

Chapter 1

It was supposed to be simple.

I actually thought we would be able to step outside our shelter, get the supplies, and be back before anyone realized we'd been there.

This is what happens when my sister's optimism rubs off on me.

But it wasn't Dro's fault that we walked into a damn trap. Hell just hated us.

That was fine. I hated Hell right back.

The cheap metal door was still clanging against the plaster wall of the store I'd just busted into. Max had looked into it when I asked, and told me there would be demons, but he couldn't tell what kind because his precog was still blurred. I was expecting a couple Reds or ghouls, maybe a Shredder.

I was not expecting Possessors.

The possessed humans weren't surprised to see us. Even in their human forms, the Possessors should have been able to sense my sister, because she was the most powerful half-demon known to exist. Since she was still on Hell's Most Wanted List, we had a serious problem on our hands.

The Possessors looked like regular humans, except their irises were solid black. I held back my shiver, knowing just how much pain their souls must be in. Being possessed was one of the worst things a human could experience. I had barely survived it.

These Possessors had taken over a group of tall, bulky men in black clothes. Their hair ranged from shoulder-length to bald, and their arms were covered in tattoos. Each had the tattoo of a rose thorn that appeared to be weaving in and out of their skin, blood dripping from the points. I had the same one inked behind my ear.

This just keeps getting better and better.

Finally, we snapped out of our shock. I went for the hatchet on my hip and grabbed a knife from my inside jacket. Beside me, Warrick took out a handgun. Next to him, Sephiel drew two short swords. Max wisely stepped back, knowing he couldn't fight half as well as the rest of us. Dro's shoulders were tense and ready, but I moved in front of her not just to protect her, but to keep her from doing anything that would get all of us killed.

I started reconsidering this when all of the Possessors drew enormous handguns.

But they didn't shoot. Why weren't they shooting?

Because someone else was in the room with us. Someone bigger than the Possessors, who stalked out from the shadows into the dim light. My hand tightened on the grip of my weapons, and I expected Warrick to pull the trigger.

Drake Talbot smiled when he saw our anger. He was a huge bear of a man, about six foot three and probably two hundred and fifty pounds of muscle. He had on his black duster and dark pants, his hands on his hips to display the guns and the thick, blunt hilts of his knives easily visible next to his clothes. The top of his head and his chin were covered in dark stubble. Two abysmal black eyes stared at me, filled with sadism and malice.

"Well, look who showed their faces after all," Drake sneered, standing confidently behind his bodyguards. "We didn't think you'd make it to Party Town."

Party Town. I supposed Drake would see it that way. I didn't think a city full of murderers, rapists, and generally wicked people was a place to party, but Drake was the definition of a masochist. He would see a city of death as home, sweet home.

Warrick didn't have a kill shot, and that was the only reason I could imagine for Drake to still be standing. All it would take was one missed shot to set off a chain reaction of bullets and blood.

I wanted to see Drake bleeding under my boot just as much as he did, but I wasn't throwing my knife, either. Something wasn't right.

"What are you doing here, Drake?" I growled.

He laughed. It was an awful, rasping noise. His black eyes met mine, the same way they had when he stabbed me twice and left me to die. I blocked out the memory, keeping away the phantom pain of a knife sliding into my stomach and ribs.

"Had to pick something up for the boss," he said mockingly. "You can imagine how fussy he is."

My blood went cold, and I barely heard Dro's sharp intake of breath. I could picture Sephiel's face tightening with anger. Drake looked at all of us, relishing the hatred, pain, and fear we radiated. I controlled it as best as I could, knowing answers were more important than revenge right now.

"What the fuck did you do?" I asked again.

His grin widened, and this time he only looked at me. "It isn't what I did. It's what I'm *going* to do." He dipped his chin, fixing me with his black gaze. "He's got plans for you, *chica*. Serious plans. So much detail has gone into them that even your ex isn't allowed to intervene. Matt's pretty pissed about that too."

Not as pissed as he would be if he heard you calling him 'Matt.'

"See, I found something really, really special." Drake continued. "It's the last thing we need. But don't worry, sweetheart. You'll get introduced to it very, very soon."

My stomach turned. I expected him to say something about wanting Dro. My sister was the real supernatural force in our group. I was human, born and raised. I'd never been anything but. I didn't want to be.

Whatever was being planned for me by Drake, my former lover, and the creature I feared above anything else could only involve pain. A substantial amount of it.

I'd been on the receiving end of their tortures before. I had no intention of going through them again.

Though if they wanted me for something, they wouldn't risk shooting me. They would take me alive.

No, they're not. They're going to try. And they're going to fail.

I took a risk myself, and threw my silver knife at Drake.

I didn't miss—I hardly ever miss—but I didn't hit my mark.

The thin silver blade slammed into the neck of the Possessor standing beside Drake. The huge bounty hunter had stepped to the side so the blade wouldn't get anywhere near him. He stepped so far I was a little embarrassed at how off my aim had been. Deep down, I knew better. Drake was fast for someone his size, but it looked like he'd gotten quite a bit from his deal with the Devil.

The man lurched, blood gushing from the wound in his neck. He opened his mouth as though to scream, but a spiral of thick black smoke shot out of his mouth. The Possessor's true form screeched and twisted away in the back room. Then room exploded into action.

At first I thought the Possessors were going to shoot us. At their cores, they were still gangsters. Yet as soon as I surged forward, I saw them hesitate.

They were here to stall us, not kill us. At least not me, and probably not Dro.

Everyone else though... they were fair game.

Two shots cracked in rapid succession. None of the bullets hit me, though two of the possessed Blood Thorns dropped from the bullets that crashed into their skulls, scaring the Possessors out of their vessel's dying mouths. Warrick had exceptional aim, and shooting demons with blessed silver bullets was good way to keep them from returning to rip us apart.

I went for Drake, who was backing away to escape through the storeroom exit. Fucking coward.

Two Possessors blocked my path. They tucked their guns away and threw out their fists. I skidded to a stop and stepped back, one of their clenched hands brushing along my temple.

Admittedly, I didn't think this whole plan through. Seeing the man who murdered my mentor, kidnapped my sister, tortured and tried to kill me sparked my already short temper. So it wasn't long

before they got their shots in.

The man on my left jabbed his fist into my ribs. I winced, giving the man on the right the chance to loop his arm around my throat. I was pinned to his back, my neck straining painfully as he wrenched it up. I used one hand to claw at the meaty arm on my throat, leaving my front completely exposed to the second man. He grinned, thinking he was going to get some revenge on me for the sake of his employers.

Stupid bastard forgot I was still armed.

He pulled back his fist to hit me, and even as his fist was flying for my face, I was moving. I kicked him in the knee with one foot, making him stumble. His fist brushed over my shoulder and into the chest of the man choking me. I kicked his stomach with my other foot, making him double over. Then I sliced the blade of my hatchet into his exposed neck.

Blood squirted out of his severed carotid artery, painting the dirty floor before he collapsed onto it.

The man behind me growled and slammed his fist into my kidneys. I winced at the crushing pain. He was so much stronger now that he was possessed. His grip tightened on my neck, causing black spots to dance in front of my eyes. The Possessor's free hand shot out to catch my wrist and keep the hatchet away from him. He squeezed until I thought he was going to break my hand.

Then he stiffened and released his hold. A warm liquid peppered my neck, filling the air with the coppery smell of blood. I pitched forward, touching my throat and coughing to get back the oxygen I'd missed. Assured that my neck wasn't broken, I turned around to see what had saved me.

My little sister stood over the Possessor, the knife in her hand dripping fresh blood onto the floor. The man crab walked away, blood oozing from his fingers as he tried to put pressure on the wound in his throat. He looked terrified of my sister.

At first glance, Dro wasn't the kind of girl anyone would be afraid of. She was sixteen, and utterly beautiful with the face of a saint. Her skin was flawless and paper pale. Long white hair rested in a braid along her back, ending at the base of her spine. But over the last few weeks, there was a darkness lurking behind her ice blue eyes. A danger that needed to be avoided at all costs.

A malevolence that reminded me of her father.

"What did Drake steal?" she demanded in a cold voice that didn't belong to her.

"We— we never knew," the Possessor pleaded. Usually these were the kinds of demons that toyed with their prey. The demon that possessed me had felt Dro's power, which meant this one must have been sensing it too. I started to understand why he was so afraid.

"We were just told to wait here. They knew you'd be looking for him, and we were supposed to keep you from killing him."

I glanced at the back door. It was open, and Max was beside it, keeping Warrick from going through. He was likely trying to explain that the revenge-crazed demon slayer wasn't going to be able to find his nemesis tonight. Warrick was standing profile to me, though I could only imagine the anger burning in his neon green eyes.

"You're lying."

Dro's hollow tone made me look at her again. My eyes flicked down when I saw the light coming from her left hand. Blazing white flames were curling around her wrist, clawing their way up her arm. The Possessor's eyes widened as he stared at the hellfire she was controlling. He'd probably seen what it could do, and I didn't blame him for being scared.

"I'm not!" the Possessor cried, snapping me out of my thoughts. His voice was becoming hoarse from the blood loss. "I'm not, I swear!"

I'd been in this situation before. You accused someone of lying, they said they weren't, and then you started beating the truth out of them. Eventually, you got the answer you wanted. I could tell when someone was putting on a façade, and when they were being honest.

This demon didn't know shit.

"Dro," I croaked. I muted my cough. She still didn't hear me. The fires continued to rise up her arms.

"Dro, that's enough," I warned her.

She didn't listen to me, clenching her fist and increasing the light from the flames until I could no longer see the outline of her hand.

"*Andromeda*," I half shouted.

My adopted sister turned her head slightly at the sound of my voice. Her eyes locked on mine, and I was amazed at all the anger she was holding back. It softened when she saw me, but not nearly as much as I wanted it to.

"He doesn't know anything," I told her. "We're done here."

Dro twisted her head back to the dying Possessor, white hair swishing against her back. The hellfire dulled and evaporated from her fist. She looked at the bloody knife in her hand, then went still.

This was the first time Dro had ever killed a human on purpose with her bare hands.

I walked to my sister. I gently placed my hand on her shoulder. She jumped under my touch, glancing back at me. I saw the terrified, ashamed little girl who would never forgive herself for this. I wasn't happy with that, but it was better than seeing the look of a cold-blooded murderer.

These days, I took what I could get with Dro.

"Go outside with the guys. Make sure Drake's not waiting to trap us, and that Warrick doesn't chase after him."

Dro's light eyes held my dark ones. "I don't need to go outside. I can do that from in here."

I clutched her shoulder just a little harder. "No. You don't need your powers for this."

"But—"

"No."

One look at her narrowed eyes and harsh frown told me that we were going to fight about this later. Probably the moment I saw her again outside.

Regardless, Dro put her knife on her belt, glanced at the dying Possessor one last time, and stormed to the front door. Her guardian and ex-angel Sephiel gave me a small nod. He would protect her from anything while I wasn't there. As he followed my aggravated sister, I watched Max hesitantly show Warrick the front door. He was smart not to touch him. Warrick looked ready to punch the lights out of the first person that crossed him.

Once they were gone, I picked up my silver throwing knife and sheathed it in my jacket. The other Possessors had vacated their human vessels, leaving behind their dead bodies. Usually Possessors put up more of a fight than this. I couldn't help but remember that they were fodder for something much more sinister. I stood by the dying Possessor, who was now flat on his back and choking on his own blood. Possessors hated to leave their vessels, but I wasn't going to exorcise him. I didn't have the time, and even if I did, he was a dead man. The wound in his throat was too grievous. The Possessor was the only thing keeping him "alive."

I knelt beside his head, dangling the hatchet in front of my knee. When my eyes locked onto his, they weren't filled with the pain I'd expected them to be. If anything, he seemed proud. Whatever his goal had been, he appeared to have accomplished it.

"Tell me something useful, and I'll end it," I told him.

The Possessor made a noise between a rasp and a gurgle. It took me a moment to realize he was laughing.

"Not... long... now," he choked out. "She'll be... his... soon..."

He grinned, blood staining his teeth. I decided against the mercy killing. I slowly pushed myself up, ignoring the aches and pains in my body. I walked around the shop, looking through the cabinets and drawers to salvage anything I could. I found some packets of dried and canned food, as well as some bottles of lukewarm water. I never once looked back at the dying Possessor, knowing it couldn't take me over since I had an anti-possession sigil tattooed over my heart.

Yet I couldn't shake the foreboding words the Possessor had given me. As I walked out of the store and back into the dark, bloody streets, I recalled what Drake said.

See, I found something really, really special. It's the last thing we need. But don't worry, sweetheart. You'll get introduced to it very, very soon.

There was only one reason Drake, Mateo, and Lucifer himself would target me.
They wanted to capture my sister.