

I'm cooking a couple of steaks when the door opens and closes. I didn't hear any conversation approaching, so she's alone. I know it's Amanda because of the clicking of her hard-soled shoes on the hardwood floor. Jason's sneakers squeak.

"What are the results on the revolver?" I move the steaks to the plate and add seasoning.

"Other than confirming it was handled by a demon, nothing. Are you sure you didn't smell another demon when your gun went missing?"

I take the plate to the island and sit. "I am. The demon got it from a civilian." Amanda nods and is silent as I start eating, spearing through the salad before a piece of the steak.

"Derick, I'm sorry for yesterday."

I shrug, then swallow. "It's alright. I didn't mind the interruption. I'm not sure going to the bar was a good idea."

She cocks an eyebrow. "I meant about my reaction to you going for a drink. Jason's right, I can't keep you cooped up in here."

"I don't mind it here. There are fewer distractions." I spear more food. "I think Jason orchestrated the meeting."

The door opens. "Are you two talking about me behind my back?" Jason asks.

I shake my head. "I was talking about you in absentia. If you are running an experiment using Juliette, I'd like to know what the parameters are."

Jason looks at me with a frown. "Experiment?"

"Yes. You have stated that I need to get to know humans so I can help them better. Juliette needs help with money. Is that an example of another way I need to help? Was that the purpose of talking with her?"

"She told you she needed money?" Amanda asks.

Jason is thoughtful as he sits opposite me.

"I don't believe she intended to tell me that. She let it slip while we talked."

"She must think you're a good catch," Jason says. "You're good-looking, and being a construction worker means you make good money." He nods. "It makes sense she's interested."

"She wants to marry him?" Amanda looks at Jason in disbelief.

"Wouldn't you?"

"Of course not, what could he ever provide her with?"

"Oh, I don't know." Jason rolls his eyes, so I know he's mocking her. "Financial and emotional stability? Sex?"

Amanda's eyes become wide. "Please tell me you haven't been showing him how to have sex."

"He has shown me pornographic movies," I interrupt. I don't normally do so, but I want to end their argument. I need Jason to address something first.

"I don't believe this. Jason, he's a demon-killing machine, not some sort of sexual play thing for you."

"Oh come on, Manda. I showed him porn because he needs to know how things work. You should know me well enough to know I would never consider going to bed with him."

My interruption didn't work. I look at the food on my plate and consider finishing it; it's clear they don't need me for their conversation. But they might decide to leave and finish it in private.

"Excuse me, can you stop arguing?" I say in an even tone.

They stop and stare at me.

"Thank you. Jason, Juliette believes I have children."

"Really? Why would she think that?"

"The amount of food I buy is more than one human can eat. She thought I bought it for my family."

"And what did you say?" he asks.

"Nothing. This isn't something you covered when teaching me the 'cover story.' I decided to remain silent rather than say something that wouldn't be believable. The children came up again at the bar. Again I didn't say anything, and she reached the conclusion I only see them once a month."

“There you go, that takes care of that. You never have to produce them. I can get you pictures to show her. How many kids do you want? What age? What gender?”

“No. I am not going to lie to her.”

Amanda and Jason exchange a look.

“Why?” she asks.

“For the same reason, I don’t like having to say I’m a construction worker when I’m a hunter. Lying is too complicated. I barely said anything, and she reached the conclusion I have children, who I see rarely. She is going to ask for details. She will want to know about their mother, what they study, what games they like. I did some research after the hunt. Humans are curious about each other’s families. Why would I need to remember all those useless details when I can simply tell her I’m a hunter?”

“You know why you can’t tell her,” Jason says.

“Then tell me what the point of this experiment is.”

“It isn’t an experiment. I want you to learn what it’s like to be human.” He looks at Amanda and grins. “As for their mother, just tell her it’s Manda. I’d have no problem believing someone like her would keep the kids away from their father out of spite.”

I don’t reply. I level my gaze on him. I know he isn’t serious, but this time, his flippancy bothers me. He tries to stare back but looks away after a few seconds.

“Do you want to see her again?” Amanda asks.

I think about it for a moment, but instead of answering her, I mention something I just now remember. “I gave her my phone number.”

“You did what?” Amanda exclaims. “Why?”

“A better question is, how do you know the number?” Jason asks.

“I did it because she gave me hers. It seemed like a gesture was expected, and Jason taught me that when I’m uncertain about what to do, mirror what is done.” I look to Jason. “I know the number because I saw you enter it on your phone when you gave it to me.”

“That was over a year ago, and you still remember it?”

I nod. “In the research I did, I found that it’s expected that I call her since she gave it to me.”

“No, absolutely not,” Amanda states.

“I’m going to have to go with Manda on this. Unless you are serious about pursuing a relationship with her, it’s best not to call her.”

“Shouldn’t I at least call her back to let her know I received her message?”

“No need.”

“But that is what humans do when they are left a message.”

“Yes, but women are used to not being called back. So, are you interested in a relationship with her?” he asks and ignores the glare Amanda gives him.

“No. I have no interest in burdening myself with all the useless information I would need to maintain the story of having children.”

“Good,” Amanda says.

Jason nods. “Then it’s best you don’t call her back.”

“Alright. The next time I see her at the grocery store, I will tell her it’s not a good idea for me to spend any more time with her.”

Amanda winces.

Jason shakes his head. “She’s going to be angry with you for saying that.”

“Should it bother me?”

Jason looks to Amanda, who frowns. “Yes,” he finally says. “It should.”

I watch them. From their reaction, I can tell this touches on something they have discussed in private. I don’t understand what the problem is. Jason says this wasn’t an experiment, but it is now still over. Telling Juliette that will ensure she knows nothing more will happen. Isn’t it that better than letting her think more is possible?

I go back to eating as they look at me, then each other. Meat isn’t as good once it goes cold after being cooked. Amanda is clenching her teeth. Jason’s mouth is pursed.

I can tell they want to argue, but they hold it in. They don’t want to do it while I’m here.

That's fine, this is my room. They will leave, resolve their argument in private, reach a conclusion, and then Jason will set up experiments to either fix the problem or get me to work around it.

As expected, they leave.

Once I'm done eating, I take a can of soda out of the fridge and slowly drink it, savoring the effervescence on my tongue and my nostrils. Jason explained that after a meal, it is traditional to eat dessert, sweet foods. I tried them, but there's something wrong with solid food being so sweet.

Until Jason, or one of the doctors, calls for me, it is up to me to determine how to stay occupied. I change into exercise clothes and go practice my swordplay with one of the robots in the training room.