

Chapter 10

The smell of salmon and lemon enveloped him when he entered. He tried to be quiet, but his mom poked her head out of the kitchen.

"Denton! I was starting to think you weren't going to make it."

He smiled at her, but didn't say anything. He went to her and kissed her cheek. In the dining room, he could see Jennifer setting the table, which meant Tim was in the basement keeping the kids occupied.

"Where's dad?"

"In his study. He's been there all day." There was a note of concern in her voice.

He went up the stairs, and knocked on the door. There was no response, but he entered anyway.

His dad was seated at his desk, the bottle of whiskey on it only had a fifth of its content left. The bull looked at him, and finished his glass.

"I figured you'd have more questions."

Denton picked up the bottle. "When did you start on this dad?"

"This morning."

"Why?"

"Why do you think? The stuff is called liquid courage for a reason. I'm going to need it to answer you."

"You couldn't know I was going to do this now."

Stanley shrugged. "You were going to do it at some point."

Denton sat and looked at the bull. "Why do the papers say I died in the fire?"

"You have to understand son. I knew your mother better than your father. To be honest, I didn't really like him. Things happened in that house when you and your mother were out. Men would come, rich men, men your father had no business knowing."

"He saw them behind my mother's back?"

He shook his head. "She would take you with her when the first one arrived. Whatever they did in that house, she knew. I never asked. It was none of my business, but I knew it wasn't anything good. She knew too."

He sighed. "A few weeks before the fire, she made me promise her that if anything ever happened to them, I would watch after you. I would protect you."

"I wasn't supposed to be home when the fire happened. I was half way to work when I realized I'd left my briefcase home, so I turned around. When I got here, I saw smoke coming out of an up stair window. I rushed to the door, but it was locked. I banged on it, but no one answered."

"I went to the back, to try that door, but before I got

there I saw movement in a basement window. It was your mother, she was trying to break it. I wrapped my jacket over my fist and punched it.

"It didn't break. I swear to you son, I punched it as hard as I could, but it didn't break. I had to kick it, to finally break it. Then she passed you to me. She told me to take you away. So I took you here. When I went back, the fire was burning strong, and I couldn't get close. I called the fire department.

"I was going to tell them about you, but they were busy fighting the fire. And then, those men showed up. The men your father had had at his house. I couldn't tell them about you. I had no idea what they would do to you. So I kept you hidden. Then the paper said everyone had died. We went out of town, the whole family, including you, for a few days.

"When you felt better, you didn't remember anything."

"But we went to the funeral, I remember that."

"Do you remember that we stayed at the back? You didn't ask me to get any closer, so we didn't. You were dressed in a jacket with a hood. No one saw you."

"How did you explain it to the adoption people?"

Stanley looked away. "We never adopted you."

"What?"

"We just told you we had."

"I remember seeing the papers."

He sighed. "I had those made by someone I met on a job. Turns out even criminals get stuck pipes. He was a forger."

"Why dad? Why go through all that?"

"Because I promised your mother I'd keep you safe."

"Damn it, dad. I wish you'd..." He stopped as he felt himself being watched. He looked at his hand, which he was absentmindedly rubbing on his pants. He looked at his clean palm.

When had he started rubbing it? He couldn't remember.

"Dad!" came Tim's voice.

Denton was out the room and down the stairs. "What happened?" He just knew something had happened.

He smelled the smoke as Tim answered. "Something caught on fire down stairs."

Denton ran to the kitchen. "Mom, take everyone and get out." He grabbed the fire extinguisher off the wall and ran for the basement.

The fire now covered all the back wall, and was starting to spread to the rafters. He checked the indicator, which showed there was full pressure, pulled the safety pin, aimed it and pressed the trigger. Nothing happened.

He checked the indicator again. Full pressure. He tried it again, and still nothing happened. The fire was now spreading on

the side wall. How the hell was it doing that? It was bare concrete. That stuff didn't burn that easily. And the fire felt a lot hotter than it should.

"Dent?" Tim was at the bottom of the stairs. "What's going on?"

"Tim, you need to get out of here."

"We can't. The doors won't open."

Denton stared at him, then pushed him up the stairs.

Jenifer, his mom and the kids were in the living room, coughing. His dad was staring at the bay window, terror on his face.

"Everyone down on the floor!" Denton ordered.

His father looked at him. "I can't break the window. I've kicked it and it won't break."

"It's okay dad, go with mom, stay close to the ground." He grabbed a chair and swung it at the bay window. It wobbled, but didn't break. This was impossible.

Looking out, he saw a lion step determinedly toward the door. Denton went to it, and tried to open it. The handle turned, but the door wouldn't swing out. He put his shoulder against it and tried again. It didn't even bulge.

He slammed his first against it. "Frank! Fred! We're in here!" He wasn't sure which of the two it was, but he was certain it was one of Martin's friends.

He slammed his shoulder against it again, to help the lion on the other side. It didn't move. He took a step back to kicked it, and it exploded toward him. He turned to protect his face, and saw the fire rush toward him.

He had a moment of horror as the certainty he was going to be burned alive hit him, then someone grabbed him and turned. He faced the door as the flames flew by him, the heat stealing his breath away.

The fire died down and he was pushed in a lion's hands. He turned to watch the other lion fall to his knees, his back in flames.

"We have to help him."

"Frank's going to be okay," Fred said, as he pulled Denton away from the house.

"My family!"

"We're going to look after them. Stop fighting me, you have to get in the van." The side door opened and Fred threw him inside. Colby caught and sat him.

"We have to go help them!"

Colby grabbed him to stop him from getting out of the van.

"Denton," Martin said, from behind the wheel. "You need to stay here. The others are going to take care of your family."

"Frank?"

"He'll be fine. He's tough. Fred will see to him. Now. What happened?"

"Denton got a sense of being watched, like I told you on the phone," Stefan answered, in the passenger seat. "I put a shield on him. Then dropped him off here. A few minutes later I saw the fire starting. That's when I called you for backup."

Martin turned and looked at Denton.

He looked at his hand. "Sorry, I rubbed it off out of nervousness. It tingled."

"How did they know to watch you?" Martin mused.

"He's investigating the murders," Colby offered.

Stefan turned and looked at Denton. "Did you get a sense you were watched at any point before Friday?"

"No. That's when it started."

"And that was us."

"Then why now?" Martin mused again, looking ahead.

"It's got to be because they found out who he is."

"But how? The only ones who knew are the six of us, my dad, Oscar, Leroy and Shirley. Fuck!" He took out his phone, dialed and put it to his ear. He slammed it shut, looking up at the van's roof and started driving.

Denton only now noticed symbols on it, as well as the sides. He put his nose close to one and yep, it smelled like cum.