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## [013] [Rescue (Monica)]

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Monica remembered when she had asked what the word “feral” meant.

Dia said it was too complicated for Monica, and Rick had tried to explain it. They said she had been “feral” before meeting Rick, and said that “ferals” could not think properly, that their think-heads were not all awake.

But Monica was sure that it was Rick and Dia who did not know what it meant.

Being feral meant being alone.

To Monica, thinking about her life before Rick was like tracking scents while wearing a smelly cloth over her nose. She could only determine the stronger impressions, but there was much that was lost to her. And sometimes she would lose the trail.

But some things were hard to forget.

In that cave, with... someone else. Someone strong that could fight and win. Even then, Monica had been alone. The powerful one would not protect her against the things that hurt. Monica had to grow strong to protect herself, but the stronger she became, the more hurtful things the powerful one would throw against her.

When there were no more hurtful things in the forest that could truly hurt Monica, she turned her claws to the strong one. Because there could only be one strong-one on the mountain.

Monica had won. And she kept her mountain, hunted in her mountain, hunted the intruders, fought other strong ones, won. And won. And won. If she felt bored, she would find prey to play with. If she was cold, she'd nap under the sun. If she was hot, she'd bathe in the stream or nap in her cave.

But she had been alone.

Then she found him, stumbling, afraid, lost in her mountain, his pack dying. So many strange things about him, smells, tastes, but most of all, his eyes. None had ever looked at her with the eyes of a strong one while being so weak.

Her curiosity had won her hunger, and she followed him.

And now Monica understood that not being alone was harder.

Worse, it was “complicated”.

“Warleader!”

The little green one looked up at Monica and made that silly gesture of putting her hand in front of her eyes. Dia had said it meant “respect”, but Monica could smell the fear in the little green one. But there was also excitement and fight-hungry smells on the green one. None directed at Monica, but there all the same. It was the scent of a small one that thought she could hunt.

There was another faint scent, Monica noticed, a smell of “pack” and “follow”. Similar to one Dia had when near Rick, but also different. Was this what Dia had meant with “respect” ? Monica would ask Rick about the new word.

She squirmed as Monica continued to smell at her more closely. “We’ve confirmed the camp spent most of the day fighting some ferals.” The small one straightened and closed her eyes, raising her head and exposing her throat.

Behind Monica, Dia coughed. “Warleader Monica thanks you.”

The feline snorted, making the small one jump and run away, stopping for only long enough to cover her eyes with the hand again before leaving. Monica looked at Dia. The weak-small-annoying-nagging-one had that smell of fear and hesitation.

Things were complicated. Again.

“Save Rick now?” Monica asked.

“Tomorrow, when the sun rises and the Fledglings are at their weakest,” Dia said. “But before that, there’s another scouting group that we could-”

Monica’s tail lashed, flashing her fangs and tensing her shoulders. But half-blind Dia did not see the warning, so Monica had to speak. “No,” she declared. “Monica sneak. Take Rick.”

Dia was annoying.

Rick would have noticed. Monica had been making extra sure to teach him, especially about the tail lash. It was very important because not everyone would be as patient as Monica.

She'd yet to teach him about scents. But the soft-smelly rock "soap" made it hard. It didn't even hide his smell!

"No. We have to be careful." Dia snapped loudly, scent full of fear. "They're not ready. We won't be tonight either, but it's as far as we can push."

Dia pointed towards the many weaker-ones that were working with the stronger-ones near the trees of the too-small-forest. They would cut down the trees and then cut them smaller still. Many were working together, chopping the wood into different shapes, and then giving it to the strong ones that had not helped cut the trees. They would put their power into the wood, make it strong and hard and hard to scratch or break.

They would make those funny long pointed weapons and also use it to cover their bodies with the flatter ones. It was annoying that the weak ones did not have claws to fight with, nor that they were able to make their bodies tougher like Monica could. Monica had grown bored with looking at their work.

But waiting around and napping as they cut down more trees and made more pointy sticks and more protection was still better than killing smelly-blood ones.

It had been so annoying.

Dia asking Monica to fight the strong ones, beat them, call herself "warleader", and then hunt the smelly-blood ones. They were all over, always hiding in the shadows and threatening the humans of the strong ones. Dia said it was how the bad-ones were "keeping control". But hunting them was annoying. They would always run, and they would use shadows to avoid Monica. Always took too long to catch them.

But Dia insisted that if they got away, it would be dangerous for Rick.

"Tonight. Fight!"

Monica proclaimed, raising her claw over her head.

Everyone immediately stopped their work and raised their fists, cheering loudly, stomping loudly. It was a strange roar, a together roar, like the howl of the packs but different. This was not a pack. It smelled a bit like a pack, but they were not a pack. They followed Monica, and because they followed Monica, they worked as a pack.

That felt strange.

Monica leaned closer to one of the small ones.

“Bowl?” she asked, pointing at the thing the weak one had picked up.

“This is a helmet, Warleader!” The small one said, turning it over and putting it on her head. “It protects.” Monica considered the little not-bowl on the weak short-green-maiden, poking at it with her claw. It was sturdier than wood, hard to scratch.

“It’s a bit rushed, I know.” The weak-one winced, smelling nervous. “It will stop being as hard in two days, but it’s only for tonight, so…” Removing the helmet, she offered it up to Monica. “Sorry if it’s not good enough, we were not allowed to make many things in Sinco.”

What was she supposed to do? Monica remembered when she’d shown off to Rick that she was a good hunter, when she brought him some birds that he made tasty with fire.

“Good girl.” She patted the small one’s head.

She took the helmet and put it on her head. It was small, and they bothered her ears, but it was easy to adjust. The small one smiled wide, scent full of happiness, green-pointy-ears wobbling. She quickly ran off, going back to the not-bowls and working harder.

Was this how Rick felt?

It... wasn’t bad.

The sound of rushing footsteps told Monica something annoying was coming. “Warleader!” It was a word with fear in it. “Some of the maidens have run off!”

Monica sighed and nodded. Another annoying hunt. Dia was gone too, had left to do something with the tiniest, weakest ones. Which was even more annoying because when Monica came back from the hunt, she’d tell Monica to tell her next time she left on a hunt.

But she was not Rick, and Monica did not care if Dia was angry or annoyed or worried. She made Monica angry and annoyed, anyway.

So she left the group, ready to hunt the annoying ones. Monica moved about, checking for new scents and sounds. She found the scent of much fear and of running away. Monica wanted to just ignore them, but she followed it.

They weren’t very far, not for Monica’s speed.

All weak ones, and they had taken one of the weak humans with them. They were crouched in the tall dry grass, trying to sneak, to avoid being spotted from far away. But they did not hide their scent, and they were too loud. At least they were using dark-sky to sneak better. But they were very bad at sneaking, anyway.

“We’re going to die.”

“And if we stay, we die too! If we tell the bloodsuckers, at least we’ll be spared.”

Monica moved to flank them, ready for killing. Killing was always easier, less complicated, less annoying. Still, it was complicated now. Her head turned to where she knew Rick was. It wasn’t too far, the wind was blowing in that direction too.

Were there any good hunters in that bad place? There might be. They would smell death. It was a powerful smell, Monica knew.

No killing, then.

Like hunting a big strong one while ignoring the small weak ones because killing the weak ones would alert the big strong one. Monica was not happy, but Rick was more important.

She made sure she was between the not-dead-yet weak ones and the bad place before revealing herself to them. With a little growl, she stopped sneaking, standing tall over the tall grass and looking down at them.

“Go back.”

Monica would have at least broken one of their arms, but then Dia would have been very annoying about it.

“Spare us!” they spoke weakly, like little cubs that got hurt with little things.

“Go back.” Monica hated repeating herself. Why did they not listen? She pointed. “Or Monica angry.”

They ran. Scared and weak. Prey. Monica wanted to chase them, hunt them properly, kill them.

Make things easier.

She stayed there, though. Something felt... wrong.

But the smells and sounds had nothing wrong. Monica crouched, sneaking, looking more carefully. Was there a strong one trying to hunt her?

The wind shifted, and she caught something in it.

Death. Not fresh death. Old death. Too much old death.

Monica's hackles rose. The scent came from the same direction Rick was. She did not have time to wait; she ran. She even passed the weaklings and got to the others before they did.

"Dia!" she roared, yanking the cloth room and tearing it away. "Attack. NOW!"

The weak-pink-haired-one startled. "Wait, we're not ready!"

"Rick in danger!"

At least in this, Dia was not slow or full of fear. "Mobilize everyone!" She shouted, stomping out of the cloth-house and glaring at all around. "We attack now! We have only one opportunity!"

Monica roared, and everyone there began to move.

She wanted to run, right now, to not delay a single second.

"Monica," Dia said. "We need you to hunt the watchers, help the... others sneak close, very close." She grabbed Monica's hands, leaning closer, meeting her eyes meaningfully. "And you must kill the dangerous ones before they hurt Rick. Do you remember what we talked about?"

"No trust Kiara." Monica nodded. "No trust Eva."

"They will try to trick you." Dia nodded. "You must get to Rick and bring him back... and don't forget the wrist cloth!" She pointed at the piece of white thing on her wrist. "Friends have this."

"Monica knows," she said. There was a tightness in her chest that told her she had to hurry. That she could not wait any longer.

So she ran.

Her gut told her she could not delay and she would not slow down. Monica ran across the dry grass and barely bothered to sneak. She used the shadows to move faster, to jump ahead, to avoid attention if there was any, but also without slowing down.

And sometimes, she'd get close enough to one of the weak ones that were protecting the bad ones. Monica did not slow for them, she did not hunt them, she did not sneak to them. She tore them with her claws, ripped them before they could scream.

Weak, very weak, not even paying attention.

Monica didn't like it.

Where were the strong ones? Why were so few "looks outs" there?

The smell of death was getting stronger, of old death. Of piles of corpses and hunger. Monica knew the smell, it was the same as the one from the annoying big-big-big village. The same smell of the blood-eater.

She did not like the smell one bit.

And she knew it was near Rick. She could feel it deep in her chest.

But as bad as the smelly blood-eater's scent was, there was one smell above all others that Monica feared.

The scent of Rick's blood.

Rick was hurt.

Monica stopped trying to sneak or hide or hunt. She stopped killing unless the weak one was directly in her path. The shadows swallowed her as she pushed to jump as far ahead as she could each time, ignoring the burning sensation within her lungs. Rick was hurt, and she was not going to slow down.

There were many smelly-blood-weak-ones in the not-forest. They had noticed Monica, and had started to chase after her, too slow to catch up. Too weak to do anything but be an annoyance.

Monica felt the warmth in her chest becoming colder.

No!

"Stop her!"

Weak smelly-blood shouted, they used the shadows like Monica. But Monica could not play or kill, she had to run faster. She jumped into the shadows, pushing forward, barreling through their attempts to stop her.

Rick was dying!

Something about the shadows shifted, and she could not dive back in. Monica ignored it, pushing through the trees instead. Splinters and screams, the ones that got in her way she would grab and use to hammer against the next obstacle. Weaklings dying and blood.

“CHARGE!”

Dia screamed from way behind, too far behind, too far away to help. Only Monica could get to Rick fast enough.

She gripped the warmth inside her chest and refused to let go.

A figure moved to stand in Monica’s way.

“You will not-”

The weak-one had thought she could stop Monica, slow her down.

Her head was crushed under Monica’s claws. She pushed and pushed. And above all, she did not let go of the warmth, even as it burned and made her short of breath like a very hard hit to the chest.

Rick roared.

The sound reached her, loud, powerful, beautiful. It was the worst-best sound. It was a strong roar for someone like Rick, a roar Monica would be proud of. But it was the roar of death.

The last roar.

Monica grabbed everything she had, everything she could grasp, everything at all. She grabbed and grabbed and pulled and pulled. The shadows screamed, the weak smelly-blood ones cried in pain as Monica’s power bit at them. And the instant she could hold no more, she roared out.

Everything around her exploded.

The annoying not-forest was gone, there was nothing in her way.

She saw Rick. There were others in the way. Surprised, stunned, slow.

Monica charged, pushing harder.



Shadows, light, sprint, leap, roll, shadows. Monica ran fast, she screamed in her ears, her legs burned, her claws ached. There were shouts and screams and blood. And the strong old death trying to get to her.

No one was as fast as Monica, no one would get in her way.

Rick saw her, his eyes dim, his breath slow. He let out a soft gasp and fell.

But she got to him first.

He was still alive. Bloodied, bleeding, dying.

Monica's heart beat against her chest so hard she could barely even hear Rick's own.

His breathing was shallow, there was so much blood. And mixed with it, Eva. Eva had done this. Monica's ears were ringing, anger, fear, anger, fear, anger. The weak one wasn't too far away. She could smell it. The others were close. Monica would kill.

She would kill them all.

"Hey."

Rick had whispered, but it had been louder than everything else. He was hurt. She couldn't help him, but she had to keep him safe.

She had to take him to Dia.

"Rick safe."

Monica gave him the not-bowl of head protection. Her eyes trailed over the blood-smelly strong ones. Two of them were the most dangerous. Monica took their faces in, their scents, the sound of their breathing, of their heartbeats.

She would not forget them.

The old-old-smelly-blood-death one took the challenge.

"It seems we have gue-"

Monica kicked the ground as hard as she could, sending rocks and dirt and dust at them all. She added a fake-challenge-roar for good measure. The weaker ones shrieked and panicked, the strong ones thought Monica would fight.

"Do you really think-?"

She ignored the old-smelly-blood one and ran. She needed the strange glowing powers of Dia to save Rick.

All around her, many fights started.

But she ignored them.

Deep inside Monica, the fear bit at her, stung like a fresh wound that only grew deeper with every breath.

The fear of being alone again.

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## [014] [Destiny (Kiara)]

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Kiara was pinned, surrounded by the flavor of enemies.

The one-armed brute, Urtha, was the only one that did not have the taste of loyalty or obedience. No, her emotions were meaty and bloody with hints of pepper, eager for a fight, but also prioritizing self-preservation. It was she who kept Kiara fixed on the ground even as the Succubus' bond rebelled and screamed at the thought of her human's certain death.

Were it any other situation, she'd have snapped the bond off, at least to be able to navigate the situation calmly. She had no intention of letting her investment become someone else's meal. But no, the bond with the human was not so easily cracked.

And thus, Kiara was reduced to fighting against her own panic as well as the blood-suckers that were ruining everything.

"I told you he was mine!" the Succubus said, glaring, watching as her human was being torn to bloody ribbons.

"Consider this an admission fee." It was an offhanded reply from the Vampire. "Once you are free of the sentimental attachment to the blood-bag, you will be able to fully support our cause."

The superiority complex tasted like wine and ash, every last one of them and their obsession with blood, power, and eternal life. It was sickening just to stand near them, let alone having to interact with them.

The Succubus' mind raced, it raced through a million answers. How could she possibly convince the dust-rag to keep Rick alive without revealing the truth of what he was? Of what he could do? It was a miracle they thought she was struggling because of sentimental attachment rather than the bond being still there.

"Listen to me!" Kiara's body thrummed with power, pressuring it out to emphasize she meant business. "I've been searching for someone like him for decades. This is no mere flight of fancy. He is necessary for me to become a Dark Queen!"

A long shot, even if it was the truth.

Behind her, the Ghoul laughed. Even now the thing stank of putrid flesh with the kind of fanatical smoky undertones of loyalty you could only find in a death cult. “You must be deluded.”

The Vampire joined in on the sound, chuckling mirthfully. “The name of Dark Queen is merely that: a title. Only fools believe it to be an actual form maidens can take.” She shook her head. Her smug amusement tasted of bitter lime. “You must have grown up in some poor corner of the world. Succubi are much like Vampires, we have achieved perfection, there is no higher form we can take.”

Kiara grit her teeth, gaze flashing to Rick. The weak man was, somehow, still alive. An accomplishment in itself. But a miracle that would not last forever.

She didn't have time.

“I discovered ruins of the abandoned capital of the Empire of the Sands.” She declared through gritted teeth. How much could she say without it being too much? “Within it, there were texts written by Dark Queen Djamilah herself! They described the steps necessary for a Succubus to ascend.” She wriggled and snarled, making a gesture at Rick. “That human is the final ingredient I need! You have a spell of truth detection. You know I do not lie!”

Perhaps it was the desperation, or perhaps something else, but there was a tiny part of her that screamed in desperation. For once. For once, would someone believe her? For once, would the blood-sucker be different from the others? Or at least smart enough to understand that the death of Kiara's human would not bode well for the Vampire's plans?

“The spell of detecting truth cannot distinguish between honesty and self-deception.” The Vampire proclaimed. “And charmers are well known for lying, particularly to themselves.”

Kiara snarled, her power flaring out, this time as a warning.

They were all the same. Just as well. Words would not work and time had been running out. Just another fool. “If you insist on getting in my way...”

A breeze of cinnamon swept over them, and Kiara's attention snapped to the human. He stood there, bloodied, half dead, so weak that his normally ignorable aura was now invisible. Yet the overpowering flavor was coming out of him, growing in power even as his power remained negligible it sharpened.

And then he screamed, a roar that pushed an intent to rule and stand above everyone that cut into everything else like a guillotine. The cinnamon overwhelmed all else, the flavors of the crowd dulled and muted altogether. Even the Vampire could do nothing but stare in wide eyed surprise.

*It was in the scorching sands that I found my King.*

*He was so scrawny he cast no shadows.*

*Yet he could silence the mountains with but a look.*

*Such was his weakness.*

The moment would have been perfect if not because the cinnamon came with underlying hints of the minty barbarity of that damnable cat. Men weren't supposed to go around swaggering and pretending they were some sort of dangerous beast!

But it had worked. The leech had been scared of her wits and made a run for it.

And now the Vampire was looking at her human like he was a toy she ached to possess and play with. With every inhale the blood-sucker took, the salty shock and indignation was being replaced by buttery curiosity.

Panic gripped Kiara.

She knew exactly what happened to humans that became playthings to a Vampire.

“RICK, RUN!”

The words burst out of her mouth before she could even think them through. And they were followed by an explosion at the edge of the camp. With it came a new roar, and the roar brought that familiar mint taste. Kiara wasn't sure whether to be relieved or furious. It was now that the damnable beast showed up!?

But this was an opportunity she could not allow to slip by. Everyone's attention was upon the brute and not on Kiara.

“It seems we have gue-”

Monica kicked up a bunch of dirt and dust, clouding the air with the earthy taste. The Vampire's curiosity and desire for Kiara's human turned to bitter indignation.

“Do you really think-?”

With a whirlwind of darkness and dust, the cat was gone, along with the human. There was no way the meek healer wouldn't save Rick.

And with that thought, the panic of the bond vanished.

The Succubus' lips curled upwards.

"Hunt that maiden!" The Vampire commanded.

The Ghoul and the Orc hesitated, not seeing the danger that Kiara posed. The hesitant trust tickled at the back of Kiara's tongue like a strong drink. A terrible mistake all over.

Because Kiara only ever did things for herself.

"Hey, leech!" She called out at the blood-sucking hag. "I know what happened to your sister!"

Her proclamation came as she let loose a burst of condensed pleasure upon everyone around herself. It was exactly what she'd needed to get some space and take to the air before they could pin her back down.

"I know who killed the worthless little bat!" she added, climbing high and away from the immediate reach of the brutes. She'd have to be careful if they started throwing spears, though.

"Speak!" The Vampire commanded, anger and wrath flaring out. It tasted of deliciously anxious effervescent spice. The old maiden had summoned wings of blood and taken flight to chase.

The Succubus took a second to sample the surroundings. The fight had broken out, the bandits were fighting against... other bandits? How had the damn brute gathered this many maidens to fight!?

"She died like a weakling!"

Whatever the case was, letting the Vampire take control of the situation would be the worst-case scenario. The blood-suckers were at their best when surrounded by death and controlling that flow.

Fuck it.

“I found her half-dead in a gutter, covered in shit.” Kiara stated, smirking down at the blood-suckers and confirmed the Vampire’s truth-detection spell was still in place. “She begged me for help, for just a sip so she could patch herself back up!”

Looking at Lady Aimes was no different than watching a plugged kettle that was getting hotter and hotter. The anger bubbled under the surface, frothing and escaping in little bursts of spicy lemon. The entirety of her focus was upon Kiara now, and that was exactly where it ought to be.

She just needed one more little push.

Kiara spread her wings, gaining altitude, using her powers to boost her voice so it could be heard. “I told that pathetic excuse of a Vampire that I would let her take some blood if she kissed my boots. She didn’t even hesitate to do as I told her!”

A partial truth, the dying leech had been quite happy to share details of her “mission”, and how some nobles had traded a big favor in exchange for having her cause trouble for the human.

Rick.

“Shut up!”

The kettle was whistling, bending, bulging from the pressure, the metal turning red as it expanded.

“And then I killed her.” Kiara sneered. “I took the energy she had left, watching her bleed out, begging. She just kept calling out!” Kiara prepared herself, fully aware this was going to be her one chance. “*Oh Lady Aimes! Lady Aimes, sister, my love! I failed you! Please save me! Please!*” Kiara twisted her own voice to replicate that of the dead blood-sucker, shifting her hair to a deep black.

Not a perfect imitation by any stretch, but close enough.

And just like that, the kettle exploded.

“KILL HER!”

Blood-energy flared around the Vampire, forming into that same ranged spell she’d used to attack Kiara just minutes ago. The Succubus laughed, prepared to reach out and grasp the beam. It was so hastily made it was child’s play to twist and bend around, sending it back down to the ground.

Her aim was a little off, but it did catch several of the smaller leeches and tore them to shreds. The pitiful things writhed and screamed, the energy running rampant within them and tearing them from the inside out.

“Is this all?” Laughing louder still, she pushed her appearance to continue shifting, to more closely resemble the dead sibling bit by bit. “Are you trying to avenge your little worthless sister, or are you just putting up a show?”

The Vampire screeched, eyes wild. “YOU WHORE!” She formed a blood-blade on her hand. “Don’t you dare use her form!”

Kiara might have been more agile, but the little whiny bitch was fast enough to catch up, anyway. Her sword lashed out at the Succubus’ skin and found purchase. But against her defenses, it would take more than a half-focused spell-blade to do more than light scratches.

If the Vampire were more focused, light scratches would have been enough to put some actual pressure on her.

“*Ahn~. Sister, that feels so good!*” Kiara moaned, quickly extending her powers to feel out the Vampire’s aura. There was so much energy ripe for the picking, just crudely flaring out and presenting so many openings.

“Stop it!” A second blade was formed, swiping at the Succubus with blind rage, biting at her skin, looking to skewer her and cut her to ribbons.

“*Is it in yet?*” she asked.

It fucking stung. The Vampire’s blood-energy, as crude as it was, still was trying to burn her from the inside. But not showing it only made it easier to push the maiden into forgetting how to even properly fight.

“*Thrust deeper! I beg of you!*”

“Shut up! Shut up! Shut up!”

The soup of emotions coming from the blood-sucker was horrible, acrid and foul, desperate and blind. Kiara wanted to gag just being near it. There were far better things to do with one’s energy. Yet it wasn’t as if she was in a position to be a picky eater, prodding at the Vampire’s defenses and worming her way inside through the cracks.

Whatever had kept this blood-sucker alive this long, it had not been her level head and combat prowess.



“Ah, there we go.”

Nor in protecting herself from a charmer.

Kiara tightened her grip of the Vampire’s power, shattering the spell that gave the blades form. They exploded, raining blood and turning into little more than rain. But Kiara was not done, grasping the Vampire’s arm before she could escape and yanking her closer. The auras clashed, but there was nothing but sand to support Aimes’ defenses.

The attempt to make a protective spell was laughably easy to brush aside.

Kiara smirked.

“Let me show you how it’s done!” She used her claws to push her hand into the tender flesh of the Vampire’s gut. The ancient maiden’s blood burned against her skin. *“I’m so deep inside of you, sister! Do you feel it?”*

She pushed deeper, tearing everything she could.

“My Lady!”

The air trembled above them, and Kiara recognized the teleportation spell for what it was. Warnings flared out. She was forced to disengage, pulling away just in time to avoid the Ghoul’s claws, letting the Vampire drop. The brute’s sudden appearance threw Kiara off for a split second, uncertainty gripping her as the oaf clearly wasn’t able to fly.

It clicked into place when she saw the Ghoul catch the Vampire right before they hit the ground.

“Shit!” Kiara swore, diving after them.

The blood-sucker was still alive. She had to finish her off!

But she wasn’t fast enough. The two blood-suckers had vanished into the shadows. Kiara slowed, turning, looking for the jump destination. She ignored the ongoing brawl that had spread all around the camp. It wasn’t worth the attention, especially when both sides looked no different to her.

Where had the blood-suckers gone!?

“Succubus!”

The roar called out to her from the rabble. Kiara glanced at the one-armed giant Orc, Urtha, and the equally giant metal club she was swinging around. The green brute was

enjoying herself immensely, smirking from ear to ear like a little girl that had just been given her first taste of honey candy.

The giant pointed the club at her.

“We have a score to settle!”

Kiara did not have the time for this. “Sure!” She twirled her tail, gesturing around herself. “Right after I kill the bloodsuckers.”

Still, it wasn't like she could just completely ignore the former warleader. Her eyes kept roaming in search of...

“I will help.”

What?

She couldn't help but stare at the oversized maiden with some suspicion. Though she could taste the determination of her words, and the underlying sweet thirst for revenge.

“You're serious.”

“I respect the tribe's customs. The bloodsuckers only used them to take control.”

Kiara glared, sensing an undertone of... minty greed and of deception. Not that it was unexpected; creatures like this would always follow the rules until it became inconvenient. Not that she was much different.

Still, better leave the terms clear. “The cat will kill your tribe, one by one, if need be.” There was an offhanded gesture with her hand. “Declare your surrender, and I'll help you get the lot back under your feet. But the male is mine.”

“I can help to kill off the Vampire if she's in as bad a state as I saw. But I will not have the tribe surrender while the thing lives.”

Kiara's brows narrowed. “You can't fight her, can you?”

“Orcs fight with our chests laid bare. That blood eater comes in the dark, killing our men and children.”

That was annoying. “Let's just get moving before-”

The air trembled, something massive swept over the camp, something that made Kiara's blood shudder and warm up. The power trembled in the air and tasted of flesh, fresh and

rotten. A chorus of voices raised into the sky, all around them the shadows trembled and moved.

The Fledglings had been called, and they were obeying their mistress.

The blood splatters in Kiara's hand trembled, slithering off of her skin and to the ground. The power was resonating in the air, and it was growing thick all around them.

"That's... not good." Urtha growled.

"No, it's not."

It was impossible to miss now, the way the energy flowed all around, a spell of massive proportions that grew with every passing second. The complex patterns in the elemental energy were foreign to her, she couldn't understand what was going on... or what it would do.

Only that it was bad.

Very bad.