

1403

No one jumped them, or ambushed them, or so much as made a sound. The temple was empty.

"Acelina told me what happened, that the angels showed up. That you... tried to get to me, when Shaul flew into the cathedral."Ŵw@,novêłworM.c@M

She grumbled and continued down the huge black hall. The Las were smart enough to follow from a distance, only poking their eyes and small horns around corners at a safe distance.

"You let her go."

"I had to let her go."

"Bullshit. You should have killed her. Now the angels will know about your new abilities!"

"If I killed her, there's no way Heaven would ever consider--"

"Consider what? You heard what those two angels told us weeks ago, that we had to keep our heads down. Now we know why. The angels have an order out to kill you, David! You should have killed her, and then we'd have more time to get you away!"

He froze. "That's what this is about? Getting me to safety?"

"Yes! That angel was good, David, really good." Caera almost gestured to her ruined eye, but turned at the last second and kept it out of his vision. "I can't protect you from angels! If you hadn't... done that stuff, with the spikes and amber, we'd all be dead. The Cainites barely gave them pause, and Jes and I are the only reason the angels didn't slaughter the rest of us, and that was only for a few minutes!"

A lightbulb clicked on over David's head. She'd biased walking closer to the wall with her bad eye, so he wouldn't see it.

"Caera... hold up."

"I'm looking for any hiding Cainites. Come--"

"Please, just hold up."wŴw.n(ə)vêłworM.(ə)@m

After a deep growl that sent cold shivers up through his spine, Caera stopped. David came around in front of her, and sure enough, she tilted her head slightly to the side. She was hiding her ruined eye.@wŴ.Ñove@wóπM.com

He got down on a knee in front of her, set both hands on her jaw, and gently turned her to face him.

"Damn," he said. "That is rough."

She yanked her head away. "I knew--"

"Caera, come on." He took her jaw again. She was an eight-foot-tall demon -- when standing on two legs -- with a slightly cat-ish short snout, and some big teeth. Beautiful, badass, and very angry with him for being so insistent. If he wasn't careful, she might bite him; not bite him hard enough to remove a finger, but still.

Demon skin was tough, toughest where it was dark, and demon eyebrows were nearly solid black, a patch of skin that resembled an eyebrow. The fact the angel had cut clean through it like she'd wielded a magical scalpel was terrifying.

"It's ugly," she said.

David winced and shook his head. Mia would have been proud of him for figuring this out.

"You need to watch scrying pools more, if you think a scar is ugly. Guys love scars. Maybe not as much as girls do, but... Lot of guys out there who are into badass muscular women with scars, trust me."

"I lost an eye, David. This isn't a little makeup. I have a fucking gash across the face."

"Yeah sure an open wound is a bit nasty, but it'll close in what, a day or two? And then you'll have a sexy scar." He gave her his best smile, leaned in, and kiss her. "I thought you were livid with me for letting the angel go because you wanted revenge."

"Revenge? How petty do you think I am? Asshole." She flicked him with a claw. Ow. "It was a fight. Hell, we tried to sneak attack them."

He laughed, leaned in, and pressed his forehead against hers, and tilted his head to nudge it over her good eye.

"You really thought I'd think you were ugly because of a scar?"

"The... thought had crossed my mind." Sighing, she returned his lean, rubbed her horns into his scalp, and kissed him, too. "I'm just so fucking angry. I lost to that angel. I didn't get to help you. The angels killed most of the Cainites, not me. Daoka's bleeding to death. I lost a fucking eye, and--"

He kissed her again, set his hands on her shoulders, and held onto some of her spikes for leverage so he could stay kneeling with her and keep kissing her. A month ago he didn't know how to kiss to save his life, but he was getting better at it, and Caera purred as she nudged her nose into his.wŴw.π@v(ə)@Ŵσ(ι)π.C@@

"It might not have been what you wanted," he said, "but the Cainites are dead."

"Dead!" Lasca said, and she squealed as she joined them, Laara behind her. "Revenge! Imps and grems can live in tunnels again!"

"That's true," David said. "That's... true."

Laara came closer, book still snug under her arm, and she tilted her head as she looked up at him.

"David sad?"

"I... nevermind. Let's finish checking this place out, then get back and check on Dao."

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They checked every room. No Cainites. Big as the cathedral was, it was a simple layout, a giant chamber under the main chamber for prisoners, and a couple hallways that circled the two floors, each with dozens of attached rooms. Back in the main chamber, the stairways on the side only led up to a balcony that circled the inside, perfect for a congregation to listen to someone lecture from the pulpit.

Many of the corpses had been farmed for their hearts already, either by the gremlas Laria and Latia, or by Acelina. It was a veritable feast, one David did not look forward to partaking in, but he was hungry and it was only getting worse.

For now, though, it was time to properly inspect the anvil.

"It's useless, now," David said, gesturing to the amber vein that ran along the cracked floor. Bits of lava continued to leak from it down one side of the chamber, easily avoided, but holy crap, it made a stink as it burned corpses.

"How would it have worked?" Caera asked.