

Chapter 03

I arrive at the bar a few minutes late, Jason said it was a good idea to have her wait on me a little. I don't know what that does, but he's the expert here.

I'm wearing blue jeans that are a little snug at the hip, Jason brought them, along with the white button up shirt and leather jacket. I wanted to get a different pair, but he insisted, saying it was good to advertise. I have no idea what I'm supposed to be advertising.

The Golden Pint is one room, with the bar at the back, tables set randomly and booths against the walls. The air smells of beer, salt and humans. No trace of demonic scent.

Juliette waves at me from a booth at the back and I go there, sitting down across the table from her.

"You came." She beams at me.

"I said I would."

"I know, but you have no idea how many times the guy has been a no show." She suddenly puts her hand over her mouth and blushes. I know it's a reaction to being embarrassed, but I don't know why she is.

A server saves me from having to decide how to react. "What can I get you?"

"I'll have anything on tap," Juliette answers.

"I'll have a Miller Light." It's the least horrible tasting one from the list Jason had me try.

"You want it bottled or from the tap?"

I stare at him. What's the tap? Jason didn't cover that when we went through the beer tasting. "What's the difference?"

The server hesitate a moment. "Well, it's a little cheaper from the tap."

Juliette puts a hand over mine. "Don't worry about the price, I'm the one paying for it tonight."

I nod and ask for one from the tap. At the grocery store Juliette indicated she didn't have much money. I won't have her spend the little she has on my beer.

"I'm really happy you came."

I smile. "A... coworker indicated I needed to get out more."

"Really? And what do you do for a living?"

"I'm a construction worker." It's the employment Jason felt explained my physic the best without cause too many questions to be asked.

She studies me while the server puts our beers on the table and she pays him. "Okay, I would never have guessed that," she says once he leaves.

"Why not?" I'm surprised, what did Jason miss?

"I don't know, I guess you're just a little too clean cut? I expect guy in construction to be a little rough around the edges, you know?"

I don't know. How is someone rough around the edges? old clothing? I'm starting to suspect Jason hasn't really prepared me well for this evening. I nod, if only to acknowledge her question. "What about you? where do you work?"

"Oh, I'm a waitress at the Hot Soup Dinner, by Clark street. I do mainly the lunch crowd and early afternoon, before my kids come back from school."

"You said you have three of them."

she nodded after taking a sip. "two girls and one boy. Elizabeth is nine, Garrison ten and Julie eleven. How about you? how many do you have?"

I don't respond, and after a moment I look down at the table, copying her movement when she was embarrassed and the server was there. Should I lie? Make up a number. How many children are normal for a family to have? she has three, but is that a small family? What names should I give them?

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to embarrass you." She pats my hand. "So you only see them occasionally?"

Again, I don't know what she means, but I nod. It's easier than trying to make up something.

"How often do you see them? Once a week? A month?"

"Once a month." Is that too long?

She smiles. "I'm guessing they're coming over soon?"

I nod, then say. "This weekend." That's when people aren't working, right? I remember Jason mentioning something about that. How he wished he could get the weekend off like everyone else.

"So you're going to have a BBQ? I've got to say I'm amazed your kids are okay with all those fruits and vegetables. When I throw mine a party they insist on cakes and ice cream."

"Eating healthy is important." Somehow that sounds like something stupid to say. Socializing is more difficult than Jason said it would be. Why does he want me to do this? How does getting to know one of them going to help me keep them safe?

"Yes, it is. Unfortunately it's easier to do when you have the money for it. I'm sorry, I didn't mean for that to sound like an accusation." She gives me a weak smile. "It's not your fault if I've had bad luck with my jobs."

"It's alright." I put a hand on hers. Is this what Jason wanted me to see, that people aren't just threatened by demons? But what am I supposed to do about this? "I'll be happy to help if I can."

She smiles widens for a moment, then falters. "No, you shouldn't burden yourself with my troubles. I've already taken a side job to help with the money flow."

Before I can figure out how to respond to that my phone buzzes. I take it out and read the text. 'Sighting. Pickup on its way.' I put it away and stand. "I'm sorry, that was work. I need to go deal with something."

"At this hour?"

I nod, turning for the door.

She grabs my hand. "Can we do this again?"

I don't have the time to deal with this now. "How about we discuss it next time we do our groceries?"

She smiles and lets go of my hand. "I look forward to that."

I walk to the door, even though I want to run. Outside the black van is already there. The side door opens and closes behind me.

"I didn't know you rated a date," The medic says. A woman this time, and after a moment I recognize her. Her name is Valerie

"Jason said I should go. What do we have?" I take off the leather jacket and shirt, putting on a black T-shirt. I take off the jeans and put on the black pants.

Valerie gasps, and when I look at her she's looking away, blushing.

"There's been a sighting on Henron street." the driver replies while I finish changing. "No reported attacks yet, but it sounds like it's a big one."

I put the gun belt on, and clip my collapsible sword to it before putting my trench coat on, then sit in the chair. "Do you want to take the readings now?" I ask Valerie who still isn't looking in my direction.

She nods and takes the box of sensors out of the small locker. She blushes as she lifts my shirt to apply the sensors. She didn't blush the previous times she had to do this.

"How long until we're there?"

"Fifteen minutes. I need to make a few detours to avoid the construction on Jasper."

I close my eyes and rests. This isn't quite sleeping, I still hear what's happening around me, but it lets me recharge, not that I really need it now. I don't want to have to deal with the strange looks Valerie is giving me.

The sensors come off a moment before the van stops and I'm out of the seat. "Any new information?"

"The cops have closed off both ends of the street, so you don't have to worry about traffic. Civilians have been

instructed to stay indoors. No new sighting of the demon, so he has to be around here."

I exit the van and they drive off. Once they are far away I listen.

Demons don't stay still for long. They exist to chase and eat humans. Even when they try to be quiet, they whine and rumble, not to mention the sounds their victims make.

I hear multiple television sets, a couple arguing, one eating, and another having sex, a man and a woman, at least it sounds a lot like the pornographic movie Jason had me watch, but without the cacophony of the music. Nothing to indicate a demon is in the area. This one is more cunning then.

I walk along the street until I pick up the scent by an alley. I smile; this is one thing they can never mask. I follow the scent down the alley, guns in hand. If the demon can keep quiet he might be hiding anywhere. Their dark coloring make them difficult to see in the dark, and their heat signature adapts quickly to their surroundings, if it's standing still I won't know he's there until he moves.

I reach the back of the alley, and the scent is strongest here, but there is no sign of a demon. I look around again, my night vision is better than humans, but I don't see a demon here.

I start to head out of the alley and something catches the light on a beat up oil drum. It's a revolver. My revolver I realize once I'm close enough. The one I lost in the fight last night. I look around, still no sign of any demon. I sniff it and the stench of demon is strong on it. It was definitely handled by one.

I look around again. Why didn't I smell the demon at the other location? This demon smells different from the other; I wouldn't have mixed up the scents. The answer was obvious; the demon had a human agent, except I would have smelled something. No, whoever picked up the revolver hadn't been tainted. The demon had found him afterward. I sigh, that means there's another dead human somewhere in the city.

Then why had the demon left it here. Was it calling me out? Could it be smart enough to do that? There hadn't been any reports indicating that level of intelligence.

I looked up. The roof was a hundred feet up, but there was a fire escape going up each side of the alley. The calls had said it was a large demon, but they could alter their shapes, make themselves look more massive than they were.

I go up the fire escape on this side of the alley, on the third floor I pick up the demon's scent. It jumped here. I jump to the other side and catch his scent on the sixth floor. He jumped down from the roof, and then jumped back up. What

surprises me is that I can't pick up any human sent with his. He left the alley without a victim.

Did he go down there just to leave my revolver?

His scent is all over the roof, but there is no sign of a demon. This makes no sense. Demons don't fly. They can jump very far, but they can't fly. And this one stayed away from the edges of the building, except for when he went in the alley. How did he leave?

I jump to the other roof, even if there aren't any indication he did so, and there is no scent on them. None of the windows are broken. There's still isn't any sounds of someone in pain or a demon trying to hide.

I take out my phone and call the van. "When did the calls start coming in?"

There's a moment of silence. "Five minute before we picked you up."

"What did they describe?"

"Demon, black, big. you know, the usual."

"How many calls came in about it?" I can hear him typing.

"By the time we dropped you off, twelve."

I look around again. Twelve calls, where was he? "There isn't any demons here."

"Are you saying this was a prank?"

"No, there's been a demon here, but he's gone."

"How?"

"I can't tell you. His scent is confined to the alley and one rooftop. The only other way he can have come in or out is through the street, but it would take most of the day of people walking through his scent to dissipate it completely."

"So what?"

"It means this demon has a trick up his sleeve we don't have on file."