

Chapter 07

"What happened?" Amanda asks. She isn't happy with me, that's obvious, but she's trying to keep her tone calm.

"He escaped." I might as well start with that.

"How?" She stipples her fingers.

"The warehouse he led me to had a hole in the floor opening up to a fresh tunnel. That lead to the demon junction we found last month. There were too many scents there, his got lost among the others."

She looks at Jason. "I told you we should have vented it."

He sighs. "It wouldn't have done any good. Demon scent sticks to rocks and earth better than to anything else. We can put the biggest blower at one end and have it go for a year and it's still going to stink in there. What we should do is cave it in, but the main crossing is under a residential area and there's no way to do it without causing a sink hole under a dozen houses."

"We should fill it up then."

Jason had a short laugh at that. "We can't get enough concrete to fill it. Not to say that they would just dig around it. Demons are expert diggers. The best we can do is monitor the entrances we know about, but those haven't been used since we found them."

"So we have a demon loose in the city. Not great, but he isn't the only one. He's going to resurface, and you can take him down then." She levels her gaze on me. "What concerns me is that you said he led you there. Did the warehouse give him a tactical advantage?"

I shake my head. "He wanted to talk."

Amanda and Jason stiffen.

"Talk?"

"Yes. More specifically, ask me questions."

They exchange a worried look.

"A demon popped up out of nowhere to talk with you?"

Jason's tone was dubious.

"It wasn't the first time I met him."

There a moment of silence as they both stare at me.

Amanda's eyes narrow and I hear her teeth grind against each other. "I come you never mentioned a talking demon before?"

I look down at my hands. "I don't know. I wanted to tell you yesterday, but I couldn't bring myself to mention him."

"Why not?" Jason asked, hint of anger in his voice.

"I don't know."

Silence again.

"Could the demon have done something to him to keep him quiet?" Jason asked.

"No," Amanda replied.

"It has to be possible, he's..."

"No!" She slams a hand on her desk and I look up, startled. "It doesn't matter," she continues in a calmer tone. "Demons don't control people like that and you know it."

Jason suddenly looks at me. "He's the reason for your panic attack yesterday."

I feel myself getting hot and I look away, but I can feel Amanda's eyes on me.

"Why did he scare you so badly?" she asks.

I don't know how to answer, since I don't know why he scared me like that. "He killed another demon to save my life." That's the only thing I can think of, not that he killed another demon, but that he did it for me. That makes no sense.

"Are you absolutely certain?"

"Yes, he said he wanted me to live."

Jason is about to say something, but she raises a hand to forestall him. "Derick, we're done for the time being. The doctors are waiting for you."

I nod and leave.

"Could he know?" Jason asks as soon as I close the door. And start walking away.

"Of course not." Amanda replies after a moment.

"It's can't be a coincidence. None of them have ever talked before."

"He can't be here..." I'm too far to hear what else she says.

The doctors run me through the usual tests, and I pass all of them. I go back to my apartment and eat. The news talk about the weather, the country's finances and a few isolated demon attacks around the country.

I'm finishing a large bowl of fruit and vegetable, as well as my second can of coke when Jason enters. "How are you feeling?" he asks.

"Unsettled, and weary. I can't figure out what he wants with me, and I'm worried about what he's going to do next."

"You don't think he's done?"

I shake my head and go to the fridge. I hesitate for a moment then take another can. There's only one left.

"What did he ask?" Jason watches me as I sit back down.

"He wanted to know my name. Why I didn't believe him when he said he wanted to understand me."

"Understand you? did he say how, or why?"

"No." I thought back on it. "At that point I think we were arguing. We sounded a little like you and Amanda sound at times."

"So no detail on what his agenda might be."

"Is there more I should know about demons?"

Jason shakes his head. "Why?"

"He can talk. I was shocked when he spoke, yet you and Amanda weren't all that surprised by it. He can't be the only one. Are there reports on talking demons I haven't read?"

Jason didn't reply immediately. "No, there isn't." He picks up a piece of fruit that fell out of the bowl and eats it. "You have to remember, we've been at this a lot longer than you have. We've learned to roll with it when one of them does something unusual. After a few more years you'll be the same. Once of them will belch flames and you won't even blink an eye."

I nod. "I wish I knew why he was after me. Am I unusual among hunters? Is my success rate higher than others?"

"You've read the files on the other hunters; I'd say you're on par with most of them."

"I haven't read them. I didn't want to see how they functioned. I wanted to find my own way."

"Still, you haven't read them even once you came up with what worked for you?"

"No. I follow the news. It's enough to tell me that the other hunters are dealing with demons."

"Alright, I'm surprised, that's all. Do you have any thought on what you're going to do if he pops up again?"

"He will. I'm certain of it. He isn't done with me. I'd like to assemble a full tactical team. He's fast, strong and cunning. I don't think I can take him on my own, and he knows it. The only way to kill him is to surprise him with superior force."

"Sure, we can do that, but how are we going to know it's him? We can't have the team follow you all the time. For one thing they aren't trained for something that intensive, and for another." He smiled. "You're the one supposed to protect us, not the other way around."

I smile back. "I wouldn't want them around all the time, I prefer being alone in the field. This is the third day in a row he made himself known."

"Third?"

I nod. "The evening when all I found was my revolver, that was him."

"You didn't mentioned that before."

"Sorry, I forgot. I think he's going to lay low for a few days. When he is going to surface, he's going to choose a location out of the way. I don't know why, but he doesn't seem to want to involve civilians. Each time we've had a sighting of him, there hadn't been any human death."

"So we can leave the violent ones for you to handle alone?"

"Yes. Those are easy to deal with."