

Chapter 16

I stare at him for a moment. "Are you crazy? We can't go there."

"I will not leave what remains of my brethren in their possession."

"You were worried about what they were going to do to me when all I wanted to do was talk with Amanda. what do you think they are actually going to do if we walk in there?"

"I don't care what they attempt to do to stop me. They are only human."

"Humans armed with silver weapons."

"You think I fear silver?"

"Shouldn't you? I know it hurts you."

"Only if they can touch me."

"They have guns."

"Are they anywhere near as good as you?"

"Of course not."

"Then i don't see how they are going to be a problem. I disarmed you easily enough."

"It won't be that easy if you try it again. And it's not just about he weapons they have, there's a lot of them. It isn't going to be easy."

"They've never gone up against me."

"I've fought enough of your kind to know what to expect. I'm telling you. You don't stand a chance."

"You have only fought our young, and while they were driven crazy with hunger. You and they have never fought one of use who is well past being ruled by hunger. They certainly have not gone up against anyone like me. Let them attack me, I will tear them limb from limb."

"No, Absolutely not! If we do that, there will be no killing."

"We?"

I sigh. "Yes, we. I can't just give you directions. I'll go with you, but you can't kill any of them."

"Why are you still seeking to protect them?"

"Because they're humans. I was made to protect them."

"They lied about why they made you."

"It's still all I know! If you expect me to turn my back on them just because some of them lied, you are wrong."

"They are not worth your protection."

"You don't get to decide that," I growl. "This isn't negotiable. If I take you to the soul stones, no one dies."

He looks at me, his gaze unreadable. "Very well. I will not kill anyone, but I make no promises on how little, or how much I will hurt them."

I shrug. "I get that. I doubt I'm going to be able to fully restrain myself. Let get moving, someone's bound to have called the police after the roaring you did."

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"How are we getting in?" Claw asks.

We're standing in the shadows, looking at the entryway, at the two guards standing there.

"This is the only unlocked entrance. The garage can only be opened by someone inside. There are doors around the building, like the one I got out by, but those are going to be locked."

He looks at me. "How do locked doors stop you?"

"I don't have the access card for them."

He keeps looking at me.

"What?"

"I've felt how hard you can punch. Why don't you just punch a hole in the door, maybe rip it off. That's what I do."

"I can't do that. that's..." I'm about to say that's where I live, but that isn't true, not anymore. "I never thought about it. I haven't had to force my way into a building before. I guess we can go in by the door I used. It's on that side."

We take the long way around to get to the side of the building, using more alleys and rooftops. The only way I can tell which of the three doors along the wall is the one I used is the smell of exhaust from Juliette's van by it.

The door doesn't have a handle. So I try to pry my fingers around the lip of the door, but there isn't any space. Suddenly I realize I do have purchase on it, and pull. The door creaks and bends away from the frame, which allows me to see the fingers of my right hand. The black nails are extended and flattened.

With a curse I let go of the door and take a step back. I shake my hand, trying to fling the stuff off. I don't have a knife to cut it off so I look around for something sharp.

Claws grabs my wrist, forcing me to stop moving.

"Let go of me, I have to get that off."

"There is nothing on you. It's your skin, reacting to what you need."

"I need that stuff off!"

Claws looks at me, with what I think is annoyance. "Calm yourself. It is your skin, not some alien part attacking you."

I wrench my arm out. "That's easy for you to say." I point to him. At the darkness at the fringe of his 'clothing' acting like frayed strands caught in the wind. "You're probably having fun making yourself looking like someone dressed in tattered clothing." I notice the still flattened tip of my fingers and cradle my hand in my arm, where I can;t see it.

Claws looks down at himself, and the frayed darkness still. "No, That isn't me doing anything. It's my concentration wavering." His outline became defined again. "In the wild, I don't need to concentrate on my form. It changes and flows according to my need. Keeping myself looking like this for so long is taxing."

"But there's something inside, right? Bones, blood? I've cut demons so I know you bleed."

"This is my skin, not the whole of who I am." he points to my cradled arm, the tip of his finger extending into a long claw. "Just like that is your skin. You need to accept it."

"I didn't ask for it."

"None the less, it is yours. Refusing to accept that simply means you will not use it."

"I've never needed that before."

Claws grips the edge of the door and rips it off the frame. "And yet, you do now."

Grumbling I follow him inside.

It's late, so it's not surprising the hallways are empty. I lead Claws to the elevator at the back of the building. It's used primarily for large items and there won't be any guard there at this hour. My fingers hovers over the call button.

"Is something wrong?"

"This isn't a good idea."

"I don't care, I want what's mine."

I shake my head. "No, not that. Taking the elevator. Amanda can control them. We're better off taking the stairs."

"Where are they?"

"Down this way."

I lead him to the east stairs and we go down. The door to the fifth sub basement opened as we're next to it. A guard stares at me and Claws for a moment before going for his gun. Claws is faster than I am. He wraps a large hand over the guard's gun hand as he'd pulling it out of the holster.

I hear the bones break. The guard screams in pain. And Claws throws him against the wall. More bones break and I rush next to the guard to make sure he's still alive.

"Don't do that again," I tell Claws as I stand.

"He's alive."

"You Shattered his hand and broke his collarbone."

"He would have attacked us."

"He wouldn't have been able to do anything against us. You didn't have to hurt him like that."

Claws' gaze pierced me. "Derick, he is just a human."

"No! he isn't just human. He's a person. He deserves to live and not be in pain. You're fast enough immobilize him. we can tie them up."

"I did warn you I would hurt them."

"Not him. Not people who can't even defend themselves against you. If we're attacked by trained fighters, one of the support group, fine. But you are not going to just hurt people wantonly."

"You are being unreasonable."

"No. I'm being perfectly reasonable. You said you're in control, unlike the ones I've fought in the city, the young ones. Well you're going to prove have to it."

"Fine. I won't hurt anyone who doesn't pose a threat to me. I guess that means I won't hurt anyone at all."

"I'm okay with that." I handcuff the guard's hands and continue down.

The eighth level is quiet. I hear the whirs of computer fans from the closest labs. "They're stored in the containment room, on the other side of the building."

We're halfway when Valerie opens a door and almost walks into me. She jumps back in surprise and almost drops the apple she's holding. He chews quickly and swallows. I move my right arm behind my back.

"Derick, they told us you'd left."

"I... left something here. I'm just getting it."

"Maybe I should tell Amanda you're here."

"You don't have to disturb her. It's rather late. I'll just be a moment."

Her eyes grow wide. She drops the apple and reach behind her back. I can guess what she just saw. I grab her left wrist as she raises the gun and push her against the wall.

She winces and she hits it.

"Sorry," I say. I look over my shoulder. Claws is in the doorway. His scent if all over me. I can't tell when he's moving about anymore. I look back at Valerie and she's looking at my hand.

"Oh my God. When did that happen?"

"Earlier."

"When? Under what conditions?"

"It doesn't matter. Valerie, I'm going to have to tie you up."

"Of course it matters. I'd theorized that you'd show some demonic aspects, I've always wondered what you didn't. I have to know what the catalysts was."

I stare at her. "You know what was done to me?"

"Of course I do. I've been working on the project with Amanda from the start."

"Didn't it ever occur to tell me about it?"

"That wasn't my decision to make. Not that I would have told you anyway. I've seen what happens when once one of you

knows what he is." She looks from me to Claws. "Well, this. You always switch sides."

One of me? Right, in the video Jason says I'm the fourth attempt. I curse under my breath. Did anyone else know? did they all know? I remember some of the anger in the voice of my support teams when talking about me. I hadn't thought anything of it before, but did they know?

Valerie gasps in pain and I release her. Her wrist is covered with small lacerations. The darkness on the palm of my hand is formed in small blades. I was angry, I wanted to hurt her and the darkness responded.

"I didn't want this," I tell her.

She looks at me with fear.

"Is this going to take long?" Claws asks from the door.

"No." I grab one of the cords from behind a computer and rip it out. I pull her hands behind her back, none too gently and tie them.

"If you think that thing is your friend," Valerie says, "you're deluded. It's using you."

"Seems to me everyone is."

"Derick, you don't have to leave. We can help you. You're not the first one to manifests demonic traits."

"Why don't you stop lying."

"I'm not lying, Derick. The others didn't have the control you have, but we learned a lot from them. We can learn even more from you."

"Don't you mean from my body?"

"No. if you cooperates nothing has to happen to you."

"I don't believe you."

"I'm telling you the truth."

I push her down behind the desk. "I don't care."

I push Claws aside as I leave the lab and close the door.

"Are you going to leave her like that?"

"Yes."

"What if she gets free?"

"I don't care."

"She might alert the others we're here."

"I don't care." But that's a lie. I do care. I hope she tells Amanda I'm here. I'm angry and I want to hit someone. I can feel the darkness on my arm shift about, flow and harden. I want to make someone pay for what I'm going through.

We reach the containment room and I see I am going to be able to do just that. There's a large window next to the door showing me the thirty or so people in the room, surrounding the containment unit. They're armed and armored. Their rifles move up to aim at us.

"Why aren't they firing?" Claws asks.

"The window is bullet proof. They don't want to waste their bullets. Claws, what I said about not hurting them, you can forget about it. These people deserve the pain."

Claws doesn't say anything. He runs through the window. It isn't demon proof.