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And because she knew her words weren't enough, she punched Romakus in the leg as hard as she could. It took effort to not immediately scream in pain at her nearly broken hand, but she managed, and she glared up at him as she kept her hands in fists at her sides.

Romakus's smile returned, tempered and controlled. After a few quiet seconds, he squatted down in front of her, and gestured to her with an open palm. It almost looked like he was offering an olive branch. Almost.

"You really don't belong in Hell, do you?"

"No. I don't."

"We deal with souls all the time down here, unmarked. Many of us have dealt with tens, even hundreds of thousands of them. We're not used to a soul actually giving a damn about anything other than their own skin." He put his other hand to his chest in a very old-timey gesture of sincerity. "I apologize." And, of course, he said it with an old-timey accent, like he was in a movie in the '50s.

Whether he was kidding or not, every demon gasped. Thinking back, had she ever actually heard a demon ever use the words 'I'm sorry' and whatnot? She couldn't remember any. Apologizing was not something demons did.

"Thank you," she said, earning some more quiet gasps from the demons. Another pair of words rarely used. "Just... yeah. I'm going to do everything I can to stop what the mystery woman said was going to happen. I don't know what that is yet, but when I find out, I'll stop it. And that's it. I got no desire to hurt anyone, or world domination, or anything like that." She slipped the leash back on and took a deep breath. Muscles she hadn't realized she'd been clenching relaxed as the metal settled around her neck, like a warrior reunited with their sword.

"I'd rather we kept the leash," Julisa said, "and for more reasons than just Vinicius is a tasty treat. What happens if someone else gets his leash?"

Mia joined her bodyguard, and smiled up at him before looking back out to the small crowd.

"Vin resisted Zel for centuries. I saw the kind of torture she used on him, and it included a lot of weird spire stuff. She tried to break him with mind-bending tools and stuff, and she couldn't. You really think you could make him work for you just because you can hurt him?"

Julisa frowned, but Livian shook her head.

"No," the Zel-look-alike said. "No, I suppose not. Though, you'll have to convince us that Vinicius is actually willing to do as you request."

Uh oh. Wincing, Mia looked up at her bodyguard, but Vinicius kept his eyes on the three tetrads, occasionally sneering; a subtle gesture on his short snout, but more than enough. The other demons took steps back and put boulders between them and the colossus.

"Vin, can you..." Please Vin, please please please do this. "Can you... pick me up and put me on your shoulder?"

Vin hesitated, but only for a second. With an annoyed grumble, he scooped her up, and she shivered as the demon set her on his shoulder. One of his spikes stuck up right along the crack of her ass, and she squirmed to make sure it didn't penetrate her tail bone as she grabbed one of his horns. She smiled at his one visible eye from her perch, earning an eye roll from him, but he let her stay where she was.

"Vinicius," she said, eyes on the rest of the demons, "is helping me of his own choosing. But I'm not an idiot. We all know he's super dangerous." And the big guy loved that everyone knew that, no doubt. "The leash is to keep me safe from him in case... something happens, not to force him to do stuff for me."

"Or to stop him from killing angels," Romakus said. "Angels about to chop your head off."

"That won't happen again. I'll do everything I can to avoid fighting angels, but if it happens, I won't stop Vin."

Yosepha glared up at Mia, but a few seconds of painful eye contact was enough to lower the angel's eyes. She agreed with Mia. She didn't want to, but she did.

"I think that's enough for today," Romakus said. "Yos and I have some things to talk about, and the princess"--he gestured to Vinicius--"needs his beauty sleep."

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"I should kill them all," Vinicius said, voice a quiet rumble. If alligators could whisper.

"We need their help." Once Vinicius had sat down in their alcove, she climbed down his body and stood in front of him, between his legs. "Look at me. I'm wearing a rune!"

He tilted his head to the side.*www.ɪɔ̃VɛLworm.ɔ̃O(ɪ)*

"A rune," she said. "Like, an angel rune. I'm wearing one! That's where I got all this." She gestured to her black jewelry and the red silk that did only a marginally better job of covering her bits than the last thing she'd worn had. "I mean... I think I'm wearing lipstick!" She pushed out her lips as far as she could, and went crosseyed staring down her nose. No luck. She pushed up on her top lip with her fingers, and exposed a sliver of the usually pink skin to her line of sight. "Red! I'm wearing red lipstick! Red-ish, anyway." No figuring out the color without a mirror.

"And braids."

"Braids? Am I?" She combed her hair again. Holy shit, he was right. Yosepha hadn't said anything, but sure enough there were a few braids in Mia's hair, in some sort of arrangement that left plenty of hair still untouched and flowing wavy. "Do I... look like a viking? I mean, with the red hair and freckles and stuff, and--"

Vinicius snorted, but said nothing.

"Right, probably not. But, still, this is awesome!" She spun around between his legs and posed, hands on her hips. "Any tattoos?"

He nodded. "On your back."

"Oh! What is it? Yosepha didn't tell me I had any*Wɪɹw.N̄ɔ̃vɛL(ɔ̃)ɔ̃Rm.c.M*

"I... don't know."

"You don't know?"*Www.N̄(ɔ̃)vɛLwɔ̃ɹ.M.ɔ̃ɔ̃m*

"I do not. It's a black line that runs down the center of your spine. There is a circle at the top, middle, and bottom."

"Sounds... kinda basic. But basic can be great, too." Nodding, she spun around a few more times. But, after a squeak, she stopped and pushed down the dangling fabrics of the skirt. Remember, no underwear. "I feel like I took a shower, and got dressed up for a sexy party or something."

Vinicius snorted, annoyed, but it wasn't long before he looked at her again.

"You'd fit right in with the vola of the Scar."

"Oh? Why?" Of course an old demon like Vinicius would call the succubi and incubi by their old name. "What's the Scar like? Why's it called the Scar?"

"It is a great canyon, as long as the canyon that broke Death's Grip."*(w)ⓄW.n̄Ovɛ(ɔ̃)w(ɔ̃)ɹm.(c)ɔ̃(ɪ)*

"Whoa."

"It is a land of sex and music, and little else."