

Souls of the Fallen: Corrupted

Caius

Good Intentions

Pacing has helped our thought process but not enough to set us free. Our feet echo in this tiny space. The emptiness is similar to how our heads have felt for the past few days of being locked up in here. I know the answer. The one thing capable of liberating us, but I'm sure they won't approve. Especially her. She'd never agree to such a thing. Unfortunately, we can't waste much more time. Our people are in need of more resources and our reserves are running drastically low.

"I'm completely stumped," Nell says, scratching his head. "The nations will be in deep doodoo if we can't come up with a renewable source."

"Why don't you swear like a normal adult, Nell?" Theo teases. He flops into a metal chair and readjusts the patch over his left eye. His tone is more aggressive than it has been over the time spent in this room. "You were voted into this group to be a respected decision maker. No one is going to take you seriously if you can't say 'shit,' dumbass."

"How does my choice of words alter my ability to produce an efficient solution to our dilemma? Stop being a doodoo-head!" he intentionally says to get on Theo's nerves.

Angel jabs Nell on his shoulder. "Cut the mess, you two." She walks up to the white table in the center of the all white room and prepares a glass of water. She's been drinking a lot lately.

I've spent a lot of time with Angel and haven't seen her drink so much. Maybe she's letting the situation we're in get the best of her.

"You've been pretty quiet lately, Caius," Valdis mumbles from her corner. She's been crouched there all day.

Her brother, Anubis, lays next to her "conserving energy" as he's been saying. I'm sure he's just sleeping... To be honest, he was probably tossed in here based on the strength of his sister's smarts. They must've thought he was smart by relation. From what I've heard, he's more talented in other ways.

"I—There's something I've been considering for a while now," I respond as she stares at me with an aggravated glare. I can't tell if it's from me being shifty or if being locked in the room is making her upset.

"How long?" Nell asks.

"Since yesterday..."

"**YESTERDAY?**" Theo stands up so quickly, he knocks over the chair he was sitting in. He stomps toward me but Angel steps between us. He collides with her small frame but she's able to hold him back. "You have time to waste, Caius?" he yells. "These mother fuckers have technically **JAILED** us for being smarter than them! You telling me you want to stay in this box even longer? Why are you keeping secrets?" He scowls at me.

Angel continues to struggle holding Theo back.

"It's a bad idea."

"But it could get us out of here!" Valdis says loudly, waking Anubis.

"What's happening?" Anubis groans while sitting up.

“Theo is exuding testosterone because Caius is withholding ideas,” Nells says.

Theo’s flailing around Angel instantly stops. He slowly turns to glare at Nell. His head slowly turns back to Angel and he looks her up and down. They both realize she’s on the wrong side to stop him from getting to Nell, the smallest of our group. Angel slowly shakes her head. The room is still and silent for a few seconds, until Theo snatches the empty glass from Angel and slings it at Nell.

A high pitched squeal comes from Nell as the glass shatters on the wall behind him. “What is your dilemma?” he asks in a panic. “The dense base of the glass could’ve caused enough blunt trauma to knock me unconscious! Inflict a concussion, even!”

“Shut up,” Valdis says in her raspy voice. “Spill it, Caius. What’s this bad idea of yours? I wanna go home.”

All eyes are on me. I look to Angel to find a little solace among the judgemental staring. She smiles and shrugs slightly. I release a long sigh. “The crystal growths in the depths of the wildlands are a resource we haven’t tapped into yet. Their energy—”

“Mutates the wildlife around them! The shit is toxic!” Theo yells.

“But if it can be contained and handled properly... We should be able to harness the volatile energy inside of them!” I gain momentum in my explanation for the solution. “The flow of energies to the south is never ending. We can draw power from—”

“Death...” Angel mumbles.

“Yes!” I get excited but immediately pull back to reality. She’s disturbed and it clearly shows.

Valdis laughs. “You want to harness the power of death? That’s not like you, Caius, BUT I’m intrigued.”

“We’re talking about tampering with the souls of the fallen,” Angel says while averting her eyes from mine. It hurts to see her unhappy with my answer. “This is beyond taboo.”

“It makes sense though,” Theo says. “People die every day. Their souls migrate to the world’s southern vertex. Once they’ve clustered enough, it solidifies into crystals.”

“Right,” I confirm his statements.

He smiles. “I’m still mad you didn’t mention this yesterday but this is brilliant!”

I bow slightly at the complement but look at Angel again for comfort. She’s back at the table again.

“I’m not for this! This is against all I know and believe in!” Nell says.

Valdis scoffs. “A man of science against research and claiming beliefs... Are you sure you deserve to be in this room?”

Anubis stands up and stretches. “Okay! Problem solved now who the fuck do we talk to so we can get out of this bland prison. I swear, if I see anything else white... Imma flip a fucking table.”

“They’re listening in on us,” I say. “We have to agree that this is a plausible solution to our energy crisis. We should vote on it.”

“No, no, and a thousand times more NO!” Nell says as he folds his arms.

“It’s a greenlight for me!” Valdis says while rising. “Let me out.”

“Good work, doc. Kinda dark but it’s a solid idea.” Theo gives me a thumbs up. “Angel? Not that it matters! I can already tell how this will turn out” he laughs.

“It’ll work... but it’s a no for me,” Angel says. “There are just some things we really shouldn’t tamper with.”

“Blah, blah, blah... Anubis?” Theo questions.

“Mhmm... whatever gets my skin warmed by sunlight.”

Theo rubs his hands together. “Just as I thought! Okay, Caius. Just say yes and we’re free!”

I look at Angel in her gray eyes. She looks back at me for the first time since I put forth the idea. Her right hand taps then rests just above her heart. It’s her way of saying my decision won’t affect our love. I can sense the pain pulsing from her heart but this is for the sake of the world.

“I’m sorry, Angel...”

Theo squints. He walks up to me and steps into my line of sight. “I’m going to need to hear a more direct answer.”

Our eyes connect. He raises an eyebrow as we stare at each other for a moment. “I approve.”

Theo smiles. He pats me on my bald head, steps away from me, and yells at the ceiling. “Okay, scumbags! We have your answer! Now, get us out of here!”

Rattling comes from the other side of the door across the room. The door opens and one of the Goodwind family workers holds the door open. He gestures to the hallway leading to our freedom.

“The General has approved of your idea and will speak with you about execution personally,” the worker says.

“Execution! But we did as you said!” Nell screams in fear.

Anubis shoves Nell into the wall as he’s walking past him. “He’s talking about enacting the plan. I thought I was the dumb one in the room.”

Anubis is the first to exit. Valdis shortly after.

Theo kicks over a chair. “Good riddance.” He rolls his eyes at the shorter worker who’s still patiently holding the door.

Nell gains his composure and jogs to catch up with the others.

Angel walks up to me slowly with her head down. “You ready?” She asks. A smile has returned to her face. Her warmth softens me.

“I’m so sor—”

Angel hushes me with a kiss. “We’re in this together. No matter how big of a hole you dig, I’ll be here to help you out. It’s why I married you, smarty pants. You’re hopeless without me.” She winks and grabs my hand. We walk out of the room together. Thanks to her strength, I’m feeling slightly better about the decision I’ve made.