



CHRISTINE SCHULZ

*Dawn*  
*of a*  
**DEMON**

NIGHTFLY BOOK 1

# 1



“What kind of magic do you think he has?” I squirmed uncomfortably in the hard wooden chair and chugged the rest of my beer from the oversized glass, slamming it on the table in victory when I finished. My tongue licked the fizzy foam coating my lips, the flavor-enhancing magic bubbles tickling my taste buds and sending enticing notes of citrus dancing across my tongue.

“I’ll bet you the next round of drinks he’s some kind of elemental. I’m thinking ... water.” Ryker, sitting next to me with an empty glass in need of a refill, curled a half smile in my direction.

“Water? Nah. Why would you say that?”

“Because he’s slippery and cold. Just like water.”

“Real cute,” I intoned.

My brows lifted at my teammate. I rested a hand under my chin, then discreetly glanced the other way to detail the situation before I agreed to his challenge. With a quick sniff, I tried to catch our target’s magic scent, but he was too far away and all I could pick up on was the malty aroma of beer mixed with copious amounts of cologne and perfume worn by all the business workers enjoying a drink at the bar.

Despite it being a Tuesday evening, almost every table and stool was occupied. With a friendly staff, contemporary decor, and cheap drinks, the watering hole was a popular place for working professionals to unwind and relax after grinding away at the office all day. As the evening went on, people piled into the small establishment, loitering near the crowded bar, the upbeat music playing in the background drowned out by the loud chatter amongst colleagues and friends. Ryker and I stayed huddled at our corner table, pretending to be two casual drinking buddies.

Unfortunately, our visit to this bar wasn’t a social one.

The mission this evening was to apprehend Davian Grymes, a man with a name perfectly befitting his dirty schemes. The military had received an anonymous tip that Davian would be conducting a transaction at this bar tonight.

“Zulli?” The sound of Ryker’s voice calling my name snapped me out of my trance. I peered up to a server batting her baby blue eyes adoringly at Ryker as she slid a beer across the table in front of him.

“If you need anything else, just let me know.” Her voice was smooth and feminine. The petite woman dipped her head and brushed a brown curl behind her ear, biting at the corner of her lip as she conjured a bashful smile.

“Thank you.” He smiled warmly at her. “Actually, would you mind grabbing another one for my friend?”

The woman’s expression went blank. “Oh. Sure.” And then she stormed off.

I threw my head back and laughed at Ryker. “You are never going to figure it out, are you?”

“Figure what out?” he replied, a look of bewilderment on his face.

“She was obviously flirting with you.”

“What?” Ryker swiped a quick glance over to the brunette filling a pint glass behind the bar. “She was just being an attentive server, asking if we needed anything.”

“And I supposed you *needed* her phone number?” I tapped on the cardboard coaster under his drink.

His eyes blinked at the numbers written in black ink. “Oh. *Oh*. I should apologize.”

“Probably not necessary. I think she got the hint.”

I took one look at Ryker and shook my head. He didn’t exactly stand out in a crowd, with his cropped brown hair, amber eyes, and rosy skin, but he had this charisma that attracted people to him like lint on a dryer sheet. He was always smiling and going out of his way to make people happy. The fact that he had no idea he had this effect on people made him even more alluring to others.

“Here, you can take my beer.” Ryker slid over his glass. “This one’s on me.”

“Thanks.” I flashed Ryker a grateful smile and pressed the cold pint to my lips.

“I still can’t get used to your hair.” Ryker tilted his head, scratching his own scalp.

“Me neither. But it beats getting my neck snapped in half next time some jerk decides to yank on my ponytail again.”

My neck twisted from side to side, my fingertips running along the smooth shaved sides of my scalp. The hair on top of my head was left

longer, streaked a forest green. I never bothered to style it, so the short strands that fell right above my brow had become chaotic and unruly, sticking out in all directions like a bird's nest. With a flick of my head, I attempted an overly dramatic hair flip but ended up giving myself whiplash instead.

“So how's the almighty CEO of NightFly Technologies holding up?” Ryker asked in a pretentious tone. “After fifteen years of working as your father's right-hand man, Davian goes rogue and is caught stealing sensitive data and equipment. Isn't Zavyr worried that Davian might be targeting him after what happened?”

My hand reached for the back of my neck and rubbed it. “My father's fine, I guess. He doesn't talk to me much about the family business. I know he has increased security on the building. I keep him updated on what the military finds out about Davian, but otherwise, he tends to keep me out of the loop on what he's doing.”

A girly laugh that could be heard from one end of the narrow establishment to the other caught my attention. It came from none other than my third teammate, Kasra.

She leaned in with a delicately placed hand on the nape of Davian's neck, grazing her fingers through his short, graying hair. Davian returned the gesture with a set of hairy fingers slowly gliding down Kasra's skin-tight black pencil skirt. She pushed her mid-length blond hair off her shoulder, fanning herself as she unbuttoned the top button of her white blouse. Davian, and everyone else at the table, dropped a lascivious gaze to her chest.

Kasra had a gorgeous, curvy figure and could fake an infectious personality like a pro. She was an expert at playing to the whims of others, the perfect person for getting Davian alone so we could finally apprehend him and make him pay for his crimes. Most importantly, as a soldier in the Chitol army, she was trained to hold her own. She could take down this whole bar before they even knew what had hit them, no magic necessary.

“Uh oh. Looks like we have trouble.” Ryker's hand dropped to a knife concealed under his loose-fitting hoodie.

I followed his gaze to a drunk man stumbling over to Kasra, his foot striking a table leg, causing a loud screech, though it was muffled under the noisy conversations going on around us. Leaning back in my chair, I adjusted my belt. To the average person, it appeared to be a decorative leather strap holding up my baggy pants, but the fake metal bullets that lined it each held a small amount of magic liquid or powder.

“Hey, beautiful!” The obnoxiously loud drunk slurred his words and swatted at Kasra’s hair.

Kasra leaned out of his reach and gave him a lazy smile as she rose from her seat and attempted to steer him away in the opposite direction.

A disapproving growl came from Davian’s mouth, his attention locked onto the imbecile bothering his pretty eye candy. He stood up from his chair to confront the man, when Kasra gently touched her fingers to his forearm, hoping to calm him down before things got out of control.

Davian roughly pushed Kasra aside to take a swing at the drunk man, her hands bracing the edge of the table as she collided into it. Pint glasses wobbled, beer and other liquids spilling over. With the reaction time of molasses, the unstable loudmouth let out a painful whimper as Davian’s fist connected with his jaw. The intoxicated man stumbled backward into a chair, inadvertently agitating another half-drunk man, whose whiskey he was now wearing.

Davian whipped out a gun from a holster on his waist and pointed it at the drunk’s head just as Kasra jumped in to intervene. In one swift motion, she grabbed Davian’s wrist and thrust it upward toward the ceiling, continuing to push his arm behind his back in an unnatural direction. With her free hand, she chopped at his knuckles until he lost his grip on the gun and it clattered to his feet.

The patrons in the busy bar began scrambling all over the place, screaming and knocking each other over like a bomb was about to go off in the building. The sober guests ran for the exit, while the intoxicated ones stuck around to cheer on Davian and join in on the fun. The look of excitement on their faces was alarming, their battle cries full of determination as they snatched anything within their grasp and launched it at whoever was nearby.

“I think that’s our cue.” Ryker nodded to me, and we both darted over to Kasra, diving into the chaos.

Rushing past our target, I activated my own magic to get a whiff of Davian’s oozing from his body. I violently rubbed my nose, the smell of salty air burning past my nostrils. Water magic. Glad I didn’t take Ryker up on his bet.

The tip of my boot nudged something soft on the floor. I looked down to see the drunk, who had fallen flat on his back. His poor balance made it look like he was trying to stand up on a patch of black ice, his flailing arms knocking over everything in his way.

“I’ll get you for this!” The incoherent words babbling out of his mouth took me a moment to decipher.

“Doubt it.” I kicked him over with my boot, and he was officially down for the count.

When I returned my gaze to the room, half the bar had joined in on the fight, the noise intensifying to eardrum-rupturing levels. The three other men who had been sitting at the table with Kasra circled her, taking turns with their knives and magic, trying to take her down. She was ducking and dodging their attacks, smacking the men around with her bare hands. One of them leaned over to snatch a pair of kitchen shears from behind the bar and sent it flying toward her face. She stepped to the side, narrowly avoiding it, but the blades now had another target.

“Watch out!” I dove at a frightened bartender hustling toward the front door, who was about to be on the receiving end of the sharp object embedding itself into the back of her head. As I crashed into her, the pointed tip pierced me in the arm, ripping open my skin before clattering to the floor. I seethed at the burning pain that radiated from the shallow puncture wound, warm blood soaking into my plaid button-down.

“You’re welcome,” I insinuated, although I was certain she was too in shock to hear my words. The woman froze, let out a high-pitched shriek, then ran out of the bar and never looked back.

Ryker was battling his way through some angry patrons, using his magic to stab his knife through expertly placed portals and trying to prevent an angry mob from reaching Kasra. Glasses shattered across faces, plates were thrown like deadly frisbees. Tables overturned and chairs flew across the room.

An overly confident man came charging at me with a fork, so I picked up the scissors from the floor and chucked them at him. Missing my mark, sharpened cat claws shot out of my fingertips. I lunged in his direction, my body contorting as he swung his fist at my face. As I twisted around him, my claws cleanly slicing four gashes up his forearm. The man’s eyes bulged open and he took a step back. The once fearless man dropped his utensil and scampered off in a different direction.

I winced as something heavy shattered against the back of my head. Whipping around, my foot crunched on broken glass from a liquor bottle. I skewered my next target with an unflinching stare and ripped a blue bullet from my belt.

“*Dormeo!*”

Sleep powder exploded across his chest, and the man dropped to the ground with a thud, eyes rolling to the back of his head.

“Show women some respect,” I muttered to the unconscious man as I defied my own statement by grabbing a wooden chair and chucking it at a husky woman about to pounce on Ryker. Just beyond her, a man with dark-rimmed eyes and washed out skin concealed himself with a trench coat while he pushed through the rowdy crowd.

“Ryker!” I cried, pointing at Davian trying to make a run for it.

“Go get him!” Kasra insisted as she punched a pot-bellied hooligan in the gut. She still hadn’t activated her magic. “I’ve got this.”

Fighting a brief curiosity to watch Kasra in heels and a skin-tight skirt take down a horde of savage men, Ryker and I took off, chasing after Davian as he left through the hallway and out the back door in the kitchen.

Rounding a dumpster, I darted down the alley and abruptly stopped when I reached the main street. Just like inside the bar, the sidewalks outside were bustling with people. I searched for a man in a trench coat, noticing that half the pedestrians around me were wearing one. This was a business district and everyone was rushing to get home after a busy day at work.

“Can you smell his magic? Or hear him?” Ryker appeared beside me, scanning the street.

“Give me a second,” I replied.

Closing my eyes, I engaged my magic and focused on finding any inkling of Davian’s presence. Vibrations from cars whizzing down the street buzzed through my feet. The smell of rubber slipped past my nose as tires churned in a whirling motion around me. Mumbled conversations from those passing by offered no insight as to where he might have gone. I then tilted my head up toward the evening sky, inhaling a deep breath.

The salty stench of Davian’s magic that lingered in his path stung my nostrils. My ears twitched at the slightest rattle of metal above me. I opened my eyes and my gaze shot toward our escapee just in time to see his foot swinging over the ledge onto the roof of the building adjacent to the bar.

“*Capto!*” My spelled boots stuck to the brick wall, while magic enveloped my hands. They became tacky, sticking to the brick just like a spider, as I began to climb up the side of the three-story commercial building.

Although I couldn’t see it, the presence of magic hummed directly above my head. Ryker’s portal opened, and I crawled through, climbing straight to the top floor. Without a clear picture of his destination when

using his portal magic, this was as close as he could get me to the roof where Davian had fled to.

My weak hands began slipping on the cold brick, and I scraped down the side of the building a few feet before my magic completely gave out. A shriek flew out of my mouth, my stomach making its way up into my throat. Ryker passed through a portal at the top of the fire escape, grabbing my wrist before I plummeted to the sidewalk below. He hoisted me up, and we stepped over the ledge onto the roof.

Ryker gave me a look, scrunching his brows and pressing his lips together. He didn't need to speak to remind me that, while I may have had two shifter powers inside me, I only had half the strength and abilities of each.

Fans and vents were scattered sporadically across the flat roof of the commercial space. The tall office buildings around us reflected the late evening sun setting over the city, casting sharp shadows that made for great hiding spots. Lucky for me, I didn't need to see to know where Davian was. I placed my palm on the ground, feeling the slightest vibration of footsteps to my right.

"Over there!" I called out, pointing to the man fleeing toward the rooftop's access door.

I couldn't see Ryker's portals opening. Magic energy was something only a few select people could physically see. However, with my heightened senses, I always knew exactly where I needed to go.

My foot kicked through a small portal, tripping Davian and sending him flying face-first into a ventilation unit. As he scrambled to his feet, I ripped a bullet from my belt. Although our target was well over twenty feet away, I dropped the cylinder right at his feet.

*"Demitto."*

Bright green sticky goo erupted from the bullet, and like heavy duty bubblegum, it stuck him in place. Feet cemented to the ground, he tried to jerk free as I trotted over to him, ripping a knife from a sheath on my hip with one hand and flashing the sharp pointed claws protruding from my fingertips on the other. I approached Davian warily, and he returned my frown with a smirk.

"Nice try," he sneered.

Water slipped down Davian's body, and the elastic substance securing him in place washed right off. He threw out his arms in front of him and a water cannon shot from his palms like a fire hose, the swirling cyclone plastering my face and pushing me back.



Despite popular belief, human cats do not always land on their feet.

My knife went flying through the air and my boots slipped, the gravity magic having drained from them. I slapped a hand onto something metal, but my sticky fingers couldn't lock onto the slick surface.

I gulped down a mouthful of icy water, the saltiness burning my throat. Another blast Davian's magic rushed at my chest. Rocks, twigs, and other debris caught in the vortex scraped across my skin. My body became numb as it was dragged across the rough concrete surface of the roof. I tumbled, somersaulting over myself until I rammed into a metal fan vent, flipped over it, and soared into the open air.

"Zulli!" Ryker rushed over to me just as I was hurtled right over the ledge of the roof and started my descent of three-stories to the ally below.

Before my body splattered across the pavement, a warm pocket of magic subdued the icy water around me and the scenery suddenly changed. Instead of falling to the street below, I was dropped out of the sky about six feet directly above Davian.

A rush of adrenaline mixed with panic as I screamed, frantically waving my hands around. When my body crashed into his, he flattened to the ground like a pancake, air hissing through his lips like a deflated balloon. Ryker's portal closed, and the water flowing through it shut off like a faucet.

Davian threw me off his back, but I didn't go far. I flipped around, grabbing his pant leg. He kicked out his foot and caught me in the jaw. The pain throbbed through my skull. I spat out a wad of blood, reaching for another bullet on my belt before I noticed Davian remove something from a pocket in his trench coat.

"I hear water and electricity don't mix well." He threw a yellow marble at me, a cloud of magical powder exploding across my chest.

The magic current paralyzed my muscles. My whole body began contracting and twitching, and I watched helplessly as he lingered over me.

"Tell Zavyr I'm coming for him."

"Wha-what do you wa-want with my d-dad?" My chest burned with magic as I pushed out the words.

He turned on his heel and darted for the exit, disappearing into the shadowy stairwell. I could hear his heavy footsteps echoing down the stairs as he made his escape.

"Zulli! Are you okay?" Ryker sprinted over to my side and dropped to his knees in a puddle of water.

I pushed myself up onto my elbows. The military had trained its soldiers to endure a number of different magic attacks like these so that their effect was limited and we recovered faster, but this one had really packed an extra punch.

"I'm okay. Just a couple cuts and bruises. His water mixed with the electricity magic really got me good, though." I threw my head back and clutched a hand to my chest, desperately panting. The electric current had fizzled out, but my body was still pulsing with pain.

Relief washed over Ryker, dimples forming on his cheeks as a smile tugged at his lips. He raked a hand through his short chestnut-colored hair. "Zulli, what would you ever do without me?"

"Pretty sure I'd be dead by now. Sorry you got stuck with me and ..." I suddenly remembered. "Kasra! We have to go back for her!"

"Let's find her, head back to base, and then you should get those injuries looked at. Did you get ... stabbed? When did that happen?" His finger traced the tear in my shirt, sopping wet with a dark red stain.

I shrugged at the hole in my arm, pretending I wasn't bothered by the throbbing pain. I ran a finger across the bumpy, bleeding surface of my skin that was scraped raw from being dragged across the roof, tenderness settling in. When Ryker turned away, I licked it and made a sour face. I watched as the bleeding began to stop, the burning pain starting to subside. It was common knowledge cat shifters had the ability to heal minor cuts and wounds with their tongues, but I wouldn't be caught dead letting anyone see me lick myself.

Ryker opened a portal, and less than a second later, we were entering the back door into the bar. Piles of unconscious bodies lay sprawled across chairs, tables, and the floor. A grunting sound came from behind the bar. I peered over, and there was Kasra, holding the last stubborn thug in a choke hold. The man's mouth went slack, gasping for air that never came. He gave up trying to free himself and silently passed out.

"Took you guys long enough," Kasra chided. "The rest of Davian's bimbos are tied up over there in the corner. Did you get him?"

Kasra didn't come out of this ordeal unscathed either. She picked tiny pieces of glass shards from cuts on her arms and neck and beer dripped from the hair sticking to her skin. A red welt had started to take shape on her cheek, the likelihood it would turn into a nasty swollen bruise pretty high. At some point, she'd lost her heels, probably using them as a weapon to stab someone. Her black pencil skirt and white blouse looked like they had gone through a paper shredder.

“No. He got away.” I looked to my feet, embarrassed at myself.

“Oh. Well that sucks.” She scanned the bar and pursed her lips. Anyone who was lucky enough to escape had long since fled the building, and everyone else was either unconscious or almost unconscious, too drunk to move or understand what was going on. “Hmm. We should probably get out of here before anyone else shows up.”

Kasra had done a number on Davian’s henchmen, but unlike the rest of the people in the bar, they were still very conscious. And very pissed off.

The spicy scent of cinnamon cut through the musky atmosphere as Ryker used his magic to open a portal back to base. Kasra passed through first, shoving a stout man firmly in front of her.

I grabbed the bulkier of the two remaining men, leaving the remaining scrawny guy for Ryker. I smirked at him, and he just chuckled. I’d never felt like I had to prove anything to Ryker, but the two of us always had fun challenging each other to see who was stronger, faster, and smarter.

“Let’s go, Baldy.” The man was almost a full head taller than me, his biceps the size of my legs. I grasped one of his meaty arms, clasped it behind his back with magic-dampening handcuffs, and pushed him toward the portal. He abruptly stopped, firmly planted his feet on the ground, and headbutted me with the back of his skull. It packed such a punch that my vision vanished for a brief moment and I fell backwards onto my ass. “Son of a ...”

“Zulli!” Ryker took a step toward me but I waved him off.

I shook off the dizziness, jumping to my feet and throwing myself onto my prisoner who was running for the exit. My arms wrapped around his neck and my legs around his waist, holding on with all my remaining strength. Since I was half his size, he just took me for a piggy-back ride through the bar.

For such a bulky man, he darted around like a rabid fox, grunting and seething. He bounded over the body of a man who was groaning as he slowly regained consciousness. Baldy then twirled around with more finesse than I could have imagined. My legs lost their hold on his waist and swung out to my side. My foot swept across the bar, taking out a group of martini glasses that shattered when they hit the ground.

My fingers started to slip, my dwindling magic of little use. My palms burned as they chafed against the scratchy fabric of his shirt. After a few minutes of struggling, my grip finally let go. My momentum carried me forward, and my head smacked against the sharp corner of a table. I barely

had a moment to blink before I saw the plastic pitcher full of beer come crashing down onto my face.

The alcohol soaked into the scrapes and cuts on my skin, burning my eyes and igniting an eruption of pain like a pot of boiling water was just dumped on me. I used the hem of my shirt, soaked with Davian's salty magic water, to try and wipe it away. Black dots danced around my vision, my ability to stand thwarted by dizziness. My sight returned just in time to see a thick leather boot about to stomp down and crush my skull when a blast of heat hit my face. A hand shot through a portal, grabbing onto the man's ankle from the side and yanking his leg out from under him.

Baldy let out a frustrated grunt as he lost his balance, toppling over and slamming his jaw shut when it hit the hard floor. Licking the tip of a pointed fang, I crawled on top of him and sunk my teeth into his neck.

For such a brute, I felt only a minimal presence of magic. I sucked it out, careful only to take enough to subdue him. Draining too much magic would likely kill him, but if I didn't take enough, he could attack me again.

Like a silky mouthful of chamomile tea, notes of honey and citrus mingled with a delicate floral aftertaste that glided down my throat, warming my insides with magic. While I wasn't able to take on his powers, the extra magic energy boost was just what I needed to replenish my own.

Having completed my fill, I retracted my fangs and pushed myself off Baldy's back. His feet slipped across the wet floor as he tried to stand, kicking over a chair that clattered loudly.

"I totally had him," I reprimanded Ryker, not angry at him for assisting me but more annoyed that he'd had to.

My tenacious fugitive no longer had the energy to stand, so I wrapped both my hands around one tree trunk arm and hoisted him up myself.

"I know you did," Ryker responded, grabbing the other beanstalk of a man, who was too scared to try anything after seeing what happened to his buddy. Ryker's portal reopened, and he led me through it so we could head back to base. "I saw an opportunity and wanted to help."

We surfaced at the Chitol military base in the hallway near the heavily guarded holding cells. The officer on duty buzzed open the thick steel door that led inside.

"How's it going, Officer Haynes?" Ryker marched through like he was carrying a sack of feathers, while my knees were buckling underneath me as I tried to carry the weight of a horse over my shoulders.

“Slow night, so I can’t complain.” The soldier, a younger fellow whose newbie excitement hadn’t worn off yet, grabbed Ryker’s prisoner by the arm and led him into the hallway.

My foot squeaked against the tile floor, and I nearly flattened to the ground with a giant falling on top of me.

“You need some help, Zulli?” Ryker asked, holding out his hand to grab the man’s waist before I could stop him. This time, I accepted his generosity because otherwise, he’d end up having to carry both of us.

Our footsteps echoed in the quiet corridor. Most of the cells on either side of us were empty, and those that were occupied had sleeping bodies in them. The officer unlocked two adjacent cells, and hurried in our captives. They’d be kept here pending further investigation and, assuming they’d be found guilty of their crimes, transported to a more permanent prison facility.

On our way out, a burst of cheers and a round of enthusiastic applause rang out from the end of the hallway.

“What’s going on over there?” I asked Officer Haynes. The group of soldiers was too far away for me to hear.

“Captain Myra Llama just successfully completed her twenty-fifth mission by capturing one of the country’s most notorious terrorists! She’s not only the youngest military captain we’ve ever had, she also has a solid track record of never failing. She told me the guy was like twice her size and had some super powerful strength magic. He took a hostage and was about to crush the woman’s neck with his bare hands, but Myra used her ninja combat skills to not only free the hostage but also knock the guy out and bring him in! Amazing, right?” The guard peered up at the ceiling, dark eyes gleaming and a smile creeping up his thin face.

“Fan boy,” I muttered under my breath while rolling my eyes.

The soldier heard my comment, snapping his gaze at me and giving me a critical assessment. “You’re soaked and you smell nasty. Go take a shower.” He waved me off and went back to his command station.

As most people had gone home for the day or set out on other missions, the rest of the base was quieter than usual. The main hallways, normally bustling with human traffic, were mostly vacant. Only a few night owls had stuck around to get some extra work done.

I kept my chin up and shoulders stiff, stared straight ahead, and tried to avoid eye contact with Ryker and Kasra, but Ryker always had a sixth sense when he knew something was bothering me.

“It was a team effort, Zulli,” he spoke softly, patting a hand on my back. “We failed as a team.”

“It’s not that.” I shook my head, scrubbing a hand through my damp hair. “Davian made this comment about my dad. He said he was coming for him. Maybe he was just drunk or playing with me. I don’t know. A lot of people have strong feelings about my dad, since he makes money off people’s illnesses, but given his history with Davian, I can’t help but to worry that Davian is planning something against him. I should check on my dad, make sure he’s okay.”

“*After* you get those wounds checked out. You look like a bloody swamp monster.”

I could smell the stench of blood, beer, and salt water wafting off me. A finger touched the side of my head, a thick coating of warm liquid coating it. My head was still spinning, and my ripped clothes were stuck fast to my skin.

Kasra followed alongside me as I made my way toward the infirmary, Ryker heading off to the locker room in the other direction. The small medical space had six exam tables sectioned off by curtains. Fluorescent tube lights ran the length of the room, which made it look brighter than it actually was, with its stark white plastered walls, white furniture, and white tile floor.

“What trouble did you get into this time?” My favorite nurse, Lana, approached me, hands on hips in disapproval.

“Got stabbed, blasted with a water cannon, almost fell off a roof, and lost a battle with the side of a table. The usual.” My half grin was accompanied by a raise of my eyebrows.

Lana’s short auburn hair fell in flat waves just above her shoulders, the fringe pinned up and out of her face with a clip. Her blue-gray eyes were dulled by the black bags under them that she wore with pride, a sign that she tirelessly labored to attend to her patients no matter what time of day, forgoing precious sleep to ensure they were treated properly. Not bothering with a typical white lab coat, she wore a pair of black slacks and a neatly pressed patterned blouse.

She picked at every limb on my body, checking for injuries and determining how she should treat them. She slathered a variety of different gels all over the cuts and burns on my skin. The magic infused in them burned more than the wounds themselves, a sign that they were working. After a few minutes, it looked less like I had been skinned alive and more like a nasty sunburn from a long day at the beach.

“You’re lucky, Zulli,” Lana told me as she listened to my breathing through a stethoscope. “I know you’re trained to endure magic, but had that energy spell been more powerful, it would have likely stopped your heart.”

“Well, I *am* half cat shifter. Don’t I get nine lives?”

The nurse smiled and quietly laughed, adjusting her metal-rimmed glasses to get a better look at my injuries. “You’re also half spider. A lot of those buggers only live a few days, and that’s if no one squashes them first. Besides, with the amount of times I’ve seen you in here, I’d say you’re long past nine lives! Be careful will you?”

“Sure thing, Doc. Thanks.” I hopped off the examination chair and strolled out the door.

Kasra was waiting for me outside the infirmary, leaning against the cinder block wall with her arms folded across her chest.

“Aren’t you going in to get checked out?” I asked her.

“I’m fine. All I really want to do right now is go home, take a shower, and sleep. You ready?” She picked at a crusty piece of hair, saturated with dried blood and beer.

“Where’s Ryker?” My head twisted to scan the hallway.

“He said he had to do something and not to wait for him.”

Kasra jiggled her car keys in her hand, and I responded with a lazy smile. She happened to live in the same apartment complex as I did, so I hitched a ride back home with her. Officer Haynes would have to alert the proper authorities about the three men we brought in. After that, we still had to meet with the colonel for a debrief and there was a mountain of paperwork ahead of us before we’d be allowed to question them. There was no point in any of us sticking around for the rest of the night. We’d come back tomorrow reenergized and with clear minds to get our answers.

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