

Chapter 38:

– Silas –

I flew the ghost bike through the underworld, with Rebecca sitting in front of me and Taylor right behind me. Gabriel flew ahead of us, her twelve glowing wings lighting up the darkness and showing the way forward.

I still could not believe we were really here, in the middle of the Great War from DxD.

Part of me wondered if I was actually going to meet God here. I did not know what he would be like. Was he supposed to be kind and forgiving, or was he going to be the strict, old testament version of Big G?

Taylor kept moving around behind me, pressing her body up against my back through my costume. She would not stop shifting, like she was restless or nervous.

Rebecca, on the other hand, was almost completely still in front of me. Before, she had been playful, even rubbing her ass against my crotch and making it hard not to get turned on. Now, after I learned she was actually Alexandria, she was stiff as a board.

I knew she was freaked out, and to be honest, so was I. I did not know how to handle it. Fuck, I was just trying to keep us all flying and not lose my mind. I mean, yeah, I had met Contessa and she was surprisingly chill. I just hadn't been expecting this kind of thing.

Taylor pressed her body tighter against my back as we cut through the heavy underworld air. I could feel her nerves in the way her hands gripped my waist. After a minute, her voice finally broke the silence. "Silas, what exactly did your system tell you about this world?" she asked, her voice soft but shaky. "You sounded like you knew more than you were letting on, back when you were talking with Gabriel."

I felt Rebecca twitch between my legs, her body tensing up, so I knew she was listening just as closely as Taylor.

I thought about how to explain.

I raised my voice to be heard over the wind and called out, "We're in another world that's almost like our own Earth, but here, every mythology is real. Gods, demons, angels, legends—all of it exists. Not just stories."

"Fuck," Rebecca muttered from up front, her head turning just enough for me to see her eyes go wide. Her voice was flat, almost numb, but it still carried all the shock I felt myself knowing we were here.

Was it weird I considered this world MORE dangerous than Star Wars? Or maybe it was just this specific time period. I knew that there would *some* "good" devils and fallen angels, but the

majority would unfortunately be evil as fuck. Unless we ran into Runeas Gremory or Azazel, we would be fighting for our lives.

Taylor let out a little squeak behind me. "Wait, are you saying that winged lady up there is actually an archangel? She wasn't just calling herself that because she's a cape with white wings...?"

"She's not a cape." I nodded, even though neither of them could see my face. "She's the real deal. And it gets crazier. We're not just in another world. We're back in time—right in the middle of the war between Heaven and Hell. God's forces against Lucifer, devils, demons, and all the fallen angels who didn't side with the devil but still want to rebel against heaven. The whole thing is a mess. Just chaos, war and death."

Rebecca's head dropped and she let out a long groan. "Double fuck."

The three of us were quiet after that, just flying through the darkness.

Finally, we started to see lights flickering in the distance, but as we got closer, I realized those were not lamps or torches. They were angels, dozens of them, glowing softly as they flew through the air. Each one had wings like Gabriel—some with two, some with four, but only Gabriel had twelve. Their white feathers shimmered in the darkness, lighting up the side of a massive stone fortress carved right into the mountain ahead of us.

As we approached, sentry angels flying patrols spotted Gabriel immediately. They waved at her, calling out in voices that echoed above the fortress walls. No one tried to stop her or even looked suspiciously at us flying right behind her.

It was obvious the angels trusted Gabriel absolutely, and maybe that was just how this faction worked. I doubted the devils or the fallen would have let us in without some kind of interrogation.

I guided the bike down into the main courtyard, the tires squealing softly as I touched down on the stone.

Within seconds, a group of angels swooped down from the walls, their wings flapping as they landed around us. Most of them had two wings, and all of them looked young, beautiful, and excited to see Gabriel. They started chattering all at once, voices overlapping, but every word was in ancient Latin.

Gabriel grinned, waving to the crowd. She switched easily into their language, answering their rapid questions with a calm, friendly tone.

Rebecca and Taylor slid off the bike, both looking a little overwhelmed. A few angels stared openly at the ghost bike, reaching out to touch the wheels and the metal. One of them—a dark-haired woman with big blue eyes—pointed at me and said something rapid-fire, her hands waving animatedly.

I just raised my hands while shrugging. “Sorry, I have no idea what you’re saying,” I said. “We only speak English.”

The moment I spoke, every single angel froze. Wings paused mid-flap, conversations cut off, and the entire courtyard went silent as all the angels stared at me. Then, just like before, that weird magic ripple passed through the air, and suddenly every angel started speaking in English—fluent, excited, and all at once.

A tall angel with silver hair leaned in, her eyes wide. “This language—there are so many words! I have never heard anything so detailed. What is a 'motorcycle'? What does 'fuck' mean?”

All around us, the angels started jabbering in English, tripping over the new words, absolutely fascinated. “The vocabulary is incredible!” one said.

“The grammar is so strange, but so flexible!” another gushed.

“This is so much better than Latin. I am never going back.”

Rebecca rolled her eyes and groaned under her breath, “I am so jealous. These beings can learn any language just by hearing a couple of words.”

“It's not fair,” Taylor snorted next to me. “I am literally failing Spanish...”

Gabriel finally stepped forward, raising her hands, her voice calm but commanding. Instantly, her angelic siblings quieted down. She looked around and said, “These are our human guests. Silas, Rebecca, and Taylor. They were sent here to aid us in the war effort by our Father!”

Damn, was it too late to correct that misunderstanding?

As soon as Gabriel finished speaking, all the angels burst into cheers, applauding and calling out their thanks to us. They actually believed it. They meant every word. It was all so honest and pure.

I was honestly a little thrown off by how sincere they were. I was not used to this. Maybe it was just that I was from Brockton Bay, where we were all untrusting cynical assholes...

– Rebecca –

Some of the angels crowded closer and began asking if the humans were hungry. A golden-haired angel with bright green eyes smiled kindly at them. She explained, “We do not really need to eat food. We survive on the faith our Father provides us, but we keep food around just in case we have mortal visitors. It might not be very good, though. You should check before you eat anything.”

Taylor looked a little relieved to have something practical to do. She lifted her hand and sighed, “I can check it for bugs. Just in case.”

"I'll go with you, Taylor." Silas said, turning his head and giving Rebecca a faint look.

Rebecca watched the two of them walk away, feeling her stomach twist. They really were her closest friends since Hero died. And that was over a decade ago...

She had always known this kind of fuck up was inevitable. A secret like this, wasn't ever going to go over easily. At least Silas was not outright ignoring her. That would have hurt even worse. She guessed he and Taylor might need to have their own talk—probably about the fact that Taylor had known about Rebecca's identity and had not told him.

Gabriel watched the pair leave as well, her serene face softening. The archangel—Rebecca still could hardly believe she was thinking that word seriously—turned to Rebecca and asked, "Would you mind if we spoke in private for a moment?"

Rebecca straightened, forcing herself not to flinch under that bright gaze. "Of course," she replied, her voice steady even though she felt anything but calm. She followed Gabriel as the archangel led her away from the crowds of angels.

Rebecca folded her arms across her chest, doing her best to look calm as she followed Gabriel into a small, private stone chamber off the main corridor. The heavy door shut behind them with a muted thud. She waited, watching the archangel with careful eyes. Gabriel snapped her fingers and, in an instant, a shimmering golden barrier snapped into place around the walls and ceiling. Rebecca heard the soft hum of power as the world outside faded away—no sound, no prying eyes, nothing but the two of them in that glowing bubble of privacy.

For a moment, Gabriel's serene smile vanished, replaced by a look of cold judgment. When she spoke, her voice lost all warmth. "Your soul is tainted. You have committed countless atrocities—more than I have ever seen from any human, even the most monstrous among them." Gabriel's eyes hardened, pinning Rebecca in place. "You, Rebecca Costa-Brown, are a monster...."

Rebecca felt a chill run down her spine. Even as the unbreakable superwoman of Earth Bet, she had never been looked at like this. She could remember standing her ground against the Simurgh, staring down Endbringers, but standing here under the archangel's gaze, she felt powerless. Rebecca realized that if Gabriel wanted to destroy her, she would not stand a chance. For the first time, she wondered if Gabriel might be even more powerful than Scion himself.

The thought made her feel almost dizzy.

Her whole life had been shaped by the need to defeat Scion, the greatest threat her world had ever known—and now she was standing in front of a being that might be even stronger.

Rebecca forced herself not to look away. She shifted on her feet, uncomfortable. "Yes," she said quietly, her voice steady despite the fear bubbling in her chest. "I am aware of everything I have

done. The deaths, the lies, the betrayals. But everything I did—I did it for humanity. For the survival of my species. I did what I had to.”

Gabriel tilted her head, studying her with an expression that was equal parts beautiful and disturbingly innocent. “Is that so?” Gabriel asked, her voice almost curious. Rebecca gritted her teeth. A being this powerful had no right to look so damn adorable. The archangel shook her head, her feathers rustling behind her. “A human soul as dark as yours would be famous in this world. The gods of every pantheon would know your name. Your reputation would echo through every realm—especially with all the death I can see staining your spirit.” Gabriel’s gaze was steady. “And yet, I have never heard of you, Rebecca. Where do you and your friends truly come from?” Rebecca hesitated, but then Gabriel continued, her eyes flicking as if she was seeing something invisible. “And then there is Silas. His soul is the complete opposite of yours. It practically glows.” Gabriel’s tone turned incredulous. “He carries the karma of someone who has saved millions—possibly billions—of lives. I have never witnessed such purity and hope in a human before. It is extraordinary!”

Rebecca could not help herself. She snorted. That sounded about right. He freed an entire planet of slaves in the Star Wars universe and then he went off to drive off the simurgh before she could ruin another city—driving all the people insane to turn on each other.

“And what do you see when you look at Taylor?” Rebecca asked, unable to hide her curiosity. She tried to keep her voice casual, but there was a tension there. A hope that maybe Taylor would be judged less harshly.

Gabriel tilted her head, considering the question. For a moment she looked almost playful, one finger pressing against her lips as if tasting the question itself. “Taylor is complicated,” Gabriel admitted. “Her heart is full of pain, and there is darkness there. But I also see hope and love—stronger than you might realize. The balance of her soul is positive, if only just. She has more good karma than bad, but there are stains. She has brought death, even to some who may not have deserved it.”

Of course the archangel saw everything.

Taylor had a body count, and yes Rebecca had helped cover some of it up. The idea that all of that was visible, laid bare by some kind of angelic soul-reading, made Rebecca uneasy and impressed at the same time. Especially considering all of this had literally happened on Earth, in an entirely separate universe.

She tried not to let any of that shock at this Angel’s abilities show on her face.

Instead, she forced herself to speak up again, her tone dry, almost flippant. “So, are you going to *kill me* for being evil or whatever?” Rebecca asked, cocking one eyebrow and trying to sound braver than she felt. “Is this the part where you turn me to ash, just like you did to those devil bitches?”

Gabriel's expression softened, but there was steel behind her eyes. "I will do no such thing," the archangel said quietly. "That is only because that young hero, Silas, clearly carries strong feelings for both you and Taylor. His deeds, his soul, do not yet outweigh the sins you have committed. But I sense the balance could shift. If you are given a true second chance, will you take it? Will you try to earn the trust you have been given by one such as him?"

Rebecca felt her throat tighten. She did not have a flippant answer for that. "... I want to try," she said, her voice rough. "I really do. I care about him, he makes me want to be better. He's like the fabled story hero I always wanted to be. Before everything went to shit..."

Gabriel studied her for a long moment, as if weighing her soul in her hand. Finally, she nodded. "That is enough. For now."

– Taylor –

Taylor followed Silas down a polished stone hallway, two angels—one with curls as gold as a sunrise and another with deep brown skin and four shimmering wings—flanking them like overeager tour guides.

She could not help but fidget, tucking a loose strand of hair behind her ear as the angels continued their cheerful barrage of questions. Taylor had always felt awkward in churches, and this place was a thousand times more intimidating. She had never really been much of a believer—especially after her mother had died.

The first angel, the one with the golden curls, leaned in close as they passed through a tall stone archway. "So, you eat food every day, yes? What is that like? What is your favorite food? And what is it like to... what is the word... defecate?"

Taylor blinked, then shot Silas an incredulous look. "Did she just ask what it's like to poop?"

Silas just grinned. "That answers the question about whether angels poop or not..." he chuckled.

Before she could respond to that, the brown-skinned angel piped up. "Is it uncomfortable not to be able to fly? I imagine walking must get tiring. Do you like smelling your own sweat all the time, or is that considered unpleasant for mortals?"

Taylor groaned, running a hand down her face. "For fuck's sake. This is worse than health class."

The angels gasped in delight at the new phrase. "'Fuck's sake?'—is that another human swear? What does it mean?" the golden-haired one asked eagerly, her huge blue eyes shining. "Who is 'fuck' referring to?"

Taylor shot Silas a look, silently pleading for backup, but he just laughed under his breath. "You are on your own, Taylor."

She felt her cheeks flush. “It’s... just something people say. Like when they are frustrated. Or really, really confused.” Taylor kept her eyes on the corridor ahead, feeling more out of place with every step. She wished her mom was here. Or that her mom could see her now, walking through heaven’s outpost in the middle of hell, trying to keep a straight face while being grilled by literal angels about her bowel movements.

“This is our food!” the golden-haired angel announced proudly, extending her arms dramatically toward a corner piled high with what might once have been grains and fruit. Now, it was little more than a heap of rotting mush, crawling visibly with insects and worms. The pungent stench of mold and decay immediately filled Taylor’s nose, making her gag.

Beside her, Silas sucked in a breath and sighed audibly, clearly disappointed. Taylor glanced sideways at him, trying not to laugh at how utterly tragic the expression on his face looked.

The angels beamed proudly, utterly oblivious to their reactions. “We keep it here in case mortal guests arrive!” the other angel—the one with four shimmering wings—added cheerfully, fluttering just above the mess. “We hope it meets your needs!”

Taylor swallowed hard, exchanging another long, despairing look with Silas. How could creatures who were literally divine have such a skewed idea of edible food?

Silas quickly composed himself and smiled warmly at the angels. “Thank you both so much. We’ll, uh... we can handle it from here. You’ve already been incredibly helpful.”

The angels exchanged delighted looks, glowing softly with joy at his praise. “You are very welcome!” they chorused, wings fluttering as they quickly departed up the stairs, leaving Taylor and Silas alone in the storeroom.

The silence stretched awkwardly between them. Taylor stared at the rotten pile, then sighed heavily, her shoulders slumping. “We are so fucked,” she muttered softly.

Silas shook his head and rubbed at the back of his neck, looking mildly stressed but not panicked. “It’s not as bad as it looks. I have some emergency supplies in my inventory. It’s just... with three people eating, I’m guessing we have maybe a week tops before we run out.” He frowned, looking genuinely regretful. “I really should have stocked up more.”

Taylor raised an eyebrow, feeling a reluctant smile tug at her lips. “Well, at least you thought ahead.”

He laughed quietly, the warm sound echoing softly off the stone walls. His presence helped ease the anxiety knotting her stomach, at least somewhat. But then another silence settled in, heavier this time. The longer it stretched, the more uncomfortable she felt, guilt gnawing at her chest. She fidgeted nervously, shifting her weight from foot to foot, eyes fixed firmly on the dirty stone floor.

Finally, Taylor forced herself to break the silence. “Silas, listen...” she began quietly, her voice shaky and hesitant. “I owe you an apology. About Rebecca, I mean. Keeping her identity a secret from you... that was really shitty. You deserved better.” She glanced up hesitantly, meeting his eyes.

Silas's expression softened immediately, and he sighed gently, stepping closer to her. He seemed thoughtful for a moment, choosing his words carefully before replying. “Yeah, I won't lie. That hurt a bit,” he admitted honestly. “But I get why you did it. She asked you to keep it quiet, right?”

Taylor nodded quickly, relieved he understood at least that much. “She did. She told me everything, made me swear not to say a word. But I should've trusted you. I should've known better. Keeping something like that from you wasn't fair...”

...Taylor watched Silas closely, anxiety squeezing at her chest as she tried to read his expression. His eyes narrowed slightly, and he hesitated, clearly struggling with his words.

When he finally spoke, his voice was quiet, guarded. “So... Rebecca Brown,” Silas said slowly, eyes locked firmly on the storeroom's stone floor, “the cute, sarcastic Latina girl I sat next to in class, ate lunch with... Is she even real? Or was all of that just another carefully crafted persona to fool me?”

Taylor saw the hurt in his expression, the tension in his jaw, and felt her own heart twist painfully. She moved forward, instinctively reaching out to touch his arm gently, desperate to reassure him. “No, Silas, Rebecca Brown is real. Of course she's real.”

His eyes flicked up to hers, cautious, vulnerable. “How can you be sure?” he asked quietly, pain evident in his voice.

Taylor shook her head firmly, her fingers tightening gently around his arm. “Because she was my friend too. Not Alexandria. Not the hero. Just Rebecca. Whenever we spent time alone, away from Winslow, away from everything... she let her guard down. She laughed at stupid jokes, she binge-watched movies with me. She talked about you—a lot,” Taylor admitted softly, feeling a blush creep up her neck as she said it.

Of course, both of them did.

Silas raised an eyebrow, the corner of his mouth quirking upwards slightly. “She did?”

Taylor rolled her eyes. “Yes. She tried not to let it show, but whenever you came up in conversation, she'd get this stupid, goofy smile on her face. It was... honestly kind of adorable.” Silas exhaled slowly, tension gradually easing from his shoulders as he listened. Taylor took advantage of his softened demeanor, stepping closer to look directly into his eyes, making sure he heard every word she was saying. “Listen, Silas. Rebecca Brown might have started out as just a cover, sure. She told me that when she first transferred to Winslow, it was to keep an eye on you...” Taylor hesitated, biting her lower lip before continuing. “But somewhere along the

way, I think Rebecca Brown stopped being just a cover. She became real to her. Like an escape. A place where she didn't have to be Alexandria, didn't have to carry all that weight."

Silas's gaze softened further, something like understanding finally starting to replace the wary suspicion in his eyes.

Taylor continued. "We talked a lot, you know—about everything. About school, about Sophia fucking Hess and how much we both hated her," she continued with a small smirk, eliciting a reluctant chuckle from Silas. "We talked about you all the time. Trust me, Silas, there was no pretense there. Rebecca Brown wasn't fake. Maybe she started that way, but she's very real now, I promise."

Silas finally nodded slowly, seeming to process everything Taylor was saying. After a long moment, he sighed softly, the tension finally releasing fully from his posture. "Okay. Yeah, I get it. It's just... a lot to process."

Taylor took a deep breath, her heart fluttering nervously in her chest. She glanced up at Silas through her eyelashes, watching the conflicted expression on his face. They were both tense from everything they'd discussed, and she wanted desperately to ease that tension.

"Maybe I can help your mind process something else," she said softly, her voice playful but edged with shy confidence. A sly smile spread across her lips as she stepped closer, placing her hand gently over his chest, feeling the firm armor beneath her fingertips.

Silas's eyes widened slightly in surprise, but he didn't pull away. Encouraged, Taylor leaned up onto her tiptoes, closing the distance between them, and pressed her lips to his. At first, it was gentle, almost hesitant. But as she felt Silas relax into the kiss, it quickly deepened, becoming warmer, more intimate.

Taylor's breath hitched as his lips parted hers, and his tongue gently, tentatively slid into her mouth. She met him eagerly, her own tongue tangling with his as the world around them seemed to fade away. Her fingers moved upwards, running through his soft blonde hair, gripping it gently as she pulled herself closer, pressing her body against his.

She heard a low, appreciative noise escape Silas's throat, sending a thrilling jolt of pleasure through her body. His hand moved lower, sliding down the curve of her back and settling boldly onto her ass. His fingers squeezed possessively, pulling her hips firmly against his, and she couldn't stop a startled yet excited little squeak from slipping out of her mouth.

Heat flooded Taylor's cheeks, her body responding eagerly as she rubbed her thighs together instinctively, arousal beginning to pool between her legs. For a few perfect seconds, all thoughts of angels, devils, and wars vanished from her mind.

There was only Silas—his lips, his warmth, his strong hands holding her close.

That blissful moment abruptly shattered at the curious, innocent voice that suddenly called out from the stairway behind them. "Oh! Are you humans going to mate now?" The familiar voice of the four-winged angel chimed in brightly, brimming with curiosity. "I've never seen that before, and the concept of it seems so fascinating!"

Taylor broke away from Silas instantly, stumbling back a step with a mortified squeak. Her cheeks flamed bright red beneath her glasses, embarrassment flooding through her so intensely she felt dizzy. Silas stood frozen for a heartbeat, clearly caught off guard, before hastily shifting his stance, awkwardly adjusting his costume to try to conceal the obvious bulge that the heated embrace had caused.

"Ah, no—no, that's not going to happen right now," Silas said quickly, his voice strained with embarrassment. His face was flushed a deep crimson that matched Taylor's own, his eyes darting anxiously between Taylor and the curious angel.

The angel's wings drooped visibly, her expression crestfallen. "Aww," she said with genuine disappointment, as if she'd been denied a particularly interesting lesson. "That is unfortunate. Human mating rituals seem quite fascinating. Perhaps another time?"

Taylor groaned softly, hiding her face in her hands. "Oh god..." she muttered, thoroughly mortified.

The angel pouted at her. Was it because she used the lord's name in vain just then?

Beside her, Silas cleared his throat awkwardly. "Yeah sure, another time..."

The angel brightened immediately. "I would like that very much!" she said enthusiastically, entirely oblivious to the embarrassment radiating from the two humans. She then shook her head. "Oh yeah, big sis Gabriel wanted to see you both. She has gifts!"

– Silas –

Dragons weren't supposed to get embarrassed by anything.

Still, fuck—getting caught making out by that wide-eyed angel was embarrassing. It's like all my supernatural senses melted away when I was kissing the Queen of Escalation just then.

My face stayed hot all the way up the stairs, each step a reminder of just how awkward that moment had been. Taylor walked alongside me, cheeks still red, eyes fixed forward to avoid looking at either me or our annoyingly chipper angel escort.

...Five minutes later, we stepped into a spacious chamber lit by soft, glowing orbs. Gabriel stood waiting, her majestic twelve wings folded gently behind her. In front of her hovered two elegant suits of armor, glinting in polished gold.

"I noticed Taylor and Rebecca arrived without proper protection," Gabriel explained with a warm smile. She gestured gracefully towards the armor. "These will serve you well, I hope."

My eyebrows rose sharply as I took in the armor's design. It was exactly the kind of thing you'd expect from the DxD universe—functional, yeah, but more than a little provocative. The breastplates would hug every curve snugly, and emphasize their chests, while the lower armor curved around hips, thighs, and asses. It looked as though the armor had been specifically molded to show off their figures, leaving very little to the imagination. If this armor was designed by Big G, then I had to admit that guy had taste.

Wait, was that a blasphemous thought in this universe? Meh, fuck it...

Rebecca stared at the armor with an incredulous expression, her eyes flicking up to Gabriel as if waiting for the punchline. Taylor glanced at me sideways, biting her lip in embarrassment, cheeks flushing all over again.

"Uh," I cleared my throat awkwardly, forcing my eyes upwards to Gabriel's innocent face. "Are you sure these are battle-ready?"

Gabriel tilted her head curiously, clearly confused by my reaction. "Of course, Silas. Each suit is blessed with protective enchantments by the Father himself. They will keep your companions safe from harm from even high-class devil attacks." She smiled, completely unaware—or perhaps unconcerned—that the armor made them both look like they'd stepped straight out of some angelic pinup magazine.

Rebecca sighed deeply, running a hand through her dark brown hair. "Is there any chance I can have mine in black?" she asked dryly, turning the hovering armor slightly with a skeptical frown. "I'm really not a gold type of girl."

"Actually—" Taylor spoke at the same moment, then paused as she and Rebecca exchanged surprised looks. I smirked slightly, realizing again how similar their tastes actually were. Taylor adjusted her glasses, cheeks still pink as she gestured toward the armor. "I mean, gold's fine, but... black just suits me better too."

Gabriel blinked, clearly taken aback. She seemed almost scandalized, a cute little pout forming on her delicate lips as she glanced between the girls. "But... black is a color associated with *evil*. With darkness."

Rebecca shrugged nonchalantly, arms folding beneath her chest. "Yeah, well, it also goes with everything," she pointed out matter-of-factly.

Taylor nodded enthusiastically beside her. "Exactly. Practicality matters!"

Gabriel stared at them both for a long moment, her expression caught somewhere between confusion and mild exasperation. Finally, she let out a gentle sigh and snapped her fingers lightly. In an instant, the armor shimmered and shifted, the golden hues melting away into sleek,

polished black that gleamed elegantly beneath the chamber's soft lighting. "There," Gabriel conceded softly, her tone slightly resigned. "If this is what pleases you."

Rebecca and Taylor both approached their respective armor suits, inspecting the modifications. Rebecca looked genuinely pleased, her lips quirking into a satisfied smirk as she nodded in approval. Taylor traced her fingers down the armor's chestplate hesitantly, obviously still embarrassed by its snugness, though I couldn't help but notice the appreciative way her eyes lingered on it.

And then, for the first time since we'd arrived in the Underworld, my system screen abruptly flashed into existence right in front of me. An emergency quest notification:

[Emergency Quest: The Devil is Due!]

[A Demon Lord approaches your base with his swarm of insects, intent on slaughtering every holy being inside. Defeat or repel the Demon Lord to prevent as many angelic deaths as possible!]

That meant a Maou—a devil king. Instantly, I knew exactly which one it was going to be.

Taylor, Rebecca, and Gabriel all stepped closer, crowding around me to read the glowing words hovering in mid-air.

"Well," Rebecca said after a tense moment, voice edged with weary resignation as she turned towards the sleek, black angelic armor Gabriel had provided. "We'd better get suited up, then."

She glanced my way, her dark eyes lingering on mine for a moment. A flicker of something passed between us—apology, guilt, anxiety. We hadn't gotten the chance to clear the air yet, to have that heart-to-heart conversation she knew we desperately needed. But now wasn't the time, and Rebecca obviously knew it as well as I did. We would have to wait till after the battle.

Taylor suddenly jerked her head sideways sharply, her eyes widening as if seeing through the stone walls themselves. "Silas, a massive swarm of insects—no, millions—is coming fast. Like a fucking tidal wave. It's heading straight toward us."

Gabriel, however, seemed completely oblivious to Taylor's growing anxiety or the tension thickening rapidly in the room. Instead, her bright eyes were fixed reverently on the space where my system notification had just vanished. Her twelve wings quivered excitedly. "Was that message directly from our Father?" she asked breathlessly, stepping closer to me, her gentle hands clasped together as though in prayer. "Silas, you are truly, truly blessed!"

Despite the situation, her innocent enthusiasm almost made me chuckle. Almost. My lips twitched upward slightly, before falling again into seriousness. "Maybe so, Gabriel—but we've got company. Beelzebub himself is on his way."

The moment the name left my lips, Gabriel's excitement vanished instantly, replaced by an expression of righteous fury and resolve. "So he is..."

XXX