

She takes the sensors off my chest a moment before the van stops. “Any new information?” I ask, standing.

“The police have confirmed the area is cordoned off,” says the driver, “but they can’t be sure everyone has left their homes.”

“They should know to stay indoors,” Valerie says.

“There haven’t been any new, confirmed sightings of the demon, but they’ve heard growls and snarls, so it has to still be around.”

The van drives off the moment I’ve exited. I wait until it’s out of my hearing range, and then listen to the sounds around me.

Demons don’t stay still very long; they exist to hunt humans. Even when they try to be quiet, they shift about, whining and rumbling. Not to mention the sounds their victims make.

I hear multiple television sets, but I can’t make out what is playing due to them not being on the same channel. I hear two women arguing about the order to evacuate. A couple is having sex, a man, and woman, not playing on television, since there isn’t the music that came with the pornographic movie Jason had me watch. In the distance, I can hear the murmur of people massed together.

I don’t hear the demon. Has it left? Is it somehow still?

I walk along the street until I pick up a scent. I grimace. I smell blood in the alley. Once I step in it, I also smell demon stink. It’s different from the one I fought last night; no demon has the exact same scent. After a few steps, so little light reaches in that I now see heat. I see the brick walls by the heat they radiate, from what they absorbed during the day.

This will make finding the demon more difficult. Even with enough light, their dark gray-brown coloring lets them hide in shadows, but now, if I can’t hear it move, I can’t tell where it is. Because they don’t radiate heat, I’d thought I would be able to see the void they made against warm walls, but they have the ability to reach the same temperature as what is around them, making them invisible to my thermal vision.

But I can smell the blood, stronger the deeper I go in the alley. A few more steps and I reach a bend. Glancing in, I see the remains of bodies—three, maybe four of them—dead not long before I arrived, by the heat they are radiating. I stand in the middle of the alley and listen. The walls muffle the far-off sounds, and these lodgings have been evacuated, so the only sounds are my breathing and—

My phone rings, making me jump. I ignore it; it can only be Juliette. She’s the only one who doesn’t know never to call my phone. Why did I give her my number?

That sound is enough to distract me. I don’t hear the rustling in time. Claws cut through my trench-coat and my skin as I move out of the way. I land on my back and roll back to my feet, gun in hand.

I can’t see it. I can’t hear it. I look up, but I can’t see it there either. It’s standing still again; this one is cunning. Hopefully, my phone will not ring again. I close my eyes and focus.

There.

I fire where I hear the slightest scraping against the brick. A roar explodes in the alley, and it comes at me. I jump out of the way, emptying my gun in it. I roll and holster it, taking out my sword. With the walls, this close, the sound of the bullets firing hurts my ears probably as much as the impact hurts it.

I slash as it gets close, and I feel the blade bite into flesh. It screams and backs up, and I reel back from the sound. I have to remember not to fight them in enclosed spaces again. Rooftops and streets are better.

Something scrapes against the ground, but it’s metal, not claws. Something large and square flies at me and I jump over it, only to be struck in the stomach upon landing, sending me flying after it. It explodes against the wall. I hit it, feeling metal shards dig into my back.

It comes at me. I pull out my second gun and empty it in its face.

It staggers back. If it roars, I can’t hear it over the ringing. I take a step toward it, only to falter. My equilibrium is shot. I holster my gun; I don’t want to lose another one. I’m surprised to find I’m still holding my sword.

I force a staggering step towards it, then another. I raise my hand to cut its head off, but it topples over before I swing. I stare at it for a moment, wondering if it's trying to trick me. I've never read about a demon killed in this fashion before.

I poke it with the sword, but it doesn't react. Keeping my distance, I move to its head. It doesn't move. I cut its head off before it can try to attack me, then I sit down and let my hearing come back. It's the first time I've hurt my ears this way. It takes ten minutes for me to stop hearing the ringing. I stand, and my equilibrium is also back.

I don't need the hatchet this time; the demon's face is broken in pieces. I search through the goo and come out with the soul stone. I clean it and pocket it.

I head out of the alley, and I hear more and more of the city's sounds. I stop near the mouth, looking at something on the ground catching the streetlight. It's a gun. Did I drop one of mine and it bounce this far? I check, and both my guns are in their holsters. Someone else's gun?

But no, it's just like mine. It *is* mine, the one I lost last night.

I walk to it, bend down, and catch the demon smell coming from it. It isn't the same scent as the one I just fought or the one from last night. I unhook and unfold my sword, looking around. There was another demon here.

I don't see it. How come I didn't smell it last night? My gun couldn't have bounced that far. It only took me a moment to work it out. The demon had a human agent. No, that wasn't quite right. One of its agents would have its stink on them, and I would have smelled that. No, a civilian had found the gun, and the demon had found him, or her, afterward. I sigh. That means there's another dead human in the city.

I look at the gun again. Why is it here? Why did the demon place it somewhere I was sure to see it? Is it calling me out? Can it be that smart? None of the reports I've read spoke of that level of intelligence.

I smell around, but the only place with the demon's scent is the area where the gun is. I look up. The roofs on either side are a hundred feet up, but there's a fire escape on both buildings.

I go up the side of one building, and I pick up its scent on the third landing, and then on the sixth. I don't pick it up on the roof, so I jump to the other building, and there it is thick. The demon stood here for a long time, letting its scent sink into the materials. It jumped down, dropped the gun, then jumped from one side of the alley to the other to get back up. What bothers me is that I don't smell any blood. The demon had to have brought food with it.

Its scent is all over the roof. I jump to the other roofs, but its scent is on none of them. This makes no sense. Demons don't fly. They can jump far, but they can't fly. I come back to the roof with its scent and look down. No broken windows, no screaming humans, no muffled cries of pain.

I take out my phone to call headquarters, and the screen tells me I have a message. I listen to it.

"Hey Derick, I'm really glad we met and talked," Juliette says. "I'm sorry you had to leave like that, but I hope that whatever problem came up was easily fixed. I hope to get to talk with you again."

I don't understand why she called; not thirty minutes have passed since I left the bar. I call headquarters.

"What did the calls describe?"

It takes the person on the other end a moment to find her voice.

"Demon, black, big. The usual," Cynthia says.

"How many calls came in?"

"A dozen, by the time the van dropped you off."

"And they all describe only one demon?"

"Yes, why?"

"There was a second demon, and it was lurking on the roof for a long time." I tried to remember how thick the demon's scent had been at the end of the alley. There almost as long.

"Did you get it?"

"No, it's gone."

“And you didn’t see it?”

“No. It must have left while I was fighting the other demon.”

“Can’t you track its scent?”

“No, it doesn’t leave the rooftop, except for one jump down, but it came back up after that.” It had, hadn’t it? “The only other thing I can think of is that it walked off in the street, but it would have left its scent there. It takes a good day of people walking through demons’ stink to dissipate it.”

“What does it mean?”

“That this demon had a trick we don’t have on file.”