

I catch sight of Claws's form in the flash of gunfire as I turn to cut a demon coming at me, claws-first. He's being overwhelmed, but I can't do anything for him here. I'm out of the door as his distinctive roar sounds out. Nothing about it sounds like he's in trouble.

I don't see Adam in the hall, and I can't make out his running over the sound of the fighting, but I know this building. There are only three ways to reach the lobby. The elevator is out of order, which leaves the two stairwells. The southeast one is the closest. He'll head there.

And I realize Adam is my prey. I am hunting him.

As I run after him, my senses heighten for any indication of his presence, I feel better, more alert. I make out the slap of a boot ahead of me. I pick up his scent amidst the myriad of other demon smells. Is my sense of smell sharper? The smell seems more distinct.

Claws said that the hunt itself feeds his people. Is that what's happening? Am I healing through hunting? Or is it just the adrenaline that's making it seem like I'm healing?

A door bangs open in the distance, boots striking metal stairs when they land.

I push myself, and don't feel the expected resistance from my body.

The halls are empty of demons, and other than Adam ahead of me and the fight in the distance, I hear no other sounds. He might have moved all the demons who were in the building to the garage, but there will be thousands outside, along with Amanda.

Will he use her as a shield? Does he think I care about her? But I can't let her die. She's the soldiers' mission, so if she doesn't survive, will they bother stopping the city's bombing? Even if all the demons are gone?

The door to the stairs hangs crooked off one hinge. I can't afford to be silent—speed is vital now. The sound of my boots add to his, but I am catching up. A door opens, and then bangs close. I don't slow as I reach it, the skin on my right shoulder hardening, and the door flies out of its frame as I hit it.

I see his form down the left-hand side of the hall. It goes around a series of conference rooms, past the building's midpoint, before turning right to follow the west wall, and then right again to head to the lobby. Clearly he didn't get the same tour of the building I got. I head to my right.

Amanda showed me the rooms on this floor, on every floor. She explained how people gathered here to discuss projects. I hadn't understood the point of that, but what I did note, because it made good tactical sense, was that each room had multiple accesses.

I run through the first door on my left, cross the room, and burst through the opposing door. I go through that room and another door. I'm back in a hall. The next door I need is on my left.

The doors are wood, and I don't feel them as they explode under my shoulder. I go through four more rooms like these, and I stop in the lobby.

I listen for him, blocking out the sounds of demons outside. I listen for the distinctive slap of his boots on the floor. They're distant, coming from the opposite hall. Good, he's still following it.

Silently I hurry to the first conference room and enter it. I leave the door open, listening to his approach. There's another conference room opposite this one, and the door before me is open.

I smile as I listen, timing my move. I can take him. I can make him pay for the people he's hurt, for who I had to kill. His footsteps come ever closer.

I burst out of the doorway, collide with him, and we're in the other room. I slap at the door before I throw us down, and send him flying deeper still. The door slams shut and the room becomes black. Adam's heat-form crouches, looks around, and runs at me.

I catch him and redirect his momentum. He crashes through chairs, rolls, and stands. At the sound of a crack, I throw myself to the side. Of course he has a gun. More come, but I don't hear the bullets hit the wall, and the sound isn't right for a gun.

A green light emanates from his position as I get to my feet. He throws the glowing sticks around the room—chemical lights. I never needed them; I can see in almost complete darkness.

The room becomes clear. The long table is broken in places, the chairs overturned and spread around the space.

He stands there, looking at me. He shakes his head. "I'm disappointed in you, Derick. I get that you wanted to save that demon—the two of you have some sort of connection. I respect that. But now you're siding with the humans?"

What is he doing? Why bother talking? He can't think he will convince me to join with him.

"Don't you get it? It's their fault what happened to you. They locked you up in that body." He casually walks toward me. I move to keep him away. "They're keeping you from experiencing the wonder of a flowing body." His tone becomes hard as he grabs the side of the table. "They took the hunt from us!" The table flies against the wall between us. "How can you want to save them?"

"Maybe it's a good thing I don't remember what it's like being a demon." We circle each other, kicking chairs and other debris out of our way. "I'd hate to become like you, Maurice."

"My name is Adam! I'm the first of my kind!"

I smile at his anger. It's just a name, but to him it's everything he is. "It's from this bible, right? Valerie mentioned it. The first human created. She didn't say who created him. Is that your plan? You know the next one Amanda makes is the fifth, so that's 'E', which fits with Eve. Are you going to force her to pick a woman? Mate her? Reproduce?" I put disgust I don't feel in my voice.

"You think this is a joke?" Maurice growls. "You think that I'm a joke?"

"Jason says I don't have a sense of humor, so I doubt I'd know if this was a joke or not."

"Who's this Jason? And why do you care what he says?"

"Jason is..." I remember everything he did for me, taught me. How he did his best to make me more than a killer, to make me human. He exposed me to so many human concepts I don't understand: music, paintings, sex, but I see now it was his way of going against what Amanda wanted. She wanted the killer.

His betrayal still hurts, even knowing he didn't have a choice and that he did what he could to mitigate the damage, but then he shoved me aside and took a bullet for me.

"Jason is a friend," I say, knowing I mean it.

"He's human," Ad—Maurice snarls.

"I know." I smile. "I don't have many friends, so I tend to cherish them."

"They aren't worthy of us. None of them are. Have you looked around? At what they're doing to this planet? Do you even know why they came here in the first place? How they turned their own planet into a wasteland? That's what they're going to do here if I don't stop them."

I know they came from elsewhere. Lives Alone was the first to mention it, but I read up on it. Nothing I read talked about why they left, only of the opportunity coming here represented.

Not that I care what happened on another world.

"So your answer is to go to war with them?"

"Their only place on this world is as our cattle. For the young to hunt and feed off."

"This isn't about the demons. It's about you. You want to feel like you're better than they are."

"I am better!" His scream echoes off the walls. "Even trapped in this form, I am better than all of them!"

"Then why the army?" I ask when the echoes die off. He looks at me, confused. "If you're so much better than they are, why do you need an army, Maurice?" I make sure to linger on the name, and his eyes flash in anger. "How come you didn't just sneak in here? Why didn't you kill, torture, or whatever it is you want to do with Amanda, and then leave?" His hands ball into fists. "Why aren't you out there, killing humans with your bare hands? It's easy enough for you, isn't it? All it took was one slap."

Then the anger is gone out of his eyes. He laughs. I don't understand why he does, but it isn't the first thing he has done that confuses me.

"I know what you're trying to do," he says when he stops laughing. "You're trying to get me angry so I'll make mistakes. I have news for you: I'm smarter than that."

"I'm not trying to anger you. I'm just curious. You say you're better than humans, but you're hiding behind demons. You claim you're doing this for them, but you send them to their death while you run for your life." I tilt my head. "I'm just trying to understand what you're so scared of, Maurice."

“I am not scared.” His growl is deep, making the words difficult to understand.

“No, Maurice, you’re scared. You’re pretty much terrified of something, which means you’re very much human, Maurice.” My smile broadens. I did want to understand, but it doesn’t mean I can’t also needle him. Each time I say his human name he grinds his teeth, narrows his eyes.

“A demon doesn’t cower behind others in fear. Come on, Maurice, you’re the one with the memories, right? What do demons do when they’re scared? They attack. Sure, they’ll run if they get too injured—they aren’t stupid—but I don’t see any injuries on you. You made sure everyone else took the hits, not you.”

I indicate around us, the building, the city, maybe even the world. “It’s humans who hide when they’re scared. You think Amanda created us because she’s courageous? Demons scare her so much she has to destroy humans in the process of making herself warriors to kill them.”

I shake my head, and I don’t even have to work at putting the sadness, the disappointment in my voice. “Maurice, you’re no better than she is.”

His scream as he launches himself at me is deafening.