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Daoka clicked a couple times, quiet, right into Caera's ear, before she patted the tregeera on the shoulder and moved on to join Jes. She found the biggest axe she could and handed it to Acelina. No way a Cainite wielded that axe, even one full of demon hearts; it was probably Renato's, or another demon's.

Acelina took it, looked down at it, experimented with the weight, and nodded.

"Next time we run into some Cainites," Jeskura said, "don't bother with the armor, David. It'll slow you down too much, and guaranteed we're getting into a fight."

"Battle! Fight!" Lasca handed David back the dagger.

Wincing, David took the blade back. The hilt was only just barely big enough to wield it with two hands, but he had to if he wanted a real chance of using the heavy thing.

"Stay out of the fight, David," Caera said, "if you can.*vwW.noveL@oR@.coM*

"Yeah, will do."

"If the boy can use that gold light again, perhaps he can help us?" Acelina asked.

Caera shrugged, nodded in a direction, and got moving.

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They found another alcove to hide in. No one said a word. Everyone found a comfortable spot to sit, and Caera and David took first watch. There were fallo spiders around, and they had to tear down the spiderwebs -- damn strong webbing -- to make room for everyone to sit down, but they managed.*www.NoVè()worm.c0m*

Caera sat by the alcove entrance, and David sat with her. He sat close, too, close enough they almost touched, testing the water to see how she'd react. The last thing David wanted whenever he was the one bursting at the skin with anger, was for someone to come comfort him. Hell, someone getting into his personal space was enough to make him go from angry to livid on a normal day, back on the surface. Was Caera the same way? Would he even be the same way, after everything he'd been through?

Caera didn't react. He reached out and put a hand on her back. She didn't react. He rubbed her back, dug his fingers between the spikes, and forced his knuckles into the hard skin and harder muscles. She reacted, but only barely, just enough to lean in a little closer to him. A flicker of movement from her eyes, a small smile, and back to watchdog mode.

They sat there with only distant remnants making sound, and let the hours go by. Twilight came and went, and Caera slid in a little closer to him until their legs touched.

"Don't die," she said.

What to say to make her feel better? Something smooth. Something confident, and manly.*www.n@V@()worm.c0m*

"Didn't plan on it." Hey, that wasn't bad. "Don't die either, okay?"

She smiled down at him, licked his forehead, and curled her tail around behind him until it half surrounded him. It was another hour before it was time to switch shifts, and it went by quick.

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~~Mia~~

She tried again. She failed again. She tried and tried and tried, and what Yosepha said about it getting easier was true, but it was still like asking someone who'd only just recently started playing the piano to play Flight of the Bumblebee. Yeah, it got easier, but it was still going to take years and years of work. She had days.

Groaning, body aching, she dragged herself back to Vinicius's alcove. It was both of theirs, but she'd spent a lot of time without him lately, either with Yosepha or alone. She wasn't worried about him leaving; the leash didn't allow it. If he tried to actually escape, or tried in any way to put distance between him and her beyond a point, the leash would activate and shock him. She was free to roam around, but not him. The necklace knew his intent.

He was alone, sitting, and examining his wounds. Like Mia had a million times after a workout, he worked through his joints, testing them for aches and pains by gently swinging his arms or bending them into strange positions.

"Feel better?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Fully healed?"

"Y--"

"You're not fully healed, Vin." She gestured to the scars on his body, spots where the skin was red, while the rest of him was dark red, even black in some places. "The fuck you in a hurry for?"

"I'd rather we saved the world before it ended and took me with it."

"Uh huh." She put her hands on her hips and stood between the giant's legs. Perfect glaring distance. "Where's Julisa?"

"I don't know."

"I doubt that. She's been dying to get on those dicks again. Where is she?"

Sighing, he gestured past her toward the exit.

"Likely talking with Livian and devising a way to seduce me." For some reason, he said that with just the barest hint of sadness and frustration.

"And that's bad because...?"

"I am trying to heal."

Mia laughed and gently kicked one of his legs.

"You got at least one, and probably a half dozen demonettes nearby who want to fuck you, Vin. To get fucked by you. On the surface, a guy could be in a coma for years, and if I told him there were six girls who wanted to fuck him, at the same time, sitting around his bed, he'd wake up with a hard-on."

"This is not the surface. I am not a... guy."

"Not a guy? I... I guess that's true, yeah. Demons and angels aren't technically male or female, are you?" She stepped over his leg, put her back against the cave wall, and sank, exhausted. At least she'd kept her potram rune going, this time. "Demons are all pretty aggressive about their desires, aren't they?"

"Usually."

"And they don't seem to go with the usual social dynamics on the surface. The girl flirts and puts up some signals saying 'come get me'. The guy flirts back and tries to get her." She put up her hands as a disclaimer. "I mean, you know, societal standards and all that."

Vin tilted his head, but said nothing. He didn't understand. And that was kinda awesome in a strange way, that human standards, culture standards, none of that stuff ever crossed his mind. But she had to keep in mind what Yosepha said, that Heaven had no rules for the better, and Hell had no rules for the worse.

"My point is," she said, "this isn't the surface, and demons are all horny all the time." Not that she was much better. "The lady demons here will happily be the aggressive partner. All you need to do is sit there and look pretty." She grinned up at him, but alas, Vin didn't so much as rumble. Did the big guy even have a sense of humor? Maybe he'd laugh if she made a joke about... breaking bones and erupting organs.

"They probably would."

"Okay, well, Julisa wants to fuck you again. Why not let her?"

He shrugged with his good shoulder, and a slow rumble flowed out of him, like a truck sighing.

"I spent over two centuries in a prison, being tortured by a..." He ground his teeth. "I am... not myself..." Shaking his head, he gestured to her. "You saw."

"In Zel's cell? I did, yeah, but what's that got to do with--"

"I am not... recovered."

She got back up and looked at him, but Vin's eyes drifted toward the alcove. He was listening for anyone eavesdropping. What he just said amounted to admitting weakness, a mental weakness at that, and that was definitely not something demons did, male-like or female-like.*w(W.novELw(c)r@.c(o)M*