

Chapter 09

I don't know how long I stare at the empty doorway. I can't have been more than a few minutes, the men haven't come back yet, and the women are still barely stirring. One of them, an older one is trying to comfort another one, and I realize they need help.

I call emergency services and let them know eighteen women need medical attention. Then I try to help them myself. They're all in bad shape, bruises, cuts and some have badly healed broken arms.

I realize I don't know how to help with any of that. My injuries heal on their own under a day, humans' don't. Many of them show signs of dehydration, and that I can help with.

I go through the building until I find a kitchen. It's dirty, but the faucet works. There are four pitchers, dirty with beer. I clean them and filled them with cold water. I bring them to the women, who wearily take them and pass them along, each taking only a few sips.

I don't know what else to do. I stand there, watching them. I'm supposed to protect humans, but demons are the ones who are supposed to be hurting them, not other humans. This isn't how the world works.

Emergency services arrive, rush in and immediately go to the women. They are going to help them, so I leave.

I don't stop walking once I'm outside the building. I should call headquarters so the van can pick me up, but I don't want to go back there right now. I need... something. I don't know what.

The sun is disappearing behind the buildings and the number of people around me increases. I watch them, trying to see something in them, the goodness Amanda and Jason have told me is in humans, but I don't see it. Their faces are masks of disinterest and tiredness.

I see two men arguing on the steps before the entrance of a building. I've seen arguments before, Jason and Amanda often argue, but with these two I can read malice on their face. Then one shoves the other over the side before entering the building.

The man falls two feet and lands badly. His arm is broken. His staggers to his feet, glares at the entrance and then leaves, clutching his arms against his body. No one even looks in his direction. No one offered to help him.

Is this what humans are? Uninterested in the welfare of those around him? Indifferent? This can't be what Jason meant when he said humans were good.

I see more scenes like this as I walk. A woman slaps a man and calls him worthless before dragging him inside. A man makes lewd remarks to a woman, she tells him to leave her alone.

Instead he grabs her by the arms and pulls her to his car, shoves her on the back seat and drives off. No one tries to rescue her. Two men grab another one and pull him in an alley. I can hear them beating him.

I shiver, even if it isn't cold.

Is that what I've been made to protect?

The sky grows dark, the street lights come on. The number of people around me diminishes until I can go a few blocks without walking by one. But the feel of them changes. The look in their eyes is hungry, or fearful. I see a few of them assess me. I can tell they have weapons hidden under their shirts. They decide I'm not worth whatever they were planning. Which is good, I'm not supposed to hurt untainted humans.

I don't want to hurt humans.

I turn a corner and stop. I breathe in deeply. Yes, I didn't imagine it. It's faint but the demonic scent is there. I track it and I hope it'll lead me to one. I need to hit something.

The scent gets stronger and I walk faster, almost run. My hands are shaking in eagerness. I can see myself cutting it, ripping his limbs apart. Shooting it until it's nothing more than a puddle on the ground.

I don't know why I'm feeling this way, or even what I'm actually feeling. I'm usually calm on a hunt. I know what I need to do, but I don't envision it, or feel this delight at the coming fight.

I enter an alley and the scent permeates everything. He's here. I walk slowly. I can't see him; my heat vision only shows rodents scurrying about. He doesn't have a victim.

I'm surprised to realize I don't care that he doesn't. I should be relieved that no one had been killed by him, but all I want is him, regardless of who else suffers.

I hear breathing, rapid breathes, eager. I still can't see any heat, so I know it's him. Scuffling ahead. A low growl and he jumps at me.

I fall down, with him on top of me. I easily shove him off and roll to my feet. I reach for my revolver, and grab my sword instead. He's too small to be *him* and my desire to hurt him increases because of that.

I make short work of him. I lose my sword at some point, but that doesn't slow me down. I use my fists to pound him into submission, and then I keep hitting him. The look in his eyes turns to fear and that drives me further. I don't stop hitting until the light in those eyes is gone and his head is a broken heap.

I look at him panting. I feel exhausted, far more tired than what this took, and my right arm throbs. I search among the remains of his head until I find the soul stone.

It isn't him, but at least it's one less demon in the world.

I step out of the alley. I don't feel any better. I want another one to hit. I want to kill every demon out there until the world is as it should be, until the humans are as good as what Amanda told me they were.

I need to get back to headquarters.

I look around. I have no idea how to get back there. I don't even know where it is. The van always takes me there. So I call them. I don't want to, but it's the only way I can get to headquarters.

The van arrives. I sit in the chair, but shove the medic away when he comes to put the sensors on me. He tries to insist but I glare at him, and he leaves me alone. He calls headquarters and talks softly with them. I hear the conversation, but I don't pay attention to it. I don't care what he thinks.

Jason is waiting for me when I get out of the van.

"D, are you alright?"

I look at him, in his eyes. Is the concern real? Is it another lie? "I'm fine."

I can see the doubt, but he doesn't say anything. He leads me to Amanda's office, where she's seated, impatience on her face. She's about to say something, but Jason shakes his head. She frowns but closes her mouth.

"What happened?" Jason asks. "We got reports from the police and paramedics. They say you let the demon walk away. After that you were just wandering around the city."

I look at him, I can't hide my surprise. How do they know where I went? "I was tracking him."

"Why did you let him walk away?" Amanda asks. Her tone is more severe than usual.

"It was him. He said things that put me off balance. Then there were the women. I couldn't abandon them."

Their gazes are searching.

"And you went back to tracking him after the paramedics arrived?" He expression is dubious.

I nod.

"D, you were walking."

I glare at him and Jason takes a step back. I don't reply immediately. "He's too cunning. He setup that first attack to look differently than what he's done before so I wouldn't expect him there. He lured me to the building with the women."

"Why?" Amanda asks.

I keep my breathing calm. They're human, they can't tell how nervous I am. "To show me that humans are no better than demons." I think I managed to keep the anger out of my tone.

"And?"

"All I saw was women in misery. I couldn't smell any demons there, but I don't know how they ended up that way."

They exchange a look I can't read. Do they believe me?

"And the demon, you tracked him? you found him?" Jason is weary.

I nod because I don't trust my voice not to crack.

"What happened?"

Again I don't trust myself to say anything, so I just lob the soul stone on Amanda's desk.

The tension in their body disappear.

Amanda smiles at me. "Good job."

"Yes, D. Great job. You look like this took a lot out of you. You go rest. We'll do the tests tomorrow."

I nod and go to my apartment.