

Love's Creation Galley

Love's Creation
by

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Triskelion Publishing
www.triskelionpublishing.com

Published by Triskelion Publishing www.triskelionpublishing.com
15508 W. Bell Rd. #101, PMB #205, Surprise, AZ 85374 U.S.A.

First e-published by Triskelion Publishing
First e-publishing November 2004

ISBN 1-932866-47-7
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Cover art by Triskelion Publishing

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places,
and incidents are the product of the author's imagination. Any
resemblance to
persons living or dead, business establishments, events or locales is
entirely
coincidental.

Dedication

To all the people who encouraged me in my story telling, from the Romance Writers of America, San Diego and Colorado Springs. To the wonderful husband who paid for my first seminar on how to write professionally and who never complained about the house or late dinners. To the best and most intuitive editor on the face of the earth, Maggie Ryan. Without your input, this book would not be as good as it is! Also, to Kristi and Gail, at Triskelion Publishing, who took a chance on me! You all are the best!

PROLOGUE

The cafe in the middle of the busy New York City block was his favorite haunt. The Entity, who on the earthly plane was known as John, came to listen and continued to learn simply by the act of listening. He learned that in Germany beings such as he were known as 'doppelgangers'. In India he would have been known as a Tulpas, and in Hebrew tradition, Golem. With only a thought, he found he could transport himself anywhere in the world, but he kept coming back to the little cafe that boasted "The best deli sandwich on the East coast."

Initially, the Entity could be seen only by those who had "the sight." After several trials and errors, he perfected the process of becoming solid. His efforts were rewarded. Now he sat across from a scientist discussing quantum physics.

The regulars paid no attention to the men deep in conversation at the back table of the small deli. Their obvious physical differences were not a major concern. The old scientist was bent and worn from bending over theses, his gray hair nearly non-existent. He became nearly invisible next to the tall, dark,

exceedingly handsome younger man. The younger man's blue eyes flashed with enthusiasm as he pushed back the errant locks of curly black hair that constantly fell onto his brow.

"I really want to believe you, John, but I need more than theories and approximations," said the old man drawing the Entity's attention with the intensity of his comment. "Until then I can only disagree with you. It can't be proven that two realities can exist in one time space, even with quantum physics applied."

"I can prove it to you." The Entity smiled. He began to take out a notebook from his vest pocket of the three-piece suit. He knew the scientist wanted his knowledge. The Entity smiled and pointed at his cup when he felt the pulsing began. His body went rigid and he grimaced and swayed in his seat. He knew what would happen next. It never seemed to fail that the summoning always came when he was on the brink of a revelation to someone.

"Are you alright?" The scientist asked, reaching to steady him. "Are you ill?"

The Entity nodded stiffly. With a great effort, he excused himself and headed for the men's room. Once inside, he walked as quickly as he could into a stall and leaned against the door. He closed his eyes, and his body became surrounded by a mist that swirled from his feet up to his head. It swirled faster and faster; The Entity began turning inside it. The three-piece suit dissolved and he became clothed in the harsh linens of the period where he began his bondage. Within a moment no trace of his person could be found.

As had happened so often in the past two hundred years, he knew a new owner was momentarily arriving at the house of his creator, thus summoning bonding him

to it again. The travel through time and space caused him no alarm, but brought his being into a new dimension of knowledge with each trip. That seemed to be the only benefit from the times he was pulled back to the house. The momentary travel from freedom to bondage always left him lightheaded.

Arriving in the room of the old house, he watched as the swirling mist dissolved, leaving him alone again. He braced himself against the windowpane and watched as a young woman exited her car. Another one pulled up behind her and she waved in greeting. He watched as two women looked up at the house. Something about the blonde woman compelled him; he watched her more closely. Suddenly hope flared through him. The blonde looked up at the window where he stood!

"She cannot see you. Your hope is unnatural." The demon said as he appeared next to the Entity, John.

John looked at him and shook his head. The demon smiled back. Being the exact replica of the entity, only thinner with green eyes, rather than blue, no one who looked casually would suspect one was pure evil.

"She saw me. You know it, otherwise you would not be here to gloat."

"She will be mine, either way. You know that."

I know no such thing. Perhaps this is the creator come back to finish what she began."

The demon laughed derisively. "All your trips to the outer worlds and you still are a child with that naïve hope. Or as they say now in the modern times, that you see through rose colored glasses."

"She is not yours this time."

"They are all mine in the end. You shall see."

"No!" shouted the Entity

CHAPTER ONE

"I still say it looks like a retirement home for vampires." Marcy eyed the massive Victorian house warily. "Are you sure you want to stay here?"

"Why not?"

Though not quite sure why she'd want to stay either, Van forced a smile when she

saw her friend's serious look. "This is a great house. Uncle William left it to me because he knew I'd appreciate its ambiance."

"Oh, I'm sure of that, but it's eerie looking." Marcy shuddered. "It looks like the place where they filmed Dark Shadows."

"Oh for crying out loud. It looks like a dollhouse and it's all mine. It's a shame I have to sell it."

"You think you have enough time to get this place fixed up and sold?"

"I should be able to do it before my leave of absence is up. I told them it would probably take around two months. That should put me back in time to be at

my new job as Senior Editor."

Marcy chuckled. "And the best part is you get to taste all those yummys."

"Well, you can have the job if you want it. Being a food editor is not all gravy."

"Give me a break!" Marcy grimaced as she bent down to pick up a suitcase.

"Come on! Are you going to make me do all the work?"

"I'll be out in a minute."

Van studied the steps leading up to the beautiful hand carved door. Fog swirled

around the house, giving it an ethereal air. The porch that wound around the

front was ornately decorated with the ivy that grew up and around it.

Marcy started unloading the trunk. "Are you coming or are you just going to

gawk at it?"

"I'm coming."

Van looked at the house. Focusing her gaze on the second floor, she scanned the

windows. From the corner of her eye, she caught a movement. Someone stood in

the window.

"Marcy!"

Breathless, Marcy came out of the house. "What?"

"Come here."

As Marcy approached Van, the figure in the window moved from view. What?" Marcy repeated. "I thought I saw someone in that window." Marcy centered her gaze on the upper level where Van looked. "Well, I don't see anything. Maybe it's the guy your uncle had living here and he hasn't left yet." Van frowned. "He was supposed to be out the first of the month. I was under the impression he was gone." "Well, I didn't hear anything when I put your stuff inside, so maybe you just imagined it." "Maybe, but I need to check it out anyway." Van jumped out of her Blazer and ran up the steps two at a time. She smiled when she saw the lion's head doorknocker. Everyone in the county could probably hear it clang against the sturdy oak door. She knocked three times, just to hear it. The tone rang strong and vibrant.

Perfect. Exactly like this house feels. Marcy grimaced. "You'll be able to hear that puppy in downtown Cleveland. Come on in here and check out what your uncle did since you were here last." Marcy led the way into the house. Seeing the interior of the house, Van gasped. "I'd forgotten how beautiful this old house was." "I have to admit, it's spectacular." Marcy looked around the vestibule with open admiration. The mahogany banister leading upstairs glistened with a bright sheen. Its edges were rounded from countless hands of past residents rubbing it as they went up and down the curved stairway. The Parsons table next to the stairs held a vase of fresh flowers. The Persian rug that covered the foyer floor was exquisite. Van looked to the right into the living room, which had been decorated with a

Victorian lounge, and matching maroon chairs, all of which faced the fireplace.

An antique clock in the middle of the ornately hand-carved mantel drummed out the house's heartbeat.

"This is just too good to be true. Pinch me, Marcy."

"No, you pinch me. This place is unbelievable. From the outside it looks scary, but on the inside, it's fabulous."

"Uncle William must have been a collector extraordinaire. Look at the detail on

this." Van fingered the intricate woodworking on the archway to the living room. "Maybe I won't sell. I might just keep it for myself."

"Hold on a minute, there. I considered buying it. This would make a terrific art gallery."

"Oh, sure, just like when we were kids."

Marcy raised an eyebrow at Van quizzically. "What do you mean?"

"You always thought what I had was better, so you tried to figure out a way to

get it from me or at least beg your parents to get you the same toy." Van winked at Marcy. "Has anything changed?"

"Well, we were kids then, and I'm all grown up. Now I don't want your toys, I

just want those hunky chefs you get to interview."

Van laughed heartily.

"Speaking of chefs, what do you want to do first? Eat dinner or explore your new place?"

"Oh, I definitely want to explore. Let's check and see if that renter is still here."

Like an energetic kid, Van sprinted up the stairs.

"Somehow I knew you'd say that." Marcy raced to catch up with her.

All the rooms upstairs had sheets on the furniture. Van looked into every one,

noting each room had been decorated with priceless period pieces. When she

reached the bedroom facing the east, she knew she that this would be hers; she

could wake to the sun's delicious warmth each morning. The sleigh style bed

with its quilted coverlet was massive. She climbed into from the little step stool next to the bed. Lying back, she felt like she had been swallowed up by a

cloud. Pleased with her decision, she continued to stroll from room to room, marveling at her windfall. The doorway directly across from her chosen bedroom was the only one left to inspect. Marcy came up behind her as she opened it and looked in. The bedroom was full of antiques, which had the white protective sheets on them, with the exception of the four-poster bed, which was exposed. The room smelled a bit musty, but not unpleasantly so. Marcy walked in and surveyed the contents. "This must be the room your roommate had, or has. I can't actually tell if someone is living in it or not." "Me either. It must have been him in the window. I bet he went out the back door in order to avoid me." Van tapped her fingers on the wall. "Well, we might as well get the rest of my stuff up here. I'll bring up the suitcases and you can go get the takeout." Van heard Marcy sigh. "Good, because I'm starving. I can't believe you didn't want to stop until we got here. You drove like a maniac. I thought I'd never catch up to you." "Complain, complain, complain." "Me? Complain? Not on your life. But if you want me to..." Marcy put her hands on her hips and raised her eyebrows. Van playfully prodded her friend down the hallway to the stairs. "No, no, just get the food." Marcy started her descent, but paused halfway down. "You know, Van, your mother must've had a reason for not liking this place. It does feel kind of weird. These pictures on the wall of all these ancient people give me the creeps. You're the psychic. How does it feel to you?" "It feels just fine." Van smiled to reassure her friend. She had picked up on each room's particular vibration, but she didn't notice anything unpleasant. The only room which seemed a little off was the one they'd just been in. The

pictures on the wall were imposing with their stern faces, but they didn't appear to be sending out any negative feelings for her to pick up.

"I don't know why you just don't admit your abilities," Marcy continued as if

Van hadn't said a word. "You know what they say: use it or lose it."

"Having you for a best friend sometimes can be a big pain in the--"

"Don't get so uptight." Marcy turned and faced Van. "I just wish I could see

and hear things like you do. Actually, I'm jealous."

"You, the center of the art world, jealous of me?"

"Sure I am. Always have been. You know things."

"And I shut those things out of my mind."

"Yes, but remember when you saved that woman's life when her gas stove leaked?"

"That's different."

"No. It's not any different." Marcy rubbed the banister as if in doing that, the right words would come out of the ancient wood. When she spoke, her voice

cracked. "I wish I would've known ahead of time to save my Dad when he ran off

that bridge."

"Marcy, that was an accident."

"Yes, but if I could do what you do, I could've seen it ahead of time and warned

him not to go."

Van wanted to reach out and touch Marcy. She wished she could hug away her best

friend's sorrow. Van always believed it had been an accident, but, in the back

of her mind, she always wondered if somehow, she could have prevented it.

She never told anyone about the premonitions she'd had prior to the accident.

No one knew. Pain seared her heart as she recalled the weekend Joe, Marcy's

dad, died. The impressions had been there, but she had misinterpreted them.

She had seen Marcy's dad and the car. At the time she thought it had been

related to Marcy wanting to borrow it. She thought Marcy was going to be in an

accident and she did everything she could to keep Marcy away from any

car that weekend. Early that morning, she awoke to a familiar spidery feeling crawling up her spine. In her mind's eye, Van had seen 'Uncle' Joe drive away that morning, but she didn't tell anyone what she suspected. After all, two of the quarterbacks from the football team were over and they would have thought she was a flake if she'd have called attention to her abilities. By Monday, the whole school would have known that Van Moore needed to be shunned. So she stayed quiet. And Joe died. Just a month later, her little sister, Jenny died. Again, Van had remained silent, not wanting to call attention to the things she saw, afraid of being right. More afraid of being wrong and ridiculed. The only person who knew what she saw had been Marcy. Marcy, who never condemned her for not saying anything the morning her father died. Fortunately, she hadn't had any fatalistic impressions since. She never knew if she just blocked them before they got to her, or she had lost some of her ability. She still remained intuitive, but not much more than most people. Van reached down and pulled Marcy up to her. As she hugged her, she whispered, "It doesn't always work." "Oh, Van, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to remind you of Jenny." Both women held each other tightly, lost in the memories they'd dredged up from the past. "Look, this isn't getting me settled in," Van said as she wiped away a tear. "You're right. Let's get to it, woman." Marcy grabbed another box and shoved it at Van, who executed a pratfall, which started Marcy laughing. Smiling weakly, Van lugged the box into her temporary new home. Within a short time, Van felt lighthearted herself. Her enthusiasm took hold and she felt like she could fly as she ran to her vehicle to unload her things.

Life was finally going her way. The only thing she lacked was a man. She could do without that complication for now. She had a house to think about selling and a new promotion when she returned to her job. Heaving another box from the trunk, she turned around to find Marcy next to her with a displeased look on her face. "Now what?" Van asked. "What do you feel like? Chicken?" "Tacos. I want tacos." "Negative, girlfriend. This is Rock Creek, Ohio. They don't have a taco place. Though I suppose I could make 'em...." "No! Gross! I don't want to die young. Burgers then." Marcy stuck her tongue out at Van. "All right, what burger place?" "How should I know? Just go down the main drag and see what's there." "What do you want to drink?" Marcy raised her eyes to the sky. "I bet the water here is great, not like California." "You can have all the well water you want, but I'm going to run to town and get some fully leaded soda. What do you want?" "Juice." "No problema, Miss Natural Health." As Marcy drove off, Van entered the house. Without Marcy's cheery presence, it didn't seem as comfortable as it had moments before. "Marcy's getting to me," she told the hall tree. Van took her suitcases up to her new room then went across the hall to peek in the door of the musty old bedroom. As she opened the door, she became disoriented. She closed the door, looked down the hall, and then opened it again. Puzzled, she glanced back. Had she chosen the wrong door? The door gave her a view of an authentic antique bedroom, full of all the daily needs from another century. She wrinkled her nose. Even the odors seemed authentic. How did we miss this room? Van stepped back into the hallway and looked to the right and to the left. She

felt sure this should be the room they thought the renter had. It looked completely different.

Van edged into the room and ran her hands over the bureau top. A silver handled brush and comb rested next to several bottles of pungent perfume. She wrinkled her nose from the conflicting scents as she opened one decanter after another.

She looked in the cheval mirror and through its haze, she spied a wardrobe closet behind her. Turning around, she walked across the braided rug to open it. It contained beautiful period costumes.

"Uncle William must have been a stickler for authenticity." Van said as she touched the clothing and brought out a cape. Putting it on her shoulders, she twirled around in it, viewing herself in the mirror. It fit perfectly. The cloth wasn't as coarse as she expected, but soft and pliant. The green color was vibrant, but not a shade she'd ever seen before. Van knew Marcy would love this room and its authentic clothing.

"Hey, I'm back," Marcy called out from the bottom of the stairs.

"Come on up here. You have to see what I found."

Excited by her find, Van ran out of the room, holding the cape together at her neck. Marcy reached the top of the stairs as Van exited the room.

"Look at this cape. Isn't it gorgeous?" Van pirouetted in front of her startled friend.

"What are you talking about, Van? What cape?"

"This one, you goose. The one I'm wearing."

Van looked down at her hands. Though she clasped them at her neck, they held nothing.

The cape was gone. She looked behind her on the floor. It wasn't there.

Her knees weakened and she reached out to steady herself on the doorjamb.

"Marcy, honest. I had a beautiful cape on just a minute ago. Really, I did.

Stop looking at me like that."

"Maybe it slipped off when you ran out of here," Marcy suggested as she set the

bag of food down.

"Maybe, but I think I would've felt that."

"What room did you find it in?"

"Right in there." Van pointed to the doorway.

"Van, that's the musty smelling bedroom, the one we thought the renter was still

using, if he's even here."

"No, it's the room that had the cape. The room did look like someone actually

lived in it, using all the antiques. Maybe he is still here. Wonder why he keeps all those womanly type things, though?"

Marcy gestured with frustration. "Van that is the old room. We both wondered

about it, remember?"

Positive she had been right, Van kept her gaze on Marcy as she opened the door

wider and pointed. Marcy looked in and shook her head.

Van looked over Marcy's head and her mouth opened but no sound came out. A

musty odor prevailed, but nowhere was there sight of a wardrobe or the perfumes

she'd just seen.

Van felt faint again. Grasping the door, she leaned on it for support.

"I know what I saw and felt. Here. You saw me come out of this door."

Van's

voice became a tortured whisper.

Marcy peered into the room again. Turning back to Van, she said, "You know, I

could stay the night."

Van saw the misgivings on Marcy's face. For some unexplained reason, she

wanted the house to herself. She didn't want to share it with anyone, not even

her very best friend.

"No, you need to get back to your gallery. The buyers need to see the famous

artist and you promised Ardith you'd be there. Besides, the fog's coming in

again. I'll be okay. Really."

"I'm worried. Look, you can't ignore this. Please," Marcy pleaded. "If you're going to have visions again, I can stay."

"Visions? Good grief, Marcy, we've been through this already. This is the real

world. I don't get visions anymore, just intuitive feelings, like any other sensitive person. I'll be all right."

Van hugged her. Van had survived more than visions in the past. Her curiosity and a sense of adventure overcame any misgivings she might have. The house brought out her latent abilities again just as the Shaman she had studied with had told her something would. Marcy was unaware that in the past few years, she had studied to learn how to control her psychic abilities and she didn't want to explain it to her now. Until she felt comfortable with them, she didn't want anyone around. This was so different from Los Angeles. L.A. was too hectic, too many vibrations coming at her. She needed to shield herself and shut down there. Lately, though, she'd been feeling a pull to hone her abilities again.

She felt a need to help someone. Her psychic gifts were both a blessing and a curse. Now, however, she picked up on the memories the house contained. This could be a good place for her. It wasn't frightening, just exciting. She wanted to explore the house, but first she needed to reassure Marcy and get her on her way, just in case something did happen.

"I don't feel any danger or menace," Van said. "Nothing bad. I got curious about the room and the clothes. I probably just mixed up the rooms. You know, this isn't exactly a small place and all the doors do look alike."

"If you say so."

"Besides, I'm more worried about you." Van adjusted her eyes to better view Marcy's aura. "Yep, you better stop worrying about me and relax. I'll be fine. Really."

Marcy didn't look convinced.

Van tried another tactic. "Come on, let's eat. Too bad about the fog coming in. I'd love to see the hills from here."

Marcy nodded and Van knew her friend wouldn't reopen the subject of psychic

sensitivity now that she had changed it. There could be no going back.

That

was the ultimate rule between them. Never look back. They'd almost forgotten

this afternoon, but it was the code by which they lived.

After eating their lunch and lounging in the parlor for nearly two hours rehashing old times, Marcy announced, "I hate to eat and run, but Mike is waiting in Cleveland and I do have that show tomorrow afternoon."

"Thanks for coming here with me and helping me get unloaded."

"No problem." Marcy smiled, and then became serious again. "Call me. I know

I'm an hour away, but I'll be here if you need me."

Van smiled and said softly, "I know and I'll give you a jingle as soon as the phone gets hooked up."

"Grief. You're going to be here all alone with no phone? Until when? I thought you'd taken care of that already."

Van placed her hands firmly on Marcy's shoulders and walked her to the door.

"I'll be fine. The phone's scheduled to be on sometime today. Now stop worrying or you'll get wrinkles and then I'll look younger than you."

"Not in this lifetime." Marcy grinned.

Van watched Marcy's car until it disappeared into the fog. When the engine

sound vanished also, she went into the house. It was time to see what shape the

kitchen was in. She had reserved this closer inspection until she could be alone. Kitchens were special to her. They meant all things good, warm, and

caring.

Van surveyed the gleaming, white-tiled counters and the hardwood floor. It was

a cozy kitchen, even for its size. Braided area rugs covered a large section

from the sink to the table. Another one lay under the table. The round table

in the middle of the huge kitchen covered with a lace cloth which had a blue

underlining, looked inviting. Butter, salt, and pepper shakers were sitting in

the middle of the table. Van smiled at them. Roosters. How apropos.

Van went from one orderly and clean cabinet to the next. The only thing missing

was food. Where had all the food gone? Probably neighbors. No one

knew she'd
be coming so soon.
At least I won't have to deal with mice now.
She peeked into the refrigerator, sighing when she found it as empty as
Mother
Hubbard's cupboard. Van realized she'd have to venture into town to get
some
supplies.
Well, there's no time like the present.
She retrieved her keys from the Parsons table and halted in the foyer as
she
felt a presence. A chill touched the back of her neck and she turned
around,
but couldn't focus on it. The feeling of being watched crawled up her
spine. A
whispering voice made its way into her mind, but the words eluded her.
Unconsciously shaking her head, Van headed for her Blazer.

The entity watched from the second story window as the vehicle moved
away from
the house. The demon joined him.
"She is back and she is mine. Enjoy her while you may, but she will be
mine,
as you will, also. The beginning of the end is at hand."

CHAPTER TWO

The Entity sat in the old oak rocking chair allowing Van's thoughts and
desires
overwhelm him.
He stood and walked slowly to the opposite side of the ornate Victorian
styled
room. The braided rug muffled the sound of his footsteps. His long legs,
encased in tight black leggings, ate up the short distance. The billowing
sleeves of his white shirt, opened to the waist, barely held the muscles
that
stretched taut against them as he raised his hand to his head to push
back the

dark curls that spilled onto his forehead. He braced himself against the windowpane--the same one from which he'd watched new owners come and go, over and over.

The old house had seen a multitude of personalities. As had happened so often in the past, she was a new owner. Each time a new owner arrived, the Entity's hope of being released from his imprisonment renewed itself. Each time, he came away disappointed.

By her arrival and possession of the house, she had unwittingly bonded him to this room again--the room he shared for over two hundred years with his memories.

Something was different this time. Something about her.

Her posture, and the way she used her hands in speaking, struck a resonant chord within him. He squinted his eyes, trying to remember that long forgotten thought at the edge of his consciousness.

He shook his head.

Something about her.

He remembered how hope flared through him when she looked up at his window.

When she shook her head quizzically, his essence pulsed with anticipation.

Something was going to happen. He felt it to the core of his being.

As quickly as his hope rose, reason dissolved it.

She is no different from the others.

No one ever saw or heard him when he remained here. In this house he could only be a silent observer of life and then only from the room to which he was bound.

Yet somehow this time seemed different.

Something about her.

Suddenly he knew and his spirit soared.

She had returned to finish what had been left undone for two centuries.

Would she do it?

He slammed his fist against the wall in frustration. She had refused him in her last lifetime. She could just as easily refuse him again.

He turned and began to pace back and forth, trying to avoid hearing her

intimate, emotional thoughts, but they filtered, unbidden, through him.

Van tried to shrug off the strange feeling of someone watching her as she slipped behind the wheel of her SUV. The five-minute drive to town wasn't enough to relax. She'd need a two-week Caribbean cruise to calm her nerves.

She loved the old house. She remembered visiting with her parents and how often she dreamed of being a princess in it when she was a little girl. When inside, she felt warm and comfortable. Now she owned it. And she had decided to sell it. It still made her feel unique knowing that none of her friends could claim ownership of such a grand old Victorian homestead.

But something...something just felt unsettling. She couldn't shake the feeling that someone watched her even though she was a few miles away. Parking in front of the only grocery in town, Van surveyed her surroundings. The small store was wedged between an old time diner and a barbershop, which actually had an old-fashioned barber pole in front of it. Country music blared through the open doorway from the bar across the street.

Must be the busiest place in town. The sound of loud laughter forced Van to smile in spite of her taut mood. So this was the typical small town life she'd heard so much about. It's still quieter than L.A. I can handle it for a couple of months-- I think. Van entered the store. Looking around for a cart, she found only small hand baskets. Sighing at the prospect of lugging all her groceries in her arms, she grabbed one and sidled down the narrow aisles, which were jam packed with every kind of grocery and gourmet item you could think of. The old linoleum floors rolled and swelled in spots. Van smiled at the modern displays of floor polishes next to ads for dishwashing soap that had to be

from
the fifties era when poodle skirts were the rage.
Twenty minutes later, she'd found everything except for fresh mushrooms.
Convinced she hadn't looked hard enough, she decided to ask the stock
boy who
loitered near her the whole time she shopped. He had dark hair and his
eyes
matched it perfectly. He would have been handsome if he didn't act so
creepy.
Before she could utter a word, he asked, "Hey, aren't you the lady that's
moved
into the old Willie Bodin place?"
"How'd you know?"
"Heck, this is a small town, lady. Everybody knows everybody's
business.
'Sides, your fancy, house-selling guy was here and spilled his guts to ol'
Randy
at the diner."
The boy stepped closer. She felt his hot pizza breath on her face. He
didn't
seem to notice her recoiling from him. "Ain't you scared to be there all
alone?
That place is haunted. Me and the guys tried to spend a night there
once. We
never did make it though."
"You slept in the house?" Van couldn't believe Uncle William would let
this
boy in the same room with his priceless antiques.
"Oh, yeah. Old Willie never minded us kids much," the boy smirked. "He
used to
say he wished he had a son like me. You must belong to his psycho
sister,
right? You're the one who gets the house and all the gold in it." He
leaned
closer. "If you live."
"If I...what?" Taken back by his rudeness, Van glared.
"Don't pay attention to Duke," the aged cashier intervened as she took
Van's
basket from her and put it on the counter. "He's the one who's a bit daft."
With her attention diverted, Van looked at the old lady whose reproving
glare
didn't quite match the cheerful round contours of her face. When she
shook her

head at the boy, wisps of curly grey hair fell unheeded onto her brow. She looked like Mrs. Santa Claus down to the frilly white apron she wore over her ankle length dress.

When the old woman picked up a broom, Van jerked back, expecting her to swat him

with it, but instead, she scolded, "Duke, get your nose hind end out to the

walk and sweep 'til there ain't any dirt left in the cracks."

"Yes, Ma'am."

Duke grabbed the broom while he snickered at Van.

Turning her attention back to Van, the old woman said, "Sorry 'bout that, Missy. By the by, my name's Martha. Martha Stoneman."

The woman's broad smile was contagious. Van found herself smiling back.

Suddenly Martha became serious. "If you need anything, anything at all, you

come to me. I'll make sure you're getting it. You understand, don't you, sweetie?"

Van didn't know what Martha meant and shock permeated her when the old woman

took her hands into hers and held them tightly. Startled, Van pulled back, but

Martha held on. No one would guess this little old lady would have that much

strength.

Without the spidery feeling, which usually precipitated her psychic revelations,

Van watched the vision that formed on the face of Martha.

Van didn't see just one grandmotherly old woman, but layers upon layers of

women. Van marveled as their hair flowed from them in a profusion of colors and

styles from various periods of time. Faces, figures and garments changed in

succession--a showcase of centuries. As the old one held her hands, Van

continued to watch women flow across her old face.

Amazed, Van stood rooted in the space she occupied. When the display ended, Van

looked into Martha's eyes and a deep understanding filled her. Martha smiled,

then leaned over and kissed Van on the cheek.

The simple gesture of friendship brought Van back to reality and her initial discomfort at Martha's odd behavior vanished as a feeling of eternal friendship

replaced it. She felt she had known Martha for eons. The empathy passing

between them went deep into her psyche and Van knew it would endure throughout

the ages and continue to grow.

Van whispered softly. "Thank you,"

The old woman smiled before releasing Van's hands, and Van felt instant regret

at the loss of contact.

Assuming her old persona, Martha turned to the register, picked up a package of

mushrooms from the side of the counter and placed them in Van's basket.

"Will

you be needin' anythin' else?"

Van shook her head, and Martha made quick work of adding up and

bagging Van's

groceries.

"On second thought, maybe."

Martha looked at Van expectantly.

"Do you know if there are any other rooms for rent in town?"

"Whatever for?" Martha looked at her in surprise. "You been scared by talk of

haunting already?"

"No, not for me. For the man who is living in my house. Do you know anything

about him?"

"What man?" Martha looked curiously at Van. Van was amazed that Martha didn't

know about him. Apparently, there were no secrets in this town, but this one

must have escaped her.

Or maybe she's just forgotten.

"The boarder," Van continued. "Apparently Uncle William decided to rent a room

to this guy. He was supposed to be out on the first, but I think he's still there. I'm not too happy about having him there, especially when I have to get

it ready to sell."

Martha looked thoughtfully out the window. A few moments passed, but Van barely

noticed. She became mesmerized by the colors in Martha's aura. Adjusting her vision, Van concentrated on the dazzling array. The brilliant gold, violet and fuchsia shrouding Martha's head were the most unusual combinations she had ever seen. She wondered what those particular colors meant. Suddenly Martha turned to her and said, "He's harmless. Just will take a little getting used to." Martha's voice brought her back to reality. Van's focus returned to normal as she replied, "Oh, I know that. The attorney said the boarder is a little peculiar. Even so, I'd like to get him out. I was told he rehearses at night and I like to go to bed early." "Rehearses?" Martha's asked, snapping her head up. "Yes, I understand he's an actor." "Have you seen him?" Martha leaned toward Van expectantly. "Well, I saw him at his window when I pulled up today. Apparently he left before I could meet him." "So, you did see him." Martha smiled and then stared into space for another long moment. Once she finished her communion with herself she looked at Van. "Well, I suspect he's not a showy type. I think you'll do well in the house.

It needs someone like you to care for it." "Well, I like it, too. I almost hate to sell the old place. It's so homey. It feels good, you know? Well, other than this strange feeling I have someone is watching me." "Those old houses always have so many energies caught in the walls, it's no wonder you feel that way." Martha smiled at Van. "Will you be needing anything else today?" "Well, one more thing," Van said. "Do you know where I could get some information about the house?" "No, I sure can't," Martha replied. "The newspaper building burned up about forty-five years ago, just after Miss Montieth got herself a heart attack in that house. That was real curious, too. They never could figure out why such a

young woman had a heart attack. Some thought it was foul play. Others thought

it was something else maybe."

"Did they think she was murdered?"

"Oh no, not that," Martha replied.

"How old was she?" Van asked.

"Well, she must have been about your age, say twenty-nine or thirty."

"That is a little young, but it can happen."

"Yeah, but she t'wern't the only one who died like that."

The hairs on the back of Van's neck rose as a chill passed over her entire body

and centered in her spine. She felt sure she needed to remember something, but

she couldn't make it come to the forefront of her mind.

Shaking her head to dispel the chill, she asked, "You mean someone else died of

a heart attack, too?"

"Oh, yeah, plenty. Seems 'bout every fifty years, give or take a few, some woman dies in that house."

"Dies?" Another chill moved up Van's spine to the back of her neck. The coldness on her neck felt as real as the money in her palm. Nausea climbed in her throat.

"Now, that don't mean nothin', sweetie. It's just a quirk. I'm always goin' off at the mouth worse'n that Duke boy. Look, if you be wantin' to know 'bout

the house and them dead folks, you might go up to Jefferson County to the

courthouse. Maybe they got somethin' to help you figure out the history."

Quickly, Martha changed her conspiratorial manner to one of open curiosity.

"You single?"

"Yes, I am. Why?"

"Just askin'."

"Okay."

Martha seemed likeable, but really odd at the most random moments.

"Well, thanks for everything." She tried to give her best smile, but she knew

it never reached her lips.

As she moved out the door with her arms full of grocery bags, her mind whirled.

If a death occurred every fifty years--give or take a few-- and the last one being forty-five years ago, was the house due another one?

A long, cold shudder coursed through her body as she climbed into her truck and turned out onto the road. Even the beautiful fall scenery didn't diminish her anxiety. So many questions were unanswered. Had she inherited a haunted house? Would that make it harder to sell? Did she really want to go back there? Despite what she'd just heard, she felt safe there. But was she? Maybe I'm not as intuitive as I think I am.

Van stopped at the fork in the road. She could turn one way, head to Cleveland airport and be done with the whole scenario. She could hire someone to clear out the house and then get back to L.A. and her hectic new job.

Sighing deeply, Van stepped on the gas. For some reason she couldn't turn her back on the place. It beckoned her.

Moments later, she pulled into the driveway and drove slowly up the tree-lined drive. When she reached the turn around, she hesitated, reluctant to leave the safety of her truck. For several moments, she simply stared at the structure.

As Van watched, the house shivered visibly as if someone--something--had given it a good shake.

Van's heart pounded and she swallowed hard.

Control. She needed to control herself before her imagination took over and created a totally different reality.

It was just a house.

Her senses were alert and she probed the house again, her gaze drifting to the boarder's window.

Nothing. No sense of anything.

I'm tired. Maybe I should go to Marcy's for the night and try to figure out what to do tomorrow.

She turned the key in the ignition but the engine didn't kick over. Gritting her teeth, she tried again, but it nothing happened.

"Damn."

The battery was dead.

Trying one more time, Van turned the key and nearly jumped out of her seat when

a crack of lightning struck a tree less than fifty feet away. The crash of thunder that immediately followed propelled her into action. She leapt out of

the truck, grabbed her groceries, and ran through the pelting rain into the house.

Putting away her supplies did nothing to soothe her frazzled nerves.

Normally,

it would soothe her to do things that were second nature, like putting away groceries, but not this time. She tried to reason out what compelled her to

stay.

She knew she felt an inexplicable bond to the house. It didn't feel haunted or

evil, yet she knew something walked the floors. Yes, she admitted, she'd wanted

to leave for the night, but she knew she wouldn't be able to stay away.

Something about the old homestead called out to a spot deep within her.

She

felt as if she belonged here.

Maybe I shouldn't sell it.

Sell or not to sell? She wasn't used to being so ambivalent about anything. As

the editor for a leading woman's magazine's food section, she made decisions

moment by moment, without hesitation. She was lovingly known as the dragon

queen to those who couldn't decide issues within moments. She didn't tolerate

fence sitting for herself or anyone on her staff.

As she walked around the kitchen, Van drew in a long breath then exhaled slowly.

She loved kitchens--probably a good thing for a food editor.

She found an old teapot and filled it with water. After she put it on the burner, she opened the tea bag and waited for the pot to boil. It felt so comfortable in there.

The heart of a home is the kitchen.

A smile pulled at her lips. Mom used to say that often.

Sitting down at the Formica table, she stirred her tea. Suddenly a familiar, spidery feeling crept into her lower back and up her spine.

Now what?

It had been years since she'd had a real vision, but the sensations that precipitated them were undeniable. She gave in to the spidery sensation, which

gave her only little warning.

Bending her head down, she closed her eyes, afraid of what she might see. The

impressions spilled into her mind until she was a blank canvas for the universe

to sketch upon. Bracing herself, Van waited.

After a few minutes, she felt compelled to look up. When she did, she saw a

woman standing directly in front of her across the table.

"Well, are you going to be sitting there all day or are you going to help me with this pail?" the woman asked imperiously.

Van stared. As she opened her mouth to reply, a little boy dressed in breeches

and a blue cotton shirt came out from behind Van and said, "Yes, Mama, I'm a big

boy. I'll help."

She watched them walk out the kitchen door. Standing up, Van turned to face the

stove. A fireplace formed in its place. As she began to move away from it, a

man appeared. He stared into the flames with his jaw set. His expression

softened when the woman came in.

Now pregnant, the woman's muslin dress stretched to contain her figure.

He

helped her to set her basket down. Then, without a moment's hesitation, he

swept her into his arms.

Feeling like an intruder, Van turned away from the tender moment, but turned

back when other scenes played themselves out. The manner of dress changed with

the time periods, but all the events were loving. She watched and absorbed the

warmth of love into herself.

Van felt a relief to know the house had witnessed warm, caring relationships.

Now she knew her first feelings about the house had been right. Not one event

in the kitchen depicted death, hate or malice.
Hoping against hope, she believed perhaps all the uneasy feelings she'd had up to this point weren't connected to the house, but exclusively to her re-awakened psychic power.
I need to control my energies better or I'll go nuts here.
It had been years since she had even thought about her psychic abilities.
The house seemed to bring the vibrations upfront and center for her. It made it seem easier to 'feel'. Even the storm outside seemed less threatening. She lifted her cup to her lips and wrinkled her nose. The tea had gotten cold.
Apparently, a lot of time had passed while she watched the events of the past play themselves out. As much as she loved the security of the kitchen, the day's events had finally taken their toll. She was tired.
After locking the doors, she wearily climbed the stairs.
As she entered the room she'd chosen for her bedroom, she sighed. It was beautiful. The fluffy pillows and overstuffed mattress looked inviting. The highly polished wood nightstand shone in the glow from the small lamp.
Her journal next to the lamp looked like it had been there for years, not just a day.
Pulling on her oversized long johns, she wondered about her boarder. She hadn't seen him all day today. The note she left on his door remained taped in the same place.
Maybe he had found another place.
She'd sleep better if she knew for sure.
I wonder if he left just for a couple days? Maybe he knew I was going to talk to him about leaving.
If the rumors were true, the guy is definitely not interested in women--his career being the most important thing in his life--that, and his research into the eighteenth century. From what her attorney told her, Uncle William had liked the fellow well enough, but then, Uncle William had been a bit of an eccentric himself.

Van locked her door.
No sense in taking any chances.
As she turned out her nightlight, she heard someone talking.
Damn.
Obviously her boarder had come back. She made a mental note to talk to her
unwanted roommate tomorrow. Early.
Definitely.

CHAPTER THREE

Van groaned and struggled to open her eyelids. Someone had called her.
Lying
quietly, she strained to listen.
"Must've been my imagination."
Van fought with her pillow, turning the warm side away from her. As she
snuggled deep into her newfound cool space on her pillow, a breeze
brushed over
her face like an icy caress.
In an instant, Van came fully awake. Pressure built in her chest and then
in
the next moment, all the air in the room seemed to be swallowed up as
she gasped
wildly trying to breathe.
When a shaft of lightning brightened the room, she glimpsed a shadow on
the
wall. Taking a large breath in, she turned her eyes toward where the
shadow had
been. She raised her head slightly and froze.
Someone was at her window.
Impossible.
There was no ledge on the second story bedroom.
Her heart pounded painfully against her chest. She shivered as a murky,
swirling uproar passed through her, leaving her cold.
As another spear of lightning pierced the semi-darkness, the shadow
moved
slightly, and she could see octopus-like tendrils snaking out to her. She
strained not to blink. Without thinking, Van reached out from under her
comforter. As her hand neared the shadowy presence, it pulled back its
curls
like a fog, leaving her even colder than before.
As quickly as it appeared, the shadow vanished. Van's senses went

hollow. The lone sound inside the house was the clock out in the vestibule, its cadence loud in the quiet. A rapid series of energy sparks, like electrical impulses, burst through her body again, forcing her to vault up in bed. Confused, Van reached for her covers and drew them up to her chest, clutching them so tightly her fingers ached. Something was happening here. Since she had arrived at the house, she had felt a link with it. She hadn't picked up any bad vibes earlier, but her skills were rusty. The scene in the kitchen had proven that the house was a catalyst for her senses. Universe, you have my attention...what do you want? Soothing shades of rainbow colors swirled around her as she tried to focus on the different sensations coursing through her body. Warmth, love and a genuine feeling of peace flooded her senses. She felt sheltered from everything as she ignored the indiscernible noises trying to invade her cozy space in time. She wanted to keep the warm, fuzzy feeling a little longer. The sounds persisted however, drawing Van out from under her secure blanket of insight. Loud voices carried from across the hall. She threw back her covers and wished she'd taken Marcy up on sleeping at her house. Van reached for the phone. Deader than a doornail. Oh great. The storm must've knocked it out. Who would she call anyway? Her boarder remained her problem, no one else's. Van pulled her robe over her long johns and jammed her foot into a fuzzy slipper. She spotted Uncle William's walking stick propped in the corner and grabbed it with an ungraceful yank. She used it for balance while fitting her left foot into her other slipper. With the cane held tightly in her fist, Van edged toward her door, pausing

with
each step to listen. Each time she stopped to listen, the noises stopped
also.
After several repeats of this, Van straightened her back and her
determination.
No more cat and mouse games.
Even as much as she wanted to stride across the hallway, the darkness
and her
newness to the house prevented her. When she reached the door, she
cocked her
head against it and listened.
Nothing. No sounds came from the room. The only sound came from the
house
timbers creaking. The wind, mournful as it blew past her, made her shiver.
A
cat yowled loudly and Van jumped again, dropping the cane from her
perspiring
palms. She groped along the floor, feeling for it in the dark. It had
disappeared into the night, like the shadow outside her window had done.
The furry neighborhood Romeo and the house settling convinced her that
her
renter wasn't making the noises. His room stayed quiet.
She released her breath, surprised to discover that she had been holding it
for
so long. Closing her eyes, she strained to hear anything else over the
sound of
her thudding heartbeat.
The hallway was dark and unnerving, and Van's wariness made her feel
less in
control now. She scurried, like a frightened mouse, across the hall to her
room. Turning the lock on her door, she flipped the latch. She sighed
with
relief when it slipped into its setting without a sound.
Good.
She didn't need any more noise. She grabbed the desk chair, shoving it
under
the knob.
There. That should hold off...whatever.
Van huddled in the armchair by the window, staring out into the blackness
of the
storm. Her phone was as dead as her car battery. If it weren't for the
storm,
she would walk into town, but she couldn't leave.

As she hugged her knees, she heard the tinny sound of chimes, like those from an out of tune music box. Suddenly voices forced themselves to the forefront of her mind.
Name me!
I cannot.
Van shook her head trying to dislodge the voices in it. Instead of leaving, they magnified themselves and Van felt the spidery feeling crawling up her spine again.
No, not another vision. Not now.
Against her will, she found herself watching a strange scene unfold before her.
Van shuddered at the sight of the hideously scarred woman. The horror of the woman's face made Van cringe involuntarily. Somehow the woman's ugliness clashed with the masculine beauty of the man making love to her. Sort of a wildly skewed version of Beauty and the Beast. It had been hard to see him clearly because of the mist surrounding, him and the position of his body, but Van felt his beauty.
Something about him.

The woman arched to meet her lover and cried out in ecstasy at his rhythmic movements. The lover watched woodenly, without interest, as she tossed and turned beneath him.
Name me! He demanded again.
Do not toy with me.
Name me and what has begun will be finished.
I cannot. The panting woman reached for him.
Why not? Have you not been served well?
Yes, but you will most certainly leave me if I name you.

The vision ended.
Van puzzled over the words in the vision. Why did the man want the woman to name him? What was that all about? Why didn't he already have a

name? He was
an adult. Why did she refuse?
Walking to her bedside table, she took out her journal and documented
the scene
and her reactions to it. From past experience, she knew some things that
didn't
make sense in the present sometimes in the future tied together like the
threads
in a spider's web.
She pondered. If the shadowy evil she had sensed earlier influenced her
vision, could it have distorted the woman's features?
Creaking floorboards, lurking shadows and spooky visions were enough
drama for
one night.
Well, I'd say I've had an interesting night so far.
She settled down again in her bed, willing her eyes to close. The
disquieting
events of the dark night kept her awake as the clock chimed each passing
hour.
The storm subsided and the house grew quiet. Each time she managed
to doze off,
she awoke to the slightest sound, apprehensive of what might be lurking in
the
night.
Finally, as dawn began to consume the shadows of the long, disturbing
night,
reality swirled and blended with her dreams. She heard the chimes again.
As
they tinkled with the wind, Van slept and began to dream.

Someone called her and she rose from bed. Her body felt heavy in its
dream-like
state, but her movements were light and flowing as she drew a robe over
her
filmy negligee and glided out of her room.
Van looked down at herself and wondered when she had changed into this
gossamer
gown. The creaking of the floorboard and the pull she felt, distracted her
from
her garments and forced her out of her room to the door across the hall.
When she opened the door, an unearthly light inside dazed her
momentarily.
"Hello?" she called into the room.

She received no answer. As she began to close the door, a movement in the corner caught her attention. A swirling vapor appeared and a man formed within it. Without hesitation, she stepped into the room and reached out toward him with her energy. Instinctively, she knew he needed her help to materialize. When he condensed from the mist and became entirely solid, he approached her and clutched both her hands. Van's heart skipped a beat and her mind rebelled. He felt real--he looked real.

But, this is a dream, isn't it?
She wanted him to be real, though. Never in her waking life had she seen a man so perfectly formed and so utterly handsome. From the top of his curly black hair to the tips of his knee high black boots, which were snug against his legs, she wanted him to be real. Part of her wanted to escape back to her warm bed. Another part wanted to stay and keep looking at this vision of manhood that made her wet between her legs. He leaned toward her as he stroked her fingers with a gentleness she found both soothing and hypnotic. "You are so beautiful." His deep, husky voice tantalized her, causing her to listen more intently as it seemed to fill the void in her soul. "Your aura shimmers like sparkling stars against a moonlit sky. It is right for you to return. I've waited to hold you again. The pleasuring will be complete and we will be one." "Who are you?" Truth be known, she didn't really care who he was. She just wanted him to keep talking in his smooth, deep voice which folded itself around her, making

her
sway as if hypnotized. Van watched his features as he appeared to weigh
the
question in his mind. When he spoke, it seemed like a sigh with words.
“You created me to bring pleasure to you. I am your eyes, your ears and
your
servant, if you want me. If you do not, I still cannot leave. I would rather
be your lover, but if not your lover, I will still be your protector.”
“Okay. I’ll go with the lover and servant part, but I don’t need a protector.”

At least I don’t think I do.
“I did not help the others,” he continued. “They could not see me. You,
my
darling, can see and feel me. Anna, I did not believe this could be, but
you
are here.” He touched her hair. “And you are so very lovely now.”
“My name’s Vanessa, not Anna.”
He lifted his hand and with tanned fingers, caressed her cheek. Each
place he
touched sent out ripples of warmth, which drew her closer and made her
want
more.
“My beautiful creator. You are so supple to my touch.”
He stroked her chin in a soft, gentle motion. His eyes darkened with
passion.
“You are as much mine as I am yours.”
The warmth again coiled around her, fusing her to him. A deep yearning
rose
within her and she groaned with primitive need. The craving within
overpowered
her resistance to him. Nothing else mattered. She wanted him to take
her and
burst through the protective cocoon she hadn’t allowed anyone else to
enter.
Somehow she knew he sensed her needs as he crushed her to him. She
leaned into
his firm chest, inhaling his scent. He smelled of soap and leather. Sliding
her arms around his back, she arched to meet him.
He carried her to the bed. As her negligee slipped slowly from her
shoulders,
it added the sensual feeling of silk to his caresses. The feather mattress
molded around them, enveloping them in a cloud of softness and warmth.
Her eyes misted over as she clung to him. The fresh scent of spring

flowers
filled the room. Exhilaration filled her as she succumbed to the feeling of
being womanly, wanted and... powerful. She knew she was the only
woman in the
world who could satisfy his need.
She wanted to do nothing else but make love with him for pure pleasure of
it.

Van awoke with a start.
It took a moment, but she finally realized she was in her own bed.
Whew. That was one hell of a dream.
Cautiously, she looked down and seemed almost surprised to see her
long johns.
In the past it had been easy to distinguish between reality and her
dreams, but
this one had been so real. She actually thought she'd worn a silk
negligee,
something she'd never be caught dead in.
Her cheeks warmed as she remembered the intensity of their lovemaking;
at how
her imagination had created such an erotic dreamscape.
With a familiar player in a new show.
It had been the same man--the one in her dreams since she had been
small. When
she was younger, he'd comforted and protected her from the terrors of the
night,
making her feel warm and secure. As she matured, he'd taken on new
aspects.
When she became an adult, her dreams became more intimate.
But nothing as detailed or intimate as this one.
The clock chimed ten. Van realized she hadn't slept so late in ages and
she
savored the extra rest. She decided she could almost get used to waking
up
without worrying about a deadline for the magazine.
She looked out the window and even though the day was overcast, she felt
she
could tackle the world. She pulled her jeans over her slim hips and opted
for
the pink cashmere sweater. She loved the way it felt against her
skin--almost
as good as the silk negligee.
It was a dream, Moore. Get real.

Catching a glimpse of herself in the mirror as she left her room, Van did a double take. Her face flushed and she had a soft glow around her.
I should sleep in more often.
She stopped abruptly in the hall outside her door. Van grimaced.
Oh boy, the renter.
Bending over, she picked up the cane she'd dropped last night. Holding it loosely, she crossed to the other door.
Should she go in?
Momentary indecision clutched at her, but logic overrode it and she inched open
the door. This was her responsibility now, she reasoned, and she needed to find
out if the guy was still here or not.
She took a tentative step inside the dim room, clasping the cane a little more
tightly when the scene in front of her unfolded.
An unearthly light illuminated the room. Next to the antique four-poster bed
stood a man.
My mystery boarder, no doubt.
This had to be him, but he wasn't at all what she'd imagined he would be.
She'd
expected a small, Woody Allen type, but instead, a cover model stood in
front of
her. She took in his tousled black mane of hair, which looked as if he'd
just
awakened. It was hard not to notice his blouse sleeved shirt and the tight
pants which clung to hard muscled thighs and long legs.
He dressed like the man in her dream. Heat rose in her face. She took a
deep
breath and mentally chastised herself when she realized he couldn't
possibly
know he had been the object of her sexual fantasies.
Regaining some equilibrium, she said, "So we meet at last. Are you
packing?"
"Whatever do you mean?" With casual ease, he leaned against the bed
column and
continued to look at her, seemingly unperturbed at her uninvited presence
in his
room.
It's as though he expected me.
She took a step closer, holding the cane tighter.
"You were supposed to move out before I got here. Why haven't you left

yet?"

Van watched his gaze roam over her body with more than casual interest.

His

lips curved upward. Was he smiling or smirking?

"This is my place."

Definitely smirking.

"Your place?" Van took another step closer.

"Yes. I reside here."

"I understand you had an agreement with my uncle, but you know he's dead, don't

you? I own this house now."

A tinny chiming began and Van became distracted when she heard the out of tune

melody. It sounded as if it were right in the room. The sound grated on her

nerves. The sensation of anger that welled in her astonished her.

Unsuccessfully, she tried to squelch the strange feelings, but they rose up again in her. Though the chimes struck a deep discordant note within her, they

also made her feel hot and sensual.

Suddenly, without warning, lust overwhelmed her. Her breath came in short gasps

while she struggled to maintain a calm appearance. The craving wouldn't back down.

The chimes stopped. She eyed her renter. She felt hot, sexy, and furious, all

at the same time.

"This isn't going to cut it at all."

"Cut it?" He raised his eyebrows, glanced at the cane and appeared to study her

with even more care. Before she could react, he had crossed the floor putting

himself immediately in front of her.

"Oh, no, you don't." Van backed away and brought the cane up to swing.

With no apparent effort, he lifted it from her and flung it easily across the room. Van stepped back, but as she turned to run out the doorway, he appeared,

blocking her exit.

How'd he do that so fast?

Van jumped aside and pushed him as hard as she could, readying herself for a

karate maneuver. When her leg came up, she connected...hard, but the

kick
didn't even faze him. He leaned over for a split second, and then stood upright. She shuddered.
What is he made of?
"Why did you do that?"
"What?" She scanned the room for an escape, keeping one eye on him.
"Why do
you think I did it? You better get out of my way, or I'll do it again and I won't be so nice."
She hoped she sounded fiercer than she appeared.
He smiled.
The aroma of leather and soap filled the room. Where had she smelled the
fragrance before? Her mind faltered and began to spin.
The aroma. So unusual.
She heard the chimes tinkling their strange melody again. Suddenly, she realized she couldn't seem fierce because she felt sexy and hot all over. Against her will, her body reacted to the strange melody that danced in her
head. Desire and longing overcame her. She shook and her breath came in short
gasps. Her eyes widened with amazement.
"Oh my God."
This was the man from her dreams last night.
I'm going nuts. Why can't I seem to stop what's happening?
He reached for her.
"What are you going to do?" Van asked as he clasped her small hands in his.
She didn't know whether to run or stay.
"What would you have me do?"
His closeness caused her senses to reel even more. She fought back the uproar
with all the power she could muster.
"Just leave." It came out as more of a plea than a demand.
He took a step back, folding his arms across his chest. Van watched his features become solemn. His voice was flat. "That is impossible. I cannot."
"What do you mean?"
"I cannot leave."
Something about him.
She had to know him from somewhere other than the dream but she couldn't think
straight with him so close. Her reaction to him confused her even more.

When
she tried to concentrate, her thoughts became muddled. What was it
about him
that caused her to react this way? Why couldn't she be logical? All she
could
think of was whether he thought she was sexy.
She wanted him. In the biblical sense. In the most basic sexual way.
Swirling
desires pummeled her mind and libido. She could feel the wetness
between her
legs.
Her common sense completely disappeared when she looked into his
eyes. Memories
inundated her mind.
Iridescent robin's egg blue surrounded his black pupils--these eyes had
haunted
all her dreams through the years. She'd searched for them in every face
since
she had been a teenager, until she finally gave up hope of ever finding
them.
Now they were here, right in front of her, and she could only gawk like an
adolescent seeing her first movie idol in person.
Here stood the man she'd been searching for all her life. But he wasn't a
man--was he? How could he be if he infiltrated her dreams?
Precognitive dream, perhaps?
Van tried to focus on whether she could be experiencing a new dimension
of
vision. His closeness made it impossible to see or feel anything but him
and
the present.
What's happening here?
Van closed her eyes and took a very deep breath.
This is too bizarre. Too strange.
Damn. Only here twenty-four hours and I'm losing my grip on reality. So
what
if he looks like my dream lover? I have to get him out of here.
Her heart pounded, her thighs trembled and her mind lost the fight to
stabilize
her runaway passions. Her body reacted with a will of its own. The
chimes
enticed her to abandon her self with their melodious seduction.
Van found herself sidling next to him, drawn to the space he occupied.
Uppermost in her mind was a single thought. She wanted him. She

wanted him
inside her. Possessing her. Possessing him.
Now.
Closer.
Much closer.
“Do you still wish me to leave?” he whispered as he leaned down to her,
his warm
breath soft against her cheek.
“Yes,” Van responded as she took a step back. Then, unconsciously,
she took two
forward. Desire overcame her. Her body filled with yearnings that
demanded
immediate gratification.
He has to stay.
“That is your wish?”
“Maybe. No. I don’t know.” Van felt less rational than ever. “I don’t want
you to leave, but you should.”
Van shook her head, trying to dispel her rampant thoughts. Never in her
life
had she been so perplexed.
“Thank you, my sweeting,” he whispered again, leaning toward her.
The familiarity jarred her, yet she wanted to hear it again.
“What are you thanking me for?”
With feet that felt like they were made of concrete, Van sludged her way
across
the room.
“Just because I let you stay doesn’t mean you’re going to be hanging my
panties
from your bedpost. You need to understand I didn’t expect to have to
share the
house and I’m not too thrilled about it. Leave me alone and we’ll get along
fine.”
“Are you sure that is what you wish?”
She walked to the bed, trying to gain some room to breathe--to think, but
it
felt too hot to think. There was no room in her brain to think. It was all in
a purple puddle somewhere.
Wonder what the temperature is in here?
He crossed the room and reached for her with a gentle motion. Bending
over in a
gallant gesture, he softly kissed her hand.
At his touch, spasms of energy raced up her arm and spread through
every fiber

in her body. Before she could consider how the nerves in her fingers connected to the ones in her stomach causing it to do somersaults, he picked her up in one sweeping motion. He tenderly placed her on the bed. In the next instant, he lay next to her, one of his huge hands under the small of her back, the other gently cradling her neck.

Déjà vu.

Softness surrounded her as she responded to the heat of desire coiling around her...settling low in her...making her feel weak and strong at the same time.

He bent his head and touched his lips to her forehead. Then he kissed the tip of her nose. Then he kissed her trembling lips. His feather light kisses on her neck and cheeks sent quivering sensations down her arms and thighs.

The tips of her breasts tingled with anticipation. Pinpoints of pleasure swirled, spread and compounded through every part of her being.

She felt him trace the skin of her throat with a long, graceful finger. She tilted her head, long sigh escaping from her parted lips. Luxurious swirls of bliss wrapped around and melted into her as their kiss deepened. With half-opened eyes, she saw him smiling down at her. When their gazes met--her body shook with the connecting jolt.

His caresses penetrated all her barriers. She was his, completely. Forever. Nothing else mattered.

A soft country ballad danced around the background of Van's mind blocking out the tinkling of the chimes.

The clock radio that had automatically come on across the hall filtered through her consciousness. It took a moment more for reality to claim her. Foggy headed and confused, she shoved her unwanted boarder away with a strength she didn't realize she possessed. She couldn't, however, shove the warm, glowing feeling away.

She shook badly--with desire. And self-loathing.

Backing away from him, she rolled off the bed.

"What do you think you're doing? Screw that, what was I doing? I'm warning you, you're definitely out of here if you consider me some kind of prize notch in your bedpost."

Her eyes opened wide in amazement when he sat up in one fluid motion and examined the bedpost closely.

"What is the matter with you?" Van backed away to the door, trying to ignore the heat racing through her veins.

"I thought you enjoyed the play," he replied. "Did I not perceive your desires correctly?"

Perceive my desires correctly? Does this guy think he's going to get a break by getting lucky with the new landlady?

"Did I not please you?" he asked.

Oh yeah, you pleased me, all right. Too much. How could he act so innocent after all that?

"I know this may be a little hard for you to believe, all things considered, but rolling around on a bed with a man I don't know is not something I do every day."

He stood up on the opposite side of the bed and folded his arms across his massive chest. With his feet planted apart, he looked every inch a dangerous pirate, even more so because of his outrageous clothes.

"Why are you dressed in those clothes?" Van asked as the incongruity of his outfit registered. "Was that you last night? Were you rehearsing?"

For the briefest instant, Van thought she saw a look of sadness flicker across his face.

Clenching his fists at his sides, he replied so quietly Van had to labor to hear. "Yes, I am in rehearsal."

Well, Van thought, at least that explains why he wears the old-fashioned clothes and why this room looks like a bordello stage set from The Wild, Wild West.

Uncle William had been known for his idiosyncrasies and obviously surrounded himself with equally eccentric artists. She wondered who else might show up on her doorstep.

Van looked at his forlorn expression. Unable to believe she said it, she gave in. "You can stay until you find another place. I'll bring you the classifieds. Consider it a going away present."

"I do not think I can find another place. I have tried many times, but this house calls me back."

Van sighed as she took in the room's furniture and fixtures. "I can understand that. This place has its own-- personality, that's for sure, but you have to understand my dilemma. I need to get the house ready for sale and I can't have you here when people are looking it over."

"I belong here."

Oh boy. This wasn't going to be easy.

What if she couldn't get rid of him? He scared her. No, to be truthful, she scared herself. She should make him leave right away--give him a three-day notice. What was it about him that made her reluctant to have him leave? Why did she react this way to a total stranger? What's wrong with me? He could be a serial killer.

Doubtful.

Something about him.

She felt positive that she knew him from somewhere. Maybe she'd seen his picture in a magazine or trade journal somewhere. That could explain the familiarity she felt and definitely be more logical than thinking her dream lover had been brought to life.

Although, that would be nice, too.

She shook her head. Knock it off, Moore.

Pulling herself up to the tallest of her five foot six inch height, and concentrating on trying to make her voice sound stern, she said, "I'm not crazy about having you here. I came to get this house whipped into shape to sell and that's what I'm going to do. I was hoping to find peace and quiet while I did

it, not a mini bohemian artist colony.”

He leaned forward and gently lifted her chin with his finger, saying, “May you

find all you are looking for. That is my reliance also.”

“Would you mind staying on the other side of the room?”

He looked at her quizzically, but complied. Van watched him smoothly move to

the other side of the room. He looked sleek, graceful and definitely dangerous

for her runaway hormones.

“Is this far away enough so that you can remember what you wish to say?”

Van could swear his eyes twinkled.

She began to leave the room, but turned when she reached the doorway.

“Please

try to rehearse a little more quietly. And until I figure out what’s going on, no friends in here. Understand?”

He made a majestic bow. “Your wish is my command.”

Van rolled her eyes and groaned. “Right. Just keep it down and we’ll get along fine.”

As she stepped into the hallway, she turned to look at him once more, pondering

her earlier reaction.

What had happened here? Why had she given in without any substantial argument

to him being there?

As she looked at him, her thoughts obscured again and all her questions seemed

irrelevant when compared to his being in the house.

I can’t believe this. I travel two-thousand-five-hundred miles from L.A. and get an actor for a roommate in backwoods Ohio.

Van smiled as she thought about his cavalier attitude toward her remarks about

notches on the bedpost. He’d actually looked for them.

Her mind filled with images of her very desirable boarder as she slowly descended the stairs. Heat rose in her cheeks when she remembered the feel of

his chest and the look in his eyes...those magnificent eyes. She could look at

them eternally.

Pausing on the step, she smiled weakly as the tinny chimes sounded against the

breeze. She closed her eyes and a searing heat pushed itself through her. She touched her breast through her sweater. His lips had kissed her there. Her fingers circled her nipple with soft, round movements. Cravings spread like fire through her, tightening the little bud at the tip. She trailed her right hand down to her jeans, gliding softly in slow, lazy circuits. Breathing heavily, her mind dimmed. He had touched her and... Her breath caught in her throat. I don't even know his name.

CHAPTER FOUR

"Leave her be."
"Are you entreating on her behalf? Perhaps this woman is more useful than I previously imagined."
"She will not help you."
"Yes, she will. In the next few hours she will learn your secret and then she will be mine."
"Hold your tongue, fiend!"
"The memories in the box are hers. She 'will' remember because the memories are written on her soul. As Caesar once said, "Hic jacta est-- The die is cast." The Entity turned away from his tormentor. The Demon laughed.

The attic felt cooler this trip. And darker. The light seemed sufficient enough, but the long, dark shadows on the wall appeared to reach out as she stepped into the smaller of the two rooms. Van's sixth sense found the box before she even saw the emanations coming from it. Quickly, she gathered it up in a double folded towel and fled back downstairs to the kitchen. The ornately carved box seemed out of place in the modern kitchen. Van stroked her finger over the carvings covering its exterior. The top had exquisite designs of circles and semi-circles within flutes of wood. The Celtic

design

was beautiful and compelling. Little creatures were carved into the sides. Picking it up with the towel, she looked closely at the creatures carved there.

Their eyes were inset with gemstones, artfully done to make them look alive.

The eyes were so lifelike that they seemed to follow her as she turned the box

in her hands.

Van found an engraved inscription on the bottom of the intriguing box. The date

read 1782, with the name of Anna Devlin carved in to the wood.

Anna? Her dream lover had called her by that name.

Putting the towel aside, Van tentatively touched the small chest. Even though

it had knocked her on her behind earlier, it delivered no sensations now.

Van

couldn't pick up any vibrations or see any visions in relation to anyone in the

house.

Strange! Well, good. Maybe I just went on psychic overload.

Van gently placed the box down and went for another cup of tea. As her tea

steeped, she looked at the enigma on her table.

No sense in staring at it. Might as well open it up and see what jumps out.

She unlatched the hook and pushed it out of the way, and lifted the lid.

The

dark interior hid its contents well. The teapot whistled and Van squealed and

jumped. Her nerves were on edge she tentatively opened the lid and then shut it

again. Taking in a deep breath, Van pushed open the lid in one quick motion,

then stared, transfixed at the contents.

No body parts.

Just a book. A very old book.

Van let out an audible sigh of relief as she lifted the old volume out carefully, afraid of what might happen when she touched it. Nothing again.

No

visions, no voices.

Feeling more adventurous, Van admired the hand carved leather. The artwork on

the cover was exquisite, matching the designs on the box it had been

stored in.

She looked inside and found a diary beginning on Anna Devlin's eighth birthday.

Van flipped to the last page. It ended eleven years later.

May 8, 1792

Papa gave me this wonderful journal to keep my thoughts in. He says it will

help me with my letters. He is proud of me. I got an A in letters and arithmetic. I think he bought this present for me instead of buying the butter

churner Mary has been yelping for. I am glad! Mama always used the one in the

corner of the kitchen and never said it was no good. Mary wants everything new.

I hate her. Why does Papa like her? She is mean to me and to Pepper. Maybe

Pepper will claw her on the leg again and then she'll leave. I wish I could make her leave. Papa says he made a box for me to keep my journal in.

It has a

key and a lock. I am glad. Mary will not be able to read it. I will wear the key around my neck forever.

Van continued to read about the daily life of young Anna.

Anna's hatred never dulled, but continued to grow when her father married Mary.

Anna wanted to be loved exclusively by her father, but did things to alienate

him. Mary conceived and then spontaneously aborted the infant. Her father

angrily blamed Anna for the infant's death because she had wished it to be so.

Instilled with the idea that her thoughts could make things happen, Anna became

frightened. She only gave her thoughts free reign when writing in her journal.

In it, she felt free to write what she feared to say aloud.

December 15, 1794

I am sorry dear journal for not writing for so long. This illness makes me weary. Mary said she saved me. I do not believe her. The doctor says

not to
scratch, but I cannot stop. I do not care if I am ugly. No one will want a
murderess for a wife. When I grow up I shall live alone and be happy. No
one
will bother me and I will wish away anyone who does. Mary pretends to
like me
but I know she hates me. When they thought I was asleep, I heard her
say she
fears for me. I wonder why. She should fear for herself. When I am big
enough, I will take Papa away from her and never make him cry out in pain
like
she does. I hear them in the night. She cries and I am happy, but then I
hear
Papa cry out in pain and I want to tear her heart out. I must wait. Until
then, I will scratch myself all I want to, especially when Mary tells me not
to.
I will not let her put the poultice on me. I will suffer like my Papa, but I
will not cry out.

Van wept. As she read the diary, she became engrossed in Anna's life.
She
began to feel the emotions, which made up the young girl. She felt her
anger,
her sadness, her loneliness and her madness. She agonized with Anna.
Anna succeeded in making herself ugly. The pockmarks made craters on
her face
and arms. By age twelve, Anna was a recluse, ashamed of her looks and
afraid to
venture into town because of remarks made to her. Her journal entries
became
filled with hate for those around her. The entries reflected her lack of
emotional growth and mental stability.
The only friend she made was with another outsider named Martha
Stoneman who
lived with her mother in the woods. Martha saw past the pockmarks and
the fat
which surrounded Anna's body and ignored them.
Van stopped reading.
Stoneman? Martha Stoneman? Could Martha at the store be related to
Anna's
Martha?
Van picked up the diary and began reading again.

The town knew about the Stoneman women. Most avoided them when they passed in the streets; however, when a balm was needed or a potion desired, they all knew the way to the house in the woods. Each person was treated, even if they could not pay. On occasion, a lecture or a sympathetic ear was all that was necessary, along with the famous witch's tea. No one believed Martha when she would tell them it was chamomile with peppermint and honey. They all wanted to believe it was magic, so the legend and the superstitions continued. Anna puzzled over why the Stonemans were outcast when they possessed enormous physical beauty and were so helpful to those who came to their door. She found out the reason on her sixteenth birthday.

May 8, 1800

Dearest Journal, this was the best birthday I have ever had! Papa and Mary allowed me to spend the night at Martha's house and we ate, sang, did needlework and talked until the candles had melted to nothing. I think Papa and Mary wanted time to themselves. The twins were sent to the McGuire farm and Tom spent the night in the barn with his new pony. The best part about all of this is Martha told me a secret, but I think I can tell you, you never tell any of my secrets. Martha is a witch! Her mother made her one when she was only 12. She is very good at it too. She showed me some magic. She moved a spoon by just looking at it and then I felt a tingling all through my body when she touched my hand. She told me everyone in town thinks her mother is evil and she dances with the devil when it is a full moon. That is such foolishness. They do nothing but serve peppermint tea and give healing poultices to those in need. I

want a love potion. Martha said it could be made but I could not tell her mother. Tonight we will pick the herbs for it. Martha will instruct me and soon I shall have the love of my life at my doorstep. He will love me and no one else and then we will be married. Then all the childish fools who look upon me with disdain shall wonder what they had given away. It will be a sweet revenge when I ride into town in a fine livery. No one will sneer at me again!

After being worn down by Anna's insistent begging, Martha's mother, also named Martha, decided it would do no harm to share her knowledge with this hapless girl. Fascinated by the quiet dignity of her best friend's mother, Anna wanted to have the same serenity they possessed in the face of the odds against them. She secretly desired the power she could wield over the town. Her sixteen-year-old romantic thoughts turned to several young men who had spurned her because of her physical appearance. She never disclosed her innermost thoughts to Martha or her mother. These were the secret thoughts written in the diary. By the time she turned seventeen, Anna had become proficient in the use of herbs and she had learned several rituals. She enjoyed the feeling of power when she helped in performing them. She knew she had found something no one could take away from her. She had also learned how to create elementals, which helped her on occasion to get her revenge. Little things...

July 18, 1801

It is uncommonly cool for this time of year. My rituals must be working. I find creating the elementals most enjoyable and rewarding. It appears they do

more than what the Stonemans believe they can. I find it extremely amusing to watch those who have come into contact with my little creations. "Where did my watch go to? I am quite sure I laid it here or there" Oh, what fun this is. I want them to know it is I who causes the small incidents in their lives, but the best revenge is secret. Just the two of us know, dear journal, my friend. Please do not be offended because I write the proportions and incantations of my potions and rituals in another book, but I fear if this one is found, I will have enough hell to pay for my thoughts! But you can enjoy the thrill of the results with me. Ah, Papa always says he who laughs last, laughs best. How right he is. I must close for now as I must go into town and gently brush against Tom Faire's coat with my newest potion. I do believe his coat needs a mud bath soon.

When she was finally caught, Martha severely chastised her, relating to her a witch's credo was to "Harm none". To Anna's credit, she listened. She decided hurting others was not really helping her. Anna wanted a lover. Coming to the logical conclusion that if she could make elementals which did little things, why wouldn't that principle work for a creation a bit larger? Diligently she pursued her quest, gathering books and materials together. She read and studied the religions of the East and the West until the small hours of the night, learning all the legends about entities produced for the service of their creators. These entities were more than mischievous elementals. These were living, breathing beings who appeared real to those who saw them. She wanted one of her own. Badly.

October 20, 1801

Poor Journal! I have left you for so long. So many things have been happening and so many ideas come into my head all at once that I am astonished I

can have
such thoughts. This is the biggest secret of all I am about to tell you. I cannot tell Martha because I am afraid she will tell me I cannot do this thing,
but when it is accomplished, I will glory in her praise! I am going to make myself a lover! I am elated with this project. He will be handsome and faithful and an excellent lover. He will make me cry out as Papa does to Mary, even now after all these years. He will be mine and only mine.
He will love me completely and no one else. I will only share him with Martha,
if she wants him, but not at first. I have been searching through all the books
Martha has and I told Papa I needed to go to Cleveland to research a subject for
a report for my class. He is not very smart anymore. He really believed me and
allowed me to go. It was so exciting. I think I shall live in Cleveland when I
am married. There are so many more shops and bookstores and there are societies
who consider contacting the spirit world something to be achieved. I know I
should like to live there. It is so stimulating for the mind!
But, dear Journal, I digress. I will tell you it is most confusing. I have decided to mix several components of several religious rituals and with this
combination, I should achieve my reliance. I must close for now, as I must
prepare. I only have 10 days until All Hallows Eve when I shall perform this
most wonderful of tasks.

November 1, 1801

It was successful. The being is magnificent to look at! He does everything I
want him to do to and for me. He reads my thoughts and carries them out within
a fraction of a moment. He seems to know every intimate detail of me and pleases me with his knowledge. I am so happy! I must test him and his abilities. He is so exquisite! I could look upon him eternally! I hate to leave him for even a moment! However, I must do my chores. It is too bad he

cannot help with them! He cannot seem to leave my room. He seems to lose some essence of himself when I pass the doorway into the hall. I will contemplate on this. But for now, I will enjoy him.

Van stared at the diary. She shook her head. The flavor of the tea relaxed her, but her mind churned with all the possibilities; none plausible. The more she read about Anna, the more she became emotionally attached to her. Images of Anna danced in and out of her mind. Nothing substantial, just fleeting thoughts and feelings. There had to be some reasonable explanation. The answer was probably simple. How did she explain away the boarder's room? And how could he be in it? Could her boarder be the entity in Anna's diary? Raising her tea to her mouth, Van stopped midway. Van shrugged her whole body trying to dismiss the thought. But what about Martha. Martha Stoneman. Coincidence? Martha did have a lot of psi power. Could she be...? This is too bizarre for even a California girl to believe. As Van poured more tea into her cup, her gaze went to the diary again. Though she tried, she couldn't resist reading the next entries. She had to know...could the boarder be her entity? My Entity? Where did that come from? Van shivered, but it seemed right. Is that what her dream lover meant when he said she had come back again? Looking at the diary, Van decided she needed to know, even if it wasn't what she wanted to believe. As she continued to read, it became apparent the Stonemans noticed Anna's newfound zest for life, but when questioned, she would just blush shyly. After a time, they just accepted the calmer, happier Anna, without question. After her year and day initiation, Anna was welcomed into the witch's

circle.

May 10, 1802

Life holds much promise. I am delighted. All the events have gone well and I seem to require nothing more. I have good friends, a good home, although it is very noisy now that the twins are older, but in all everything is fine. The only significant problem I have is the entity is requiring a name from me. I wonder... if I give him a name if he will leave because he has his own power? I have not given him a death date because he is too exquisite. I want him with me forever! He is the consummate lover. He performs well and is so compliant. I think I will tell the Stonemans about him now, after all, I have had him for several months and nothing has gone wrong. I know they will be proud of my accomplishment. Perhaps this will take them further into areas they had not explored before. Tonight I will tell them.

The younger Martha was intrigued, but the older Martha wanted to know if she had given it a name and a death date. When she realized Anna hadn't, she was furious. Martha told her what she needed to do to destroy the entity before it became too powerful on its own. She cited the example of the belief in the Devil in order to obtain more funds for lagging coffers. She told Anna the devil was initially an entity, but as the belief in its existence became more wide spread, its power germinated, on its own.

May 10, 1802

Ah, dear Journal, I seek solace within your pages. Life is not as promising as I supposed. The Stonemans only lectured me on my creation. Martha, the elder, told me I must destroy it before it gains too much power on its own! She does not know I limit its power. I did not breathe an infinite mind into it. It is like a child, wanting to please and it takes my praise as a child takes to a

sugar candy. How could I destroy it? It is mine! It loves only me and makes love with the greatest skill. I crave its touch even now. Ah, it is here. I must close. The sweetness of desire is creeping upon me as it caresses my neck. Yes, my love, touch me there. Ah, it is wonderful.

Anna refused to destroy what she had created.
At nineteen, Anna met a man.

July 4, 1803

I can hardly believe this has happened to me, although I should have more faith in my own powers. I have met a man. A real flesh and blood man who has asked me to go for a carriage ride on the morrow. Oh, dear journal, he is so handsome. His hair is soft as corn silk and contains its coloring. His eyes are the greenest I have ever known. He is tall and well muscled, at least from what I could see as he bent to pick up my kerchief. Oh, I must explain how this happened. I am so glad I am not as rebellious as I had been in times past. Mary was quite persuasive when she said she required my help at the church picnic. I expected to help and then retire to the oak tree and read while the others played their nonsensical games. All went as I had anticipated and I was engrossed in my novel when I felt him next to me, even before I saw him. I looked up and the sun shone behind his head as if a halo surrounded him. He asked what I was reading and we began to talk. And how we talked! He is so knowledgeable about all things. I am quite amazed. He is no more than six and twenty, yet he appears to have the wisdom of a man twice his age. He appeared not to be repulsed by my features and even feigned an ant was crawling up my hair in order that he might caress my cheek. The sensation of a surge of

energy, which pulsed through my veins, sent shivers to my nerves and I shuddered. Gallant as he is, he offered me his overcoat, thinking I had taken a sudden chill. He makes me feel beautiful. I think I shall close for now to think about him more. Ah, the entity is here. I must make him understand I do not desire him now. I wish I had listened to Martha and given him a death date. He is more insistent about things now than he was in the beginning. Well, dearest journal, I will write more later. I want to dream of Arthyr now and

how we shall be married and how we will live on the farm he has purchased. It is so wonderful. I can be near Papa and the boys and still have all I desire. How fortunate Arthyr bought the farm exactly next to ours. I can see us, with several small children riding to church in his black carriage with the silk curtains. Oh life will be wonderful and complete.

October 6, 1803

Arthyr continues to call each day. Arrangements have been made to announce our engagement formally at the church next Sunday. I am glad he is coming to the church with me and will be doubly glad when we are married and no longer have to put up a pretense by arriving each Sunday and listening to the boring sermons. If only the preacher knew how much he has benefited from my rituals. The ritual brought Arthyr here and the coffers of the church are filled with lucre given generously by my beautiful love. Both Marthas are happy for me. I think they believe I have given over the entity to the abyss, but I have not. He has been most useful when in the night I yearn for my Arthyr and cannot have him. The entity fills the need Arthyr will soon supply. I have erased much weight from my body and, even though he gallantly tells me he does not consider me heavy,

but voluptuous, I know it perturbed him. He has promised to bring back cosmetics to cover my scars and creams to make my face smooth. He knows I am vexed daily by the appearance of my face. He appears to take no heed of it. He is so wonderful. He makes me feel lovely.

Relief flowed through Van. Anna was not fixated on the entity as much even though it came every night to her. Anna's thoughts continued to be on Arthyr and more often than not, she told the entity to leave as she wanted to extend the feeling of desire.

June 10, 1804

Dearest Journal, you have been such a consistent friend through the years. I shall continue to add to you as my life continues with Arthyr. I can hardly believe in a few short days I shall be Mrs. Arthyr Sangri. It is so amazing to me. And yet, I wonder why am I amazed? I have unlimited power. The world and its creations are at my command. Oh, yes, I must tell Arthyr about the entity. It grows uncommonly clever. Sometimes I think it has a mind of its own, although I know that is not possible. It only knows what I tell it and I had not told it much of late. I must tell Arthyr. How can I? Will he understand? I will send it to Martha. It can be hers. That would be a fine bridesmaid gift for her. Yes, I will do that. It will be a wonderful solution and everyone will prosper. Tomorrow I will tell my love, tonight I will have the entity one more time and then I will release him. I wonder how he will fare without a name or a death date. I wonder if Martha can give those things to him if she didn't create him? I shall ask old Martha.

June 11, 1804

I am waiting. Arthyr has promised to come to me tonight. He appeared upset

when I told him of the entity, but not nearly as shocked as I supposed.
He
understood the needs I had and is willing to allow me the entity even now.
He
told me he occasionally is on business for many months and it would be a
comfort
to know the entity would protect me from harm during those times. I am
so in
love! He is such a continental, sophisticated man. I am truly blessed by
the
goddess. Where else could I find such understanding in another? Now I
can have
my entity and my Arthyr.
I am waiting still. The hour grows late. He said he would be here, but is
not.
I feel the need for him rising within me. Perhaps I should take the entity.
When Arthyr comes, I am sure my desire will be aroused and what harm
would there
be? Ah, the entity is here. I shall listen to his entreaties for a name, but
he will satisfy this burning in my crotch before I tell him this is not the
night for naming. Foolish creation, but he is lovely to behold and he grows
more skilled at the art of pleasuring.

June 12, 1801

Arthyr came but not to me. I waited. I hate him. Why, you ask? I saw
him
arrive and then he entered the stables. I thought I would run out to him
and we
could kiss again. How I loved his kisses. But now I hate him. He took
away my
love with a blow. From his lips I heard the truth of his feelings. He spoke,
not to me, but jesting with the groom Father had hired to help in the
evenings.
He told him that as soon as he married me, the pockmarked little whore,
he'd
have control over the farm. He said I was a monster, with no conscience.
He
said I lay down with the devil every night, but when we would marry, he
would
take my powers to become more powerful himself. Then he said I was too
ugly to
do anything else except have a make-believe lover.
I saw nothing but black fury and his laughing face! I wanted to scratch the

face from his skull and throw it to a fire and watch it burn to ashes. Then who would be ugly? I ran at him with the pitchfork. The groom fled. Arthyr just stood. He smiled at me as I rammed the fork through him. I left before he died. I am sure he died with a sneering smile on his face, leaning against the beam. I ran from the barn to my room. My entity came to me and comforted me. He is all I need. I am just happy in the arms of my own true love. He would not harm me. He cannot harm me. I created him and I will create another.

The diary ended.

Nearly an hour went by as Van sat holding the book in her lap. Her mind churned. She couldn't escape the feelings that overwhelmed her. What happened to the Entity Anna had created? Did Anna go to prison for killing Arthyr? Too many questions and not enough answers. Exhausted from her mental gymnastics, Van replaced the diary in its box and put it in her nightstand. She took out her journal and it opened to the page she had just written. It was a past life experience I saw. That was Anna in the bed and Mr. No Name making love to her. Van couldn't shake the scene from her mind. It replayed itself as she read her remarks. She could almost feel as Anna did. Van closed her journal and then opened it again. Stunned, she stared at her last entry. The ornate handwriting looked like Anna's. Shivering with a tremor of nervous fear, Van shut her journal and put it in the drawer quickly. What happened to Anna? The diary had ended too abruptly. The possibility could be that she might be Anna's reincarnation. What then? Was this her Karma? To re-live another life with an entity built for pleasure? Could she find out if she regressed herself? Regression was a possibility, but

not something Van wanted to do alone.

A quarter of the book remained, but no additional writing. Looking out her window at the night, she decided she would have to wait until the next day to find out. The house creaked and groaned against the wind, as if agreeing with her.

CHAPTER FIVE

What was she doing? On the stairs for crying out loud? By herself? She pulled her hand away from herself, held it out at arm's length, and looked at it as if it weren't hers. Though she tried to deny it, she still felt pleasurable sensations flutter through her. Her mind cleared slowly, but the desire lingered.

What's the matter with me? I've turned into a walking hormone.

"Work. I'll work so I won't think about sex."

She ran down the stairs to the first floor and grabbed a packed box, she decided

to carry it to the attic for storage and see what she could find there.

With the box balanced precariously balanced on her hip, she flipped the switch.

The highly polished narrow attic steps glared in the harsh light. It felt like these were the eyes of the house. Maybe that's where she kept getting that

feeling of 'being watched'. She believed every thing in the world had a vibration of its own...a soul of sorts. This house definitely had one. It pulsed with a life of its own.

Something is here.

Van sensed it, but couldn't pinpoint where the feeling originated.

Ignoring the impression, she trudged to the top of the stairs and turned on another switch, lighting up the whole front part of the attic.

"Holy cow."

Surprised by the enormous quantity of boxes and crates, she put down the one she

carried.

When she pushed aside the partition separating the two attic rooms, a strong

musty, stale odor assaulted her, making her gasp for air.

Ack. What died in here?

She ran to the small oval window across the room and jimmied the latch open. As

she took in gulps of fresh air, she looked out at the front yard. With a little hedge trimming and a good mowing and a little elbow grease, it could look presentable to potential buyers.

Van turned and looked around the attic storeroom. Antiques and old crates

surrounded her as dark shadows crept up the walls. The dress forms, adorned

with disintegrated clothes looked like disheveled ghostly sentries. She shivered inwardly.

Leaving the window, she tried to determine what to open first. An old crate,

which had 'clothes' written on the wooden boards, claimed her attention.

The

stench of mildew and mothballs wafted out from the old clothing, making her gag.

She lifted up a dress, marveling it was still intact. It had to be at least a couple hundred years old.

She eyed the whalebone corset underneath and shuddered at the thought of being

laced into one; it looked painful with its wooden bracing. Another corset was

almost in pieces and Van tossed it onto the floor. Soon, she had a pile of old,

torn and rotted clothing beside her.

Looks like the trash man is going to have a load this week.

Each box she investigated contained more old treasures or decayed items. Some

boxes held genuine art pieces or jewelry. Baubles, coins and knickknacks from

another time filled other crates. Van rummaged through crates and baskets--each

one even fuller of wonderful things than the previous.

More than a pirate's treasure belonged to her and she was grateful Uncle William

hadn't sold it all. Maybe she could take everything back to L.A. and open an

antique store. Or, maybe she'd just keep everything herself.
Van found herself tuning into the vibrations of each item she held.
Flashes of
pictures or pieces of conversations came to her. Some items just gave
her
feelings. She had never had so much to experiment with at one time.
None of the containers affected her negatively. She saw the love, hate
and
tumult of past lives, but nothing extraordinary.
As she turned to survey her bounty, her gaze went to an old Quaker-style
rocking
chair in an unlit corner. A ray of sunshine glinted off a small box under the
chair. It was in an area too low for her to stand up in so Van crawled to it
on
her hands and knees.
The box beckoned her as it shimmered with blues and gold around the
edges. She
hesitated, not sure she wanted to unlock its secrets--just yet. It looked
so
inviting, though.
Well, I might as well do it.
When her fingers touched its edge, a jolt of electricity zapped her. As she
jolted up, she hit her head on the low slant of the roof.
Damn!
Van eyed the box suspiciously. Other than the electrical shock, which
set her
on her derriere, she had no sensations from it. No feelings, no thoughts.
Nothing.
That's weird.
Everything else in the attic gave off some type of vibration, she should
have
felt something.
Cautiously she reached out one finger and touched it again.
Nothing.
Sitting back, she studied it before tentatively placing two fingers on it.
Nothing happened. With no sensations or any additional jolts, Van
became
confident enough to pick it up with both hands. Holding it gently, she tried
to
decipher the carvings etched into the sides. The light from the single bulb
which hanging in the middle of the room seemed more of a hindrance than
a help
as it cast long shadows on the little sculpted figures.

Turning it over, Van felt indentations on the bottom, but couldn't see what they were. However, her fingers ran against a mechanism and she realized she had found a music box. She twisted the key three times and the tinny melody exploded from the recesses of the box. The same melody that she'd heard in her boarder's room and everywhere else. Suddenly, with no warning, images of sexual couplings bombarded her, spilling one on top of the other in quick succession. The swiftness of the mental impact made her lose her balance, tipping her over sideways on the floor. Unable to sit up, she flung the box away and only then did she right herself. This is too weird. Again without warning, a pulsation began between her legs. Her muscles flexed in a rhythm she couldn't control. A want so strong she couldn't think straight overcame her. The visions, which began when she held the box, continued, but became even more sensual. Undulating, overpowering waves of passion consumed her as erotic cravings fought with her last fledgling powers of control. Her body swayed. Her hands moved of their own volition as she lowered herself to the floor. She began to pull up her blouse overhead and raise her bra above her rounded breasts. Her hands went to her jeans zipper and found her warm triangle, already slick with the promise of satisfaction to come. A thunderous pounding sounded in her head. The relentless beat pulsated louder and louder until it permeated all of Van's senses. She finally pulled her hands away from the tight wetness of her crotch and covered her ears to block out the roaring beat. The hammering continued until her mind cleared and the cravings vanished. As suddenly as it began, it stopped. Van breathed hard. She felt as though she had just finished a marathon.

She opened her eyes to find her boarder standing above her, scowling. Embarrassed, she sat up quickly and waited for him to comment on her actions. When he didn't, she looked more closely at him and noticed something different. His clothes appeared rumpled and his manner seemed--more imposing. When he spoke, his voice didn't have the softness it had before. "Vanessa, you are not safe here." As if his point was obvious, the boarder looked slowly around the room. "This house is cursed. I know its cycles. It wants to destroy you. I, on the other hand, only want to protect you. Come with me." He bent to give her his hand. Confused by his reversal in attitude toward the house, Van began to question him, when a loud crash resounded. Glad to have an excuse to leave, she bounded down the stairs, buttoning her jeans in the process. Before she reached the bottom, another crash sounded. The echo of it receded behind the old oak door, which housed her boarder's room. What the hell is going on? Throwing open the door to the old musty bedroom, Van stopped just inside the doorjamb. The spidery feeling crept up her spine and permeated her mind.

Before her eyes, old sheets and dust slowly faded. Images coalesced as it again became the bedroom of her boarder. Feeling faint, she choked back the bile that rose in her throat. She watched as her boarder and his double clashed in a vicious fight, terrifying her. She didn't think either would survive the battle. As quickly as it began, the vision faded. Frightened, Van turned and bolted to her bedroom door. She hugged the wall, peering across the way into the strange room where pungent perfumes released a myriad of odors from the uncorked bottles on the old dresser.

Van's breathing was labored as she looked to the right and left. No sign of her boarder or anyone else. Her heart pounded against the wall of her chest and she closed her eyes, trying to swallow back her rising fear . I don't think I can take too much more of this. I need a drink. Making sure the coast was clear, she vaulted down the stairs, two at a time. In the kitchen, she pulled her bra down and washed herself up. She downed a whole glass of water without stopping. Then she fumbled with the teapot. While the tea steeped, she stared into her empty cup. Feeling faint again, she bent over and put her head between her knees, squeezing her eyes tightly closed. I'm fine. I should know better than to spend hours fingering other people's memories. It's my fault. Nothing wrong with the house--just me. Convincing herself it couldn't have been anything more than a carry over from the abundance of visions she had received in the attic, Van calmed. As she took the first sip of tea, she decided she needed to touch base with someone from the real world. Someone outside this house. She picked up the phone and was relieved to hear the dial tone. It took Van a long time to convince Marcy she felt fine. "Well, I don't believe you totally, but I'm glad you say you're okay because I have got the world's biggest stomach ache." Van chuckled. "It's not funny," Marcy said as she sniffled loudly. "You should feel sorry for me. You know how I suffer after one of my binges of nervous eating. I really did try not to overindulge this time, but before anyone had shown up, I had already downed a whole tray of canapés by myself. Oh boy, I don't feel very good." "I suppose you want to renege on our lunch date?" Van asked. "Aaaghh. Lunch? Food? Oh, please don't hold me to it. I need to stay lying

down on a soft bed for the next few years with a case of antacid for my tummy."

"Well, I guess I eat alone."

"Hey, are you all right?" Marcy asked. "What's going on? Are you having visions?"

Van closed her eyes, trying to control her voice. She didn't want anyone around, but Marcy was her best friend--one who knew her well. Van needed to appease her curiosity because if she didn't, Marcy would be at her house without a second thought.

"Okay. Yes, I had some visions in the kitchen and the attic, but they were just

fine. I was amazed to see all the people who'd lived in this house over the years."

"You're having visions again? After all these years? And they're okay?"

Marcy

didn't sound entirely convinced, but Van sensed she'd decided to accept her

explanation. "So, can I pass on lunch today? Maybe we could do dinner tomorrow?"

"Sure, but now you have to buy."

Marcy's hearty laugh warmed Van. "Oh, I get penalized for not showing up? Good

friend you are! Hey, Mark just got here. Catch you later, sugar. Love ya."

"Take care. Love you, too."

For a few moments, talking to Marcy had pushed away the unusual events and Van

felt more relaxed, but she still didn't want to leave the security of the kitchen.

If I shut out all the psychic intrusions, I'd be done packing in no time.

Only a few more weeks and all this strangeness would be behind her.

She just

wished she could figure out what was happening to her libido.

The small box in the attic came to the forefront of her mind. Maybe it contained answers, but she didn't really want to touch it again. A shudder ran

through her at the thought.

The box had felt heavy. Maybe something was inside it. She really should try

to find out what it was, but she'd take precautions before she touched it again.

She sure wouldn't turn it on.

It was a long shot, but she went with them when the feeling was right.
And it was right, right now.
Grabbing a towel from the drawer, Van climbed the stairs again.

CHAPTER SIX

Van shut her bedroom door and started to unbutton her blouse when the same sounds she'd heard the night before, began again. Apparently her boarder had been rehearsing, even after she'd told him to be quiet at night. She had no choice. She'd just have to give him notice, making it clear he had to leave or she'd call the Sheriff. Of course, if he turned out to be the entity Anna created, she'd have another bucket of worms on her hands. Van shook her head. That diary sure got me going. Entities and boy toys. That was stuff for paranormal romance novels, not real life. She strode across the hall. When she reached his door, her knees became weak and her stomach hurt. Squaring her shoulders, she lifted her hand and tapped lightly on the door.

When no one answered, she rapped on it with her knuckles.
No answer.
"Hello?" She called through the wooden barrier.
Still no answer. Van knocked harder. She knew he was in there. She could feel it.
When no one answered at all, she turned the knob quietly and peeked in. She saw him sitting on the edge of the bed. He was hunched over with his head in his hands.
"Hello, can I come in?"
"Please do," he answered, not looking up.
"Why didn't you answer your door?" Van asked, but then realized something was

extremely wrong. She forgot her annoyance and confusion for the moment as she crossed the room.

"Are you alright?" she asked, bending over to look at him.

"Aye, I'm fine," he replied without looking up at her.

"You don't look fine. You look terrible. What's wrong?" Van pulled the old rocker nearer to him and sat down as close as she could possibly get.

She wanted to check everything--his skin, his coloring, and his gorgeous eyes. "It's the lonely feeling." He clenched his hands together. "I thought it had gone, but it lingers."

"Oh," Van nodded. "I know how you feel. I miss my friends and this small town seems like a world away. If it weren't for the fact that I needed time away and I wanted to visit with Marcy again, I think I would've sold this house, sight unseen."

His aura distracted her momentarily. It became rainbow colored; covering his whole being, not just the contours and it pulsed at a slow rate. The man put out distress signals on every plane of existence.

"I'm sorry, my mind wandered," she apologized when she realized he had spoken.

"What did you say?"

"I tried to help them, but I couldn't."

Van felt a sharp nip between her shoulder blades. Doubts assailed her. Should she ask about Anna? What did she have to lose, beside her sanity? She plunged in, head first.

"What are you talking about? Does it have something to do with Anna?"

"What of her?" He became alert.

He knows.

Van sat back and glanced down, unable to look him in the eye.

He stared at her. She knew he waited for an answer.

She fidgeted with her blouse. "Anna. Well. Yes. I was reading a book and the name came up as someone who lived here once and since you study that century, I thought you might have learned something about her."

He relaxed visibly. "I learned of her. What did you wish to know?"

Van released a long breath.
Quick thinking, Moore.
"What was she like?"
"She was a young girl who died in this room. She was killed by her own greed for power."
"She was killed? Who killed her?" Van sat up straighter.
He looked as if he were trying to remember. "I cannot give a name." Anna must have died right after that last entry into the diary. But the only one who was in the room with her that night was the entity.
Van looked at him more intently. The moment of truth had arrived and she became tongue-tied. What should she do? How could she ask him if he was an entity?
Uh, by the way, are you an entity? He'd probably call the loony bin and have her carted off.
But, what if she were right? Confusion set in again as she argued with herself.

He looks so real and acts so...human, and he does have a name.
He had to be real flesh and blood, not some conjured up sex toy--that killed in cold blood.
Another nip at the neck. Van unconsciously swiped at it and tried to stand up, but her legs had become rubber and she sat down again. The nips on the neck were a new sensation for her. Were they warnings of danger?
Van looked at him. She was sure she'd have felt any evil in him. Even Martha had agreed he was benign, and Van knew she could trust her.
The boarder and Van sat quietly for several minutes, each staring into space, lost in their own thoughts. Van finally broke the silence.
"Is there anything I can do?" she asked. "You can talk to me. We could be friends. Maybe we could talk about your play."
"My play?" He looked puzzled.
"Sure. Maybe you just need someone who isn't caught up in your world to listen."

"My world." He looked down again.

"Sure. Explain your world to me. I'm fairly intelligent and I do have a reputation as a great listener. Tell me about yourself." And I'll keep watching you for strange things, like disappearing or something.

"If you are very sure you want to know." He absentmindedly stroked her hands

with his fingers.

"Yes, I really want you to tell me everything about yourself, including your name, if you wouldn't mind."

"I am called John Smith."

Right. And I'm Pocahontas.

Between the visions and reading that blasted diary, she seemed to be having

trouble distinguishing between reality and her imagination.

"I have been chased by a demon since--"

"Hold on one...little...minute," Van interrupted as she rubbed the back of her

neck where she felt the nip again. "We all have demons to manage. I was

thinking more that we could talk about how you're feeling right now. It might

make you feel better to talk." She needed to deny anything he would say to

convince her he wasn't who she wanted to believe he was.

He shook his massive head and slumped down even further. When he replied, his

voice remained soft, and Van had to strain to hear it.

"I feel so alone."

She felt alone, too, especially after he walked across the room.

Trying to make him feel better, she said, "You know, I can feel lonely in a crowd."

"Sometimes it aches and it is so dark in that place," he countered.

"I know. In school, I often felt on the fringes socially, but when I was away from school, my imaginary characters in my mind kept me company. I learned

never to be lonely when I was alone."

"Yes, I would also believe I had conversations with those around me, even though

they never responded."

Van shook her head sadly.

"Loneliness is the way of my life," he stated. "Of all the things I have seen, learned about and marveled at, I have had no one to share them with--until now.

Perhaps you will end my torment?"

He clasped her hands and he drew her in to him. She pulled away slightly, but he held on. She remembered the warmth she had felt in her dreams. But this was no dream. She was wide-awake and it had been a long time since she'd been held by a real man. He released her hands and she ran her fingers up and down his arms. They were strong, sinewy and looked as if he worked out in the outdoors, not in a gym.

In her mind, Van debated. If he were an actor, he'd be gone after his play was over. If he were the entity in Anna's diary, well, that would be another kettle of fish to fry.

It wasn't as if she didn't have feelings for him. No, not feelings, she corrected herself--concerns. Just the same as anyone would have for another person. Who was she trying to kid? She felt a deep connection to this man. A

connection she wasn't quite sure about--one which pulled at her heartstrings.

His fingers caressed her chin. The music box melody began and Van felt herself

drawn in to his embrace with even more force, and she couldn't resist the incessant drive to touch him and to be touched by him.

He bent to touch her lips with his. His lips teased hers and she felt warmth

flowing through her. Her body yielded. In one flowing motion she wrapped her

arms around him and returned his kiss, passionately. She felt his tongue on her

mouth and she opened to him. As he probed and darted within her, she responded,

with all her being. As they stood together, she lifted her leg and encircled his thick, strong thigh. He grasped it with his hand and held her pinned to him

as his tongue moved seductively in circles within her sensitive mouth. A low

moan escaped from deep within her.

He leaned back and looked down at her and she could feel the heat rising

in her
cheeks. She ran her tongue over her lips, swollen from his passionate
onslaught, savoring the feeling. This time she gave herself permission to
enjoy
it.
He bent to kiss her breast.
Suddenly she felt awkward. When had the chimes stopped?
She shifted and withdrew from him.
As Van moved away from him, she tried to focus.
"You move too fast." She directed her frustration at him.
"Sometimes it is good to go fast," he replied. "Sometimes one needs to
seize
the moment because they may not have another."
She stopped midway to the door. Did he know he had touched her core?
Living
for the moment was ingrained in her. She wondered what kind of
dangerous
impulse led her to his arms. Hesitantly she walked toward him again,
yearning
to be near him, but afraid of what would happen.
She reached up to touch his shoulder. The need to make contact
overtook her.
"I understand and you can trust me."
"How can you understand my dilemma?" He said.
Before she could reply, a wave of torment ripped through her soul and Van
became
overwhelmed at the depth of his desolation. Her confusion and the
impressions
piercing her soul made her flinch. She saw the years piled upon
themselves. He
lived alone in a world which did not recognize him. His feelings of isolation
marked her like a firebrand.
Confused and overwhelmed by the psychic feelings bombarding her, Van
backed away
quickly and stepped to the door. She didn't turn back to look at him.
Too much, too fast.
She was drowning and couldn't come up for air.

He watched her leave his room, feeling her arousal and confusion. With
that
acknowledgement, tenderness for her grew within him.

She had changed from the Anna of old--not only in her appearance. The previous incarnation of Anna would have tackled him onto the bed and demanded her due. This new Anna seemed shy. She knew about him, even if she wouldn't admit it to herself. He wondered--would she give him a name this time? She resisted her impressions and refused to believe what was in front of her. Would she be able to perform the ritual? What could he tell her? I need you to finish what was begun. No, he would have to be more subtle, because he did not want to frighten her. He needed her to make him mortal. Now, in this lifetime, she was different. Kinder, sweeter, gentler, more full of...life. He had waited so long and now, something about her made him reconsider. Perhaps this existence could be enough, if she were with him again. A frown creased his brow as he paced the room. He needed to accomplish his goal. So be it. He had watched life go on around him and he wanted to be part of it or be done with it. He'd been a lost soul, condemned to return, time and time again to this house; to relive the horror of the Demon who chased him through the centuries, growing stronger as his strength increased. The Demon who destroyed what he wished to preserve. So many lives--so much waste. Women had died in their attempts to capture the Demon as their own. The handsome Demon, whose cunning and patronizing attitude seduced the women, believed It could reach the Entity through them. Even now, It did not realize none of them saw the Entity. Too late, each realized the Demon was not interested in them or their mundane ideas. It remained a gamble the Demon took each time, and always, the women lost the draw. The Demon was blinded to anything except the attainment of his power. The women saw Its

ugliness only when they breathed their last breath.

The Entity shook his head, unable to shake the memories of their faces. This time was different, though. This was the real Anna, not just another hapless woman.

Like the Anna of old, Vanessa caused things to happen, but in different ways.

His boundaries were extended, something which had never happened before now. He

could move about the house as long as he remained in her immediate vicinity.

How far from her could he go before he started to fade? He smiled.

Maybe he

wouldn't fade at all.

The quickness with which feelings surfaced now also startled him.

Learning to

decipher them proved more difficult and sometimes confusing.

What am I feeling?

Protective.

Yes, he needed to protect Vanessa. Knowing the Demon was sure to want her, he

needed to keep her safe. In order to keep her safe, he was constrained to keep

her at a distance.

It appeared impossible, but if he did not, she would be in danger. He could not

allow her life force to be taken from her. He needed her to finish her work for him.

As if his thoughts brought about the inevitable, he felt the approach of the Demon. Concentrating, the Entity put himself at her bedside and covered her

with his essence as she slept. The Demon stood at the window, unable to pierce

the invisible shield. Looking at the sleeping Van, the Demon let out an unearthly, maniacal laugh.

The laugh ended as abruptly as it had begun. The Demon turned his luminescent

green eyes toward the Entity.

"Soon," he glowered, "soon you will be mine as will your precious little human.

You cannot be everywhere." Then he vanished into the night.

The Entity kept watch until he felt Van awaken to the morning light. He vowed

he would keep his precious lover alive.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Vanessa kept busy moving furniture around. She thought about the previous night and how John had opened up to her about his feelings. She couldn't deny she was attracted to him. The best thing she could do would be to keep herself busy and stop thinking about those rock hard abs and that wonderful feeling when he held her in his arms. He seemed to anticipate every want and need. She closed her eyes and began to sway to unheard music. She dropped the papers she held and that startled her back to reality. Vanessa searched for documents. Uncle Willie had too many papers in too many places. "It'll take me a month of Sundays just to get this in any semblance of order," thought Vanessa. While she was so engrossed, the doorknocker clanged again. Vanessa opened the door to a gorgeous, blond hunk of a man. He wore a white suit with a pink silk shirt. His eyes were covered with a pair of very expensive sunglasses. "Good morning," he said with a cordial smile on his handsome face. Vanessa stuttered a greeting. "I just came to welcome you to the neighborhood and bring you a casserole. I would have come sooner, but I had some business to finish up." He pushed the casserole to her. "It's vegetarian." Van absentmindedly reached out for it. "Thank you...Mr.--?" "Richard Witmer" "May I come in?" he asked. "I'm sorry. Of course, please come in."

She looked at her visitor closely.

"Don't I know you, from somewhere?" She asked. "But that's impossible.

You

live here and I'm from California."

"Well, you might have seen me on one of my book jackets."

Recognition came.

"Ohmigod! You're Richard Witmer! The author of those wonderful horror books."

Richard almost seemed shy for a moment. He looked down and then up to Van.

"Yes, I am. But please don't hold that against me. It pays the bills."

"Are you kidding? I love your books! They're so real. You do the metaphysical

community proud."

"Thanks. I think." He laughed and it was a nice laugh.

"Let me take this into the kitchen. Why don't you come in and I'll make us some tea."

"That would be great," said Richard as he followed Van and the casserole.

When they got to the kitchen, Van put the casserole away and began to heat up

the water for tea. She watched her famous visitor out of the corner of her eye

as he walked around the kitchen, as if for the first time.

She could not ignore the sensation of dread creeping slowly up her spine.

"So how long are you planning on staying here?" he asked.

"Well, I am hoping that the house will sell in a couple of weeks and I can get

back to my job," Van said as she placed teacups and sugar on the table.

"Have you heard the rumors about this place?"

Van stopped and looked at him.

"What are you talking about?"

"Since I've been back here I've heard nothing but," he replied. "William invited me over several times, but I was never able to take him up on his offer.

Then when I heard the rumors, I was almost glad I hadn't."

Talk about dramatic.

"So, it's that bad here?"

"I think so." Richard really looked concerned.

"Richard, I've been here nearly two weeks and no ghost has tried to do me in."

"Vanessa, I really think you should leave this house. It's dangerous for you to

be here." Richard looked at her and Van felt sure he was as sincere as he could possibly be.

"I really appreciate your concern, but I'm perfectly safe here," she replied.

"My boarder is home at night and there isn't much that scares me."

"Your boarder?" Richard smirked. "Something could happen to you here. Right

now. How would he protect you?" He came close to her. Menacingly close. The

hairs on Van's neck prickled and rose. What did she pick up from him that

didn't feel right?

What is he trying to say?

"You don't know me and yet you're trying to impress me with supposed dangers in

the house. There's no danger here."

Van shivered. Gooseflesh appeared on her arms and legs. She felt chilled to

the core. Richard's words were just words, but Van felt them rip through her.

There seemed to be an undercurrent of threat in them. But why?

"I don't mean to be rude, but I have a lot to do and this is probably a bad time

for a visit."

Richard's smiled and changed the subject. "Tell me, have you read my book yet?

I think it might give you some insights on what goes on in this house."

Vanessa spun around and narrowed her eyes. "Which book?"

A deep-seated fear welled up in Van, rooting her to the spot. It couldn't be.

He couldn't be talking about 'The Incubus', could he? Vanessa looked at him

deeply.

No, it's just me overreacting to his presumptive nature. I am not picking up

his thoughts!

He down deep scared her. She couldn't fathom why, though. Heck, he was just a

guy, handsome one, but nevertheless, a next door neighbor guy. Right?

Something about him just felt wrong.

Richard stood up. Crossing the floor, he touched her cheek with his hand. The

iciness of his fingers sent a frisson of anxiety through her. Trying to move

away, she felt as though her body had been frozen to the spot. She squeezed her eyes shut and grounded herself, visualizing a long extension of her backbone going into the earth and securing itself around the core of the Mother. "I told you there was much you didn't know. I had planned to wait to tell you. You're not very cooperative, but you have spirit. I like that about you, Vanessa. Spirit is a very desirable." He leaned toward her and brushed her cheek with a kiss. Van recoiled. The place where his lips had touched her skin felt as if it had been frozen. Inexplicably, she felt intrigued. She suddenly wanted to know more about him and what he did. She wanted to be close to him. Shaking her head to dispel the errant thoughts, Van returned her attention to his words. "I would have liked you to come to me willingly, but since I don't have time to waste anymore, I need to make you listen." She knew he waited for an answer. Do I have a choice? "Of course you have a choice. Right now, you could speak aloud, but you choose to communicate telepathically with me." Van became truly frightened now. Where was that walking stick when she needed it? This guy was psychopathic. One minute pleasant, the next very bizarre. This town was full of strange people. Van raised her voice slightly. "I am not choosing to have you read my mind." He laughed, but his laughter lacked mirth. He then took her by the arms. "You need to listen carefully to what I have to say and then you can choose intelligently." Van remained still. Her arms hurt where he held her. "I don't have a choice do I?" She replied. "Good. I was only waiting for your consent." Richard let her go and crossed the kitchen. He motioned for her to sit down on one of the chairs. After she sat, he did also, pulling a chair directly in

front of her. She was relieved he hadn't taken off his sunglasses. She didn't

want to have to look at his yes.

"So?" Van asked, impatiently nodding her head.

"I just want us to be friends," began Richard.

"Sure, just like you were friends with Anna Devlin?"

Richard's gaze pierced Van.

"How could I be friends with someone who has been dead for nearly two hundred

years? What do you know about Anna?" he asked cautiously.

Van put out her psychic feelers. It seemed to be her chance to find out what he

had in mind while he talked about a vulnerable subject.

"I found another book in the attic. It's a diary, apparently written by her,"

Van answered.

"Really? Now that is riveting." His droll, urbane voice cut through her.

"It is interesting," Van continued. "She tells about her childhood and then about other things."

Van stopped. She had forgotten Anna had described creating John and quite

possibly this Richard was the one she talked about. Could it be? No one would

believe this. They'd think she was suffering from nervous exhaustion.

"What else?" Richard leaned forward in the chair.

"Well, I haven't finished it," she replied.

"Yes you have."

"Stop it."

"Stop what, Vanessa? Your mind is like an open book to me. I can't help seeing

your thoughts. I know you don't care for me, but I'm sure, in time, we will come to be very good friends."

Not in this lifetime.

"Yes, in this lifetime. We are destined to share together. You'll understand

more as time goes on. I am here to protect you from things you can't even begin

to comprehend."

"And how do I protect myself from you?" Van hoped to taunt him with her look of

contempt and her scathing words.

Richard paused before he spoke. "You don't have to protect yourself from me. I

present no danger to you, other than perhaps in a romantic way.

Vanessa, you must understand. I am not the kind of man who has casual relationships or who rushes into them. However, when I saw you, I was pulled and attracted. You are beautiful. Those huge blue eyes, those soft lips, your body make me feel things I haven't felt in years."

"How many years, Richard?" She pushed. She had to find out. "You aren't much older than I am, so how many times have you been 'attracted' to someone? And when?"

"What are you trying to divine, Vanessa?"

"I just want to know," she replied, edging away from him.

"You don't need to believe me, just trust me when I tell you how I feel."

Richard's body leaned in even more.

"Look, this conversation is going where it has no business going and I have plenty to do yet today, so goodbye, Richard."

Van stood up.

"I know about your ghost upstairs."

Van sat down suddenly.

"You're suspicious about him, too, aren't you?"

"What are you talking about?"

Richard eased back into his chair and looked up at her, smiling.

"Ah, I have your attention. Did your so-called boarder ever tell you who he is, really?"

Van tilted her head. She watched for any expression change on Richard which would alert her to his intention. He had closed himself off again. Her psychic senses could not penetrate his barriers. She needed to rely on physical reactions.

"Well, since you seem to be all knowing, who is he?"

Richard looked smugly at her. "You seem taken with him."

"He is definitely more of a gentleman than you!" Vanessa cursed herself. He stood up and walked to the steps, pausing. "What do you really know about him?"

"Richard, I'd really appreciate it if you just never came back here. I won't bother you at your home, either."

"Vanessa, my love, I cannot leave you alone. I desire you, I want you. If it's courting you want, that is what you'll get from now on. You are most welcome at my home anytime."

"No, I don't want you around any longer and I certainly don't want to visit you.

Just leave me alone!"

The last words came out hysterically. Vanessa realized she was losing control,

again with yet another man. She also felt drained and tired. Richard seemed to

be larger, but her eyes were playing tricks on her. They had to be. She needed

to believe this was just another man, not the monster she had felt earlier he

was.

"Vanessa, I am here for you, anytime. Just call me. I'll hear you."

She felt his gaze on her.

"We were meant to be together. I'd explain more, but you just aren't receptive

now. I have a story I've written in the past few days since I met you.

Please

read it and then decide how you feel toward me. May I bring it to you?"

"Oh, for heaven's sake, don't you ever give up?"

"No." He replied. "What I feel for you has no boundaries and yet, you hold me

away. I will not give up."

"We just met. I have no feelings for you, other than maybe, distrust and confusion."

"I know and I'm truly sorry for the way things got started between us, but please accept my apologies. Please read my story."

He crossed over to her and took off his glasses.

Van shrank; from what she thought would happen next. She became shocked when

she looked into his eyes and found a shadow of love in them. She felt no repulsion at all. The green seemed to darken with his desire as he looked at

her. There was no hint of danger or intimidation. The most surprising thing

was that she felt his barriers coming down and she felt loving sensations emanate from his psyche.

"Be Gone!"

Startled, Vanessa jumped. She turned to the booming voice behind her. Her eyes widened in surprise when she saw John. He looked angry. He looked violent. John kept his gaze unblinkingly on Richard. He came closer and the kitchen seemed to quake with each step. "Do you think I am afraid of a wraith?" Richard laughed, but the sound rang hollow. Vanessa looked again at John and then at Richard. Confusion spread through her. She felt emanations from both and yet, they were scrambled. It was as if her psychic senses had short-circuited. Vanessa tried to stay between the two towering men. Keeping John behind her, after making sure he didn't advance, she stated softly, "I don't want anyone hurt here. Please go home now, Richard." Turning to face John, Vanessa raised her eyebrows and stated loudly, "Swashbuckling is fine in the movies and on stage, but this is real life!" "Do not fear, Vanessa." He smiled down at her. Vanessa looked up at him and noticed she had missed the slight graying at his temples. She stood transfixed on that, until she remembered Richard stood behind her still. It was an impasse. After a moment of glowering, Richard finally spoke. "I'll go now, but we will talk again, my dear." "Sure," she replied as he left. Van turned around to chastise John again, but he was gone. "Considering how noisily he crossed the kitchen to accost Richard, he certainly disappeared quietly," she thought. Wringing her hands, she tried to think about Richard and the drastic change she had acknowledged. Where was the fear? Where was the repulsion? Had she just imagined them before? Had stress caused her to imagine sensations which weren't there? Richard did not seem as threatening. He seemed benevolent and

loving.
She shook her head again.
Feelings. She had felt them. Myriads of feelings coming from him.

The Demon watched Vanessa through the window. He smiled.
She is appealing, even though her physical charm is the least of her attraction.
What he really wanted was as elusive to him as the pot at the end of the rainbow. If he could only have the powers of the entity, he could have more control of the world as it was. He reasoned he would have to gain Vanessa's confidence before she would let him in to her life again.
If that aberration of the ethereal hadn't shown up, it would have been easy to seduce her. Now control was going to be harder to regain. She was tough... and intriguing. When she had been Anna, she seemed to be more pliable and more naive. Her psychic powers had been immature. In this lifetime, as Vanessa, she had developed well psychically; he almost regretted her physical destruction.
Almost.
Perhaps he could salvage her. After all, this was the second time he had to seduce her. It might be nice to share eternity with someone like himself. He had never wanted that before, but then, he had never met anyone like Vanessa, either.
He knew the bond she felt with the entity. Once she realized who and what he really was, it would be too late. A mother's love would be easier to break than the tie binding Vanessa to the entity.
He crossed the porch and grabbed the laptop computer. He'd told her he had written a story to explain everything, and now he had to come up with one.

"What possessed me to tell her that?" He mumbled to himself. "Now I

have to
actually sit down and write the blasted thing.”
The thought of writing romantic drivel in order to pacify Vanessa’s probing brought a lump of revulsion to his throat. He swallowed hard. This could be a
hard task. How could he write about love when he felt none?
Why am I always putting pressure on myself?
He thought about the dim lights of his library room and with that thought, arrived there immediately.
Settling into his wing-armed chair, he tried to think of how to begin. The laptop screen remained blank. The cursor winked at him, daring him to begin.
He pounded his fist on his desk. The story would be the key. She needed mental
seduction first. He would be able to take control of the physical once that was
accomplished. After all, it was mind over matter.
The Demon smiled.
“Ah, Miss Vanessa. Soon you will open your mind and your virtue to me.
Then I
will have your essence as well.”

CHAPTER EIGHT

“Hello.”
Van jerked out of her reverie. She half turned in her chair and saw John standing near her. She adjusted herself to look at him more directly. His closeness caused her to feel warmth flowing up from below her core.
Blinking
her eyes several times, she asked, “How did you get in here without making any
noise? That door squeaks like a son of a gun.”
“Son of a gun?” He repeated, questioningly.
“Yeah, it squeaks like a bear.”
“Squeaks like a bear?” He asked again, looking at her with some
puzzlement.
Van sighed deeply. This is not going to be easy.
“Are you going to repeat everything I say?”
“No. I am curious at your choice of words,” he replied. “I find it amusing
to
think you believe bears squeak.”

"I amuse you?" asked Van. "Well, I won't bother you any more. I'm going to my room."

"Bother?" He asked again.

"Yes, bother. You know, don't worry, be happy." Van was exasperated. He

seemed to be sophisticated one minute and then as innocent as a two year old the next.

"Oh, I see. Well, I am not worried at all." He smiled down at her.

"Well, what a relief," she replied sarcastically. Seeing his confusion, she smiled. "By the way, thanks for helping with Richard."

"Do not bother," he replied, still smiling.

"What?" Now it was her turn to be confused.

"I do not want you to worry about it. It is necessary. He must be controlled.

He is not allowed here." John moved closer to Van. She felt the heat of his body.

"Okay, let's get something straight. You can't tell me who is allowed here and who isn't."

Van looked at him. Feelings were overwhelming her. They were sensual. She

tried to ignore the emotions coming to the surface of her psyche. It was difficult.

"Do not bother," he replied, continuing to smile. "You are the mistress of this

house and I grant you may say who is to enter and who will not."

Van looked at him. It was hard to concentrate with him sitting directly across

from her. His eyes were on hers and his long slender fingers entwined around

each other. His thumbs made circles in the air, playing a game of avoiding each other.

"Where are you from?"

He just sat and looked at her. "I am from here."

Talking with him was a veritable roller coaster ride. Was he an upbeat guy or

not?

Well, Van thought, there is definitely something to be said for those past times

if all the guys looked like him. Until now, she had only seen him by candlelight or lamplight. Van wanted to touch him in the worst way. "So," she began, "what brought you out of your room today?" "You." The word was a caress folding itself softly around her. Van sat for a few moments. She stayed at a loss for words. Finally summoning up what was left of her control, she asked, "What do you mean, I did?" "I sensed something was amiss and I came to look for you. I found you." His gaze never left her face. He tilted his head to look at her more closely. "Well, I sure am glad you did," she replied. "He frightened me" "No!" Van jerked herself up. If he keeps bellowing like that, I'll have a nervous breakdown for sure. He looked furious. What did I say to make him so angry? He looked volatile. She thought he would break something. He got up abruptly and strode to the window, counting to himself. He must be mad if he has to count to ten. Suddenly he stopped. He had reached the number twelve. Van looked at him and began to ask him why he stopped so quickly, but she decided to go to the living room instead. She thought he might need some time to himself. As she reached the archway between the foyer and the kitchen, she stopped. Squinting, she tried to focus on him. The light from the kitchen diffused and it almost appeared as if she could see through him. It was an ethereal glimpse of a man in a haze. Wish I could capture that on camera! Raising her voice, she asked him, "Would you like to join me in the living room?" "I can bring the tea in here." "I would like to join with you, but I do no- don't care for any tea, thank you." She nodded and continued to the living room. She heard him behind her counting again. Turning, she asked, "Why are you doing that?" He strode across the living room diagonally, ignoring her. "Excuse me, but why are you counting?"

He looked up, as if he had been surprised she remained there still. He said,
"Oh, I would like the measurements for my, uh." He stalled, looking for the
right words. "I canno- can't remember. It escapes me now."
"Okay. Well, I'm going to get more tea and then put a fire in the fireplace."

Van left the room.
He followed her as she made the tea. He stood so close she almost spilled the
water on him as she poured it into her cup. When she went to the table, he
walked beside her. When she sat, he pulled the chair around the table and sat
next to her.
"You know," Van began, feeling uncomfortable with his constant nearness,
"Richard isn't here now, so you don't have to be this territorial."
He smiled at her and she felt as if she could melt into him.
"I'm so very sorry. I will try not to displease you, but I feel the need you
have to be near."
"Well, I never had this much attention even when I won national awards.
Country
air must be good for human species. Maybe I'll do an article on it!" Van
looked at his perplexed expression and laughed.
As his puzzled expression increased, she laughed even more.
Holding her side and covering her mouth, Van tried to choke out words
between
fits of laughter. "You have the most expressive face. I'm not laughing at
you,
really."
When he leaned forward, she became quiet. She could feel his intensity.
"I am not naive about all things, Vanessa."
With that, he took her arm and placed it on his with her hand around his
neck.
He reached for her with his other arm and drew her close. They kissed.
Softly
at first, then, as their passion exploded, the kiss became fire.
She did not pull back this time. She wanted him. She wanted to feel his
arms
around her. She envisioned it before she felt the hardness press against
her.
It was long, hard, strong, straight, pulsing with anticipation. It promised

the undeniable pleasure of the flesh with no inhibitions. Van stroked his massive back. She stroked his neck and placed her other hand on the waistband of his pants. She slowly slid the fingers of her other hand down around the back and felt the firmness of his rounded buttocks. Firm, but pliant. She inched closer to the seam which separated each one. "We need to stop," he rasped, his breath ragged. "What?" Van reached involuntarily to tidy her hair. "Why? Don't you want me?" "Oh, Vanessa, I believe I do, but it is not time." He stood. "I must tell you something." "What?" "You have read the book written in the hand of Anna, correct?" Van didn't think she liked the sound of where this was heading. "Yes, I read it." "Do you know who I am?" "I have my suspicions. But really, no one can make another person." "I am proof one can." Van sank into the chair. John stood watching her. "I didn't want to believe it." "I am here to protect, love and pleasure you." "This is too much for me to process. Why are you telling me this?" "I need you to do something so I can attain the next plane of existence. Without you, I cannot." "What are you talking about?" "There is a rite which must be done to achieve that end." "And you want me to do that?" "I would." "I do not know anything about witchcraft. I am an intuitive psychic, not a dealer in the black arts." "I am sorry to have troubled you. I will search for another resolution." Van was taken aback. Was he giving up this easily? Then she knew instinctively that he had asked others to do the same and had come to expect rejection. "John, it's not that I won't, I just don't think I could. I wouldn't have a clue how to start." "I understand. It is not a problem. Perhaps, if you knew me." "What do you mean-know you?" He stepped forward and took her in his arms. He closed her eyes with a gentle

sweeping motion of his fingertips and when Van opened them, she saw herself as a little five-year-old girl. She was a small figure, lying in her bed, crying softly.

As Van watched, she saw a figure appear next to her small self. It was him...John. He bent down over her and stroked her hair and told her about faeries and princesses and how you must believe to make your dreams come true.

"But is my dolly...dead?" little Vanessa asked.

"It is never dead," he replied. "There are many places which you will explore

when you are grown up and in those places you will find everything is very real

and very much filled with life."

"Are you my guardian angel?"

"No, I am not an angel, but I do watch over you."

"I love you," she said and then reached up and grabbed him about the neck.

Pulling him closer to her face, she said, "I will always love you." Then she kissed his nose and he smiled.

A tear rolled down Van's face as she remembered. Her favorite doll had been

drowned when the basement flooded and her brother had told her it was dead. The

horror of death was too much to bear and little Vanessa was shattered until John

had visited her.

"You see, it was I who comforted you when you were a frightened little girl.

It

was I who admired you when you were a young beauty. It was I who soothed your

pain when your father died. You thought you had been visited by an angel. I

gave you comfort those times. I was not tied to this house in those moments and

I sought you out."

Van trembled. She knew it had to be the truth. Her knees felt weak and she

wasn't sure she could stand up much longer.

"The Demon who pursues me inhabits the body of Richard. He wants you, but only

because that brings him closer to me. You are in grave danger. Those who died

before you would attest to that. In order to escape the Demon and to find my

own destiny, I need a name."

"But I call you John, isn't that enough?"

"The name must be given in the ritual. You see, I really have no name unless

you give it to me then."

"Fine, I get it." She touched each of his shoulders with her hand. "I dub thee

John Smith."

John shook his head. "If t'were only that simple."

Van knew for sure her head would explode. Lunging, she grabbed his hand.

"Look, you are real. This is nuts. You're as real as I am." She pounded on

his chest for emphasis.

"I wish that were true. That is my deep desire to be mortal--as you are, because then I would have a soul."

"I can feel you. I can touch you. You're not a ghost."

"Tis true, but I am not mortal, either. I only have the illusion of mortality while you are close to me or when, on the outside, I will it. It does use up much energy on the outside and I am limited."

"Illusion of mortality?"

"Yes. If I would be more than twelve paces from you, I would not be visible to

your eyes, even though I would be here."

Jabbing him in his chest, Van shook her head.

"Tis true, why do you not believe me?"

"Because, dammit, I don't want to!"

Van's eyes filled with tears and she tasted their saltiness as she talked.

"I

want you to be real. I don't want you to be a man only in my dreams. I don't

want to go back to California without you. I want to be normal, not weird like

this. I am so afraid of losing my sanity and more of losing you. I don't want

you to be a figment of my imagination. I love you, dammit."

"Your feelings are for the illusion."

"That's not true! You're not an illusion. You're as real as this dresser,"

Van

banged on it to make her point.

"I am not, though I wish it were so. Walk from me to your room."

Still clutching the box with one hand, Van walked backward from the room. With each step she took away from him, he faded a little more. By the twelfth step, she couldn't see him. Running back into the room, she watched as he became more dense. Stopping short of him, she bowed her head. Her world had turned upside down and she was falling like Alice in Wonderland into a deep, dark hole. Only there was no crazy rabbit to lead her around. Her gaze fell on his boots. Then she raised her eyes and looked into his. He held out his arms to her. Dropping the box, she flew into the comfort she knew she would find there. "Oh, Vanessa. I would that you had found out more subtly, but there is no time to waste. You said you were leaving and if the ritual is not performed before you go, I am doomed. The demon will have me without contest." "All those things I felt for you are not real. Why? Why is life so profane? I finally find a man I could love and he isn't even real." Van sobbed into his chest. As he comforted her, he told her how he came to be. "I know all that. It's in Anna's diary." "Then you also know I need to have a name and a death date." "What good would that do me?" Van asked. "I told you before. If I had a name, I would have my own power and then I could search for the way to become mortal," he answered. "And I hope that with a death date I would die in this state and be raised again mortally. I want to feel as you do. I want to share in the pleasuring, not only watch it. I want to know what joys are given to man which I can only observe. I want to feel." "What about me?" "You are my creator. You have come back. You are important to the very soul I would want to have." Van became dispirited. "But what about how I feel? What will happen to me if

you have your own power? Will I ever see you again? Will you be as you are now? Will you leave me?"

"I do not know those answers. I just know what I know."

Tears ran down her face, but she didn't wipe them away. "Don't you understand?"

I don't want to lose you. I want you. I need you. Why can't we just live here

forever? I could keep the house and we could stay here together."

"Vanessa, I will be there for you always."

"How? You'll be on your own, looking for a miracle." Van turned away from him.

"You won't need me anymore if you have your own name. Why should I give you one?"

The memory of his torment as he lay with Anna filled her mind. She heard Anna's

voice, "Wanting a name are ye?" Would she again deny him his need?

She was no

longer the scarred and mentally ill woman of the past, but Van thought, maybe I

haven't changed in the depths of my soul.

Her thoughts were interrupted by his pleas. "Would you deny me my freedom?"

Would you have me join with the demon? That is my destiny if you refuse me. It

must be done or I am doomed. To try is better than to look forward to certain

annihilation."

In her dreams, he had come to her and fulfilled all her fantasies. He had been

a pirate, dashing, handsome and rough. He had come to her cloaked, naked

beneath the volumes of material. Just the sight of his muscled body made her

wet. He filled her with tenderness when he came to her soft and supple, giving

her pleasure so consuming, she could only lay sated, while he gently bathed her.

In the past two weeks, he had done things so sweet and romantic, outside of her

dreams. Every evening, she would find a rose on her pillow, making her

day end

on with a warm smile. She felt secure with his unrelenting positive, unconditional love. He didn't care about her past. He seemed only interested in the present moment and how he could make it the most wonderful for her.

She thought of their long talks at the kitchen table. He had a keen mind and he

debated issues well, with sensitivity to her ideas and feelings. He was more

human than most people she knew. Would it be fair to let him despair? Then again, life wasn't fair. She had finally found someone she cared about.

No, she needed to be honest. She loved him. How could she not?

He is perfect. Handsome, smart, sexy. And not real. Way to go, Van.

Turning back to face him, Van took his hand and whispered, "I'll do what is necessary."

More tears fell onto Van's cheeks. She knew she had made the right decision.

She could see it in his shining face. But was it the right decision for her?

Probably not. But she had to believe. She knew she had to preserve the belief

that if she loved him and let him go, if he never returned, he was never truly

hers to begin with.

He reached out to bring her closer to him, but she resisted. She loved him. It

hurt so much to love.

He bent to kiss the top of her head. Her tears continued to fall silently onto

his chest. She knew she had just sealed his fate, whatever that would be.

Would he be gone, and she be alone?

Hollowness seeped through her. She wanted to lash out and scream at the

unfairness of her life, but she just leaned into him and cried silently.

"If giving you a name can make you more alive, there must be something which can

make you real. There just has to be. I can't lose you when I have just found

you. I'll find a way to make you mortal without you dying and then..."

Van stopped.

What if he became mortal and didn't want her?

"I will always be there for you, Vanessa."
His words soothed her like a caress. Soon she rocked in his arms.
"Do you feel anything for me?"
"I do not know. I do know that when I am with you I am more of what I am."
"I'll name you right now." Van looked up into his eyes.
Frightened she would name him right then, he held her away and blared,
"No! Not
now. It must be done with the ritual."
"What ritual?"
"I do not know," he replied. "There is one I learned when I was on the
outside,
but my memory fades as I live within the walls of this house."
This was not going to be easy. Suddenly Van jumped from his arms and
ran to the
bed.
Van spied the book she had flung away earlier. Pulling out of his
embrace, she
ran to it.
"The book! It has rituals in it Anna performed," she shouted to him.
"Maybe
it's in here."
Leafing through each page, Van felt cheated when it ended.
"Why didn't she write it down?" she shouted. "Where in the hell would she
put
such an important piece of information?"
John shook his head. It seemed so futile. He had no answer to her
question.
There was no mention of the entity or the ritual that would make him his
own
person.
Slamming the book shut, Van threw it across the bed.
"Nothing. Not a damn thing. A complete zero."
"There is a way. I know it, I just cannot remember it."
"Now what?" Van asked. "How many people know about making entities
real? It's
not something I can just go up to someone and ask about. I'm sorry, I
just
don't know what to do." Suddenly Van brightened. "Do you need a
special ritual
or can I just make something up and then name you, like have a baptism
or
something?"
She could see he was as frustrated as she. He frowned, his brows

knitting
together and causing a curl to fall onto his forehead. She wanted to touch
it,
smooth it back and caress his cheek. She loved him so much.
In the next moment, he looked at her and smiled seductively. He leaned
in to
her and kissed her.
"Have you thought of something? Do you remember anything?" Van was
eager to
find the answer to his dilemma and maybe to her own.
"Were you not thinking of me and the pleasuring?"
"I don't think so. I just thought about how sweet it is when your curl falls
across your eyebrow when you are deep in thought," Van admitted.
"Okay, maybe I
was, on a very deep level. You really can feel my thoughts!"
"It is my purpose."
"I think I'm going to miss that if you become mortal."
Van shook her head. Her stomach rumbled and she realized she had not
eaten yet
that day.
"I'm going to go into town to get some things," she said. "Do you want to
go
with me?"
"I cannot leave the house. I have tried, but even though I now wander it, I
cannot leave its boundaries."
"Well, we haven't tried leaving together," Van offered.
"True." He looked thoughtful. "We can but try."
"Good, then come on!" Van started for the door.
John followed but as she stepped off the front stairs, she turned to look at
him. He stood on the porch, full and vibrant. The sun streaked his hair
and it
shone like black velvet.
"Come on, it's only a few more steps and we'll know if you can leave."
John stepped off the top step. As his boot touched the next one, he faded
slightly. Going down to the next step, he diminished even more. He
backed up
the stairs on to the porch.
"It cannot be." His voice carried the despair she felt.
"Well, at least we know now." Van strode back up the stairs to him.
"Soon
you'll be able to do whatever you want. Right?"
"I do not know what will happen or what I am capable of doing. I only hope
I

can be with you.”

“Oh, John, that’s what I want more than anything,” Van replied. “I don’t care

where it is, I just want to be with you.”

He held her close, but they both knew eventually she would have to go.

“Don’t worry,” she said as she stepped away from him. “I’ll be right back.

I’m

going to try to see if Martha is related to the other Stoneman women and if she

might have an old book with rituals in it. If she doesn’t, tomorrow I’ll go to the library and start researching.”

“I hope Martha is helpful. Time is close.”

“What do you mean?”

John shook his head. “I do not know.” Van sensed his lack of memory frustrated

him. Somehow, she’d find the missing ritual. She only hoped it would be in

time.

“There must be a way to give you what you want without losing you.”

John looked down at her. “I wish all things could be possible, but I do not know if it can be.”

“If there’s a way, I’ll find it. I mean it.”

John smiled at her. “I believe you will, my determined creator.”

Van stared at his departing figure as he left. She looked into the glass window

of the open door and saw her reflection in it. She looked liked a wanton woman.

She chuckled at what Marcy would say.

She’d probably be pouring champagne.

Van was hot. Damn hot. No one had ever gotten her so aroused with just a kiss.

She wanted to do things she didn’t even know she knew how to do.

Running into the kitchen, she picked up her phone and was surprised to hear a

dial tone. Why that surprised her, she couldn’t say. Maybe she’d been living

in a make-believe world for too long and the reality of the real world seemed

less real than the fantasy one. But being in the real world, she dialed out and

let out a sigh of relief when she heard Marcy’s voice.

Vanessa related the events that had occurred since Marcy had left.

“You mean Richard Witmer wants to visit with you and you don’t want him

to? Am
I missing something? The guy is gorgeous and rich. Are you crazy?"
"You know I don't care about that stuff."
"Van, you have to care about something sometime. Richard Witmer is a
good place
to begin, if I say so myself. And if you don't want him, I'll look him up
when
I move into the house."
"What?"
"Yep, I put in a bid...one you can't refuse," Marcy said. "Yes, I did and
then
he'll be my neighbor."
"You don't understand. Something happened when I touched his hand.
There's
something very weird about that guy."
"Well don't make yourself sick over it." Marcy said.
"Trust me, I won't."

CHAPTER NINE

When the heaviness of the Demon's visit lifted, the Entity shook his head.
It
had declared Its intentions in no uncertain terms. It wanted Vanessa also.
It
knew she could see the entity and he knew It would be relentless in Its
pursuit
of her. Even though his knowledge was limited while he remained within
the
walls of the house, the Entity realized he needed something more. But
what?
As he mulled over his dilemma, he came to stand behind Vanessa while
she talked
on the phone. She noticed him and motioned to him to wait a moment.
He nodded
and stepped back, six paces.
He watched her being vibrate to what she heard. He sensed her thoughts
and
feelings were excited. Her essence showed bright with a golden energy.
He saw
her mind race with calculations of time and money and he felt her
momentary

melancholy. When she hung up the phone, he approached her. Her eyes were sparkling. "Well, I have some good news and some bad news."

When he didn't respond, she continued. "The house is sold. I accepted the bid from my friend, Marcy. If everything goes right, I should be back in L.A. after next month. That gives me a month to try to figure out what to do to help you."

He knew what she expected him to say. How could he respond to an announcement such as this when his whole existence was in peril? She would be gone in a month, whether the ritual had been performed or not. The feelings he felt from her were overridden by the news of the house being sold. He could not lose her.

He needed her. He had to convince her how important it was to him. Van looked at John. "Look, I'll try to help you. I just told you I would. I couldn't leave here knowing you were doomed to this existence. Trust me. If I can do it, I will."

Van, realizing she rattled on, stopped again. "Are you all right?" John pursed his lips and stared at her. He could feel the emotions running through her, but how could he explain that he had just found her? Now she would be leaving soon. Without her, he was nothing. He felt that there was more to having her in the house. It felt that he needed her more than just for the ritual, but he was not sure why.

"The house is beginning to grow on me, too." She stepped toward him. "Don't you understand I have a responsible job and need to get back there for it? I don't know how to do what you want. And I am confused about you, and my feelings for you, too. I mean, as much as I want you to be real, you're not. You're a figment of someone's imagination and a combination of things that came together correctly at one time. Whether that can be changed or not, I don't know. I am willing to try before I leave though."

John could not speak. He only knew he'd be alone, half-alive forever. The Demon's proposition seemed his only choice. He could not chance Van would lose her life in performing the ritual to preserve his, especially when she did not realize the danger involved. "I'm truly sorry," she said, holding out her hands to him. "I do feel for you." She looked at him, but when he didn't respond, she dropped her arms to her sides and sighed. He watched as she climbed the stairs to her room, leaving him standing mute in the vestibule.

Van sat on the edge of her bed, musing. She had accomplished what she had set out to do in less than two weeks. Only one potential buyer had walked through in those two weeks, so Van had not held out much hope she'd be leaving on time. She had actively looked for a house sitter or at least a family to rent the place until it sold. She knew she should be overjoyed that Marcy might be the new owner, and yet she wasn't. It had to be his fault she felt so melancholy about this. She shouldn't have offered to help him in his quest for mortality. It was asinine for her to believe she could perform a ritual when she didn't know the first thing about one. She was no witch. The thoughts of returning to a normal world and her new job overtook her and she realized she had been caught up in a drama which had no bearing on life in the outside. Outside of the little town of Rock Creek, the real world was waiting, where entities, demons, and witches were the makings of Hollywood movies. Yet, how could she deny the existence of him? How could she just walk away and forget all the things that happened in this house? How could she forget his touch, his ability to anticipate her every want, desire and need? How could she forget his intelligence? How could she ever forget those eyes?

The house. It, too, had grown on her. It seemed to be hers more now than ever.

Her psychic abilities had blossomed while she stayed. It was a heady experience to pick up an object and be able to know what had happened in the

past. It became a compulsion for her. How could she give it up? Would this

stay with her when she returned to L.A.? Or would these past few weeks just be

a pleasant, if bizarre, memory?

Could she relegate her feelings toward John to a memory? How could anyone not

love him? He was perfect in every sense of the word. Could she walk away from

him and forget the intensity of her love for him?

Love? When did I decide that?

Van shook her head and ran her hand through her hair, twisting the ends. How

could she actually love someone who didn't really exist? The pull to return to

normal was great, but the pull to acknowledge her feelings and her desires was

even greater. No one would understand this.

No one.

Maybe Anna, but she was dead now. The only object she never received historical

sights on was the diary. When she touched it, she just got that hot and sexy

feeling and heard the tinny music box noise. But, that was a heady experience,

too. She'd almost miss it. Almost.

She opened her nightstand drawer and pulled out the ornate box.

Carefully she

opened it and touched the diary. The tinny sound filled the room as smoldering

passion enveloped her psyche. She pulled back her hand quickly as though she

had touched a burning stove, and dropped the box in the process.

Bending over,

she shut the box's lid to turn off the irritating noise and her libido. Leaning over again to pick up the box and the book, she found a slip of paper

wedged

into the back cover of the diary.

"What's this?"

The paper was brittle and tore slightly as she dislodged it. It had been yellowed with age and Van could barely make out the words, but what she read

made her heart beat faster.

Another book? I

If there is another book with rituals and spells in it, I need to find it.

The attic was the first place she thought it might be. Van ran upstairs.

She

searched every nook and cranny she could find, overturning boxes and crates and

tapping walls to find any hollow spaces.

After two hours, and a bevy of spider webs imbedded in her hair, it was clear

the book was not in the attic. Giving up, she trudged down the stairs, to search closets.

The door to John's room was open.

"Might as well look in there."

Upon entering, Van saw the cane she had used the week before. She smiled

thinking of how futile the cane would be against him; he had the strength of ten

men. As she bent to pick up the useless defense tool, she noticed something

under the bed. Reaching in, she pulled out an almost identical box to the one

the diary had been stored in.

"It's almost the same box as the diary is in. This has got to be it."

"What diary?"

Van jumped.

"Would you please stop sneaking up on me like that?" She screeched at John.

"Please forgive me, I did not mean to startle you." He offered his hand to help

her up.

Ignoring his proffered hand, Van hugged the box close to her chest.

"You do not need to be afraid I will take what you have recovered. It is time."

He then turned away from her.

"Time?"

He didn't answer, but walked away into a mist. Watching him disappear made her

body tighten. She couldn't lose him. If nothing else, she had to try to

save

him, for his own sake, if not for hers. Inspiration came.

"Martha!"

She knew what she needed to do and she was determined to do it.

Van smiled. "Martha will know what to do. I know she will."

"She is leaving to find the ritual to release me."

It has not yet been accomplished.

"It will be. Then you shall be cast back into the hell you came from and deserve to abide in."

I am stronger. A mortal against the dominions of hell are no match. She will

be mine, and then, so shall you. Time for hope is over.

"No!"

The Demon's maniacal laugh embedded itself in the timbers of the house and it

shook in repulsion.

CHAPTER TEN

The five-minute drive into town seemed to take an eternity.

Please be there, Martha.

As she pulled up in front of the store, she saw Duke, the Obnoxious, sweeping in front.

That sidewalk should be clean enough to eat off of.

Smiling as sweetly as she could, she passed him and swooped into the store.

Martha was nowhere to be seen. Hurriedly she ran to the back, but Martha wasn't

there either. Duke came up behind her as she came from the freezers.

"What are you doin' in there?" He asked, warily.

"I'm looking for Martha," Van replied. "Do you know where she is?"

"Sure, I do," he answered.

Van waited. Duke stood next to the fruits, rubbing an apple in the most seductive way he could. He smiled at her.

"Well?" she finally blurted out.

"Well, what?"

Exasperated to the point of committing homicide, Van took a breath and

then said
slowly, "Do you think you could tell me where she is right now?"
Staring at her, he eyed her critically. "Why should I? What kind of
business
do you have with Martha? You gonna be a witch, too?"
"What?" Van didn't hide her surprise. Hope flared like a flame fed with
oxygen. If Martha was a witch, maybe she did know exactly what to do.
Especially if she was a witch descended from the Martha in Anna's diary.
"Look Duke, I need to find Martha. It's none of your business why. Just
tell
me where she is and I won't tell her you called her a witch."
Duke visibly paled. "Okay. I'll give you directions to her house, but it's
real
hard to find."
Impatient, Van tried to control her voice. "Just tell me and let me worry
about
getting lost, all right?"
"Sure thing, missy." Duke looked around the store and then leaned into
Van.
"Don't say nothing about her being a witch, okay? I didn't mean it, you
know."
Van shrugged. "I know."
Van grabbed the scribbled directions from Duke and jumped into her
Blazer.
With the directions clutched tightly in her hands, she drove hard and fast
down
the highway to the edge of farm country where the hills met the meadows.

After what seemed an eternity, she came to the dirt road that butted
against
the two-lane freeway. She turned down the tree-lined lane, but as she got
further into the countryside, the directions didn't make sense and became
harder
to understand.
Where am I going to end up?
Van drove in circles trying to find the road that cut through to Martha's
house.
She looked for all the signs Duke said would be obvious, but either they
had
been taken down or bushes and trees had overgrown them.
Or he gave me the wrong directions.
Two hours later, Van stopped the Blazer and got out where, according to
Duke's

directions, the road was supposed to be. She sat on a log and looked around.

"It has to be here somewhere."

Frustrated, hungry, anxious and tired, tears rolled freely down her cheeks.

Feeling sorry for herself, she held her head in her hands and cried.

For a person who never cried, I sure made up for it today. If I can't even find

a simple road, how do I think I can manage to perform a minor miracle?

What

made me think I could do this anyway? He's not even real. He'll probably not

want me when he is. How in the hell did I get involved in this mess?

A picture of Marcy's face came to her mind.

How could she explain to Marcy that she didn't really want to sell the house now

because she was in love with man who wasn't even real? Her friend would do the

right thing and convince her to enter a mental hospital 'for a little rest.'

What am I thinking? Not sell and live there?

Living there with John would be ideal. She could freelance her writing and still have him. He was a perfect companion and lover. She would lose nothing

if she kept things at the status quo. If she didn't give him a name, he'd still

be bound to the house and to her.

"But what about the Demon?"

Startled, Van jumped up from the log and nearly toppled over it. She turned

around to see Martha standing behind her.

"What did you say?" Van asked.

Martha smiled and offered her hand, "I said, all that would be lovely, but what

would you do about the Demon? He wants your friend as much as you do."

Van couldn't think. The knowledge about her lover... boarder... entity...had

left her wrung out. There was nothing left for her to give.

Martha put her arm around Van's shoulder and they walked silently deeper into

the woods.

Van finally looked up when they reached a set of stairs. What she saw was not

what she had imagined Martha's house would look like. In front of her was a modern ranch style house with a barbecue set up on the patio and a flower garden with some colorful flowers still in bloom. Not a hint of a witch's hut. "Are you disappointed?" Martha smiled at Van and then winked. "No candy covered cottage here. I just lure kids in with the promise of computer games and junk food. I'm quite the modern witch you know, keeping up with the times."

Van smiled and Martha hugged her.
"What's that delicious smell?"
"Oh, I have some cinnamon rolls baking," Martha answered. "Always try to have something special for company."
"I should have known you'd know I was coming."
Van was intrigued.
"It's a gift." Martha replied. "It's not so great when someone wants to surprise me though! I should tell you about the time my friend Amy came by and--" Martha stopped. "Oh, you don't want to be regaled with war stories of an old lady, now do you? But I could almost bet you'd like one of those rolls with lots of butter and a nice cup of chamomile tea."
"You must be psychic." Van laughed as her stomach rumbled. Martha laughed heartily with her. "Guess that's my answer, eh?"
Van followed Martha into a spacious, immaculate kitchen. She sat on a wooden bar stool with a five-inch seat cover on it. She was amazed at the sleek and modern kitchen. It could have been photographed for a home and garden magazine.

Martha brought her soup while the rolls finished baking. She chattered on about mundane things like insects, flowers, and the colors in the rainbow as she brought Van tea and a hot, fresh cinnamon roll which melted in Van's mouth. Relaxed, refreshed and feeling full of energy, Van helped Martha with the

dishes. The simple act of cleaning up felt normal, good, and pleasant. Deja vu again. When had she done this before? Martha just smiled. Dishes done and put away, Martha took her on a tour of her home. Being polite, Van was ready to 'ooh' and 'ah' at the appropriate times, but she was not prepared for the amount of interesting items that filled Martha's home. She toured for nearly a half hour. "Martha, I can't believe this house is as big as it is," Van exclaimed. "On the outside it looks large, but to have all these rooms and so many fantastic items, it's amazing." "Oh, just a few knick knacks about is all," Martha demurred. "Oh, sure, a Ming Dynasty vase, just a knick knack." "Well, I have one more room to show you and then we'll talk, all right, sweetie?" Van agreed and Martha led her down a narrow corridor which extended in the back of the house. As they walked down the hallway, Van began to feel cooler. The wooden walls ended and continued into a cave-like tunnel with sod walls. The dirt walls became darker in appearance the closer they got to the room where Martha was taking her. She wasn't frightened, but a little apprehensive. Good thing I trust Martha. "Yes it's a good thing." Van laughed. Mental telepathy. Must be something in the water. "Are we in an underground cave of some sort?" asked Van. "No, this is a tunnel that connects to my ritual room. It is part of the original cottage which was built on this property in the late 1600's by my ancestor, Martha Stoneman. She was determined to escape the witchcraft trials in Salem being held by Samuel Sewall; and she did. Coming here, she lived out her life, giving birth to one girl who carried on the Tradition. A girl child has been born to each Martha living in the house and will continue to be as this was her bequest and her legacy." "Do you have a daughter named Martha, also?"

"Yes, dear, I do." Martha stopped and turned to Vanessa. Smiling she continued with her story. "My daughter is at Ohio State right now. She is studying veterinary medicine and carrying a four point average, I might add." Martha's pride showed in her face. "But dear, this isn't getting your problem solved, is it?" Martha turned to walk again. "Oh, here we are. What do you think?"

Martha stepped back to watch the expression on Van's face. As she opened the door Van looked in and was stunned. Feeling faint, she held onto the wall. It was as if she had been taken back in time. She knew this room. It was made from stones, piled one upon another. It was cool and airy. Herbs hung from the rafters and pots and pans and baskets hung on the walls. Candlelight gave the room a warm glow and a feeling of timelessness enveloped Van; she hung back, afraid to enter. Martha gave her a little push and suddenly, they both were inside.

"This is the most unique room I have ever been in," stated Van. "It almost feels like being in church."

"As it should. This is where I practice my religion, worshipping the Goddess. It is my place for peace and solitude. Generations of Wiccans have celebrated here. Children have been born in this room. Hand-fastings performed. And those who have gone before me are here also."

Van turned suddenly to Martha.

"You mean this is a graveyard, too?" She shivered involuntarily.

"No, dear, it is not a graveyard, but the ashes of those who have gone before me are here. Their memories are here and their strength is here for us to draw upon."

"You know why I'm here, right?" Van asked.

"I know. It was written you would come again and you would perform the ritual which would release the Entity from his bondage. However, I expected you nine years ago when the cycle was due to complete. This is the last cycle the ritual

can be performed for another century and it must be performed on All
Hallows
Eve."

"But that's in two weeks. How can I learn enough to do this ritual by
then?"

"I will help you, but I have some warnings for you first."

Martha walked around the perimeter of the room. She motioned Van to
follow her.

Van began to walk across the floor and was stopped by an invisible wall.

Martha called out for her to stop.

"What?"

"You must never cross the floor. The circle has been made there. Most
often

the circle is taken down after rituals are performed, but this one remains
intact, always. There is a doorway for us to enter when it is time."

Van felt jittery.

"Put out your hand with the palm flat to the opposite side and feel the air,"
Martha instructed.

Van did as she was told and found herself feeling an actual wall. Invisible
to

her, yet as solid as the wall behind her.

"This is amazing!" Van kept feeling along as she followed Martha. The
wall

seemed to be circular and very, very solid.

"What would have happened if I had crashed through it?" Van was curious.

"Well, for one thing, you wouldn't have. It is centuries old and
impenetrable.

It would have knocked you on your behind. But, if someone ever did break
through a sacred circle, they would allow in all the demons or those who
are

unable to find the light, into it. That would not be good for the ritual and it
could harm the person conducting the ritual as they could become
possessed or
worse."

"Oh my god. Will I have to make a circle for this thing I am doing?" Van
looked around warily.

"Yes, and it is very important you do not allow anyone to enter it after it is
built."

"Can you do this instead of me?"

"No, only you can do it." Martha stopped. Van watched as she pulled out
an old

book. It was large and some of the writing was indecipherable. Martha
turned

to a page near the center and Van recognized Anna's script.

"Is that the ritual?"

"Yes, Anna had given it to Martha because she wanted to create an entity for

herself. Her mother would not allow it and the next day, Anna was dead.

The

pages were not returned to Anna's parents because they would not have understood

and these would have been destroyed. Wisely, Martha's mother placed it in her

Book of Shadows and it has passed down through the years, in hopes

Anna would

reincarnate and perform the ritual before the entity became too strong on his

own."

"He's apparently not that strong. He can't even leave the property," Van said.

"He can, he just does not know it. Just like us, he is limited by his own beliefs. He is still an infant in the metaphysical realm. I know, however, that he is learning and becoming stronger since you have come back in this

lifetime. You give him strength and he will use it to gain his own power."

"But I thought he needed a name?" Van asked.

"It is like decoration on a cake. Not needed but nice to have. What he needs

is a death date, so he can go on to his destiny. The name will give him the

power of his ego, but with that he will become his own person, so to speak."

"But what if he wants to become mortal?"

"Mortal? I don't think so. For that to happen he would have to transmigrate

and that could be disastrous." Martha shook her head.

"But you know how to do it?"

"Not exactly. I know it has been done, but I have never studied it."

"How can we find out?" Van's curiosity was getting the better of her.

"Why does he want to have mortality with its limitations?"

"I don't know. I just know he does and if I can help him get it, I want to do it."

Martha sighed in exasperation. "But you're not listening. It is dangerous for

him. He could possibly not exist if it failed. He would be gone as if he never

had been."

"What's the difference if he has a death date? He still will stop existing, right?"

"On this plane of existence only. He will continue on in another plane if he is given a death date."

"I am so confused," Van sighed.

"I know dear. But I must tell you all the facts, otherwise the wrong decision could be made."

"So, I need to talk to him to find out if he wants to become mortal for sure, or

if he would be happy with just being. This is too much for one person to handle. And what about, you know, making love? Would he still be able to do it

if he had a name and a death date?"

Martha nodded. "Of course, but then he would have the choice. Now he does it

as a compulsion because that is his purpose."

"What if we did it when I was fully awake? Would it ruin the ritual? He seems

to think he can only please me when I am in the dream state."

"Being awake or asleep is of no consequence. As I said, he limits himself by

his own beliefs. When it is time for the ritual, the words of the death date, the new name, and the coming together will be a completion of it."

Van thought about what Martha said while she watched the old woman assemble an

assortment of herbs and candles. When she was done, she told Van she would have

the rest of the ritual copied out the next day. She wanted Van to come and

practice in the room every day until the day it was to be done. Van promised

and left with her bundle of objects.

With new directions from Martha, Van found herself home in less than fifteen minutes.

Amazing what the right map can do for a person!

She felt elated. She rushed out of her Blazer and up the steps. Throwing

down
her keys, she raced up the stairs to John's room. Throwing open the
door, she
was not prepared for the silence that greeted her.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The room was filled again with the dust cloth covered furniture. Vanessa
walked
in slowly, touching the sheets to make sure she wasn't seeing things.
Puzzled,
she furrowed her eyebrows and closed her eyes. Opening them again,
she saw the
same scene.
Where is he? What's gone wrong?
Desperate to find John and the answers, Van turned and ran from the
room right
into Richard.
"What's wrong, Vanessa?" He asked. He looked innocent, beguiling and
sexy.
"Nothing," she answered curtly. What was he doing here?
Van looked down at his arms as he re-adjusted his packages. Then she
focused
and realized he had no packages, but was carrying a laptop computer and
a bottle
of wine. He was dressed as if he planned on going on a cruise. She
admitted to
herself he was devastatingly handsome. But what was he doing here?
She needed
to get rid of him and find John. She was excited and wanted, no, needed,
to
tell John about her discoveries.
Looking at Richard and thinking about what John said concerning him
made Van's
blood run cold. She wondered how such a normal looking person could be
possessed? Van was confused.
Her annoyance toward Richard vanished. He didn't look dangerous or
annoying
when he had that little boy lost look on his face. It was hard not to like
him.
He was charming and he did seem to be trying to be nice.

"How did you get in, Mr. Witmer?" She said as she stood in the doorway not allowing him to pass. Ignoring her stance, he brushed by her and set his packages down. As he did, she smelled the sickeningly strong spicy aroma again.

I wonder if he bathes in the stuff.

"Now, was that a nice thing to think?" He said out loud.

Fear pierced her chest and she felt as if she couldn't breathe. He was reading

her mind. If so, maybe John was right and Richard was possessed. She needed to

get rid of him soon and have time to re-think her situation. Maybe she could

get rid of Richard's demon at the same time she helped John become mortal. But

how did a person get rid of a demon? Especially when it was in someone's body?

She stared at him through slitted eyes.

"I'll try to refrain from speaking telepathically to you."

Fear overwhelmed her, but she replied icily, "I would appreciate that. It's rude

to infringe on a person's private thoughts. It tends to make people uncomfortable."

"Enough said," he said cheerfully. "It won't happen again." He looked around

and then at her. "Where can I put my laptop for now?"

"Look, Mr. Witmer-"

"Richard."

"Whatever. I'm feeling just fine now and I don't want to impose on you.

I'm

sorry you took the trouble to cart over your writing equipment, but you really

don't need to stay."

Her heart tightened in her chest and her pulse raced. He made her feel as if

her clothes were too tight on her body. He looked as if he could devour her.

Maybe it was just the fact that he could read her mind so easily. She would

have to be careful and try to block her thoughts.

"But I do need to stay. I happen to know some things which may be of help to

you in the near future."

Vanessa felt a prickle go up her spine. What could he know? More importantly,

what could he know to help her with John's situation?

"What are you talking about?"

As Richard was about to answer, a sound reverberated through Vanessa's already

tense body.

She jumped and stared at Richard. "Did you hear that?"

"Hear what?" he asked, smiling at her.

"Never mind. I'll be right back."

When she was out of his sight, Van pressed hard against the wall, clasping her

hands to her stomach. It hurt so much with a pain she'd never felt before.

Her

body felt as if she was being sucked through a straw. She took a deep breath

and exhaled slowly, several times.

What was going on with him? Was she overreacting? Maybe John was jealous and

didn't want Richard around. He was possessive enough to justify that argument.

And Richard, wasn't he just a regular, handsome and rich guy, who happened to

have ESP? Something about him definitely unnerved her. She took some deep

breaths and returned to the room.

I wonder what he would do if he knew what I really thought about him.

"I do know," Richard said as he turned to her.

"I told you not to do that! It's damned impolite!"

"I can't help it," he replied. "I try to shut it off, but sometimes strong thoughts come in unbidden. Will you ever forgive me?" He batted his eyelashes

at her.

Vanessa laughed and the tension in the room eased. She smiled at his attempt to

look abject. He returned her smile. She was drawn to his overt friendliness,

momentarily forgetting her apprehensions about him.

Don't forget!

She heard the small voice in her head.

Richard was studying a small Queen Anne chair.

"Looks out of place, doesn't it?" Mused Vanessa trying to focus on

something
other than Richard's hypnotic, green eyes.
"No more so than some of this other furniture," said Richard as he gave the room
a perfunctory glance.
"Now what do you mean?" Vanessa's possessiveness of her temporary home put an
edge to the question.
"Well, for instance, this Queen Anne chair would never have been put in the same
setting as this credenza," said Richard.
"Are you also an expert on decorations from this era?"
"Let's just say I've an intimate knowledge of some things."
Vanessa ignored the innuendo. She wasn't interested in pursuing her curiosity
about Richard. In order to appear blasé, she began to move a chair.
Richard leapt the few steps across the carpet to take it from her. His icy fingers wrapped around hers as he reached for the chair. The chill from his
hand transferred a frosty sensation to the nerves in her fingers and ran up her
arms.
Her gaze flew down to his hands. The hands of an artist, manicured and well
shaped with long slender fingers. The skin covering his hand was almost translucent in appearance.
Suddenly, Vanessa wanted nothing more than to get away. As she stepped back,
Richard looked up, startled.
"Does the coolness of my skin bother you?" He asked.
"Should it?"
"Most people find it revolting."
"Well, Richard, it seems to me you suffer from some type of circulation disorder. That makes your extremities feel cold to the touch. Isn't that right?"
"Partially."
Vanessa noticed he appeared to be relieved with her answer. She knew it was the
wrong one.
"So, what is the other part?"
"It's nothing I care to discuss right now," he replied, as he put the book down
and approaching her. "Do you know how beautiful you are, with those

huge blue
eyes and long lashes? I've wanted to do this since the moment I saw
you."
Before she could object, Richard put his arm around her and pulled her to
him,
tightening his hold as she struggled to get away.
Richard never said a word, but Van felt the pull on her being. Tendrils of
his
consciousness snaked their way through hers, attempting to take over her
thoughts. She squeezed her eyes shut in order to block out the sight of
him.
She opened her eyes and focused them to find his aura. There was none.
Now,
for sure, she knew it wasn't Richard in the depths of those eyes and she
couldn't chance being taken over by the hypnotic effect.
She felt, rather than heard, the roar which surrounded them. The tendrils
pulled back immediately and then they were gone.
With the release of the psychic probing, Van focused on Richard. His
face was
strained and he looked as if he were in pain. For the moment he looked
very
human and very miserable. She felt sorry for him.
Without a doubt, she knew for sure Richard was not in control of himself.
She
also knew whatever was controlling his body could read her projected
thoughts.
Instantaneously, his demeanor changed and he was smiling, winsomely.
"I'm truly
sorry, Vanessa."
Whatever you are, you don't look a bit sorry, she thought angrily.
"You're not just another person, Vanessa," the Demon in Richard
continued,
"You're someone special."
Van maneuvered away from him. "What do you want?"
"You are all I want."
Van turned away from him, but he grabbed her arm and with tremendous
force,
swirled her around again.
"Think what you wish, it doesn't matter." said the Demon, staring at her.
Van saw Richard's face go blank and realized the Demon within him was
trying to
hypnotize her again. She pulled away against its onslaught, but the
constant

enormous stress was wearing her down. She felt herself weakening though she continued to fight him with all her strength. Kicking, biting and pinching whatever she could reach, she was finally able to get him to release her. He yowled in pain while she ran to the stairs. It followed. Van glanced over her shoulder to see how close it was. She lost her footing and tripped, tumbling back down the set of steps to the landing. Momentarily stunned, she lay and watched as the Demon came forward and grabbed her. Her immobile body which hung from his hand like a rag doll. She felt liquid trickling down the side of her face as the Demon's icy fingers traced the outline of her face. It held her as she fought. She couldn't defeat its strength, so she quit her struggle for release. I'm going to die. It put one hand on the back of her neck as it bent to kiss her. Its frosty lips lowered to her neck, sending pinpoints of pain throughout her body. She felt the hunger in its soul and she looked on in horror, as its eyes became black opaque pools of lust. The spirit within her cringed and Van froze. There was no hope, nothing she could do. She had no resources left to fight with against his strength. He was in control of her body. Her soul was in mortal danger, and she felt powerless. She willed John to come to her, but her thoughts were blocked and turned in onto themselves, revealing her deepest fears. As she watched its eyes darken with need, its gaze becomes fixed at the pulse beating in her neck. Suddenly, survival instincts rose up within her and she attempted to struggle, pushing and clawing weakly as the Demon slowly caressed her cheek. Without warning, she could only think of images of past lovemaking and unfulfilled desires. Scenes of gore mixed with lust filled her mind. Carnal pleasures fought with her last fledgling powers of control. An undulating,

overpowering wave of sensuality consumed her. Like a moth drawn to a flame, She acquiesced. Suddenly a thunderous pounding began. The relentless rhythm beat louder and louder until it permeated all her senses, overcoming all her thoughts. Abruptly her mind was empty. The Demon dropped her and she crumpled to the floor and covered her ears to block out the roaring beat. The driving beat stopped when the Demon retreated several feet from her. "I see you have a champion, Vanessa," Richard smirked. "What?" Dazed, Van let go of her head. "The evil of the house wants you, also." "What?" "Vanessa, you aren't safe here." As if its point was obvious, It continued, "This house is cursed. Come with me. I will protect you. I can bring you greater joys than you have ever known. You will forget the evil that lives here and you will be happy again. You will have all you have ever desired. Money, fame, bliss. Come with me. Now." Hadn't John said almost those exact same words to her in the attic? Was that John in the attic? Was she going nuts? Were there two entities? Two demons? Shrinking away from It, Van was about to answer when a loud crash came from overhead and a surge of energy coursed through her. Van glanced at Richard...or whatever he was...making sure he was not going to advance on her again, and then she ran up the stairs to where the pounding originated. Throwing open the door to the old musty bedroom, she stopped just inside the doorway. As she watched, the old sheets and dust slowly faded and became the bedroom of John. She looked toward the stairs and saw Richard bounding up the steps. His mouth moved as if he was shouting, but she couldn't hear the words. Instinctively she ran into the room for protection. He tried to enter the room, but was

pushed
back and thrown against the opposite side of the hallway like a rag doll.
He
crumpled to the floor. Van watched as he recovered and flung himself
forward
again. He was thrown back a second time. He fell in a heap.
Van tried to leave the bedroom, but the invisible wall which kept Richard
out,
now held her in.
Without looking back at the door, she turned and walked in to the interior
of
the room. Richard's voice became audible. She could hear him plainly as
she
sat down in the rocking chair, rocking back and forth, back and forth.
"You see, Vanessa, I wasn't lying. This house is evil and has control.
You
aren't safe here. I can't get to you. It's holding me out. You'd better
come
with me, now!"
Van, too tired to explain that she couldn't leave the room, even if she had
wanted, could only shake her head, no.
"No? Vanessa, think!" The Demon in Richard shouted. "You're in danger
here.
You must come with me. Only I can protect you from the evil of the
house."
"No, Richard. I am perfectly safe here." Van replied as she stared at the
pattern of wood planks on the floor.
"So, you think that not looking at me will make this all go away? I assure
you
it won't." The Demon's voice became softer, more compelling. "Vanessa,
you
must understand I only have your welfare in mind. Many people have lost
their
lives in this house. I've grown fond of you and don't want to see anything
happen to you. Don't you believe me?"
Van shook her head again.
"Damn it, Vanessa, look at me!"
"Get out, Richard. You're not welcome here."
"You can't be serious, Vanessa. You're in danger. I can't say it enough!
You
need to leave!"
"Richard, you're the only one hurt here. I think you should take your own
advice and leave."

Van watched as he looked up at her and then down at his crumpled white coat. He seemed confused and disoriented. He stumbled away, but turned around before he left.

"I'll check on you later."

Van sighed.

What had she gotten herself involved in? What barrier prevented him from getting in? She tried to focus her energies to see if the room held any secrets, but there was nothing in its energies to give her answers. All her knowledge and experiences had not prepared her for anything like this.

Within two weeks, she'd acquired a boarder who wasn't a real person and a

neighbor who she believed was a psychic vampire.

Van shook her head. She wanted answers and wanted them badly, but she could hardly keep her eyes open.

Not even trying to consider where the quilt came from that covered her, she

snuggled in the massive old rocking chair and closed her eyes. She hoped when

she opened them, she would find herself in a normal old house, with no paranormal people, things or neighbors to contend with. Alice in Wonderland

didn't have this much confusion and trauma.

The Demon was not within him and Richard couldn't see the presence standing,

observing him, as he stumbled down the stairs.

John knew that though the demon was not present at the moment, but it could show up instantly.

Standing guard, John felt a new awakening. Loyalty. And a sense of justice.

He knew he could have killed Richard on the spot, but Richard was an innocent in

the overall scheme. The Demon would use him and cast him aside as he did the

others he had inhabited. He only needed their bodies to do his evil.

Battling the Demon on a daily basis while Van lived in the house made

him
realize he would use up the dwindling energy he needed to put up the
shield to
protect Van and Richard.
As he contemplated this, he felt the subtle shift in the room's vibration.
Richard's body was again outside the doorway. At once, the Demon was
looking
through Richard's eyes. Then he took Richard's body and crashed
through the
barrier. Then, using Richard's body even more, It danced a jig around the
Entity.
"You have not won," It spewed. "You are mine and I shall have you! Your
little
whore will not be able to help you. You will be destroyed and your
essence
shall be mine."
"Why not take me now?" The Entity glared, waiting for its answer. "Why
do you
wait? I am here. You are here. What prevents you?"
"I cannot," the demon said. "This mortal is too weak. Never fear, I have
great
patience. I wait for another day. Your time is limited. Beware."
"Be gone!"
"You tell me to be gone?" The demon shrieked and the windows in the old
house
shook. "I am the Master. I am Akuma. I shall have you. You are mine. I
am
your only salvation."
Despite Richard's weakened condition, the Demon leapt at the Entity. Its
luminescent green eyes leered. Slime-filled creatures issued from its
mouth as
It leapt around the Entity, spinning into a frenzy as It got closer and closer.
The Entity braced himself. With all the power he had in his essence, he
pointed
his finger at the Demon and shouted, "Be gone, I say to you."
Suspended in mid-air, the Demon looked at the floor and then slowly
turned it
gaze on the Entity. Black hatred covered its being.
Ignoring the curses and ravings spewing from the Demon's mouth, The
Entity
simply pointed a graceful finger toward the door.
The Demon was slowly forced away from him. It fought the grasp of the
energy

which pinned it to the air. When it was outside the door and past the porch, the Entity lowered his hand and the Demon dropped to the ground. Like a mangled puppet, it scrambled Richard's body to its feet and began to run doggedly up the stairs. The strength of the Entity's force held it back again. The Demon spewed vile curses, and then with a sneer, It faced the Entity saying, "Your theatrics will do you no good when I have a more suitable host. Enjoy the precious time you have left." The Entity scowled and the demon retreated. Then, it was gone and Richard lay splayed on the ground. Knowing there was nothing he could do to change the way Richard would view his predicament when he became oriented again, John shut the door to the room and went to Van. A warm feeling overwhelmed him as he looked down at her. Touching her cheek and brushing a strand of hair from her face he watched her. A new feeling overcame him. He felt—protective. She mumbled. He smiled; she looked so innocent, so small, and so very lovely. Something stirred where his heart would have been if he were a mortal. His being took on a green glow and it vibrated within itself. He picked her up gently and carried her to the bed. Her breathing was soft and even. He watched the beat of her pulse at her neck; the soft silkiness inviting him to touch. As he did, he felt his groin tighten. A red glow flared out from him and snaked up through his being. When it reached his chest, it turned a brilliant green and pulsed with a life of its own. He felt heady. His thoughts became mixed and his movements, awkward. He stepped back from Van, but the glow did not leave. It continued to travel up through his head and out above it.

It
stayed in a golden haze around his hair, forming a halo.
He reached for the button on her blouse and tugged it open. Van
murmured again,
but a smile came to her lips.
In her sleep, Van dreamt of John.

CHAPTER TWELVE

He put his hand on her breast.
Her nipples grew hard and taut. The heat of her desire flared as she
slowly
awakened to his caresses. She thought of his touch on her belly and
immediately
his hand was there. When her mind filled with fantasies of his kissing her
there, she felt his lips join his caressing fingers near her navel. Thinking of
how it would feel to have him push her legs apart and feel the softness of
his
lips caressing her intimately, his response was as quick as the thought.
Lovemaking was totally enjoyable with him because every thought turned
into a
reality and her desires were quenched over and over.
Sated, Van pulled his face next to hers. She knew he would think she
was still
asleep. Peeking through slitted eyes, she watched him watch her. He
appeared
puzzled, but he continued to kiss her eyelids. Not being able to resist
letting
him know she was awake, her eyes fluttered open.
"Vanessa, you are awake." He said, shocked.
"Yes, I am." she replied, smiling.
"I assumed that was true as I could not perceive your thoughts as clearly."
"But I thought you always knew what I was thinking?"
"I was able to do this in times past, but it seems to be diminishing.
Perhaps
you are not thinking of what you desire as much as you had before?
Perhaps your
desires are diminishing?"

"Oh, no," Van replied, "I assure you I do think of how I want to make love quite often lately."

John looked perplexed. "It does not make any sense. Why do I not perceive these things then?"

"Is it harder to feel my needs when I'm awake?" Van asked.

"Not harder, just safer," he answered.

"Why safer?"

"It is not correct to use the creative force can when you are fully conscious."

"I was awake just now." Van stated, watching for his reaction which didn't take long to register.

"What?" he shouted. "No!"

Van threw her covers off. "I'm telling you the truth, I was awake the whole time."

"It cannot be. If you were awake and we consummated the act, then I am doomed."

John wrung his hands.

"What do you mean, you're doomed?" Van asked.

"The act can only be consummated when you are conscious in the ritual. Since we

finished it and you were awake, then the ritual would be voided now." John crossed the room and stared out the window.

"John, Martha said it was not necessary to be asleep when we made love. The

consummation in the ritual would be different than what we did right now. It

needs to involve more than just the act of love, it needs to involve the invocations and the aura."

Van walked over to him and put her arms around his waist.

He turned to her and looked into her eyes.

"Is this the truth?" He asked.

"Yes," she replied. "We can satisfy our desires and complete the act whenever

we want. Doesn't that make you happy?"

"Yes, it does," he said.

"You don't sound convinced." Van took his hand into hers and kissed it.

"We

can share together. I can give you pleasure and you can give it to me."

"That is not possible." he replied flatly.

"What do you mean?"

"I do not feel love when we pleasure. I only feel a release of sorts. It is not like what you imagine for me. There is no fluid other than yours to fill the void."

Van looked at him and tried to comprehend what he was saying.

"You mean you just do it? No feeling? No end?"

"I only feel what you feel. When you are satisfied, I am also."

"This really sucks." Van felt unwomanly. Selfish.

"I might as well be masturbating."

John reached for her and drew her close. "Oh, Vanessa, you are so beautiful. I

am sorry you did not understand."

Van shook her head. "Let me get this straight, the only time you are satisfied

is when I am? You have no separate feelings or desires other than mine?"

"That is my purpose," he answered. "I was created to give you pleasure."

"But don't you love me?" Van looked down, away from his gaze. She didn't want

to see his face when he replied.

"Vanessa, I do not know what love is."

"But you must know what some feelings are. You know about feeling lonely. I've

seen you happy. Why can't you feel love?"

"Those feelings I have learned. I have no control over what feelings will integrate into my being at any time. They come to me unannounced and only then,

after they are immersed into my essence, do I comprehend what they mean by the

experience which precipitated their coming."

"Is that why you want mortality? To learn how to feel?"

"That is part of it." he answered as he held her more tightly.

"What's the other part?"

"I want to end this existence. There is nothing worse than this."

Van's heart swelled with pity for him. He was so beautiful and so kind; yet, he

was in a circumstance which limited his growth and potential. He had no control. Van knew she could give him that control if she could learn the ritual

and undo what had been done to him all those years ago.

Pushing herself away from him, she smiled. "I'm going to go to Martha and get

the ritual down pat and we'll get you what you want. I only hope that it's enough."

"Vanessa, the risk is too great. I am content now. I would not have you

risk

your life for me.”

“What is love? I must know. Vanessa, please tell me, what is love?

How can

sacrifice be love?” His words rushed out in a flurry.

“You care about what happens to me, don’t you?” She asked.

“Yes, I do.”

“And you care about how I feel. You care about me being taken care of in all

things, don’t you?”

“You know that I do,” he answered impatiently. “But what has this to do with

love?”

“You would risk yourself to make sure I was safe, wouldn’t you?”

“Yes, yes, but how does this relate to love?”

“Would you risk your existence for me?” Van asked.

“Yes, I would.”

“Then you love me.”

The simple statement shook him to his core. He loved her? Could it be?

Was

this love?

“Take a minute and do whatever you have to do to comprehend a feeling.

I’ll

wait.” Van sat in her chair and folded her hands in her lap.

He felt confused but then understanding came over him. His face took on a

beatific expression. He saw Van watching him as a profusion of lights covered

him until he glowed within and without his being. The substance from which he

had been created, stretched and pulled him, kneading him as if he were pliant

dough.

Life flowed in him and through him. Myriads of rainbow colored light filtered

through the ethereal body he inhabited. He dissolved, then solidified and dissolved again. He shuddered when his being filled with a different representation of life. His hands became less translucent.

When he regained his equilibrium and was conscious of her again, she jumped up

to wrap him in her arms.

"Are you all right?"

"I am fine, my love," he answered as he gently pushed the hair from her face.

"I understand. I feel love. I am loved and you are loved. Love is beautiful. Love is fulfilling. Love is the ultimate joy in the universe. I have been surrounded by it on all sides and never recognized it or its power. It is greater than any other power in the world." He looked down at her and his being

flooded with the emotion.

"I do love you," Van said softly.

"And I love you."

As he bent his head to kiss her, she lifted her face to his and he joined her in

their first kiss of true love. It was the softest, tenderest kiss that became a

force which stirred him as none other ever had.

Touching her face, he kissed her eyelids, her brows, her cheeks, the contours of

her face, her chin and her neck. All the while he whispered his love in her ear. Each kiss brought on a stronger declaration within him that he had found

the illusive element that would make him the being he would become.

His lips and hands pressed against her chest. He put his ear next to her heart

and heard it beating quickly as she became more aroused by his ministrations.

He touched the circle around her nipple as his lips kissed the taut nub and brought it to a full head. He moved between each breast, adoring them, exploring them, as if it were the first time.

Moving down her stomach to the triangle of short blonde hair at apex of her

thighs, he breathed in the musky scent of her sex. His mouth watered in anticipation of what lay there. He wanted to devour her and bring her to an ultimate climax. She wrapped her legs around his head as he lapped her wetness.

He kissed her and licked her until her moans became screams.

La petite morte.

Now he understood what that meant. The little death that never ended life.

This is what he would want for himself. It was enough now, though, to give her

this pleasure.

As he raised himself to place his manhood at her hot, open hole, she

suddenly
sat up and he knew she wanted to ride him. He lay back as she straddled
him and
slowly sank onto his cock. Wishing he could feel what other mortal men
felt, he
moaned. She moved faster. Throwing her head back and holding onto his
thighs,
she came to her orgasm and he smiled. He flipped her onto her back and
pressed
his manhood into her already moist and swollen opening. She raised her
hips and
welcomed him with slow, sensual thrusts. He matched hers with his and
as they
soared through the expanse known to those who truly love, she felt the
bonding
of their beings.
Colors flowed around and through both their bodies as they came. A silver
cord
extended from his solar plexus, joining with hers. He could feel the joining
and the happiness he felt at that moment he had never experienced. He
tried to
search for the word that explained what he was feeling. Complete. He felt
complete. He looked at her and knew she felt it as well.
Surprise and joy overwhelmed her and she hugged him close to her as
they rested.
He held her close and asked, "Was it good for you?"
Startled, Van replied, "Don't you know?"
Now he looked startled. "No. Yes, you were satisfied, but what I felt was
my
own satisfaction. It is a truly wondrous thing, this love."
Van chuckled. "Yes, it is."
Van snuggled in closer to him and caressed his face.
"Love conquers all, you know."

The demon paced outside the door. He watched and sulked. Anger built
inside
him. Odors and slimy creatures surrounded his being. Flies and nits flew
over
and around him.
This is not correct. It cannot be.
He paced the hallway, unable to enter the shield in which their love

encased
them.

How could this happen? The little whore was much more intelligent this lifetime. How did she do it? How did she beguile him into consummation while

awake? The deviant witch.

No matter. It was just an additional challenge. She was still only human and

no match for him. However, there was the problem of the entity becoming more self-aware.

That could prove a major problem. How could he dissolve this infatuation and

yet retain enough of their relationship for her to pursue the ritual?

She is human and he is naive. Surely, I, Akuma, Master of all demons who

thwarts success can find a way to destroy this affection they feel.

The Demon laughed.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Surrounded on all sides with books, papers and candles, Van continued to memorize the ritual chant.

"God, or should I say, Goddess, I'll never learn all this in one more week!"

The cat she'd inherited, glanced up at her, seeming annoyed at the disturbance.

"You know, Catwoman, if you don't like me talking out loud, you could go find

somewhere else to sit." Van stared back at the cat, who blinked slowly at her.

"I'm still sure Martha put you in the truck when I wasn't looking. The more she

denies it, the more I think it's true."

Catwoman purred, blinked again and swished her tail.

"Okay, I admit it. I'm glad she did." Van stroked the cat behind its ears and

the purring sounded like a small engine running.

Van smiled and went back to the book and the papers. Closing her eyes and

holding her script, she said the words aloud. The words still were foreign

to
her. Try as she might, it was a struggle to make each sound come out correctly.
Even Martha's recording full of static sounded better than the gurgling Van spoke.
Throwing the paper aside, Van hung down her hands to her sides and bent her head
on the table. In the process, she ended up on Catwoman's tail.
Catwoman yelped and jumped straight up, catching papers in her claws. Papers
flew everywhere as Catwoman streaked across the kitchen and jumped on top of the
refrigerator where she sat, looking down at Van condescendingly.
Van jumped up and tried to rescue the flying debris. More papers flew out from
under her. Suddenly, she sat down and started laughing.
"Geez, I'm sorry, Catwoman. Come on down kitty, I'll give you some tuna."
Catwoman began to nervously groom her tail.
Van's laughter began to turn to tears. "Ten days and I still am lost. What am
I going to do?"
She felt a soft clutch on her shoulder. She gazed up and saw John, smiling down
at her. Seeing the trust in his eyes made her heart burst with sadness and sent
her into another fit of tears.
"If it's up to me to bring you mortality, you may as well forget it!" she cried and tossed a book across the table.
He leaned over and kissed the top of her head.
"Vanessa, it is enough that you try," he said. "Had I known it would take such
a toll on you, I would have never asked for the help."
"But I want to help."
"You are helping, but there is more to this than just your help. You must remain safe."
"I will," Van replied. "Martha has shown me how to construct the circle.
At
least I can do that without a problem."
Van shook her head. John took her chin in his hand and raised her face to him.

"It will be as it should." He bent to kiss her and she reached up to embrace him. He touched her soul as well as her body because his touch always soothed her and calmed her; the warmth surrounding them grew and glowed. Looking at him through love-filled eyes, Van realized there could be no other being in the world for her but him. He was the embodiment of all the good and wonderful things she cherished. He was her best friend as well as lover. The few short weeks they had shared together seemed like a lifetime because they had shared and enjoyed experiences and so many levels of love. Van knew somehow she must perform the ritual to make him mortal. It was all he wanted. There was nothing else she could give him except her love and her body as a channel for his life. John smiled. He knew what she was thinking and he felt compassion for her. She was willing to give up all she had to give him life. Could he allow her to do it? Did he want it so badly as to jeopardize her existence? The overwhelming urge to protect her grasped at his being as he cradled her against him. He felt powerful and yet completely inadequate. "You know I have no intention of getting hurt," Van murmured into his chest. Holding her away, he smiled. "I would that there were another way to achieve this, but I know of none." Van looked up at his beautiful face. The face of an angel, a very sexy angel, to be sure. She just had to do this for him. "I asked Martha if there was another way and she said there wasn't. I just need to memorize this ritual and I'm having a hard time doing it," Van replied, nuzzling closer to him. "I'm so tired. I wish . . . well, if wishes were horses, I'd have a barn full." Pulling away from his embrace, she replied, "I wish you could put these words in my head so I won't forget them, but, you can't, so that's that."

"I could try," he answered.
"I wish," Van replied and smiled. He was so giving. God, she loved him. She watched him. How could she love someone who wasn't real? But, there it was. She was in love with him. The emotion overflowed through her being. It surrounded her in a cloud of softness. She looked down and saw colors radiating out from her arms and her body. Amazed, she looked back at him. How could she not love him? He was everything she could ever want in a man. As she gazed up into his eyes, she noticed a change coming over him. She leaned in closer to him. It was amazing. His eyes were taking on more depth. How odd. She watched as he began to fade from her. She tried to adjust her eyes to see his essence as it changed. Fear gripped her. "John!" she screamed. What was happening? He was melting right before her eyes! She was holding a smoky mass of filmy vapor. Reaching out to grab him, she stumbled. He was transparent and there was nothing to grasp! "Stop!" She shouted. "What's happening? Stop!" Tears filled her eyes. Her heart beat faster when a small voice surrounded her. Whirling around in a circle to see who was speaking, she felt, more than heard the words. Her tears fell faster and her heart felt as if it were being crushed by a heavy weight. "Vanessa, do not forget I will be here for you always."

When Vanessa's energy pushed against his, he felt it immediately in his essence. Her feelings rushed in and he felt the pull from the astral plane...just as he had long ago. He knew he would reach new heights of awareness and this excited

him. Yet, he felt dismay at losing sight of Vanessa. What would she do? What if the demon reappeared and overtook her? He knew he would be gone for a period of time for the change in him to take place, but he didn't know how long it was in her time. It had been ages since it happened last and it took a decade to complete.

Her love was the catalyst putting this event into motion. Only good could result. When the new awareness of the extent of her love came to her, it melded with his energies.

Love is extremely powerful, he thought.

Suddenly his thinking was blurred. There was nothing he could do except give in

to the sensations. He felt his essence being pulled apart, piercing him.

The

pain of the feelings she had felt ripped through the threads of his being, tearing, mending and pulling through.

Concepts bombarded him. Some were warm, some cold. None were temperate because

there was no in-between. He grappled when the Darkness overcame him.

Then the

piercing brightness of white light came, forcing him to close his eyes.

Darkness surrounded him. He felt energized, and at the same time

abysmally

exhausted.

Colors swirled around him. Grays, greens, shades of red, black, purple, bright

orange, pink, blue, indigo, all nuances of the rainbow filtered through his being.

Next, thousands of words descended into his mind. Explanations,

precepts,

thoughts, all poured into him. His being filled to the point he feared it would

burst and fragment itself; and yet he reveled in the newness of this experience.

A calming sensation came over him suddenly. He felt rested and renewed. His

spirit was open to acceptance.

Spirit?

He had never thought of himself in the terms of having a spirit. Could this mean he had transmigrated? Was he a living being? Had it been as simple as having Vanessa express her love through her being? As he contemplated these thoughts, he watched his essence taking on a new dimension. The old transparency was gone. Could he be human? He touched himself. He felt solid. Was this an illusion or was he flesh and blood? Looking around, he found himself in his room. He crossed the floor to the cheval mirror and glanced at his reflection. Reflection! He could see himself. Joyfully, he thought of Vanessa. Nothing happened. He was not immediately transported to her. He tried to focus on her thoughts, but could not find her. "Vanessa!" He waited for her reply. He shouted her name again. He waited, but his shout went unheeded. Startled, he ran for the door. As he crossed the doorway leading to the hall, he met with an invisible barrier. It violently pushed him back into the room. "What is happening?" He roared. An eerie laughter came. The Entity whirled around. Slowly, his gaze fell upon the demon in the hall. It looked exactly like him, but the glare from Its eyes did not manifest anything but pure evil. Outrage poured from the Entity's being. Sparks of anger flew through the air. He rushed the door. The barrier threw him back. "Do you like your 'new' self?" The Entity pounded the barrier with his fists. "You are truly bound to this room. But have no fear; your little human will not lack the adventure. I will be there for her. And once she has succumbed to me, you will be mine." The Entity's shouts never penetrated the restraints of the invisible restriction. How could he help Vanessa now? The Demon laughed.

When John had disappeared, Van desperately searched every room in the house.
She thought he might have gone back to his own room, but he wasn't there,
either.
Tears clouded her vision. The more she thought about what happened, the more
confused she became.
"It has to be my fault, but what did I do?" she asked Catwoman.
The cat just licked her paws, nonchalantly.
Every time she had every finally made the decision to acknowledge her feelings
for someone, they were taken away from her.
He always knew what she wanted, sometimes even before she did.
Maybe she had
destroyed him with her intensity. Didn't Tom Smalley tell her she was too
passionate for him? Maybe she was too passionate for anyone, even a
non-person.
Could raw emotion destroy him? Maybe entities only dealt in surface
feelings,
not deep emotions.
Figures.
Van tried not to compare him to the lost loves in her life, but it was hard.
She always felt most of the affairs which had gone awry had been her
fault, but
this was so different.
Van picked up her car keys and left the house. Maybe Martha would have
an
answer. Martha would be the only one she could talk to about this.

As Van pulled up to Martha's home, Marcy was pulling up the drive to
Van's
house.
Marcy noticed the door of the house open and Van's car missing. She
slowly
pulled up to the steps and stopped. She waited in the car for several
minutes.
When nothing seemed to be happening, she cautiously got out of the car
and
entered the house.

"Van?"

No answer.

"Vanessa?"

Silence greeted her. Going to the Parson's table, Marcy began to scribble a

note to Van when the aroma of sandalwood floated through the air.

Straightening

up slowly, she turned toward the door and saw the most exquisite man she had

ever laid eyes on.

"Hello, can I help you?" She asked.

"Hello, I'm Richard Witmer," the hunk replied. "I'm Van's neighbor and I just

came by to see how she was doing."

"Richard Witmer, the author?" Marcy was astounded. "I am so happy to meet you.

Van told me you were her neighbor, but I didn't expect to meet you. I thought

you were reclusive?" Marcy laughed nervously. "At least that's what the magazines say."

"Normally, when I am writing, I am, but I'm between deadlines and so came to

visit," he replied, smiling.

"Well, seems as if we're both out of luck," Marcy said. "Van's not home. I was

just writing her a note to let her know I was here."

"Have you come far?" Richard asked.

"No, just from Cleveland," Marcy replied.

"Oh, well, that's still a hike to the nether lands of Rock Creek!"

His dimple showed when he smiled. Marcy liked that. As a matter of fact, Marcy

liked a lot of what she saw. He was dynamic, sophisticated, handsome and

intelligent.

Exquisite.

Her artist's eye already caught the planes of his face and she could imagine him

posing for her next project.

"Do I have a smudge on me or something?" Richard asked looking down at his

white jacket.

"Oh, I'm sorry," Marcy replied, chagrined. "I was just wondering if you might

pose for me someday. You have the most interesting face."

"Pose for you?"

"Yes, I'm sorry, I'm Marcy Peterson. I'm an artist with a gallery downtown. I

usually show other artists, but lately I've been putting some of my own pieces

out for sale," she replied. "You'd make a terrific study."

And I'd like to have you alone for a while.

Richard smiled. "It's my pleasure to meet you, too. I have been to the Peterson gallery and purchased pieces for my Malibu home. I'm flattered but I

don't know that I would make such a wonderful a subject for you. I have little

patience with sitting still!"

Realizing she wanted to have him around more than just for a pose,

Marcy's mind

pushed ahead. His nearness made the heat rise in her cheeks and she prayed she

wasn't blushing bright red.

"Since your friend isn't here, would you like to come to my place and have a cup

of coffee or a glass of wine?"

Suddenly shy, Marcy replied, "Thanks, but I can't. Actually I think I'll wait for her. I haven't heard from her for a few days and the last time she called

she sounded very strange. To tell you the truth, I'm a little worried about her. Besides, I'm buying the house from her."

"You're buying this house? Whatever for?"

"Well, my gallery is doing well and I thought it would be nice to have a place

in the country to work from. I also thought that this might be a good place to

have another gallery. It has a charm of its own, you know."

"This house is certainly interesting. William was a character. When he was in

residence, he would visit me quite often. I always came away with new ideas for

story lines. I miss him and his eccentricities."

"I heard he was unconventional. I just never knew what anyone meant by it."

"Well, as far as I could tell, he thought the place was haunted. As a matter of

fact, he was quite convinced of it. During the day it didn't seem to be

particularly frightening, but once, and mind you, I mean only once, I came to see him during the evening and I could swear the house was alive. It creaked and groaned and sounded as if someone was pacing in one of the rooms above. I didn't come in because he wasn't home, but I could hear it from the outside."

"Stop," Marcy pleaded. She shivered. "You're scaring me!"

"I don't mean to frighten you. It's just that this house has had a lot of people in it and it has to have some of their energies left from them. I doubt very much if there really are any spirits of the dead here."

"You can't know how much that relieves me." Marcy's laugh was shaky.

"Maybe all that creaking and groaning is what is making Van act so strange."

"Well, living alone can make some people react differently. I know Vanessa has been obsessed of late with old volumes of books. I see her talking at great length with Martha Stoneman, the woman who owns the grocery store. Now, there is a strange old bird if I ever saw one."

"Look, Mr. Witmer-"

"Please call me Richard," he interjected.

"All right. Richard. Van isn't here, why don't we go to her kitchen and have something to drink while we wait."

"I'd enjoy that, as long as you let me help," Richard answered.

"Most assuredly!" Marcy replied. She smiled to herself. Mark wasn't here and it wasn't as if she was going to jump this guy's bones here in Van's house. Although, he sure was appealing.

Marcy stopped when they reached the doorway to the kitchen.

"What the heck happened here?"

Papers covered the kitchen floor. Books were piled everywhere. Candles glowed.

A huge furry black and white cat hissed at them from atop the refrigerator.

The place was a mess!

"This is not the way the Van I know keeps her kitchen!"

"Funny you should mention it, but I did tell you I thought she was behaving

a
little strangely of late?"
Marcy looked up at Richard. "What do you mean?"
"Well, she seems to have become more reclusive than I am."
"Van? Reclusive? Nope, that's not my girl. Let's see what all this stuff is."
As they examined the old books, the scribbling on the paper, Marcy became more
alarmed. Something was definitely wrong. Had her friend gone over the edge?
Could the visions she mentioned have been worse than she made them out to be?
Without thinking, Marcy began to pick up the littered paper and put it in a pile
on the table, while Richard blew out the candles and tried to coax the cat down
from the refrigerator. Catwoman hissed at his efforts. As she collected papers
that lay on the table, Marcy's gaze went to one.
"Richard, come and look at this!" She exclaimed.
"What is it?"
"I don't really know. Maybe you can decipher it."
Richard took the paper from her hand and began to read. When he finished, Marcy
saw the concerned look in his eyes.
"What does it mean?" Marcy asked.
"I'm not sure, but I think Van is going to perform a ritual on All Hallows Eve."
"Van? A ritual?" Marcy was disbelieving. "Like in black magic?"
"No, I don't think this is black magic, but it is powerful," Richard replied.
"I studied this when I wrote one of my novels about a doppelganger--"
"Doppelganger? What's that?"
"In Germany they believe doppelgangers are the split apart of a person's spirit.
Every culture has its own version of companions or elementals that are so like
a human they are often able to walk among the living and you can't tell they are
not real."
"Is that what Van is doing? Making her own creation?"
"I don't know. It would appear so."
Marcy stared thoughtfully at the floor, and then turned to look up at Richard.

"You know, I think it would be better if I were here alone when Van got back, but if this is going to take place on Halloween Eve...that's only three days away. We've got to do something."

"But what?"

"We've got to stop her from doing this."

"I agree. This could get dangerous, especially if she doesn't know what she's

doing. Who knows what might happen."

"What could happen?"

"She could lose herself to a possession or even be killed if the energies are,

well, for lack of a better word, evil."

The word and what it entailed sent a chill up Marcy's spine. Her friend was in

danger. Van probably was too involved to even recognize it. Marcy figured it

was her job to prevent Van from hurting herself. After all, wasn't that part and parcel of being a best friend?

Richard walked to the kitchen door. "I'll be going now, but if I find anything out between now and Saturday night, I'll let you know."

"Thank you so much, Richard."

"Another time, after this is settled, maybe you can come and visit me and I'll

make you one of my famous casseroles."

Marcy smiled gratefully. "I'd like that. Thanks."

Wonder why Van didn't like the guy. He was great and so nice. Marcy couldn't

find anything wrong with him, other than the fact that he left too soon.

Deciding she needed to do something with the mess, Marcy started in on the

dishes. She was far from a domestic goddess, but even she couldn't handle this

much mess.

Marcy began to clean up the pile of dishes in the sink. Fruit flies abounded.

Marcy wrinkled up her nose at the stench. She couldn't believe her friend would

allow her kitchen to get this filthy. But then, maybe Van was not the same

person who came to this house five weeks before.

Just as she finished putting the last dish away, Marcy heard Van's Blazer drive

up. She watched the cat jump off her perch on the refrigerator, onto the counter and run to greet Van.

I thought only dogs ran to greet their owners.

"Marcy?"

"In the kitchen!"

Marcy gaped when she saw Van. She ran to her and they hugged hard.

Marcy had

never seen Van look so beautiful. It was as if she had taken on a glow of her

own even though her eyes were red rimmed, she looked wonderful. She had added a

few pounds in all the right places.

"What have you been doing? You look wonderful!"

"Hmmm. I don't know!" Van said as she began rummaging through the papers on the table.

"Look, why don't we go out tonight? You and me. Just like old times. We'll

people watch and laugh at all the weirdos and have a good time."

Van looked up at Marcy and replied, "I don't think so. I have so much I need to do."

Trying another tack, Marcy sat down and said, "I really need to talk to someone.

And you're here. Can't you spare a couple of hours? Besides, what are you doing anyway?"

"Studying for a final," Van curtly answered.

"I've got some champagne in the car so we can celebrate the sale of this house."

Van's head jerked up. Marcy watched as she opened and closed her mouth several

times, but no words came out. Finally, she spoke.

"No, Marcy, you can't buy the house. I mean, I think I don't want to sell it anymore. I think I want to stay here. I can't get rid of this place."

"Slow down, buddy," Marcy was alarmed. One minute she was happy and the next,

paranoia was prevalent. This was not the devil may care Van she knew. Each

moment caused more concern. What was happening to her friend?

"I thought you'd be happy I bought it instead of some stranger," Marcy continued.

"It's not that."

"What is it then?" Marcy could not believe the fear that showed in Van's face.

She needed to get her out of this place. Maybe Richard was right, maybe it was haunted.

"Look, I really need to work. Could we do this some other time?" Van seemed agitated.

Not knowing what else to do, Marcy picked up her purse and started to walk out the door. As she reached it, she turned to tell Van about the Halloween party she was having. When she turned, she froze.

Van was looking up with an adoring face to the thin air. Her arms were wrapped around an object which Marcy couldn't see. Marcy heard her whispering softly.

"Van?" Marcy called out gently.

Van turned around and looked at Marcy. The look was filled with love.

"Van, are you having another vision?"

"No! Of course, not," Van replied. "I'm sorry Marcy, this is my renter." Marcy shuddered when Van pointed at the air. It looked like she was holding

hands with someone. Someone Marcy couldn't see.

"Van, you're scaring me."

"What?"

Van looked up at the air and then to Marcy.

Marcy edged toward the door.

"This is John Smith the renter I inherited with the house."

Van looked up again.

Marcy felt her skin crawl. She didn't know what to do. Should she stay or go for help?

"Van, I'm going to go next door and get your neighbor, okay?"

"Why?" Van's smile disappeared.

"You're talking to thin air. I don't see anyone. I think you should sit down and rest."

"I feel fine." Van said. "If you bring Witmer here, I'll leave until he goes away. I don't like him one bit and neither does John."

Ohmigod. A hallucination with attitude, thought Marcy.

Van turned to face Marcy. She looked possessed.

They had been friends since they were three years old and never once had Marcy

feared for herself or Van. Now she feared for both.
Marcy ran from the house.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Van ran after Marcy, but when she reached out and grabbed her arm, Marcy jerked away and bolted to her car. Mystified, Van watched as the car squealed out of the drive and tore out onto the main road. A touch on her shoulder caused her to turn. Smiling, Van looked up into the Entity's face and thought about how he looked when he became the ravishing pirate. She leaned in to him, waiting for him to sweep her up into his arms and carry her off. He didn't budge. Why wasn't he picking up on her thoughts and desires? Normally, he'd have to be told not to pursue her. Perhaps the incident with Marcy put him off. She'd certainly been rude. She's scared because she just didn't understand yet, Van reasoned. I'll call her later and smooth things out. She'll just have to accept that I'm in love and he'll soon be mortal. Actually, Marcy didn't even know he wasn't mortal. Marcy must've seen him. Maybe it had to be someone who was not as close as she and Marcy were. That had to be it. Van was nudged from her thoughts when the Entity broke from her embrace and walked away. She watched his back as he left. Somehow it seemed less broad than it had been before. Van noticed his appearance suffered, too. Usually his clothes were in impeccable shape, but not now. Maybe whatever happened to him

while in the half-life state did something to his body measurements.
Hope not all things changed.
Van giggled and then chastised herself again for her errant thoughts. The Entity hadn't spoken a word to her since his arrival in the kitchen and now he was walking away from her when normally she'd have to beg him to leave her alone.
I don't know if I like this independent attitude!
Something was wrong. Maybe he was going through his changing thing again. Or, maybe he was stressed just knowing it was only a few more days until the ritual.

Did entities get stressed?
Deciding he would be back when he was ready, Van poured over the script for the ritual again.
Suddenly the hairs on her neck rose. She turned slowly and then with a sigh of relief, she relaxed.
"It's only you. You had me going for a minute." She smiled and pointed to the chair across from her.
The Entity moved stiffly, almost zombie-like, across the floor and sat down. He stared at her and Van noticed something was different about his eyes. She pushed the niggling doubt to the back of her mind and began talking to him about the ritual.
"So, what do you think?" Van asked when she finished explaining how she was going to convert the bedroom into a ritual circle.
The Entity sat immobile...unsmiling...not saying a word.
Van peered into his face, looking for a hint of ... anything.
"Are you all right?" she asked.
His head jerked up and he said something, but Van couldn't make out the words.
Can entities have strokes?
Maybe that disappearance had taken a more of a toll on his being than she knew.

This is not good.
She needed him to be in top shape to be able to perform the ritual. A malfunctioning entity did not bode well.
"Is there anything I can do?" Van's concern went unheeded as the Entity just stared into space.
Great. I go through all this and I have a space cadet on my hands.
She watched as he rose from the chair and walked from the room. He walked through the vestibule into the living room and sat on the lounge chair. Van shook her head.
Realizing there was nothing she could do until he talked to her or she could get to Martha's again, Van decided to take a shower.
Scrubbing her hair she sang silly songs from her childhood. While she lathered up, she sang melancholy songs from her teens. As she rinsed, she hummed a country western ballad which played over and over in her mind.
Towelng off, Van thought about him. What was she going to do if he continued to refuse to communicate? She should've just followed him into the living room earlier and demanded an explanation.
Living room? How could she have seen him from the kitchen? He told her twelve paces away from her, he faded. She knew that. Could having an astral trip do that much for him?
Van pulled on her clothes as fast as she could. Her thoughts running a hundred miles an hour ahead of her.
Could there be two entities? He'd never said there was but then, he had never said there wasn't. He just called the demon--the demon, never saying what it looked like. Maybe that's what she saw that day. Twins fighting? A doppelganger entity? How could that be?
She stalked to the room across the hall. When she opened the door, she blinked in surprise.
The room was dark and smelled moldy. No light filtered through the window, even

though it was the middle of the day. Panic seized her. Where was he?
"John! John!"
Stepping into the room, Van felt an immediate draft of cold air envelope her.
She shielded herself as best she could and advanced further. When she came to the bed, her mouth hung open in horror.
She had found him.
Her senses were forced into a blackness which overtook her. She encased herself in a protective shield and silently thanked Martha for teaching her. She tried to not look at the display in front of her, but even so, she couldn't take her eyes away. Closing her eyes was no use, they flew open of their own volition and Van was forced to watch the scene play out, moment to moment. Suddenly, she felt John around her, but she couldn't define him. He was only a voice in her mind.
"Trust me, Vanessa."
"I trust you, my love, but where are you?" Van feebly whispered into the air.
"What can I do to help you?"
"I am here with you. Trust me and become one with me."
"I will. I love you."
"And I love you as well. Let me enter in with you so that you might see how I came to be and so that you might recognize the one which would destroy us."
I have no life without you."
"I will always be here for you, Vanessa."
A blinding light flashed across her mind, temporarily blinding her. She was then carried on a wave of smooth velvet. The soft, swirling colors which surrounded her on all sides felt delicate and warm. Van was not ready for the jolt which put her in John's room again. As the waves floated down and away from her, her attention went immediately to the bed and then, she felt him in her mind again.
"This is my story, my love."
Though her body did not move from its place next to the bedpost, her mind

joined
with his and she was within his essence and being. She became him and
was his
essence as it played out his beginnings.
Through his eyes, she turned and saw herself standing at the bedpost.
Glancing
down, she watched as her hands became his. Piercing the darkness of
the room,
she saw the woman, who had created him. It was Anna, disfigured, over
weight;
yet Van knew it was she, herself. Had she been this vile woman who
used John
for her own ends? Was this the young girl scarred on the inside as well
as out?
How could she be here, inside his essence, and also be a part of Anna
and
herself, in the present?
Suddenly, Van felt a pull and felt the pressure of the physical act begin.
Startled, Van realized what was going to happen next and she was taking
an
active part in it from his point of view. The thought repelled her, but his
grip on her soul was tight and she couldn't go back to her own time and
her own
body. She held her breath, but as the feelings mounted in Anna, Van was
tugged
along in the wake of the lust and carnality. Van became enmeshed in the
feelings of the moment and the hypnotic movement of the undulating
waves of time
as they buffeted her on all sides.
As he mounted Anna, Van felt a knowing as his rhythmic pulsations
caused Anna
to cry out. She felt her, no, his lips kiss Anna's mouth. She felt her hand
touch Anna's breast and make the tip stiffen in anticipation. As Anna's
sensations heightened, Van watched her toss and turn on the mattress,
hungry
with desire, wet with anticipation, but he ceased his ministrations and
withdrew.
"Do not toy with me."
"Name me." he demanded again. "Name me and what has begun will be
finished."
"I cannot." Anna grasped through the air at him.
"Why not? Have you not been served well?"
"Yes, but you will most certainly leave me if I name you."

Anna turned woeful eyes to John. "Do you not understand? I created you. You are bound to me. Only me. For as long as I shall choose, bound to only me."
"Tis true, but you never allowed me a death date. You will leave this miserable life, but that luxury is not mine. What will become of me here?"

He could hear Anna's curses as his essence ebbed within hers, but another sensation distracted him. In the core of his existence, a quickening began and a need for understanding overwhelmed him. He yearned to be flesh and bone; to escape his half-life existence. Within the fabric of his being, he felt a hunger for both a name and a day from which to withdraw from the earthly plane. He knew Anna controlled his destiny, but the urge to leave her was great. "Where are you?"
Hearing her sobs, he lingered to watch her lie on the bed of straw and goose feathers, writhing with lust. It occurred to him, for the first time, Anna was not comely. Somehow, he knew other mortals would be repulsed by her pockmarked face, but even recognizing this, he still considered her most beautiful because she had given him a life, such as it was. His confusion grew more with each moment, straining his limited mental abilities. His perceptions increased at a rapid pace as knowledge forced itself upon and into his being. As he began his ascent away from her, the substance from which he had been created, stretched and pulled him, kneading him, molding him to its desire. Life flowed in him and through him. Myriads of rainbow colored light filtered through the ethereal body he inhabited. He dissolved, then solidified and dissolved again. Shuddering from the experience, his being filled with a different representation of life. He looked at his hands as they became less translucent.
What is happening to me?
Although it was frightening and painful, he reveled in the newness of his

changed existence.

Something again stirred within him. The desire to join more intimately with his

creator engulfed him even though he had no concept of how it could be accomplished or to what amplitude it was even possible. He did not understand

it, but he became excited with the anticipation of what it would bring. He grasped at the new wisdom surging through his being. Self-awareness began as he

moved toward her again.

"Wanting a name still, are you?" Anna shouted, crazed with desire. "I'll name

you. Your name shall be..."

A tortured scream halted his approach. Then a sudden silence. John waited,

listening. The energy in the room had changed. He still felt a pulsating, but

it did not come from Anna.

Lowering himself, he found only stillness. Hovering over her, he saw her eyes

stare blankly into the darkness. Her mouth gaped open. No life force emanated

from her and his previous ability to anticipate her wants and needs had vanished. He roused all the energy at his command trying to wrench a change

from within her, but to no avail.

His essence stretched, but only a void existed where she had been.

What is this? Why have her words ceased?

A primal fear enveloped his essence and he unconsciously moved away from the

silent woman.

Another presence.

The Entity reached out with his being into the dimly lit room. The light beamed

a point, suddenly fanning out to encompass the being which was kneeling beside

Anna's bed. It appeared to be his exact image, only darker in complexion.

The Entity tried to enter the being's mind to discern its wants and needs, but

only detected a blank void. The being had taken the life force of his creator

into itself, but did not live.

Its energies attracted the Entity, beckoning him. In his innocence, he felt compelled to do what he had been created to do...give pleasure. With a cautious, yet loving hand, the Entity touched the being. A jar and an ebbing from his own core was the response. Surprised at the sudden violation of his newfound substance, the Entity drew back. The being's soundless words followed him, surrounding and soothing him, drawing the Entity in anew. The words lulled him like a soft, hypnotic ballad. Its voice comforted the Entity in his confusion. All thought of disunity was gone. The Entity came again to the being, desiring to be a part of It forever. The Demon in the being's essence spoke aloud to him. "I am Akuma. I shall give you my name. A name is what you want, is it not? The essence of your being will be joined with mine. You have witnessed that I have power over life and death. The bitch is dead. We shall share this power and I will give you your desires, if you would but enter in with me." Understanding swept over the Entity and he leapt away from the vile being. He denounced the Demon's intent and swirled away into the cover of the Veil.

Although the Demon did not follow, the Entity found it impossible to close out the cutting words slicing through the barrier separating the mortal world from the immortal. "I will have your essence! I will name you and I shall live in the flesh forever! Until that time, I bind you to this place when it contains a life force! You shall--" The Entity did not hear any more of the curse as he crossed over to the loving place where neither the Demon nor his words could enter. The Demon's anger at being thwarted built into a raging storm. Through the night, thunder shook the house and lightning blazed across the dark, murky, cloud filled sky. A keening began in the blackness of the night, mounting in intensity. The

sky
became electrified with the sound of the Entity's first emotion; sorrow.
And the Demon laughed.

Van saw the rainbow lights coming and she knew she would be transported back to the present. She allowed herself the luxury of feeling the comfort of the swirls of color warming her, filling her with love. Her eyes closed as the warmth filled her soul. She floated on a cloud of soft vapors, not caring if she returned or not. The beautiful feelings were hypnotic and addicting. No cares. Only total love. The floating feeling was supreme. With a jar to her system, she found herself slumped on the floor in John's bedroom. Grasping the end of the bed, Van pulled herself up and peeked over the edge. The bed was empty without a wrinkle in the coverlet. Turning her head, she looked to each side of her. She was alone. Releasing the bed, she turned around and sat facing the doorway. Only six or seven feet separated her from it, but it might as well have been a thousand. She felt so weak, she didn't think she'd make it that far. You must leave the room, Vanessa. "John, is that you? Where are you?" Van looked around the room, squinting her eyes, hoping he would materialize. "Vanessa, get up. Leave the room." "Where are you?" "I am within you. Please leave the room." "I'll try, but I don't feel so good." Van pulled herself up with the help of the bed rail. When she found she could stand without teetering, she took a tentative step forward and then another. Finally, she made it to the door and rested against it. "Just a step more, my love. Please." "Damn, you're pushy. I'm working on it. This is not easy." "I know, my love, but you must go one more step." Van put one step into the hallway when the Entity appeared in front of her.

"Oh, there you are. No wonder you were in such a hurry to get me out here."

Van gave him a weak smile.

The Entity did not return her smile, but grabbed her hand and disengaged it from

the door and pushed her back into the room.

"No, sweetheart. Really, you are not reading my mind right this time,"

Van

protested. "I really am not in the mood. I really do have a headache."

The Entity just prodded her back in.

"Why am I the only one talking here?" Van asked. Not only did she feel sick

inside, but now he was acting stranger than before.

"Sit."

It was a command and Van sat without thinking. The tone of his voice convinced

her not to try to circumvent his wishes.

"Now what?" Van asked.

The Entity sat on the bed next to her. He put his arm around her awkwardly.

His touch was hesitant. Van looked up at his face and noticed his eyes were not

blue, but green.

How did that happen?

"Look, I don't feel well, so if you don't mind, I'm going to lie down in my room."

"No."

Van looked at him closely. "You certainly have turned into a man of few words."

Something didn't make sense. Her mind was muddled and she had a hard time

making a cohesive thought. With a start, she sat up straight. She looked into

the Entity's eyes and realized what had been eluding her. She needed to leave.

To get out of the room.

Think, Moore, think.

"Could you get me a drink of water?"

The Entity looked at her, puzzled.

"Well, you did tell me you were here to serve and protect me, didn't you?

Well,

I need water."

It seemed like an eternity, but finally he raised his hulk up and walked stiffly to the bathroom. As soon as he entered it, Van dashed to the door and stepped out into the hallway.”

“Thank you, my love.”

“Ohmigod.” Van crumpled against the wall. “Was that who, or what, I think it was?”

“Yes, my love. It is he, the demon who has chased me for these past two hundred years.”

Van tried to get up, but found her legs were like a rag dolls.

“We need to get out of here...”

“I have sealed him in for the time. You are safe now, Vanessa. Go rest.”

“Uh, what about you?” Van inquired. “Isn’t it time you came out now?”

“When you have rested, I will dislodge myself. Your body could not endure it now.”

“Oh, that makes sense, but I’m not crazy about this set up.”

Van heard a chuckle in her head.

“Some would think you were a lunatic talking to yourself in this way.”

Raising herself up from the wall, Van replied, “Well, no one is here to hear it, so it doesn’t matter.”

Van crawled into her bed and shut her eyes. Instead of the usual blackness, she saw vibrant colors, swirling and glowing and constantly moving like a kaleidoscope.

“Is this what you see all the time?” she asked. “Can you shut it down so I can rest?”

“I will do my best.”

At once, all the colors went slack and then, faded. But even so, Van did not feel like resting. Her body was going a hundred miles an hour.

“This isn’t working. Your energies are too high for me. You have to leave now.

I’ll be okay.”

“Vanessa. My love. Would you touch the pillow for me?”

“Sure, but why?”

When I am within you, I can touch with your hands. I can see through your eyes.

I hear through your ears. Just for a moment. Please. If I never become what I hope to attain, at least I will have known life in a minute way.”

“You can do this?” Van felt his positive assurance enfold her and she rose from her bed and fingered every thing she could.

As he experienced the joys of touch and sound...she called the weather so he could hear what a telephone was like in the ear...she felt like a tour guide. She ran water over her hands, splashed it on her face and laughed. Suddenly a melancholy overcame her. “What’s wrong?”

“This life is so good. So much more than I could have ever thought of to be.

Oh I feel the depths of sadness. I would that the ritual is successful and we both survive. I would that I could pleasure you in this state.”

“Pleasure me? Now? I would love to, but I really don’t think I can do it.”

Then Van brightened with an idea. “Come on, you parasite, I’m going to give you a pleasure you won’t forget.”

In the kitchen, Van busied herself with pots and pans, stopping often to rest.

His being inside her was disrupting and tiring, but she wanted to give him something he had never had. She was going to feed him a sumptuous dinner.

During her preparations, they conversed about the whys and wherefore of dining.

He told her of Paris and Germany and the foods served there. He told her about how he had watched people of the Orient use every part of a chicken, including the feet, in their meals.

“I’m already nauseous, don’t make it worse,” she joked.

The time spent in the kitchen was wonderful. Van was surprised at the voracious appetite she...he had. Sated with food and wine, Van rested in the living room on the settee. She felt lightheaded, but good.

“Vanessa, I must leave you now. Your body is not able to contain me any longer.

I am injuring you.”

“Fine, John, do what you need to do,” Van replied sleepily. She felt her heart

pumping hard in her chest. There was a slight pain in her stomach area. Probably too much garlic, she thought. Without notice, she felt a sharp pain in her lower stomach. Van doubled up and emitted a shriek. "Ohmigod. This is worse than food poisoning." The pain traveled from her abdomen to her heart and then up through her head condensing in the middle of her forehead. She grabbed onto her head and pushed in. It felt as if her insides would come out in that one place. Suddenly she felt a whoosh of wind pass through her fingers and the pain was gone. Weakened by the assault on her body, Van lay sprawled out on the floor in the living room. She stared up at the mosaic ceiling, noticing it for the first time. "Amazing what one notices when they are flat on their back." Once her heartbeat returned to normal, she tried sitting up. She still felt some residual dizziness, but the nausea was gone and she could breathe more easily. He certainly must have taken up a lot of space in her. He! Where was he? "I am here, Vanessa." Van turned her head and saw a paler version of her Entity on the love seat. "You look awful. What's wrong?" Van grabbed onto the couch and pulled herself up. The dizziness returned and she had to wait until she was able to move again. "Vanessa, it doesn't matter how I look, I can see myself in a looking glass." He was excited about this piece of news, and it piqued Van's interest. "And that means what?" she asked. "Perhaps I am mortal now, without the ritual," he replied, excitement showing in his face. "Well, the only way I know how to prove it is to see if you bleed." "Interesting," he replied thoughtfully. "I'll get a needle in a minute," Van said, trying to sit up straighter. "Maybe a few minutes. I still feel a little lightheaded."

Van leaned back on the couch and closed her eyes. She thought she had

just
closed her eyes for a moment, but when she opened them again, Marcy
and Richard
were standing over her and the clock on the mantle was two hours later.
"She's awake," Marcy said.
"Thank goodness," Richard responded. "How do you feel, Vanessa?"
"Oh, no, not you again." Van turned away and buried her head in the toss
pillow.
"Van, listen to me." Marcy tugged on Van's arm trying to get her to turn
around.
"Go away. You think I'm nuts."
"No, Van, I don't," Marcy replied. "We saw your boarder."
Van turned around slowly. She looked at both Marcy and Richard shaking
their
heads like Kewpie dolls in the back of a car.
"You...saw...him?" Van asked.
"Yes, and he said you need to leave here before you get hurt," Marcy
replied.
Turning around, she looked at the chair where he had been last. He was
gone.
Van jumped up. "You both think I'm nuts. Well, maybe I am, but I'm not
stupid.
John wouldn't say that. He needs me here to finish." Van stopped.
What had he said just before she'd closed her eyes? Something about
his
reflection and the ritual wouldn't be needed?
Van looked suspiciously at her visitors.
"Come on, Van." Marcy stepped toward her.
"No, it's not true," Van stepped back and tripped back onto the couch.
"Vanessa, we have no reason to lie," Richard joined in. "We only have your
best
interest at heart." He put out his hand. "Come and spend the night at my
house
and then we'll all talk in the morning."
"We?"
"I'll stay with you at Richard's tonight, okay?" Marcy looked so sincere
and
frustrated.
"I can't. I have to learn the ritual, I think." Van looked around wildly.
"Where is he, if you saw him?" Sliding off the couch, Van circumvented
Marcy
and Richard and then ran upstairs.
"John! John! Where are you?"

Feeling a familiar touch on her arm, Van whirled and faced John.
"They said they saw you, did they?" Van asked.
"Yes, I believe they did," he replied.
"They want me to go with them. I can't leave you now." Van searched his face
for an answer.
"It is your decision, Vanessa."
"Then I won't go." She watched as he smiled. He was different again.
His
smile wasn't as warm and didn't reach his eyes as usually it did.
Going through what he did might have made the difference. I don't feel like
myself right now, either.
"I'll go tell them and then I'll be right back."
"Fine."
He walked stiffly into her room.
Van backed against the wall. She took deep breaths, exhaling slowly.
Hearing a
commotion in the living room, she ran down the stairs. When she reached
the
living room, Marcy was giving CPR to Richard. Van ran across the room.
Richard's chest was moving slowly.
"What happened?"
"I don't know. One minute we were talking and then next he turned white
as a
ghost, clutched his throat and fainted."
Van looked down at Richard. She was confused. What was going on
here and who
was she going to believe? Where was John when she needed him?
Next to you.
She heard his voice and turned to see him. Not knowing if Marcy would
really
think she was certifiable, Van cautioned him with a hand signal. Van
watched as
Marcy turned and looked up and beyond her.
"That's your boarder?" she asked, approval showing on her face. "This one
looks
pretty real to me."
Van turned in the direction Marcy looked and said, "Yes, this is John.
John,
Marcy. And that is Richard."
Marcy put out her hand and John took it in his. He bent to kiss it and
Marcy
blushed.

Van released a huge breath of air. She hadn't realized she had been holding her breath. Relief flowed through her. Marcy could see him; therefore, he must be very real, especially if she blushed at his touch. Van was relieved. Happy. Vindicated. Marcy just impolitely stared. Richard sat up and as the color slowly came back to his face, he looked up and his eyes widened in surprise. Richard fainted again. "What is going on with him?" Marcy asked. Van shook her head. "I guess he must've seen John before he became mortal." Marcy tipped her head. "Mortal?" Van sighed. "It's a real long story, but I am just too tired to tell you now. Besides, we have to get Richard out of here." Van stopped in mid step. "Why did you come back after I told you not to bring Richard here? You know I don't like him one bit." "Well, I don't know why not, he's sweet, kind, handsome and just plain nice," Marcy defended. "Well, other than when he gets a certain look in his eye and seems to go off into another world. Guess that must be the way writers are." Van looked closely at her friend as a blush rose again on her cheeks. "Marcy! You really like him. I wouldn't have guessed." "I like him, Van, but I love Mark," Marcy said. "Who are you trying to convince?" Van asked. Marcy turned to John and asked, "Could you help me get him to the car?" She then turned back to Richard before he gave an answer. Van watched as John appeared to weigh Marcy's words in his mind. She telepathically signaled to him it would be okay. He shook his head as if trying to dislodge something. Walking over to Richard, he put his arms under his neck and they went through him. He had no substance. Van backed away. Something was wrong again. She put out her shield and backed all the way to the kitchen. She still could see him.

No!

Running back into the living room, she said, "John, you must still be having some leftover leaks from the other planes. Why don't you go up and rest and I'll help Marcy with Richard?" Without a word, John left. Marcy, who had been silent the whole time, looked from Van to Richard. "Can you tell me what's going on here?" Van shook her head. "I don't really know myself, but let's get you out of here and then I'm heading off to Martha's house." "Van, stay with me," Marcy pleaded. "I am scared to death. This is not my lifestyle and I don't know what to do about him." She pointed to Richard. "Well, I think you should get him down to the hospital and make sure nothing major is wrong. Then call me later and we'll go from there." Marcy nodded and they then lifted Richard up and out into her car. Van waved as they drove off, Marcy sitting stiff with tension and Richard slumped over, still out like a light. Closing the door on the outside world, Van turned around and faced the stairway.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

The house was unusually quiet. Van centered her psyche and searched. She felt nothing. Nothing was not a good thing. "John?" she called softly. No response. Grounding herself and surrounding her body with a white cloud of light, she began to ascend the stairs. As she passed each picture on the stairwell, they all moved their eyes

and followed her. Some smiled and some frowned, but all moved. Van noticed the movement from her peripheral vision, but disregarded it. The only thing she wanted to do was find out what happened to John. As she approached his door, she hesitated. It was closed. That wasn't unusual for him, but it seemed really closed, not willing to be opened. Darkness flowed over her and the hallway became dim from it. Van shivered at the chill that came with the loss of light. Van lifted her hand to knock. As she did the door swung open with a heavy creaking. It opened slowly, methodically. No one was on the other side. Not wanting to enter the room, she called out for John again, but didn't get an answer. What am I supposed to do now? Turning away from the doorway, she crossed over to her room. When she entered, she turned and looked across the hall. The door was still open and she could see a flickering on the bed. Running across the hall, she entered the room. "John?" The door slams shut and Van was caught in the room again. Running to the door, she tried to shove it open. Nothing budged. Exhausted, she walked slowly to the bed and sat down on the old rocking chair next to it. Going over the ritual in her mind, Van remembered her conversation with Martha. She knew this was going to be a risk, but she had to take it. Martha insisted she be present when Van performed it. She couldn't come in to the circle with Van, but she'd be there in case something happened. Something already did. John was missing. There was a malevolent entity around also and maybe a demon or two. Van didn't know. She figured she needed a

scorecard to keep track.

Van looked around the room. John was standing in the corner, watching her.

"John? Why didn't you answer me?"

"Vanessa, I want you to know that I will always love you, but I do not think you should perform the ritual. It is mightily dangerous and you could lose your life."

"Well, you could lose yours, too."

"I have none to lose. I am here only on borrowed time. You are not."

"Well, it doesn't matter. I have decided to do it, come hell or high water." He looked at her quizzically. She smiled. Considering the fact that he'd been

around for two hundred years, he sure didn't pick up on a lot.

Van walked to the door. As she opened it, the cold, icy air of the hallway hit

her. The house creaked and groaned. It almost felt as if the floors were moving.

Things like this were beginning to feel normal to Van. But that shouldn't be,

she chastised herself.

Vanessa looked at John.

"Try not to worry. I'll be fine."

He only looked sorrowful.

"I would that you would be fine. I shall be near you."

"Martha says it's safer if you stay in this room until I summon you with the ritual. We're going to do it in the circle that Anna built in the woods."

"I cannot go there. I am bound to the house."

"You are only bound as far as you believe you are."

John looked as if he were weighing her words in his mind.

"I will stay here unless I discern you are in danger."

"I love you."

"And I, you."

It took a monumental effort for Van not to go to him and touch him. Every nerve

in her body wanted him. Her body ached for his comforting touch. She could see

he was struggling with the same wrenching desires. However, Martha said it

would be best not to be in each other's auras before the next night.

Van stepped into the hallway and shut the door behind her.

Preparing the area for the ritual was not hard, but the cold air on the October night fought Van. The wind came up and toppled her candles. The altar, constructed out of the flat rocks, teetered and fell. The cold sliced through the heavy jacket she wore. Shivering, she up righted everything again and began to walk back to the house.

As she passed the barn, Van edged to the doorway. In the past six weeks that she was in residence, she'd never gone out to the barn. After reading in Anna's diary that it was the place of Arthyr's murder, she had decided against it. Tonight, however, with the moon full, it didn't look as frightening to her.

"What are you doing?"

Vanessa screamed and jumped. Looking around, she spotted a man just inside the doorway, looking out at her as if she were an intruder. She couldn't make out his features, but he looked familiar.

"What are you doing?" she retorted.

"I live here."

"Oh, no, been there, done that," Van said. "Who are you? Do you have a name?"

"Yes, I do have a name. I am Jarrod."

"And you say you live here?" Van backed up as he advanced out of the barn.

"Well, I used to live here, but I moved out on the first. I just came back here to pick up some of my things I left in here."

"Oh, so you're the guy who was renting from Uncle William." Van relaxed. Now that he was out of the shadows, she could see him and he was an eyeful. Tall, dark and handsome. Yep, that described him pretty well. His eyes were light colored, not dark as she would have supposed. He looked at her as she took his features in.

"Are you an actor?" she asked.

"Well, not much of one," he replied. "What's your name?"

"I'm Van."

"Well, Van, what are you doing out here at ten at night?"

Van couldn't think of a reasonable reply, so she said, "Just getting ready

for
Halloween. And what about you? Why are you skulking around at ten on
a
property which you no longer live on?"
Van thought Jarrod looked a little nervous. I must have hit a nerve. She
put
out her psychic feelers and came back with nothing at all. No essence.
Nothing.
Then she tried to visualize his aura. Perhaps it was because it was night,
but
she couldn't see anything emanating from him. Stepping away from him,
she
slowly began to walk back to the house. He followed her for a few feet.
"I worked until nine and came out here now because it's the only time I
have
before I leave here tomorrow."
"It would've been nice for you to call first, you know. I could've shot you
as
a trespasser."
"Hmmm, there's that. But you didn't," he replied with a smirk.
Van began to feel uncomfortable with the conversation, so she smiled and
said,
"I have to get in. Big day tomorrow for me, too. So, get what's yours and
have
a nice trip."
Jarrod tipped his hat, turned around, and walked slowly back into the barn.
Something about him bothered her. It was as if she knew him from
somewhere.
Then it hit her like a ton of bricks.
He looks like John, only thinner, and not as gentle appearing.
Van ran into the house. Looking around for the diary, she found it and
shuffled
quickly through the pages. Did Anna really create two entities?
No, she would have sensed that. Wouldn't she? Besides, as long as he
left the
property, it would be fine. And she didn't have time for any more puzzles.
This was the last night to practice the words and the movements for the
ritual.
Tomorrow was John's death and birth day.
If everything goes right.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Van thought she might be too excited to sleep. Her thoughts were on the ritual.

It had to be right. It didn't matter any more if she lost him when he became

mortal, it just mattered that he did. She shut off her bedside lamp and snuggled under the warm comforter.

Just as she began to drift off, John came to her. He stood by her bedside and

looked down on her. Opening her eyes, she smiled at him. She took her arm out

of the comforter and reached for him.

In an instant he was lying beside her.

"You know, I'm going to miss that instant thing you do," she said.

"I will, also. But my hope is that we will be together like this on the morrow

night." He sighed into the air.

She looked at his profile. It was strong and kind. The perfect Roman nose.

The dark curls of his hair framing his high cheekbones. The muscles on his arms

dipped and the shadows made them look enticing. She looked at his bare chest

and her fingers twirled the hair on it. She slowly moved them down to his navel.

She smiled. He was wearing boxers. Purple boxers. She lifted the edge of them

and put her hand on his manhood. It surged and grew. He flinched with her

intake of breath. Getting on her knees, she used both hands to move the underwear down, past his long thighs and over his masculine calves. She threw

them to the side.

Looking at him, she nodded. He acknowledged her and as she bent her head down

to taste him, he fingered her hair, pulling it toward him.

She licked his shaft and then put it in her open, hot mouth. She could hear him

groan. She thought there was nothing sweeter than his cock in her mouth. It

was heady for her to know she was giving him pleasure. Or was she?

"John?"

"Aye."

"Can you feel this? Are you getting any pleasure?"

"Woman, do not stop. I cannot bear it."

That's all she needed to know. She might not be able to consummate their

relationship tonight, but she could give him pleasure.

"Tomorrow will be your death day at midnight and if you cease to exist, you

won't have any memories." Van cried softly. "I am going to name you Jonathan.

It means, gift of God."

Suddenly, he sat up, startling her. She lifted her head and saw him smile, a

slow, seductive smile. He reached for her and she fell into his arms.

Turning

her, he began to touch her breasts. Rolling them with his fingers, her nipples

stretched taut. She felt the tingling into her private parts. He bent his wonderful head and began to suckle and nuzzle her breasts. Kissing her belly,

he slid down, holding onto her hips. Then she felt him spread her legs and put

his lips to her. He sucked and licked her nub until she screamed in pleasure.

Then he softly kissed her.

Rising, he placed himself above her and when she felt his cock inside her, her

mind went blank. All that surrounded her were sensations and colors and feeling.

A beautiful silver cord wrapped itself around the lovers and sparks of electricity jumped from it in all directions. Rainbow colors flowed from their

bodies and mixed with the cord, making the connection even more dense.

With

each thrust of his manhood into her, the colors vibrated and danced around them,

circling them until it covered them completely.

Her hips thrust to take him all in her. She wanted to get as close to him, take

him as deeply as she could. She wanted to become part of him and never let go.

Pulling herself upright, she grabbed onto his arms and hugged him as they climaxed.

The silver cord lay slack around them, but did not detach itself or fade. Breathing heavily, Van lay back as he cradled her in his arms. As her body

regained its normal heart rate, she began to cry softly.

John held her closer and whispered endearments to her. That only made her cry

worse.

"What if--?" she began.

He put his finger over her lips and shushed her.

"There is no what if in our love. It will go on. We have now and we will have

the memories of it. On the fabric of time, everything exists at one time.

So

this time will always be for us and we can re-visit it."

Van looked at him, questioningly.

"It's true, Vanessa. We always will have this time."

Van shrugged and pulled away to look at him.

"Tomorrow night. Will you be here in this bed with me?"

"I cannot say," he replied. "But if the Universe is as kind as I believe it to be, we will be. The Universe loves us as we are and conspires to make each and

everyone of its beings happy. I cannot believe it would allow our love to not

exist. Or allow my essence to be gone forever as if I never existed. You have

told me my new name and have said tomorrow is my death date. That is enough."

"I want to believe you so badly." Van sighed and cuddled into his warm arms again.

"Believe, Vanessa. I will be with you always."

Van didn't hear him as she had fallen asleep.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Van looked out the window of her bedroom, wondering if it would be the last time

she did.

As she slipped on the green cape over the muslin dress tied with the witch's cord which Martha had given her, she thought about what she about to do.

The risk of losing her life was even more real. The risk to lose John seemed to be the greater risk, in her opinion. Praying softly, she began to descend the steps. The house felt different. It wasn't creaking or groaning as it usually did at this time of night. Van looked at the portraits on the wall and they were still. No moving eyes or heads. Tension filled the air. John was waiting at the bottom of the steps. He looked every inch the pirate again. In the last few weeks he had taken to wearing Khakis and t-shirts, but tonight, he was as she first saw him, dressed like a rogue pirate. She felt her heart stop and love overflowed her. The cord which had surrounded them the past night grew more solid as she came closer to him. As she touched the last step, it pulled her to him with a solid yank. Startled, she looked down at it. "Can you see this cord binding us?" she whispered. "Aye, I can," he replied, and then he kissed her. It was a lover's kiss, and she felt the passion behind it. A tear rolled slowly down her cheek. She looked up at him full of questions, full of regrets for not saying or doing more with him. How would she live without him? "I love you so much," she whimpered into his chest. "I love you also, my beautiful creator. I am glad you changed your mind and have allowed me with you." He touched her face softly and it looked as if his eyes glistened. What if... Walking hand in hand, they exited the house. Neither wanted to answer the "what if" question they both held in their minds. As they reached the bottom step of the veranda, John turned and looked at the house. It gave no indication of what was to come. A branch hung precariously

from the window at which he had stood so often. When he gazed at it, the branch suddenly fell, slowly to the ground, like a tear falling from an eye. Overwhelmed with emotion, he looked at Van. She was beautiful in the moonlight with the green cape surrounding her small figure. He looked back at the house and sighed.

"I will miss this place."

"I hope you won't have to miss it," she sighed. "I hope we will be walking back together within the hour."

"That is my reliance also, my love."

A tear fell and he wiped it away before she saw it. Then the incongruity of the action startled him. Tears were not part of his makeup. Tears were for human mortals. His essence leapt with joy at the revelation. Only the ritual stood between him now and his obtaining a soul and life eternal.

The walk to the little circle in the woods seemed to go too fast. She wanted it to last forever. He looked forlorn. Tears welled up in her eyes. She looked at him and thought of how sweet and kind he was and how unfair life was to take such a gentle soul and dismiss it.

Moonlight shimmered through the tall trees as Vanessa and John approached the circle which had been used two hundred years ago by Anna.

"I cannot enter the circle," John said

"I know. But soon, my love," Van replied.

She kissed him one last kiss, long and soft. She clung to him, weeping.

There was no one else in the world for her. He was all that love was. Her body was heavy with the burden of possibly losing him. She looked into his eyes for one last time. Her heart was broken. She had no idea what would happen and it tore at her being to know that she might lose him and never see his beautiful, soulful eyes again. She turned away, finally.

Unlit candles circled the area and Vanessa began to light them, moving

deliberately from one to the next. Reverently she sets out the silver chalice,
an athame, a bell and several small cloth bags filled with herbs.
As she lights a piece of charcoal which sat in a small shell on the altar, she
sprinkled the herbs over it. It smoked and she inhaled the aroma. It brought
some peace to her.
Picking up her athame, she walked clockwise around the circle, chanting the
incantation, marking a pentacle shape into the air into each of the four directions.
When she finished establishing her circle, she returned to the altar. She added
more herbs to the smoldering charcoal and took another deep breath.
Finally,
the time came to invoke the ritual.
"Spirits of light, Spirits of the night, I call upon you to take the want and need of do what I bid thee in this moment true and bright of cause which will be brought from second sight."
As she ended the invocation, she heard a deep, throaty voice. Looking around,
she tried to focus, but couldn't see where it is coming from.
"Who are you?" she cried out.
"It is I, but I cannot enter the circle without your permission."
Van looked in the direction where John should have been standing, but he wasn't there.
"Show yourself to me, my love," Van says. "Where have you gone?"
Within a moment, John morphed into view. He walked smoothly around the outer
perimeter of the circle.
"Let me in, Vanessa."
"Let you in?" Vanessa asks warily. She and John had rehearsed how he was to
enter several times, but now he appeared to not be able to remember.
"You know I can't enter in this state."
"What state?" Van's caution built as she contemplated what to do.
"No, Vanessa, do not let him in!"
Van whirled to see another "John" standing a few feet from the first.
"Look at me!" the second one cried out.
The first one turned to look at the second and then he smiled.

"We are one of the same. We need each other to live. If either of us extinguishes, the other perishes also," the first said with conviction. Vanessa looked from one to the other. They both looked identical. With her eyes squinted, Van focused on their auras. They are different. The first one, who began pacing the circle like a panther on the prowl, had no aura. The second one stood perfectly still and the silver cord which bound their love hangs from his core. She asks the second, "Is that true? If you live that evil wretch will also?" John replied, "I know not. I only know I am lost without you, my love. Please take this pain of love away and make it whole again." The second entity stops suddenly and turns to her. "You must perform the ritual to bring us together. We will be whole and our love can be given freely to you." "Liar, she knows that is not true!" John screamed out. The Evil Entity flipped his hand at her and said, "Continue, wench. And I prefer the name Jarrod, if you don't mind. John is so mundane." John pushed in front of the other and cried out to her, "No, Vanessa, he will murder you when you have brought us together. I cannot bear to live without you." Vanessa watched as the Evil Entity, Jarrod, pushed John aside with a flick of his wrist. "Don't listen to him, Vanessa. I won't kill you. I love you, too. I am he who cherishes you. He is the liar. He only wants to become mortal to find his own way. I need you to exist and I pledge my mortal existence I will not harm you." Van was torn. Could it be true John was playing her like all the guys in the real world? He was using her for his own ends? At least Jarrod told her he wanted her so he could exist. "Get on with it, my love. Time's passing. I won't exist if you delay." Jarrod looked pleadingly at her.

Vanessa looked from one to the other.

"I can't do this. What if I give life to the wrong one?"

John spoke. "You know me. We shared our love in the physical realm.

You love

me."

Jarrold turned to John and quietly admonished him. "Be still. If she

performs

the ritual, we both shall have life."

"But you will kill her."

Jarrold smirked, and with a syrupy voice says, "No, I would let her live to please you. Convince her to finish what has begun and we will both live."

"But I want a soul," John replied.

Vanessa shook her head. Turning away from both entities, she began to invoke.

Huge snowflakes begin to fall on her, shimmering like tiny diamonds in the dark.

Raising her athame to the night sky. "Oh goddess! Spirits of the east and

west. Spirits of the north and south, I beseech you to come and help me do what

I can't do myself."

Turning to the entities, she continued, "You will live as long as I--"

Jarrold stopped pacing and approached John abruptly. His lips did not move, but

he glared into John's eyes as he took John's hands into his.

"She beseeches for us. It is almost time. If we both live, we'll have a soul to share. But you know one can't live without the other. We'll both perish into non-existence. Oh my darling fiend, you concern yourself about the human.

Do not worry about the little bitch, she'll remain and we'll share her promises."

John said, "Remain? As what? I will not ask this of her."

Jarrold grabbed John by the collar and brought his face against John's.

"You will!"

"No!" John screamed.

"Then you will die with your whore!"

Jarrold grabbed John's arms and tossed him into the circle. The circle crackled

and split open. Electricity sparked everywhere. Vanessa covered her face to

shield it from the flying debris as the wind billowed and swirled around John.

Lightning bolts flew and loud thunder crashed as the wind became wilder, whipping the couple; pulling them apart.

John stretched out his arms to Vanessa.

Vanessa shouted, "I name you Jonathan, gift of God. I love you!"

Vanessa grabbed John's shirt, pulling him closer to her as she touched his heart

area with her knife. A huge electrical arc sprang from her hand to his heart.

The wind whirls wildly around them, pulling and pushing them back and forth

harshly.

"Vanessa, I love-" John cried out.

Another electrical arc flew into the circle, crashing into John. The last expression Van saw from him is horror and pain. His being melted into nothingness until the ground swallowed up what was left. Vanessa reaches out,

grasping at thin air.

Van looked around and saw Jarrod on the outer edge of the circle.

Suddenly

Martha appeared, running up to the circle.

"Vanessa, are you all right?" she tried to shout over the wind.

Martha began to enter the circle but was pushed back.

Vanessa crumpled to the ground, while Martha screamed out to her, "I can't get

to you, Vanessa. Open the circle."

Vanessa whispered, "It doesn't matter any more."

Martha stood helpless as Jarrod approached her, smiling sweetly.

"She's fine. She's destroyed the evil one."

Martha looked at him puzzled. The entity stood near her, generating a warmth

she can palpably feel.

"How can she have destroyed the evil, if you're still here?"

Jarrod snarled, "Silence bitch! There is no bargaining this time."

Martha looked him in the eye and quietly said, "I didn't bargain the last time.

You took."

Turning to Vanessa, she pleaded, "Use your power."

Vanessa snorted, "Power. What power?"

As Vanessa watched, Martha transformed into a younger version of herself, strong

and hard. When the metamorphosis was complete, she lunged for the evil entity.

It morphed into an ugly demon and laughed maniacally. It lunged back at Martha and struck her to the ground near the edge of the circle. Martha screamed out to Vanessa, "Use it, damn it!" The demon lunged again at Martha and they fought mercilessly. Blood flew from Martha and the demon beat her over and over. Vanessa watched as the demon grew in size as Martha became weaker. He picked her up like a rag doll. "It is finished now, Akuma," Martha whispered weakly. He stopped in the midst of tossing her. He looked down and said, "I have the bitch. You are useless to me now." The demon threw Martha to the ground. An electrical bolt lurched from the ground and enveloped Martha's body. She stiffened and then lay silent. The demon, satisfied, turned, malevolently smiling at Vanessa. Picking up Martha's limp body, he pointed at her. "She can't help you now." Vanessa ran to Martha, but he prevented her from reaching out. She then realized she is outside the safety of the circle which is sizzling and glowing behind her. "Let her go and return to the hell you came from," she demanded. The demon turned away from Vanessa and dropped Martha onto the ground. Slowly he turned back to Van. He smiled. With a swiftness she could never imagine, he yanked her up and threw her back into the circle. He then casually walked into it. "Now my little bitch, we are where we should have been all along. Finish what has begun." Vanessa glared at him. "No, I won't give you life, you miserable bastard." The demon smiled down at her, saying, "Ah, little one, you have already done so much. A few more words and it will be over and you can leave here." "I can't leave if I'm dead. You're going to kill me, right?" "I cannot tell a lie, yes," he replied sarcastically. "No, you can't tell a lie, you tell millions of them." The demon stopped at the chalice and took a sip. "Good choice in wine, my dear. I assume only the best for that lack-luster

know-nothing."

He approached Van, menacingly.

"Get the hell away from me."

"Finish what was begun!" he thundered.

"Finish what? I gave John a new name, and I suppose today was his death date,

thanks to you. You've killed Martha. What's left?"

The demon lunged at her.

"No!"

Vanessa looked at him. What was going on? Why was he so angry?

Then

realization came.

"What? You just realized that you can't exist any more, either, right? He has

a name and a death date and you killed his essence. He's gone. He was goodness. And you destroyed him and your chance at life. Now what?"

Growing in size, he towered over Van and bellowed, "I'll have your life!"

"I don't think so."

With the realization he couldn't really hurt her, peace overcame Van's spirit.

Van calmly looked at him.

The demon growled loudly into the night. He approached her and bent down, as if

to kiss her. As he does, a bright light flashed into the circle.

"No, my love, she is not what you seek!"

Vanessa looked over in surprise as the ugly pock marked woman who had been in

her visions appears within the circle.

The demon whirled around.

"My creator!"

The demon rushed to her.

"I shall give you life. Take my soul into your own and you shall live."

"My creator!" The demon fell at her feet.

"Today is the day of your death, my love. I name you John."

The wind began to howl morosely. Leaves scattered and blew up into a whirlwind

of dead matter. The demon morphed into the entity, John. After the change, he

fell buck-naked to the ground in pain. Van looked and grimaced. Anna at least

had good taste in hot men.

Anna looked at Vanessa. She smiled and nodded kindly. Bending, she gently

lifted the new entity. She helps him as he is unsteady on his feet. The candles on the altar suddenly blew out. Electrical sparks began to fly everywhere. The area within the circle became saturated with a bright white light which turned into a rainbow set of stairs. Anna and the new entity stepped onto it and ascended slowly out of sight. The light flickered and extinguished. The air is still again and Van looked around. She stared at the empty altar. Everything is a mess. At the spot where Jonathan lost his bid for life was a large burn mark. She lay down on it and sobbed. Then she heard a voice. "Vanessa." With hope, she looked around the circle. "Vanessa." Realizing it is Martha weakly calling her, she runs to her. Helping her sit up, Vanessa begins to cry. "What happened?" Martha asked weakly. Vanessa shook her head. "I'm so sorry," Martha cried softly. "I told you I wasn't sure what would happen." "It's all right. He got a name. He'll be able to go from here to wherever and do what he needs to do now." Martha struggled to rise. Gripping Van's arm, she said, "Help me. Let's get to the house." "The house." Van sighed. "I guess I will let Marcy buy it. Nothing left for me here." As they leave the circled area, it still glowed with the light brought there. Eerily, the candles on the altar light again.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Van kept busy by nursing Martha. Martha sat stroking Catwoman and holding a wet cloth on her forehead.

"I think you were more frightened than anything," Martha observed.
"No, I wasn't," Van replied. "I was empty."
"But you did what he needed to have done."
Van looked away. Tears welled in her eyes again.
"What was the point? He's gone."
Martha pulled Van down to her. "He would have been gone anyway. At least you gave him a chance to have a soul. If you hadn't done what you did, he'd just not exist any longer. But, thanks to you, he's somewhere."
Van crumpled and wept in Martha's lap.
"I actually fell in love. I never thought I would. And then I did. It took so long to find the right man and now he's gone."
Martha patted Van's head sympathetically.
"You know, why don't you go on upstairs and take a nice warm shower and put on some dry, clean clothes. That might help."
Van looked up at her. Sighing, she nodded. Getting up, she took her teacup to the sink and rinsed it out. Looking back at Martha, Van shrugged.
As she got to the top of the stairs, the phone rang.
"Go on," Martha said. "I'll get it."
Vanessa continued to climb the stairs.
Martha called up, "It was Marcy. I told her you were cleaning up and you were fine. She'll be over tomorrow, she said."
"Thanks, Martha."
"I'm going to leave now, if you're sure you're going to be okay."
Van stopped at the head of the stairs and looked down at the old woman.
"Martha, you've been just wonderful. Thanks for everything. But yeah, I'm going to be fine. Go home and I'll stop by to see you before I go back to L.A."
"All right dearie. Good night."
Van paused at the door to John--Jonathan's bedroom. Her hand went to the knob, but she paused.
What's the point of going in?
She shook her head and made her way to the bathroom. After the shower, she dried herself off and looked in the mirror. She looked tired. She felt hopeless.
Walking back to her room with the towel wrapped around her, she thought of how

bleak the house seemed.

She stopped in front of her room and looked over at John's bedroom door again.

Walking across to it, she opened it and peeked in.

It was just another room with white sheets draped over furniture, including the

four-poster bed. Seeing the bed covered with protective sheets stopped her

short. Tears filled her eyes. She shut the door with a quietly.

Going to her room, she walked in and went directly to her closet. As she was

getting out her long johns for bed, she heard a noise. Looking around, she found Catwoman sitting on the chair next to the closet.

"Well, I guess I still have you. Want to see what life is like in California?"

Catwoman meowed.

Turning around to her bed, Van began slipping into the huge comforter when she

gasped.

Pulling back the large spread she found - him.

Jonathan was lying there, in all his magnificence. Vanessa just stared.

She reached out to touch him and found a needle next to his forefinger. It was

red with blood.

She looked at it curiously, and then she looked at him. He smiled.

"Oh, Jonathan!"

He reached for her and cupped her face in his hands. Looking deep into her

eyes, he smiled and said, "I told you I would be with you always."



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