

Chapter 8

Asmore's Diner

An hour later, I was dressed in a lovely fur coat, blue tank top, and sexy leather pants with matching black ankle boots.



RAINE MONDAY

I realized, for the first time, I didn't look like a guy dressing in women's clothes, but an actual woman.

Asmore's was literally across the parking lot, and Joyce sat in one of the booths near the window.

"Wow, don't you look smexy!" she said, as I scooted into the booth.

"Thanks, you were right; those pants did fit."



"Girl, I got all kinda things up in that lost and found. Just let me know if there's anything you want to try on or wear, and we'll likely have it in multiple colors. I've been running a side business sellin' them things online."

I sighed at her use of 'Girl.' It was time to start getting used to it; my identity was changing, whether I liked it or not.

The waitress wore a pink uniform and set our placemats before us.

"Hey, Joyce!" She said, popping a big piece of gum. "Who's your pretty friend?"

"Hey, Rose," Joyce said. "This is Sean. He's our new IT guy at the hotel."

"Welcome to DarkWater Falls, Sean!"

"Uh, thanks, I guess," I said.

DARKWATER FALLS



“You don’t sound too thrilled,” Rose said.

“Yeah, it’s been a bit of a rollercoaster.”

“It can be like that at first,” she said. “But then you get used to it and realize it’s really just hell on earth!”

“Ha ha, Rose.”

“At least you’re not trying to put me on the menu,” I said. The pizza place—

“Mary-Beth is a bitch,” Rose said. “But her bark is—”

“Worse than her bite!” We all said at the same time, then laughed.

“Exactly.”

“So, I know the hotel is cursed,” I said. “What’s up with this restaurant? Are you a vampire also?”

“Nothing so dramatic,” Rose said. “We’re just a diner like every other diner you’ve ever been to.”

“But—” Joyce said.

Rose glanced at her, and Joyce gave a brief nod.

“But yeah, I take it you drank the water at Curl-Up-and-Dye?”

I glanced down at my budding breasts and shook out my long blonde hair. “Yeah.”

“So, all establishments in DarkWater have special *water*. It kinda goes with the name, ya know?”

I nodded, frowning in confusion.

“So, like you drank the water at the salon. She told you, you’d be her shampoo curl, or stylist or something, right?”

I nodded.

“So we have green water here. What color is the water at the hotel?”

“Blue,” Joyce said.

“Joyce drank the blue water when she first got here. It’s why she’s relegated to the hotel. She can’t work anywhere else, and if she tries to leave DarkWater, she’ll always return to the hotel. She’s stuck there until someone else drinks the water.”

“Wait.” I paused, holding my hands up. “So because I drank the water at the salon....”

“That’s your station.” Rose ran her fingers through her hair. I noticed it was getting split, and she needed a deep conditioning treatment. *How the hell did I know that?*

“You’re starting to catch on.”

“So, I have to return to the salon and work there?”

Both the ladies nodded.

“But I’m leaving DarkWater! The only reason I’m here is because—“

“Because the tunnel is flooded,” they both said in unison, then giggled.

“So I can’t leave?”

They both shook their head sadly. “Believe me, honey; we’ve all tried,” Joyce said.

“But you’re letting me stay at the hotel!” I said. “We even had a deal!”

“You can stay as long as you’d like, baby.” Joyce said. “And if you can figure out a way to get out of DarkWater Falls, let us know, wouldya?”

I felt myself wanting to cry again. Was I really trapped here? The waitress set to water glasses in front of us, and I *almost* took a sip, then glanced up at her.

“Just water, honey. You’ve already received the gift of DarkWater.”

I sighed, and drank some.

“So, I don’t get it,” I said. “You said the curse here at this diner was different.”

She nodded. “Owner is a demon. He’s got a rather large hellgate under the supply room. Same as the church.”

Joyce nodded. “Rose, I want the special.”

“And for you, honey?” The waitress said, looking at me.

“Um...whatever she’s having.”

“Two specials, coming right up!”

I stared at the placemat in front of me. It was all too much. I felt like crying again.

DARKWATER FALLS

“It’s a lot to take in” Joyce said, putting her hand on mine.

“Yeah.”

“It’s not like you won’t have friends, though.”

I looked up at her, tears brimming in my eyes. “Until Mary-Beth or the Chadwolf make me a blood bag?”

“Listen, I know there’s some scary things in DarkWater, but there’s ways of staying under the radar, you know?”

“How?”

She shrugged. “All the creatures here have to offer you a choice. They won’t just indiscriminately slaughter you, unless you make the wrong choice.”

“Like Mary-Beth telling me to get out of town?”

She nodded. “She could have caught you with the water from the diner and either turned you, fed on you, or added you to their stock. She didn’t do that. She told you to get, while the going was good.”

“If I didn’t have the cramps, I might have made it.”

“Yeah, a tg transition is rough on the body.”

Rose brought us two cheeseburgers and fries. They looked and smelled amazing.



RAINE MONDAY

I suddenly found I was ravenous, and began eating quickly, wolfing down the burger and fries in almost no time.

“I’m going through a similar transformation that’s equally disturbing,” Diana said.

“Oh?” I said, munching on a French fry.

“Dominic from DWF General is turning me.”

“Turning you into what?” I said.

She smiled. “I’ll be part of the vampire faction.”

I sighed. “Aww, and we were having such fun.”

She took a small bite of her burger, then winced. “We can still be friends, but dead meat no longer appeals to me.

“How much...” I stopped myself. It didn’t seem polite to continue.



“I’m almost complete. He’ll finish me tomorrow night.” She replied to my unspoken comment.

I nodded, watching her carefully.

“Don’t be afraid; like I said, I’m still partly human.”

“You seem kind of excited.”

She nodded, rubbing her neck. “Dominic is a powerful man. To have him as my liege will be so yummy!”

DARKWATER FALLS

I nodded again, wishing for the umpteenth time I could leave this crazy place.

“So what’s it like?” I said.

She shrugged. “Well, I’ve received two treatments so far—only one more to go.”

I nodded, listening.

“I can hear better; my vision has cleared up. I have zero aches and pains, and my strength has increased tenfold. I can lift *both* trashcans behind the hotel, and they’re full! I love the feeling of the power, the strength, and the clarity it’s giving me.”

“All at the price of your soul,” I said, munching some fries.

“Who hasn’t bargained their soul, though?” She tried to eat a fry but stuck out her tongue and set it back on the plate. “We work for a business, a government, an agency. In many ways, they own us just as deeply.”

“Won’t you miss the sun?” I said.

She shrugged. “Yeah, that’s about the worst part. I thought the worst would be drinking blood, but...”

“But now you don’t mind?”

Her eyes lit up briefly with an inner fire. “God, no. I crave it now, but I’m trying to be civil about it and only drink what I can get at the hospital. Until tonight, I could still eat human food, but apparently, I’ve even crossed that boundary.”

“I guess I don’t see the attraction. Won’t you be sad to become a monster?”

“I’ll only be feral for a couple of days. After that, I should have some control. It won’t be too bad.”

“I see.”

“There are five factions in Darkwater, Sean. Vampires, Werewolves, Witches, Demons, and Ghouls.”

“And I guess I’m what, food?”

She shrugged. “You don’t have to be.”

“Is Mei considered a witch?”

She nodded. “Potent reality blender. There are different types of witches, just as there are different kinds of vampires, demons, and werewolves.”

“Oh my,” I said.

She chuckled at that.

“So, what kind of vampire will you be?”

“There’s Asps, Adders, Rattlesnakes, and Cobras. I’ll be part of the Cobra colony. Dominic is the leader.”

“I see.”

“Do you think you’ll be a witch like Mei?”

I sighed and shrugged, feeling very tired. “I don’t know. I want just to be me.”

RAINE MONDAY

“You’ll need to align yourself soon, Sean. Otherwise, you’ll be aligned, or ingested, against your will.”

“Will there be anything else?” Rose said, returning.

“No,” Joyce handed her some bills. “Keep the change, gorgeous.”

“Aww, thanks!”

Joyce and I walked back to the hotel. Night had fallen, and I could hear soft moaning from one of the rooms surrounding us.

“Guess one of the ghosts is active.”

Joyce nodded.

“Think Wanda will be around?”

She patted me on the arm. “Oh, I’m sure of it, baby.”

I sighed, not liking her tone of voice.

As I returned to the room, past the doorway of the moaning ghost, I realized I didn’t like it at all.