

Chapter 4

I'm cooking a couple of steaks when the door opens and closes. I didn't hear her speak, so she's alone. I know it's Amanda because of the clicking of her hard sole shoes on the hardwood floor, the hall is carpeted. Jason wears sneakers that squeak.

"What are the results on the revolver?" I move the streaks to my plate.

"Other than confirming it was handled by a demon, nothing." She's looking at me when I turn and sit at the island. "Derick, I'm sorry for yesterday."

I shrug. "It's alright. I didn't mind the interruption. I'm not sure going to the bar was good idea."

She cocks an eyebrow. "I meant about my reaction to you going for a drink. Jason's right. I can't keep you cooped up in here."

"I don't mind it here. There are less distractions. I think Jason orchestrated the meeting."

Jason enters then. "Are you two talking about me behind my back?"

I shake my head. "I was talking about you in absentia. If you are running an experiment using Juliette, I'd like to know what the parameters are."

Jason is surprised. "Experiment?"

"Yes. You have stated that I need to get to know humans so I can help them better. Juliette needs help with money, is that an example of another way they need help? Was that the purpose of talking with her?"

"She told you she needs money?" Amanda asks.

Jason sits on the other side of the island, thoughtful.

"I don't think she intended to tell me. She let it slipped while we talked."

"Maybe she thinks you'd be a good catch. You're good looking, If you told her you're a construction worker she thinks you make good money. It makes sense she's interested."

"She wants to marry him?" Amanda looks at Jason in disbelief.

"Wouldn't you?"

"Of course not. What could he provide her?"

"Oh, I don't know, financial and emotional stability, sex."

"Please tell me you haven't been showing him how to have sex."

"He has shown me pornographic movies," I interrupt. I don't normally do so, but I don't want them to go on about their own argument. I want Jason to address something first.

"I don't believe this. Jason, he's a demon killing machine, not some sexual play thing for you."

Jason rolls his eyes. "I showed him porn because he needs to know how things work. And you know me way better than to think I'd go to bed with him."

My interruption wasn't enough to get them to stop. I look at the steak I have left, and consider finishing it, but they might leave to continue the argument in private. "Excuse me, can you stop arguing?"

This time they notice, and they stare at me in surprise.

"Thank you. Jason, Juliette believes I have children."

"Err, she does? why?"

"The amount of food I bought at the grocery store. It's more than one human can eat, so she thinks I bought it for my family."

"What did you say?"

"Nothing. I didn't know what to say, so silence was preferable to lying. You know I don't like lying. She also thinks that I only see them once a month."

"There you go, that takes care of things. You never have to produce them. I can get you pictures to show her. How many kids do you want? What gender?"

"No. I'm not going to lie to her."

Amanda and Jason exchange a look. "Why?" she asks.

"Because lying is too complicated. she is going to ask for details about them, probably about their mother. From the research I did, humans are curious when it comes to families."

"You can always tell her Amanda's their mother," Jason offers. "I'd believe someone like her would keep the kids away from their father out of spite."

I don't say anything, I just level my gaze on him. I know he isn't serious, but this time his flippancy bothers me. He tries to stare back, but he looks away after a few seconds.

"Do you want to see her again?" Amanda asks.

I think about it for a moment. "No, I'd rather not. Unless I tell her the truth I don't see how I can continue."

"Then that takes care of it." She looks pleased.

"You're going to run into her at the grocery store," Jason says.

"Yes, and I'll tell her that it's a bad idea for me to spend any more time with her."

Amanda winces at that.

"She's going to be angry at a response like that."

"Should I be bothered by that?"

Jason looks at Amanda, who frowns. "Yes, you should," he finally answers.

I watch them. This is touching on something they have discussed in private. I don't understand what the problem is. I

go back to eating. Once cooked, meat isn't as good if it's allowed to get too cold.

I can tell they want to argue again, but they hold it in. Whatever it's about they don't want me to hear it. That's fine, they'll go have their argument in private, reach a conclusion and then Jason will setup experiments for me to go through to either fix the problem, or determine how to work around it.

They leave me to finish my meal. Once the steaks are gone, I take out a can of coke and drink it slowly. Jason explained that after a meal I should eat sweet foods, desserts, and he's had me try some, but I didn't like them. There's something wrong with solid food being sweet.

I'm left to myself unless Jason calls for me, so I change into my exercise clothes and go to the training room to practice my sword play against one of the robots there.

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The van takes the turn fast enough some of the wheels leave the road for a moment. I understand the driver's hurry. When the call came in, there was already four dead. The number is only going to get higher the longer it takes for us to get there.

"Three sightings in as many days," the driver grumbles. "They have to be planning something"

"The demons who are smart enough to plan act through tainted humans," I tell him.

He casts me an angry look over his shoulder before focusing on the road again. Valerie takes the sensors off my chest. She doesn't look away this time. whatever affected her yesterday has passed.

"We're only a few minutes away. The demon has retreated in an alley with two victims, no information on if they are alive or not."

They're going to be dead by the time I get there. Demons like the darkened alleys. We don't know why, not for sure, it isn't like the sun hinders them, and in the day time the shadows aren't dark enough to allow them to hide effectively in them. It might just be the confined spaces, it could make it more difficult for their victims to get away from them.

In this case, it's probably the police car sirens that chased it deeper in the alley. Those things are so loud. The van stops. "Have them turn off the sirens," I tell the driver as I open the door. "I need to be able to hear the demon move." And I'd like to avoid a headache.

I walk to the alley the police officers are pointing their guns at. Beyond them people have gathered. They really should be told to leave. If the demon gets past me he will be able to kill a lot of them in his escape.

I take out my guns and go in. I'd prefer going on the roof, but I can only follow him by scent for the moment. I've gone a hundred yards when the sirens fall silent. My ears are still ringing, so that isn't any help right now.

I can smell two humans mixed in with the demon's scent, but they are becoming weaker as I go. It doesn't mean they are dead. Demon scent sticks to people, and it does that quickly. It also lingers on them for a long time. That's how I can tell humans have interacted with demons, their scents become tainted by the demon's.

Obviously, those tainted aren't always working for demons, like these two they might have been captured. Unfortunately it's rare for a human to survive such captivity.

I don't worry about the garbage piled on the side of the alley, or the dumpster and cans. Even if this demon is smart enough to try to ambush me, I can now hear someone whimpering ahead of me. I quicken my pace, one of them is still alive.

I see a dark form ahead and shoot it. He ducks, turns and roars. He's holding the humans by the neck. I empty my revolvers at him. He drops his captives and moves much faster than I've seen a demon move before.

I can't tell if any of my shots hit him and he's running at me. I drop my guns and take out my sword. I dodge a slash as I unfold it. He moves too fast for me to get much details other than the rage in his red eyes.

I take a step back, I have to draw the fight away from the humans, but he doesn't follow, backing up toward them. It knows I want to protect them. He's definitely smarter than the others.

I rush him, slashing back and forth. I need him focused on me, and only me. His claws parry my sword, but as I back he follows. I let him get a couple of slices in close, cutting my trench coat. Emboldened, he roars.

I cut his roar short with a slash at his muzzle. He gurgles as his lower jaw falls to the ground. He grabs at the wound and I slash again, feeling the blade cut his skin, but not deep.

He stumbles against the wall and I press my advantage, only to be hit by the garbage can he swings at me. I roll to the other side of the alley and lose hold of my sword. He kicks me before I can move and I bounce off the wall, landing in a heap. I barely scramble out of the way in time, the can hits the wall, braking some of the bricks.

In my scramble back, my hand lands on something metallic. I close my hand around it as I roll out of the way of another kick and manage to make it back on my feet. I glance at what I'm holding as I dodge a blow, one of my revolver. I open the cylinder and let the empty cartridges fall out.

I back away with each of his swings. I dig in the trench coat's pocket for more bullets. I'm hoping he's going to stop following me like he did before. I need the respite. Unfortunately he doesn't, and as I pull out the loader he hits me and I go flying again.

I don't lose my gun, but the loader isn't in my hand when I get up. I reach for the other loader, but I can feel the bullets have fallen out. I close my hand around as many of them as I can, and dodging like my life depends on it I manually reloads the revolver. When I close the cylinder there's only four bullets in it, one slipped through my fingers and I don't have the time to search through the pocket for the sixth.

Of course, there isn't much I can do with a gun. The only sure way to kill a demon is to cut off the head, get the brain separated from the body. So long as the brain and body can talk, a demon can still cause a lot of damage.

Of course, a bullet through the head will work, silver in the brain will destroy it, but at this distance, and dodging blows there's no way I can make such a shot. I'd have to be point blank to make it under these circumstances.

I look around for my sword, because I've just realized how I can do it, but it's going to hurt. If I can find my sword I can end this with a lot less pain for me.

It's nowhere to be seen.

There's no way to avoid it now.

I dodge the next few blows and then kick the garbage can out of his hand and rush him. The gun is at my side and I try to hit him with my off hand. I don't want him to notice it even if he can't know what it is.

By reflex I try to avoid the clawed hand, but it grabs me, the claws digging in my left shoulder. I bite back the pain as he pulls me against him, cut jaw open. I don't know if he can eat me without his lower jaw.

I'm not going to find out. I bring up the gun and puts it in his maw and fire four times.

He looks at me, surprise registering in his dimming eyes before he crumples to the ground. The claws are wrenched out of my shoulder, making me turn and groan in pain. When I straighten up there's another demon looking at me.

I bring up the gun, but before I can fire it the demon's head turns at an unnatural angle with the sound of breaking bones. He falls to the ground, and there's someone behind him.

I see the jeans and hoodie and think he's another hunter. Then I notice that instead of shoes he has large clawed feet, and looking inside the hoodie I see glowing red eyes.

I take a step back and point the gun at him.

He doesn't move. He's a little taller than me, and wearing clothing. Demons don't wear clothing. I look at his eyes. Where is the rage? I don't see anything in them.

"You killed him," I say, unable to stop my voice from shaking. He killed one of his own kind. There's a few records of demons killing each other, but always when they are fighting over food. Then why isn't this one attacking me?

He looks at the body at his feet. "I did." His voice is low and gruff.

"Why?"

"He was going to kill you."

"What do you care if he kills me?"

He watches me for a moment, and I get a sense of a muzzle under the hoodie. "I don't want you to die." He turns and takes a few steps away. In that moment I realize that with his clothing, I can't tell he isn't human. In three leaps he disappears to the rooftop.

I'm frozen for a moment, trying to understand what happened. Then I step to the demon he killed. Before I bend down to examine it I catch the scent of his killer.

I know that scent.

It was in the alley where I found my revolver last night