

Chapter 13

I walk for a time. I don't know where I'm going, but I won't go back to ask for his help. The city can't be all that big, I'll come across the headquarter building eventually.

They wind shifts and I stop.

I turn around and look at him. He looks almost human, wearing pants, shoes, a jacket with the hood pulled up, but his scent gives him away. He looks so realistic that it takes me a moment to realize he's not wearing anything. It's the darkness, his skin, shaped to look like clothing. The hood hides his muzzle and glowing eyes.

"Why are you following me?"

He tilts his head to the side. "I was going to leave, but then I saw you walking in the opposite direction to the building where you said you wanted to go. I'm curious as to why you lied to me."

"I didn't lie," I growl. He looks at me expectantly. I sigh. "I don't know where it is."

He nods. "Follow me." I do so and we go back the way I came.

We walk in silence past the building he held me and go a dozen block. He stops at an intersection and points toward the setting sun.

"Just walk along that road. It's a good way away, but you'll reach it." He turns and starts walking.

I watch him for a moment, feeling like I should say something. I turn to head toward headquarters, then turn around.

"Claws," I call. He stops and turns. "I'm... Look..." I sigh. "Thanks for pointing me in the right direction."

He looks at me for a moment then nods. "That's my role." He turns and resumes walking.

I don't know what he meant by that.

I end up watching him recede in the distance until he vanishes. Only then do I start on my own way.

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The building looms large. I've never really looked at it before, even when coming back from grocery shopping. It's always just been there before, a part of my life, not something to pay attention to, just live in. It's twelve stories tall, each side all windows, except for the ground floor, which is concrete except for the lobby which has glass walls on each side of the door.

Now that I look at it, it's a little larger, but looks similar to the other buildings around it. I don't know what happens in those. Another place where people work? Live? I never wondered about what this part of the city is about. Maybe later I can spend time doing that.

I stop on the sidewalk, in front of the lobby entrance. I see a few people walking from one side to the other, carrying papers. The elevator door opens and a woman steps out, heading toward me, but looking at her phone. She lifts her head to push the door open, sees me, takes a step and freezes.

She looks at me for a moment, and then her eyes grow wide. She backs into the building and yells something I don't hear. A guard runs to her, she points at me. He raises his radio to his mouth speaks then comes outside. His hand is over the gun at his hip and for moment I think he's going to draw it and shoot me, but he looks around at the other people walking along the sidewalk.

"Tell Amanda I want to talk to her."

"My orders are to take you to her."

I smile. "No, tell her to come here." Our tone of voice is normal enough none of the pedestrians pay attention to us.

"I've got other men coming. Don't force us to subdue you."

My smile widens. "How much collateral damage are you willing to cause in your attempt?"

He looks around again before taking out his radio. "He wants the director to come down here."

There's silence, then. "She's on her way," comes over the radio.

"I heard." I say before he repeats the message.

Four more guards join us. Now we're drawing stares, but other than giving us a wider berth, none of the pedestrians react. I see Amanda walk out of the elevator and hurry to us.

"Derick, thank God you came back. I was so worried about you."

I stare at her. She was worried? I find I can't say anything.

"I am so sorry for what I did. I over reacted."

"Yes, you did."

"I'm really glad you're okay. Why don't you come inside, we can talk."

I take a step forward, then stop. Is she telling me the truth? Is this another lie? How am I supposed to know?

"No, I don't think so. Right now I don't trust you."

"I understand. I deserve that. I just want to make things right by you."

Does she mean it? I've never heard her being this contrite. She's normally so cool and controlled. Jason is the one I'd expect to sound like this...

I focus on her, blocking out all other sounds, listening only to her. Her breathing, and the faint sound of someone talking to her.

"Okay," the voice says, "he isn't going to respond immediately. He's thinking things over. You broke the trust you had with him. Don't lose your cool, or you're going to lose him."

"Jason's wrong," I tell her. "You've already lost me." the surprise registers on her face only for a moment before being covered up with her usual look of serious determination. "You don't actually care about me, do you?"

"How do you know about Jason?"

"I can hear him talking to you though the ear piece you're wearing. For all the tests you did on me, you don't actually know what I'm capable of, do you?" It takes a lot of effort to stop myself from rubbing my right arm.

She looks at the distance separating us. "You never told me your hearing was this good."

"I didn't know it was unusual until now. That's why you want me dead. You said you could learn more from my body. You're hoping to know what I can do."

She laughs. "I know what you can do. I want to know how you can do it. What changes happened in you to make it possible."

"I'm not going to let you do that."

"I realize that."

"So, what happens now? You're going to hunt me down and try to kill me?"

"Why would I do that? It would take too long, and you'd kill too many of my men. No. you're a write off, two and a half years pretty much wasted. The only good thing to come out of this is that I know the process works. I'm just not going to bother with Jason's advice on the next one. Although I'm sure he's going to come up with a cute name for that one too. 'E' something.

"No, I don't have to do anything. You've killed a lot of demons. I expect a lot more of them are angry at you. How long do you think you'll last without our support?"

"Really? You're going to let me walk away? I find that hard to believe after you stabbed me."

"Speaking of which, how did you disappear like that?"

I just smile.

"But to answer your question, I'm not going to be wasting any more resources on you. Go ahead, walk away. Have fun fighting off the demons alone. Send me a postcard wherever you end up settling down." She turns and goes back inside, calling her men after her.

I stare at their back and I'm — disappointed. I didn't expect her to walk away. I thought she was going to force me to fight. I wanted that fight.

I consider rushing them, but what will I gain? A quick death? Do I want to die?

No, I don't.

I turn away and walk up the road.