

I don't know what to do. I don't know where to go. Am I still a hunter? Was I ever one? These questions float in my mind as I walk, but I don't get any answers. I don't know if I want answers. The last time I found some, I lost everything I had been.

I stop as I catch a scent. Alcohol.

I look up and the sign for the Golden Pint blazes. A group of men and woman leave it, and I catch fragments of conversations. I turn to walk away—I don't drink alcohol, so there's no point in entering—but I stop. Where do I have to be? Maybe sitting down I will be able to think of something to do.

The room is like it was the last time, but there are more people. The conversations are lively. A group of men at the bar are arguing, about a woman, from what I hear.

I sit down in a booth, and I'm startled to realize it's the one I was in when I met Juliette. A server approaches, but I wave him off. I look around the room. Two women are snuggled together in another booth. I can't hear what they say, but there's longing in their eyes as they talk.

A flash of light draws my gaze to the television. Text crawls under an explosion. "*Increased activity in the district of Morotik.*" That's south. Jason mentioned them in one of his lessons on

I stop thinking about that and focus on the television. It shows a fight, men fighting each other. "*Violence intensifies in Anounga after district leaders announce rationing.*"

I am surprised to see human on human violence on the television, without a mention of demons as the cause. I wonder if any of the news I saw at headquarters was real. I look at the announcer say something I can't hear, as images of a smoking building show behind him.

I find that I don't care. I don't care that humans fight each other. That demons are hurting them, or that they are killing demons. It no longer matters to me if their cities crumble to dust. I don't seem to care about anything right now.

I even consider returning to headquarters and letting Amanda do whatever she wants to me. I know that nothing good will happen if I do that, but the idea doesn't bother me. I could leave the city. That idea doesn't bother me either, although I suspect it will be harder for me to survive outside. I would have to go to another city.

If I can't decide what I want, what do I need?

Food. I will need food. I eat much more than humans. I have the card I use to pay for my food at the grocery store, but how long will that work? When that stops, how do I go about getting more money? What do humans do to get it? Other than the story about working construction, earning money never came up when Jason told me about humans. And since I know that was a lie, I can't see about doing that for money.

I take out the wallet. There is little in it. I didn't need much. The payment card, an access card—in case I needed to enter headquarters in the night and the guard wasn't at his post. That never happened. I realize I don't know if the payment card works only at the grocery store. I will have to test it, find a different store to buy food from.

Someone sits across from me, and I look up. Juliette gives me a small smile. I put away the cards and wallet.

We are silent for a moment, and as she opens her mouth to speak, I ask, "Who are you? Really?"

She freezes, tries to speak twice, then says, "I'm a mother of three who works two jobs, and does her best to make ends meet."

Jobs are related to money.

I study her. "How can I know you're telling me the truth?"

A server comes to the table, and Juliette asks for a beer.

"I can show you pictures of them," she says once the server leaves. "If you want to come home with me, I can introduce you to them."

"No. I'm not going anywhere with you. The last time I did that, you lied to me."

She looks at me, confused.

"You said that it would help take it away." I open and close my hand.

“He said I had to make you drink it. You were panicking, and whatever was going on with your hand was the only thing on your mind. I’m sorry.”

I look at her, trying to tell if she is telling the truth. I have no idea. “Do you know what he is?”

“Who? Mister C?”

“Is that what he said his name was?”

“That what he said I should call him. I know it isn’t his real name, but he was willing to pay me to help him, and I needed the money. As for what he is? I figured he was an investigator or some rich guy with a fascination with you.”

“He had a fascination with me, that’s true, but he’s a demon.”

She shakes her head. “That can’t be right. Demons don’t use money, they just chase people down and kill them.”

“Yeah, that’s what I thought too,” I mumble. “What did you do in exchange for that money?”

“He wanted me to talk with you, get to know you. That’s why I figured he might be an investigator. I thought he needed information on you, but that you knew what he looked like, so he had to go through me. He wanted to know what you did if you had a family, the normal stuff.”

She pauses when the server returns with her beer.

“I have to say it wasn’t easy to get you to talk with me. I must have spent two months trying to discretely get your attention. I don’t know what I would have done if the incident with the bottle hadn’t happened. It gave me an excuse to be more blunt, although I didn’t expect to have to chase you through two full aisles before you’d acknowledge me.”

“You put a hand on me, how did you expect me to react?” How long has Claws been in the city? He mentioned getting my scent off one of the demons who fought me and escaped. There were only two of them. One in my first weeks—I underestimated how fast they could be, but he seemed very young. I didn’t think he was smart enough to leave. The other was a month later. He escaped when he tricked me into a building and brought it down on top of me. The worst of the damage was to my legs, broken bones in multiple places. It took two full days until I was able to walk again.

“I’d been calling after you for a whole aisle. I thought you were deaf.”

“Then you ask to meet here so you could ask me the questions.”

She blushes. “Well, yes, but also because I wanted to spend time with you.”

“Why?”

She stares at me. “You have to know.”

I just look at her.

“You’re a good-looking guy. And you didn’t let the bottle fall. I figured that maybe if I asked the questions in a way that made it seem like I was trying to get to know you, we might become friends in the process. Who knows, maybe more.”

I frown at that, trying to work out what she means, to stop me from snapping at her. It had all been lies. Then I get it.

“You mean having sex with me.”

Her face turns crimson, and she looks down. After a moment she isn’t quite as red and looks up. “Well, maybe.”

I shake my head. I have no idea how I feel about that. “Do you seek to have sex with any man you know nothing about?”

“I wasn’t going to just bring you up and jump your bones!” she snaps. “I was getting to know you. By the time you had to leave, I knew you had a good job and took care of your children when they were with you.”

I snort. “I don’t have children. I am not a construction worker. Like I said, you know nothing about me.”

There’s shock on her face. “You lied to me?”

“And you were honest?”

She looks away. “Okay, that’s true. Then how about you tell me about yourself now?”

“No. You don’t need to know that anymore. He knows what he wanted to know about me.”

Your Mister C,” I add at her confused expression. “How did you know I was here?”

“Mister C called me earlier. He said you were headed to that building a few blocks from here. He asked that I keep an eye out for you and try to help you if I could do that without getting myself in trouble. See, that’s why he can’t be a demon; they don’t care about us getting hurt. Anyway, I was close by, and I saw you talk with the people there, then you left and came here. I wasn’t sure if I should come in too, so I figured I could just watch from a distance. But you looked lost, so I sat down. Derick, I want to help you if I can. Just tell me what is going on. What is that building? Why were you bleeding when I got you out of there?”

I look at her. Can I tell her? I’m not supposed to; humans aren’t supposed to know details about us. Us? I’m the only one, and everything else is a lie. Why should I care about protecting that?

“I am two years old.”

She chuckles. “That’s funny. You look pretty good for an infant.”

“I am not joking. Two years ago, I woke up for the first time. I have no memories of a time before that. Although I now know I was someone else before I woke up.”

“So you have no idea who you used to be? That’s horrible. Why did they do that to you?”

“They told me it was so I could hunt and kill demons.”

She stares at me. “You’re that guy who’s been doing around doing that?”

I nod.

She studies me for a moment, then she smiles, then chuckles. “That’s a good one, you almost had me. You’ve got the look down pretty good, with the trench-coat and gloves, but I’ve seen videos of the guy. The stuff he can do, no human can do that.”

“I am not human.”

“You’re kidding?”

“No.”

She looks at my face, searching for something there. She sits back, a little pale. “What are you?”

I rub my hand before answering. “I don’t know.”

“But you said you were someone else before, so you were human then?”

I nod.

“What did they do to you?”

I shake my head. I am not protecting secrets, I just don’t want to tell her what I saw.

“Who are they?” she asks softly.

“I don’t know.” I won’t give her Jason and Amanda’s names. I worry what they might do to her if they find out she knows about them. “I never knew to ask if the organization had a name.”

“So that building, that’s them?”

I hesitate, then nod.

“So what happened?”

“I found out the truth about how I was made. She didn’t like that. She tried to kill me. That’s why I was hurt when you found me.”

“But you’ve taken down demons, how can one woman hurt you?”

“I trusted her. I knew she was going to be angry, but I didn’t think she would do that to me.”

“Then why did you go back? Why did you talk with her? That was her I saw there, right?”

“I’m no longer sure why I went back. I thought I wanted more answers. I think part of me wanted her to tell me everything could be fixed, but it can’t.”

“She didn’t try to capture you?”

“She knew I could take down all the men she had there.”

She leans in and whispers. “Is she going to send people after you?”

“She said no, that I’m not worth the expenses anymore, but I don’t know if I trust her.”

She leans back. “What are you going to do?”

“I don’t know.”

She drinks what’s left of her beer before speaking. “You can come to my place if you want.”

“No, I can’t.”

“It’s okay, really. It isn’t large, but I can make room.”

I shake my head. “Juliette, I am going to be hunted. Even if Amanda doesn’t send anyone, demons are going to come after me. The reason I was created may have been a lie, but I am not going to endanger you because of that.” I look at the television, and the idea forms as I speak. “I’m going to head south to Morotik; the news talked about how they’ve had an increase in demon attacks. It’ll draw the demons after me and away from the city, and it will give me something to do.”

“You don’t have to do that. You just said the reason they made you is a lie. You don’t have to keep on killing demons.”

I shrug and stand. “It’s all I know.”

“Then learn something new.”

I shake my head. “There’s no point in it.” I look at her. “I understand what you are doing. You want to protect me, to keep me safe. You hope we can have something, but we can’t. I am not human. I could not provide for you. I believe you when you say you are sorry you lied to me. I do think you are being honest with me. You’re the only human I’ve known who has been honest. I thank you for that.”

I turn and leave before she can say anything else.