

As I step back outside, I see one of the moons shine bright over the buildings. I'm surprised at how much time I spent talking with Adam. The street is deserted, silent; even the human prisoners have been brought inside. Only Claws is still there, slowly dying. Adam can't trust him, especially as hungry as he must be. Again I want to go to him, but I can't. Not right now, not while I know I'm being watched.

I turn the small box in my hand.

I remember a phrase Jason told me, so long ago I don't remember the context for it. "People need to pick a side. Us or them. It's probably the oldest concept around."

Maybe he was trying to make me understand something fundamental about humans, something true and not another one of the endless lies he told me.

Or maybe not, I'll never know.

I open the box. With this I'm picking a side. My side, me and Claws in the Dark. The only one who has never lied to me. The one who showed me the lies I had lived with.

The transmitter inside is small. A button on a circuit board. I press it, close the box, and put it back in a pocket. I look up again. The second moon is just starting to appear over a building.

Demons have a name for them, but humans don't, or maybe Amanda and Jason just didn't think I needed to know that to kill demons. I never thought to ask about them, not even Robert. And Lives Alone told me without having to ask.

The larger of the two, almost at the zenith, is the Old Eye. Demons believe that not long after the Old One regurgitated the world, the first of their kind hunted it, caught it, and a magnificent battle ensued. In the end the Old One ran off away, one of its eyes gouged out. And now it still runs, its other eye opening and closing slowly, always looking for its pursuer.

The smaller moon is the New Eye, the First One, still on the hunt. Gaining and losing ground as the Old One flees.

They build celebrations around the ongoing hunt, believing that the New One needs their support if he is ever to catch the Old One. They also celebrate other events based on the moon's position in the—

Boots scrape against the ground, safeties are flicked off.

I see them deep in three alleys, the dim red of their body heat marking them against the cool air. They stop at the mouth and wait.

Adam told me that demons are superior to humans because of the hunt. Humans move, stop, hide. Hunt from the shadows, while demons throw themselves into the hunt, need it to live.

I don't think he's lying, he believes all of it, but he's wrong. Young demons do that. They don't have a choice—the hunger drives them to hunt mindlessly—but older demons are more cunning. They do chase, but do so with intelligence, taking advantage of the shadows just like humans do, guiding their prey until it's where they need it to be for the kill.

One of them steps out of an alley. He moves slowly, machine gun making an arc from left to right and back, looking for enemies.

Humans hunt in groups, and they hide because they can't take on demons in a direct fight. They adapted. I suppose that's something to be respected.

The captain reaches me and speaks in hushed tones. "What happened?" He indicates the empty poles. "Where is she? Where are all the demons that were surrounding the building, filling the alleys?"

I don't lower my voice. There isn't anyone around who cares what we say. "They brought Amanda and the scientist inside. Didn't you see it happen with the drones?"

He shakes his head, still scanning around. "They were brought down. We're down to one, and we're keeping it high enough they can't get to it, but it means we didn't get any details on what's happening."

"It's part of the celebration Adam is throwing in my honor. He wants to make sure everyone welcomes his new lieutenant."

The man takes a step away and aims his weapon at me "What did you do? Who's Adam?"

So, they hadn't known the name he chose for himself. That hadn't been another lie. "I did what you ordered me to. I got close to him so you'll be able to rescue Amanda, kill him, chase

the demons away, whatever it is you're really after here. I don't care."

He looks at me, and I can feel the suspicion ooze off him.

"What did you think I'd do? Did you think I was just going to show up and ask him to ignore all of you as you went about pulling off your rescue and killing them all? He's a demon, not a human. I had to convince him I'm like him, on the same side as him. He was so happy not to be the only one of his kind he made me a lieutenant in his army."

The human was jittery. "You expect me to believe that? I've read the files. The experiments all failed in the same way; you betray us for them." His scent is different. Still human, but not the same as earlier in the day.

He's one to speak of betrayal. "I'm here against my will, remember?"

"You agreed."

"Like you people gave me a choice. You told me to gain his trust, to get him to lower his guard, well I did that. Are you planning on taking advantage of it or not?"

"The demons that guard the building, where are they?"

"There are no demons guarding the building."

"We've seen them. They're always here, a lot of them."

"Those weren't guarding anything. They stayed close, hoping to get permission to go out and hunt. Adam controls who can do that. Tonight he gave them all permission to hunt. Didn't you hear them out there? The screams?"

The captain lowers his weapon in shock. "All of them? Shit, you didn't stop him? You're going to let them all—"

"What did you want me to do?" I push the machine gun away before he can do anything and I get in his face. "You're going to bomb this place anyway. How many people is that going to kill?" He tries to back up, but I still hold onto the machine gun. It takes more effort to keep hold of it than I expect.

"You said you're here to rescue Amanda, so she can go back to making more demon-killing people for you. Are you going to do that? What do you care if humans are still alive by the time the bombs drop? Make up your mind about what it is you're really after."

He pushes me away, and this time I let go, although I'm surprised at the strength behind the push. He doesn't look that strong. I can't tell if his anger is because I know about the bombing, or that humans are dying. Humans have been dying at the hands of demons for centuries—they should be used to it by now.

He makes a hand gesture and the other soldiers join us.

"What kind of opposition are we looking at? How many guards between us and their leaders? That Adam?"

"There aren't any guards. Demons don't understand the concept of setting up protection. They kill what attacks them or die trying.

"Who's Adam?" one of the others asks. By the voice, I think it's Cline.

"It's what their leader calls himself," the captain replies.

"Does he think he's going to find himself an Eve and start a whole new race or something?" A few of the soldiers chuckle.

"Quiet." Silence falls at the captain's order. "Okay, Derick, you lead the way, but you better not try anything stupid. You might think humans are weak, but we're boosted. We will take you down without problem."

"When I do something, it isn't stupid." I turn and head for the lobby. The captain falls into step next to me and the others fall in behind us.

"Where's Adam?"

"He set himself up in the garage. It's the only place large enough for him to hold court." Adam's words—I have no idea what they mean.

"Great, another would-be king," someone behind us says.

I look at the captain and he shrugs. "History books say people like that are why we left the old world."

"Elevators are over there."

"Don't be stupid. We're taking the stairs."

I shrug and lead them there. He stops me before I open them.

"This stairwell leads to the garage," I say with a sigh.

"I know, I studied the plans. How many demons with him?"

"There were a dozen of them dozing when I came up. The number might have shifted one way or the other. Adam lets them do what they want overall."

"Where is he?"

"He was sleeping in a large chair he made from the lockers and a bunch of equipment." When I asked why he made it, his answer was that he needed a proper throne.

"Doctor Walker?"

"Tied up next to his chair."

The man thinks things over, then lifts the flaps on his arm. It's where the vial went, but I can't see what he looks at. "Is everyone locked to the hour mark?"

The soldiers do the same as he did, then nod.

"Weapons hot. Don't fire until I give you the signal. I don't want to hear a sound from any of you from this point forward. If you're going to have to sneeze, do it now, because in the stairwell it's going to get us dead."

They are all silent.

He nods to me and I open the door.

The stink of demon hits me hard, but I spent the day here; it isn't debilitating anymore. I can even tell some of them apart. Demon scents don't mix completely like humans do. There's always a part of it that stays distinct.

The scents don't change in strength as we go down. In this small space it will take months to start diminishing. Even if the humans try to remove them, it will be weeks before I can smell a difference.

We reach the garage and I place my hand on the handle, waiting for him to give the signal to open it. He looks behind us, gets nods, and nods to me. I push the door open and step into the large, open space.

Only a handful of emergency lights still work, leaving a lot of darkness on the floor. The columns add more areas of pitch black that anyone could hide in.

The soldiers spread around, sweeping around machine guns always aimed where they are looking. I'm impressed at how quiet they are. I can hear them, but I suspect no human could.

At the other end of the room, not quite in the center of a light, Adam slouches in his chair. On the floor next to the throne is a curled-up form wearing a dirty lab coat. I have no idea how he can be comfortable on all that metal. He laughed when I pointed it out and said I'd become soft, living like a human.

I'd tensed, expecting he was insulting me. Humans did that a lot, but his laugh had been gentle, and there was no duplicity in his eyes. He slapped my shoulder and said he'd be sure to find me a thick mattress to sleep on.

The captain makes hand gestures and the soldiers spread wider.

The light around Adam illuminates a handful of shapes, curled up on the floor, barely moving. In the other areas of light we can see a few more demons sleeping.

We move forward, the soldiers scanning the darkness. I don't bother. Even my thermal vision doesn't show anything.

It isn't until we're halfway to Adam that I begin to hear faint rustling around us, much fainter than the soldiers' quiet steps. I see some color shift in my peripheral vision, but humans can't see that.

Another hundred steps, and the rustling increases. The soldiers' breathing shifts. Some of them heard something. One of them moves next to the captain, and they exchange hand gestures. He looks at me and I keep my face neutral. He raises a fist, signaling to stop.

The soldiers obey it. I keep going.

I don't hear his raising the machine gun to point it at me, but I feel the air move behind me. I don't react to it. I don't have to. A form made mostly of shifting patterns of heat moves between us. The captain gasps as he's struck, and the machine gun clatters to the ground.

"Derick, stop!" he orders.

A wall of demons forms before me, around all of us.

“Damn it, fi—” the captain’s voice is cut as he’s kicked. The demons rush around me. The humans yell, and there’s the flash and sound of a few gunshots and guns are clattering on the floor.

Adam is walking toward me, smiling. We stop when we’re even with each other, and I turn. The humans are putting up a better fight than I expected. Whatever they use to boost themselves does help them, a little.

“Don’t worry, I told them not to kill anyone, and everyone here fed recently.”

I shrug. It isn’t like I care if they live or die. “Let’s get on with this.”

We head for the stairs, leaving the sounds of the fight behind us. Outside, we’re not alone. The demons have come back from where Adam sent them to hide. One of them is tying Amanda back to her post. The surviving scientist is tied to the other post.

“Are you sure you don’t want to stay?” Adam has asked this throughout the afternoon and evening as we made our plans. “We’re the only ones of our kind around.”

I face him. “We’re nothing alike.” My voice is cold. I haven’t hidden my dislike for him, for what he’s doing, and I’m not stopping now.

He grabs my shoulders. The grip isn’t hard, but I know I can’t break out of it. Adam is physically stronger than I am. “I understand friendship, Derick. I understand loyalty. I respect both, but he isn’t like you. You will realize that one day. When you do, remember that I am here, waiting for you.”

I nod, because what else can I do? He releases me.

I turn to face Claws and form an edge around my hand. I cut the bonds, recognizing them up close as the same thing he used to restrain me. The rope can’t be broken—only cut—and only gets tighter the more it’s fought against. If Claws had been stronger, he could have made an edge and cut it himself.

He falls over me and I struggle to keep him up. He’s heavier than I expected. He turns his head to look at me and there is pain in his eyes.

“Derick, what did you do?”

I can’t look at him as I help him walk. “I saved you.”