

Chapter 15

I never thought about it before, but this road is always busy. The sidewalk isn't crowded, but even this late there a lot of people walking about. I stand to the side of the entrance to the Golden Pint and watch them. I watch them, and I find myself wondering why they are out at this hour. They are well dressed, so they might be heading for some entertainment.

Jason mentioned at one point about the theaters and movies. Something else I don't understand. If they want to escape the lives they are in, why don't they simply escape? What does sitting in a dark room with other people, watching someone do the things they dream of, get them?

I join the crowd and walk along with them, heading away from headquarter.

I see him on the next block. He's leaning against the wall in a beam of light. The walkers don't pay attention to him, but it's obvious to me who he is. I wonder what he thinks of them, for not realizing they are walking by a demon.

I stop in front of him. "I thought you were leaving the city."

He looks up at me, his hood hiding his red glowing eyes from anyone not looking straight in. "I was."

"Then what are you doing here?"

"I was worried about you." He moves away from the wall and walks away, in the direction I was going in. I think about heading in the opposite direction, just because I can tell he wants me to walk with him.

A quick sprint puts me next to him. I want to know why he's worried about me. "So?"

He doesn't turn his head; his shoulders are hunched. "I made it six blocks, then I thought about where you were going. What they might do to you. I know you're good, but I thought you could use some backup. I followed you far enough away you couldn't tell. I'm surprised they didn't do anything."

I shrug. "So, you sent Juliette in the bar after me?"

"No, I had nothing to do with that."

"How did she know I was there then?"

"She lives a few building away. Maybe she saw you there talking with that woman."

I don't reply. I hadn't considered she might live close by, even if we shop at the same grocery store. In the distance, I see the red and blue flashing lights of a police car, then the sirens. It's getting closer.

Amanda said she was going to led the demons deal with me, but she can influence the police. She's had to do it a few times when I started hunting and they weren't familiar with me. They might be looking for me now.

I duck in an alley, and Claw follows me. He's a demon, and I should be annoyed at him, but I find his presence comforting. I don't know where I'm going. If Claw knows, he isn't commenting.

We cross streets and roads, going from alley to alley, following their winding path. My mind focuses on the ground before me. I try to think about something, anything, but I don't know what there is to think about, so my mind remains numb.

At least until I hear something break above us. Something large and heavy, followed by smaller sounds. A brick chimney has toppled over. I look up and I don't see anyone, or anything. Claw growls lightly. I turn to ask him what he noticed, but before I can talk I hear demons landing in front of us.

I count six of them. Only a little light reaches us from the street, and it illuminates the one in front, taller than me, muscular, the darkness, his skin, ripping over him, and the two immediately behind him. They are a little shorter and not as large, their skin doesn't do anything, almost as if cowed. All I can see of the other three are the eyes.

The odds are certainly not in my favor. Even if I was armed, I've never gone up against six. Except for the time Claw saved my life, it's always been one on one. I clench my fists, and the constant throbbing in my arm quiets down. Even with Claw's help, I am not surviving this, but I am going to make them hurt.

We're all immobile for a moment, then Claw roars.

Windows shatter, and I go down to a knee, covering my ears. I see one of the demon run off before I have to close my eyes, trying to block out what is assaulting me.

My ears hurt from the volume, but that isn't what brought me down. That roar is filling me with fear, terror, a desperate need to be as far from here as possible. It's taking all my concentration not to get up and start running blindly.

Silence falls on the alley, but it takes me a moment to realize it, even then the ringing in my ears is deafening. I open my eyes in time to see another demon flee, scrambling up the wall.

I only make three left, and two are looking nervous. The only one who doesn't show any signs the roar affected him is their leader. I look over my shoulder. Claw is twice as large as when he was walking with me, in height and width. He's bigger than when he fought me. His skin is moving on him angrily.

The leader growls, Claw growls back. It takes me a moment to realize the growls aren't even, they modulate, drop and raise in pitch. They are talking, and while I don't understand the language, I can sense the intent.

Claw demands obedience. The other is defiant. Claw's tone changes and there's pleading in it now. The reply is pride and arrogance. Claw commands, the other disrespects.

Claw sighs, and before I realize it was an actual sigh, and not the tone of what he said, the other one has jumped over me to tackle Claw. I take a step back so I won't be hit by a stray claw, and I keep an eye on the other two. They are focused on the fight, not me, and don't look to want to move.

The fight isn't long. By the time I look to them again Claw has his arm wrapped around his opponent's neck tight enough he isn't moving except for breathing. Claw implores him. The other replies with anger.

With a scream of anguish Claw separates the other's head from his body. The body crumbles at his feet. He looks at it, then at the other two. Even though it isn't directed at me, the rage in those eyes make me step back. The other two scamper away.

Claw breathe heavily, his gaze goes over me, but he doesn't acknowledge my presence. He puts the head on the ground, then rips it open. He digs through the goo and pulls out the soul stone. He looks at the corpse and sighs. I see sadness in his eyes.

I look away when he licks the stone clean, to avoid throwing up. When the sound stops, I look back. He's holding it gingerly, gazing at it. "What's the big deal?"

He glares at me. "I had to kill him!"

"So?"

In the next moment, he has me against the wall forearm pressing in my throat, not hard enough to prevent me from breathing, but I can tell his anger is real. "He was mine," He growls, then he is searching, starting to speak, then stopping a few times. "He was my child," he finally says.

"Then bring him back."

He looks at me in shock, then glares. "What do you mean?"

"You have that." I nod at the stone in his hand. "So, bring him back."

He releases me. He studies me as I rub my throat. "What do you think this is?" He shows me the stone.

"It's his soul stone. His life force, or spirit, or whatever you call the stuff that makes you live."

He looks at me for a moment, then he laughs. It isn't a pleasant sound.

"Life? this is what you think this is?" He says once he's done laughing. He cradles the stone. "This forms as we die. This contains our memories, our accomplishments, who we were."

"Okay, it's just like I said."

He looks at me. The anger is gone from his eyes, I think that what I see there is pity. "We don't come back. We aren't mystical, death is as final for us as it is for humans. When I get back home I will light a fire, and throw this in it, so it will burn and be carried to the first one."

"What do you mean, you don't come back? if you don't why have I been collecting the soul stones from all my kills?" Dread forms in the pit of my stomach as I remember the video I watched. The soul stone in the container, being hit by lightning and vaporized.

I'm wrenched out of my thought when Claw pushes me against the wall again. "How many?" he growls.

"Forty or so."

"Take me to them."