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"Y-Yeah, she did. I asked if she could take me to the Forgotten Place herself, but she insisted the rider would track her down if she did that, and kill me. So, yeah. I'm trying to get to the Forgotten Place, which means..."*Ww.NOvELWoRM.cOm*

"Getting to False Gate first," Romakus said. "You think the war state will have the means to get across the red sea?"

"War state?"*Ww.NoVELWoRM.cOm*

Romakus shook his head. "False Gate is a mess, little soul. It hasn't been the same since the angels took down Belor. Something happened there after that, something involving the rider, and now we avoid it."

Oh god damn it. Why couldn't things just go smooth?

"Your plan," Yosepha said, "to journey across Hell to the False Gate, with this... creature, on your leash, is a courageous one."*Ww.NoVELWoRM.cOm*

Mia winced. "But...?"

"But foolish. The Black Valley will not make for easy crossing, for many reasons. Angel's Spine will be worse."

"Then, can..." Okay. Be brave. Just ask. "Can you... take me?"

"Take you?"

"Take me to the Forgotten Place. Fly me across the sea."

Yosepha shook her head. "While only a small scouting party discovered Vinicius yesterday, make no mistake, there are thousands of angels searching for the unmarked. Tens of thousands. If we took to the sky, they would spot would us in a matter of minutes."

"Tens of thousands? How many angels are there?"

Predictably, the angel didn't answer.

"And," Yosepha said, "I am not entirely convinced you should reach the Forgotten Place. I have no reason to trust the woman in aera armor. I have no reason to trust any of you."

Sighing, Mia rubbed her face and shook her head, too.

"I can't prove anything to you. So... what now?"

"Now," Romakus said, "the rest of us are going to have a chat. We'll decide whether or not to kill you."

Vinicius growled and stood up straight, but Mia gestured to settle down.

"They won't kill me," Mia said, "for the same reason Zel wouldn't kill me. I might be valuable."

"You might be," Livian said, "but Vinicius?"

"Aw, do we have to kill him?" Julisa asked. "I'd rather keep him around."

"Of course you would," Romakus said, rolling his eyes. He enjoyed doing that. "Either way, give me the leash, and leave us."

"W-What?" Mia clutched her necklace. "But--"

Romakus held out a hand to her. The playful look in his eyes was gone, and a dangerous demon with a dangerous grin was looking at her instead.

Mia looked up to Vin behind her. He didn't like the idea either, and he took a step toward the giant-but-much-smaller demon. Of course all that got him was every demon nearby stepping in, particularly Livian and Julisa, and the two demonesses grabbed him by his wrists.

"Don't!" Mia said, to the women and to her bodyguard. "Just... don't. He's wounded. He needs to heal."

"You are our prisoners," Yosepha said, "both of you. You will do as we order until we come to a decision. Give Romakus the leash, and depending on what we decide, it may be returned to you."

So much for them trusting her. Or was it, they didn't trust her to keep Vinicius in line once he was healed?

"You won't be able to make Vinicius do what you want with that leash," she said.

"No," Romakus said, "but he'll be hard pressed to stop us from killing him when we decide to. Now give us the leash."

She looked to Yosepha with pleading eyes, but the angel looked away. While the angel had some empathy, something in short supply from the demons, she would not stop Romakus, either. Mia looked back up at Vin, and the giant traded a quick glance with her before setting angry eyes on Romakus while practically ignoring the two four-armed ladies holding his wrists.

If he wanted, he could probably break free of them and fight. He'd rip open his wounds, bleed everywhere, get bitten and torn open by the other demons and get a bunch of new wounds, and then probably die. But he'd kill many of them before he went down.

And then he'd be dead, and Mia wouldn't have her bodyguard.

With a slow sigh, she slipped the chain off, and gently set it in Romakus's palm.

"Don't... hurt him, okay?"

Romakus raised a brow, glanced at Livian and Julisa, and then to Yosepha, as if they could explain Mia's behavior. Fucking demons didn't understand basic empathy!

She missed Adron.

Vin growled down at Mia. Upset. Well, fuck him. If this was what she had to do to keep him alive, then she would. Even if she shouldn't have, even if she shouldn't care, she would, and she did.

Yosepha glared up at Romakus and bat him in the chest with her wing.

"Do not use that unless absolutely necessary, Romakus."*Ww.NoVVELWoRM.cOm*

"Aw, Mom, come on."

Yosepha rolled her eyes. They both did that a lot.

"I am serious. Mia will not be touched, and as much as I do not like it, this arrangement she has with the ragarin has kept her alive. Do not use the leash unless you have to." She aimed a wing, straight up at Vinicius. "And you, creature, are not to give us a reason to use it. It was an angel that killed Belor. Do not make this angel kill you." Again, every demon shut up quick, and more than a few of them backed up a little. Even Vin looked impressed. "Now, I will speak with Mia privately."

"Oh hell no," Romakus said. "That was not part of--"

Yosepha half turned with a stomp of the foot, and every demon simultaneously pulled back more as if an explosion had hit them in the face.

"I will speak to the unmarked. Alone. You may speak to Vinicius alone."

Romakus glared down at Yosepha, snarled, looked at the leash in his hand he wasn't allowed to use, and then up at the rumbling titan.

Yosepha didn't wait to find out what he'd do. She took Mia's wrist, and marched them out of the cavern. Not a single look back. She even flared her wings once before hooking them snug to her back, like some sort of smug 'stop me if you dare' gesture.

Eventually, she let go of Mia's wrist, but her stance didn't change from powerful, upright, stern, and all that imposing stuff. The fact Romakus had had his dick in her ass recently, and that Mia had seen it, didn't bother her at all. Or she just didn't let her embarrassment show.

"So, um, what'd you wanna talk about?"