

Of the seventy or so scientists Adam had imprisoned here, we only have eight still alive that we bring back for the medic to look after. Valerie is now helping her, cleaning wounds and bandaging what doesn't require more work. She sees me and looks away, shame in her eyes.

I can feel my anger rising, but it isn't directed at her, or them. It's directed at Adam, at Amanda, at the people like them who use people, who imprison them, kill them needlessly, experiment on them. Forcing them to work for someone else's plans. No one should have to be submitted to that, not humans nor demons.

"I'm going to end this," I tell her.

She doesn't look up from tending to the cuts the man received. "Why? You don't owe us anything. Not after what we put you through."

"Will you do this again? When it's all over?"

"I doubt they're going to let us do it."

"If they do. If Amanda immediately starts cleaning up this place and goes right back to making more people like me, will you be here to help her?"

She doesn't answer immediately, and I look around. The captain is talking with his soldiers. He'd wanted to head for Adam the moment they'd dropped off the scientist, but he'd been drawn into an argument with them. He keeps tapping his wrist.

"I'm done with this," Valerie says. "Of the four mach—like you we made, you're the only one who's halfway decent, and considering what we put you through, I think that's in spite of us, not because of it."

I can't tell if she's lying or not. The visual clues to truth and lies are subtleties that, like many human things, escape me. I choose to believe her.

"You said you've been here since the start. What can you tell me about Adam?"

She snorts. "I can tell you that isn't his name, for one thing."

"Amanda called him Maurice, but it seemed to anger him."

"Maurice Hingurg. He was in the army—he volunteered for the procedure."

"Did the man I was before this also volunteer?"

"I don't know. I doubt it. You arrived sedated, and when you woke up, you panicked. Doctor Walker said something about you having been picked because you were the perfect candidate."

"That wasn't me. He had a family, people he loved. He was taken from them."

"I didn't know about that. I'm sorry."

"I'm not the one you should apologize to."

"I guess not, but he isn't around anymore."

I don't suggest she find his family. I can't see how that would help anyone.

"What Maurice went through wasn't anything like what you did. The process was crude back then, painful. He screamed and fought against the restraints, then he went still."

I try to recall if Valerie was in the recording of my creation, but the scientists in the chamber were busy and moving about, and Jason had focused on the man in the chair, who would become me after that.

"We thought he'd died. We couldn't find a heartbeat. We were wheeling him away on a stretcher to dissect when he sat up. He almost killed Ferguson. He had his hand around his throat, and his skin was doing strange things. When he let Ferguson go, there were cuts on his neck. Maurice was confused, and instead of asking about what had happened to him, he wanted to know why he was naked."

She moves to the unconscious woman, or maybe she's sleeping. Valerie cuts her shirt off, and on seeing the woman doesn't have a bra on, she drapes what's left of the shirt over her chest. She glances at me, and I get the feeling she's gauging my reactions.

I know that I'm expected to have a reaction to seeing exposed breasts. It was one of the things Jason had the most trouble understanding about me. When I pointed out he didn't react to breasts either, he showed me pictures of naked men. He explained that he reacted to that. I didn't react to them either.

"Maurice seemed normal for a while, a few months maybe—well, mentally normal. Physically, his body had changed within hours of him waking up. It was the same with Francine and Isabel. Within hours of the procedure, it was evident they weren't entirely human

anymore.”

She looks at me. “It’s why I was surprised when it took you close to two years to show any outward signs.” She went back to cleaning the woman’s gashes. “The first sign we had something was wrong with Maurice’s was when he decided we had to call him Adam. He explained it was because he was the first of his kind.”

“Why?”

She glances at me.

“Why does the name ‘Adam’ have to be used?”

“It’s from the Bible. He was the first man created. Eve was the first woman. Anyway, after that, we thought we should put him through a battery of tests, but Doctor Walker said no. She didn’t act with him like she did with you. She was proud of him, thought he was the crowning success of everything she’d worked on for the previous fifteen years. He was going to usher mankind’s supremacy on this planet. He was going to get rid of the demons once and for all.”

“Did any one of you think, at any point during that, that they belong here as much, if not more so than humans do?”

She shakes her head. “Doctor Walker was terrified that one day the demons would band together and kill us all. She picked people who thought like her to work on the project. Turns out she was right too. Look around.”

“That isn’t their doing, it’s Adam. And she created him, so she’s responsible for what is happening here.”

“My people do not ‘band together to kill,’” Claws says, making her jump and scream. The soldiers look in our direction, reaching for their weapons, and immediately relax when they don’t see further violence.

“Mates will hunt together,” he continues, watching with amusement as she tries to calm down. “They will hunt with their child, until the madness is too strong for them to be able to exert control. Too large of a band and it is impossible to control the hunt, to direct the prey, keep the hunt going until we are nourished.”

Valerie goes to the side away from Claws, then kneels next to the woman to continue washing her.

“What did Maurice do after that?” I ask.

“Nothing out of the ordinary. The change of name was it for months. He was a master at killing demons. Even before the process, he’d been great at hand-to-hand combat. Add strength and speed to that, as well as the way the black bands on his skin can become hard, and it made him really tough.”

She focuses on the woman, applying bandages. “We shot him, as part of testing his resistance. And the higher the caliber he was able to take, the more invincible he thought he was. He even wanted to be shot with irradiated bullets. Doctor Walker nixed the idea, but he managed to convince one of the soldiers to do it anyway.”

She frowns. “Actually, looking back on it, that’s about when he really began to change. The bullet went through him, of course. The radiation weakens demons, short-circuits their healing and how they can control the body, so it wasn’t a surprise. He took weeks to heal from that, and he was in pain the whole time. None of the painkiller we had worked on his physiology. After that he always had this weariness in his eyes, like he didn’t think he could trust us anymore.”

“You think the radiation is what caused his personality to change?” It didn’t sound plausible; I’d been stabbed with an irradiated sword and I hadn’t changed.

She shakes her head. “I think that the incident made it sink in he was actually different from us. With the radiation affecting him, I think he began seeing himself as more demon than human. We knew he had both sets of memories. We’d used his knowledge to kill many of the demons around the periphery of the city, and he’d never had any problems killing them, even if he remembered them.”

She stood and stretched. “After the incident, his kill ratio dropped like a rock. Doctor Walker thought it might have had something to do with further changes happening, but he was more erratic all around. He was irritable, easy to anger. It culminated with him killing his support team instead of the demon he’d been assigned.”

“That’s when Doctor Walker was ordered to terminate him.” The captain doesn’t look happy as he joins us.

Valerie frowns. “No, that came a few months later. He claimed not to remember what happened, so we ran tests, and for a while he was back to his old self.”

“Do you think he lied?” I asked, cutting off whatever the captain was about to say.

“Not then—we didn’t have any reason to doubt him. We knew there would be glitches since it was a new process. Plenty of theories were advanced to explain what had happened. The most credible one we had was that the demon’s memories had gained dominance for a while. After that, he started spending more and more time alone in his room. I even caught him snarling behind someone’s back.”

She paused, and picked up just as the captain was about to speak. “Then there were the accidents.”

“What accidents?” the man asks in surprise.

“In here.” She indicates the building. “Stuff would blow up, hurting the person using it. Guns would jam, explode, or fail to work in the field. We redoubled the checks and maintenance, but it didn’t change anything. Thompson got the brunt of the blame for the weapons, since they were his responsibility. He insisted Maurice was sabotaging them, but Doctor Walker wouldn’t listen to him. As far as she was concerned, he was perfect.

She pulled a chair and sat down. The captain still looked impatient, but he let her continue.

“Thompson installed cameras all over the armory, without telling her. Thompson wasn’t one to take the blame for someone else’s mistakes, and not for sabotage. He got evidence of Maurice tampering with the guns. He and her had one hell of a fight over that. The order to terminate Maurice came not long after that.”

The captain shook his head. “That was the second order to kill him. Command got a copy of the armory video, but as far as they knew, Maurice was already dead at that point. So Doctor Walker had some explaining to do. She claimed she never received the order, and the tech never found proof the message reached her and was deleted. His termination wasn’t left up to her at that point. A specialized team was sent.”

“They failed?” I ask.

“Not as far as we knew. At Doctor Walker’s recommendation, Maurice was told there was a demon he had to kill, and he was sent there as if everything was normal, usual support team, same armament. The ambush worked, but it was a bloody confrontation. By the time it was done, only two of the assault unit were left alive. Maurice’s body was confirmed dead. Amanda took it to run tests before destroying it. Command got the tests results, and video evidence the body had been destroyed.”

“No,” Valerie says, “Maurice’s body never came back here. I would have known. Doctor Walker said the army took him.” She sighs. “I guess I should have known something was off when she wasn’t as broken up about it as I expected, but she set everyone working on the next version. I thought she was just burying her grief with work.”

“Did she have any contact with him after that?”

Valerie stared at the man. “How would I know? I told you, she said the army had his body. I didn’t have any reasons to suspect otherwise. I wouldn’t know where she put him.”

“Where ever that was, he escaped,” I say. “Adam mentioned escaping from a box.”

“Then he set out to build this army. Stories reached my people from those who wander. Youth coming together in ever-larger groups. Larger than families. We didn’t know what to make of them. It was Adam convincing them, forcing them to come with him, to turn on their elders. He did it to one of the city’s older demons. When he wouldn’t accept Adam’s orders, Adam had his army kill him. Not a hunt. He told them to rip him apart, and they fell on him. We do not kill without reason. We hunt for nourishment, we kill to protect what is ours. This was senseless. None of them should have agreed to do it, but because Adam told them to, they did.”

“Why didn’t he get them to kill you too?” the captain asks.

“Because there are things that even Adam cannot force my people to do.” He straightens. “My age defies your understanding. None of my kind would dare lay a claw against me if I don’t give

them a reason to.”

“One of them did,” I say before I realize I’ve opened my mouth. I remember the group of demons that had ambushed me and Claws, and the fight between Claws and their leader.

Claws deflates a little. When he looks at me, I get a sense he’s bashful.

“Yes, my children can be stubborn.”