

XII.

The Hunter

The following day, after classes, I took a chance. Maybe I was desperate, or maybe Salvador's superstitious nature had rubbed off on me, but for whatever reason, I decided to give that weird occult-item-hawking salesman a call. His business card was buried in my wallet, a bit worse for the wear, but still readable. I sat at the edge of my bed, rubbing my feet together to try and stave off the anxiety that spiked with every ring.

"Hello, you've reached Samuel the Salesman, your go-to man for all things strange and occult; this is Samuel speaking, how may I help you?" Well. I did call his business number.

"Hey, this is Basil. My roommate bought a couple of coins made to ward off nightmares from you awhile back, if you remember that?" I ventured that information in the hopes of a connection.

"Yes yes, you were the sick boy! I remember you two well. What can I do for you my boy, those coins not working? Because you know, I have—"

"I was wondering if we could meet." I cut him off, and his end went silent. "Hello?"

"Yes yes I'm still here! Well, that depends on what the meeting would be for," he said plainly.

"I'd like to talk about..." I hesitated. I felt so dumb for what I was about to say. "I want to talk to you about supernatural illnesses."

"Is that so? Well. Free today?"

"Yeah, I finished classes so I'm free the rest of the day."

"Excellent! Meet me at the Little Local in an hour. It's the coffee shop a few blocks removed from your campus. Sound good?" he asked.

"Yeah, I can do that. I'll be there. Thanks." I hung up and let out a sigh of relief. It still felt dumb, but I had to satisfy my nagging curiosities about the weird injury I had on my neck that the doctors couldn't explain. It was the same place that I was getting bit in my nightmares, over and over. There was no way that was a coincidence.

It was late in the afternoon, so Salvador was in class, and so was Allie. I was on my own for the long walk to the Little Local.

It was a rustic place that fit in with the small college town atmosphere that made up the rest of the city. A brick building with wood-framed windows, and a sign hanging from a wrought-iron support; it looked like it was an original from when the town was built. The interior on the other hand had obviously been remodeled into a sort of modern-rustic aesthetic. It had all the charm of an old-timey building interior, but all the amenities and cleanliness of a modern establishment. The air was filled with the pleasant scent of freshly ground coffee.

I saw him at a booth in a far corner of the room, and evidently he saw me, as he waved at me with an inviting grin. I situated myself in the seat across from him.

"Well now, Basil was it?" came his emphatic greeting. "You're looking much better than when I last saw you!"

"I feel better," I replied as I looked him over. The border collie salesman was probably in his mid 40's. No wedding ring, so probably not married. Probably. His briefcase was beside him in the booth, and I guessed it was full of all the weird items I had seen when we first met.

"Well good. Now, as you know, I'm a busy man. So what can I do for you?" he asked as he leaned over the table toward me.

"I wanted you to take a look at something for me." I pulled out my phone and opened my images folder, and turned the screen to face him, showing him the blue spiderwebs that crossed the surface of my skin. "This look like anything to you?"

He grabbed a coffee stirrer from a container on the table, popped the end into his mouth, and started to chew on it. "That looks pretty bad."

"Can you tell me something I don't know?" My words were more biting than I had planned, but they seemed to get the point across.

"Right, of course I can. You know, I had my suspicions when we first met, but I didn't want to say anything." He paused, I waited.

"Say what?"

"I'm pretty sure that roommate of yours is a vampire." He sat back in the booth and looked straight at me, his face flat and unwavering.

I gave an uneasy chuckle. "That's not a thing," I said plainly.

"You've got the bite marks for it," he shot back, gesturing to my shoulder with a nod of his head. Even with my shirt on, I was starting to feel naked.

"You can't prove-"

"They match the description, from what you showed me. Now you can believe me or not, but you came to me, remember?"

I sat back and ran my hand over my head, trying to sort out my thoughts. Salvador? A vampire? That was the stupidest thing I had ever heard. Vampires don't exist. They can't exist. Everyone would know. Right? "What else can you tell me, then?"

"Depends on what you want to do."

I hesitated. If it was true, if by some chance he was right, getting rid of my ailment would mean getting rid of Salvador. I wanted the former, but not the latter. Salvador was too important to me. A stray thought flashed across my mind like a bolt of lightning. All those deaths. If he was a vampire, they were his fault. He had killed those people. Probably more. I began to wonder when he would finish me off. I swallowed hard and quickly shoved that thought away.

"If anything you're saying is true... Then I want to kill the vampire."

"Are you sure?"

I paused. "Yes."

"Good. Now, me being me, I have all the supplies I need right here." Samuel thumped a hand against the side of his suitcase. "We just need to catch this vampire off-guard. When does he sleep?"

I was already getting uncomfortable. "His room is locked from midnight until about two in the afternoon," I mentioned. "Dunno when he actually sleeps."

"That's good enough. You see, the thing about vampires, is that they can't be too far from the coffins they were buried in for too long, or they die. That's why you always see vampires sleeping in coffins, and not in beds or other more comfortable places."

"What are you saying?"

"I'm saying, we find out what grave your roommate sleeps in at night. If we find him snoozing in a tomb, then he's a vampire. If not, then it's not him."

"How the hell are we supposed to find out what grave he might be sleeping in?"

"Not we, you. You know more about him than I do. You figure it out," he told me. "Oh, also. You can forget looking at normal graves, those are too much work, and too obvious. You'd be looking for a mausoleum. That should narrow things down." He sighed and started to get out of the booth.

"Wait! What do I do when I think I've figured it out?"

"Call me, and we'll kill him."