

Zane: The Demon Prince

Chapter 1: Zane

My name is Zane and I'm not your average high school senior. I'm half human and half demon. My "father"--even though I don't like to refer to him as that--is Viper, the king of the demon world. He met a human woman and she had me. Viper is planning to fulfill a prophecy that would allow him to cover Earth in a never-ending blanket of darkness.

The prophecy says that if the demon king and his son ever combined their powers after the son's 18th birthday, their powers would be strong enough to take over the Earth. Viper wants me to be his Demon Prince. Of course I want no fucking part of that. However, I don't really have a choice. The nightmare I had last night confirmed that.

I open my eyes and I look around. I'm in a big, empty black space. Ghosts and spirits circle around me, making my head spin. Things get even worse when a shadowy figure emerges in front of me. He has spiky black hair and is dressed in all black. My blood turns as cold as ice. It's Viper, the king of the demon world.

My father.

"Zane, my boy, why won't you join me? Once we rule the Earth, the universe will be a breeze!" He exclaims while spinning around in a circle.

"Screw that!" I snarl. "I want nothing to do with your evil plan! Mom didn't, either! She didn't deserve to die!" I struggled to keep my tears from falling. No way am I gonna let this asshole see me cry. He growls and throws his arms in the air.

"Fine, Zane! You're weak, just like all of those pathetic humans! The prophecy is inevitable! There's nothing you can do to stop it! You can't change your demon blood! Soon it will consume you, and when it does, you WILL help me conquer the earth!"

Viper raises his hands and the spirits float into my mouth, choking me and making it almost impossible to breathe. Then, hundreds of hands grab me and pull me down into the darkness. I don't want to admit it, but deep down I know he's right.

There's nothing I can do to stop him.

"Zane! Zane, wake up!" I hear someone shout as they shake me. I shoot up in my bed, my heart beating so hard and fast I think it might explode out of my chest.

"Shit!" I growl through my teeth. I slowly open my eyes and see my uncle John. He's wearing a clean-cut suit and tie. He's a doctor at Healing Hearts Hospital. He runs a hand through his shoulder length dark hair. His dark brown eyes are full of worry.

Viper met my mom and got her pregnant to get a new demon prince. There were no new young demons in his world. He also wanted her to be his "demon queen." Of course, she refused. She ran away from him and called John for help. Before John could get to her, Viper got furious and killed her.

I was only three years old at the time and John adopted me. The following year, he sat me down and told me everything my mom told him: who Viper really was, his prophecy and some demon powers that I eventually developed when I turned sixteen last year.

"It's okay. It was just a bad dream," John whispers. After what feels like forever, air finally returns to my lungs.

“What was your nightmare about?” He asks. I want to snap, “*Why would you ask that?*” since he knows about Viper, my mom, everything. Instead, I simply say:

“I don’t wanna talk about it.” John looks down, immediately regretting he asked.

Nice going, asshole.

“I understand. I’ll go get breakfast ready, then.” He leaves my room without another word and heads downstairs to the kitchen.

“Damn it!” I grumble as I get out of bed, grab my clothes from my drawer and head to the bathroom. *I shouldn’t have been that way, but John should know by now that I don’t like talking about my problems. It won’t change the fact that my father is a monster and I have demon blood coursing through my veins.*

It won’t bring my mom back.

I glance around me and notice my bedroom looks darker than I remember.

That’s weird. I could’ve sworn John turned on the light when he woke me up.

I look up and see that my bedroom light is on. Then, I look down...and see dark shadows around my hands. I flinch and drop my clothes.

No! Not again!

A year ago, my demon powers started to emerge. They would take over me whenever I got really emotional, either from anger or fear. If I don’t keep my emotions under control, I could lose my humanity and become a complete demon, which is what Viper has wanted all along. I take another deep breath and calm down.

I'm okay. I'm okay.

After I slip out of my pajamas and take a shower, I stare at my reflection in the mirror. It's not helping me forget my nightmare at all. My ocean-blue eyes are staring back at me. I try to comb back my spiky black hair with blonde streaks, but my hands shake so damn much that I nearly drop the comb. The black hair came from Viper. I got the blue eyes and blonde hair from my mom.

Mom.

God damn it!

My eyes turn into a dark blue color, getting darker by the second. I notice that those shadows are spreading from my hands to my arms and legs. I clench my teeth in frustration and see them turn into pointy, sharp fangs. I lean my hands on the sink, shake my head and take ragged breaths. I look up and see that the shadows have disappeared, and my eyes and mouth are returning to normal. I let out a big sigh of relief. I really need to keep it together or Viper's prophecy will definitely come true. I groan and get dressed in black jeans, a black t-shirt, a denim jacket and brown leather boots.

I walk down the stairs and toward the kitchen. My stomach rumbles when I see the stack of waffles and glass of chocolate milk John left for me. As I eat breakfast, I try to forget my shitty morning.

Maybe going to school will help me forget about the nightmare.

The school bell of the last period rings and I'm beyond relieved this day is over. I practically run out of my World History classroom. As I walk the hallways at school, I keep my

head down. I'm doing everything I can to not draw attention to myself. After my nightmare, I know the smallest thing could tick me off and send me spiraling into darkness.

I can't wait to get home and just be alone.

My head is still down as I bump into a guy wearing a football jersey.

"Watch where you're going, loser!" He shouts. I look up. He puffs out his chest, and it almost makes me want to laugh.

"Whatever," I mutter. He grabs me by the shirt collar and knocks me against a locker.

"What did you say!" I look around and see a crowd starting to form around us.

I'm about to lose it.

Regular people would get into a fight right now. I'm close to unleashing the demon inside of me and ripping this dude apart, piece by piece.

"I'm sorry," I breathe out. He lets me go.

"Just don't let it happen again." The school day is over and my anger is reaching a breaking point. First the nightmare, then that dumbass jock?

I can't take this anymore.

I lean against a tree on the other side of the school. I pull at my hair as I try to center myself. Emotions are attacking me like a million little wasps. I can feel the darkness inside me filling every corner of my being. Soon, I'll be nothing but a black hole. No light can penetrate my dark heart. Dangerous thoughts start to echo in my head.

What's the point of trying to be a normal human? It won't solve anything.

"Stop it," I groan.

Would helping Viper with the prophecy really be all that bad?

"Stop it!" I yell.

I mean, it--

"STOP IT!" I scream.

There's no hope left for me.

Chapter 2: Melody

The alarm on my phone goes off, playing "Here Comes the Sun" by The Beatles. I smile.

That's Mom's favorite song.

I turn the alarm off, get out of my bed and stretch. I notice a bright light shining through the curtains. I open them and gasp. It's such a beautiful, sunny day today. After I shower, I get dressed in my favorite yellow sweater, light brown skirt and light brown shoes.

I brush my long, dark, chestnut brown hair and look at my reflection in the mirror. My light brown eyes match Mom's. I smile again. I put my cell phone in my bag and head out the front door of my apartment. On the way to school, I take out a picture of Mom that I always carry with me.

"Hi, Mom," I say softly, my eyes watering. "I'm on my way to school. I'll see you later. I love you." I hug the picture and put it back in my bag.

My father passed away from cancer when I was three years old, so I never really knew him. For the next 13 years, it was just me and Mom. She was my best friend. I know it's silly for a teenager to say that about their mom, but it's true. Last year, when I was 16, she passed away in an accident.

When my landlord heard what happened, he let me live by myself rent free until I graduate and find a job. I felt guilty for not paying rent like everyone else, so I insisted that I find a job now. I've been working at an afterschool center a few blocks from my high school ever since. I miss Mom every day, but I'm still happy for all the memories we had. That's why I always have a picture of her with me. The school bell rings and I exit my chemistry class, the last period of the day. I reach into my bag and take out the picture of Mom.

"Hi, Mom," I say as I smile at the picture. Her wide, bright smile shines like the sun. "Another school day finished. I passed that Chemistry test. I'm proud that all the hard work I put into studying paid off." As I put the picture back in my bag, I feel a tap on my shoulder. I turn around and see a girl with blonde hair done in a ponytail. It's my classmate, Katy.

"Hey, Melody. Did you hear about what happened earlier today?" She asks.

"No. What?"

"The quarterback almost got into a fight with that dark, scary guy."

"What do you mean, 'dark, scary guy?'" I ask.

"He had spiky black hair with yellow streaks and light blue eyes." She pauses and lowers her voice to a whisper. "Someone said he had an evil look in his eyes." Before I can ask Katy what that means, we hear a buzzing sound. She takes out her phone, looks down at it and gasps.

"I gotta go, Melody. I don't wanna be late for my new job. See you tomorrow," she says as she hurries out of the classroom. I don't know where Katy works because I don't see her that much outside of school. I walk towards the local pizzeria down the block from the school to have dinner. As I walk there, I think about what Katy said for a minute. *Whoever this guy was, I felt bad for him.*

"Everybody is going through something."

That's what Mom used to say. Nobody knows that more than me.

"No."

Someone is groaning. Who can that be?

"No!"

What? They're yelling now?

"NO!"

Oh my gosh! Now they're screaming in pain!

I turn around and see someone leaning against a tree in the opposite direction of the school. As I step closer, my breath hitches. This is the guy that Katy was talking about. I can't see his face, but the spiky black and yellow hair is enough to prove it's him. He's pulling his hair, grinding his teeth and growling. He must still be angry about what happened. If he is, I don't want to irritate him more, but I can't just stand here. Mom's voice echoes in my mind:

"Everybody is going through something."

She's right. I have to find a way to help him.

“U-Um, excuse me? Are you alright?” I ask him, my voice shaking. He looks at me and my skin tingles. He really does have light blue eyes, like an ocean.

“I’m fine,” he wheezes.

He definitely doesn’t sound fine.

I try to ease the panic building inside me. If this guy really is in pain and needs help, I have to remain calm. I steady my breathing.

“Are you sure? Should I take you into the school so you can see the nurse? I could even call 911 for you.”

“No, really, I just...” He trails off. Then, I see something that can’t possibly be real. His eyes start to change from light blue to dark blue to pitch black, like when you sleep in your bedroom and there isn’t the smallest bit of light. His clenched teeth are turning into pointy, sharp fangs. Scary markings appear on his body that look like skulls, dragons and gargoyles. His entire body is being engulfed by dark shadows. I take a step back, gasp and cover my mouth with my hands, holding back a scream. I feel like I’m in a horror movie.

What is happening?

I panic, thinking he’s about to attack me. Instead, he lets out a loud, painful scream and falls to the ground. He’s pulling on his hair with one hand and clutching his chest with the other.

“Oh my gosh! Are you okay?!” I cry out. Without thinking, I tug on the front of his shirt and turn him completely on his back. I look directly into his eyes. They still have a nightmarish black color.

"It's okay. It's going to be okay," I whisper. I know I'm crazy for what I'm doing. This guy is a stranger and I've just seen him change into...well, I'm not really sure. But I don't care; no one deserves to be in that much pain. I kneel on the ground next to him, my hand laying on top of his chest. His heart rate is starting to slow down and his breathing is calming. His teeth are straightening, the marks are disappearing and his eyes are returning to their light blue color. He sits up and puts his hands on his knees. He slowly looks up and into my eyes.

It feels like he's looking into my heart.

"Who...Who are you?" he whispers.

"I'm Melody. We go to the same school," I tell him. His eyes go wide.

"Seriously?"

"Yeah," I giggle nervously. "Small world, huh? I heard you saying 'No' over and over, and it got worse and I just..." I swallow hard, feeling my eyes get watery. "I just had to find a way to help you." He groans as he gets into a sitting position.

"But you don't know me and you just saw..."

I shrug.

"I know, but my mom used to tell me that we should all do what we can to help other people, because you never know when you might be the angel they need." He's just staring at me now.

Nice, Melody. He thinks you're weird.

I start to ramble and laugh nervously. "You know what? Forget I said anything. I don't really know what I'm talking about." He shakes his head.

"It's fine. Actually, I think that's exactly what I needed to hear today." My heart feels like it's sprouting wings and starting to soar.

"What's your name?" I ask.

"It's Zane," he replies. Then, he suddenly looks away from me.

"Listen, Melody..." My breath hitches after hearing him say my name for the first time.

"It's not that I don't appreciate you helping me, but you saw what I turned into. I'm dangerous. It's best if you stay away from me." I look down at the ground. I know he's right. Still, something inside me won't listen. I look back up at him.

"But, you were in so much pain. Maybe I could..." He slowly stands up and now I can see his full body for the first time. *He's incredibly tall with muscles bulging from his arms, chest and legs. I'm feeling things I've never felt for a guy before and I have no idea why.*

"Trust me, Melody. It's for the best. The last thing I want to do is hurt someone," he whispers before walking away.

Chapter 3: Zane

I feel like the biggest asshole in the world as I walk away from Melody. I really did mean it when I thanked her for helping me. If she hadn't been there, I would've gone full demon. I could never let that happen, because there would be no going back. Actually, it was kinda bizarre that despite how obviously scared she was of me, all she cared about was helping me. A complete stranger.

A monster.

Out of nowhere, I remember what she said her mom told her: *"We should all do what we can to help other people because you never know when you might be the angel they need."*

This girl had been my angel.

I shake my head. *It doesn't matter, anyway. She had already seen what I was like. It's gonna be hard for us to stay away from each other since we go to the same school.*

I can't wait to get home.

I step inside the front door of John's house. I walk down the hall and see him in the kitchen, washing dishes. He turns around and sees me.

"Hi, Zane," he greets with a smile. *He's obviously trying to pretend my nightmare never happened.*

I wish I could do the same.

"Hi, John," I say, lowering my eyes to the ground. John's smile quickly fades.

"What's wrong?" He asks. I let out a heavy sigh.

"It's happened," I whisper. John's face turns pale.

"Oh, no," he whispers.

He knows exactly what I'm talking about.

He turns off the faucet, dries his hands and puts them on my shoulders.

“Come sit down, Zane,” he says, gesturing to my bedroom. I sit on my bed and he sits on a black chair by my desk. My heart, mind and body feel as heavy as lead. A deep, weathered breath leaves my lungs.

“At school, I accidentally bumped into this jock douchebag. He got in my face and wanted to fight. I knew I would completely lose it if I did, so I just apologized and he walked away.” I’m struggling to keep my breathing calm as I continue. “After school, I was so angry. I don’t know how I can keep this demon from emerging, and...I just...”

“Started to mutate?” John finishes, his own voice shaking now. I nod. Suddenly, John’s eyes start to widen. “Wait, Zane. You said you *started* to mutate. That means that something made you stop. What was it?”

My heart beats faster when I think of Melody, even though it shouldn’t. She was clearly scared, and yet she still calmed me down. It was like she was more scared *for* me than she was scared *of* me.

That smile.

Damn it!

“This girl from school heard me screaming and ran to me. She saw me start to change and...”

“She what?!” John yells as he shoots up from his seat.

“John, can I finish?” I groan.

“Sorry,” he says as she settles back into the chair.

“So, even though It was obvious how scared of me she was, she just wanted to help me. Without realizing it, I started to calm down and turned back to normal.” John’s eyes seem to sparkle.

What the hell?

“Zane, I think this girl is what you’ve been looking for,” John says. My skin tingles.

“What do you mean?” I ask, clearly puzzled.

“Think about it. The demon part of you starts to take over when you’re angry or afraid, but this girl calmed you down.”

I can’t argue with that. Seriously, what is it about Melody that makes me forget about my fucked-up family? Her eyes? Her smile? The way she just wants me to be happy?

That’s all I’ve ever wanted.

Then, I groan loudly.

“It doesn’t matter. I told her to stay away from me. It’s for the best. If I ever hurt someone, I really will become a complete demon.” John sighs softly and gets up from his seat.

“Don’t give up, Zane. You’re not your father. If your powers ever do develop, you can use them to help people, not hurt them.”

He quietly leaves my bedroom and closes the door. I fall back on my bed and rub my eyes.

Yeah, right. I’m a monster, not a fucking hero.

The next school day flies by. I haven't run into Melody, which is a good thing. Being around me will only put her in danger. I stop in my tracks.

Why can't I stop thinking about her?

Yeah, she helped me, but that was it. She's just an ordinary girl.

Get her out of your head already, Zane!

I walk to the pizzeria down the street from school. Maybe having some dinner will clear my head. On the way there, I pass by an afterschool center.

Huh. Never noticed that before.

I push open the doors of the pizzeria. Since I still can't stop thinking about Melody, I'm not paying attention to where I'm going. Next thing I know, a box of pizza is flying through the air. Out of reflex, I catch it like a running back. When I look up, I see a small group of kids at a red and white-striped table. They're cheering, like I had just saved someone's life. I look to the left and see Melody smiling from ear to ear.

Damn, this girl sure is pretty up close.

Damn, I sure am an idiot!

"Hi, Zane. It's, um, nice to see you again," she says as she looks into my eyes. Her voice is shaky and she quickly looks down.

What the hell? Why is she suddenly so nervous around me?

Oh, right. I told her to stay away from me.

She probably thinks I'm annoyed. Maybe I am, just a little. Not with her, but with the world for putting her in danger by being around me.

"Yeah, sure," I say dismissively while handing her the pizza box. I glance at the kids.

"So, what's the deal with the kids?" I ask.

"I work at an afterschool center between here and our school," she explains. "We're having dinner here. Then, I'll bring them back to the center and their parents will pick them up."

Great. Now I've put these kids in danger, too.

"Hey, you. Don't we go to the same school?" I hear a girl ask. I turn around and see a blonde-haired girl behind the counter. Her name tag reads *Katy*.

"Yeah, I guess," I say.

I have never met this girl before.

She grimaces.

"I heard you almost got into a fight with our school's quarterback. What was that about?"

Shit. I had forgotten about that.

Before I can answer, I see a blonde-haired guy walk through the front door and towards Katy. He must be a customer.

"Hello," Katy says as she smiles at him. "What would you like to--" Before she finishes, the guy pulls her by her shirt collar, drags her across the counter and onto the floor, and puts a gun to her head. Her scream of terror echoes throughout the pizzeria.

“Listen up, folks! Unless you don’t want this bitch’s death on your conscience, you won’t move an inch while she gives me all of the cash in this dump!” He shouts. Melody crosses her hands over her chest. Just before she screams, I put my hand over her mouth.

“Melody, hide!” I hiss into her ear as I pull us under the table.

“Down here, everybody!” She whispers to the kids as they crawl under the table. Katy slowly turns around and sees her coworkers and boss, white as ghosts. She whispers “I’m sorry” to them as she opens every cash register and dumps the money into the robber’s bag. I feel the demon inside of me rising. Suddenly, I remember what John told me about my powers:

“Don’t give up, Zane. You’re not your father. If your powers ever do develop, you can use them to help people, not hurt them.”

Time to find out if you’re right, John.

I carefully climb from under the table and head toward the robber. I stop when I feel Melody pulling on my jacket.

“No, Zane! It’s too dangerous! You could...you could...” Her eyes turn watery. I wipe away her tears with my thumb.

You’re right. I could die.

“It’s okay, Melody. I have a plan,” I whisper. I hold up my hand and create a black force field around her and the kids. I stomp towards the robber.

“Hey, asshole!” I shout. “Why don’t pick on someone your own size?!” Still holding Katy’s left wrist, the robber drags her as he stomps over to me.

“Shut the hell up, you douchebag!” He yells. Suddenly, he gets a wicked grin on his face. His eyebrows rise in excitement and his mouth spreads wide as he slowly loosens his grip on the gun’s trigger against Katy’s head.

“NO!” Katy screams.

I grind my teeth as I feel my demon side starting to take over. I look up and see the dark aura circling around me like a hurricane. I look down and see that a strong, black energy has formed in my hands. The robber and Katy gasp. In my peripheral I can see Melody whisper, “Oh, no,” even though the force field is soundproof. She thinks she knows what’s coming, but it’s actually gonna be a whole lot worse than when we met. I give the robber a striking glare.

“Who are you, anyway? a wannabe hero?” He scoffs.

Maybe John is right. Maybe I can use my powers to help people...like a hero.

Without saying another word I let out a guttural growl, point my open palms at the robber and shoot dark energy at him. As he screams, he lets go of Katy and his gun. He knocks into a glass wall and falls to the floor. As much as I try to get myself under control, I know I’m not back to normal when I see my reflection in the shards of broken glass. My eyes are still almost completely black, my teeth still have sharp fangs and the demonic markings are still on my arms. I clench my hands into fists, the dark energy still visible all around them.

Fuck!

This is the first time I’ve seen myself in the middle of my true form. I slowly turn around and see the terrified looks on everyone’s faces... including Melody’s.

My body almost instantly returns to normal. The dark energy in my hands quickly fades away and the force field vanishes around Melody and the kids. I look up and see Katy, her boss, her coworkers, the customers, the kids and Melody staring at me, their eyes full of fear. I look

back at my reflection in the broken glass. Even though I'm back to normal, I still feel like shit for losing control of the demon inside of me.

I need to get out of here.

Without a second thought, I stand up and run out of the pizzeria, not looking back once.

Some hero, huh, John? Yeah, right. More like a fucking coward.

Chapter 4: Melody

Everyone in the pizzeria is shocked and speechless. Zane's transformation today was way scarier than we met. On that day I could tell he had some dark demon powers, but today I actually saw them, and so did everyone else. That might be why Zane ran away. He probably thought they saw him as a monster, not the hero that he was. He just saved me, the kids, Katy and everyone from getting killed by that robber. That's all that mattered to me. I feel my heart ache as I think about how much pain Zane must be in.

I lead the kids out of the pizzeria and call their parents. Five minutes after the parents pick up the kids, I hear sirens nearby. Several police cars pull up to the pizzeria. A few of the officers grab the robber and present him to an older officer with slicked back black hair, a thick mustache, glasses and a name tag that reads *Chief Baxter*.

He looks at the robber and scratches his head, then tells the other officers:

"Take him to Healing Hearts. It's the best hospital in the city. They'll run some tests and let us know if he's alive. If he is, we'll take him into custody after he recovers." The officers nod, escort the robber to a police car and drive away. Then, I see a younger officer asking Katy some questions. He has short, smooth white hair. He looks to be in his early 20's. His name tag reads *Officer Fitz*.

“Tell me, Katy. How did the suspect end up against the wall?” Officer Fitz asks her. I start to panic.

Oh, no. Is she going to tell the truth? If she does, will the police go after Zane?

After taking a deep breath, she tells them everything that happened. Chief Baxter grunts in frustration.

“Yeah, right. That’s the most ridiculous thing I’ve ever heard. Why don’t you tell us what really happened?” Katy grabs onto his uniform.

“But that *is* what happened! I’m telling the truth!” Suddenly, she turns to me.

“Tell them, Melody! You were there! That guy from our school even made a force field to protect you and those kids you watch!” Chief Baxter and Officer Fitz glance at me. My heart is beating faster by the second. Officer Fitz slowly walks toward me.

“Miss, did you also see what happened today?” He asks. He seems more patient and friendly than Chief Baxter. I look up at him.

“Yes,” I say in a quiet voice. “I saw the same thing that Katy did. I know it’s hard to believe, but it really did happen like she said.” My eyes move frantically between Chief Baxter and Officer Fitz. I’m praying that they believe me. Officer Fitz smiles at me, and I relax a little.

Chief Baxter still does not look convinced.

“Fitz, look through the security camera. I want to see this ‘power’ for myself.” Officer Fitz stands on a chair to reach the security camera on the ceiling. He pulls out a camcorder from his bag and connects it with the security camera. After a minute, a black and white video develops of Zane walking towards the robber while still holding Katy. Everything that Katy said happened today plays on the video: Zane changing before our very eyes and making scary,

growling sounds, attacking the robber with his dark powers, me walking over to comfort him and then Zane running out of the pizzeria. The video stops abruptly.

“What the hell?!” Chief Baxter shouts.

“Oh my God!” exclaims Officer Fitz.

“See? I told you I wasn’t making it up!” Katy yells. Then, Chief Baxter says something that terrifies me:

“That young man is a monster.” I swear, I can feel my heart start to break.

“Now, hold on, Chief,” Officer Fitz says. “Yes, if what we saw is real, then this kid could be dangerous. But, he did just save several people from being killed.”

“That’s right!” I blurt before I can stop myself. I will do anything to convince everyone that Zane is not a monster, including Zane himself.

“If he really was a monster, he wouldn’t have done what he did! If you ask me, he’s a hero!” My eyes move to Katy and she gives me a small smile. She feels the same way I do. Car engines rev near the pizzeria. We all turn around and see several news vans approaching.

“Fitz, take these young ladies home. I’ll deal with the press,” Chief Baxter orders. Officer Fitz nods and then turns to me and Katy.

“Come on, girls,” he says. I give Officer Fitz the address to my apartment. While Katy and I ride in his police car, I can’t stop thinking how unfair it is that Chief Baxter called Zane a monster.

“What will the police do about...that guy?” I ask Officer Fitz, making sure I don’t use Zane’s name.

"Honestly, even though that kid thwarted a crime, he's clearly a threat. We'll have to keep an eye out for him," he replies.

"That's not fair!" Katy shouts. "We would be dead without him and you're acting like he was the one who robbed the pizzeria and almost killed us!" He lets out a deep sigh.

"Listen, girls. I agree with you about him. But, with powers like that, he could be unstable and a much bigger danger than a gunman."

I have to agree with that, even though I don't want to.

"If he keeps helping people like this, we'll back off our surveillance on him. If he ends up putting someone in danger, we'll have to take...drastic measures." I swallow hard. I almost ask Officer Fitz what that means, but I don't. I look over at Katy and she has a frustrated look on her face. She probably doesn't want to know the answer, either. The police car pulls up to my apartment. I take my house key out of my skirt pocket and unlock the door. *My bedroom, bathroom, kitchen and living room are pretty small, but I don't mind. I'm sure Mom would be proud of me for staying so positive after she passed away. I wonder if she would also be proud of how protective I am of Zane.*

There I go, thinking about him again.

I sit on my bed and take out my picture of her. "Hi, Mom," I say softly, my hands shaking. "I barely know Zane and I know that he can be dangerous, but I still believe he's a good person. What do you think?" I remember what Mom told me about helping other people and being their angel. I told Zane this when we met. I suddenly smile at the picture. "You're right, Mom. Zane was my angel, Katy's angel, everybody's angel today. Chief Baxter may not see him that way and Zane may not even see *himself* that way, but I do." I hold the picture to my chest.

Zane... I wish I could hold you like this.

Chapter 5: Zane

My mind is spinning as I barge into my bedroom.

What the fuck was wrong with me?

I took John's advice to be a "hero," saved a bunch of people from an armed robber and what did I do? I hightailed it out of there without another word, like *I* was the criminal!

Fuck! Why did I run away?

Maybe it was seeing my reflection in all that broken glass. It reminded me of how I have this demon blood mixed with my human blood and there's nothing I can do to change it. I punch my pillow when I think about how I ran away.

I'm going to hurt everyone eventually...including her. I just don't know when.

The next morning, the alarm clock feels like a jackhammer into my skull. I look at it and it reads 6:30 A.M. My mind is still spinning from what happened yesterday. I groan as I sit up and rub my eyes. After showering and getting dressed I walk to the kitchen and make myself some breakfast. John usually leaves at 5:00 A.M to get ready for his shift at the hospital. When I turn on the TV, what I see on the morning news takes my breath away. The news crawl reads:

"Yesterday, police arrived at the aftermath of an attempted robbery at a local pizzeria. He held a female teenage employee at gunpoint. Chief Baxter, head of the city's police department had this to say at a press conference."

I lean against the kitchen table, trying to calm my racing heart. I look up and see the chief of police talking in front of a sea of reporters.

“On our surveillance camera, we discovered that a young man with some kind of dark powers wounded the suspect. While we are grateful that he saved several lives, we still consider him very dangerous.”

You’ve gotta be fucking kidding me!

“We will maintain surveillance for him rigorously in the coming days. If he continues to help and protect our citizens, we will eventually lift our surveillance on him. However, if we identify any sign of him being a threat to the public, we will capture him by any means necessary.”

I turn off the TV. I’m beyond pissed off.

Talk about ungrateful!

As I walk down the school hallways, I keep my head down and my hands in my pockets, just like always.

At lunchtime I sit at a table by myself. I’m praying that everyone will just leave me the hell alone, for their own safety.

“Zane!” I hear a high voice call out. I look up and see Melody walking toward me. My heartbeat is accelerating. I hope she doesn’t think I’m a douchebag for running out of the pizzeria, like a bat out of hell.

“Um...is it okay if I sit next to you?” she asks, clearly nervous.

“Sure,” I simply say. Her mouth spreads into a wide, beautiful smile. For the first time since I met her, I smile back. Melody sits next to me and most of the darkness in my chest fades away. But, I still feel terrible about yesterday.

“Melody, I’m sorry about yesterday. I was just so overwhelmed by everything. Having Katy, your kids and everyone see me mutate, seeing my scary powers, and then me seeing myself. I know it’s no excuse for running away, but...” Suddenly, Melody wraps her arms around me, pulling me in for a big hug. She feels so warm. The darkness left inside me immediately disappears. I’ve never felt anything like this before. She pulls back. Her eyes are watery, but she’s still smiling.

“It’s okay, Zane. I understand. I can’t imagine how hard it was for you. I saw the morning news. It made me really sad because Chief Baxter made it seem like you had some kind of ulterior motive. I know that’s not true. You saved everyone. You were like a hero.” Then, Melody says something that almost breaks my heart:

“I just wish you would see yourself the way I do.” I look down at the floor.

“Me too,” I whisper. A hurricane of emotions begins to spin inside of me. Now that Melody has seen my powers develop and part of my true form, I can’t hide who I really am from her anymore. I let out a deep breath and ask her:

“Melody, do you want to come to my house tomorrow after school? There’s something I need to talk to you about.” The nervous look on her face already makes me regret asking her, but I can’t back out now. I put my hand on her shoulder. “I like you, Melody. You’re the first real friend I’ve ever had. But, if we’re going to keep hanging out, you need to know everything about me.” She sits there silent for a minute.

“O-oh, okay,” she said with a shaky voice. She reaches into her skirt pocket. “I’ll make a memo of it on my phone.” When she tries to pull her phone out, a piece of paper falls on the floor. “Oh, no! I’m sorry, Mom!” She panics as she frantically picks it up.

Mom? What the hell?

The picture is of a woman with short, reddish-brown hair and a big grin on her face.

"Who's that?" I ask, even though I'm pretty sure I know who it is.

"This is my mom. She was my best friend." She glances down at the picture again, then briefly closes her eyes. "No. She *is* my best friend." She looks back at me. "My mom passed away in an accident last year." My heart is breaking for her.

"Oh my God, Melody. I'm so sorry," I whisper. Even though I never really knew my mom, I still miss her every day. At least Melody has memories of her mom to hold on to. Instead of bursting into tears, she gives me a huge smile, just like her mom in the photo.

"It's okay. She's still here with me." She smiles down at the picture. "Isn't that right, Mom?" I smile, too.

Damn, this girl is amazing.

The school day is over. Melody waves at me with that angelic smile of hers as she walks away. Suddenly, I hear my phone ring. I take it out and see John's name on the caller ID. I answer it.

"Hey, John."

"Hi, Zane. How are you doing? Are you okay?" he asks, concern palpable in her voice.

"Sure. Why wouldn't I be?" I reply, clearly confused.

"Well, the police brought a man to the hospital and it turns out..." He trails off.

"Oh, right. *That*," I groan.

"I'm really proud of you, Zane," he says hopefully.

"Thanks." I smile to myself.

I'm sure Melody is proud of me, too.

"John, can I bring a friend over tomorrow?"

"A friend?"

"Yeah. Her name's Melody. She goes to my school. She's the girl who saw me transform the first time and was at the pizzeria when I used my powers." There was a pause on the other end of the line.

Shit! Was John gonna say no? I've never had anyone over before, let alone a girl.

"Zane, you're going to tell this girl all about Viper, aren't you?" He whispers.

"Yeah. She deserves to know everything. She's...really special to me." Suddenly, John's tone does a total 180. I can practically see him smile.

"Okay then. She can definitely come over. See you when you get home." He hangs up his phone before I can respond.

What...the hell...was that about?

Chapter 6: Melody

As I watch Zane walk away from the school, I feel a mix of excitement and fear. I'm excited because I'm going to Zane's house and getting to know more about him now that we're friends. However, I'm also a little scared because I know what he has to tell me has to do with his dark powers. I sigh and take out my picture of Mom. I remember that Zane didn't think I was weird when I told him that I talked to it. Actually, he liked it. He even smiled for the first time since we met. A warm feeling is developing in my chest and my nerves disappear.

"Hi, Mom," I said. "I don't know what Zane has to tell me, but whatever it is, I can handle it. Since I've met him, I've just wanted to see him happy. So I'm going to stay positive about this. Love you."

I hug the picture and put it in my skirt pocket. As I walk toward the afterschool center, butterflies start going haywire in my stomach after I remember what I confessed to Mom.

Since I've met him, I've just wanted to see him happy.

Is Zane really just a friend or something...more? As soon as the kids see me, they jump on me. I laugh and hug them.

Some things never change.

"Miss Melody, the guy who saved us at the pizza place was on the news this morning. Do you know him?" asks T.J. He and his twin sister Sally are ten years old, the oldest kids I take care of.

"Yes. We go to the same high school." All the kids cheer and jump up and down.

Sally tugs on my shirt.

“Can he come over sometime, Miss Melody? Pleeeeeease?”

“You really want to meet him?” I ask.

“Yeah! He’s a hero! “He used his awesome powers to stop that robber! He’s so cool!” T.J. shouts. I grin.

Can’t argue with that.

I wonder what Zane would think if I asked him to meet the kids. He doesn’t really seem like a “kids” person. Then again, it will be great to show him that I’m not the only one who sees him as a hero.

“Okay. I’ll ask him to come over.”

Chapter 7: Zane

The next day, I'm beyond tense as I walk down the school hallway. I have no idea how Melody is going to react to my confession. Two voices in my head are battling each other for dominance. There's the smaller, more optimistic voice in my head that believes that Melody can take anything I tell her. After all, she's already partially seen the demonic side of me and accepted it.

Then, there's the bigger, more logical voice that believes that no normal person could possibly be okay with who I really am. If Melody runs away, like she should, it will be for the best. Then again, Melody isn't exactly normal. Seriously, who is that happy all the time?

Actually, it's kind of...cute.

Damn it!

Just like yesterday, I hear the same whispers down the hallway, some positive and some negative. I'm doing my best to ignore them, even the positive ones because they make me think of Melody. My mind is stuck in worst case scenario mode because there is no way she could accept the real me, despite what she's already seen. I hear a high, sweet voice near me.

"Hey Katy, have you seen Zane?"

I know that it's Melody. I turn around and see Katy pointing near me.

"Oh, there you are!" She chirps as she walks toward me. I smile, even as I hear the big, logical voice echo:

"Don't get too comfortable, idiot! You might make her cry after the talk."

Maybe, but seeing her in front of me right now, smiling like an angel, I don't fucking care.

"Hey, Melody. What's up?" She's still smiling but I can tell she's suddenly nervous about something.

"Um, Zane, I was wondering if we could do something before we go to your house?"

"What's that?"

"Well, the kids at the afterschool center want you to visit them." My eyebrows shoot up.

"Really? Why?"

"They think you're a really cool hero," she giggles.

God, I love it when she does that.

I laugh for the first time in years.

Literally, years.

"They do, huh?" Melody's cheeks are turning red. I put my hand on her shoulder.

"Sure, Melody. It'll be great to know that you're not the only one who believes in me."
Melody gives me a big hug.

Always full of surprises.

"Thank you so much! The kids will be so happy!"

You make me so happy.

Even though it's impossible for me to not think about the talk, I've decided to enjoy this moment. I want to see the kids be excited to meet a hero. I'm far from being a hero--if they only knew who I *really* am--but I don't mind pretending. As I knock on the front door, I hear a cluster of cheers from the kids. I smile to myself.

Maybe this would be fun after all.

Melody opens the door.

"Hi, Zane! Thank you so much for coming!" She greets me with a wide grin. I smile and ruffle her hair as I walk in.

"No problem."

I glance around the room. In one half there is a small blue table, building blocks and stuffed animals, and a sign that reads, "K-1st Grade." In the other half there is a bigger green table, board games and playing cards, and a sign that reads, "2nd-4th Grade." The second I step into the room, a pair of twins run toward me with the other kids following behind them.

"You're here!" The girl squeals. She has long, dark black hair, kind of like Melody.

"You're so awesome!" The boy cheers. He has short, light brown hair. Melody laughs.

"Sally, T.J., let's give Zane some space."

"Your name is Zane?" T.J. asks.

"Yeah," I say.

“That’s a cool name!” he shouts.

“Yeah, I guess it is,” I smirk..

“Can you show some of your powers to us?” Sally asks. I tighten my jaw. I don’t want to accidentally destroy this place...or have the demon part of me go out of control. I glance worriedly at Melody.

“As long as we do it outside so nothing gets broken, I guess it’s fine,” she smiles.

Okay then. If these kids want a hero, I’ll be that hero for them.

Melody leads me and the kids out of the building and toward the playground behind it. I take a deep breath and form some dark energy in my hands. Melody and the kids’ eyes are going wide as I do it. I raise my hands to the sky and the energy bursts like fireworks. It made the kids clap and cheer. Then, I use the energy to form a sword and pretend I’m slashing bad guys. Melody’s cheering now too, as loud and excited as the kids. I can’t help but glance at her and give her a smirk. It’s like I’m trying to impress her as much as the kids.

As the kids eat snacks that Melody brought from inside the building, I hear car engines and look up. A group of adults exit out of their cars and head towards the building. They must be the kids’ parents. My nerves shoot up. I may have saved their kids, but they may still see me as a monster. A man and woman notices us at the playground, runs over to T.J. and Sally, and hugs them.

The mom cheers as she picks up T.J.and ruffles his hair. She glances at me and her face turns white.

Great.

“That’s the guy who saved us at the pizza place!” T.J beams like I’m his big brother. “He used his super cool dark powers to save us! He was showing us more of them!” Sally’s dad picks her up and kisses her on the forehead. He doesn’t look as nervous as the twins’ mom.

I hope that’s a good sign.

All of the parents are staring at me. I don’t know what to do, so I’ll just explain everything to them. I take a deep breath to calm my nerves.

“Ladies and gentleman, my name is Zane. You may have seen the story on the news where there was an armed robbery at the local pizzeria. I used my dark powers to protect everyone.”

I demonstrate my powers the same way I did to the kids. The difference is that I was excited to show the kids. I don’t think I’ve ever had so much fun. Now, I’m almost terrified to do it in front of the parents. The air is silent and cold as I finish. I slowly open my eyes and the parents are...applauding? And cheering?

Wow. So this is what it's like to be in the Twilight Zone.

The next thing I know, the twins’ mom is giving me a huge hug.

“That was amazing!” She exclaims. All I can do is blink and shake my head over and over again. I probably look like I’m having a seizure.

“I may not know everything about you, Zane, but you saved our children’s lives. That’s good enough for me.” The twins’ dad walks over and shakes my hand.

“I couldn’t agree more. Thank you for protecting our kids.” I look over at Melody and happy tears are rolling down her face. I smile at her, the kids and their parents. I feel like I can

finally be happy. Suddenly, I hear police sirens racing toward the afterschool center. My blood turns ice cold.

This could get really, really bad.

Several news vans follow behind the police cars. Cameramen have the windows down and point their cameras at the shitshow about to happen. The old police chief that I saw on the morning news jumps out of his police car, holding a gun in his right hand. His name tag reads *Baxter*.

“Leave those kids and their families alone, you punk!” He shouts while pointing the gun at me. A younger officer whose name tag reads *Fitz* gets out of his police car behind Baxter, and he points his gun at me, too.

“We got a call from the people in this neighborhood about a young man using dark powers,” Fitz explains. “We will not let you harm these families. Now please, come quietly.” Melody and the kids start screaming. In less than a minute, about two dozen more squad cars crowded the streets. All the officers are pointing their guns at me before I can blink. I clench my teeth, shut my eyes and tighten my hands into fists. I’m doing everything I can to not let the demon inside me out, but it’s tough. *No matter how hard I try to do the right thing, it’s never enough. No matter how happy I am whenever Melody’s around, it’s never enough.*

I’m never enough.

“No! Please!” Melody yells. “Zane didn’t do anything wrong! He was just showing the kids his powers, the same he used to save all of us!”

“That’s right!” the twin’s mom shouts. “This boy saved our babies!” The twins’ dad stands next to Melody, crosses his arms and scowls at the cops.

“Exactly. If I remember correctly, a crazy gunman could’ve killed all of our children, but Zane stopped him.”

Thank you!

Suddenly, John drives up behind the police cars and jumps out of his car. He runs towards me, but Chief Baxter grabs John’s wrist with his left hand, still pointing his gun at me with his right hand.

“No! Please! Zane would never hurt anyone!” He begs. I see Melody’s eyes widen. Oh yeah, she and John haven’t met. This is all too much for me. I’m seconds away from destroying everyone and everything. So, I decide to do the one thing I know will keep the demon inside me at bay. I get down on my knees and lift my wrists in the air.

“Take me away, lock me up, I don’t care,” I whisper. “Just leave everyone else out of this.” Baxter, still holding onto John’s wrist, nods to Fitz. Fitz grabs my wrists, twists them around my back and locks handcuffs on them. My head hangs low. I can hear John screaming and sobbing.

This is what I do. I make people cry. I hurt them. Whether as a demon or a human. It’s all I was put in this fucked up world to do.

As Fitz carries me to a squad car, T.J. and Sally run to me with their parents. Melody and the rest of the kids and their parents follow them.

“We don’t care what the cops say!” T.J. shouts. “You’re still a hero to us, Zane!”

“Ditto!” Sally chimes. I smile back at them. Then, I see Melody about to cry.

“It’s okay, Melody. It’s for the best,” I whisper and smile at her. “Thanks for everything.”

"Fitz, take this monster away," Baxter scoffs.

"Yes, sir," he replies.

Baxter pushes me into the back seat. Then, he gets in the passenger's seat while Fitz gets into his police car and drives away.

"So, are you takin' me to jail?" I grumble. Baxter gives me a deadly look over his shoulder.

"Are you kidding? If you're as dangerous as we suspect, you could kill all the inmates. We're taking you to a place where you won't be a threat to anyone ever again."

I almost laugh at that. These assholes think I'm dangerous *now*. They have no idea what's in store for them.

Chapter 8: Melody

My heart is breaking for several reasons. The kids are crying while their parents try to console them, Zane looks like he's given up on life as Chief Baxter and Officer Fitz arrest him, and a man crying hysterically as Zane is taken away. I wonder if he is Zane's dad. That was something Zane might have told me if we had our "talk," but it obviously won't happen now. In fact, I don't know if I will ever see him again. As the man's breath finally calms and he is about to get into his car, a strange feeling comes over me. It's the same feeling I had when I first met

Zane. As scared as I was of him, I needed to help him. That feeling was back. I slowly walk towards the man.

"Excuse me? Do you know Zane?" I ask him. He looks up at me. He still has tears in his eyes, but his voice is steady.

"Yes. I'm John, Zane's uncle," he replies. My pulse speeds up.

That explains his breakdown.

"Well, my name is Melody. I'm Zane's friend. We go to the same school and I take care of the kids you saw at an afterschool center." He gives me a small smile.

"I see. I was worried that Zane would never have a friend. I'm glad it's with such a sweet girl like you." The fear in my heart starts to fade away. I grin at him.

"Thank you. That's very nice of you to say." My grin slowly starts to fade.

"I hope it's not any trouble, but...can we talk?" I lower my eyes to the ground.
"It's...about Zane."

John's eyes close briefly and he lets out a breath. He seems to know exactly where I'm going with this.

"You...saw him, didn't you?" He whispers. I nod.

"Come on, Melody. I'll take you to my house. We can talk there." As we drive to John's house, my nerves are going haywire.

What were the officers going to do with Zane? Would they put him in jail? Would John ever see him again? Would I ever see him again?

I take out my picture of Mom.

What do you think, Mom?

I remember the time I sobbed for hours after my father passed away. Mom gave me a big hug and said:

Never give up, no matter what life throws your way.

I smile and hug the picture.

You're right, mom. I won't give up. I still believe in Zane.

"Melody?" I hear John say. I quickly turn toward him.

"Oh, I'm sorry. Yes?"

"We're here." I follow John into the front door of his house and we take seats at the kitchen table.

"Can I get you anything to drink?" He asks.

"Yes. Root beer, please," I say. Root beer was Mom's favorite soda. John pours a cup of root beer and gives it to me. I take a long drink, trying to calm my nerves. John gives me a somber look.

"Listen, Melody. Since you're Zane's friend, I think you should know everything about him." I silently nod.

I wish we could be more than friends.

“He had actually planned to have a talk with me today before the police came.” John nods in understanding, then lets out a long breath.

“Even though you haven’t seen Zane’s complete true form, you can tell that he’s not 100% human.” My heart falls to my stomach. I’ve known this since I first met Zane, but hearing it out loud makes me anxious. *I was about to learn everything about Zane’s life: the good, the bad and the ugly.*

Mostly the bad and the ugly.

“Zane’s father is the king of the demon world. His name is Viper. He wanted to fulfill an ancient prophecy that would allow him to conquer Earth by covering it in a never-ending blanket of darkness. He needed a son, so he could multiply his power. There were no more young demons in his world so he came to Earth.”

John pauses for a second.

“Are you okay, Melody? Is this too much for you?” I shake my head.

“No. I’m okay. I need to know everything.”

“Okay,” he whispers, then continues.

“Viper met my sister and she had Zane. When Zane turns 18, Viper will be able to combine their powers to be strong enough to fulfill the prophecy. He wanted them to be his ‘Demon Queen’ and ‘Demon Prince.’ When she refused...” John pauses again.

“He killed her,” he confesses, his voice cracking. I’m one second away from sobbing myself.

"It's alright, Melody," he says with a sympathetic smile. "After that, I adopted Zane and have raised him ever since. When he turned 17 last week, I was very worried because I knew anything could trigger him and the prophecy would begin. I just prayed that he would be strong enough to keep the demon inside of him under control." He sits quietly in his seat for a few seconds. "Well, now you know all about Zane." He gives me a reassuring smile that makes me a little less nervous. "So, Melody, how did you meet him?" My hands shake a little in my lap.

"Well, one day, I was on my way to the afterschool center when I heard someone groaning and screaming in pain. I saw Zane, and even though I was a little scared, I had to find a way to help him." John smiles at me, and it's calming my nerves down by the second.

"When we started talking he fell to the ground, screaming louder and even in more pain than before. Then, he started to transform and I just kept telling him that everything would be okay. Eventually, he calmed down and turned back to normal."

In the blink of an eye, John jumps out of his seat and gives me a big hug. As surprised as I am, I also feel really happy.

"Melody, I don't think you know how much of an impact you've had on Zane," he says. I have a feeling I do, but I still giggle and say:

"Oh, I don't know about that." He sits back down in his chair and his eyes seem to sparkle.

"No, really. I keep telling him that he can use his powers to help people, like a hero. He always thinks so little of himself but..." My heart is so excited, it feels like it's doing cartwheels in my chest.

"Wait a second, John! Did you say, 'hero?'"

"Yes..." He drags out the word, clearly confused.

“Did you see that news story when Zane stopped an armed robbery at the pizzeria?”

“Yes...” He repeats in the same confused tone.

“Well, I was there with the kids from the afterschool center, and we saw Zane use his powers to stop the robber.”

“Really?! That’s amazing!” John shouts as he jumps up from his seat again. I grin.

“Yeah. The kids were so excited that they asked me if they could meet him the next day. He agreed and he showed them his powers, and then...” I trail off. I don’t want to think about how Chief Baxter only saw Zane as a monster when me, the kids, their parents, Katy and everyone else saw him as a hero. John finishes for me.

“I know, Melody. I know.” As much as I try to keep the tears in my eyes, I can’t stop them from falling down my cheeks.

This is so unfair. Zane doesn’t deserve any of this.

John gets up from his seat, wipes my tears away and hugs me. “It’s okay, Melody. Zane will be okay. We have to believe that.” I sniffle and take out my picture of Mom.

“Who’s that?” John asks.

“It’s my mom. She passed away last year.”

“Melody...” he whispers. I shake my head.

“It’s okay. She always told me to stay positive and see the good in people. When I look at Zane, I don’t see a demon or a monster. I see someone who just wants to be loved and

understood.” John nods in agreement. Looking down at the picture, I think about the love my mom gave me.

I want to give that kind of love to Zane.

I start to tell John something I wish I could tell Zane, but may never get the chance to. I take a deep breath.

“John, I think I...” I hear a buzzing sound. John reaches into his pocket.

“Sorry, Melody. Hold that thought. I get a text whenever there’s breaking news.”

He looks down at his phone for about 15 seconds, then covers his mouth in shock, causing the phone to fall to the floor. My heart leaps into my throat.

“What is it, John?”

He turns on the TV in the kitchen and flips through channels until he gets to the local news. The caption reads:

Teenager With Demon Powers Transported to Scientific Holding Facility.

My skin crawls.

That sounds way worse than going to jail.

The news crawl reads:

“Earlier today, a suspicious being identified as Zane was arrested by local police after reportedly endangering a group of small children. SWAT from all across the country have surrounded the holding facility to keep Zane at bay.” John and I just sit there, speechless. To

make matters worse, I see John glance out the window. When I do the same, I see the sky start to go from sunny and cloud-free to dark and ominous.

“No, no, no,” John whispers.

Several lightning bolts hit the ground, one at a time, and the sound of thunder cracks through the sky like a whip. John and I look at the TV and the same thing is happening where the reporter is. The new caption reads:

Mysterious Storm Raging, Take Cover Immediately!

Someone is banging on the front door. John runs to the door and opens it. It’s Officer Fitz.

“Sir, Melody, please come with me!” He directs. “The police academy is evacuating citizens from their homes and escorting them to a storm shelter!” John looks down at the floor. He knows that this is much worse than any regular storm. He looks back at the officers.

“Okay,” John finally agrees. Then, he glances over his shoulder at me. “Come on, Melody. Let’s go.”

I silently nod and we follow the officers out of John’s house. Just as we are about to step into their squad car, I see something straight out of a horror movie. A figure dressed in all black emerges from the sky. He has a mischievous look in his eyes and his grin is a thousand times scarier than the Joker’s.

“No! Not him! Not now! This can’t be happening!” John panics.

“John! Is that...” I start to ask, but I’m so overcome with fear that I can’t get the word out.

“Yes. That’s Viper. Zane’s father,” he whispers.

This can only mean one thing:

The prophecy.

“What the hell is that!” Officer Fitz shouts.

“Ah, finally I am strong enough to conquer the Earth! Once I consume this planet in never-ending darkness, I will have enough power to control the entire universe!” Viper proclaims.

Then, he spots John. Even though he doesn’t notice me, my own blood freezes.

“Well, well, well. What a pleasant surprise, John. Nice to see you again,” he says in a sly, arrogant voice. John scowls. Then, Viper’s eyes move over to me.

“Oh, who do we have here?” he teases. I almost pass out.

“Melody, get behind me!” John commands. I hide behind John’s body so Viper can’t see my face anymore.

“Your prophecy will never come true, Viper!” John shouts. “Zane is strong enough to fight off the darkness!” Viper lets out a loud cackle.

“Oh, is that so? Well, you might want to take a look behind you.”

Chapter 9: Zane

Start of flashback

As I sit in the cop car, feeling damn uncomfortable because of how tall I am, I think about what Baxter told me. They're not taking me to jail, but to someplace much worse. Wherever it is, I deserve it. Because of my demon blood, I put everyone around me in danger. Those kids, their parents, John, Melody.

Melody.

I groan as I think about her. This sweet girl has been through so much, and unlike me, she never gives up. *Every second I'm around her I start to believe that there's hope for me.*

What a joke.

I'm a monster and that's all there is to it.

"We're here!" Baxter calls out.

I look up and see a gigantic building with a dull, grayish color, like a tombstone. Dozens of SWATs are surrounding it.

"What the hell is this place?" I mutter.

"It's a scientific holding facility," Baxter says. "This will be your new home every day as we try to figure out who--or rather, *what*--you are. That way, you won't be a danger to our city." I want to shout that I use my powers to save people and make kids happy, but I know I would just be wasting my breath. Baxter steps out of the police car and drags me in front of the holding facility. The SWATs stare at me. I growl back at them. Some simply raise their eyebrows, while others flinch. They probably saw a little of my demon side come out. *I'm quickly losing it, but I'm not sure if I care anymore.*

Baxter escorts me into the facility. It has the same gloom, depressing gray color as the outside.

Shit.

At the end of the hallway stands a scientist in a white coat with flat, black hair and glasses.. His name tag reads, Dr. *Duff*. He reminds me of Viper, which makes me want to vomit. The cops hold up their badges.

“Chief Baxter, at your service,” Baxter states. “I have apprehended the entity known as Zane.”

Entity?

Man, they really don't think of me as human.

I don't, either.

Not anymore.

Duff gives me a sinister smile. Again, thoughts of Viper assault my mind. I want to scream, but I know it won't change anything.

“Thank you, Chief Baxter,” he replies smugly. “When I heard about this freak, I was hoping you would capture him. So what if he saved lives? He's much more dangerous than any human. He's clearly up to something. Let's not take any chances.” I grit my teeth, feeling the demon emerging. Duff takes a step towards me.

“We're going to have lots of fun,” he teases. I look over my shoulder and see Baxter with the same expression on his face.

Fuck both of you.

Baxter and Duff lead me to the elevator at the end of the hall. At the top floor, there's another group of SWATs waiting for me.

“This is to make sure you don't try any funny business,” Duff whispers in my ear. Baxter walks away, and two of the SWATs grab me and drag me into a large all-white room. They strap me to a chair that looks like they got it from a dentist's office. Duff puts on some stupid-looking scientific glasses and stands behind a machine that looks like one of those water guns you see at county fairs. It almost makes me snicker.

“This nifty machine will launch a laser into your body that will literally extract the dark powers out of you. When I’m done, there will be no more evil demons corrupting our peaceful little town.”

I’m not evil, I’m a hero!

I’m only half demon!

I’m just as human as anyone else!

I want to scream all of this in protest. Instead, I just shut my eyes and pray for this to be over quickly. Duff and the asshole SWATs laugh like they’re the villains and I’m the hero.

Yeah, right.

Like I can be a hero.

I’m a demon, that’s it.

Suddenly, the evil voice that contaminated my brain before I met Melody consumes my thoughts again:

What’s the point of trying to be a normal human? It won’t solve anything.

No, it won’t. There’s no hope...

Would helping Viper with the prophecy really be all that bad?

I guess not. If I have to drown in darkness, everyone else does, too...

I mean, it... it's my destiny.

It sure is...

In my mind, I see Viper standing in front of me, holding out his hand. Shadows of bleak darkness swirl around us.

"Zane, my son, join me. Be my demon prince and I will help you get revenge on these pathetic humans."

"Yes, father..."

"Make them suffer as you have suffered..."

"Yes, father..."

"Together, we will be the most powerful beings in the universe!"

"Yes, father..."

Viper snaps his fingers and I wake up from my trance. I see the dark aura taking over me and I know I'm starting to transform. My vision turns black as my eyes darken. I touch my teeth with my tongue and I taste blood as they have turned into pointy fangs. I look down and see the demonic markings develop on my arms. Duff and the SWATs look absolutely terrified. The laser is gaining power.

If these motherfuckers want a demon, I'll give them a fucking demon.

"GET THE FUCK AWAY FROM ME!!!" I scream from the top of my lungs, just before the laser fires. The dark shadows around me capture the laser's energy and it disappears right

before it hits me. I pull the straps holding me to the chair off my arms and legs and stomp towards Duff and the SWATs.

“What the hell?” Duff shouts. The demon inside has completely overtaken me. I let out a deep, otherworldly growl as I shoot overpowering dark energy from my hands at them. The entire room starts to shake as glass breaks and the plaster floor cracks so hard and deep, shards may have fallen into the center of the Earth. Duff and the SWATs crash through the glass screen and into the hallway. I hear them groan and struggle to get up. I clench my hands into fists and see that they’re still full of my demonic power, as if I hadn’t just used it. I smirk.

Who’s laughing now?

I step out of the room and see all of the SWATs running towards me. As they shoot their assault rifles at me, I hold up my left hand to create a blanket of dark energy to block their shots. They all tremble in fear. They probably know what’s coming next. I form knives from my dark energy and throw them at the SWATs. They all fall on the ground, groaning in agony. I walk past them and toward the front door of the facility. Just as the SWATs who were guarding the door outside notice me and aim their assault rifles at me, I push my arms to the side and a strong wind blows them out of my way. Viper’s voice echoes in my ears.

“Come to me, Zane. We’re one step closer to achieving our goal.”

“Yes, father...”

I blindly follow his voice, not sure where I’m going. My feet seem to have a mind of their own.

Who am I kidding? I can’t be a regular human.

I don’t deserve happiness.

I don't deserve Melody.

I don't stop walking for a second, even when I think of Melody. Her gentleness, her beauty, her smile.

What a joke.

My destiny has always been to be Viper's demon prince.

That's all I was put on this fucked-up world to be.

Chapter 10: Melody

End of flashback

“Oh, is that so? Well, you might want to take a look behind you.”

John gulps and my skin tingles. We turn around, slowly and carefully. What I see makes me want to cry until I can't cry anymore. It's Zane. He's surrounded by shadows and darkness. His eyes are pitch black. His body has even more markings than before.

No. He's a complete demon now.

Viper flies over us and stands behind Zane, putting his hands on Zane's shoulders.

“Zane, my boy! You finally accepted your destiny!” Viper beams.

“Yes, father,” Zane drawls in a deep, scary, demonic voice. My heart falls to my stomach.

Viper laughs and pats Zane on the back. They hold out their hands and a blanket of darkness covers the sky. It quickly spreads downward to the buildings, then lower to the streets. My body freezes in fear.

The prophecy is coming true.

John and I turn around when we hear police sirens behind us. Officer Fitz jumps out of his squad car.

“Melody! Come with me! I’ll get you to the storm shelter!” he shouts.

As John and I run to the squad car, I see Viper has a demonic grin on his face.

“Where do you think *you’re* going?” he taunts. He snaps his fingers and Zane flies over me, then swoops down and grabs me. I scream.

“Tell Zane to let Melody go, Viper!” John shouts. Officer Fitz grabs John’s wrist as Viper flies towards them.

“Sir, come on! We have to go!” He insists.

John clenches his jaw, stifling a cry. They jump into the squad car and rush to the storm shelter. Viper flies behind them.

“Get back here! No one can save you!” He shrieks. Zane is crushing my body. My heart breaks as I see the nightmarish black color of his eyes. I don’t even try to hold back the tears. I cry painfully, tears of sorrow falling down my cheeks. He’s holding me even tighter. I’m sure that I will lose all of the air in my lungs within minutes.

Living without Zane would be worse than dying.

“Zane, please let me go! I still believe in you!” I yell.

He lets out a low, monstrous growl, and his grip on me loosens a little.

I need to keep believing in him.

“You’re a hero! You may not see it, but I do!” I call out.

His fangs slowly start to turn to normal teeth. This might be my last chance to save him.
I need to tell him how I feel.

Here goes nothing...

“I love you, Zane!” I cry out.

I repeat it over and over, hoping it will get through to him. Since meeting Zane, all I’ve wanted is for him to be happy. We’ve both been through tragedy, but I choose to be happy and I want the same for him. Even if this is my last day alive, I still won’t give up on him.

You never give up on the people you love.

Chapter 11: Zane

I'm nothing but a monster.

"I love you, Zane!"

I don't deserve to be happy.

"I love you, Zane!"

Happiness isn't for me.

"I love you, Zane!"

Wait, what the hell...

"I love you, Zane!"

Holy shit! Melody?!

My eyes shoot open and my head is throbbing, like someone has literally knocked me out of a nightmare.

Damn!

I look up and see that the sky is as dark and black as a bottomless chasm, with not a dot of light in sight. My eyes frantically look around me. An ominous mist covers the street. It's slowly turning to the same hopeless black color as the sky.

What the hell is going on?

I realize that my arms are grabbing onto someone tightly and their arms are doing the same to me. I slowly look down and I see her.

Melody.

"I love you, Zane!" She cries again. It's not a dream. She's really saying it.

Melody loves me.

I hear her start to wheeze, like she's losing her breath. I realize that I'm still crushing her body.

Oh my God!

I quickly let her go and she kneels on the ground, coughing and holding onto her chest. I immediately kneel in front of her and put my hands on her shoulders.

“Melody! Melody! Are you okay?!” I panic. She looks up at me and her eyes widen.

Is she still scared of me?

I feel normal. I don’t see any demon symbols on my body. I touch my teeth with my tongue and realize that they’re straight again. Before I can say another word, Melody wraps her arms around me and starts crying again. My heart is breaking.

“Zane! Oh my gosh! You’re okay!” She sobs. *I guess I am back to normal.*

All because of her.

I put my hands on her shoulders and look her in the eyes.

“Melody, did I do this?” I ask, my eyes wandering to the desolation of the city around us. She nods and snuffles. I wipe away her tears with my thumb. I shudder as I think about my full transformation, but I know I need to tell Melody everything. I briefly close my eyes. I’m about to recall the time I gave up on being human.

“Melody, remember when I showed the kids my powers and I let the cops take me away?” I ask.

“Yes, I saw on the news that they took you to a scientific holding facility,” she says.

“Yeah. They were about to do an experiment on me to physically extract the dark demon powers out of me.” Melody gasps and covers her mouth. My body tenses. “I remember my demon powers kicked in. They were at least a thousand times stronger than what you saw at the pizzeria. I smashed through the facility and knocked all of the SWATs that were guarding the facility out of the way.”

“H-how did your demon powers emerge?” She asks, her voice quivering like she knows what the answer is. I try to keep my own voice steady.

“I...I had given up on being human. No matter how hard I tried I just couldn’t do anything right. I tried to forget about Viper and his prophecy, but I wasn’t strong enough to control the demon inside of me. I had accepted my fate as his Demon Prince. There was no hope left for me.” Melody gives me a sad smile, struggling not to cry again.

“Zane, we all have a choice to how we live our lives. Ever since I met you, I could tell that you weren’t a monster. You just needed someone to see you for who you really are.” Without thinking twice, I put my hands on her cheeks and I kiss her softly. I hold her gently in my arms and feel every bit of darkness leave my body.

“I love you, Melody,” I whisper.

Chapter 12: Melody

I love you, Melody.

Those words echo in my ears again and again. They calm my racing heart. When I saw Zane in his complete demon form, obeying every word Viper said, I was terrified that he would never be okay. But now here he is, choosing to live and to not give up. I’m so happy for him. Then, I think about his kiss. I could feel his pain disappear. No matter what happens, everything will be okay, as long as we’re together. Suddenly I hear a loud banging noise, like an explosion. I jerk my head up to meet Zane’s eyes.

“Oh my gosh! What was that?!” Zane squints his eyes as he looks down the street.

“I’m not sure. I can’t see from here.”

We both jump to our feet. Zane looks at his hands and they have dark energy around them. He closes them into fists. My heart speeds up.

Is he going to transform and go back to the demon side of him?

Instead, Zane looks pretty much the same. This is the first time he hasn’t changed at all when his powers start emerging.

“Melody, are you afraid of heights?” He asks. I’m not sure what that has to do with the loud sound we just heard, but I answer anyway.

“Not really. Why?” He narrows his eyes and holds me close.

“Hold on tight.” Before I can ask what he means, he jumps high into the night sky. I yelp as we leave the ground. A thought makes my heart fly high, too: *This looks like a scene from those superhero movies me and Mom used to watch.* I look up at Zane.

He’s amazing.

“Melody, look down there!” Zane shouts as he points down.

Dozens of police officers are in front of the storm shelter. They’re shooting at Viper, but to no avail. He wraps them in dark energy and throws them on the ground. The sight almost makes me scream.

“Zane, we have to get down there!”

“Right! Keep holding onto me, Melody!”

Zane backs up and jumps from the sky to the ground. I close my eyes, praying that I won't let go of him. He lands on his feet right behind Viper. The ground shakes a little, but not enough that Viper notices. I'm dizzy as I carefully get off Zane. Viper is standing in front of the storm shelter's front doors. All of the police officers, including Chief Baxter and Officer Fitz, are laying on the ground, struggling to stay alive. The squad cars are turned over and their headlights are shattered. Viper lets out a terrifying laugh as he blasts the front door of the storm shelter with dark energy.

"No one can stop me now! The entire world will drown in darkness and soon I will take over the entire universe!" He bellows. Zane and I see the kids, their parents, John and everyone else in the city crammed in the storm shelter like sardines. They're all trembling in fear. I hear Zane growl angrily through his teeth.

"Hey, Viper!" He shouts. Viper quickly turns around and gives us a sinister grin from ear to ear.

"Oh, look who it is! My son, Zane!" His eyes meet mine and I hold Zane's hand to keep from fainting.

"Oh my my! We meet again, miss..." He licks his lips and my body trembles with fear. "*Melody...*" He whispers mischievously. I feel like I want to throw up after hearing him say my name. Viper doesn't seem to mind at all that Zane didn't finish me off, like he thought Zane would. It seems like Viper can read my mind because he says:

"So, this worthless girl is still alive. No matter. She'll soon be dead along with all the other wretched humans you call friends and family!" He exclaims as he points to everyone in the storm shelter. They're all seconds away from crying, and so am I. Zane grinds his teeth so hard I think they might break.

"Screw you!" He snarls as he holds my hand tight. "The love Melody and I have is stronger than the demon blood in my veins! She showed me how to be happy, how to choose my

own path! My destiny was never to be your Demon Prince; it was to be a hero!" Zane looks over at me and smiles. "I realize that now," he whispers and I smile back.

Oh my gosh, Zane. I love you...

Viper laughs so loud that it echoes throughout the street.

"Don't be ridiculous, Zane! You are a demon, like me! Stop fooling yourself!" Zane's eyes narrow and he clenches his fist. Dark energy forms in them instantly.

"What do you say we test that?" Zane scoffs. Viper smirks and lifts his arms. The sky goes completely pitch black. As scary as the clouds and fog were, they at least cast shadows over the sky and ground. Now, if not for Zane and Viper's powers and the lights in the storm shelter, it would be impossible to see anything.

"Melody, go in the storm shelter and hide with everyone," Zane says before he jumps into the air.

"Prepare to die!" Viper cackles as he flies into the air behind Zane.

I run towards the storm shelter as fast as I can, not looking back once. I know that the world will either be saved or destroyed. There is no middle ground. Zane's strong words echo in my mind over and over again as I run:

The love Melody and I have is stronger than the demon blood in my veins!

I hope that's true.

Chapter 13: Zane

Before I met Melody, I thought my destiny was to help Viper conquer Earth and then the universe. I never wanted that, but I felt I had no choice. Then I met Melody and she taught me that we have a choice on how we live our lives. She chose to be happy after her mom passed away, and I wanted to do the same. I thought my powers were a curse, but now I realize I can use them to save people...and save the world. I'm high in the sky and Viper is right behind me. I shoot dark energy at him with my left hand and form a sword with the energy in my right hand.

"Take this, you bastard!" I yell as I attack. Viper creates a whip out of dark energy and he hits me across the face with it before I can counter his attack. I scream as I crash to the ground, creating a big crack in the street.

“See? I told you! The human part of you has made you weak!” Viper taunts

Shut...the fuck...up.

He lifts his arms and creates a giant orb of demonic energy. I try to get up and move away but my body is so battered from falling on the ground that I can't. I scream as the energy engulfs me. I can't breathe and it feels like all of the blood and energy has drained from my body. My heart beat is slowing by the second. I'm sure I'll be dead in a few minutes.

“You're a poor excuse for a demon and a human! You're nothing! You can't even stand up on your own two feet!” Viper laughs. I'm struggling to get up but it feels like my body is dead, with no life to hold it together.

It feels like my soul is dead, too.

As I lay on the ground, struggling to keep my eyes open, seconds from death, I remember the nightmare I had on my birthday. The last thing I thought as Viper dragged me down into the depths of darkness was:

“There's nothing I can do to stop him.”

Looks like I was right all along.

“Zane! Please get up!” I hear a voice scream in a distorted voice, like something from another dimension.

What the fuck?

“We all need you! I need you!” The voice screams again. I lift my head and realize that Melody is screaming through a megaphone.

Melody.

The girl who gave me a reason to live, to keep fighting.

The girl I love.

I can't believe I was so fucking stupid to give up that easily. I can't let Melody, John and everyone in the city die. I carefully get up, grind my teeth and clench my fists.

"Hey, Viper! Don't forget about me! You're not finished with this pathetic human yet!" I roar at him, while he is still facing everyone. He turns around and gives me an evil grin.

"Back for more, son? Very well!" He hollers. He forms knives out of his power and throws them at me. I quickly use the dark energy from my left hand to create a shield to deflect the knives. Viper steps closer and closer to me, firing more knives as he goes. I need to get on the offensive if I have any chance of beating him. Then, I hear something that gives me the strength I need.

"Zane! Zane! Zane!"

Is that...chanting?

I glance to my right and see Melody directing everyone to chant my name. I smile.

Melody...you're my hero.

I smirk at Viper. For the first time since he came to Earth, his devilish smile disappears.

"And just what is so amusing, my boy? There's no way you can beat me!" He spits out, like the thought of him losing was vile.

“Turn around, Viper,” I slyly tell him with a smirk. He swiftly turns his head to see everyone chanting. He growls in disgust. “Now you see how strong us ‘weak and pathetic’ humans can be!” While still deflecting Viper’s attack with my left hand, I use my right hand to form energy into spikes and throw them at him. He steps back and groans in pain, causing the knives to vanish. Catching him off guard, I shoot a blast of dark energy at him, which causes him to fall back against one of the police cars he turned over. The sound of shattered glass and metal echoes through the air and I see everyone in the storm shelter cover their ears.

“Why, you little...” Viper groans as he staggers to his feet.

He lifts his hands over his head and thunderclouds begin to cover the sky. I know Viper’s gonna try to make lightning bolts come down, so I prepare to create a force field to protect everyone. However, Viper’s hands start to shake and he falls to the ground. The thunderclouds fade away. The sky starts to lose its nightmarish black color and turn into a normal midnight color.

“What is happening?!” He yells. I stride toward him and step on his head. He coughs and ghosts and demons leave his mouth, fading into the air.

“The darkness inside me is fading away,” I whisper with a mix of mischief and anger. “That’s the source of your power. The more anger and sorrow I have, the stronger you become. Now that I’m happy, you’re weak as hell.” Viper’s eyes go wide.

“But how can this be?” I point at Melody and everyone in the storm shelter.

“That girl and those people don’t see me as a monster. They believe in me. Thanks to them, I’ve realized that I’m more than just a pawn for you and your shitty prophecy.” *I turn to Melody and I give her a cocky smile. She nods at me, knowing exactly what I want her to do.*

People in love tend to know how to read each other’s minds.

She turns to everyone and shouts through her megaphone:

“Ok, everybody! If we want Zane to defeat Viper once and for all, we need to awaken the hero inside of him! Everybody chant ‘Zane’ as loud as you can, as much as you can!” She directs.

This...girl...is...amazing.

Everyone chants my name, ten times louder than the first time.

I can feel Viper’s body going lighter and softer under me by the second. I feel a strong force in my hands. I look down and gasp. The dark energy emerging from them is so powerful that the dark shadows it creates are spreading from my hands to my arms. I have never felt this kind of power before. It soon spreads throughout my entire body, and heals the bruises and lacerations on my body from earlier. I glare at Viper and give him the kind of demonic smile he taunted me with earlier.

“You’re done, Viper,” I state smugly with a cocky grin on my face. I grab him by the throat, toss him up into the air and use the energy in both of my hands to create two swords. I jump into the air and slash him quickly, over and over again. More ghosts and demons are escaping his mouth and he’s looking paler by the second.

Almost finished.

As he falls to the ground, I lift my hands over my head and start to form the kind of demonic orb Viper attacked me with earlier. It’s not as big and it may completely drain my demonic energy, but it’ll be enough to finish him off for good.

Everyone continues to chant my name even louder.

That's all the encouragement I need.

“DIE, YOU ASSHOLE!!!” I scream from the top of my lungs as I throw the orb on him. Before it hits him, I fly to the storm shelter. The kids are hugging their parents and Melody is holding John's hand.

“Zane, what is...” Melody starts to ask before I grab her face and kiss her.

“It's okay, Melody. It's almost over,” I whisper.

Just as she's about to ask what I mean, I turn my head and see the orb about to hit Viper. I turn back around and see that the crowd is watching and they start to panic. The kids are crying and their parents are trying not to do the same. John and Melody are folding their hands and closing their eyes.

“Everybody, lay down on your stomachs, cover your heads and ears and don't come up until I tell you!” I direct like a drill sergeant. They all immediately do and I use the last of my strength to create a force field around the entire storm shelter. A few seconds later, the orb hits Viper and he lets out a demonic, blood-curdling scream that sounds like every demon and monster from the demon world screaming at once. I growl as I hold the force field in place. The sound hurts my ears like a bitch and I won't be surprised if they start bleeding. To make matters worse, I don't know how much longer I can hold the force field up before I pass out... or maybe even die. Still, as I look at everyone who believes in me--the kids, their parents, John and my angel Melody--I know there's nothing I can't do. I can hear Viper's screams start to fade and I know he's almost finished.

Just...a little...longer...

After what feels like an eternity, Viper's screams start to fade until he's just laying on the ground, moaning and wheezing. I let my hands fall to my sides and I fall to my knees. I check my hands to see if I have any dark energy left. Just barely, but enough to knock out Viper for

good. I stagger to my feet and approach him. He looks damn disgusting with his face all wrinkled and dried up from a lack of demonic energy. There's no way he could form that arrogant grin on his face now.

"Zane...you..will...always...be...my...demon...prince..." he wheezes out.

What a fucking joke.

"No, Viper. I'm not your son," I tell him in a surprisingly calm voice. "You're not my father. You and your prophecy have failed. It's over."

I lift up my fists in the air with the last amount of dark energy I have and pound them down onto Viper's chest. He coughs and one last demon leaves his mouth and disappears like smoke. His entire body starts to disintegrate: His hair, eyes, mouth, head, chest, arms and legs. The dust left behind vanishes as if it was never there.

Good...fucking...riddance.

I fall to the ground, my energy completely drained. I hear screaming, crying and feet stomping. I lift my head, turn around and see Melody, John and all of the citizens running toward me.

"Zane! Are you okay?!" Melody cries as she hugs me. I slowly open my eyes. There she is, holding me, tears in her eyes. My heart beats faster than I can keep up with, so I decide to do the one thing I know will calm it down. I grab the back of her head, close my eyes and kiss her, deep and long. She squeals in surprise and I don't give a damn that practically the whole city is watching us.

I need her.

I might die without her.

Suddenly, I hear a cough. I open my eyes and see John standing next to us. He crosses his arms and smiles. Then, it dawns on me.

Shit! Melody and John haven't met before Viper came. Plus, me and Melody were supposed to have our talk.

I pull back from Melody and nod towards John.

"Melody, this is my uncle, John. He..." John just shook her head.

"It's okay, Zane. Melody and I have talked already. She knows everything about you..." I blink several times.

Oh, no.

"You mean, Melody knows about me and Viper?" I ask John. He nods and his smile grows again. I narrow my eyes.

"So, that's why you got all weird over the phone?"

"What can I say? 'I knew you were in love with her,'" he says as he pats me on the back. My eyes widen.

"Seriously, John? You knew that, even then?"

"Sure did." His grin grows wider. "I am a doctor, after all. I specialize in the heart." I turn to Melody, whose entire face is as red as a tomato.

"Listen, Melody. About everything that John told you and everything that's happened today, I..."

She interrupts me by giving me a hug and places her head on my chest. My heart calms to a steady beat.

She always knows how to put me at ease.

“It’s okay, Zane. I understand. You’re not your father. You’re not an evil monster. You’re a hero.” I touch her cheek, my heart filling with so much love it might explode. “You know, I remember what your mom said : *We should all do what we can to help other people, because you never know when you might be the angel they need.*” I pull her into a tight hug.

“You’re *my* angel, Melody,” I whisper in her ear. I hear another cough clear through the air. I roll my eyes and smile. “What is it now, John?” When I turn around, I see Baxter and Fitz standing in front of all of the townspeople. I scowl at them.

Talk about a fucking buzzkill.

“Chief, don’t you have something you want to say to Zane?” Fitz asks Baxter with a glare. Baxter let out a deep sigh.

“Yes. Zane, I can’t apologize enough about how I treated you. Your uncle told me everything about you while you were fighting that demon. I was so scared of your powers that I was too blind to see that you were the hero this city needed.” He reaches out his hand and I shake it.

If Melody can accept me and believe in me, then I can forgive Baxter for treating me like a monster.

“Are you sure you don’t need help carrying those?” I ask Melody as we walk to the afterschool center.

"No, I'm okay. Thank you, though," she smiles.

Melody and I are having a pizza party with the kids to celebrate my big victory. She's carrying four boxes herself. Just as she hands me the keys to the front door, I put my hand on her shoulder.

"What is it?" She asks.

"I have a surprise for you. Close your eyes." Melody closes her eyes. I look down and see dark energy developing in my hands. I form the energy into the shape of a rose. "Okay. You can open your eyes." She gasps when she sees the rose in my hand. She jumps and nearly drops the pizzas.

"Melody, I think I should carry the pizzas," I laugh as I take the pizza boxes and hand her the rose.

"Oh my gosh, Zane! It's beautiful!" She beams.

"Not as beautiful as you are," I tell her I take the rose and tuck it behind her ear, then unlock the front door. As usual, the kids all run up to us in two seconds flat. I put the pizzas on the tables of the "K4-1st Grade" and "2nd-4th grade" sections.

"What's that, Miss Melody?" Sally asks, pointing to the rose.

"Zane made this for me," she grins. I nod and show the kids how I made the rose. They all jump up and down and cheer.

"We saw you two kiss after Zane beat that demon and now he made you a rose?" "Are you boyfriend and girlfriend now?" T.J. inquires. Melody immediately has that cute blush on her face. I wrap my arm around her shoulder.

“That’s right,” I smirk, and the kids cheer again. When the parents come to pick up the kids, they thank me for protecting them. “That’s just what us heroes do,” I say with a smile. Melody looks up into my eyes after everyone leaves.

“I’m so proud of you, Zane. I knew you could do it,” she whispers. I lift her chin and kiss her sweetly.

“There’s no way I could’ve beaten Viper without you Melody,” I whisper back. “You gave me a reason to live. You’re amazing.” She blushes and smiles at me.

I used to think my only purpose for being alive was to help Viper fulfill his prophecy and become his “Demon Prince.” But, meeting Melody gave me the strength to choose my own destiny. Sure, being a “hero” wasn’t part of the plan, but I took it head on because I could be *her* hero. As long as I’m with Melody, there’s nothing I can’t do.

The End

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