

1356

"It... told me about how Lucifer wanted to take over Heaven. It showed me the names for places, but it also showed me a bunch of runes. Hundreds. Thousands, maybe? I... I don't know what they mean, but they're in my head, floating around. Each time I look at you, the potram one glows. That's all I know."

Sighing, Yosepha sat down in front of Mia, reached around with one of her giant wings, and gently pat Mia on the shoulder. Mia stared at her, waiting for the other shoe to drop, but the angel just sighed some more and shook her head.

"Be at ease. I'm not going to kill you. Or hurt you. You've convinced me it is not your intention to be a threat, despite the oddities of your body."

Mia smiled. "People think I'm a threat?"

"Of course. That aura alone gives cause for concern. But now, I am afraid this knowledge is potentially a hundred times more serious, Mia."

"But, why? I don't know anything! And even if I did, I don't want to do anything bad! If anything, I want to help."

"And if the only way you could help was to die?"

That was a shitty, cheap argument, and Mia hated it, but it was also a very real possibility.

"If... If me being unmarked and stuff, if me just being alive, or in the afterlife or whatever, will, on its own, cause a big apocalypse or something, then I would let you kill me. If I had to, I'd kill myself." Mia hugged herself as a cold shiver worked through her. "I don't want to do that. And I'm terrified I might have to, if angels are out to kill me. I mean, aren't you the good guys?"

Silence, with only the distant remnants to fill in the background noise. Yosepha's eyes fell, and she relaxed her sitting position until she was on her ass, knees apart and ankles crossed.

"Heaven cares for the souls worthy of her protection, and the rapholem, gabriem, and mikalim do all we can to continue that cycle. It is a cycle that has existed since God created us all, and it is a cycle angels cherish."

"Cherish?"

Yosepha lifted her head and smiled. It was far warmer than any expression the deadly angel had made so far.

"You may have noticed demons are quite obsessed with souls. They not only consider them a source of food, but the greatest target of their desires."

"I... have noticed that, yeah. Succubi and incubi are just, ridiculously hot, but any time a human is nearby, like a betrayer or whatnot, they're the ones that get all the attention."

"Yes, and it is the same with angels."

"Eh?"

"Angels want nothing more than to protect and soothe the souls that come to Heaven, Mia. It is our God-given duty, and where we find contentment. The rapholem guard our walls. The gabriem tend to the souls within and insure their stay with us is as pleasant as possible until they choose to move on. And we mikalim stand ready to attack any threat that presents itself. But, even us mikalim, and the rapholem too, find joy in the presence of souls."

Mia's shivers melted away, and she lowered her knees from her chest.

"That sounds nice. Wait, when they choose to move on?"

"Indeed. Souls do not stay in Heaven for all eternity. You would eventually think of it as torture, given a billion years."

"True! I was wondering about that. Vinicius was locked up for at least a couple centuries, but he's still sane... for a demon. No human could go through that and keep their head on straight."

"Correct. Demons and angels weather the flow of time differently than souls. And in Heaven, souls are given the time they need to heal and taste of its bliss. When they are satisfied, they rejoin the Great Tower of their own choosing."

Mia sucked in a breath. "Rejoin? You mean, die? Like, suicide?"

Sighing, Yosepha shook her head and brushed Mia's shoulder with a wing. The huge white feathers were soft.

"Only when a soul has decided they are now healed, content, and have nothing left to gain from the shelter and bliss Heaven provides, do they decide to move on. They step into the fountain, are baptized in its waters, and without pain or judgment, are dispersed into its welcoming embrace. Their resonance joins the flow, and angels may drink of it to sustain themselves. And the soul themselves, they are guided by the water to the Great Tower, where who they are, their memories, their emotions, their sense of self, all of it, merges into the center of all existence. Or so we are taught."

"W... Wow."

"It is a beautiful moment, and many souls and angels come to watch." Nodding, Yosepha brushed Mia in the face with her wing tip, probably a little harder than she needed to. "This information is private, unmarked. Do not share it mindlessly."

"I won't! I won't."

"Good. I have told you nothing that can be used against us, but still, it is information best not shared."

"Then... why share it?"

"Because, now that we have spoken with each other at length, I am... unable to deny that you seem to be a soul, Mia, the sort of soul that Heaven should have accepted into her embrace."

Mia tried her best at a smile, and failed.

"Heaven didn't like me."

"Apparently not," Yosepha said. "You are unusual, you and all the unmarked, but I will not ignore what my grace tells me. You are a soul, and while here in Hell there are usually no unmarked, you are as common in Heaven as grains of sand are upon the beaches of Earth."

Mia tried to smile again. Success.

"That sounded lovely. Poetic."

"Ha. I am a mikalim. If you wanted poetry, ask Galon. He would share a tale with you, or poem, or song, while making sure you climaxed a dozen times upon his length."

Oh, damn. Mia gulped and squirmed a bit.

"Sex that common in Heaven?"

"As common as it is in Hell, if not more so."

"Wow."

"Is it a gabriem's duty to tend to the souls, as I said. That includes intellectually, emotionally, and sexually. Whatever your heart's desire, a gabriem can fulfill."

Mia giggled. The sound almost shocked her.

"What if... a girl had a fantasy of being taken, roughly, all reluctant, a power fantasy and stuff? What if her fantasy was an angel swooping down and just fucking her where everyone can see? Doesn't sound very... Heaven compatible."

Yosepha rolled her eyes, but she laughed, too.

"It is not an uncommon fantasy, and something gabriem have long learned how to satisfy."

"Damn. Heaven sounds awesome."

"That it is."

Mia scooted a little closer. "How'd you hook up with Romakus? I figured angels and demons killed each other on sight."

Yosepha fluttered her wings slightly

"That... is a long story. Needless to say, we did fight upon our first encounter. But once I realized he was part of the Damall, I let him speak. And from there, things..." It was the angel's turn to squirm.

Mia scooted closer again. This was fun!

"He is really sexy, in that... scary killer kinda way so many Earth girls seem to be into."

Groaning, Yosepha's wings drooped, and she glared at the ground with exaggerated body language.

"He is that, as you saw. In Heaven, there is no shame in sex, or indulging in the strange things that sexually stimulate us. But, that does not mean it is smart to expose myself to such a deadly, manipulative creature."

"Aw come on. Bad boys are like that." She didn't need her psych books to tell her about how hilariously hot and hilariously unhealthy those kinda relationships were. "I..." The potram rune glowed brighter in her mind the closer she got to the angel.

"Yes?"

"What is potram?"

Yosepha set her eyes on Mia, and let the silence draw out.

"You ask a lot of me, unmarked."

"Yeah, I know. But... these runes, they're driving me insane. They're in here, in my head, making me crazy. I can't make sense of them, can't use them, and every so often they jump up at me and..." She pulled on her hair and twisted side to side. "David's probably going insane, or already gone insane, getting teased with a puzzle like this."

Yosepha looked at her straight in the eyes, face serious, and Mia did her best to keep eye contact. This was important. They'd already shared a lot of information with each other, Mia in particular, but that didn't mean the angel would toss her some potentially deadly secrets.

"Runes are powerful, Mia. Terribly powerful. Even potram, as innocent as it is, taps into and uses that power."

"But, what power? I don't understand."

"Angels can summon power with their grace, as demons summon power with their sin. But runes are different. They are gifts to the angels from God."

Oh shit. Mia froze, head to toe, eyes locked on Yosepha's, looking for any hint of exaggeration from the angel. Nothing but seriousness from her obsidian eyes.

"Gifts from God?"

"Yes. All the runes are from God himself. Ways in which those with the power can enact their will through the fabric of existence."