the unmarked must die, and that their existence puts the Great Tower at risk. But..." Sighing, she shook her head and fluttered her wings a couple times.

"Something is amiss."

"Amiss? You're telling me! I was just a regular girl, and I died randomly and--"

"When did you die?"

"When? Uh... I think about five weeks ago? But David and I hung around the university for over a couple weeks before we 'crossed over.'" Crossed over deserved air quotes, and she used them.

Yosepha frowned. She was good at it.

"The unmarked began appearing around five weeks ago. I am no rapholem, so I did not see Hell taking them from the gate, but they shared the tale of the unmarked pulled into Hell."

"The unmarked started showing up... right after I died?" [www.ov@om.com](#)

"Yes."

Mia sucked in a breath. "So, all unmarked died at the same time? I mean, first death."

"Yes."

"And... what did they look like?"

"Many sexes and ethnicities, but they all looked your age."

"That's weird. That's very weird."

"Let's go talk in the main chamber," Romakus said, "and we can see what we'll do."

Mia frowned up at the big demon. "You mean whether you'll kill us or not."

"Yeap."

Fuck.

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--David--

He could do this. He could do this. [www.ov@om.com](#)

He couldn't do this.

No, he could do this. He'd made a promise, and he was going to keep it. But holy fuck, every step was a struggle. How the hell did the Cainites wear all this armor? There was a reason David wanted to become a programmer, and not a fireman. This, was a lot of fucking weight.

He had his half breastplate on again. Well, a new one, in better condition than his old one. He had a piece of metal covering his left shoulder and his right wrist, a piece across his stomach, and one on his left leg, all snug with leather straps. It was hilariously uncomfortable, and heavy. They'd kept the smallest sword the Cainites had used, what amounted to nothing more than a large dagger, and it weighed at least fifteen pounds. Fifteen pounds wasn't all that much, until you wielded it in one hand with all the weight pulling at the wrist.

Thankfully, it had a hook on its grip, so he dangled it from the front side of his breastplate. Which, of course, meant more weight pulling on him. He was never much of a sweater, but sweat he did in Hell, double sweat he did now. If they were on the surface, he'd probably be suffering heat exhaustion, but that'd only limit the amount of suffering a soul could feel, so in Hell he probably couldn't suffer that. Nope, he was just going to be intensely uncomfortable until someone had the mercy to stab him, or he stabbed himself. This was torture.

The fact he had remnant guts around his shoulders was just icing on the cake.

He paused, panted for a bit, and did his best to not look behind him. The girls were back there, hiding around tunnel corners, while he walked ahead and alone. One mistake and he was dead. One angry demon who saw an easy meal, and he was dead. The girls wouldn't be able to intervene in time.

The tunnels went on, and on, and on. Or maybe it was the hundred pounds of metal he was dragging that made it seem so long. The Las had told him where to go, a group of Cainites nearby, and Caera was convinced they could get information from them. She was also convinced torture wouldn't be effective, if they wanted that information; apparently Cainites were tough.

Caera had a theory. The reason Cainites were so different from just regular souls, was the demon hearts. Cainites ate forbidden fruit and occasionally the hearts of fellow humans, but it was the demon hearts they got their hands on that made them the way they were. Demon hearts had a kick to them, and left a lingering impression on the soul. Eat enough of them and you got a bit stronger, a bit tougher, and all that goodness.

David hadn't eaten many demon hearts yet, but he had eaten some. Far as he could tell, he wasn't becoming some sort of bloodthirsty psycho like Cainites supposedly were, but the thought weighed on him, nonetheless.

Noises ahead. Well, lots of noises, considering the remnants, but new noises. He stopped and listened. Yeah, that was talking. Not whispers, either, but casual talking, like whoever it was wasn't expecting anyone dangerous to come through these tunnels. After a few more minutes of listening, words like 'on the hunt', 'no catches', and 'Greg' surfaced. They were Cainites.

David took a slow, deep breath, and double checked. A long tunnel with more bloodgrip than he liked, but it was plenty wide, big enough for the girls to move through, Acelina included. Enough amber veins to see well. No statues in the way. Remnants dangled from the ceiling, doing their usual screams and yells, and David avoided eye contact with expert precision. The tunnel was straight, with an alcove on the side where the voices came from.

He glanced back. Caera's horns and eyes poked around the tunnel bend. He motioned for her to come forward. She shook her head. He gestured to the alcove, and she gestured to him with a 'good ahead' motion. Well, if he died, this was on her.

Fuck. If he died, Caera was going to hate herself. But she wanted this so badly, she was risking his life to get it. He was going to make it happen.

He stepped around the entrance of the alcove.

Three Cainites sat around a pile of bones. Demon bones. Two women and a man, all wearing the same armor David was, and all wearing remnant guts.

All three looked at him, and two reached for their weapons sitting nearby.

"Who're you?" the closest woman asked. If her hair had color, a fresh coating of remnant blood buried it under liquid red.

"David," he said. His hair was a mess of fresh remnant blood, too, and the girls had rubbed some dirt and stuff onto his face to seal the image. But looking the part wasn't the issue. Lying was the issue.

The man got up. Big guy. David was used to other guys being bigger than him, or at least taller, but this guy had serious muscle definition with trapezoids up to his ears. Shaved bald, too.

"David? Haven't seen you before. Greg didn't mention you, either." The man hoisted his axe up onto his shoulder. Yeap, that was superhuman strength. Fuck. "First kill?"

First kill? First kill first kill. What did that mean? Double fuck.

Okay, think for a second. Cainites were all pretty fucked up, horrible people, far as Caera and the others told him. The absolute worst humanity had to offer. They certainly had high numbers, with the big man in front of David sporting a whopping 587 on his forehead. The others, 492 and 611.

First kill on the surface? Like, some sort of cult of murderers? No, the heart David ate yesterday didn't have any memories of murder, just mountains of animal torture.

First kill... in Hell?

"I... found a woman, in a tunnel. She was... desperate, for anyone to help her." He swallowed hard. "So I bashed her head in with a rock, and ate her heart."

492 whistled and fiddled with the pile of bones.

"Savage. Guess you earned your number."

David nodded, and summoned every supernatural paranormal power he had to make sure number the girls rubbed into his forehead with dirt and blood and scratched into him until he bled, didn't spontaneously disappear. 580.

"Y-Yeah..." He squirmed a bit. Maybe he could pretend to be a squirmy serial killer, or something? The shy guy who has awkward conversations with girls, then stalks and kills them?

"Good thing Hell doesn't care about size," the man 587 said, "scrawny guy like you."