

I pull Jason's belt off with a hand while restraining him with the other. He thrashes about, trying to reach for the bleeding stump. His arm ends just above the elbow. There's a mist of blood and bone around and on us. It's a wonder that's all Jason lost when he threw himself in front of me.

I put a knee on his chest to hold him down, and wrap the belt an inch above the stump. I tighten it and Jason screams louder, until he stops. His head slumps aside and finally he's unconscious.

I know I'm causing more damage as I tighten the belt even more before securing it in place, but now the blood flow is down to a trickle. I trim the few pieces of dangling flesh, then sit back and study Jason's face. His skin is pale under the spray of blood, but his breathing is even.

"Are you alright?"

I stand, but I keep looking at Jason. "I'm fine, you?"

"It was not much of a hunt, but I do feel better."

I look at where Thompson was; there's nothing but smears of blood left on the floor. Claws devoured him quickly.

Jason coughs, and I look down at him. His eyes are open, filled with pain, but he isn't screaming. "I couldn't risk it," he rasps.

I crouch next to him. "What are you talking about?"

"You're wondering why I jumped in front of you. You're thinking you could have healed. I couldn't take the chance he'd kill you. You're too important. Better me dead than you."

"You're an idiot, Jason." I can't find it in me to put any venom in my voice. "The bullet wouldn't have hurt me; my skin would have protected me. You should have jumped away."

Jason starts laughing, but it turns into coughing. He places his remaining hand on my cheek. "I couldn't do that, D. You're the best thing I've ever been part of. The only good thing to come of my work with Manda." His hand drops. "Fuck, getting shot sucks."

He glances at the stump, and quickly looks away. "Where did you learn to do that?"

"There's a lot more on the Internet than what you and Amanda led me to think."

"Ain't that the truth. You found all the porn on it yet?" He has another coughing fit.

"I still have no interest in watching sex,"

"That was me trying to make you laugh, and failing again." He closes his eyes.

"We need to go," Claws says. "You have to turn the power on and we have to leave."

"He's right." Jason tries to raise his hand, but he can't muster the strength. "Fuck, I'm tired. Give me a pen and paper. I'll write down the override code for the door."

"I don't have either."

"Right." He slides his hand to his body, coating it with blood, then writes ten digits on the floor. He's panting by the time he's done.

"The big lever on the right of the breaker. Push it up, and it'll turn the power back on. The number is going to work on any of the cells. Go. Don't worry about me, I'll be fine. You need to stop Adam and get them out of here, D. I'm counting on you."

"I'm not leaving you here."

"You have to."

I snort as I stand. "I don't have to do anything you tell me anymore. The moment the power is on, Adam is going to send demons down here. They're going to rip you apart. Even if they don't come, you need a doctor to look at that."

Jason protests, but I ignore him.

I go where Thompson was bent over. The rifle is on top of a long crate. In it are submachine guns, twelve of them. I pull six of them out, find a box of magazines and snap a cartridge in each. There's a roll of tape on the table, and I tape them together.

"What are you doing?" Claws is standing next to me as I grab two metal boxes and put them on the table.

"We're here so the soldiers can help us, right?" I tape them together. "They can't do that without weapons." I hand that and the guns to him.

"I don't know how to use them."

"They're for them. You just have to carry them. I'll handle Jason."

Claws gives me a look I almost understand, and instead of taking the bundles, he moves to Jason, changing to two legs before picking him.

“Get the power back on and let’s get moving.”

The lever resists for a moment, then with a loud snap, moves. The lights come back on, and I grab the guns and case.

By the time we make it to sub-five, I hear a clatter of claws from above. I close the door and don’t wait to see if they heard us. I run by the cells, looking for the one containing the soldiers.

They’re in the last one, four empty cells between them and the others. They’re stretched out on the floor, their breathing calm. None of them show signs of distress, or of even being aware the lights are on. It’s almost as if they are where they want to be.

Jason’s code opens the door, and by the time I look in they’re all on their feet, ready for a fight. I put the guns and cases on the floor, and with a foot, shove them in their direction.

I look in as the captain picks up the guns. The frame around the window shows recent scratches. They may have looked like they were comfortable, but at some point before I got here they tried hard to escape.

“What’s this?” the captain asks, handing the bundle of guns to the woman next to him. “Feeling guilty about throwing us to the demons? The boss man didn’t give you what you wanted, so you’re double-crossing him too?”

I feel him move behind me as I see them react to his presence. Gasps from most of them as they take a step back. The woman hurries to free one of the machine guns.

“Before you shoot him and piss him off, you need to know that he’s who I came here to get, and that he’s the reason we’re here. As far as I’m concerned, you can all rot in here. He’s the one who wants you free, not me.”

The captain looks at us, dubious. “A demon is coming to our rescue? Do you think I’m crazy?”

Claws steps around me, his body shifting so he barely touches me. I have to look behind me, because he isn’t carrying Jason anymore. The man is seated on the floor. He gives me a weak smile and a wave of the hand.

“You know that my kind will work with yours.”

The captain rolls his eyes. “Oh sure, when it’s us working for you.”

“If you believe it is that simple, you do not know your people.”

“Whatever.” He shakes his head. “Why would I work with you?”

“Because you and I want Adam dead.”

“Isn’t he one of your people? Some kind of prophet? That’s what they were saying when they dragged us down here.”

“Adam is not one of my people. His existence is their bane. If he isn’t stopped, he will bring your wrath on all of mine.”

The guns are raised and pointed at Claws the moment they are handed to one of the soldiers, but the captain raises a hand, keeping them from firing. “You know us pretty well.”

“I have watched your people for a long time. I have seen what you do when something stands in your way, when something angers you. You call us monsters, but you will annihilate all who oppose you, along with those who have nothing to do with the conflict. You do not belong here, but I cannot remove you, so I have to accept that you will stay, that you are a threat to those I hold dear if you are provoked. I will not let Adam be the excuse you use to kill us all.”

The man smirks. “That wasn’t very flattering, considering you want us to work together.”

Claws takes a step toward the man. The captain doesn’t move, but those behind him take a step back.

“It was not meant to be, human. I do not like you. You have destroyed much of the wild. You are a pest infesting this world. If I had been old enough and known what was to come when I watched that metal box fall from the sky, I would have rallied my people and exterminated you then. We will do this together—kill Adam and disband his army. And then we leave each other alone.”

The man leans forward. “Yeah? And what if I don’t feel like working with you?”

The lights flicker. Before I realize what’s happening, I rush back to the wall in the corridor

and Claws is in the doorway, keeping the door from closing.

“Then stay in this cell. Once I have killed Adam, I am certain more humans will come and find you. Make your decision. I am weak, and I do not know how long I can prevent the door from closing.

The lights go off, leaving us with only a greenish light coming from sticks on the floor of their cell.

“Out,” the captain says. The soldiers leave the room, the captain the last of them.

A woman is at Jason’s side. “What did you do to him?” she hisses in my direction.

“Stopped the bleeding. Before you accuse me, a human did it to him. Shot him with a high-powered rifle.”

“Captain, this man needs medical attention.” She looks at the stump. “I need to disinfect the wound and cauterize it.”

“Sergeant, we have a job to do.”

“Damn it, Branson. I’m a doctor first and soldier second. I’m not letting this man die. And it isn’t like one less person is going to change things. You only have six guns.”

The captain isn’t happy with her. “Fine, but not here. You need a defensible position.”

Jason tries to stand, but she holds him down. He glares at her. “Two—no, three floors up, there’s a full surgical room. They haven’t been used in years, but you should have everything you need, and there’s only one way in or out.”

She slips his good arm around her shoulder and helps him stand. “Captain?”

“How about the other prisoners?” someone asks first.

“Yes, Sergeant, that will do. The prisoners stay here. It isn’t like we can get them out now that the power is out again. They’re safe in there anyway.”

“Yeah? Then what about them?”

The corridor is filled with the people from the room with the missing door. By their expression, it’s clear they will not go back in.

“Ah, crap,” the captain says, and I find myself echoing his sentiment.