

I don't know how long I remain crouched before the dead demon before I break its skull and pull out the soul stone. I barely feel myself move as I do the same to the other one. Then I call the van.

I don't recall saying anything, but in moments I hear it come to a stop at the mouth of the alley and the side door slide open. I force myself to walk to it.

I get in and sit in the chair. They say something, but I am not listening to them. *I don't want you to die*, I hear it say again.

I feel someone working my fingers, and I look at Valerie. She is wearing thick gloves and is trying to pry my hand open. I turn my hand and open it. The stones in it are still covered in goo. She looks at me, concerned, before taking them and looking at one of the chair's readout.

I don't need to look at it to know my heart rate is elevated and my breathing shallow. I don't understand why.

I don't understand why a demon wants me alive. How it could kill one of its own kind, over me? I do understand something: those eyes were calm. Where the rage normally is, there was calm. Even as it killed, as it saved me, it was calm.

The van comes to a stop. The door opens. People move around me. They say things I that don't register, but the tone of their voices do. Worry, concern, even fear. I don't pay attention to them. They don't matter.

"What happened?" a voice I recognize asks. I focus on the words and pull myself away from the pit that opened in my mind.

I look at Amanda as she studies me.

"I... It was an ambush." I should get out of the chair. I'm still wearing the trench coat, which means demon scents are sticking to the chair. I need to take it off. I need to go see the doctors. They'll have tests to run. But I don't move.

Jason appears next to her. He looks worried, and a little scared. "D, my man, you need to talk to us." He's right, I need to tell them what happened.

"They are smarter than before."

"They?" Amanda frowns.

"There were..." I notice the people around us, now using what they need to do as an excuse to stay close to us and listen in.

"D, talk to me."

I focus on Jason. "There were two of them." I should tell them about the third one, but not in public. "The first had two human captives. It kept them alive, as a way to draw me in and ensure I would remain. We fought. It was very fast and vicious, but I killed it. As it died at my feet, the second demon dropped behind me. I never caught another scent in the alley; it must have waited on the roof."

"It surprised you?" Jason straightens.

I nod. "They were working together. How can demons work together?"

"But you killed it too," Amanda states, instead of answering my questions.

"I..."

*I don't want you to die*, I hear it say. I need to tell them. They need to know a demon saved my life, but what will they think? My heart beats irregularly for a moment.

"D?"

"I think I got lucky." What can they think? It's never happened before. Could they believe that I have been tainted? "I don't think it expected me to react as quickly as I did."

"It can't have been all that smart," Jason smirks.

"Didn't you listen to me?" The anger I feel at lying gives my voice a sharp edge. "They were working together. Or at the very least, one of them was using the other to tire me out. There is nothing in the records about demons cooperating in such a way. Even when they attack as a group, they always behave as mindless beasts. The smart ones don't work with other demons."

Amanda frowns. Jason looks worried.

After a moment she looks at me, and I am left with the impression the frown was directed at me. She places a hand on my arm and squeezes. "It's a new behavior. We'll document it and

learn from it. You've been rattled by this, and it's understandable. Forget the tests, go to your apartment and rest."

I nod and get out of the van. I've taken a couple of steps when I stop. I need to tell them about the other one. "There's..." A demon saved me, what can it mean? Does it have something planned for me?

Amanda looks expectantly at me. "Yes?"

"I mean..." Was her frown directed at me? No, she made me, she knows I would never act against humans. "I think..." What if she thinks I am flawed? What if the demon saved me because it sensed it can use me?" I shake my head. "It's nothing." I will find it, and I will kill it. They don't need to know about this yet.

'Why' hounds me the entire way to the eighth floor, though no answers accompany it. I am hungry, but I head to the shower. I throw the trench-coat and my clothes in the hamper and move under the water, set as hot as it gets.

Showers don't help to remove demon scent off a person, I know that, but I still scrub myself hard. Am I becoming irrational? Am I actually flawed? I shake my head. I can't be. It's the demon's behavior. It's too different from anything I've read about. That makes it dangerous.

I have difficulty breathing, and I don't understand why. My hands shake, then my arms, and then my entire body. I am under scalding water, and yet I am shaking as if I have spent eight hours naked in a freezer. What is happening to me?

I catch motion in the steam, and back away, snarling.

"Jesus man, what are you doing?" Who is that? I make out a form, a little smaller than me, through the thick steam. "If you want a sauna, you should use the one next to the gym."

Motion, close by, and I back to the other end of the space.

"Fuck, that's hot." The shower stops.

I prepare myself. As soon as I can see where it is, I will attack.

"D, you okay?" It moves closer. I prepare to strike, but I catch the scent through the steam. It isn't a demon scent. He puts a hand on my arm, and instead of striking back, I flinch.

"D, calm down. What's going on?" His other hand, on my other arm. "Are you... Are you scared?"

I am not scared. Fear is for humans, not hunters. I kill demons. Nothing scares me.

"D—Derick, I need you to breath, take deep breaths. That's it, another one. There you go. Again."

I follow his instruction, and with each breath, I take in his scent, and finally I recognize it. Jason.

"What... What is happening to me?" My teeth are chattering.

"From what I can see, you're experiencing fear." The steam is now thin enough I can see the worry on his face. "That ambush must have more than rattled you."

I shake my head. I have to tell him it isn't the ambush. I have to tell him how dangerous the third demon is, but I can't get to words out.

"Are you feeling better?"

I nod.

"Alright, let's get you dry and in bed. I think what you need more than anything else right now is rest. I'll make sure the tests are postponed."

I let him dry me; I doubt I could have pushed him away. I feel weak, like when I first woke up, with my body barely obeying me.

He leads me to my bed and tucks me in. He pats my head. "Just go to sleep. I'll see you tomorrow."

I close my eyes, and when I open them again, it's morning. I have slept for sixteen hours. I have never slept this long before. At least I feel better.

I think back on last night. So that is what fear feels like. I do not like it, but I now recognize that it started in the van. I try to understand what caused it. Did I realize even then that it was so dangerous?

I take a quick shower, remaining aware of how I feel. I don't want to lose control of myself in

such a way again. Once clean and dry, I dress and start on breakfast. I am famished.

Amanda enters as I finish my fourth steak. I haven't started on the large bowl of cut fruits yet. She takes a few pieces.

"Jason told me you felt fear for the first time." She studies me, and for a moment I think I see disappointment in her eyes. "I suppose it was only a question of time until it happened. Do you think it's going to prevent you from hunting them?" Am I imagining the sharpness in her voice?

I swallow the piece of meat. "No, I am still effective. I will make sure I don't feel it again."

"Do you know what caused it? If we are aware the cause, we can decide what to do about it."

What to do about it? My heart speeds up. Does she mean to make a new hunter? Remove me? "Jason thinks it's the unexpected element of the two demons working together. I know what to expect now." You don't need a new hunter.

She smiles, but it seems smaller than usual, not as jovial. "I'm glad to hear that." She squeezes my shoulder. "You have tests in an hour in lab fourteen."

"I'll be there."

She looks at me for a moment, then nods and leaves.

It takes me a moment to find my hunger again.