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Vin looked at her and held her gaze. A long silence set on them, and Mia forced herself to keep eye contact, no matter how heavy the silence grew. If he was going to say something important, something like 'you're going to become just like the rider', she had to know.

"He was not always like that."

"No?"

"No. When we first met, his aura was... not cold. It was heat, and power. It felt something like a demon's aura. Not the same, but similar." After another long moment of silence, Vin looked down, eyebrows furrowed as he dug through his memories. "A human who'd gained power from eating angel hearts, supposedly."

In some strange turn of events, some weird, mystical, magical moment of sheer lunacy, Vin was willing to answer her questions with more than yes and no, or a grunt. She had to take advantage while she could.*www.movielworm.com*

"Scary."

"But something changed at some point, before my failed attack on Death's Spire. We met again, and he'd changed. The rage had lost its heat, and gained a coldness to it." He shrugged, as if it was perfectly reasonable. "He was no longer willing to join me on my rampage. We fought."

"You fought? He attacked you?"*www.NothingWorries.com*

He shrugged again. "We attacked each other."

Of course they did. She bit down the urge to yell something about men being dumb men. But that wasn't fair, or accurate. They were both predators, apex predators at that, and upon realizing they couldn't cooperate, a fight was inevitable.

"So, way way way back when, the rider was... like you? A big ball of rage and aggression?"

"Yes." He almost sounded proud.

"But then, some hundreds of years ago, you met him again and he'd changed? Just randomly? And now he's this cold killer who's... out to get me? And probably the other unmarked?"

"Yes."

She shivered again and stood a little closer to her bodyguard.

"He was able to tame monsters before the change?"*WWW.MovieWorries.com*

"Yes."

"You know how?"

Vin shrugged. "His aura."

"Do auras work on hellbeasts?"

"Not demon auras, not well." He gestured to her. "Maybe your different aura will work better."

"Maybe. But, I mean, I'd prefer to not use an aura. And it's not like I'm good at crafting auras other than sexy ones. Remember when I tried that control aura on you?"

Another long pause as Vin met her eyes, and this time she looked away. It was an uncomfortable, weird memory for her, and no doubt a frustrating one for him. If things had gone according to plan, Zel, her tools, and Mia's aura would have broken Vin's mind and turned him into a doting slave.

No wonder Vin didn't really feel quite like himself lately.

"Your aura is a tool. A powerful tool. Use it."

She sneaked a peek back at him. Sure enough, he was looking straight at her, unfazed.

"And the rider's aura and mine, you don't think they're the same kind?"

"Whoever or whatever the rider is, his aura is not like a sin aura, or a grace aura. Those auras are... direct. A sword to the chest." Of course, he'd use a battle analogy. "Your aura is... like a vibration, a hellquake. It cannot be resisted. It simply is." The vibration comparison was more accurate than he knew. "The rider's aura has always been more like a harsh wind, now and before. You can resist it, but to do so is not easy. It surrounds and attacks you from all sides."*www.NothingWorries.com*

"Fuck." She shivered, rubbed her arms some more, and caressed her egg. "That... Yeah, that's what it felt like when I was near him."

"It's closer to demon or angel than it is to yours. But... not entirely different, either." Vin nodded more to himself than anything, eyes pointed down as he slipped into thoughts. "Before, it had heat. He wanted violence. He relished in it." The child of Belial smiled, but it faded. "Now he wants death with the absolute conviction of someone who has died themselves."

Died themselves. Mia stepped away and tried to suppress the urge to shiver more. That was enough trembling from her, today. The rider wasn't around, and even if he showed up again, she had Vinicius to help her.

"Vin."

Vin raised a brow, a subtle motion on his dragony demony face, and waited.

"I uh, I wanted to..." Fuck, what did she want to say? How did she even want to say it? A lot of humans struggled with receiving a heart-felt 'thank you' from someone else, let alone a compliment. She doubted Vin would feel bashful or awkward about it. If anything, he'd be offended, and that was the problem. The fuck did she say to someone like him to thank him?

Sighing, she set her egg-puppers to the side, and stood between her bodyguard's legs again. Vin looked at her, eyes stern, dripping with the stoicism of a crocodile. The big guy probably didn't even realize the tall, dark, brooding atmosphere he was putting out was very appealing to stupid young girls like Mia.

"I..." Double fuck. Why'd she have to notice that? Now thoughts of what Galon said floated through her mind. It'd certainly be a way to thank Vinicius, and repay him. A blowjob here or there, what would be the harm? Or maybe even sex? Maybe he could fit inside her? Or maybe just... a piece of him? Or maybe--

She clamped down on the fingers and strings inside her.

"I wanted to say, that... I don't know what the future is going to bring, but if there's anyone I'd trust to rip and tear any demons or angels that get in our way, it's you."

The dragon smiled. Compliment successful? A slow rumble worked through the demon, and his eyes stared into her until a single word from the colossus might make her shatter. Was he angry? Was he happy? Was he going to say something really mean and make her cry? Was he... going to scoop her up and jam his tongue into her again?

He opened his mouth, but after a pause, said nothing. Instead, he grinned at her, licked his teeth in a very 'I know what you're thinking' kinda way, and went back to being a statue.

Leaving Mia to squirm in her thoughts of said tongue opening her up again. God damn it.

~~Day 44~~

~~David~~

"Healed?" David asked.

"Healed!" Lasca beamed up at him, slipped in past his hands, and rubbed her forehead and horns against his chest to prove it. "Shallow cut."

"Yeah, it was." He moved her dreadlocks out of the way to double check the scar. Pinkish, reddish skin, the softest possible for a demon. But it was healed over, and as long as nothing happened to it, it'd eventually turn to an off-shade of dark red like the rest of her forehead.

"Angel spear hurt."

"I can imagine."

"Super sharp."

"Evidently."

"David saved me!"

"I... did, yeah." He smiled. "But you saved me too, fighting all those Cainites."

"Not like David did, nope nope." Nodding, she climbed onto his lap, hooked her legs around his hips, and flapped her wings a few times as she hugged him. With her cheek against his throat and horns rubbing against his chin, her breasts pressed to his chest, and she made sure they did, too. Lots of wiggling, lots of wiggling.

The group was going a little stir crazy. Jes never left Dao's side, but even she was feeling the weight of sitting around for the third day, waiting for the riiva to heal. Of course Dao insisted she was good to go, but Caera knew better, and whenever Dao clicked at her, Caera gave her wrapped stomach a poke. Dao's hiss of pain was proof.

One more day, and they'd be off. Dao still wouldn't be able to move on her own, but Caera would have no trouble carrying her, mount style. A week after that, maybe Dao could move on her own, but until then, they had to be careful with every step they took. Go slow, no chase scenes with deadly angels, nothing like that. It was going to be a crawling walk across the last stretch of Death's Grip to reach the Grave Valley, but a walk that could wait until tomorrow.