

KIT:



The Cyberblood Chronicles



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Dedication

This book is dedicated to the memory of Mary-Anne
Amsbary

Chapter 1

Kit had to admit to herself that Bruce wasn't a total wanker. Like most field agents, he was intelligent and physically fit, two attributes that Kit found admirable in any man, though the intelligence was sometimes optional. He was, as far as she could tell, completely devoted to protocol. He was a stickler for rules and regulations and insisted that she learn each of the standard operating procedures that the Committee had developed over the centuries. As Kit's officially assigned mentor, Bruce had complete control of Kit's life in her newly chosen profession, vampire hunter. No, Bruce wasn't a total wanker, nobody is perfect.

In her more generous moods she had to admit that it would be very difficult for anyone to be her mentor. Unlike most hunters, Kit was recruited by the sitting director, Jean. The Committee had developed a policy of calling everyone by his or her first names, even the director. She had been drawn into his last case as a field agent and was instrumental in helping him track down and destroy one of the more notorious vampires.

Flush with the glory of his kill, Jean had assumed the directorship from Rene. Rene had held the post for ten years and had overseen many successful hunts. Under his direction, the Committee had grown and prospered. Its coffers swelled and his agents spread into more dark corners of the globe. Jean had big shoes to fill.

Because of her relationship with Jean, many of the trainers either treated her with kid gloves or abused the hell out of

her. Some felt that they could score points with the new director by treating his hand picked agent tenderly, while others felt that this was a good reason to lean on her as hard as they could. She wasn't sure if this was to show the new boss that they had the "right stuff" or merely trying to show her her place. She wasn't happy with either approach, though in the end it kind of evened out.

Kit had been in training for two years now and she was growing restless. She had been given a taste of a field agent's life and she wanted more. It wasn't the expense account because only blue level (top level) agents got to live the life that she had been exposed to with Jean. He had lived in luxury apartments, flew around in a private jet and had credit cards with no limit on them. As a junior agent, Jean had proven his worth to the Committee and when his mentor, Rene, became director Jean was promoted to blue level. At the moment Kit did not have a color.

There were four designations: black, red, gold and blue, in that order. No one alive had any clue as to why those were the colors and why they appeared in that order. Bruce was a red level agent and that gave him some latitude in his actions, though he did have a strict schedule of check-in's that he had to maintain. He would often get pulled off case as he got close so the gold or blue agents could complete the job. Bruce was the perfect company man and never complained. He did, however, have complete authority over Kit and he seemed to have years of pent up organizational frustrations to work out on her.

Kit was determined to be an exemplary trainee, but she was learning that that was not in her nature. Bruce was critical and demanding. He would find fault in her every move and decision. It did seem to Kit that he was unlike her instructors that were hard on her because of her relationship with Jean. She felt he would be this awful with anyone he was to mentor. Kit dreamed of getting her black designation, she could taste it.

As a black agent she would be assigned much of the scut work. Arranging transportation, making and maintaining contact with local law agencies and minding work, but she would be an agent, she would be on her way. Mostly she would be out from under Bruce's thumb.

For all his lack of imagination, Kit knew that Bruce was someone to be taken seriously. He was a good researcher and he laid the foundation for three very important skills in his career. He knew how the game was to be played and he played it well. He was a complete professional. Kit knew she would never be an agent like him, but knew she could learn from his discipline and adherence to rules. Kit also knew that, though she hadn't had anything remotely resembling a sex life in the last few years, she was a sadomasochist and could take anything this guy could dish out.

Her previous experience with pain had served her well in her training, especially her fighting classes. Her instructors taught a combination of Savat, Jujitsu and Tai kickboxing. There was no attempt to teach the art of any of these systems. They just drilled her endlessly in various grappling, blocking and striking techniques. They would spar with her for

hours. She was determined and never submitted to them. She would leave her sessions black and blue and more than once with a fracture. She was earning a reputation independent from Jean and this pleased her very much.

At least her reputation as a skillful and persistent fighter had pleased her. Her reputation as someone who cut corners and questioned authority at every turn embarrassed her very much. She was thankful that Jean never intervened for or against her, either would have been mortifying beyond words. She had seen him often, they were friends and he was married to her best friend Ginger. He never discussed work when they were together, though she was sure she felt his gentle hand in her assignment to Bruce.

Bruce was taking her on a "Bug hunt". When she started her training, Kit assumed that all vampires were like the one that she had helped Jean kill. She found nothing could be further from the truth. Vampires came in many "flavors". There were the Lords and Ladies, wealthy, smart and crafty. There were gypsies, nomadic solitary and elusive. There were leaches, stationary, territorial and shy. They were hunting a band of "bugs": instinctual, pack oriented and blood thirsty. Bugs were easily the stupidest vampires, but they were deadly nonetheless. They lived short and spectacularly bloody lives. The assumption was that their transformation eroded their sanity and that they didn't care if they died, only how many they could take with them,

Bugs would often make frontal assaults on their hunters. This was invariably a suicidal move because you never hunted bugs without extensive back up. This was cold comfort,

however, if they managed to kill you along the way. You had to be very careful with bugs. You had to pick your moment and strike without mercy

Technically, she had already killed a vampire. A vampire lord to be exact, but it was unarguable Jean's kill. She would blacken the eye of anyone who would dare to say otherwise.

Jean had directed every aspect of the hunt and had taken a .357 slug for his troubles. No, in every way it was Jean's kill. Kit was, however, credited with saving the lives of two civilians from a servant of the vampire who had attacked them. Kit was very proud of this.

The civilian in question was named Pat. He was the servant's best friend before he had fallen under the influence of the monster. He was trying to kill Pat to show his worthiness to his new Mistress. It was Pat who had helped Kit carry the body of the vampire into the light of the setting sun. It destroyed her instantly.

Pat had also gone to work for the Committee after the incident. Unlike Kit, he became a researcher. He was a student of human behavior and was getting good at explaining and predicting the movements of his targets. Kit's friend Ginger was turning into something of a computer wizard and the two of them were turning into a productive team.

It was also Pat's job to act as liaison for Jean to David. David was the servant of the vampire. He had been released from her influence upon her death, but he had lost most of his sanity along the way. David had killed one of his friends, seriously injured two others and tried to kill Pat. This weighed

heavily upon his conscience. He also harbored a deep and unyielding hatred for Jean. Though he understood the evil power of his former Mistress, who had become a part of him, he never could forgive Jean for her destruction, even if he admitted she deserved to be destroyed.

David was also something of a psychic. All vampires possess some psychic abilities, but vampire lords possess truly formidable powers. She had wormed her way into David's psyche through a computer chat link and endowed him with some of her power. He retained some of this power after her destruction, though he lost his ability to control it.

The main manifestation of David's power was a link he created with his friends. He was now linked to Pat and his wife Julie, to their friend Samantha (who was now an elementary school teacher in Ohio) and to Kit and Ginger. Both women had been David's chat friends. That was what drew them into the drama in the first place.

David now had flashes of his friend's psychic states. There were two problems with his power however. The first was that he had no control over it. He would suddenly get blinding flashes of emotions and images that usually terrified him, though less so if Pat were close at hand. The second problem was a matter of time. Kit had learned that time is irrelevant to psychic energies; in fact, so was space. David's flashes could be from the past, the present or the future. He once woke up screaming after reliving Kit's rape, which had happened more than ten years earlier. He had more than once relived his attack upon his friends. David was a mess.

Jean had instructed Pat to watch David and help him. He truly cared about David's health. He also knew he would be a valuable asset if he could learn a way to control his power. No one was really optimistic about this happening, but they tried anyway.

2

"So tell me about this gang of bugs?" Bruce had asked.

Bruce was a strong believer in the Socratic method. He endlessly quizzed Kit on everything. He might have easily asked what the first contact protocol was for gypsy vampires. He knew the answer and he wanted to be sure Kit knew the answer, even if she had been asked the same question an hour earlier.

Kit knew there was no point in arguing with Bruce or trying to put him off. She had more luck arguing with her computer. She had once considered offering him sex to get him to ease off, but knew it would be futile. He would probably quiz her about the Committee's position on sexual harassment while they made love.

"We have a band of three, maybe four bug vampires." She recited.

"In the past year there have been seven attacks on biker bars throughout the southwest and mid-west. There were never any survivors or witnesses to these attacks. The police assume that a new rival gang is attempting to mark out a name for itself. Announcing itself with authority, so to speak."

Bruce winced, "Please don't editorialize."

"Yes Sir." She tried her best to keep most of the sarcasm she felt out of her voice this time.

"Intelligence indicates that it is, in fact, a bug gang that's likely headed by a former motorcycle gang member, either from one of the gangs attacked or from a rival gang. The attacks occur sometime after three a.m. and before five a.m., which would indicate that the bugs at least have the presence of mind to stake the bar out before attacking,

"Each bar is always isolated, either a desolate roadhouse or after-hours club in a deserted part of a city. The attack in Omaha occurred in the warehouse district. It is likely that the pattern persists because gangs like this type of bars. The bug is familiar with these bars and they can hit and run with little fear of detection.

"Each attack, while spaced almost equally apart in time, betrays no pattern in location."

"What does this tell us about our prey?"

"That they are using the time between attacks to cover their tracks and then stake out the new location. It is possible that they are even using this time to infiltrate the target gang."

"Good." He said and she waited for the other shoe to drop. "But tell me something that isn't in the briefing manual."

Kit was shocked. It was not that he would praise her and then try and throw her a curve, he always did that. He could never just say she had done something well and leave it at that. Her success was always met with a higher challenge.

No, what shocked Kit was that he had asked for her opinion about something, not just something from the book, the file or the report.

"Excuse me, Sir?" She wanted to be sure before she crawled out on a limb.

"Tell me what you think all this means. What conclusions have you drawn about this case so far?"

"You want my opinion?" She stretched this last word out for emphasis.

"Damn it, Kit. Give me your best idea! If you ever hope to be more than a black level agent, you'd better learn to think."

"Yes Sir, just wanted to be sure I'm clear about what you want." He exhaled in a snort at this.

"All right, what I'm thinking is this: the fact that the location is random while the time isn't means that they are completely stupid or they can't control the time variable."

"And?" he prompted.

"And for some reason they have to attack when they do."

"Why would that be the case?"

"Sir, the only reason I can think is that they have a non-vampire with them."

"What?"

She took a breath "Sir, all vampires, including bugs, are known to control their blood lusts. Some of the Lords can go for decades without killing at all. Most bugs can go a year or more if they have to."

She was on a roll and he hadn't stopped her yet "Now, we know they have some smarts because that they attempt to cover their tracks. So, it would make sense that the attacks would be varied by time as well. The attacks, however, are regularly spaced out. The variance of time can be measured in days. So either they are incredibly stupid, which doesn't

seem likely, or they travel with someone or something that can control it's own lust nearly as well, even with their help."

"What might this other be?"

"The first thing that comes to mind is a werewolf. You know, I've had some experience with them and I know a little on how they work. There are still a few leftover from Jean's last kill. It could be one of them. Possibly, he was the one to put the bug gang together. He could be using them to control his lusts."

She thought a second, "Though I don't know much about them, it could be a ghoul or other flesh eater. It could also be a witch of some sort. He or she could be using the attacks as an opportunity to perform blood rituals. The most frightening possibility that I can come up with is that it may be a demon of some sort. This demon may need the blood to stay in the realm of the living."

He thought a second, "I suppose it could even be some sort of ghost or spirit. Some damned soul using the blood to keep out of hell."

She was amazed again. Not only had he not ridiculed her conjecture, he had added his own opinion to it. She didn't know he had any opinions.

He returned to his quiz. "What do you know about the intelligence on this case?"

"Some has come from the Committee snoops." All agents called the researchers and psychic's in the home office snoops. "But the file shows some kind of undisclosed informant. The Committee suggests that it may be coming from a gypsy."

"What does that tell you?" This was not an opinion question. The Committee had definite rules about gypsies.

"All gypsy information is to be considered false or at least dangerous until it can be verified and even then, nothing is ever to be taken at face value. All advantages to the supplier must be considered. The Committee will not be drawn into a conflict among the undead or knowingly expose its agents to a trap."

"Why do gypsies supply information?"

"Mostly to cover their own tracks. Most gypsies learn to live without killing at all. They still need human blood, but they get this from sipping."

"Sipping?" he prompted. He hated her use of jargon.

"Attacking many victims, but only taking a small amount from each. An accomplished gypsy can leave the victim believing that he or she just got a really good hickey."

"Gypsies survive by moving and drawing as little attention to themselves as possible. They seldom inform on Lords because they are afraid of them. Bugs are fair game and a real threat to them because they are so reckless, they call attention to the vampire community in general. They sometimes inform on leaches, but they don't often feel the need."

"What are the ways that the different types of vampires are likely to attack?" He changed the subject just a little.

"A Lord will use elaborate plans and schemes. Their intended victims seldom see the attack before it too late. A leach uses stealth, they hide until they see a chance to strike and then it is sudden and violent. Gypsies typically run and

hide, they are cleaver and try to get their enemies to fight each other. Bugs just come straight at you in a blinding and vicious assault."

She looked at Bruce and waited for his next question. He leaned back into the seat of his car and sipped his coffee. He was done asking questions for now and that he hadn't been hard on Kit was a major victory for her. She had learned his silence was about the best praise she could expect from the man.

3

They had been parked outside of a small roadhouse north of Bismarck, North Dakota. The car was well hidden and they were in radio contact with a minder team in a stake out twenty minutes away to the south. There was a strike team poised in a small airport between the two. The plan was that if either team reported trouble, half a dozen well armed agents would be in back up in less than two minutes. That was the plan.

Kit's experience with the Committee had renewed her childhood belief in God. It was hard to fight vampires and other supernatural beings without acknowledging the existence of Satan. If you knew there was a Satan, you really needed to believe in God, but on a night like this she was reminded that men make plans and God makes storms. It was mid spring and a freak blizzard was headed out of Canada into North Dakota. It was 2:00 a.m. and they were going to loose their back up as soon as the storm hit, which was going to be any minute now.

It was biting cold and a few flurries were already evident. If it were light, you could see the cold front looming from the northwest, but at night all you could do was smell the impending storm. Bruce's phone squawked. He answered and mostly listened to the voice on the other side. He said, "Got it" and hung up the phone.

"We're losing our back up. The helicopter won't lift off with the storm. We're done."

"Damn!"

"Kit, it was a long shot anyway. We have teams stretched all over the area. There's not much hope we'd make contact anyway."

"No, we already have."

"What?"

"The vampires just showed up."

"How can you be certain?"

"Three motorcycles just pulled up."

"So?"

"So, get your head of the manuals and look around. I meant we just lost our air back up and you don't question the fact that three people just showed up riding motorcycles. In this weather?" She added the last for emphasis.

"Damn." He hissed "Too bad we have to let this contact slip through our finger."

"What?" Kit yelled.

"We don't have back up. There is no way we can face down three vampires ourselves, even if they are bugs. We're lucky they didn't attack us first."

"But..."

"Kit be quiet. Getting ourselves killed won't help anything."

"Damn it, Bruce there are people in there. You know what's going to happen."

"So tell me how our dying will help them if we go in."

She looked at him with her mouth open for a second, then slumped back into her seat. Bruce started the sedan and they drove back to their hotel as the storm started in earnest. Kit felt a compulsion to look back, but she remembered the lesson of Lot's wife and she had full faith and knowledge of what she would see. She hoped against hope that people in the bar were degenerate killers and somehow the world might be better with their passing. She knew however, that it didn't matter. No one deserved what they were about to get.

Chapter 2

Pat had spent the morning cruising through web pages and finally found what he was looking for. He licked his lips and muttered a short exclamation of delight. He had checked and double checked the interface and the details and was confident that this is what he wanted. He downloaded the appropriate file and then repacked it with a short note:

G:

Real breakthrough. This is exactly what we've been looking for!

P.

He then used the interoffice network to transfer the file to Ginger's workstation. She was in the middle of a financial hunt. Her eyes were tired and she was getting a little frustrated. The Committee had just taken down another werewolf and they were now trying to sort out his finical records. This guy was a real pack rat and the trail was dizzyingly complex. She rubbed her eyes and stretched as Pat's file was transferred to her computer.

Ginger blinked and took a sip of her tea as she set up and ran the program that Pat had sent. What she saw next made her spill her tea in her lap.

A message appeared that said:

Checking System Files.

She saw the computer run through each of the directories and sub-directories of her computer. Then a new message flashed :

Major System Errors Discovered—System Reformatting.

Warning—Do Not Shut Down

Then the computer list many of her files at blinding speed and a third message appeared:

System Error: Reformat Failure

Please Contact System Manager

The screen went blank and Ginger shrieked. She then heard the sound of laughter from behind her.

Pat and half of the on-duty snoops were stand behind her and laughing hysterically. Some of the audience was applauding. She felt her face turned red in embarrassment and rage. "What have you done to my computer?" She demanded, "I have important work there. If the system's auto back-up's didn't get it all, it's going to take me days to reconstruct all that."

Pat and the others were laughing too hard to respond. Her rage, in fact, had fueled their laughing. Something in the back of her mind told her that all was not as it appeared. Over the last two years, she and Pat had become very close friends. They were a great research team. Many of the field agents had requested their services specifically, which was quite an honor.

Many of the other snoops called them the giggle twins, because they always seemed to have their heads together and laughed and teased endlessly. They had played many tricks on each other in the past and if she weren't so tired from her hunt, she would have smelled Pat's trick coming from a mile away. She grinned and spun herself back to the keyboard in one fluid motion. She hit the "escape key" and the computer's desktop immediately flashed into existence.

She smiled to herself and then put on her best frown and turned back to the crowd.

"How could you be so mean? What have I ever done to you?" She tried very hard to sell the performance, but no one was buying.

"How about the program you loaded into my computer that told me that the system had detected a failure due to insufficient penis size?" The observers were enjoying the show very much. Ginger smiled in spite of herself.

"Yeah, that was pretty good." Pat was now the focus of the room's amusement. He had done this on purpose. He had allowed her to be the butt of a joke, but then used his self-deprecating humor to share the role with her. He was a lot of fun to play with because he never played too rough and always displayed good grace whether he was the perpetrator or the target. In short, Pat was a good sport and she loved him for it.

Ginger rose and went over and hugged him. She felt his warmth and friendship and basked for an eternal moment. She then stepped back and said "Of course, Julie tells me you have no worries in that department!" She then goosed him as she moved past him towards the ladies room. The room made a collective howl and she could see him turn red with the eyes in the back of her head.

"What's going on here?" The voice belonged to Juan, the current project manager.

"The giggle twins are at it again." One of their fellow workers informed.

"Will you two please stop disrupting the office?" Juan pleaded. Ginger and Pat had two things going for them. The first was their relationship to the director, she was his wife after all. If they were agents, this would be another matter and they both knew the mental and physical beatings that Kit had taken, but they were staff. They had no promotions to fight for. They had jobs to do and they did them.

This was the second reason that they were more or less free to do what they wanted. They were very good at what they did. What they lacked in technical skills they more than made up in intuition. They had an uncanny ability to produce results. This was especially true when they worked together. Juan knew he really had no ability to push them around and he had resorted to pleading with them.

"No problem boss." Ginger cried over her shoulder without turning back to look at him as she walked away.

Pat was too busy blushing as his fellow workers continued to tease him good-naturedly. Juan wasn't too upset, he knew that his research staff work well when they were relaxed. He knew Pat and Ginger were a very positive influence on the office and enjoyed their antics as much or more than anyone, but he did have an image to maintain after all.

2

Later in the afternoon, Pat decided it was time to go visit David. As usual, he asked Ginger if she wanted to come and as usual she declined politely. Ginger honestly cared about David and prayed each night that he would someday gain more of his sanity, but the ugly truth of the matter was that David creeped her out. He terrified her. He ranted and raved

and often knew what she was thinking even before she did. He could smell her fear and would often exploit it.

Then he would have flashes of his old personality and knew her torment and then beg her forgiveness. This too bothered her very much, so she just took to avoiding David altogether.

She had grieved the loss of her friend Debbie, and put the loss in its place. David, however, was a constant reminder of how that monster had almost destroyed them all. She had certainly destroyed David.

Pat moved to the lower levels of the complex. The Committee maintained what could only be described as a maximum-security jail. They had a number of undead under lock and key, as well as some mortals who had lost their minds in contact with these monsters. This was David's circumstance.

Except for his total loss of freedom, David was kept in very comfortable surroundings. He was given whatever he wanted to read. He was given movies and about anything he want to watch on the television. He had a living room and a private bedroom. He could order his meals from a very extensive menu and they had even tried to accommodate a few of his off menu requests.

He did lack much human contact. Even most of the visitors he was allowed avoided him. He could be physically or verbally aggressive. He seemed to delight in hurting people, especially when he was in one of his moods.

Pat was the only one brave enough to sit in a room with him without supervision or other protection. Pat had a very

calming effect on David. The two men loved each other more than they could if they were brothers.

As Pat checked in at the main desk, the guard informed him that David was particularly agitated today. Pat shrugged and quietly suspected that David was having one of his psychic spells. These always bother him greatly, especially when he was drawn into an event from the past that he had been involved with.

He was convinced that their mutual friend Wayne was haunting him. David had stabbed Wayne to death to show the vampire he had fallen in service to how much he loved her. Pat wasn't sure if this were true or that he was merely trapped by the memory and his guilt.

After moving through three air locks, he stood before the door to David's living room. There was an emergency entrance into both of David's rooms and he was monitored by video cameras, but an illusion of privacy was created and David could control his own "front door." Pat took one last deep breath and knocked.

David greeted him with a large grin on his face. Pat relaxed because he knew he wasn't in one of his depressive moods, his manic ones were easier for Pat to cope with.

"Come on in. Sorry, the place is kind of messy right now." This was an understatement. It had looked like the room had been "tossed". That is, it looked like someone had been searching through every knock and cranny for something. You could easily imagine that an earthquake had just occurred from the appearance of the room.

Pat was worried. If you were to describe David, the first thing to come to mind was that he was finicky. He kept his living space very tidy and clean. "So how are you feeling David?"

"Good, I'm wonderful!"

"Glad to hear it man."

"Oh yes, I thought it would be an awful day, but I suddenly realized that everything is going to turn out just great."

"What do you mean?"

"Kit."

"Kit?"

"Yeah, I know her attack was awful but she's going to be great! She has become so beautiful and wonderful."

"You mean when she was raped?" Pat had talked David down from that event three or four times.

"No no, that's old news. You know, her attack."

"What attack, David?"

David sighed and Pat got worried. He knew David could be talking about something that would happen or maybe not happen at all. "Well, I just want you to know that everything is going to be all right with her."

"David, tell me about her attack."

"Not much to say, Pat. Relax. Now, let me show you passage I found on existentialism and capitalism. It's fascinating shit."

Pat opened his mouth to try to focus David on the attack, but knew it was a futile effort. He went and sat with David as he launched into his latest academic interest. Next week he

could be as likely to be tickled by some theory on butterflies he discovered in Discover.

3

"So what do you think it means?" Jean had asked.

Pat took a bite of his roast beef and chewed as he picked his words carefully. "I suppose you know the possibilities as well as anyone. This could be a warning about something that is about to happen, but we have no idea when. He once had a precognition four months into the future and there are other flashes that haven't happened at all. Either they're delusions or he's casting even further into the future than we suspect."

Jean nodded.

"But what worries me more than anything was his insistence that 'everything would turn out all right'. This was from David's perspective. We have no idea what that means. All right to David could be disastrous to Kit."

"What do you think we should do?"

"Hell, I don't know. I just gather information. It's up to you guys with the expense accounts to make the decisions." Pat stuffed a hot roll in his mouth to punctuate that last remark.

Jean gave him an evil look that Pat completely ignored, "I just wish I knew what to tell Kit."

"What can you tell her? If you do tell her, she can't prepare because we have no idea when and if it's likely to happen, but we might want to keep our eye's open."

"Why's that?"

"I told you his room was a mess. So whatever is going to happen, it's going to be pretty awful. I suspect violent."

"I don't know Pat, I wish David wouldn't do this. I feel screwed no matter what I do."

"I know Jean, and it also possible that David is making this all up to make you look silly too."

"I know, I know."

Jean looked up from his meal to make sure Ginger was still in the kitchen. "Oh by the way" he whispered conspiratorially, "watch yourself for a while. Ginger is really revving up for her revenge."

"OK boss, thanks."

Later that night Ginger whispered into Jean's ear "Master, did you tell Pat what I asked?" Jean and Ginger enjoy a Dominant/submissive life-style and she always called him Master when they were alone or with close friends who understood, like Pat and Julie.

"Yes my love I did."

"Oh you are the most wonderful Master a girl could ever have."

She rolled on top of him and lowered her soft moist mouth over his. She parted her lips as he sought out her tongue with his. Ginger was determined to show her Master just how grateful she was, it took two hours.

When they were done, Jean had a thought that most Dominants have at one time or another. We really wondered who was the true Dominant and who was the true submissive. He really didn't care however. He loved Ginger with all his heart. He knew how lucky he was to have her.

Chapter 3

The ride had been exhilarating in more ways than one. He had been working this scheme for years and now it looked like it might pay off. The sedan held exactly what he wanted and he would have it. He would have everything he wanted. Soon, very soon, they would all bow down before him. He would be a force to be reckoned with.

The stinging cold air was also a glorious feeling. He could feel the flesh on his face crystallizing as he powered up the machine between his legs to increase the feeling. After all these years it was good to feel something so delicious and painful. He thought about his plans and the dangers he exposed himself to. He wondered how tonight would end. He hoped with either his triumph or destruction. It almost didn't matter anymore.

He could feel it getting colder and see that the snow was picking up as he stopped by the run down bar. He looked at his companions and wondered how much longer he would have to suffer their existence. He remembered his life as a gypsy and how he hated bugs with a passion. His opinion hadn't changed.

They were cruel and mindless. They knew only their lust and though their candles often burned brightly, they never burned for long, but he could use these two. They suited him well. When he was done, a mere thought would send them straight to hell where they belonged. He had gained complete access to their feeble minds and with a single thought he

could force them into the open at dawn. He smiled at the thought.

He admonished himself for his reverie. He must not lose his concentration now that a suitable prey was so close at hand. He needed to focus. He got off his bike and turned slightly to catch a glimpse of the sedan. He roared in rage as he saw it drive away. He cursed the weather for he knew it had deterred their back up, though he had no idea where that back up was coming from. He bared his teeth and snarled at the rear of the car.

Well, that game wasn't over by a long shot. There would be other nights; other days to draw her in. He would see to that. He turned to his companions "Hungry my little fools?"

They snarled in response and he led them through the front door. As he entered, he heard the pump of a shot gun, "Hold it right there, asshole. I don't know who you are or where you came from. This place belongs to the Rattlers and strangers ain't welcome. So you just back your scrawny ass back out the door."

He smiled as he heard those words. Maybe if the fool had fired he might have gotten lucky, but his hesitation would be his undoing. The news of their raids was spreading and the receptions were getting colder and colder. Maybe soon, one trigger happy goon might get lucky and land a one in a million shot. That would be fine too.

"Too late my friend."

"What the fuck do you mean 'too late' I'll give you fucking too late." He raised the gun to fire, but it was, in fact, too late. His target had moved with blinding speed and spun and

lashed out, grabbing the barrel to the gun in one fluid motion. The vampire saw that the man had committed himself to pulling the trigger, so he pointed it in the direction of the lone woman in the room. The twelve gauge sounded and cut the woman in half.

He knew he shouldn't play with his food, but it amused the bugs. One of them chuckled hideously and fell on the fresh hot corpse and began feeding, totally ignoring the other in the room. The vampire shook his head and turned his attention back to the man who fired the gun. A sharp tug and the gun belonged to him now.

He scanned the room and saw three others. Two were posing to attack him and one was frozen and would soon run. The vampire turned the shotgun on the coward and he too was soon in a bloody mass on the floor. He broke the gun over his knee.

To his pleasure, he noticed that the other bug still blocked the exit. He hadn't broke ranks to feed as his "brother" had. It was time to consider a personnel change. He turned his attention to the two bikers that had lunged to attack him. They had arched in opposite directions in hopes of flanking him with their attack. He caught them, one in each hand. He had them by the throat and with a quick twist they both stopped struggling and fell dead on the floor. He turned back to the only living man in the room and said, "It seems this is your lucky day. I have an opening for an animal like you in my organization. Would you like that?"

The man was frozen in his track and involuntarily shook his head. "Here let me explain it to you."

He grabbed the man by his leather jacket and slammed his head against the nearby bar. "They always say you've got to get their attention. Do I have your attention?" The man let out a soft gurgling moan as his body filled with pain. He drew the quivering man to his mouth and tore his throat with his fangs.

He felt the red warm fluid pour into his mouth and he drank his fill. The man was big and still alive when he let him fall to the floor. The second bug was still at his post, but he could feel his hunger and his rage. "All right, you can feed."

The bug lunged at the dying man and the leader stopped him with a single blow from the back of his hand. The bug fell away in pain and hissed at his Master, but made no aggressive move in his direction. "Not him, one of those." He pointed to the two dead men on the floor. The bug fell upon the closest and fed noisily and sloppily.

The leader went over to the first bug who had been feeding on the woman. He was covered with her blood and gore. The leader picked him up by his neck and carried him over to the twitching man in the leather jacket. The leader produced a knife and sliced the arm of the bug deeply. The bug hissed but didn't fight.

The leader grabbed the man by his hair and smashed his face into the gash he had made in the arm of the bug. He ground his mouth against the wound and the bug groaned in pain as the man instinctively drank the dark cold fluid as it spilled into his mouth.

"That's enough." He threw the man onto the floor. He turned his attention to the bug and with a thought snuffed his

life out. "Oh well, live and learn." He stared at the second bug to emphasize the point. "Take him. Let's go."

The bug lifted the body of the dying man over his shoulder. He groaned in pain and then bled out. The leader turned to him "Tomorrow is the first day of the rest of your life. Hope you aren't as much of a disappointment as that one was."

The leader took a match and set some of the filthy curtains on fire. He led the others out the door and into the night.

2

"It's a mess, it's a big fucking mess." The county investigator was shaking his head.

"I don't know who you people are and I don't care. It's just a mess and I'm not happy I tell you."

Bruce looked at the man sympathetically and officiously. "We have no intention of interfering with your investigation. We'd just like to look over your shoulder and observe. You might find something useful for our work."

"Who'd you say you work for, F.B.I.?" The man was fishing. He had already been told to cooperate with the two strangers. He would, but he'd fish a little if he could.

"So what do you have so far?" Bruce plowed over the man's question with his own.

"We got three confirmed dead, though there some ashes that look like they might be human, but we got no bones. Bones don't burn very well. Course I bet they teach you that at Interpol don't they?"

Bruce continued to ignore the questions, looking at Kit with something between amusement and contempt. "Who are the victims?"

"Belong to a local biker club. It's called the Rattlers. They're mean, but strictly small potatoes if you know what I mean. Nothing like you find working for the C.I.A."

Bruce almost laughed at the man's awkward attempts. Kit kept her game face on. She was furious at Bruce, but wouldn't show it now. Bruce continued pushing rubble around with his toe. "Anything else?"

"Well at least one of them was killed before the fire, can't tell about the other two. Woman over there was blown almost in two by a shotgun, probably."

"Well thank you for your time Sir, we'll get out of your way now."

"You give the boys down at the K.G.B. office my regards." The man chuckled merrily to himself at the last one.

3

When they got back to the motel, Bruce brought Kit into his room and closed the door. "OK, let's have it."

"How can you be so fucking cold?"

"Comes with the job."

"What the hell is that suppose to mean? I know other agents who care, who have passion."

"Do they or are they just good at pretending? Look, I know your upset, but let me tell you something. This is an evil and awful job. You think what we saw today was bad. That's nothing. These are monsters we're fighting Kit and they do

monstrous things. You better learn that or find yourself a desk back in France."

"But we were there. We had them made. Shit, we may not get a chance like that for years again."

"Maybe, maybe not. Yes we got lucky, but then we got unlucky. Yes we got close and maybe we'll get closer sometimes, but you tell me one thing." He paused for emphasis. "Tell me one thing our deaths would have accomplished, just one. You do that and I'll cry for those people back there."

Kit just glared in her helplessness.

"Now until you can tell me, I want you to pay attention to your job and stay off my ass. Understand?"

"Yes." She said thinly.

"What?" He barked.

"Yes." She said louder.

"Yes what?" He demanded.

"Yes Sir. Whatever you say."

"That's right. Whatever I say. I don't care who your friends are. You can be fucking the Pope for all I care. Right now you work for me. You belong to me. You don't like it, either quit or keep your mouth shut. Now get out of here and get some sleep or take a shower or take a walk. Just do it away from me."

She left without a word. She hated what he said. She hated that he pulled rank like that. She hated that those people had died. She hated that he disparaged her relationship with Jean. She hated his attitude. She hated that

he controlled her completely. Mostly, she hated that he was right.

She went back to her room and did what she did best at times like this. She sulked. She knew she had to find this guy. She was more determined then ever. Bruce would never make blue because he lacked the imagination. She was going to make blue and then she would show them. She would make a difference.

Chapter 4

The flight back to France had been long and miserable. Kit was still angry and sulking and did not speak a word to Bruce that she didn't have to. They were being called back because they would not be needed for the bug hunt for at least a month and a half. There was no point in keeping them in the field. Besides, it was not at all clear that they would continue with that assignment.

Bruce's job was to field train Kit. The recent mission was ordinarily a black level assignment. Bruce was merely walking her through. He would write an assessment and then the training supervisors would determine her next mission. This would be based upon Bruce's evaluation and their own opinions regarding her deficiencies and readiness.

Kit was certain that Bruce would hammer her in his evaluation. He had been working on it since they boarded the plane. Kit had found an empty seat away from him, as much to give him privacy as anything else.

They were flying somewhere over polar ice and Kit was lost in thought. She was suddenly aware of Bruce standing in the aisle. He motioned to the empty seat next to her and she nodded. Without saying a word, he sat next to her and handed her a small computer disk. "It has your evaluation on it. You'll get to read it soon anyway. I always find it's helpful if I'm around to clarify something or answer questions. You understand that my evaluation is not open to debate."

Kit nodded her head while staring at the disk.

"Well, good. I'll go back to my seat. You can read it now if you like. If you want to talk, just give a shout."

"Thanks" she managed, as he was getting up and leaving.

She turned the disk over in her fingers three or four times. The small black piece of plastic held the key to her future and it terrified her a little bit. On Bruce's recommendation Kit could be kept in her current role, be sent back for specific retraining or be deemed unfit for fieldwork and reassigned to a research position. This is what she had feared the most. Bruce's recommendation was final. She had no appeal rights.

Kit had to admit the Bruce had balls. She wasn't sure she could write someone up while they were both on a plane and then let them read it while they had hours of flying time together left. "Well, if he is brave enough to give it to me, I can be brave enough to read it." She said to the black disk.

She pulled her computer out from under her seat and switched it on. She took deep cleansing breaths as the small machine whirred to life. She popped the disk into the side holder and loaded the file. She closed her eyes and said a silent prayer and they focused her eyes on the words:

Trainee Katherine Wells (a.k.a. Kit) has been assigned to me for six months now and I have had the opportunity to observe her performance in the field in a variety of mission duties. It is now my responsibility to assess her worthiness for fieldwork.

As stated, I have seen her in a number of situations (See appendix for mission reports) and in my opinion the Kit is a dedicated, hard working and intelligent person. She has taken the time to learn and operationalize the training manuals. She

knows all the parameters and knows how they are to be applied.

Kit is observant and has a keen attention to detail. She spots details that many experienced agents, in my opinion, would overlook. Most importantly, she knows the difference between a fact and conjecture. She knows where facts lead and makes insightful inferences. She does know, however, that these are inferences and are open to other interpretations.

She is passionate and driven. Perhaps the only fault I can find in her behavior is that her passion sometimes makes her reach beyond her grasp. This fact notwithstanding, I see no reason that she should not be assigned to field duty as soon as possible.

The report continued with specific details from the various missions to which they had been assigned. She glanced over the rest of the document and found Bruce's narrative of the events to be accurate and sterile. To say the least, Kit was shocked. Bruce had been so cool to her the whole time, it didn't occur to her that he could write such a positive report. She went and sat next to him.

"Yes, is there something you need me to clarify?"

"No, I mean yes, I mean..." Kit stopped and collected her thoughts, she wanted to say something, she just wasn't sure what. Bruce was no help at all. He just looked at her and waited.

"I mean, I wanted to say thank you and to ask why?"

"I don't understand."

He wasn't going to make this easy "You don't understand 'thank you'?"

"No, I don't understand why you would say thank you. It is my job to make an objective evaluation of your performance. That's what I've done, nothing more or less. It's my job."

"But you never seemed to approve of anything I did."

"I do you no service if I pat you on the head and tell you everything you do is wonderful. It isn't. You make mistakes, we all do. Your instincts while generally good, lead you astray at times, but you learn from your mistakes and you control your emotions. In my opinion, you have what it takes to do outstanding field work."

She stared at him a moment and realized he was still Bruce, that he would always be Bruce. She might as well thank him for the ice floating in the ocean below them as to thank him for the report. She just smiled and sat back in her chair. She enjoyed the moment until Bruce looked at her and said, "I know we are on a plane and it's unlikely that anyone would steal your computer while we are in the air, but it does have sensitive information on it. You shouldn't leave it unattended."

Kit shook her head and went and sat guard over her laptop. A flight attendant soon brought her a meal, which she enjoyed more than any meal she had in a long time.

2

Since they were flying commercial, they had to route through Paris. As usual, they breezed through customs and there was a car waiting to take them to the Estate South of Paris that housed the Committee operations center. Kit was

amazed at how her Committee cut so much red tape. Even during the Cold War, a committee I.D. could get you through any customs checkpoint on either side of the iron curtain with minimal hassle. The Committee was dedicatedly apolitical, though its headquarters were shut down during World War Two. It turns out that the Reich was enlisting the help of vampires and werewolves, though the reports Kit read indicated that it ultimately cost the Nazis much more than it gained them.

The limo pulled up to the French Chateau. It was a grand estate that was rumored to house a reclusive millionaire who ran a philanthropic organization from his home. The Committee did encourage this rumor and would make sizable donations to various French charities to keep up appearances. Kit knew that they had been under constant surveillance as the car moved towards the house.

The Committee wasn't overly concerned about security. They weren't fighting international organizations of evil or communism. Their prey was scattered all over the world. While most knew what the Committee was and where it was housed, few would dare risk an assault on the home office. The simple truth was that vampires and such just don't have the organizational wherewithal to take the Committee head on. A few had tried in the past, but with no success at all.

She showed her I.D. to a receptionist in the front lobby. The attractive and pleasant young French woman looked in her file box and handed Kit her security badge. It had Kit's picture on it. It also held her name and you could tell in a second that she was a trainee because of the clear plastic

boarder around the card. Field agents had their cards bordered with their designation. If and when Kit was promoted to black she would be issued a new card with a black boarder. Snoops and other staff used colored cards to designate which areas they worked and had access to. Ginger and Pat both had orange cards that gave them the run of the complex.

Kit took the elevator to the housing level and checked in with the dormitory supervisor. Trainees, field or otherwise, lived in dormitories. Agents were assigned private rooms commensurate with their rank. Most of the staff also lived on site with either private or semiprivate quarters. She had lost Bruce along the way, he either went to his own room, which was not close to the training dorms, or he went to check in. Kit didn't know and really didn't care. His evaluation had softened her opinion some, but she was never going to like him personally. You learned very quickly not to poke your nose into matters that didn't concern you. Kit knew her only concern as a trainee was to train. If someone wanted her to know something they would tell her.

Kit wanted nothing more than to shower and sleep, but the dorm supervisor had other plans for her. "You are wanted in room 1254 as soon as you can get there."

"God damn, don't I even get to take a shower?"

The man was silent and Kit knew there was no reason to argue with him. She parked her belongings behind the desk and ran to the meeting room. She pushed through the door and found her case supervisor, who was also the chief combat instructor sitting behind a table waiting.

"Sit." He barked after making her wait an uncomfortable second.

She quickly obeyed and her mind started racing, wondering what could be wrong. She hoped whatever it was could be fixed when Bruce filed his report.

"Your mentor has filed his report electronically, I've been waiting to give you something."

Kit relaxed and almost fainted from the fatigue and relief.

"Your badge please." She unclipped her badge and handed it to the stone-faced man. He handed her back another card, identical to the first but with a dark black border around it. Kit knew she was at the bottom of the ladder, but she was now at least on the ladder. She thought it was the prettiest thing she ever saw.

"Congratulations field agent." He was completely businesslike and Kit struggled to match his demeanor. "Here" he said and handed her three credit cards.

She took them and saw that she held a Visa, Master Card and an American Express Card. "Those are strictly audited. So make sure you can justify all your expenditures."

"Yes sir."

"Now, follow me please." He got up and moved quickly down the hall. Kit stumbled after trying in vain to clip her new badge on while they zipped down the hall. He led her to the gym and waiting for her there were seven black level agents. They all had paintbrushes and black enamel paint. Suddenly, Kit's mind flashed on the initiation. She had seen three new black level agents during her training and she knew what was going to happen.

"Oh please, this is my traveling dress, it's the only nice thing I have." She pleaded to no avail.

"Gentlemen" Her instructor addressed the seven strapping young men "try not to hurt my gym too much." He turned to leave, but winked at Kit as he did.

Kit smiled and fell into a defensive stance as the seven men began to circle her. Kit was nothing if not a good sport, but if she didn't bloody at least one of these guys she would carry a reputation as a lightweight for the rest of her career. The first one grabbed at her and she spun and crashed into the arms of the real attacker. She lashed out with an elbow and caught him in the face and he fell howling. She saw blood ooze from between his finger and she knew her honor was intact. The others pounced on her as she struggled valiantly. She managed to land one last kick to someone's stomach and he fell over groaning.

If Kit had attacked any vital joints or organs with her blows she would have been labeled a spoiled sport. The only thing worse would be to complain about being harassed. A broken nose or sore stomach was, however, fair game. These were hard men and women she worked with and they played rough.

They held her down and painted bold black stripes all over her. Kit struggled and screamed just enough to increase their enjoyment, but not to make them stop. The paint was oil based and she knew she was in for a long scrub with turpentine. Her dress was a complete loss, though she would save it as a badge of honor.

By the time they finished all of them where laughing. This included Kit and the two she struck hard. The first man's nose was puffy and swollen, but he laughed and joked nonetheless. They helped her to her feet and hugged her, getting even more paint on themselves (they had dressed for it though). Each congratulated her and told her how much they looked forward to working with her and that they had heard wonderful things about her.

Kit worked very hard not to cry at this. She could handle the abuse, but if they were going to get sappy on her, that was going too far. They told her to wash up and meet them for dinner and many drinks later. She happily agreed.

She strode through the halls with her head held high proudly displaying her new I.D. card and her black stripes. She almost bumped into a new trainee who she did not know, who stared at her with his mouth open.

"What are you looking at trainee?" she demanded.

"Nothing, ma'am." He stammered to her back as she pushed past him.

She picked up her bags and head for her locker when the supervisor stopped her.

"Where do you think you're going?" He demanded.

"I'd like to try and wash some of this off if you don't mind." She shot back.

"This is the training dorm. The agent suites are that way!" he pointed down the hall.

"Yes Sir." She would now have a private room with a parlor shared by two or three other female agents. They would also share a bathroom.

"Congratulations agent." He said as he handed her a new key. Kit was very happy.

3

"What are you going to tell her?" Ginger asked her husband.

"The truth I suppose, for all the good it will do. Who knows what David is talking about? He sure doesn't."

"Well, at least he said it's all going to work out for the best."

"Honey, this is David we're talking about. Remember, he still thinks he did his friend Wayne a favor by killing him."

They both sighed.

Chapter 5

Ed White's hands were large. His fingers were stubby and meaty. He had an iron grip and powerful arms that had served him well throughout his life, but there were times he envied those with delicate long fingers. This was one of those moments. The retaining clamp for the fuel line was hiding behind much of the car's infrastructure. It had been a simple matter to take the screw out, but he had dropped it seven times as he lay on his back installing the new fuel line. His hand was trembling as he made an eighth attempt.

He held his breath, which only made matters worse and stabbed at the small hole, the screw poised on the tip of the Philip's screwdriver. He skewered the clamp, so far so good and pushed towards the hole in the body of the car. The screw was now beyond his grasp and he hoped it would stay balanced on the tip of the screwdriver. He caught the hole and sighed as he had missed the hole by a millimeter or two. Determined, he held pressure on the screw and turned it ever so slowly, knowing it would "walk" one way or the other. He had about a twenty-percent chance of success.

The screw miraculously fell into the hole and he quickly tightened the clamp into place. He felt a euphoric rush as the tension flowed out of his large body. He squirmed out from under the Mustang and went around to the engine compartment. It was easy to connect the line to the fuel pump. Holding a paper cup half full of gasoline, Ed poured a small amount into the gaping mouth of the carburetor.

He then slid into the driver's seat and turned the key. He was again holding his breath. The engine coughed as the priming gas was burned. The engine died and he cranked a minute, then stopped. He didn't want to drain the battery. He ran around and poured a little more gas into the carburetor and repeated his attempt. On the fifth try the engine roared to life.

Ed knew it was good to let the old v-eight run for a while. It had been a few months since the car ran and it needed to have its juices flowing for a while. Ed sat in the driver's seat and relaxed. He surveyed the dash and all the work he had done over the last couple of years and was happy. He lay his head back, delighting in the soothing sounds of the purring engine.

His mind drifted, as it often did, to the whims of chance and probability. He thought about the grandfather he barely knew, Victor Weisse, who had been a seaman on a German U-boat during World War I. No more than a boy, his boat sailed within sight of Coney Island just because the Captain wanted to see America. Victor, in a moment of courage, jumped into the inky black water and swam for his life towards the lights on the shore.

He thought of how young Victor, who spoke no English, bumped into a Jewish couple who spoke Yiddish. He had managed to get them to direct him to German town, where he could find help. The man gave him fifty cents, which was Victor's stake in his new life.

He thought about Frank White, his father. Ironically drafted into World War II as an American soldier. Because he

spoke German, he was kept near the front and often translated for the brass when prisoners were taken. He recalled the story where, two weeks after the Battle of the Bulge, he had been taken on a "mopping up" assignment with his Captain. They were to drive around behind the lines and pick up hiding German soldiers and take them to the POW holding area. Frank repeating in his best German "Come out the war is over!" into the trucks PA rig.

By chance, the Captain took a wrong turn and drove across enemy lines and two hundred German soldiers came out to surrender. The Captain had no hope of transporting so many men in the truck, so left Frank and his side arm to watch over the prisoners while he went back for help. Miraculously, none of the Germans understood that Frank was alone or believed that they could overpower him. Perhaps they were just too tired of the war to care. For two hours Frank drilled them and prayed.

He thought about all the coincidences that brought Gloria into his life. He had stood in a cafeteria line the first morning in college next to Gloria's best friend. They struck up a conversation since neither of them knew anyone. They became friends and he later met, pursued and married Gloria after Joan had introduced them.

He thought about the patent on the chip he filed. It was processed two days before a similar application was made by a tinkerer in New Jersey. Though the chip was now long obsolete, it had netted Ed a sizable fortune.

He thought about the timing of a man in a bar. If he had stayed for one more or had one less; if he had stopped to piss

or said goodbye to one more friend. He thought about his family and why they had to be at that intersection at that precise moment. How many millions of things could have sped them up or slowed them down. He thought of all the millions of unlikely things that had brought him to this moment in space and time. The grandson of a penniless illegal alien, now rich beyond imagination and alone beyond despair. He thought about all these things while that engine whispered it's sweet song in his ear.

2

Ed washed his hands and picked up the phone and punched a button. He had the Mustang parts store in California on his speed dial. The man answered and Ed said hello. They chatted for a moment. They knew Ed well at this store. He told the man what he needed. Now that the fuel system was up and working again, he needed the new master cylinder for the brakes. The man asked if he was planing on making the show in Arizona next month and Ed said he was going to try, if the brake job went smoothly. They both laughed because they each knew that it wouldn't.

With that chore out of the way, Ed settled in behind his computer system. The system was state of the art. He had made a lot of money for DynoComps and they always kept him upgraded. He had a fiber connection to his home so he automatically logged onto the internet whenever he switched the system on. He opened his e-mail and had about one hundred and fifty new messages waiting for him. He scrolled through the list, ignoring most of them until his eyes landed

on an e-mail from Kit. His eyes lit up and he opened the letter:

Lord-Sage:

I have good news to report. The promotion I've been telling you about has finally come through. I am now through my training phase and will be a caseworker. I am so happy. We had a party last night and I got soooo drunk. My head feels like a truck driver's arm pit right now (hehehehe).

I desperately need coffee right now.

I think I will have some free time for a little while before I am reassigned to a new project. I am so happy! :)

I hope we can spend some time on-line soon. I am sorry that I have not been able to see you much lately.

Hugs and kisses!

Love, Sub-flame

Ed had never actually met Kit, but they had been spending time together on-line over the last two years. They had formed a close friendship, though neither pushed the relationship towards a commitment. He liked Kit very much and enjoyed her wit and intelligence. He had no clue about her work and when she deflected his third attempt to find out, he gave up asking. It didn't really matter after all anyway.

Ed was known to the on-line D/s community as Lord-Sage. He was a Dominant and hoped someday to find a submissive woman who would come live with him. He knew, however, that he was not ready to share his physical life with another person again, so he did his romancing on-line. He wondered if he ever would be ready.

His life had moved into an easy rhythm. He couldn't say that he was really happy, but at least he wasn't sad anymore. He hadn't taken the nine-millimeter out of its drawer in almost a year. The Mustang and his chat friends had given him a focus. The 641/2 Mustang gave him clearly definable problems that he could solve and control. His chat friends gave him human contact that he could pull away from when things got too chaotic. He knew it was life with training wheels, but it was life nonetheless.

He typed a short note back to Kit and smiled. He logged into the chat service and navigated into the Bondage Chateau as Lord-Sage. He greeted his friends and spent the afternoon playing and gossiping with his friends. He enjoyed these people and loved them like family. They were smart and well mannered. They listened to him when he needed it. Most of them had also suffered deep and cruel wounds, so none of them put any pressure on him to "get over it".

3

Kit was enjoying her down time. As a new agent, she had to spend a couple of months in the home office getting specific training. She now had a predictable schedule and spent some on-line time with her chat friends that she had neglected for the last few months. Among her friends was Lord-Sage. As with many of her friends, she got to know Sage by his real life name Ed. She liked Ed very much, he was gentle and sad. He never encouraged romantic feelings in anyone, but was playful and polite. For these reasons, he had been at the top of the "Most Sought after Dom's" list that the submissives kept.

Kit had just logged off her terminal when her computer announced she had an e-mail. She opened the program and saw it was from Jean. Jean always sent her e-mails when he had work things he wanted to talk about. She smiled because she was going to have dinner with him and Ginger tonight, but she knew the logic of not discussing work in their private times. The note just told her to set an appointment to see him asap.

Kit picked up the phone and talked to Jean's secretary. The Committee's personnel came from the four corners of the globe. She supposed that three hundred years ago the common language was French, but today it was English. Jean's secretary was Parisian and though she spoke perfect English (and seven other languages not her own) she always loved it that Kit spoke to her in French, even if Kit had that terrible Canadian accent. Kit set the appointment and wondered idly what Jean wanted to talk about. She knew she wouldn't find out tonight, she'd have to wait until tomorrow.

Chapter 6

James was cursed. He had been cursed with a blinding ambition. All his life he had felt he was better than the people around him. As a child, he firmly believed that he was adopted by his working-class parents. His father was a towering powerful steelworker, born in Poland and emigrated to America to seek his fortune. He found, instead, a scab job in a thriving steel mill in Gary, Indiana. He had believed he was wealthy beyond his dreams. James knew better.

James did not inherit any of his father's strength. He took after his mother. He was small and weak. He had a quick and insightful mind, but was the continual victim of the other "Pollock" boys in his neighborhood. He did not live in a world that valued intelligence or dreams. James continued to dream nonetheless.

James would look at the cars that the bosses drove and dream of a better life. He took the El to the fancy north-side neighborhoods and looked up at the fancy walk up's and brownstones and dreamed of a better life. He prowled the libraries and colleges and read stories of the many self-made men in America and he dreamed of a better life.

As a boy, he would talk of his dreams to his parents and his few friends. These would earn him scorn and later beatings from his father and his friends. He learned to keep his dreams to himself. He also learned to hate those around him. The bosses didn't have rippling muscles and leather skin. The bosses didn't have the blank stare of a man who had learned to never hope for more than he had. The bosses

didn't suffer beatings and derision for dreaming and hoping. His father called the bosses "Sir".

James worked hard and earned a scholarship to an Indiana Public college. He had wanted one to the University of Chicago, but his grades weren't quite good enough. He pledged a fraternity, but not the one he wanted. He just wasn't quite good enough. He graduated with honors, but not high honors. Every success was accompanied with a failure.

What followed was a string of jobs that were almost good enough. It seemed no matter how hard he worked, how smart he was, he was always playing to some affable pretty boy. He always answered to men who weren't half as smart, but had superior social skills. James learned to hate these men as he hated those he had left behind in Gary.

James nurtured his hatred. It became his constant companion. It hardened him more than his father's beating ever could. James had always been cool, but now he was cold. He was critical and used his subordinates without mercy. Still, he dreamed of the big cars and the fancy houses. Whatever he had was never enough. James was cursed.

Then, one day, James became damned. He had been an easy mark for the demon, though he didn't know him to be a demon at the time. He appeared to be just another lonely salesman in the hotel bar, a man who learned to nurse a buzz and strike up conversations with complete strangers, a man who measured his life in margins and sales.

The conversations had drifted through many topics as it always had. James didn't know it, but the man guided the discussion through James' tormented youth, making him

revisit one failure after another, then onto his career, his ability to do OK, but never breakthrough and succeed. The man egged James on and James' anger grew. It grew to rage. Then it grew to white hot hatred. The man smiled and said, "Would you like it to be different? Would you like the power?"

"God Damn straight, I'd like the power. I'd give my fucking soul to show those shit eating grinning pretty boys a thing or two."

The man just smiled and said "Good answer."

What followed was a dizzying blur of activities. A ritual needed to be performed, a ritual that required blood. A local working girl seemed a useful enough object. They took her to a place that the man knew. By the time she realized where she was going it was too late, she was in their power.

They had her in an isolated room, in a lonely part of the faceless town. She was quickly stripped and bound. The man had sodomized the woman and required James to do the same. James did so, with no particular concern for what he was doing. He didn't enjoy the act. He was too concerned about her cleanliness.

Then James was directed to inflict wounds upon the woman. He obeyed. Then he was told to open the veins in her arms and let her blood flow, drawing her life slowly out of her body. The man began to ask him question.

"Do you want power over your enemies?"

"Yes."

"Do you want to walk the nights, leaving fear in your wake?"

"Yes."

"Will you serve my Master and bring destruction upon the weak and undeserving?"

"Yes."

"Do you offer you soul as payment for the power you will receive?"

"Yes."

With that, the man held a brass chalice under the flow of blood pouring from the dying whore. He held the cup up to James. James knew what he was to do.

James held the cup to his lips, but hesitated. It was not the thought of drinking blood, rather drinking her blood. Who knew what drug or disease coursed through the body of the wretched creature? The man's eyes glowed red and James drank more out of fear than anything else. The woman died as the last drop of blood flowed down James' throat. He could feel it.

James looked into the eyes of the man and began to feel dizzy. His head spun and felt lighter and lighter. He heard the man laugh as his consciousness left him. James didn't know it at the time, but he too, died that night.

James slept the sleep of death for some amount of time. It might have been hours, it might have been days. He didn't know. He woke and his mind was clear and only knew a driving hunger. He had tasted blood and he needed more. The man was gone, but the rotting corpse of the prostitute was where he had left it. She had been drained of her blood and was no good to him now.

James instinctively knew what to do. He hunted and killed. He survived and learned about his powers. He grew and

learned what he was, a vampire. He learned of others like him. He learned how to survive.

He used his new powers to visit death upon those that had wronged him. His parents were long dead and he regretted that they had eluded his vengeance. He found some of the bullies that had tormented him in his youth and taught them the true meaning of power as their fat bodies yielded up their life's blood to him.

He visited his old bosses and managers; all the pretty boys who had stood in his way, all the men who had thwarted his dreams. He taught them the folly of their actions. He always knew he would make them pay and savored it as they did.

He spent years, moving through the endless night bringing death upon those who had wronged him; those who had denied him, those who had slighted him. James was now the power, but James was cursed.

As always, his reach again outdistanced his grasp. He became bored with the affairs of men and turned his attention to the affairs of the undead. He found once more that there were those who stood over him, those who had power over him, those who hunted him and made him hide in the shadows. That was about to change.

James looked at his two bugs. His new acquisition was going to work out fine. He was strong and full of hate and rage. He had little native intelligence and also blamed everyone else for his lack of prosperity. It was an easy thing for James to strip away all his cognitive abilities and make him the perfect, deadly, servant that he needed.

James was cursed. Though he had devised a good plan to accomplish his ends, he was growing restless and impatient. As with so many of his failures, he could not allow his plans to unfold, he wanted results. He thought of ways to hurry the plans he had made.

James was cursed and it was a curse that spread death in its wake.

Chapter 7

Kit lay the black pistol on the tray in front of her. Before she had met Jean, she had never even touched a gun. Now it seemed like she was constantly armed. She had used a shotgun while under attack from a werewolf in Destin, Florida. She had put a load of silver into its shoulder that incapacitated it, leading to its surrender. Since that time she had been trained in the use of firearms by her instructors.

Now that she was an agent, she was allowed to pick out her own weapon and have it set aside for her own use. It would, however be housed in the Committee's lock down when she was home. She still had to check it out to fire it at the range.

She had pondered her decision for some time. To an untrained eye, the row of ten millimeter double action semiautomatics looked identical. Each, however, had its own action and its own feel. It may have seemed silly, but agents would sometimes spend hours narrowing down their decisions. The United States Marines had a saying "This is my weapon. There are many others just like it, but this one is mine."

Kit cradled the gun like a precious lover. A ten millimeter was an odd weapon. It was larger than the more popular nine millimeter and had a vicious kick. It was ideally suited for the Committee's purposes. When loaded with a hollow point or mercury bullet, the "Ten" had tremendous stopping power, meaning that the bullet transferred a large amount of energy to its target when it hit. When you shot a vampire, you didn't

care whether you hit a vital organ, those would heal quickly. You literally wanted to tear large pieces of the monster away.

A vampire can regenerate any part of its anatomy, but it takes longer to regrow a leg than to mend a pierced organ or two. You just wanted to knock the monster down and keep it down until you got it into sunlight. Sunlight reverted the vampire to its natural condition, which was death. Older vampire would turn to dust instantly, the younger ones might just decompose before your eyes. It wasn't a pleasant sight.

Neither was the vision of the burned bodies in that biker bar. Kit wished that the fire had reduced the victims to ash, but fire doesn't do that. All morticians know bones are hard and don't really burn. These have to be ground up and mixed in with the ashes of those who are cremated. In fact, it is the ground bone that makes up the majority of the remains. She could not purge the memory of the black and twisted skeletons with charred flesh stretched across their skulls in a hideous death mask.

Kit thought about all this as she stripped and reassembled her weapon over and over again. The image of the woman who had been torn in two, probably from a shotgun blast, would stay with Kit for the rest of her life. It made her more determined than ever to refine her skills as a hunter.

That she had been so close to the monster and allowed the attack to take place anyway gnawed at her. She admitted that Bruce was right, that they just would have added to the body count if they went in there. It still made her feel impotent and weak. She would never feel that way again.

She slid the clip easily into the handle of the pistol and snapped the slide release with her thumb. All the while, she was raising the weapon in a line with her eye. The moment it was level she squeezed off six shots in a fluid staccato. Three shots tore through the neck and head of the silhouette and the other three caught it squarely in the groin. She was pleased. Those were all considered stopping shots.

She then aimed the gun carefully and squeezed off the remaining nine rounds into other vital areas to the target. The kick and the noise helped her forget, for a moment, her anguish. It was a perfect moment of being.

"You wanted me to tell you when it was 5:15." A voice rung in her head phones. The hearing protection had speakers so that the Range Master or instructor could easily talk to someone on the firing line.

She turned and waved to the man in the booth, then she quickly gathered up her belongings and headed for the door. She went to the desk and returned the pistol, unused ammunition, her eye and hearing protection. "Thanks Jack. Hope I see you tomorrow."

"Me too Kit. By the way, you got one hell of a weapon there. Don't tell anyone because when they're this good, I'm suppose to set them aside for the blues."

"No worries Jack." Kit knew Jack had not overlooked the pistol, he had purposely left it in the rack for her to find. He was right. It was far and away the best of the lot. Jack had been a good instructor and he liked Kit's attention to detail. Kit smiled to herself and headed for the shower.

She still had the smell of sulfur on her body when she entered the shower, so she turned the water on as hot as she could stand it. She let the steaming water pour over her slim and muscular body and scrubbed hard with the pumice soap. It felt good, very good indeed, to scrub and burn away her outer shell.

Stepping into the now cold room, she shivered and wrapped a soft towel around herself and hugged it to her body like a lover. She cuddled the towel like a child might cuddle a blanket. Kit felt better and more feminine than she had in a very long time, certainly since her last trip to America. She hoped dinner would be short, she knew it would be good since Ginger was cooking. She wanted to get to her computer. It was a long way from a flesh and blood lover, but it was better than nothing.

2

Ginger had turned into something of a culinary maniac since she arrived in France. She had always been a good cook, but she became obsessed with it. Kit was never sure if it was that Ginger had her husband/Master to cook for now or if it was just living in France among the greatest chefs in the world. At a moment like this it didn't matter. The food was exquisite and the presentation even better.

The purpose of the dinner was to celebrate Kit's promotion. She had partied with her fellow agents last night and tonight belonged to her friends. Jean and Ginger hosted and Pat and Julie were in attendance as well. The fact that Kit made a fifth unattached member of the party somewhat diminished her enjoyment of the evening.

Kit could not put her finger on it, but there was a subtle but very real tension in the air. At first she thought it might be coming from Julie. For reasons of her own, Julie often felt like the fifth wheel in the crowd. She was Pat's wife and was jealous enough of his close giggling friendship with Ginger for Kit to notice. She didn't doubt her husband's love or question his fidelity, but just envied him the closeness he felt for Ginger.

Julie was having the hardest time of anyone adjusting to her new life in France. Though her father was a world renown psychologist, she had never traveled very far from Bloomington, Indiana. She experienced a great deal of culture shock. She also was the only one who didn't work for the Committee and she lived with Pat in a small house on the grounds. Pat worked long and erratic hours and Julie would be left alone with nothing to do.

Julie was, however, very fond of Kit. Kit had saved her and Pat's life. She would never forget that. She tried to visit with Kit whenever she could and would call and ask her advice about a variety of things. In many ways, Julie was becoming the friend that Ginger was before she married Jean. Kit liked Julie very much and regretted that she didn't have more time for her new friend.

But the source of the tension was not Julie. In fact, she was the most relaxed of the other three. Kit's training had included extensive education in nonverbal signals and elementary psychic discipline. She was getting good at picking up vibes and this one was coming from Jean and to a

lesser extent Pat and Ginger. Kit could do nothing and let the evening play out.

As dinner wound down, Jean stood and raised his wineglass. He looked over the table to make sure everyone else had wine in their glass, as well.

"Well we all know why we are here. Kit, I remember when I received my first agent's badge. I know how proud you feel." He smiled his best smile at her and Kit melted just a little. Jean was handsome beyond reason and could make most women swoon when he added his native charm.

"I know it's been hard on you," he continued "because of your history with me and what you went through to get here. Though I have been strictly hands off with your instructors, they have all now told me you are among the best students they ever had. Kit, congratulations."

He raised his glass and all at the table stared saying "hear, hear" and clinking their glasses together.

It was Kit's turn. She stood and Jean returned to his seat, "Wow, this has all been so great. All I want to say is that as tough as it's been, I could have taken more knowing I have the love of such wonderful people to support me." Her eyes moved over the others.

"Ginger, God! How long has it been? You are the best kid and I'll always love you. Jean, I know it's been hard for you to stay out of my training, but thank you, and thank you for making my pet, Ginger, so deliriously happy. Pat, you have shown me what a friend can be, you are reliable and stable. You put yourself on the line for your friends more than once. I'm proud to know you. Julie, what can I say. You're my new

best little sister." She glanced over to Ginger for a microsecond to see if there was any jealousy for that remark. There wasn't.

"You're funny and warm and you've been there to pick me up when everyone, including the boss, was knocking me down. I love you. I love you all."

There was about five minutes of hugs and tears after Kit's speech. Afterwards Julie asked if she could say something. "Kit, I'm not trying to steel your thunder. This is your night. I was going to wait, but I can't hold it in any more. I just wanted to tell you guys that I got a job!" Pat had obviously known, because he smiled proudly at his wife, but showed no surprise.

Everyone else started congratulating her and asking her about it. "Well, I've been taking these walks during the day. The countryside is really beautiful, you should really get our more. Anyway, there's this little art store that shows stuff from the local talent. It gets a lot of tourist trade. I was stopping in and getting to know the woman who runs it. I'm helping her with her English and she with my French. Well, she needs someone to sell to the Americans and the Brits who come through." She cocked her head in a very American gesture of finality.

The chorus of best wishes rose again. "Enough, enough." She said "This is Kit's night."

"It's our night Julie." Kit corrected her "It's all our night." Just then the phone rang.

All eyes turned to Jean. Only an important call would be allowed to disturb the party. Important calls are never good news. They all stopped and watched Jean answer the call.

He said little and betrayed less. He thanked the caller and then turned to his guests. "That was the hospital, Rene has had a stroke. He may not live through to tomorrow."

No one in the room knew Rene except Jean, but they all knew how much he loved his old boss. All the women rose to console and hug him. "It will be all right. Rene was old and lived a full life. How many men can say they have fought Nazis and vampires in one life time." He raised his glass again and they all drank a silent toast to their fallen comrade.

"I need to go to the hospital. I may be there for a while. Kit, I need to talk to you before I go." She followed him to his study.

"I was going to wait until tomorrow, but David has had a premonition."

Kit listened in silence. She now knew why there was tension in the room.

"There isn't much, but he talks about your attack. Not your rape you understand, this is different. He talks like it already happened, but you know how he is about time." She nodded slightly.

"Well anyway. I wasn't even sure if I should tell you. Who knows when and if any of this is going to happen, but I thought you should know. The other thing is that he also keeps saying how everything is all right now. So he also says there's a happy resolution to it. But..."

"But that's what he says about his friend Wayne too, I know."

"Anyway, I think you and Pat should go see David tomorrow. Maybe you can get some more out of him."

"I understand Jean. And Jean, I'm sorry about Rene."

The two shared a moment the others could not understand. Only Kit could understand how deeply Jean felt for his former boss.

Chapter 8

Kit sat in her room and watched her computer come to life. The news about Rene had put everyone in a melancholy mood. She hoped that a few hours in chat might pick her up. Before she joined the Committee, Kit had been a regular in the chat rooms. Since that time, her appearances have been sporadic at best. At first, her friends showed concern over her sudden absences, especially since it followed so closely on the heels of her friend Debbie's murder.

Kit had assured everyone that she was just fine. She told them that she was training for a new job that kept her busy. Everyone had accepted her explanation with little or no questions. The chat community has a very short attention span and they were all on to a new crisis quickly. Now Kit was treated like a long lost friend when she came into the rooms.

She had begun to use the rooms as an outlet. It became an escape from the rigors of her training. Though she excelled in her work and loved it dearly, she was feeling that she was losing something. In a way, she didn't even feel Canadian anymore. She didn't feel like she belonged to any country anymore. The chat rooms gave her a community that wasn't at a constant state of war and readiness.

In her past life, she would either go in as a dominant or a submissive. She occasionally entered that way, but she usually went in as "Feline" which was a neutral designation. It lacked the Lord, Master, Mistress or Lady title of a Dom/me. It also didn't have the "Sub" prefix of a submissive. She was now what was called a "room friend". This was someone who

would come in and play with everyone but was not interested in meeting someone for a serious D/s relationship.

—Feline—Enters the room and waves to all her W/worthy friends.

—Sub-kitten—Grins and waves to her best friend from Master of Joy's lap.

—Mistress of Life—Huggles her best friend—Master of Joy—Nods to his sister

On and on it went for a few minutes. It was early evening in America and the room was packed with regulars. Kit smiled as she read the warm messages of welcome. She could feel their hugs and their kisses. What most people find astounding about chat is that most chatters actually "feel" the action as it happens. Most submissive chatters will tell you that they actually "feel" it when they are spanked or flogged by their Dom/mes.

After everyone got though greeting Kit, they settled back into the discussion of the moment. In this case it revolved around one of the submissives. She had claimed that she was dragged off to another chat room against her will and abused sexually by the people who took her. The submissive was playing it for all it was worth and everyone else in the room was eating it up with a spoon. This was a very common story and Kit always rolled her eyes when she heard it.

It was physically impossible to take anyone to a room that they didn't want to go to. Moreover, it was impossible to keep someone in a room that they didn't want to be in. Though she believed that you could feel the action if you turned your mind over to it, she also believed you could also suspend your

belief if you needed to. It was her firm belief that these stories were used to rile people up and gain attention. Well, it was part of the game so Kit just sat back and watched the messages scroll down her screen.

She had to admit that this particular subbie was a good storyteller. She told a dreadful tale of being kidnapped and held, of being bound and gagged, held against her will for weeks. She described in graphic and minute detail how she had been sexually violated. Kit had never liked historical romance novels but could imagine the girl in question reading from some book called "The Pirates Slave of Passion."

She then talked about how she had found the courage to run away. She was now pleading with the "Masters" in the room to protect her. She was certain that her captors were going to come looking for her and extract a terrible revenge. Despite her skepticism, Kit was getting a little turned on by the girl's story. She wondered if the library had any books about pirates and their wenches, especially if they had beefy guys with long flowing hair on the cover.

Many of the Dom/me in the room were pledging their support. Most of the subs were hugging and offering sympathy to the poor young girl. Cyber space was, after all, a place where these people had come to act out sexual fantasies in a relatively safe environment.

She kept an eye on the chatters list to see who was coming in and out of the room. She had sent a few private messages to some of her friends already. She had not wanted to spoil the girl's story, and a private message (called a PM) could only be read by the recipient and not the open room.

Her friends shared her skepticism and they traded sarcastic remarks back and forth. When her friend Lord-Sage entered the room, she immediately PM'ed him and pleaded him to take her away to a private room.

With Lord-Sage, she knew that the trip would not be for cyber-sex. He didn't do that. They would, however, have an interesting conversation. He was as intelligent a person as she had ever met. She enjoyed him very much. She would also cyber (engage in cyber-sex) his tonsils out given half a chance. He agreed and they met in a private room.

—Lord-Sage—Hugs and kisses Feline—Feline—Hugs and kisses Sage—Lord-Sage—So how have you been, I have missed you very much.

—Feline—Just wonderful. Tired, been working hard lately.

—Lord-Sage—Think you got it bad? You should try being retired sometime.

—Feline—You poor thing.—pokes you ~

—Lord-Sage—LOL (laughs out loud)

—Feline—LOL—Feline—Hey, but I got that promotion I've been telling you about.

—Lord-Sage—That's wonderful love. I'm so happy for you. Don't suppose you're ready to tell me where you work?

—Feline—No, sorry.

—Lord-Sage—That's all right, I know how strict the KGB can be about security. LOL

—Feline—Don't YOU start!

—Lord-Sage—Excuse me?

—Feline—Oh, never mind. Long boring story.

They talked and teased for a long time. They shared stupid jokes. They gossiped about their chat friends (though Sage knew more than she did). They shared information about their personal lives and interests. Sage discussed, at length, the condition of his Mustang.

There was a lag in the conversation and Kit wondered if it was time to log off.

—Lord-Sage—Kit?

—Feline—Yes Ed?

—Lord-Sage—There is something I've been wanting to tell you for some time now—Feline—~Listens~.

—Lord-Sage—It's just ... just ... well, thank you.

—Feline—For what?

—Lord-Sage—For being my friend, for being there when I needed someone to hold onto. For listening.

—Feline—I don't understand.

—Lord-Sage—It's just sometimes knowing that someone is out there caring about you is all that holds you to the world. Thank you.

—Feline—I'm not sure I understand you Ed.

—Lord-Sage—I hope you don't Kit, I really hope you don't

They hugged and said good night. Kit stared at the empty screen for a time reflecting on the last two days. It had been quite a ride. She wondered where it would all lead.

2

Jean had waited outside the Intensive Care Unit until he was called by the nurse. She looked at him coolly and said, "Your friend is not well. He comes in and out. The damage is

extensive and he is very old. We are trying what we can, but his comfort is most important now."

"I understand." Jean said somberly.

"The physicians are through for now. You can sit with him if you like. If he wakes and wants to talk, it is best if you mostly listen."

"Yes."

She led him to Rene's bedside and Jean sat and took Rene's hand in his own and squeezed it lightly. He marveled at how delicate and fragile it had become. He imagined that if he held it up to a light he would be able to see right through it. He could not believe this was the young and vibrant man who had been his boss not two years ago.

He looked at Rene's face and remembered the stories of the war. How Rene had been in the resistance. Unlike so many who considered being rude a resistance to the Nazis, Rene had fought, killed and seen many friends die in his struggle. It was then that he had learned about vampires and the Committee. It was then that he set the course of his life that was now ending in this bed. Jean cried silent tears as he watched his friend's life slip away by small measures.

Shortly, he felt a small squeeze on his hand and he looked up at his old friend.

"My friend, I'm glad you are here. I have no one else. Thank you."

"It is my honor my old friend. Now please be quiet, all will be well."

"Yes it will Jean, yes it will." Jean was amazed that Rene's eyes were as blue and bright as they had ever been.

"I am proud of you Jean. If I had a son, I would hope he would be half the man you are. I have only one thing more to offer you."

Jean listened.

"I should have said this sooner but even an old fool like me believes I will live forever, but you must remember what the war is about Jean. It's not about the Committee, it's about good and evil. Never forget that. Promise me."

"I promise you Rene, but I'm not sure I understand."

"You will my friend, you will."

There was a short silence.

"You know, I'm glad you got yourself married. She's a fine woman. You are smarter than me."

"Oh no my friend." But Rene had slipped back into unconsciousness.

Jean continued holding his hand as the heart monitor softly beeped in the background. He held the old man's hand and laid his head down on the bed and waited. His mind drifted in a timeless fog until he was brought back to consciousness as the beeping had been replaced by a soft but insistent hum. He swore the man's hand had grown slightly colder.

A nurse came in and then left quickly, returning a short time later with a woman who appeared to be a physician. The nurse guided Jean away from the bed as he watched the other woman checking various vital signs. There was no insistence or panic in her actions. Jean noticed that her actions were slow and deliberate. Finally, she turned to Jean and said, "Your father is dead. I'm sorry."

Jean almost corrected her, but knew she may have been right about Rene being his father. "Thank you Doctor, I know he has earned his rest and that he will have it."

The physician smiled weakly and seemed to disappear when he blinked his eyes. Certainly she had many other patients to attend to.

He turned to the nurse and said "May I?" Nodding towards Rene.

"Of course. I will be back shortly to take care of him." Then she too vanished.

Jean leaned over the body of his friend and kissed his forehead. "Go with God my friend, Go with God." He was gone when the nurse returned.

3

Kit was nervous as she and Pat worked their way down to David's rooms. Like most others, she was very uncomfortable around David, but did her best to see him when she could. David had almost killed her twice and it was hard to forget that. He had also been a very close and dear friend when they knew each other only in cyber-space. She had, in fact, cybered with David many times.

But there was something else. David now had this way of looking inside you now that was very creepy. It was like he knew more about you than you knew about yourself. He could call up your deepest insecurities. He could make you relive your most terrible memories. He could evoke your greatest joys. She was an open book to the man and evidentially he had been skipping ahead.

"Morning, David. Look who I brought." Pat had said when David opened the door.

David looked quizzically at Kit. For a moment she believed he truly didn't recognize her. Then a flash of recognition crossed his face and he smiled broadly.

"You brought me the old Kit."

"The old Kit?" Pat reflected.

"You know, Kit how she used to be. How fun." David was grinning broadly.

"How is Kit now?" Pat inquired.

"You know, new and improved. I told you that already."

David looked at Kit, "I'm so sorry. It was quite a shock, I'm sure you'll agree."

Then he laughed "Oh I forgot, you don't know do you?"

She couldn't tell if David were being coy or really couldn't form his thoughts any better.

"What's going to happen?" Kit asked directly.

"Going to happen?" David turned the idea over in his mind "Oh, you mean from your perspective. You know time is just a matter of which direction you look. If you're looking back then the future is behind you. Of course, if you look sideways then the future and past all happen at the same time. It's really quite exhilarating."

"David!" Kit yelled, "Stop this and tell me what's going to happen."

David looked at her and said "You don't have to yell, it all worked out just fine. Or maybe it's all working out just fine. Hard to keep those straight sometimes."

Kit was getting furious. She had prepared herself for this, but David's sanity was questionable at best. "David! Please?"

"Please? No, thank you. Thank you for you will be so glorious. It's hard for me to see you now, so dull and weak like this."

Kit's inner voice told her that David would never tell her more. She had learned a lot of discipline lately and she used every bit of it now. "Pat, if you don't mind, I'll leave you two alone. David, it has been a pleasure as always." She lied.

"Oh no, it isn't" David said cutting through her artifice whenever she used it. "No it isn't, but it will be. Yes it will. Quite a pleasure indeed."

Kit left quietly and then stalked her way to the firing range.

"I need ammo, lots and lots of ammo." She told the range master.

Chapter 9

Kit had had a vague notion that vampire hunting would be glamorous. When she was traveling under Jean's protection, they had flown in private jets and lived in luxury hotels. Jean's apartment was in an upscale high rise in Atlanta. There was a gym and all services were included, including meals. Jean would pick up a phone and things would be ready for him as he needed. Kit had since learned that she was living in Jean's world and Jean was a blue level agent.

Kit was now a black level agent. While she was proud and happy to have made it as far as she had, the contrast was remarkable. She traveled, but she flew commercial and coach class at that. She was going to learn to hate peanuts she was sure. She stood in lines to rent economy cars that she and her new partner would need. She would stay in comfortable, but hardly luxurious motels. She had no one to call on the phone for arrangements. She was the one who got called to arrange things. The last two months had been spent running errands for higher level agents. Getting their cars, talking to local authorities to make sure that they would access to things they needed. If one more fat policeman called her "Honey," she was going to scream.

If her earlier gopher jobs hadn't taken the shine off her promotion, she knew this one certainly would. They were anticipating another bug attack in the next few days and black teams had been scouring Oklahoma staking out biker bars. One of the snoops picked up some intelligence indicating that the next attack would happen in Oklahoma. Kit

was sure that some gypsy had spotted the bugs in the area and had dropped an e-mail to one of the snoops.

Pat had told her that he would get two or three gypsy notes a week. Part of his job was to cross-reference the message and try and determine its authenticity. One thing that Pat always did was to try and retrace to message to its sender. The rule of thumb was: "If you can trace it back, its phony." Gypsies were too smart to send a traceable message. Pat had told her that you could, however, get a triangulation on the sender, maybe find an area that it came from. Evidentially this message had been verified.

Kit and her partner Alex now had the job of getting the lay outs of biker bars in southwestern Oklahoma. This was the seventeenth bar they had been in since their assignment began. They were all basically the same. They were dirty and cheep. The bars were small and run down. The selection of drinks was limited and the owner/bartender was big and tough. There would be gang trophies on the walls, junk they had picked up on their conquests and travels. One bar displayed the grille from a '57 Chevy Bel Air. Kit didn't even want to know the story behind that. There was always a pool table and pinball machines.

Kit had had some experience with Biker bars. Bikers didn't recognize the border between Canada and the Untied States. They had there own territories and patterns of migration. She had known a few bikers when she lived in Canada and had been taken to their bars a few times. There was a difference between a biker bar and a biker clubhouse.

The clubhouses were private and owned by the gang that used it. Bars were public and often frequented by members of different gangs at the same time. A nomadic biker might be taken in by another gang and be allowed to ride with them, drink with them and party with them, but he would have to take of his colors and join the gang to be brought to a private club. This, however, was a bar and open to all.

It was Kit and Alex's job to get the specific layout of the establishment. If agents had to hit the building, they needed to know all the ways in and all the ways out. They needed to know where the bar was located, the bar rooms. They needed everything.

Kit and Alex looked right at home. They were both dressed casually, jeans and pullovers. They carried themselves easy and did their best to fit in. Kit had once asked Bruce why they only had assignments in the US and Canada, why they never went to Greece or China. Bruce had told her when she could blend into the countryside in a small Chinese village, then she would get an assignment there. It made sense.

She had not come in with Alex. She had in fact, come in twenty minutes before him. It was 10:00 p.m., and the place was hopping. The tourists and wannabes were out in force. There was a band and a small dance floor. The business was brisk, mostly pitchers of beer. These were times when strangers were at least tolerated by the gang members. Unless you had a serious death wish, you stayed out in the afternoon or after "closing". But normal bar hours were OK, as long as you respected the gang's area, usually the pool tables.

It was also suicidal to start any trouble in a place like this. The bikers considered it their home and would dispatch anyone who raised a fuss, started a fight or anything else that might bring the police. They were the law and everyone obeyed.

Kit had found a stool at the bar and struck up a conversation with a couple of local women who were slumming. They had heard about this place from a friend and went in on a dare. Kit thought they were smart to come together. They were enjoying themselves, the band wasn't too bad and a couple of the other tourists (nonbikers) had asked them to dance. They didn't know the difference and were giggly that they had actually danced with bikers. Kit didn't want to burst their bubble and tell them that they had probably been dancing with accountants or salesmen who were also in on a dare. They would go home and tell their friends how they had danced with biker chicks.

Alex had moved through the room and gotten an invite to join a party. He sat with the young men and women and talked happily with them. All the time he and Kit were getting a feel for the place and assessing the escape routes, the arrangements of the tables, places you could hide, places you could be ambushed. They had been there about an hour and they would both soon leave.

Kit had been nursing a beer since she arrived. She had to drink, but she knew better than to drink too much. Even if this was a recon job, it was still an assignment. She drained the beer and set the glass on the bar. She was about to tell

her friends that it was time to go when she felt a hand on her shoulder.

"Like to buy you a drink." She heard the man say from behind.

"No thanks" she said turning towards the man, brushing his hand from her shoulder. It was a very strong hand.

"I said I'd like to buy you a drink and then you're going to come over and sit with me and my friends."

Kit looked at the man and cringed inside. He was big and strong. Though he had an impressive belly, there was nothing soft about him. He was over 6'4" and weighed at least 300 pounds. His hands looked like sledgehammers with fingers. Worst of all he was flying his colors. He was a gang member.

"Sorry, I just noticed how late it was. My husband will start worrying about me. Don't want to get busted you know. Maybe when I come back."

The man leaned in and he reeked of beer "I wasn't asking bitch! Now, you're gonna come over there and drink with me and my friends. We're going to have a friendly little party and maybe we'll make you forget your husband. We can show you what a man really is."

She tried one more time "Please, my husband will kill me, I'm already late." She knew pleading with him would only make matters worse. Out of the corner of her eye she saw Alex move clear of his present company. If things got too rough, he would intervene, but neither of them wanted that.

"Goddamn it, you whores come in here every Saturday night and look at us like it's a fuck zoo. Well I don't see any bars here, do you? So you want to know what we're like, well

I'm gonna give you the whole show, then you'll really have a story to tell your friends."

He grabbed her arm and squeezed hard. Kit was already twisting her shoulder to break his grip. His arms were strong and large and there was no point in attempting anything resembling finesse with this monster. She might have subdued a small man, but this Goliath was going to be a challenge. She swung her arm away from his grip and then quickly reversed the arc driving the point of her elbow into his solar plexus. He exhaled strongly and his eyes glazed just a little.

Kit then brought the heel of her over hand up under his chin and hit him with all her might. Her hand stung from the contact and the crowd, which had stopped whatever it was doing and was now watching the show, let out an audible gasp. Kit waited a moment and prayed. She knew Alex had his hand on his gun and would bring it out any second now. This was going to get real ugly real fast.

To her surprise and relief the man's eyes rolled back into his head and he fell like a tree with a very loud crash. Kit knew the trouble wasn't over. Gangs took their strength from numbers and they always back each other up. Kit knew that if she were a man, the others would already be on her. She didn't know how they would react to a woman decking their buddy. She shot a look over to the pool table area.

To her relief they were already howling in delight at their friend's misfortune. One of them put his hand to his mouth for emphasis and yelled "Goddamn wench, ain't never seen anyone who could put Mongo on his ass like that. You come

back anytime and I'll show you a time. Hey maybe we should sign the bitch up?" His friends were roaring in laughter and Kit knew a good time to leave when she saw it.

She turned to her drinking companions, but they had disappeared like so much smoke. She turned on her heels and made a hasty but dignified exit. The room was already returning to normal by the time she hit the door. When her feet hit the gravel, she broke into a run and had the car fired up and was halfway back to the motel before she knew what was happening.

2

What she and Alex had missed was one small gang member sitting in the back of the room who wasn't laughing. He had not worn the same colors as the man who had accosted Kit. He sat alone and had a drink in front of him that he hadn't touched. He watched closely and smiled slightly as the big man fell. It had been a simple thing to nudge the big man towards this woman and she did not disappoint. Yes, she was the one.

He went outside and found his bike. It was a beautiful Harley Fat Boy. It had belonged to one of his former bugs. He thought that the motorcycle had certainly served him better than the man who once rode it.

James rode into the cool night letting the sharp air caress him like a harsh lover. He was happy and grinning, letting his fang gleam in the artificial light emanating from the street lights. Even if there was someone on the empty streets, he was moving too fast for them to really see his fangs.

James was sure he had made contact with Committee operatives. He knew they would be casing biker bars looking for him and his bugs. He thought to find one of these agents, but what he found was so much better. He had found a woman.

As much as James hated authority, he hated women even more. The girls he had gone to school with had been cruel and mean. They gave all their attentions and favors to the big dumb Pollocks who bullied and hurt James. They laughed at and ridiculed him if he dared to ask one of them out.

Worse, the unpopular girls would try and befriend him. This marked him as a complete loser. He learned to hate women from an early age. He hated them for their weakness. He hated them for how he felt around them. He hated them for ignoring and spurning him and he hated them for accepting his weakness too. Everything he hated about himself he saw in women.

Since becoming a vampire, many of his victims had been women. He would so thrill in using his powers to cloud their minds and pull them to him to flatter and flirt. He would tease them and lead them along. He would make them a little afraid and then let him feel his strength.

Once alone, he would dominate them. He would torture and belittle them. He would make them hurt and make them pay for all his pain. He would make them beg for release. When they almost could beg no more he would grant it to them. He would then feel strong and powerful.

James knew he had exactly what he wanted. Not only had he found his agent but he had found a woman too. He thought life could be no better than this.

3

Kit burst into her motel room and tore her clothing off. She felt dirty and she needed a shower badly. The warm spray and soft motel soap had calmed her down some, but she was still very agitated when Alex knocked on her door. She through on some clothing and let him in.

"Are you OK, Kit?" she smiled that his first concern with be with her, and not the mission.

Alex was a breath of fresh air after Bruce. Bruce was cold and demanding and Alex was just as strict, but had a warmth about him that Kit liked very much. Alex was also a black agent, but would soon be promoted. He was her senior partner.

He was patient and kind. He made sure his lessons were heard and he asked Kit's opinion often. He had a sharp eye for detail and a quick and flexible mind. She imagined that Jean was like this as a lower agent.

"Yes, I'm fine. I'm just worked up. How did I let that happen?"

"Kit listen, you didn't let anything happen. You didn't ask that guy over. What were you suppose to do, let him and his friends rape you?"

"No, it's just that I don't want to screw this up."

"You didn't, Kit. We didn't have to draw our weapons. You just looked like you were a woman who knew karate."

"But I called attention to myself. I'll be spotted in other bars now. I've totally fucked this up."

"Kit, yes. We may have to relocate, but there are other agents, other assignments. You didn't cause this. I'll make sure everyone knows you did the right thing when I write this up."

He hugged Kit closely and held her as she calmed down. After she felt more in control, she pulled back and said "Thanks."

"No need, Kit. You're a great agent already. You're going places and I hope you remember us little people when you get there. You know I asked to have you assigned to me?"

"No, I didn't."

"Yup, I want everyone to know I worked with you back when. I mean it Kit, you're good and you're going places."

"Damn Alex, you're going to make me cry if you keep this up."

"OK, I'll stop. Look, I do need to call this in. They will probably reassign us tonight."

Kit nodded and he turned to leave. Kit couldn't help admire the curve of his behind as he moved through the connecting doors. He was cute, had a sense of humor and had a body to die for. Too bad he was her partner and senior agent. Well that isn't always going to be the case. Kit smiled to herself.

As Kit turned to pick up the things she had dropped earlier, the front door of her room shattered inward. Kit instinctively covered her face with the clothing she had picked up as the three vampires moved suddenly into the room.

Kit felt the weight of her gun in the clothing in her hand. She got her hand on the grip and shot through the clothes at the first vampire that was almost on top of her. The hollow point ten-millimeter slugs tore into the monster's shoulder and almost tore his arm off. He stopped and howled in pain. Kit aimed lower and fired three shots into his groins and his leg gave out and he fell at her feet. Kit jumped back out of his reach and looked up to acquire a new target.

If she had her weapon cleanly in her hand from the beginning, it is possible that she would have been able to hit two or three of the vampires, but her fumbling had given the other two a chance to get position. One was already next to her grabbing the weapon as Kit spun.

Kit was helpless in the grasp of the monster. He squeezed her arm dissolving the bone in his hand. Kit's mind flashed with white hot pain and she passed out. The monster slung her over his shoulder and began to move to the door. At the moment Alex, busted into the room from the connecting door. In his haste, James had overlooked Kit's partner or the connecting room. As he had always done, he had made an assumption and it had cost him. Now, the assumption had turned out wrong.

Alex fired at the vampire that was not holding Kit. The monster dropped as Alex pumped six rounds into various vital joints. In the three second that it took for Alex to drop the vampire, James was able to recover Kit's gun and fire twice. One shot went wide, but the second caught Alex in the hip. The force of the shot threw Alex back into his room.

Alex screamed in pain and rage and threw himself through his force of will back into Kit's room. He landed, prone, with his weapon drawn. He bellowed in frustration to see that the monster and Kit were gone. The other two vampires lay dead on the floor. Their cold blood was covering the floor. A crowd was cautiously gathering and Alex lay back and wept as his pain and failure gripped him like a vice.

Chapter 10

There is a graveyard and memorial in Northern France for the men who gave their lives retaking France from the Nazis. Many of Rene's comrades never lived to see the end of the war and were buried in this hallowed site. It was Rene's request that he be laid next to friends.

Just about everyone who could get away was at the memorial service. Rene had been a popular director and everyone who worked with him loved him very much. The Vatican had sent a representative, but its presence was understandably understated. The mood was somber and Jean was looked to as a crown prince might be at the burial of his father. Jean felt very alone. He now wore the mantle of leadership without anyone to turn to.

As the ceremony was winding down, Jean felt a familiar vibration in his pocket. His cell phone was ringing. He had set it to vibrate so it wouldn't disturb anyone if it went off as it had. He quietly pulled the small phone from his pocket and at the number on the display. It was his secretary calling him. She would not disturb him at a time like this if it weren't a matter of life or death. He whispered in his wife's ear and moved away from the crowd to take the call.

Ginger looked at her husband as he opened his phone and accepted the call. He did not say two words but only nodded his head slightly. After a short time, he closed the device and stared at it as if it were some evil thing he had just unearthed. He then hung his head and placed it back in his pocket. He looked up to his wife and gestured to the car. She

knew he would have to leave. That didn't bother her nearly as much as his facial expression.

His eyes told her that something terrible had happened. Moreover, they seemed to say to her "I'm sorry." Ginger was frightened. Very frightened.

2

Pat had almost simultaneously received a call at his desk. He had been one of the few who had not gone to Rene's funeral. He had never known the man and had agreed to sit a watch while those who knew him went. The desk clerk in the psych ward called him in a panic. David was tearing up his room and he was afraid he was going to hurt himself. Pat dropped the phone and ran for the elevator before the man stopped talking.

When he arrived, he was met by two large orderlies. Pat had never seen them before and knew there was something very dire going on. He nodded to the men and the three set off towards David's quarters.

The three used the direct entrance into David's living room. They could hear David sobbing and smashing things in his bedroom. The living room was already in a shambles and they moved through the rubble cautiously. This was much worse than the last time David had trashed his room.

What Pat saw horrified him. David was covered in sweat and his own blood, smashing and tearing everything in sight. He was delirious and kept saying, "I told them, I told them." over and over.

"David?" Pat said cautiously.

David jumped and turned on the trio. The two orderlies weighed over 250 pounds each. They both jumped back when they saw the look in David's eyes. The whites of his eyes were so blood shot that they appeared to glow crimson. Pat worried about David's condition, for he saw blood oozing from the eye sockets. It looked like David had red mascara that had run.

"David?" Pat repeated. He couldn't think of anything else to say.

"I told you! Didn't I tell you!"

"Yes David you told me." He wasn't positive but suspected that David was talking about his premonition regarding Kit.

"Why, why, why?"

"I don't know David. Please David, let me help you." He took a tentative step toward his friend. If he could see behind him he would have seen the two burly men look at him with a mixture of admiration and fright.

David took a step towards Pat and Pat smiled.

"David, you said it's going to be all right. Didn't you tell me that?"

David stopped for a moment and looked up. It was like he was looking for something in his head. "Yes Pat, I did say that didn't I?"

David promptly passed out. He cut his head badly as he hit the debris at his feet. Pat was over him, instantly cradling his head. Pat soon found himself covered in David's blood. He wouldn't notice until he got back to his house. Julie was surprised to see him and then horrified when she did.

Pat looked across the room and saw what had horrified his wife in the mirror. He was covered with David's blood and sweat. Though he was unhurt, he had looked like he had been in a terrible fight. He looked at his wife and said, "It's not mine, it's David's. He was having a terrible fit. I'm OK."

With that, he moved to the shower and scalded himself until he felt human again. Some of the shock was beginning to wear off and he realized he had just walked away from his post. As a researcher, this wasn't a very big deal, but he felt bad about it nonetheless.

He looked at Julie and said, "Julie will you please call the desk and tell them I can't come back today. Tell them anything. Please."

3

Jean burst into his office and his assistant was standing at attention waiting. Jean threw himself into his chair and looked at the man. "OK, give me everything you have."

"Yes, sir. A black team recon team was hit in their motel room at 12:30 a.m. local."

The man's voice was steady and clear.

"It appears to have been the work of the bugs that we've been looking for in the western United States. Agent Alex Francis was hit in the leg by a ten millimeter slug. The slug was discharged from the gun belonging to Agent Kit Wells. Agent Wells evidently shot and mortally wounded one of the bugs, Agent Francis shot another. The remaining bug seems to have carried agent Wells away. She is presumed dead, or..." The man paused here and Jean waved him on.

"Well, agent Francis was treated and temporarily detained by the local authorities. We had a clean-up team on sight within an hour and the authorities have since backed off. Agent Francis was put on one of our private jets and he will be here this evening. His wound was not life threatening, nor does there seem to be any permanent damage to his leg. We'll know more when our doctors get a look at him."

"I'll want to talk to him as soon as he's able. Don't scare him, I don't want him to think he's in trouble. Wait until he's seen the doctor, but I want to hear it from his mouth. Understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Pull the two closest blue agents off whatever they are on and get them down there now. I want this case code blue. They will have free hands and receive whatever support they need."

"Yes, sir."

Jean's mind raced for anything else to say, "The entire operation is going on a need to know basis. Kill all of Kit's credit cards and computer passwords."

"Yes, sir."

"That's all for now, but stay close. This is going to be awful. I hope there's lots of coffee for everyone involved."

"Yes, sir." The man said. He turned on his heels and left quickly.

Jean thought for a second and then put his head in his hands. The events of the last few days came crumbling down upon him and he wept as he had never in his life wept before.

Chapter 11

James returned to his lair with his prize. It had cost him his two servant bugs, but once he had this one enthralled to him it would not matter. He would have the perfect weapon to use against the Committee. He could then use them to make the Lords finally bow down to him. His ambitions ate at him like a cancer. It was tangible and ached more and more every day.

At last, at last he would have the means to strike. He had in his hands the tool of his ascension. This worthless female would be the means of triumph. At last, all those years of bad luck and misfortune would be put behind him and his new life of privilege would finally be his. He would finally have all that he had deserved.

He looked her over. He had not had the chance to really examine her closely until this moment. She was lean and strong. He had wished that she were more beautiful, but that was a minor thing. She impressed him as man-ish. She had a long, lean look that seemed to impress so many these days, but James had always preferred softer and rounder women. Her strength was a reminder of his weakness, but no more, no more.

His impulse was to tear her open and drink her dry, to pour his cold blood down her throat and make her his on the spot. James, however, knew that doing so would probably twist her mind beyond any usefulness to him. He needed her intelligence and her training. He had to proceed slowly. He

had to be careful. This was not easy since James always struck prematurely, but not this time. Not this time.

He examined her forearm. He had crushed the bone. It has already puffy and red. It would soon turn purple and then gray and then black if she did not receive any help. It didn't matter, once she had transformed, her body would heal itself. He thought that the pain would help him in what he wanted to accomplish.

He bent over her and kissed her exposed neck. He then slipped his fangs into her and let some of her blood flow into his mouth. The taste was hot and sweet. She was full of life and James savored it. She reminded him of fine wines he had had when he was mortal. It took all of his willpower to pull away and let her live. With every passing moment, he felt a growing hunger for her. He had never before tasted anything like her blood and he thought he might die if he could not have more.

He turned and left. He made sure the steel door was secured before as he slipped out to find another victim. He hoped it would satiate his hunger, but he knew in his heart that it would not. He knew the taste of the whores and homeless trash upon which he usually fed. It would not come close to satisfying him. Soon, he told himself, soon he would drink his fill and more. He just needed discipline.

He had what he needed for now. He had made his link. He could explore her mind now. Toy with her. He could learn about her. Soon, she would be his willing slave. She would do whatever he needed. Soon, he only needed to wait a little long.

2

Kit was in her tiny room back in the Committee. She woke with a start and looked at her sheets, they were soaked with sweat. She was very disoriented. She had been somewhere. Where was it? She tried to think, but it hurt her head to concentrate.

She started to get up and noticed a small but insistent pain in her arm when she put pressure on it. She looked and saw what appeared to be a spider bite on her forearm. She had once been bitten by a black widow spider and it looked like she had been again. Her arm was swollen and red and she saw the telltale fang mark on her arm.

She wondered if they had black widows in France and shrugged knowing they must. She reminded herself to go to the infirmary some time. She knew she wasn't allergic to the venom, so there was no hurry. She got dressed and went down to the gym instead.

She was going through her morning routine of stretches and warm ups when Alex came in. He smiled at her and asked how she was. She liked Alex and smiled brightly as she chatted with him. He joined her and began exercising as well.

Kit was deliriously happy. The room seemed to fade into a soft focus and all that was clear was Alex. She could not even make out his words very well. It didn't matter, that she was with him and could see him and his beautiful smile was more than enough. A part of her had wondered if this is what love felt like.

Alex invited her to spar with him. She happily agreed and found herself on the practice floor with her training gloves on.

He wore none, but this did not strike Kit as odd for some reason. They began to fight and he suddenly was rougher than she had expected. While Kit was dancing loosely and launching light attack, Alex seemed to be honestly trying to hurt her.

Every time a blow landed he would laugh and then admonish her for her clumsiness and laziness. Kit was beginning to feel like a small girl, helpless in the presence of this terrible man. She remembered being raped as a child, how that short moment had so completely defined her for years to come.

She tried to fight back. The harder she tried, the heavier her arms and legs felt. She could hardly move and when she did land a punch or a lick, Alex brushed it off and laughed at her. She felt more and more humiliated with every passing second.

Alex eventually launched a vicious blow to her head and she tried to block it with her right arm. His shin connected with her forearm full force. Kit thought he had torn her arm free and she screamed in pain. She fell to the mat and began sobbing. He stood over her and made some comment about her needing to toughen up if she was going to make it. He then turned and left, his laughter echoing in Kit's ears.

She was in terrible pain and she needed help. She staggered to her feet and tried to find the infirmary. The Committee's halls and corridors became a confusing maze and she quickly lost her way. At every turn, she was confronted with laughing mocking faces. She ran and ran until

she found an exit and bust into the green pasture behind the complex.

The wild grass was long and soft. It had yellow tassels that tickled her and comforted her. She walked for a time and the pain in her arm began to lessen. She walked and walked as the grass got higher and higher.

Suddenly, she was confronted by a slim man. He was slightly shorter than her, but seemed very kind and very confident. She showed him her arm and he produced a long white bandage and began to wrap it. It felt very good and Kit smiled to this new man. He said his name was Jim and he was glad he could help her.

When he was done wrapping the arm he said, "There, all better."

When Kit looked at the bandage she did not see the clean white cloth she expected. She saw that she had bled through the wrapping and the bandage looked more like some hideous red snake, feeding off her arm. Kit shrieked in horror, but the man only looked placidly at her and asked what was the matter.

She couldn't speak but felt terrified of this man now. She turned and ran and he followed. She ran through the grass that got thicker and thicker. Eventually, she could not run anymore and turned to face her pursuer. She was weak and in terrible pain, but she needed to take a stand. She would never be victimized without a fight ever again. She had let herself be abused once, she would never let it happen again.

Kit woke suddenly with a gasp. She was in a dark room and had no idea where it was or how she got here. She took

some deep breaths to shake off the effect of the nightmare and closed her eyes in order to calm herself.

Slowly, she pushed the dream from her mind and relaxed for just a second. As the memory of the dream faded, the memory of the previous evening began to flood in. Kit's terror was more focus and tangible this time. Unlike her dream, she knew she could not just wish this horror away.

She looked at her arm and knew she was badly hurt. Even in the weak light she could tell she was badly hurt. She breathed deeply trying to fight off her growing panic. She would need all her training and strength if she was to survive. She was determined to survive. She had to survive.

She felt her forehead and thought it felt too warm. She knew that her arm was somehow infected and was giving her a light fever. She also knew it would get worse and worse if she didn't get help.

She tucked her arm into her blouse gingerly and she began exploring her new world. A little sunlight slipped through a painted window that seemed to be at least fifteen feet above her head. She tried calling for help a few times, but her voice was weak and she knew in her heart that she would not be kept where help could find her. She was on her own.

The room was somewhat less than ten by ten. It had a dirty cot in it and nothing else. There was a steel door that was firmly bolted from the other side. There seemed little hope of breaking out of the room. She thought she might search for some secret passage, but knew those only existed in movies.

Kit sat back on the filthy cot and began examining herself. She re-examined the arm and knew it was in terrible condition. If she did not get help soon, it would poison her. Kit made a terrible decision.

She removed her pants and using her teeth and good hand tore a long strip of denim from them. It took her two hours to do this. She was feeling light headed, but continued to work. Her determination drove her on.

She managed to kick the cot enough times to break off one of the supporting boards. She then stomped on the board until it split down the middle. She picked up an appropriately sized piece and hoped it was strong enough for what she had to do.

She tied the denim strip lightly above her elbow and slipped the board in. She said a prayer for strength and twisted the stick three times. She screamed hideously as wave after wave of pain drove through her. She wanted to stop, she wanted to pass out, but she forced herself on through sheer determination. She once heard about a farmer who amputated his own legs with a pocketknife and then crawled for help after being pinned by a tractor. She thought of this while she worked.

When the tourniquet would not turn any more, Kit tied it off and lay back in the bed and sobbed. The pain was inhuman and she knew she had destroyed any hope of saving the arm. It was dead now and would rot and fall off if she were here long enough, but it would not poison the rest of her. She had sacrificed the arm to save her life.

When the pain began to ebb, she began examining the rest of her body. She had used her legs and feet vigorously, so she didn't expect to find any wounds there. She didn't. She was a little bruised around the tummy and shoulders. Whoever had carried her here was none to gentle.

She probed her good arm and found it in satisfactory condition. She moved her jaw and felt over her head and found nothing out of the ordinary. Finally, she allowed herself to touch her neck and had her deepest fear confirmed. Directly over her juggler vein she felt two small marks with her finger. They felt like small pimples. She dug at them with her finger and brought clotted blood up.

She knew what had happened. She lay back in the bed and cried like a newborn.

Chapter 12

Jean had been busy sending orders and coordinating the Committee's efforts most of the day. The protocols were very clear and he knew exactly what needed to be done. He also knew that as long as he kept busy he wouldn't have to think about the terrible tasks that lay ahead of him. He had no idea how to proceed on a personal front, so he kept as busy as he possibly could.

His phone rang and his secretary informed him that Cardinal Lindsey was waiting in his outer office. Jean wondered if he had learned the news or if he was paying a courtesy visit before he returned to Rome. The Cardinal was the Vatican's liaison to the Committee.

The man was a shrewd and handsome man for his eighty plus years. He was in extraordinary shape and could easily pass for forty. He had worked closely with Jean's predecessor Rene. There were some rumors that the two had some connection during the war. Rene would neither confirm nor deny that rumor.

The Cardinal had been very supportive of Jean and had given him great latitude when he took over directorship. Jean knew he would have to notify him at some point, but had not thought of what to say. There were still too many unanswered questions at the moment.

His door opened and the Cardinal came in wearing his complete vestment. He had not changed since the service.

"Your Eminence." Jean rose and kissed the proffered ring.

After the Cardinal was seated, Jean returned to his own chair behind the desk.

"Thank you for stopping by, I regret that I was called away. I wanted to have a chance to talk with you, perhaps show you around. You have not seen the facility in some time. Perhaps talk about Rene, I know you were close to him."

"Yes I was. I will miss him very much. I know so many people, but they are all so much younger. Please understand that I do mean to insult you when I say this but, it is just nice to have a friend who remembers many of the same things you do."

"Not at all, I understand completely. Rene was an extraordinary man. He lived in extraordinary times. I cannot imagine what it was like here during the war."

"Terrible, Jean terrible. Everyone who wears these robes hold a measure of guilt for the Vatican's weak stance against the Fascists, but the burden is heavier for those of us who were alive at the time."

"I would respectfully disagree your Eminence, you had no control over the Vatican's position and I know that many clergy stood up to Hitler and Mussolini, many hid Jews and helped them emigrate. They risked their lives and many lost them for their efforts." Jean had not come out and said so, but both men knew he was talking about the Cardinal in a large measure.

"Well I suppose it will be up to God to sort out." The Cardinal added.

The old man then leaned forward and said, "Now tell me why everyone is running around here like the war was back on."

Jean exhaled, "You understand, I was planing on making a full report. We are still unsure of many of our facts."

"Of course, I just thought that since I was here I would make an informal inquiry."

Jean considered his next words carefully. He wondered what Cardinal already knew and what he really wanted to know. The Cardinal was not the type of man to ask questions that he didn't know the answers to.

"The facts as we know them are that a black team that was working in the American southwest was hit but a group of three individuals. At least two of them were vampires and were killed by the team. The third individual is also presumed to be a vampire, but we are not sure at this time. One agent was wounded and is in transit to our infirmary. He may, in fact, be there by now.

"The other agent was taken away from the scene of the attack by the third member of the raiding party. She is officially listed as missing at this time."

"This agent was your first sponsor, correct?"

"Yes, your Eminence." This was what he really wanted to talk about. Jean braced himself.

"This agent is also a friend of yours and a close friend of your wife's."

"That's correct, but her status has no..."

The Cardinal waved him off "Please don't feel that we are second guessing your decisions." He noticed that the Cardinal

had switched to the inclusive "we." He was speaking for the Vatican now.

"It's just that these matters get sticky sometimes and there are strict protocols to be observed."

"Yes, your Eminence. I assure you that we are doing all we can. I have assigned two of my best blue agents to the case already. They should be on sight, with full support."

"I am sure. I just want you to be sure that you understand the Committee's stand on vampire hunters that go missing like this."

"Yes, I am very clear on the matter." Neither man missed that he had left of the honorific this time.

"I'm glad. I know how hard it is to lose any agent. You must feel terrible. I pray that agent Wells is already dead."

"Yes, your Eminence. Thank you."

"Please keep us informed. We know how hard your job is sometimes. The Director has certain latitudes and your predecessor certainly exercised them to the limit, but there is no flexibility in this matter. The Committee must not be compromised."

"Yes, your Eminence. I understand."

"I know that you do." He rose to leave. "My son, I will pray that God helps you find the courage to do what must be done."

"Thank you, your Eminence."

Jean sat alone in his office and reflected on his predecessor. Rene did have a reputation for bending the rules. His decisions had almost always worked out for the best, but everyone knew the risks he took, especially as an

agent. Rene was a Nazi killer long before he hunted vampires. It gave him a somewhat creative outlook on life that was not always appreciated by his superiors. Jean wondered about his own credibility. He wondered how far out on the limb he could climb.

He thought ahead to the rest of his day. The Cardinal's visit had been unexpected and unpleasant. His next two encounters would certainly be harder still.

He snapped his intercom "Lisa, please inform me when Alex has been cleared by the Doctor."

"Yes, sir. He is already on sight. I'll inform you the minute he's ready."

"Thanks and did you get those materials I asked for?"

"They are on the way, should be on my desk in the next ten minutes."

"Thanks."

"Sir, your wife has called three times now. I can tell she's worried."

Jean's stomach began to hurt. He knew he should talk to her as soon as possible, but he wanted to speak with Alex first.

"Please call her and tell her I am too busy to speak with her right now, but that I will come to the apartment as soon as I can. Please tell her that she is to wait for me there."

"Yes, sir."

Jean wanted to ask if Lisa might want to trade jobs with him.

"Sir, Alex has been cleared by the Doctor. You can see him now."

"Thanks, Lisa." Jean sighed and got to his feet slowly. He walked past Lisa's desk in the outer office and picked up a manila envelope that she had nodded to as he passed. They did not exchange any words.

When Jean entered the infirmary he found Alex lying in a bed adorned in clean white linens with his right leg in a cast and suspended. The look on his face showed complete anguish. Jean shared the feeling.

"Sir, please excuse me for not standing." The man said.

"Of course, Alex and please call me Jean."

"Yes, thank you Jean."

"I'm sorry for what's happened to you. How bad is the leg?"

"Muscle's pretty torn up, those hollow points really do a job. Bone is OK, so the Doc thinks I'll be fine with a month or two of P.T."

"That's good. Alex, I know you've been through this more times than you can probably remember now, but I need to hear it from your lips."

"I understand. It's OK I know the drill."

For the next twenty minutes Alex walked him through what he already knew. He had hoped that something about his demeanor would add something to what he already knew. It didn't.

"OK, those are that facts. I need some opinions now, Alex. You were there I wasn't."

"Yes, I understand."

"Right. I need to know a couple of things. First of all, in your opinion, was the third attacker a vampire?"

"I believe he was. I suppose he could have been some other supernatural thing, but he moved way to fast to be human. I would have gotten him if he were human. I'm not shy about shooting. I dropped the hammer before I was an agent, but you know that already."

Jean nodded. "Do you think he wanted to capture or kill Kit?"

"Capture her. He incapacitated her by breaking her arm. He could have as easily had broken her neck. I believe he wanted a capture."

"I was hoping you'd have said something different."

"Yes I know. Jean there is something else."

"Yes?"

"Jean, you've read my file you know I was a cop before I got recruited?"

Jean nodded.

"Well, some people who aren't cops don't understand what a partner means. I mean, it doesn't matter if you like them or not or even know them or not, you back them up."

"Sir, I made a mistake. I made a stupid mistake."

"Yes?"

"Sir, I hesitated. I saw him with Kit. I know I should have dropped him first, but I didn't want to hit Kit. It was a terrible mistake and now she's going to pay for it. I would have done her a favor if I had hit her, killed her. I know that now, I just made the wrong decision then."

Jean laid his hand on Alex's arm "Alex, from what I can tell the entire encounter took less than thirty seconds. It would take a cold-hearted bastard to instinctively shoot at his partner. I can find no fault in your actions. In fact, I thought you might want this now." He handed the envelope he had been carrying to Alex.

Alex looked in and found a red boarded I.D. card. "Sir?"

"This really has nothing to do with the incident. Your promotion was approved weeks ago. I just thought you'd like to have this now. Give you something to forward to while you're retraining your leg."

"Yes, sir."

"But there is one thing."

"Yes, sir."

"My name is Jean, if you call me Sir one more time, people will be using your name in the past tense around here."

"Yes S.... Ah, sure thing Jean."

Jean smiled and left. His next conversation promised to be the hardest of the day.

3

Jean walked through the door to his apartment and saw his wife. She ran to him and embraced him strongly. "Jean, what's wrong? What's going on? Everyone is acting like it's World War Three. No one will tell me anything."

"I know, sit down. I have some terrible news to tell you."

She sat and he saw the color leave her face and her eyes were already starting to tear.

"Ginger, I can only say this one way. It's Kit. A terrible thing happened on her current assignment." A tear started

rolling down her face. Jean sat beside her and slowly told her the rest of the story. She was sobbing by the time he was done.

"But she's not dead, there's hope isn't there?"

"Ginger, the only hope is that she is dead."

"What!"

"Ginger, you have to understand. The only reason a vampire would take her and not kill her is so that he can change her, make her a vampire to be used against us. It's been tried before. It never works, mainly because as far as the Committee is concerned, Kit is already dead. There is a standing order to destroy turned agents immediately and without hesitation."

"What are you saying?"

"What I'm saying is this, Kit is now being hunted by two blue agents. If they find her, they will destroy her."

"My God!" Ginger screamed. "How can they do this? How can you let this happen?"

"I have no choice, Ginger. You have no idea how dangerous Kit will become if she is turned."

"How can you say that? You have werewolves and other captured monsters under lock and key. Hell, you have David locked up downstairs and he killed his best friend. Can't you show my best friend the same compassion?"

"You may not believe me, but I am. If Kit is still alive, then the kindest thing we can do for her is to kill her. Ginger, we never take vampires alive. We have no way to control them. No way to contain them. With their psychic powers, they

would run amok and destroy us all. My God, don't you think this is killing me too?"

Ginger pushed past him and ran into the bedroom, slamming the door behind her. He could hear her sobbing and felt terrible. The last thing she needed was to see him right now. He picked up the phone and dialed four numbers. "Hello Pat? Yes it's Jean. Have you been briefed? Good. I just told Ginger. Yes, she's taking it very hard. She won't talk to me right now. Could you and Julie come and just be here if she needs anything? Thanks."

Jean hung up the phone and waited quietly for his friends to arrive.

Chapter 13

Kit was at a party. It was festive and happy and everyone was wearing their best party clothing. Kit's mother had bought her a new dress for the occasion. It was her birthday and Kit was feeling very grown up. She saw many of her friends and family and felt their love for her. She had always enjoyed being the center of attention.

Some might have found the crowding offensive, but Kit liked it. Each of these people had brought her a present and her booty grew and grew each time the doorbell rang. She grew giddier and giddier with each passing moment.

Her cousins and siblings were becoming a bigger and bigger problem in the old Victorian house. Their noise and energy were beginning to bother many of the adult guests that her parents had invited. It was very confusing and her mother finally started shooing the children out into the back yard. Kit made a special point to tell her mother to send Ginger out back when she got there. Her mother smiled and told her not to worry.

Out back, the multitude of children laughed and chased each other around the back yard. Kit's house edged up to a stand of woods and there was some talk of going exploring.

"Why not play hide and seek?" a voice called from the back porch.

It was her Uncle Ian. She did not know her British uncle very well. In fact, he wasn't even really an uncle. He was a something removed cousin who happened to be traveling through Canada and had pit stopped at Kit's family's house

along the way. Though the children thought of him as old, he was only in his twenties and had an air of charm and beauty that Kit found alluring.

"Kit's it, Kit's it" all the other children started screaming. Kit, the birthday girl, could not argue with the logic and hid her eyes against a tree and started counting to twenty. She heard the stampede of feet headed in all directions, but mostly towards the woods.

"Ready or not, here I come!" She yelled and started on her hunt. When she got to the edge of the woods she saw her Uncle Ian, who put his finger to his lips and gestured her over. Kit obeyed and enjoyed the conspiratorial look he had on his handsome face.

"Shhhh, I'll help you look, follow me." He said.

Kit followed her uncle. Having him play her game made her feel very grown up and she beamed at his attention. He led her deeper and deeper into the woods. He promised to lead her to a very special place.

Along the way, Kit spotted David hiding, but Ian led her away from him quickly. She had made eye contact with David and was puzzled by his expression. He seemed to be watching, intently interested in what Kit was doing.

When they reached a quiet spot in the woods, Ian turned to her and asked, "How old are you today, Kit?"

"Twelve."

"Why, that's almost a teenager. You know, you look much older. You look sixteen or seventeen to me."

Kit glowed with pride.

"Canada is such a strange country, nothing like England. Would you like to know how teenage girl celebrate birthdays in England, Kit?"

"Oh, yes." She said excitedly.

Ian did not answer her questions with words. Rather he pulled her closely to him and kissed her on the mouth. He pressed hard and his strength was beginning to hurt her. As she struggled to free herself, he used his superior weight and strength to push her to the ground.

He had her panties off and was penetrating her within seconds. He finished almost as fast. He rolled off of her and said, "There, now you're a woman."

Kit glared up at her uncle, but it wasn't Ian's face that looked back at her it was Jean's. Kit felt hurt and confused. She didn't know what to do.

Jean looked down and sneered. "This is what bad little agents get, Kit."

Kit's head was spinning and then she heard David's voice calling something to her from his hiding place. She tried to listen, but Jean yelled at her. He told to pay attention to him, but Kit listened harder. She could almost make out what David was saying when Jean leaned down and twisted her arm "I told you not to listen to him, bitch!"

Kit screamed in pain from her arm and woke up staring at her captor.

2

"Fucker!" She coughed and lunged at him. She found she had no strength and fell back into the bed. Her arm hurt

badly, she was tired, hungry and dehydrating fast. She was in very bad shape.

"God damn you!" she hissed.

"Too late. I already beat him to it my dear, but some day you will know that. Some day we will both serve my Master in his home. Perhaps he will allow me to oversee you there as well."

Kit groaned and turned her head.

"Looking away won't help dear. You are mine now. You will be mine for as long as you live. Longer actually."

"Fuck you!" Kit choked out. It was hardly an eloquent response, but it was the best she could do in her condition.

He was suddenly over her, pinning her down on the bed. She looked up and saw his face for the very first time. His features were delicate and what she would call pretty. His eyes were crystal blue and his lips were thin and even. His skin was smooth as silk and he had long black eye lashes. His hair was brown and wavy.

"Is that what you want? A fuck?" He mocked her. "I've no real interest in that kind of thing anymore, but if you insist, I'm sure I can manage." He smiled letting his fangs show in all their glory.

"How dare you." Kit gasped "How dare you use that against me, to try and turn me against Jean."

"Oh, how important you feel. Your attack, your rape!" He spat "You were such an ordinary child. Who cares that he had a bit of pleasure with you? You weren't worth the tears. I assure you that he had better than you. He had just taken pity on you."

"Fuck off!" Kit managed to yell, but then she coughed madly for an eternity.

"You mortals are all the same. You think your pain is somehow unique. Well, you'll soon see how unimportant your life is."

With that, he threw his head back and then sank his fangs again into her neck. Kit swooned as he did.

Kit had no way of knowing the effect she was having on him. He was using all his restraint to not turn her. He wanted her badly. His lust for her was overpowering him. The animal inside him was taking over and he needed to drink her dry. He was already fantasizing about their eternal life together.

He would even give up his plans against the Committee. He would abandon his quest for power and status among vampires. To walk and hunt through the eternal night with this perfect creature was more than enough.

Kit felt her life slipping slowly from her as the monster sucked at her neck. She could feel her heart pumping her blood into his mouth and she cursed it for betraying her. She was losing consciousness and the last thing she felt was hot burning hatred for the leech at her neck. Actually, it wasn't the last thing, the last thing was one errant thought "What was David doing in my dream?"

James pulled himself away finally. He looked down at her pale and thin body and panicked. She wasn't ready. She would likely lose her mind if he changed her now. He had to prepare her. He needed more time.

Her sweet hot blood still dripping from his mouth, he bent down and listened to her heart. He thanked his Master as he

heard the faint, labored, but steady beats. He stood suddenly and ran from the room. His lust was a tangible thing and he needed to sate it quickly. He feared for his own sanity.

3

Gloria didn't think about her life much anymore. She just moved from one thing to the next. She used to think about her body, she would exercise and diet, but no more. It didn't matter, truckers liked fat women anyway.

She used to dream of her freedom. She used to dream of the road. Well, that's all she had now. She spent her days sleeping in some guy's cab, just cruising from one place to another. Her nights were spent moving from cab to cab.

Gloria was a truck stop whore. She would screw an average of twenty truckers a night, every night. Straight lays, blow job, anal sex. It didn't matter to her. She actually liked the truckers and didn't mind too much what they did to her, as long as they paid that is.

Oh, could truck drivers pay. If you were good and knew how to forge your logbook and dodge the police, you could make a virtual fortune as a truck driver. These guys made tons of money and had nothing really to spend it on. So Gloria gave them something. Hundred bucks for a blow job, two hundred for a straight. Five hundred and they could put their little peckers anywhere they wanted.

She had been on the street before and knew what hell regular John's and pimps can be. Local guys were always the worse. Any guy who bought a whore where he lived always had something seriously wrong with him. She hated it.

She had gotten hooked up in the convention trade for a while, when she still had her looks. Those guys were nicer. Most of them had wives and were generally nice. They were just lonely on the road or turned on by their sudden freedom from everyday life.

Truckers were about the same, mostly just lonely guys who wanted a little comfort. She was happy to give it to them. They were happy to pay. She would move from cab to cab every night. Her current client would call on the radio to find her the next. Somewhere along the line, she would find some guy who would agree to take her someplace new. It didn't pay to stick around. He would get a freebie.

She was moving among the maze of rumbling trucks she had learned to call home, when she bumped into a short man "Excuse me, bud."

"No problem, miss." He smiled, "Did I hurt you?"

She had hardly felt the collision and looking at the runt she could not help but laugh a bit. "Not likely, now if you'll excuse me..."

His tone got menacing and he grabbed her arm. He was surprisingly strong for such a small guy. "Not polite to laugh at someone, need to show you some manners."

Gloria swung at him, but he twisted her arm and her blow missed by a foot. He shoved and she found herself underneath a rumbling semi. She screamed, but she knew no one would hear her. She looked up and the last thing she saw in this life was the flash of his fangs.

When James was through, he looked down at the pitiful woman beneath him. He was angry. Her blood had been hot

and rancid tasting, not warm and sweet like Kit's. She had done nothing to satisfy his need. She only filled his stomach, for now.

He knew he would have to have Kit soon, very soon.

Chapter 14

Jean could not believe how upside down his life had become in the last few days. The loss of an agent, any agent, was a terrible thing. Kit's disappearance seemed to be disrupting things on so many levels of his life. Finding Kit and dealing with her was, of course, a priority. Even with all her codes and accesses destroyed, she was still a dangerous threat to the Committee. If she was now under the influence of a vampire, he could pull her secrets from her and hurt the organization badly.

He thought about all the sensitive information she had. How many agents she had met in her training. There weren't many field agents in North America that were not now at risk. It would even be hard to institute back plans, because Kit knew those as well. If this monster was determined enough, he could take down a good number of agents.

Jean knew however, that ultimately the Committee would survive. This gambit had been tried before. The Committee was especially vulnerable during World War II and an infiltrator cut their numbers by more than a third, but even with the disorganization that the War had brought, the Committee continued to grow and thrive.

Of course all this was mute to the agents and support staff that had lost their lives, just as Jean knew that the Committee's woes were now mute to Kit. He tried very hard not to dwell on her ordeal, but he could not drive it from his mind. He knew how vampires broke down their victims. It was a torturous process. He thought about David and how

little of his sanity remained after that vampire had been through with him.

It was even worse in Kit's case because David's vampire had been a lord. A lord would be subtle and psychologically torment the victim. A lord would be patient, but he feared Kit was being held by a leech. A leech would be harsh and possibly physically cruel. He did not want to think about what Kit was going through right now. He prayed that she was dead and not suffering.

David was also a problem. His wounds had been superficial, but he needed constant restraint now. He was literally a raving lunatic. Pat visited him two or three times a day now. It wasn't helping

Pat was trying to calm his friend and possibly find out what David knew about Kit. There was no doubt in anyone's mind that David's suffering was connected to Kit's ordeal. He held onto the slim hope that David had prophesized a happy ending for Kit. Jean could only imagine that it meant she would be found and killed by his blue agents. He could see no other hope.

He examined the preliminary reports that were filed by the agents in the field. It was now the considered opinion that it was a leech and not some other supernatural being that was leading the bug gang. The plan was simple enough, keep moving in a random but somewhat predictable way and hope to draw an agent into the open. Obviously, this leech was in the bar where Kit had been accosted by the biker.

As a matter of routine, the biker was investigated and quickly ruled out. He was seen in the daylight and his records

showed that he was hardly an upright citizen, but human nonetheless.

No, this had the fingerprints of a leech all over it. A lord would never be so stupid or suicidal to think that he or she could win this game. Lords had attacked the Committee before, but nothing so direct. If a lord were directing this attack, then they still would not have seen it coming. They would have woken up one day and found twenty or more dead agents. A lord would never tip their hand on capturing one agent.

Gypsies were generally too shy and not aggressive enough for this kind of attack. A gypsy might lure an agent away with a promise of information or maybe even sex, but they never would attack in a way that would bring the wrath of the Committee into town. If there were any gypsies in the area, he was sure that they had long since moved on, leaving no trace.

Leeches were also shy, but they could also be exceptionally cruel. Again, it was assumed that this leech was making some kind of move on the Committee to impress or frighten a lord. Its ambition had overridden its caution and common sense. Jean knew they would capture this monster, but wondered what the ultimate cost would be. He was not happy thinking about it.

On a personal level, his life was a shambles. Ginger was livid with him. He couldn't blame her. He had ordered his best agents to hunt down and kill her best friend. Jean understood the cruel logic of his actions. He knew Kit understood the

risks she was taking and would actually welcome it, but how can he explain to his wife that he had to kill her best friend.

Kit and Ginger were childhood friends. Kit had seen Ginger through many childhood traumas, had been there to listen and to tease. She was a sister to Ginger. Ginger loved her deeply.

It was Kit who helped Ginger realize her submissive nature, had taught her that there was nothing wrong with it. She taught Ginger that love can come in many forms. She helped her through therapy and even helped extract her from a difficult and abusive relationship. Some women beaters stalked the Dominant/submissive community, thinking it's a free license to act out their hostilities towards women. Fortunately, there are plenty of people like Kit and her friends to keep the community policed.

Jean was a Dominant. He had learned this about himself as he roamed the Dominant/submissive community hunting for a vampire. He had met Kit and Ginger there and fell in love with Ginger. She was the brightest star in his life. He hated himself for hurting her. Self-loathing was not something Jean wore well.

Try as he would, he could not help but let his thoughts rest on Kit. He could only imagine the pain and suffering she was enduring right now. The leech would use his physical and psychic powers to tear her down, to open his mind to him. Since he would lack the abilities of a lord, he would just pound on her, heaping torment on top of torment.

He thought about the woman that Kit was. He thought about her strength. Her instructors, all of her instructors had

thought highly of her. She was strong, smart and determined. Even her psychic coach thought she showed promise, even though she had just learned some preliminary shielding techniques.

Since agents fought monsters that used psychic abilities, it was important that they at least learn to shield themselves from attack and detection. The Committee was always on the lookout for truly gifted psychics. His recruiters would even attend New Age conventions on occasion, though most of their mind agents (as they were called) typically came from Asia and Africa and had been trained since their youth in mind control. Jean had learned enough to shield his own thoughts and whereabouts. He could also shield those who were physically close to him.

He had been told by his instructors that time and again that distance did not matter. He knew some agents who could shield a subject no matter where they were. David's connection with Kit proved that. Jean just figured he needed the proximity to keep him focused.

2

Ginger did not want to stay in her apartment. She had asked Pat and Julie if they could take her in. They had agreed without hesitation. Ginger did not know if she was going to stay with them for any length of time, but she needed time to work through her anger.

"How can he do this?"

"I don't know Ginger. I just don't know." Pat said in an attempt to console her.

"Doesn't he know how much I love her? Doesn't he care?"

"Of course he cares, honey."

"Then why?"

Julie had been listening to this discussion for an hour or so. It kept going in circles and it was making her a little crazy. She too was dealing with Kit's loss and her head was reeling as well. There had been gallons of tears on everyone's part. They all loved Kit in their own way and were sick to death about the situation.

When the tears had finally subsided, Julie looked at Ginger and asked quietly "What is it that you want Jean to do?"

Ginger looked at Julie for a second. Until now, Pat had been chasing her thoughts, this was the first time either of them had tried to lead her anywhere.

"I want him to help her."

"Yes, but isn't that what he thinks he's doing?"

"By trying to KILL her?"

Julie wasn't going to chase Ginger anymore, she brushed off the question. "How do you think he could help her?"

"I don't know, but..."

Julie interrupted "I suppose it's up to us to find a way then isn't it?"

Ginger sat with her mouth open and Pat stared at his wife. Julie had her moment and she exploited it. "I mean, I would think that Jean would jump at a chance to save Kit, if one were presented to him."

"Yes, but..." Ginger tried to form an argument. She wasn't ready to let go of her anger yet. She really didn't have anything to say though.

"I mean, Jean is a good man. I know he loves Kit too. Don't you think he's feeling just as trapped as the rest of us? Maybe more?"

"You're saying we should find a way to help Kit?" Pat interjected.

"I don't see who else can." Julie continued. "Jean has too many people watching him."

"But we would be violating our orders."

"Pat, I took enough business classes to know that you can break the rules if you produce results."

"So if we are quiet, we might be able to work out a plan..."

"That Jean can use to save Kit's life." Ginger added. She rose and went into the bathroom without another word.

Julie and Pat sat quietly while Ginger was gone. Pat was already scheming and Julie was just basking in the glow of her victory. Ginger emerged about ten minutes later. She had fixed her make-up to the best of her ability and looked at her friends and smiled.

"If you'll excuse me, I think I have to go make up with my Master."

Neither of them would ever be totally comfortable with her calling Jean that, but there was something in her tone that reassured Julie about the relationship.

"Good luck, love." Julie said as Ginger left. She then turned to Pat, "Shouldn't you get on-line and see what you can do?"

"Right." Pat sprung to action and ran to his study. He had a backbone connection to the Committee's intranet there.

Jean was pouring over his reports. There wasn't much, but he read and reread every line trying to find clues or hints in every fact. He was having no success and his head was hurting. The intercom buzzed and his secretary announced that Ginger wanted to speak with him. Jean took a deep breath and told her to let his wife in.

He braced himself for another argument. He understood Ginger's anger and even shared it with her. He just felt so trapped. Deep in his stomach he feared that Ginger would leave him, though he couldn't blame her.

Ginger walked in and he started to rise "Honey..."

She cut him off by putting her finger to her lips. He sat quietly back down in his chair and looked at her bewildered.

She walked behind him and felt his forehead then she rubbed his temples for a second. She pulled him back into as much of a recline as the chair would allow, then left him, walking to the small wet bar that his office had. She ran a towel under the water and returned placing the towel on his forehead. It was hot and it felt delightful.

Ginger said quietly, "Master, you have to stop and relax. You do no one any good by over working. It is time to stop and refresh. May I get you a drink?"

Jean knew the significance of the question. In the D/s community she was offering him a serve. The serve is analogous to the Japanese Tea service, though it is not scripted as tightly. A submissive offers to fetch a drink or some other repast for his or her Master as a sign of devotion and love. Sometimes it was used to initiate romance, sometimes it was used as a public demonstration of affection

and sometimes it was used to help heal a rift in the relationship. This is what Ginger was doing.

"Yes, a drink would be lovely. Please fix something for yourself." Accepting the serve had shown her that he was open to her gesture of reconciliation, asking her to fix something for herself showed that he knew he was responsible.

Ginger smiled, "As you wish, Master."

Ginger walked back to the bar and looked around for her tray. She had bought a special silver tray with his initials carved in it as a wedding present. She placed it upon the small bar and took a clean soft cloth and rubbed it, giving it a beautiful glow.

She then found two tumblers and polished them as well. She kept her eyes on Jean and smiled throughout. She placed the glasses upon the tray and then fetched the ice tray from the freezer. She placed a number of cubes in a shaker, poured water over the cubes, covered the shaker and poured the water out. Rinsing the ice was a nice touch that Jean always appreciated.

Using tongs, she fished the ice from the shaker and place three cubes into each glass. She then poured Jack Daniel's into the glasses, just covering the cubes and added water to each.

She picked up the tray and smiled sweetly to Jean. She walked to him slowly and seductively. She never took her eyes from him. She then kneeled in front of him and raised the tray in offering "Your drink, Master. May you find it, as well as this service acceptable to you."

Jean wanted to cry and pull Ginger into his lap. He knew how hard it was for her to accept what he had to do, but she clearly had. He loved this woman with all his heart and was overjoyed that she had seemed to put her anger towards him aside, but like the tea service he too had a role to play. He would honor her serve by playing it.

He took the drink in his hand and sipped. He waited a second as the whiskey slid down his throat with a delightful sting and warmed his stomach. "My love, the drink is marvelous and your service is impeccable, as always."

He set his drink back on the tray and took the tray from her, setting it on her desk. He then reached down and took her hand and slowly pulled her up into his lap. He kissed her with all the love he could find in his heart. She returned his kiss with all that she had to give him.

"You make me so proud Ginger, I am..." He was about to apologize to her, but she placed a finger on his mouth.

"You make me happy, Master. I know you have many hard decisions to make. It is wrong of me to interfere. I am the luckiest woman in the world."

Jean knew it was futile to argue with her. He knew he was the lucky one in the relationship. He also knew that it was not proper for him to discredit her praise by telling her this. It was Kit who had taught him this, early in his marriage Kit had taken him aside and explained that Ginger wanted him to dominate her, as long as it was done with love and tenderness. It was hard for Jean to grasp this at times and outsiders hardly ever understood, but he was learning. He

again wondered about who really controlled the power in a D/s relationship.

He stopped wondering and kissed that woman he loved. For a very brief eternity he was free from all his worldly worries.

Chapter 15

Kit found herself walking down a long sterile white hallway. The end of the hall had two large swinging doors like you find in hospitals. A sign over the doors read: Coroner. Kit had a building feeling of dread. She had been in this hallway before and she knew what to expect. She was being led by a man in a blue suit. She could not see his face, because he was walking briskly in front of her and she had to trot to keep up. The sounds of their heels clicked angrily against the bare tile floor.

The man pushed through the doors without breaking stride. The doors swung open in an explosive fashion. Kit was glad no one was on the other side or they may have been hurt badly. The man walked straight to a drawer and pulled it open with one fluid motion. Kit saw a body wrapped in a linen blanket. It reminded her very much of an ancient Egyptian mummy.

The man grabbed the sheet and pulled it violently away, much as a magician might snatch a tablecloth from under a place setting. The sheet snapped viciously and Kit ducked instinctively. The man was indifferent to Kit's distress and merely said, "Is this your friend?"

Kit looked down and saw the bloody and battered body of her friend, Debbie. She had been savagely killed by a vampire in her home in suburban Toronto. Kit was about to answer when she was interrupted.

"Yes, it is." She looked up and saw that it was David who had just spoken

"Yes, it is the body of Kit's friend, Debbie Sims. I'm afraid that I'm to blame for her death." He looked at Kit with very sad eyes. "I've never really had the chance to tell you, to tell any of you just how sorry I am."

Kit looked at David and was about to speak when she was interrupted by the man in the blue suit, "I didn't ask you, you shouldn't be here. You have no authorization."

David completely ignored the man, but Kit turned to look at him for the first time. Her first impression was that it was Jean, but she blinked and realized it wasn't Jean at all. The face was the small delicate face of the monster who had attacked her. He looked at Kit and said angrily "Is this your friend?"

"Yes, it is." Replied Kit, more in astonishment than anything else.

"Good." The man grabbed her wrist and began walking again.

He was again moving very fast and his grip was that of iron. Kit stumbled and trotted as she tried to keep up. He was hurting her arm very much. She could hear footsteps following and glanced back to see David following. Unlike the other man, his pace seemed calm and even. Kit wondered how he kept up.

Kit felt herself being pulled through more doors and suddenly realized that she was outside. She was back outside her childhood home and there was a large banquette table set up in the back yard. The weather was warm and humid and the light was yellow, it gave everything a fuzzy glow.

The man set her down at the table and then sat at the head of the table. Kit was on his left hand. She saw David sit directly across from her on his right hand. "You were not invited to this party!" The man yelled at David. David continued to ignore him.

The man was growing angry and directed Kit's attention to the table. Something resembling a holiday feast, Christmas perhaps, had been laid out in front of them. Many dishes containing salads, potatoes and many other side dishes were arrayed on the table. Kit saw that all the dishes were setup around the main dish, which to her initial horror, was the body of her friend Debbie.

Kit was only horrified for a very brief second. The image was terrible, but she was somehow detached from it. She looked at herself and realized she was wearing the same party dress that she had been raped in. The image started to remind her of the bad science fiction and horror movies she had watched at a child, usually shown on a local station, hosted by a very bad actor. She expected to be pulled out of the image any second and see some guy in a cheesy costume saying "Now, is THAT scary?"

"There are some things I need to tell you." David's voice interrupted her musing.

"Didn't I tell you to go?" The vampire yelled at David.

"Look, I'm sorry, my presence here is going to cause you some grief, but it's important. I've worked it out carefully, so that I know what I can and can't tell you."

The vampire waved a carving knife at David and threatened him. "I will send you to my Master if you aren't careful!"

David closed his eyes and seemed to be counting to ten. He then erupted at the other. "Your master? I'm suppose to be afraid of your master?" David's voice was dripping with sarcasm.

"He'll make you pay for interfering." The vampire screamed.

"Tell me who you think your master is."

"Satan, of course. I have sold my soul to Satan and I do his bidding. I will sit at his right hand in the next life."

"Oh, please!" David stretched this out for effect and Kit could not help but giggle to herself. "What you made a deal with could hardly be called a demon. You have more chance of becoming the King of England than to have any favor in hell."

"But I have power, I have..."

"Nothing!" David spat. "I know what you want. I know who you plan to impress. I have tasted the power you crave. I had what you envy. You can't imagine what you are dealing with." David stopped and looked up in the sky, he seemed to be looking at something the other two could not make out.

"Sorry again, that little outburst is going to cost you, but nothing beyond repair."

Kit just continued to look at David in bewilderment. "Ah, sure." She stammered for no particular reason.

"OK, here's the deal." David said turning his entire attention back to Kit. "He can't take what he wants from you,

you have to give it to him. Second, help will come from where you may least expect it."

He stopped and looked back into the sky. "OK, that'll do. Bye." He was gone suddenly.

Kit woke violently as the vampire was shaking her badly. Her arm was dead and worthless beyond her tourniquet and the upper arm was tender and sore. He slammed her against the wall. She screamed.

"How dare he!" He ranted over and over again. He continued to batter Kit violently. Unlike his earlier attacks, this one was not focused. He wasn't trying to get anything from her, he was just hurting her because he was angry and she was handy.

Kit felt a rage of her own boiling to the surface. She remembered her rape. She remembered Ginger's abusive Master. She remembered all her friends who had been hurt and abused by weak, stupid little men. She had learned what strength was in the last few years and these men had none. They were spineless worms.

"You worthless piece of filth." She hissed through her bleeding lips. "It's just so fucking typical, you God damned loser."

He punched her and she blacked out for a moment. She woke in his grasp with his face right over hers. "You'll give me all I want and more, bitch. You all will. You are all going to pay. Don't you understand what I am?" His fangs glinted in punctuation.

"I understand exactly what you are and I know what you want. David is absolutely right. You can't take it. I have to

give it to you. That's why you've been trying to break me down, but you don't understand strength and power. You never will. You'll never have me." With that, Kit reached across her body with her good hand and unhitched the tourniquet.

First aid books used to say that a tourniquet should be loosened every few hours to let the injured limb get some blood. What happened however, was that the limb and the blood inside the limb died when its supply of fresh oxygen was cut off. When a tourniquet is released, the dead blood can flow back into the healthy body. This often had the effect of killing the person.

Kit had been wearing the tourniquet for almost two days. Her arm was well dead and the blood in that arm useless and septic. The sudden release filled Kit with a blinding moment of pain as the poison from her dead limb was pumped back into her body. Her eyes rolled up into her head and she vomited the meager contents of her stomach. She passed out and could feel death begin to grip her.

A faint smile could be detected on her lips.

2

"Noooooooooooo!" James raged as he saw Kit succumb to the poisons in her blood. He latched his fangs over her neck and drank the sick blood greedily. He could feel her heart. He could feel it pumping slower and slower. He tried to touch her mind with his, but found only a vacant space.

She was dying. He wasn't ready for this, but she was dying. There was only one thing to do. He tore open his shirt and drew his fingernail deeply into his skin. His own cold

blood rose to the wound and he held Kit's face to his breast. Hoping, praying to his Master that he would have her back.

Kit found herself standing outside her body watching all this with detached fascination. She supposed she should feel bad, but she really didn't. She was only curious, but even her curiosity would not hold her long. She felt a presence call to her and she turned to see a dark tunnel in the corner of the room.

She allowed herself to be drawn into it and could see a glow at the other end. She had read enough about after life experiences to understand all this, but the feeling was so deep and so complete it made her want to giggle with delight. She thought about all the skeptics that wrote off this experience to brain chemistry and hoped they would not miss this when their time came.

She wondered if an atheist could keep his convictions staring into the face of creation. She laughed.

She was pulled to the light and found herself being drawn to a person. She knew who it was long before she could actually see her. She was with her friend Debbie one more time. The two friends just floated together and embraced for a long eternity.

"Oh, Debbie, I'm so happy to see you."

"Me too Kit, me too. I'm so happy to get to hold you again. I really have missed you and Ginger."

"Well I suppose even death couldn't have kept us apart."

"No Kit it can't, but life can." Kit didn't understand. "Kit I am dead, please believe me that I'm happy and I'm overjoyed

to be with you now, but you are not dead. You won't be dead for a very long time." She paused "I hope."

"I don't understand."

"You will and I pray that we will be together again some time. I do miss you and Ginger so much, but it is not your time. You have to go back. It will be painful, life is painful, but you have to go back."

Kit felt like crying.

"Oh, Kit I love you so much. I wish I could take you in my arms and bring you home, but I can't. Not know. I can only tell you this, no matter what, no matter what anyone, what anything says, your soul is your own. You will always have the power to determine where you will rest."

"I don't understand."

"You will, you will." Debbie seemed to fade and Kit felt herself being drawn back to her body.

Her feeling of well being fled as quickly as it had come. She was cold and thirsty. Her physical pain, oddly had ceased. Some time had passed because she was now alone. She could feel and hear things she never had before.

She heard mice and rats running in the walls. She could sense young lovers walking in a dark park somewhere. She could smell the night. She knew with absolute certainty when the sun would rise. Her senses were full.

She reached down and touched her dead arm. She was shocked to see that not a single trace of the damage remained. It was as supple and strong as it had ever been. She balled her hand into a fist and relaxed it a number of times. She felt strong and powerful.

The only thing that bothered her was an overpowering thirst. She thought for a minute and ran her tongue over her sharp teeth. She started at the back and moved slowly forward, terrified at what she would find. Her soft tongue snagged on a sharp fang that used to be her eyetooth. She slid her tongue over to the other side of her mouth and found its mate.

The full impact of her new existence fell upon her at once and she once again broke down and sobbed hysterically.

Chapter 16

Ginger knew she was playing with fire, perhaps walking a tightrope was a better metaphor. Jean had not assigned her to Kit's case, so she had no specific orders regarding her. She had work to do and like any other snoop, was allowed time on the system to do her own projects or just play. Though she did not go into the Bondage Chateau (the chat room that those interested in Dominance and submission visited) to visit her Master, she still went to visit her friends. Ginger used a lot of her free time to play in the bondage rooms. Since she was not assigned to Kit's case, she could keep any information she found out about Kit to herself.

No one would stop her from setting up any of the thirty or more web based e-mail accounts that she had. No one would stop her from subscribing to all of the D/s list serves (web discussion groups) through these accounts. A web based e-mail account did not route mail directly to your home server as regular e-mail did, rather it routed it to a main web server and the user accessed their account through the services web page. It didn't leave a footprint on your home system. Many chatters that wanted to protect their anonymity used these accounts.

Ginger knew that Kit might use the net to find help if she managed to get away from her captor. Ginger was going to do everything in her power to help Kit if she detected her presence. She knew what she was doing was against the Committee's protocols and it would embarrass Jean, but she

had to do it. She owed Kit that much. She also knew she was risking her marriage.

Pat would also do what he could to help, but he was assigned to the case, so it would be difficult. Since Julie didn't even work for the Committee, she was the logical coordinator for their clandestine operation. Pat told Julie about what he knew, which was considerable at times and Julie would tell Ginger. They all knew they were playing fast and loose with the rules. They all hoped that they were doing the right thing.

The conspiracy had brought Ginger and Julie very close together. Not only had Julie been jealous of Ginger's relationship with Pat, she just had a visceral dislike of her. Julie was everything Ginger was not. Julie was skinny and angular. Ginger was soft and curvy. Julie's features were stark and a little large for her face. Ginger was perfectly proportioned and seemed to glow. Julie was direct and always fancied herself an outsider, Ginger was subtle and made friends easily. But they both loved Kit and this love helped them form a close and real bond in this time of crisis,

"So what do they know already?" Ginger asked Julie. She could probably get the same information and more from Jean, but that would be too compromising.

"Some of this you already know, but let me tell you what Pat told me." Julie began. They were meeting in Julie and Pat's house.

"They are certain that it is a leech. They are pretty sure that he is based in Oklahoma, eastern Colorado or the Texas panhandle. Since Kit's abduction, there have been two vampire murders in Oklahoma. Both were truck stop hookers.

They are worried because the bodies were left where he killed the women. He made no attempt to conceal his actions.

"This could mean a couple of things. It might mean that he is in such a confident position that he doesn't have to cover up his actions. Perhaps he's even trying to call attention to himself. This could mean it's a bigger trap than any suspected. Everyone on the scene is progressing slowly because of this possibility.

"The second reason is almost as troubling. It is possible that the vampire has lost control of himself and is killing with abandon. Now, they already know he was controlling himself and at least two other vampires, so that he would lose control is giving them pause. Everyone is taking it real slow and careful. They don't want to lose anyone else.

"The intelligence is sketchy. One of Pat's contacts in the area, a suspected gypsy, has passed some information regarding the leech's ambitions. This information confirms what is already believed about his motives. It seems that the word on the vampire grapevine is that this guy is going to try and make a move on one of the lords to make a name for himself.

"Now we all know that true vampire power comes from their mind control and psychic powers. It is troubling that this one would use such corporeal methods to take down a lord. It's almost like he's launching a hostile take over."

"This gives us a pretty good clue as to his personality."

"Sure does. They are working on the assumption that he either used to be some corporate functionary or perhaps military. It's just how these guys think. One of the things Pat

is looking into is mysterious disappearances from either quarter in the past twenty years. This is a Herculean task because an impressive number of these types, especially military, go missing every year.

"Pat was also told to cross reference this information with murders and deaths surrounding the disappearance. They think it's likely that this type of vampire would go back and kill past associates who he would blame for his mortal failures. So far, they have come up with five good candidates. Pat feels, however, that they could find twenty to thirty before they are done. America is a big place and twenty years is a long time."

"Why did they limit the search to twenty years."

"They had to draw the line somewhere and they think that this guy wouldn't wait to make his move. They think he's the impatient type."

Ginger sipped her tea and turned these facts and conjectures over and over in her mind. Julie rose and pattered around in the kitchen while her friend thought. As she moved around, the phone rang. Ginger watched as she spoke to the voice on the other end.

"Hello Pat."

"Is that so?"

"Are you sure?"

"Well, you be careful. Call me when you get back."

"Love you too, bye."

She turned to Ginger "He's going to see David. Seems there is a change in his behavior again."

"How so?"

Julie shook her head "I don't know. With David I can't imagine that it would be good."

"Me either." Julie can and sat back down with her friend. Neither spoke for a very long time.

2

David was not being held in his apartments, so Pat had to go see him in the infirmary holding cells. Pat hated this area of the facility because this is where true prisoners were kept. Though the security was very tight and Pat knew there was no real danger, it was tough to walk the halls in the company of werewolves and other monsters. In this case, Pat was happy that the Committee had never taken a vampire prisoner.

The last time Pat saw David, David had been kept in a straight jacket. It bothered Pat very much to see his old friend struggling like a mad man against his restraints, then Pat reminded himself that David did not struggle like a mad man, he struggled as a mad man.

When Pat found David, he was shocked. Looking through the Plexiglass that separated the visitors' area from the holding cell, Pat found David sitting upright and free. He was smoking a cigarette, a habit he had picked up in the last two years. David claimed it gave him something to do with his hands.

David looked up and brightened when he saw Pat. "Pat! How good to see you. Sorry that I don't get up." He held up his arm that was shackled to the cot on a short chain.

"No worries, David. So how are you? You look better."

"Am better. Never been better in my life, in fact."

"Glad to hear that, David." Pat said suspiciously.

"Don't blame you for doubting me bro, but I tell you I'm fine. I mean, I'm really ok."

"If you say so. Does this have anything to do with Kit?" Pat asked cautiously.

David stopped and looked up. Pat thought he looked like he was reading something. Then he looked back at Pat and said, "Yes."

"Is Kit all right?"

More reading "Can't say bro, may have said too much already, but look, they are going to put me back in my room soon. When they do, will you bring everyone by? You know, one at a time. Julie, Ginger, even Jean?"

"You want to see Jean?" Pat was shocked. He knew David hated Jean for killing his vampire Mistress.

"Yes Pat, I want to see Jean."

"Can I ask why?"

"Sure."

Pat waited and realized that David was going to make him ask. He got momentarily very angry and then smiled to himself. This was the kind of thing the real David, the sane David, would do to get under your skin. "Why?"

"I want to tell him I'm sorry. I want to tell them all I'm sorry. I've caused so much pain. Pat, I'm so terribly sorry for what I did to you, so sorry about what I did to Samantha. Oh, God and what I did to Wayne, I'm so, so very sorry." David started weeping and he wanted to be able to go to him and wrap him in his arms and hold him. He had seen David cry before, but this was not some lunatic's rant. David seemed to

Pat to be a very rational man who was just now coming to grips with his guilt.

"Sure thing David, I'll ask."

David sniffed a few times and looked at his friend in the eyes. Pat swore he saw more clarity and sharpness than he had ever seen before. "Thank you, Pat. Thank you for everything. Thank you for being my friend, for not abandoning me. Thank you for saving me."

"David..." Pat thought he might cry anytime now.

"Buck up asshole, didn't I tell you everything was going to be OK?"

"Yes."

More reading "Well, I probably shouldn't have. Now get the hell out of here. The Docs want to hurt me some more."

"Sure thing, mother fucker."

Pat left feeling strangely better.

3

"He wants to do what?" Jean demanded

"He wants to apologize."

"I don't believe it. Why now? What happened?"

"Something to do with Kit."

"Yes, but what?"

"Wish I knew Jean, I wish I knew."

"Damn, this is getting more and more complicated."

"I know."

"His doctor says he's either completely sane or the best faker of a mad man he's ever seen."

"They aren't thinking about letting him go, are they?" Pat was actually frightened.

"Not in this life time. He's still a murderer. No matter how sane he acts, we know we can't trust him."

"I know and it sure doesn't help that he keep trying to reassure me that everything is going to be ok." Pat added

"I know. We don't have a clue what that means. For all we know, he's being controlled by this new vampire and he's now working against us."

There was a second possibility that both men were perfectly aware of and neither of them wanted to be the one to say it out loud first.

"I better get back to work." Pat finally said to break the silence.

"Sure thing, Pat. See you soon."

"Right, Jean."

Jean found himself alone. He sat and considered the impossible until it was time to go home to Ginger.

Chapter 17

Bull was having a rotten day. He had stayed away from the bar for a few days. The humiliation he felt was tangible. That skinny bitch had really laid a serious hurt on him. He had been knocked out and the paramedics had been called. They insisted on taking him to the hospital and he had spent the evening getting x-rays and talking to interns and nurses. To top it off, the police interviewed him while he was there.

He had told the officer that he had tripped and hit his head on the bar when the girl pushed him. There was no way in hell he was going to tell the truth to that grinning bastard of a cop.

Bull laid low in his trailer for the next few days. A few of his friends had stopped by to laugh at him. He could hear them pounding on his door, but he left them there. They were obviously drunk and stopping by to amuse themselves. Bull had no phone, so they couldn't bother him that way.

Bull did, however, have to make an appearance. If he sulked too long, his reputation would be badly hurt. He was a real bad ass in the club and he had to go bust a few heads to prove that he was still a force to be reckoned with. He thought he would stick to his story about tripping and hitting his head. His friends might not buy it at first, but after he split a skull or two, the others would learn.

It was cool and it felt good to ride his bike to the bar on the crisp afternoon. Bull had grown up out East and he loved the dry air of western Oklahoma. It was a desolate, brown place. It was full of cows and cowboys, but the spaces were

open and the authorities few and far between. If a man didn't step too far out of line, he could get away with an awful lot in a place like this.

Bull had never really fit in anywhere. He had been big and stupid all his life. As a boy, they always thought he was older than he was and treated him like a super dummy when he didn't perform to expectation. He was a constant disappointment to all the adults in his life, mostly his mom's parents, since mom wasn't around very much.

By the time he got to school, he did learn his one true talent. Bull was an accomplished fighter. His walk to school on his first day had drawn the attention of the local bully who was in the fourth grade. The three year difference in their ages seemed eternal at the time and this moron had been terrorizing first graders since he was one. Bull was an obvious target because of his size. If this guy could intimidate Bull right off, then the rest of the class would be easy pickens.

Bull, who was know as Gerald in school, was stopped two blocks from school in an alley he was cutting through. Bull remembered that there was a lot of trash in the alley, but there was a lot of trash in that hick town anyway. The bully stopped him and demanded that Bull give him all his money. Bull had used some particularly foul language to reject the guy's verbal assault.

The guy slugged Bull square in the jaw. Bull could still remember the salty warm taste of the blood as it filled his mouth. He grinned, his teeth stained red and the blood dripping out of the corners of him mouth. Bull laid into the guy and in less than a minute had beaten the boy badly

enough to where he had to be taken to the hospital. Bull was taken down to the Sheriffs office, but they let him go when they learned that he had been attacked by the other boy.

Bull would visit that office again many times in the next few years. Bull terrorized the entire school and when he slugged a teacher, was finally sent to a special school. Things were harder there, the other students tougher and the teachers and guards were tough and hard. Bull kept fighting.

School fell away at some point. Bull had caught the attention of some local bikers and they pulled him into their club. One thing had led to another and he was now riding with the Coyotes. He was still living on his fists, so he had to redeem his reputation and do it quickly. He almost felt sorry for the first slob who gave him half a reason to cream him. Someone was going to hurt tonight.

It was three in the afternoon and the bar was dark. It was an uncomfortable transition going from the bright afternoon into the dingy dark room. Bull heard someone make a comment about the "conquering hero" when he stepped into the bar, but his eyes hadn't adjusted to the dark yet, so he didn't see who it was. He wished the guy would keep it up now that he could see.

This early, only club members were in the joint. In three or four hours, the tourists would start drifting in and they would retreat to their corner. Now, however, the place belonged to them. The bar was own by a semi-retired member of the club, a leathery old bastard named Switch. They all thought Switch got his name from the knife he always carried. Switch wouldn't confirm or deny it.

"How's your head, Bull?" Switch had asked from behind the bar.

"It's fine. You got yourself a hard bar there, Switch. Hurt like Hell when I tripped."

"Yeah, sure do." Bull listened for any hint of sarcasm in his voice, but found none.

"Yeah, right." Someone had said from behind Bull. He wheeled and gave his best mad dog killer look to everyone in the bar. They all looked cowed. Bull was happy, he was going to be all right.

Things had settled into any easy rhythm and a while later, shortly after sunset, another biker came in. He was not a Coyote. His colors said he belonged to some club named the Pack. Everyone gave him a quick once over. It was not uncommon for visiting bikers to stop by for a drink or three. If he behaved himself, he would be welcome.

"Evening." Bull said to the stranger.

"Yeah." The smaller man said.

"Never heard of the Pack before, where you from?"

"Out East, though I'm surprised. I thought you would have remembered me from the other day. I was in here when that girl knocked you cold."

Bull's eyes seemed to glow red and he walked up to the much smaller man and looked down on him. "Look friend, I don't know if you are just tired of living, but you get one chance around here. I don't give one piss who the fucking Pack is, but here you show some manners."

The smaller man turned to Bull. His features struck Bull as too delicate and girlish. The guy didn't seem tough at all.

Something in his manner did, however, tell Bull that this man was not to be trifled with.

"Look, you think it's rude for me to tell you what my eyes saw, that's your problem. But you gotta know who you're dealing with."

Bull heard the telltale click of a pistol being cocked and felt the unyielding metal of the barrel being pressed into his impressive gut. "Now I don't want to step on anyone's toes, but I sure as hell know how to press an advantage. Buy you a beer, friend?"

Bull nodded slowly and he felt the gun withdraw. Bull considered for one brief second about attacking the smaller man, but he didn't want to get shot.

"Two beers please." The small man said to Switch. Switch eased his hand off the shotgun he kept hidden behind the bar and pulled two Coors for the men.

2

The night wore on and Bull found he liked the little man. One of his most endearing qualities was that he kept Bull's glass full. The two men shot pool and told lies about past conquests. Bull introduced him around and he soon felt as if he had known this man for years. Bikers travel from town to town so much that it's usually easy for them to fit into a new club that may invite them in for a while.

After a long while the smaller man looked at Bull and said, "It really is a shame about the bitch. You know I was watching the whole thing and she really hit you with a cheap shot. I bet she knows karate or something."

"Karate my ass. I'd like to get my hands around her scrawny neck for five minutes, I'd teach her some fucking karate."

"Would you?" He egged Bull on.

"Damn fucking straight. Course I might just want to stretch that neck a little."

"Suppose I told you where you can find her?"

"You know where she lives?"

The man nodded.

"Tell me where it is. I'll go teach that whore a lesson."

"Do better, I'll take you there myself."

Bull turned to tell his other friends and he felt a hand on his shoulder turning him back around. He was surprised at the strength in that hand.

"No need to tell them. This will be your party. Unless of course you think you need help?"

"No fucking way. Bitch surprised me last time. I'll show her a damn good time."

"Sure thing, bro."

The two men left the bar and rode their motorcycles into the Oklahoma night.

3

Kit had been awake for hours. She was not as hysterical as she was the night before, but she was still very upset. She spent some time getting in touch with her new body as a way of passing the time and distracting herself. First, she recited what she knew about vampires from the Committee's files.

She knew that vampires were essentially immortal. They could live indefinitely as long as they could re-supply

themselves with human blood. It was thought that you couldn't starve a vampire to death, but that they would become weaker and weaker as they were deprived. She also knew that it had to be human blood. Animal blood would be useless to her.

She had read that a vampire possessed extraordinary strength and physical prowess. She could attest to the super human strength that James possessed. She could also feel her own body growing stronger. The muscles in her arms and legs felt like steel to her now. She had nothing to test herself on, but she was sure she was now many times stronger than she was before.

She also knew that vampires possessed remarkable psychic powers. The vampire that Jean had killed in Alabama was psychically linked to many other undead and was attacking David while he lived in Bloomington, Indiana. She also knew that James had been attacking her psychically in her dreams. Somehow, David had interfered with his attack. She wondered if David had greater power because of his relationship with his vampire or if James was not very gifted in the psychic department.

Kit stretched out with her mind and found she was reading random thoughts from all over the area. It was hard to control, but with a little concentration she could focus on one person and eaves drop on him or her. She wondered if her psychic abilities would be limited because James' had been so. She also wondered what power he would have over her now. He seemed to control the two vampires he had attacked her with completely.

Mostly, Kit felt hungry. She had a deep and nagging hunger in the pit of her stomach that grew and grew. She knew that it would eat at her until she gave in.

4

Two motorcycles roared into the cavernous warehouse. The roar of the powerful four-stroke engines made an impressive echo. If Bull had been a smarter man he might have smelled a rat as James led him into the abandoned warehouse. He was not, however, a smart man and in his state of inebriation and lust his intelligence could best be described as minimal.

"What is this place?" Bull asked as he dismounted.

"A special place. I didn't tell you. I kidnapped the cunt and I'm holding her down there." James pointed to a sunken stairwell. "It's real private here, no one for miles."

"No one to hear her scream." Bull added. "It's party time!"

Kit had heard the duo approaching and she crouched in the corner in a hopeless attempt to hide. The door flew open with a loud metallic crash and James pulled the large biker into the small room.

"Bull, there she is!" He shouted as Bull's eyes were still adjusting to the darkness of the room.

Bull's instincts took over and he growled and leapt for Kit. He was deceptively fast for a man his size and he was on Kit in the blink of an eye. He grabbed Kit roughly but her filthy blouse and shook her violently. He then slammed her head to the floor.

"There Bitch!" He yelled. He then yanked hard on the blouse and the tattered material gave way exposing Kit's

upper body to her attacker. Bull grinned big and began to drool. He then reached for Kit's pants.

During the beginning of the attack Kit held her mind apart from the room. She felt everything that Bull did but none of it hurt her. She just kept herself limp and tried to control herself as much as possible. When Bull reached for her pants Kit lost control.

"You fucker!" She hissed and swatted him off her body more easily than she had once swatted flies. Bull literally flew across the room and smashed into the greasy wall. The man began to bleed and the smell flooded Kit's nostrils.

She sprang and it was her turn to flail Bull. She pounded his limp form against the wall again and again.

"You goddamn fuck!" She said again and again.

Every bit of repressed anger Kit had ever held came flowing out of her body. Anger against her uncle, and anger against the man that had abused her best friend. She let the anger she felt for every man that had ever touched her or sneered at her or belittled her. All of it came raging out as Kit pounded the big man again and again.

The anger began to give way to hunger as Bull's bones broke and his blood began flowing. Kit suddenly stopped and latched her virgin fangs on the man's throat.

Bull's hot blood began flowing into Kit's mouth and she drank greedily. Somewhere in the back of her mind she heard James yell "Yes!"

Somehow hearing James' voice snapped Kit's anger and her conscious mind began taking control again. The words that had been spoken to her by Debbie and by David rang in

her ears. She was not a monster yet, it was up to her what she did.

She had drunk a considerable amount of Bull's blood, but the man was huge. Kit pulled back and listened for his heart beat. She was happy when she felt it pounding strongly.

"What are you doing?" James scolded. "Kill him!"

"Fuck you!" Kit hissed.

"WHAT? I order you to kill him!"

"I said fuck you!" With that, Kit threw Bull at James and caught him unaware.

James had expected to be able to control Kit as he had the others he turned. He was shocked that Kit retained her freewill and was disobeying him. His shock prevented him from defending against the blow of Bull's body and he went down.

Kit jumped and smashed James' head with all her new-found strength. She was incredibly strong now that she had Bull's blood flowing in her veins. She hit James again and dazed the other vampire.

Kit knew he was only going to be out of action for a moment and made a split second decision. She knew that Bull's injuries were critical and that her only hope of his survival was to escape now.

Without looking back she grabbed the big man and ran up the stairs. She flung the big man's body across the back of his bike and hopped in the driver's saddle. She was glad that Bull left the keys. In a moment she was roaring out into the cold night with her unconscious cargo. She did regret not staying to fight James, but she knew that Bull was close to death.

After a few moments, when she was well clear of the warehouse, she stopped and considered her situation. The first thing she noticed was that she was naked from the waist up. She was impervious to the cold, but it wouldn't do to be seen like this. She turned back to Bull and struggled the leathers off the big man's body. The jacket hung on her like a tent, but it would preserve her modesty.

She then opened her mind to her surroundings. She was in an empty industrial district, but she heard a highway off in the distance. She knew if she found that, she could soon follow a blue sign to a hospital.

"Hang on big guy. Don't fucking die on me. You have no idea what I gave up to help you."

Within ten minutes she had found a hospital and dumped the big man's body and blasted the horn and roared away before anyone could come out and see her. She felt back with her mind and knew that help had almost instantly materialized for Bull.

As she probed for Bull she felt the malevolent mind that belong to James. He was awake and actively casting for her. She remembered her training at the Committee and instantly closed her thoughts down. Her instructor had called it shielding herself.

Chapter 18

An emergency surgical team had worked on the big man for hours. He had obviously been hurt in some sort of gang related incident. He wore biker colors and was beaten almost beyond recognition. He had no identification and the nurse who found him said she saw a motorcycle leaving as she rushed out to see what was wrong.

He had multiple broken bones, including five ribs. His lung was punctured. They suspected he had a shattered cheekbone and he had compound fractures in both arms and his right leg. He was a mess. He was covered with bruises and minor lacerations. The most troubling aspect was his loss of blood. His blood pressure had been almost nonexistent when they started working on him. He drained three units of A positive before he could be declared stable. A smaller man would have died from such a loss.

Since he did not have any exterior wounds that would account for such a large volume of missing blood, they did their best to find internal injuries that might cause the problem. They couldn't find any internal damage that would account for it either. They thought that maybe the big man had been attacked by some group of wacko's who took his blood for some kind of ritual. They had seen it before in the wilds of western Oklahoma.

When they got him stabilized and packed off to the ICU, the doctor found a trim official looking man waiting to see him. The doctor, an intern on his 26th hour of 36, looked at the man with blurry eyes.

"What can I do for you?"

"Like to ask you a couple of questions, doctor."

"Sure thing officer." He was tired and didn't notice that the man hadn't shown him any I.D.

"That man they just brought in, any idea what happened to him?"

"Hard to tell, but he suffered a lot of damage. Lost a lot of blood, though we couldn't find any major lacerations. It was probably some satanic wannabe. The nurse says we get them every now and again around here. I wouldn't know, I'm pretty new."

"Don't suppose you have any idea who he is?"

"Not a clue, other than his gang jacket. He's a Coyote, we get them in here every once in a while. Local group, but you know that. Never seen one hurt this bad though."

The man thought for a second and seemed to formulate questions and then edit them out in his mind. Finally he said "Thanks for the time Doc, looks like you could use some sleep."

"Yeah. Sure thing." The Doctor smiled and staggered away, heading for an empty bed or exam table to lie on for a while. He was stopped by another policeman, this one was uniformed.

"Got a minute, Doc?"

"Uh, yeah, but I just got through with one of your detectives."

"Detectives? I'm the responding officer. They won't send a detective until some time tomorrow after I file a report."

"But he was just right here." The doctor pointed to the empty space that the man had been occupying a moment before.

2

Jean looked at his aide and said, "All right. Let's have it?"

"Agent Talbot," Jean's aide Richard Jens was the perfect gray man that bureaucracies attract. He was efficient and completely without personality. He never called anyone by his or her first name, "Reports seven suspicious attacks in the outlying area. He has investigated all of them and has found one man who matched the description of the man that attacked the subject (he wouldn't use Kit's name anymore) the night she was apprehended.

"He believes it was a promising lead because the man suffered a considerable loss of blood that the doctors are having a hard time explaining."

"Anything else?"

"Yes, a nurse on the scene says she saw a motorcycle leaving the area shortly when the man was literally dropped off."

"Hard to ride a bike carrying that much dead weight."

"Yes, it would take supernatural strength to pull that off."

Jean looked at the man to see if there was a hint of irony or sarcasm in his voice as he said supernatural. There wasn't.

"So what's the theory?"

"Hard to make one. No one can figure out why the man is alive. It is likely that either vampire attacked him, but they would probably kill him. Perhaps he was left for dead and

another biker found him and left him, not wanting to attract attention to himself."

"Perhaps." Jean thought for a moment. "Ok, let's see, what are the big cities in the area?"

"Tulsa and Oklahoma City to the East, Lubbock and Amarillo to the South, Dallas to the Southeast and the San Antonio/Austin area to the southwest of that. You have Santa Fe and Albuquerque to the west and southwest, Denver and Colorado Springs to the West and there's not a lot north of there, Omaha and Lincoln, perhaps.

"That's quite a list. Put whomever we have in those cities on alert. Tell them to watch for motorcycles and to watch biker bars."

"Yes, sir."

"That's it."

"Yes, sir." The man vanished.

There was another possibility that neither man would speak out loud. If it was Kit who had dropped him off, then she certainly was a vampire. As strong as she was, she would not have been able to balance a large unconscious man on a motorcycle. The other thing was that she was showing concern for this man. She did not want him to die. This meant that she had retained much of her humanity, which would make her hard to find since she would have all her wits about her.

It also meant that it would make it doubly hard to destroy her when they did find her. If she were some slobbering monster that was under the control of this other beast, then it would be easy, but if she was still Kit, then they would be

destroying someone he cared for very much. He thought and thought, but the protocols gave him no latitude. If he tried to protect Kit, he would be removed and another director would move in and do the same job.

He began to hate his job very much. His wife may have forgiven him for what he had to do, but he wasn't sure he would ever be able to forgive himself.

3

"So it looks like she's on the move." Pat told Ginger and Julie. The three of them were sitting in the dining room. They were supposedly eating lunch together.

"They have everyone searching the web for possible hang outs, getting biker bars, S&M clubs and internet coffee shops in a four state area and they are big states too."

"So, do they think she's alive?" Ginger asked.

"No one is saying. The assumption is that we are looking for the male vampire, but our contacts are on the lookout for anyone suspicious on a motorcycle. That's Bandito territory, so we're going to get reports of a lot of suspicious people in that area."

"Bandito?" Julie asked.

"Yeah, turns out it's a motorcycle gang that pretty much owns the southwest, big and tough. They run hundreds of sub gangs all through the area. Some people think they are bigger than the Hell's Angels, though you can't be certain. It's going to make it real tough to work around them."

"Well that's good, I suppose." Ginger said as she thought.
"Kit knows her way around bikers."

"I hope so, Ginger, I sure hope so. It's big and it's as wild as America gets out there, especially in those circles.

Everyone is grumbling about the impossibility of the task."

"Good." Was all Ginger could say.

4

David had been returned to his apartments. He had been acting lucid, so no one could think of a reason to keep him restrained. He hardly had more freedom of movement there. It was thought the comfort might help him.

His doctors were very concerned and made sure he was under constant surveillance. One thing the psychologist and psychiatrists worry about is a sudden change in behavior. A psychotic patient that suddenly acted normal could be as more dangerous than one who acted suddenly deranged. If you weren't careful, they were capable of terrible acts of violence.

The doctor recalled hearing about a patient that suffered from catatonia who suddenly woke up in the middle of a lecture in which he had been brought to show the psychology students. The man woke up and for reasons still unknown, was filled with rage. He walked to side of the room unnoticed while the professor lectured. He found a fire ax and proceeded to kill the professor and harm a number of the students. This story was told to impress upon him just how dangerous a person is who stops seeing the world as everyone else does. The doctor never forgot that lesson. He watched David carefully.

David spent most of his time sitting and meditating on the living room couch. At least that's what the doctor assumed.

What he didn't know was that David was testing possibilities and probabilities. David was coming to the conclusion that knowing the future was not nearly as fun as he thought it would be. He was wondering what he could do to help things along, but it was tough. Sometimes the smallest of actions had wildly disastrous results, while other actions produced no results at all.

David sat and wondered while the doctors watched.

Chapter 19

Kit continued to travel south for a time and then cut back east. She was heading to the Austin/San Antonio area of Texas. When she started, all she wanted to do was get out of Oklahoma as quickly as possible. It was a somewhat rational plan since she knew that Committee agents would be swarming all over the area once the biker's body had been found. Part of her wished that she had not tried to save the man. He would draw more attention to her and this area.

Kit had also managed to read some of his mind during the fight. The man was a complete thug. He had inflicted his will upon anyone he could physically intimidate and that was most people. He did not even understand the concept of consensual sex. He had had his way with many women; some willing, many not. It was all the same to Bull. She knew no one would mourn the passing of such a man.

She also knew that wasn't the point. If she had killed him or allowed him to die as a matter of convenience, it would lead her down a path to damnation from which she could not return. James wanted to corrupt her, turn her against the Committee. If she killed that way, it would only be a matter of time before her vampiric mind would rationalize a direct attack on Jean and the Committee. She would never allow that. Her soul was her own. She kept repeating that as she drove south.

Somewhere in southern Oklahoma she had found a ditch with water in it and managed to wash most of the blood off her body and off the bike. The bike had a good range and was

luckily about full when she took it. She would, however, have to get gasoline sooner or later. If she walked in covered with blood, it would draw too much attention. As it was, she was a complete mess, but at least she wasn't covered with blood.

Despite her filthy condition, she felt remarkably well. Except for a soft hunger in her stomach, she felt in perfect fighting form. She did not have a single ache or pain in her whole body. Her arm did not even show a mark where she had used the tourniquet. She felt strong and her senses were more alive than she thought possible.

She realized she could easily drive the bike through the moonless night without using the headlights. In fact, she saw better without them. She could hear everything. Even over the scream of the powerful engine, she could hear animals running in the dry landscape. She could reach out with her mind and count them one by one.

Her skin was alive and very sensitive to the humidity and temperature of the night air. It was not unpleasant and, in fact, rather sensual. She knew that no variation in temperature would ever bother her again. She almost felt that she could ride the bike through the fires of the sun or the icy mountains of Pluto.

But she knew she would not survive the sun. It would not be the heat that would kill her. It would be the light. She knew she was dead. She also knew that exposing herself to the light of the sun would change her to her "real" condition. One of her more spiritual instructors back at the Committee had described the sun as "God's eye" and said that nothing could deceive the eye of God.

She also considered just staying out in the open as the sun rose. She knew that her soul was clean now and that she would be judged on her life and not on what she had become. At least that's what she thought Ginger had told her, but she also knew that suicide was a sin and that she could not take her own life. She cursed the irony because she knew that the longer she survived, the more likely she would truly become a monster and that would condemn her as well.

As she drove, she considered that the irony was one all humans faced. If people died before they able to formulate a concept of right or wrong they would certainly go to heaven. This would save them from the stain of evil acts that they might commit as adults, but it would also rob the world of the potential good that they might do as well. No, everyone had to fulfill his or her own destiny. Everyone faced challenges. Kit's challenge was that she was a vampire. She would have to deal with it.

She also considered that her sense of logic was being distorted by her need to survive. Maybe it wasn't suicide to destroy herself because she was technically already dead. She turned the idea over in her mind a few hundred times and then banished it from her consciousness. It would do her no good to constantly second guess herself. She had decided to survive. That was that.

As morning approached, she drove the bike out into the sandy barren landscape away from the highway. She found a small drainage ditch that had a steel pipe that cut under a small hill. She dumped the bike into the ditch and filled one end of the tube with sand and dirt. With her new strength it

did not take her longer than a few minutes. She crawled into the open end of the pipe and crawled to the filled end and curled up.

She waited the sun's appearance and felt it as it crested the horizon. She felt herself slipping into unconsciousness. Her last thought was to wonder what vampire's dreamt about. She wondered if David would visit her in such a dream.

2

Kit woke precisely at sunset and was thankful that vampires did not seem to dream at all. If she could not feel the sun sinking with her mind, she actually would have believed that no time had passed at all. She felt none of the grogginess or minor aches and pains that she usually felt when usually woke up. She rather felt exactly as she had the night before. She felt perfect.

She climbed out of the pipe while the sky was still blood red from the sun. She was sad that she would never again see a clear blue sky, that she would never feel the warmth of the sun on her face again. She retrieved the bike and got moving. She knew she had a lot to do and little time to do it. Her clothes were filthy and stinking. She still had traces of blood on her and she stunk too. She had to find clothing and she had to find a shower.

She was close to Lubbock, so she knew that a shower would not be hard to find. She knew there had to be some kind of college that kept its gym open into the evening. She could blend in and find a shower there. Clothing was another question.

As she got close to the small city, she spotted a trailer park. She headed for it and skirted it until she found what she wanted. For some reason, perhaps laziness, perhaps some emergency, someone had left clothing on a line outside one of the trailers. She found some women's clothing that, while two or three sizes too large, would at least protect her modesty until something more suitable could be found.

She headed into town and found signs pointing to the local campus. It was an easy thing to find a gym with a women's locker room. Though there were guards and attendants to keep the coeds safe from intruders, she found it was a simple thing to push their attention away from her with her mind. She bathed and changed into the baggy clothing in a matter of minutes.

It was then an easy task to find a mall and use some of Bull's cash to buy herself some clothing that fit. She was frugal in her shopping decision, because she knew she had to stretch Bull's money as far as she could. It was a fair amount of money, but it would have to last. Fortunately, she would not have any meal or lodging expenses. Unfortunately, she had no idea what expenses she would encounter in the day, weeks, months and years that were to follow.

As she pulled out of town, she thought she might soon come back and buy an acre or two of the dust town. Who knows, maybe in a hundred years or so, someone might actually be interested in buying it from her. She thought about David and the vampire that attacked him. Money had been a big part of why she had chosen him. She was beginning to understand that now. She wished she had some

of David's fortune right now. Money was definitely going to be a problem. It wasn't like there was a booming market for vampires in the current economy right now.

Until that very moment, she had not considered her destination at all. She pulled into a gas station to fill up and checked some of the local maps. She realized just how big a place Texas was. It was still early and she could hit almost any city in the State, so she really had her pick. She even thought about Arkansas and Missouri, but decided to stick with Texas.

Many of her chat friends were from Texas, so she knew a little about the state. It was interesting how so many D/s chatters were from Texas. Maybe it was just that it was such a large state, but it still seemed odd. She noticed the cities of San Antonio and Austin. She had three friends from that area. From the description they gave her, it was an area she could blend into.

She plotted a course and powered her motorcycle. She noticed that the hunger in her stomach was continuing to grow slowly but steadily. Was this what her life was now? Dodging the sun and hunting her next meal.

Chapter 20

David sat in his room and contemplated omniscience. He had come to the conclusion that knowing the future was a terrible burden. He remembered debates that he had in philosophy classes regarding freewill and determinism. He had always argued the freewill position, mainly because it was harder to do. David was naturally argumentative and would always take the harder side in arguments.

He wished he knew then what he knew now. He was, in fact, correct about free will. Yes, there were determinate factors that essentially limited your actions, sometimes completely, but free will played a big factor in how things worked out. What it all boiled down to was probability, what was likely? What was possible? What were the long shots? What were the impossibilities? Even the unlikely had to occur on a fairly regular basis. Las Vegas would always have big winners for the players to see, given the thousands of tourists who lost money.

He examined the threads of Kit's life and got a huge headache trying to find a way for her to survive with her life and her soul intact. He played with the threads, experimented with various actions and was unhappy with every result. He felt like he was trying to thread a needle while wearing boxing gloves. Every door he could open for Kit closed two others, every bit of help hurt two fold down the line. David pouted, he was living the Heisenburg principle, the more he tried to be sure of the outcome, the less likely that outcome was.

He saw many dangers in Kit's way. He knew if he steered her clear of one danger, he drove her into greater dangers. It was becoming more and more frustrating. He silently wished he was still insane.

His new found sanity had another terrible price. He now had to cope with what he had done to his close friends. Even if he was under the spell of a vampire, he had still murdered his close friend. He had stabbed his friend in cold blood. He had held him as he felt his life pour from his body. He had thrilled in the act and now all he had was his guilt. He thought it was this guilt that propelled him to help Kit. Somehow, her redemption would be his. He sat and stewed.

2

James was scared and he was furious. His life of failures unfolded before him like a road paved in fool's gold. Every plan he had ever made that fell short rang in his mind, every cut he had almost made mocked him. Every woman that ever rejected him haunted him anew. His whole life had been one unlucky break after another.

This latest failure sat in the pit of his stomach like a cancer. It ate at him. He could not understand where he had gone wrong. He played the events over and over in his mind and he saw nothing that he had done wrong. How was he to know that the bitch was somehow linked to that lunatic in France?

Of James' many faults, the least endearing was his inability to learn from his mistakes. If he could admit his failure, if he could admit that his reach had greatly overextended his grasp, if he could admit that he had been playing a game he

was destined to lose, then maybe he could just cut and run. James could not admit any of these things to himself. James was a consummate loser and he was all the more dangerous because of it.

James had great power. He was, however, totally incapable of wielding it. He was like a child with a loaded gun. There was nothing he could do to avoid his eventual destruction, but the question was how many would he take down with him as he went. James plotted his revenge.

He considered the recent events. Kit's attack had taken him completely off guard. He was sure that the madman was helping her somehow. She was, however, undisciplined in her abilities. James, while not more powerful, was much more skilled. In a head to head contest, he was sure he could kill her. The trick was to set up such a contest.

When he captured Kit, he had no idea who she was. He was only convinced of her Committee membership. He had no idea, until he had her in his grasp, how close she was to the Director. This made her dangerous, but would make her eventual destruction all the more satisfying. He would hurt this man by killing his friend. He would plunge the Committee into chaos. He would earn his reputation yet.

It was a hopeless plan, just as all of his plans are. James did not suffer from bad luck. James was a fool. He never truly considered that others would act with their own free will or in their own best interest. In chess terms, he had no idea how to think one, two or three moves ahead. Because he never anticipated how his competition would behave, he was always in reactive position.

He was still dangerous, however, because he had learned how to play for stalemate. James had long learned to be happy in the failures of others, even if these failures did not benefit him in any way. James plotted his revenge.

He replayed the events and what he knew. When he recovered, he found himself bloody and dazed. He was also very much alone. The bitch had taken the massive biker with her when she left. She was undoubtedly in possession of his money and his transportation. The Committee trained her, so she undoubtedly knew what she needed to do to survive.

She would run. She would run as far as she could and then lay low. He would have to run too. The Committee would soon be swarming over this area. He could not afford to be captured now. He knew he had left too many bodies, acted too boldly. This area was poison to him now. He would bide his time. He had connections among the gypsies. They would look on his behalf. He would find this bitch. He would kill her and any that helped her. He would enjoy that very much.

He had been driving while plotting and not paying attention to his speed. He was racing through the Oklahoma countryside at over one hundred miles per hour. His musings were interrupted by twin light flashing in his mirrors. He considered running, but he changed his mind and pulled over to the side of the highway.

The Trooper kept his headlights on in a feeble attempt to blind James. A mortal would have no way of knowing if the Trooper was driving solo or had a partner with a shotgun aimed directly at him. James was no mortal and knew that

man traveled alone. The man was nervous, but put on a good show as he approached the motorcycle.

James could feel the man relax as he got closer to the bike. James made no threatening moves and the Trooper had gotten a good look at James and felt relieved when he saw James' diminutive size. James felt an inner rage at being dismissed because of his size yet again.

"Like to see your license and registration please." The man said as he stood over James.

"We have a problem officer, I don't have either on me right now." James smiled to himself.

The man put his hand on the butt of his pistol "Get off the motorcycle and walk back to the cruiser. Move slow and easy, I'm going to have to take you in."

"No problem officer, in fact I'm glad you stopped me." James slowly dismounted the large machine and turned facing the Trooper. The man, while not the incredible size of Bull, was large nonetheless. He had the look of an athlete. He undoubtedly played sports in school and now had a job where his size would do him some good.

"Nice to stop, was planning to get a bite in the next town anyway."

The Trooper had no idea what the smaller man was talking about and was about to ask him. He never got the chance. James was on top of him before his mind could perceive the action. He had indeed been an athlete, played high school and college football. His last thought was that he had never seen anyone move that fast before.

James has over the man and drinking his blood in an instant. He enjoyed this kill more than he had enjoyed a kill in a long time. All his rage towards Kit and all the rage he had felt towards larger men who had abused him all his life was washed away in the warm blood that now filled his mouth.

The Trooper instinctively tried to struggle against James. James was much too strong for the man to move. James held him as a tiger might hold a rabbit. There was no contest. There was no doubt of the outcome. The large man's life ended on the cold pavement on the empty highway.

After a delightful eternity James let the body of the Trooper fall heavily against the ground. He stood over him and repressed the urge to spit on the body. He had done his damage. He had visited his revenge on his childhood tormentors one more time. He had replayed his psychodrama yet again.

He then realized his mistake. The Trooper had, without a doubt, radioed to his headquarters before he made the stop. The license and description of the motorcycle would already be logged into a police computer. When the officer failed to check-in in the next few minutes another cruiser would be dispatched and an all points would be put out on the bike. James cursed the man for bring more bad luck into his life.

He could only continue his drive and hope to make the nearest town and ditch the bike before he was detected. He could move very fast on foot and would surely evade detection. He would hide in the new town and wait for the next drifting biker to relieve of his transportation and money. He had learned that these fools were easy prey. They roamed

the night, were reckless in their actions and they never reported anything to the police.

As he neared the lights of the small town he had a sudden sickening thought. He knew the Committee would have all its feelers out looking for him. The dead Trooper would be a surefire red flag for them. The police might give up once they had the bike and no trace of its rider, but the Committee would not. The Committee knew what it was hunting.

Not only would he have to ditch the bike, he would have to put many miles between it and him before dawn. He reached out with his senses and listened for anything that might help him. Miles to the north he heard a freight train. He probed the mind of the engineer and was pleased with the results. The train was headed east and the man was thinking about the siding that he was going to be parked on soon to allow the westbound train to pass.

James knew that once he parked the bike he would have time to run the fifteen miles to the north and board the train. Then it would be an easy thing to find a hiding place among the cargo. If he was lucky, he might even be able to hide on the train through the next day. The mind of the second engineer would tell him that.

He cursed his bad luck one more time and then thought how he was going to make her pay. It was her fault after all. He had such a beautiful plan. If she was only the obedient little bitch that she should have been. Yes, she was going to pay for this mess. She was going to pay in spades.

Chapter 21

Kit arrived in Austin with a few hours of darkness left for her to operate. The first order of business would be to find a safe place to hole up during the day. She knew for now that the storm cellars would probably be her safest bet. There was always the chance that some homeless person, or "mole" as they are often called, might find her, but she knew she could squeeze into some very small spaces that would be overlooked by most, especially in the dim light.

She parked her bike and trotted a couple of miles away, just in case someone had gotten a make on it. One of the first things she would have to do was to arrange new transportation. That bike would sooner or later become hot. But for now, she needed shelter.

She found a deserted street, not hard to do at four in the morning and pried a manhole cover from its resting-place. She was still amazed at her newfound strength. There was no way an ordinary mortal could have pried it lose without tools.

She slipped into the hole and easily pulled the cover back over her head. Two things immediately struck her about her surrounding. The first was the complete darkness that enveloped her. She had never been one to explore caves, but her friends that did had told her how disturbing complete darkness could be. She reached out with her mind and found that somehow she could see just fine. She was beginning to realize why Jean had previously told her that you never attack a vampire at night. She had an incredible edge down here, just from her sight alone.

The second thing that struck her was the smell. Though this was a storm drain and not a sewage pipe, it was nonetheless full of horrid smell. She could smell rats and their dropping, rotting flesh and plant matter. She could smell a group of homeless people off in the distance. She was somehow not bothered by these odors, she just knew them.

She prowled around for a while and found some pipes that ran along the walls. There were only a few inches of clearance between the pipes and the floor and she started to squeeze herself underneath. It was incredibly tight and she thought she felt a couple of her ribs break as she used her strength to force herself behind the pipes. There was more behind and she exhaled as her body quickly healed itself.

As her ribs mended she felt her faint hunger grow stronger. She realized that using her power would cost her. She made a note to avoid, to the best of her abilities, situations where she would have to heal. The small shelter was, however, worth the risk. She was convinced that someone searching with a flashlight would miss her hiding hole. She felt the sun rising in the distance and began to lose consciousness. She said a quick prayer before she lay, for all intent and purpose, dead until the next sunset.

2

She woke the next night and found that her hiding place had provided her with the security that she needed. She knew she'd have a busy night ahead of her. She would now need less conspicuous transportation and more money. If she could, she would try and arrange less hazardous shelter,

though she wasn't sure she would stay in Austin for any length of time. She also knew she would have to feed soon.

She returned to where she had left her motorcycle and reached out with her mind to see if anyone was watching. She sat deathly still for two hours watching from a small alley to see if any observer betrayed himself.

She noticed no one. She knew that experienced agents would be able to mask themselves from her, but she had to take some risks. While she was probing with her mind, she felt two other reaching out and probing for her. The first belonged to David. It had not tried to intrude on her. As far as she could tell, he was just checking up on her. As soon as she made a quick connection, he broke it off.

The second mind was more malevolent. She knew it belong to James. He was scanning for her. When she felt his touch, she closed her mind down for a time. She didn't know if he had been able to tell where she was, but he would definitely know she was still alive. She knew he was hunting for her. "Fine," she thought to herself, "save me the trouble of hunting him down."

She knew a confrontation would be inevitable. It was all she lived for at the moment. He had to be made to pay for what he had done to her, for what he had done to her partner. Kit was sure that Alex had been killed. The last thing she saw before she lost consciousness back in the hotel room was James firing and Alex going down.

Yes, James would pay and he would pay in spades. He would pay in spades. She knew she had more power than he did, but he was skillful at using his. She was clumsy and

awkward. She would find a way to train herself. She would get better and then she would make that leech pay for his sins.

She reminded herself that she needed to take care of her more immediate needs and approached the bike carefully. She got on and fired it up. She drove through the dark streets in no particular pattern until she was confident the no one was following her. She then set off in search of a biker's bar. She would find what she needed there.

She found what she wanted on the outskirts of town. The bar was small and it was attached to a bowling alley. The parking lot reflected the duel nature of the clientele. On one side were the pick up trucks and small cars of the proletariat bowlers, the other side was all Harley's. She pulled in and dismounted. One of the bikers whistled at her as she pulled up. She glanced over to him and gave him the briefest of smiles before walking into the bar.

The place was noisy and crowded. It was like a million other bars that catered to these guys. The music was loud and the conversation was louder. She was bombarded by the power of the lustful thoughts in the room. She walked straight to the bar and laid five dollars in front of her. The bartender came and she nodded to the taps. He poured her a foamy Coors and took the five dollars away.

She noticed that most of the bikers wore Bandito colors. She suspected that all the others were part of subsidiary gangs. They were mostly Hispanic, but not completely. The women in the bar were ethnically mixed.

The biker she had smiled to in the parking lot followed her in and sat right next to her. He was not a large man, but she could feel his strength. He had greasy black hair and his clothing was equally dirty. His face carried pockmarks and battle scares. She could tell he was a force to be reckoned with. He would be perfect.

"Buy you a drink, Chica?" He yelled over the music, it was hardly a question.

"No thanks, got one already." She nodded to the foamy beer. "Tell you what, I'm not thirsty right now, why don't you drink it."

"Sure thing." He said and drank. He was the kind of man that made any space he occupied his own. He was a walking example of self-confidence.

"One hell of a ride you got there."

"Thanks. Used to belong to my old man, but that's another story."

"I like stories, Chica."

She laughed, "Not that much to tell. Asshole slapped me around once to often, so now he's walking and I got his ride."

"Shit honey, you're playing a dangerous game. He finds you, he'll kill you for sure." He assumed her old man was a fellow biker. Stealing someone's ride was the worst thing you could do.

"No worries. He's some penciled dick from up north. Damn Coyotes got no balls, you know?"

The man laughed, "You got that right, babe." By making the pretend villain of her story a rival gang member, she could get this guy's help.

"I suppose I'll have to find a new ride pretty soon." She looked directly into his eye, "I'd be so grateful to anyone who would help me."

"How grateful?" He said, much more interested now.

Smiled her best sexy smile "Some place we can be alone?"

Without a word he took her hand and led her to the bathrooms. He walked through the communal room and into an empty stall. There was no presence he just sat on the toilet and took out his now erect member. Kit leaned down and performed some rather perfunctory oral sex. He came quickly and she could taste the trace amounts of blood in his sperm.

She looked into his eyes and pulled him to his feet. She kissed his neck softly and ran her tongue over the warm flesh. He moaned and pressed against her. She bit him and let his blood flow in her mouth.

She luxuriated in the pleasant sensation. She could feel his strength and his heart pumping for her now. He was dazed and completely in her power now. It took some self-control, but she pulled back and stopped drinking before she would hurt him.

She licked the blood from his neck and noticed that the holes her fangs made closed when her saliva covered them. He was still a little bruised, but that would make it seem like he had gotten a great hickey.

"You got any friends, lover?" She whispered in his ear. He nodded and left.

She knew that bikers liked to share their women and she was still hungry. If she was going to survive by sipping then

she would need four or five men like this on a night when she fed.

She got more than she had hoped. She had been with seven guys before she was through. They were satisfied and her hunger was sated. They welcomed her back to the gang area and she played pool and flirted with abandon now. She was one of them now and they treated her well.

At about three a.m. the first guy, Viper, came up to her and said, "I got you a new ride, Chica." He held up a set of motorcycle keys and a pink slip.

She handed him her keys and said, "I don't have the papers."

"No problem, doll. That bike's gonna be in a million pieces in an hour or two anyway."

"You're such a sweetie. I hate to ask for more, but I don't suppose you could find me some fresh I.D.? I'd hate for Bull to track me, you know."

"No problem." He told her and disappeared.

He returned an hour later with a fresh diver's license and a Social Security card. The name read: Angela Torres. Kit was slim and dark complexioned anyway, so she could easily pass for the woman in the photo. "Is Angela going to come looking for me anytime soon?" She asked.

"Shit, it's my old lady. We'll get her some new cards in a while."

Kit looked around the bar and noticed that all of the tourists had cleared out. The adjacent bowling alley was long closed and only the Banditos and their women were left. She knew what would make Viper happier than anything.

She pushed him gently onto the pool table and unzipped his jeans. The entire room stopped and watched. With a great deal of encouragement from Viper's friends, Kit again took Viper's hard member into her mouth and slowly sucked him deeply until he thrashed in orgasm. She looked up at the howling onlookers and made a production of licking her lips and swallowing his semen. She leaned into his ear. "Can you show me my new ride now?"

He silently got up and led her out while everyone cheered and roared. Viper's standing in the club had just be elevated a great deal. She could feel how grateful he was to her. "It's that Honda over there." he pointed

"A Honda for a Harley. I don't suppose I should complain, but you're going to make out OK on that trade." She tested his mind. He was very receptive to her right now.

"Hey, Chica that ride is as clean as they come, but I'll tell you what." He reached in his pocket and pulled out a wad of money. He peeled off a few one hundred dollar bills and handed them to her. "This should more than square us."

"Oh thanks, lover. Now, you watch out for my old man. His name is Bull. He's pretty tough."

The man smiled. "I hope that fucker does show up looking for you. I really hope he does. I cross that bastard and you never going to hear from him again."

She leaned in and kissed him deeply. "I'll look for you if I ride through here again."

"Any time, Chica. Any time."

Kit smiled and mounted the new bike. It was powerful for a Honda, not the massive ride that she was surrendering, but it

had the horses. She rode back to her temporary home. She had new transportation, she had fed and she had a new identity. She now needed to plan her next move.

Chapter 22

Ginger had decided to set up an electronic stakeout. She and Kit used to frequent the Dominance/submissive chats rooms when they had lived in Canada. They visited many of the services, but they were regulars at the Bondage Chateau, which was the largest public chat service. There are literally thousands of user defined services and pages, usually accessed through irc channels, but the chateau was located through a public area that was owned by one of the larger internet companies. This company used chat, games, free e-mail and a host of other services to lure users into pay services and to expose them to advertising.

Kit had tried to keep her chatting up after she and Ginger had come to live in France. The nice thing about the chat rooms was that geographical location was irrelevant, that is if you didn't mind following the daily rhythms set up by those chatters who lived in America. There were, of course, rooms and services for those who didn't speak English, but Americans dominated the majority of the chat activity.

Ginger, on the other hand, did not spend much time in the chat rooms anymore. She had gone on-line to find a dominant man, a Master. She had found that man. She had married him. She had met him on-line and they had intended to keep their romance restricted to cyber-space. Jean's last vampire hunt had changed those plans however. She had married Jean and now had what chatters called a r/l (Real Life) Master. They had maintained their Dominant/submissive

relationship, though Ginger sometimes wished he were more dominant than he was.

Ginger checked her watch and realized that it would be early afternoon across most of North America right now. She was happy because that was when she used to do most of her chatting and her friends would likely be on-line right now. She easily navigated through the "vanilla" (non D/s) rooms and the banner adds and soon found herself among her old friends in the Bondage Chateau.

She entered the room and gave a standard submissive's greeting.

—Slayers-kitten—Enters and bows to the Worthy and waves to her sublings.

This greeting, while short, embodied many aspects of the Dominance/submissive community. Ginger's name indicated two things: first, that she was a submissive, and second, that she was collared to a Master or Mistress. An uncollared, or single, submissive would have their name begin with "Sub". Ginger was known as Sub-kitten, before she had met Jean. Dominants would have their names begin with something like Lord, Master, Lady or Mistress.

The fact that she bowed the Worthy (the Dominant chatters) showed that she held them in respect. The term Worthy, itself, was very important to the community and basically meant: those worthy of my submission. It was a gentle reminder to the Dominants that the submissives were not there to be abused or played with, that they should also act with respect. It was a mark of dishonor and shame to be labeled as "unworthy" by the other chatters.

—Slayers-kitten—Sees her sister sweetcheeks on the couch and pounces her.

—Sub-sweetcheeks—Grabs kitten as she pounces and throws her on the floor tickling.

—Slayers-kitten—giggles and tickles her sister back.

—Sub-sweetcheeks—huggles her sister and kisses her too.

—Slayers-kitten—hugs and kisses sweetcheeks back.

—Sub-sweetcheeks—How have you been, sis? Long time no see!

—Slayers-kitten—I'm just fine. Life with my Master is just *wonderful*

—Sub-sweetcheeks—Woo hoo sis, tell me more, I need details. LOL (Laughing Out Loud).

—Slayers-kitten—What's to tell? Hot sex. Powerful Master. You know same old same old.

—Sub-sweetcheeks—LOL! Damn sis you are sooooo lucky. I just hate you. LOL

—Slayers-kitten—Pinches her sis.

—Sub-sweetcheeks—OUCH!

It was hard for non-chatters to understand, but you really felt the things that went on in a chat room. Maybe chatters had better imaginations than others, maybe they were more sensitive. Maybe they had some psychic talent and maybe they were just afraid of life. Ginger had heard all these theories debated at different times. She had long ago stopped wondering about it and just accepted it.

She chatted with sweetcheeks for a while. A few of their friends came and went. Both subs and Dom/mes were very glad to see her. Chatters who returned from a prolonged

absence always got the prodigal son treatment. Ginger liked drifting in every now and again just to feel the adoration of her friends.

After a time, Ginger thought she should enlist the help of sweetcheeks—Slayers-kitten—Sis, I have to talk to you about something, would you please follow me to a private room?

—Sub-sweetcheeks—Sure thing.

The computer notified Ginger when sweetcheeks was in follow mode. She would now automatically follow Ginger into whatever room she ventured, including a room that she made. Often, chatters will make follow chains and roam from room to room, although this is usually done to disrupt rooms that they don't approve of.

Ginger used the interface to make a user room. She made sure that it was a private room, so that it would not appear in the directory. She also set the security to "on" so no one could break in on them. Most chatters who engaged in cybersex learned this procedure very quickly, that is unless they liked being interrupted in the middle of having sex.

—Sub-sweetcheeks—So what's up sis?

—Slayers-kitten—Hun, what I'm going to tell you is hard for me. You must promise not to tell anyone else. Promise?

—Sub-sweetcheeks—Of course, sis.

—Slayers-kitten—This has to do with Kit. She's in BIG trouble.

—Sub-sweetcheeks—OMG (Oh my God).

—Slayers-kitten—Yes, it's a Dom she met back in the states. She called me frantically the other day. She said he had hurt her badly and that she needed to run away.

—Sub-sweetcheeks—Oh sis, I'm sooo sorry.

—Slayers-kitten—Look, he knows that she chats and may have friends looking for her on-line. You know how some of these creeps can be?

—Sub-sweetcheeks—Nod nods nods.

—Slayers-kitten—So just keep an ear out will you? I'm sure she won't come on-line under her usual names, but if you get a vibe, will you pass it back to me? My Master has connections in law enforcement. I'll be able to help her.

—Sub-sweetcheeks—Sure thing, sis. Anything else.

—Slayers-kitten—No, but you HAVE to keep this to yourself. Kit is very skittish right now. If she thinks everyone is looking for her, she'll leave and I'm afraid I'll never see her again.

—Sub-sweetcheeks—I understand. You can trust me.

Ginger chatted with her friend for another ten minutes and then logged off. She would tell the same story to three or four of her close friends. It was a long shot, but she might get a lead on Kit.

She hated lying to her friend like that. She had planned the cover story, it was one that her friends would believe. A real danger with meeting people in person who you only know from on-line is that you do run into the occasional sicko. Most chatters and most people who engaged in the Dominance/submissive lifestyle were rather ordinary and honorable people. There were drastic exceptions to this rule, however and you heard stories of abuse every now and again.

Ginger did not know yet what she would do if she got a good lead on Kit. If she could get herself into the room while

Kit was there, she might be able to pull an ISP or other identifier from her account. She might be able to get a good idea of where she was or where she was going, but how she could use that information to help Kit, she wasn't sure. She also knew that Jean had assigned other snoops to search the internet, but Ginger was confident that she could outdo them.

Ginger snapped off the computer and closed her eyes. She cried for a moment thinking about the ordeal that her best friend was going through.

2

Jean looked at the files on his desk. He was more certain than ever that Kit and the other vampire had separated. He had the dead Trooper and the abandoned motorcycle that all pointed to a lone assailant. They also pointed in almost the opposite direction from the hospital that the biker was found at. He had one vampire that had carelessly left a body and another who risked exposure to save a life.

Jean was sure which vampire was which, though it didn't matter. It was his job to hunt down and destroy both of them. He tried to think about what the evidence was telling him. The male vampire had, until now, acted with some control and prudence, that he would kill a state policeman like that was reckless and stupid. He obviously was juiced up for some reason.

Something had set him off. Something had gotten his lust up. Something had caused him to lose control. Jean was afraid that the only thing that that could be was Kit. He did not know how Kit managed her escape, but he knew that the

other vampire would be looking for her too. This case was getting messier and messier by the hour.

On a whim, Jean went to his own computer terminal and typed a few commands. A log of all the computer activities came up. He sifted through the files until he found the computer at Pat's house. He checked the web addresses and found that the computer had been logged into the chat areas. He sighed for a moment.

It had to be Ginger. He had purposely kept her off of Kit's case because he wanted to protect her as best he could. The fact that Ginger was chatting was not all that important, but that she would do it at Pat's, away from prying eye, was a little telling. He knew his wife and he knew her feelings. She would try and help Kit if she could. That she was using Pat's computer meant that Pat and Julie were helping her.

Jean thought for a moment. His was the only computer that had access to this information. Internal security had never been much of an issue with the Committee in the past. This just wasn't the type of organization where threats came at you from the inside. Usually anyway.

He looked at the log and he thought about his protocols. He thought about his mentor and what he had said. Jean desperately wanted to do good. He had given his life to God, then to the Church and then to the Committee. Every turn had been to serve what he thought was a great good, each time to fight a more tangible evil.

But he wondered if Kit was evil. He wondered if he was fighting for good or for rules and protocols that were only shadows of good. He wondered what Rene would do right

now. He wondered what he would advise if he were still alive. He thought about all of these things as he stared at the computer screen.

He got up and washed his face and stared at himself in the mirror for a good long time. He looked into the clear blue eyes that stared back at him. Were these eyes that inspired the confidence that Rene's did? Were these the eyes of a leader? Were they the eyes of a good man?

He sat back at his desk and did two things. First, he cleared and shredded all records of Pat's computer. Second, he closed off the snoop connection between the Committee's system and Pat's computer. He was, after all, entitled to his privacy. His wife could chat on the internet if she wanted.

Jean closed his eyes and prayed that he would find the path of goodness.

Chapter 23

Kit cruised the dark streets of Austin. She avoided the more popular restaurant and night club districts. The town had a very active nightlife and Kit found it exhilarating just to be out in the spring night. The energy of the tourists and young couples who were out on the town filled her with new life. She had always heard that there were places in the world that exuded positive energy. She knew that Austin was one of those places.

Kit needed to think. She needed to plan her next move. She now had an identity and transportation that was supposedly not hot. At least they would not link her to the incidents back in Oklahoma. She had some money, but she would need more. The Honda between her legs was not the beautifully powerful Harley that she had been riding, but its seven hundred and fifty cubic centimeters of displacement did provide a satisfying power kick. Riding the warm night on sleek motorcycle let her mind turn possibilities over and over in her mind.

She thought about ways that people got money. She could get some sort of job, but there was not much she could do only at night that would pay her any significant money. She knew other undead would rob their victims, but she didn't want to steal to make a living. She glided by some working girls and had a thought. It wasn't exactly an honest move, but if you had to do something dishonest, well it was better than nothing.

She parked a few blocks away and walked back to the corner where the street hookers were plying their trade. Kit had taken her top off at the bike and only wore a black sports bra as a top. It wasn't the sexiest garb that she could think of, but it was definitely advertising.

She found a spot half a block away from three girls who obviously knew each other. They would go out to the curb one at a time and try to attract a client. The other two would hang back and talk with each other while the third was trying to close the deal. Negotiations must have been tough, because three cars drove on after the driver had a short talk with the hooker. Maybe she was selling drugs too.

It didn't take long for the trio to spot Kit and to start moving in on her. She heard their taunts right away. She reached out with her mind and felt very little passion in anything that they did. All three were addicted to drugs and that seemed to be their only motivation. While they were putting on a pretty good show for the supposed interloper, their hearts weren't really into it. She wondered if they had anything one might call a heart anymore.

The three made a loose circle around Kit and taunted and threatened her. Kit paid no attention to them at all, which only incited them all the more. This was their block and no one was going to muscle into their territory. That is unless she worked for Rico. One of the girls said the name and the other immediately had flashes of fear and devotion in their minds. Rico was their pimp.

Rico was their drug supplier and this was supposedly "his" block. They circled in a little closer and Kit continued to ignore

them. She was wondering where, in fact, Rico was. Pimps are generally bottom feeders in the underworld. He might be moving a small amount of drugs, but his meal ticket was these girls. He would stay close to protect his investment.

Sure enough, a short, thin handsome man in a nicely tailored leather sports coat started walking towards the four women. The three whores moved instinctively back as the man approached. Kit considered the man as he approached and thought about all the bad movies she had seen about pimp and prostitutes.

Rico didn't fit the common stereotype. He wasn't dressed flashy. He was dressed very nicely, almost conservative. He didn't pull up in a purple car. In fact, she didn't know where his car was. He was on foot when she spotted him.

The one thing that did fit the image was his hatred of women. She could feel his loathing as he approached. She ran her tongue over her teeth as she anticipated the encounter.

He first looked to the trio "Don't you girls have some work to do for me?" He threatened and they returned to their spot and continued to troll for Johns.

He then turned his attention back to Kit, "Ain't never seen you before, so I'm thinking you're not from around here. So, you got one chance, only girls who work for me work this block. Understand?"

"I suppose you're Rico?" Kit asked trying to sound unimpressed.

"You bet your fucking ass I'm Rico and who the hell do you think you are?" He was working himself up and her neutral responses were feeding his anger.

"No one, just a girl from out of town looking to make a buck."

He strode up to her and grabbed her arm and tried to twist it uncomfortably. She relaxed and let him. "Look bitch. You want to work for me, then we got to talk. You don't, you got to walk." Kit almost laughed at his rhyme.

Instead she feigned distress and pretended to pull away but allowed him to hold on. "Please, I just got to make a few dollars. I won't be here tomorrow. Please?"

She knew pleading would only encourage him. "Guess you need to learn a lesson!" He hissed and began dragging her off.

Again, she pretended to struggle as he dragged her down the street. She pleaded but he walked her to a dark alley and pushed her behind a dumpster. He was about to hit her or maybe cut her, but Kit never gave him the chance.

As soon as they were out of sight, Kit easily twisted her arm and reversed the pressure. In the blink of an eye, she had his arm locked. She thought that she would have been able to do this before she was a vampire and that now it was too easy. She looked into the small man's eyes and saw every man that had ever hurt her or anyone she ever loved.

She twisted viciously and heard the bone shatter. He started to scream, but she put her free hand over his mouth. His eyes turned glassy and his mind could only think about his pain. She then released him and he instinctively lashed

out at her with his good arm. She easily caught and broke that one too.

She felt her hunger rise. The confrontation had brought it to the surface. She let him go and he slumped to his knees. He was fighting to remain conscious and he began to slump onto her as his mind spun from the pain. Kit reached down and grabbed his jacket and pulled him to his feet. She barred her teeth and looked at his sweaty neck. She was about to bite, but suddenly held back.

"Damn it!" She cursed and let the man fall. This isn't what she wanted to do. She wanted this man's money. She didn't want his blood and she certainly didn't want to take his life.

She knew that if anyone deserved to die it was this piece of trash. Not a single person would mourn his passing. His women would be working for a competing pimp within twenty-four hours. His bosses would have another insignificant maggot like him back on these streets before his body was cold. He made a living off of the suffering of other people, but Kit knew she could not be the instrument of his destruction. If she started killing those who "deserved it" she would quickly become the monster she did not want to become.

It wasn't that he didn't deserve to die. It was that she could not afford to be his executioner. It was her soul that was in question here. It was questionable enough that she was going to rob him, but it was a long way from killing. She needed to always remember that.

She quickly searched the man and found his money roll. He made a perfect mark. This was a man who dealt in cash

and he had lots of it. He had thousands, as a matter of fact. Kit removed his jacket and tried it on. It wasn't a bad fit. It could have been cut longer, but it was satisfactory.

She stuffed the money into her breast pocket and ran back to the motorcycle.

2

Ed was in a happy mood when he turned his computer on. The brake work on his Mustang had gone easier than he had expected. The master cylinder was quickly replaced and with the help of the Iranian kid next door, the bleed out of the system only took a few minutes. The car was in driveable condition again. To celebrate, he drove Hammed down to the local Baskin Robin's for a splurge.

Hammed was a nice kid. He had great manners but few friends. Ed had noticed him one day when he was working on the Mustang out in the front. Hammed was watching from across the alcove. Ed waved him over and after a moment the twelve-year-old sprinted across the street. Ed enlisted his help in the tune up he was doing.

He showed the kid how to use the tools, how the engine worked and a few tricks he had picked up along the way. Later, Hammed's father came over to be sure his son was not a bother, but Ed assured the man that he enjoyed his company and could, in fact, use the help sometimes.

Ed had gotten to know the family pretty well after that. His father had turned a rug shop into a large interior design enterprise and spent most of his time hunting merchandise or meeting with clients. The small gated community in which they lived, while stunningly beautiful, had few children.

Hammed would stop by to help with the car or to talk computers.

Hammed knew much more about computers than Ed did, which surprised Ed since he engineered them. Hammed knew all the hacker tricks. He knew all the back doors. He knew all the short cuts. Ed delighted in listening to Hammed while he surfed the net the way Patton moved through Europe.

Yes, he had enjoyed his afternoon with Hammed and the car and now he was hoping to spend some time with his friends in the Chateau. Lately, there had been some talk about a get together out in California. Everyone was to buy a t-shirt with his or her chat handle on it and show up for the convention. Ed thought he actually might pry himself out of the house and go. He thought he might be able to handle the crowds for a change.

He was coming to the conclusion that he missed people. He was noticing just how lonely he was. Maybe it was watching Hammed grow up, maybe it was interacting with his friends on the internet, but he was beginning to think that maybe he had just been alone too long. He wondered if the money had been a curse rather than a blessing. Without it he could not have created this cocoon he lived in.

He surfed his way into the chat room and everyone was joking around. He had just missed a collaring and they were having a party to celebrate. The Master in this case was Master-Blood and he was very popular in the rooms. He had a wicked sense of humor and teased everyone mercilessly. There was no cruelty in his humor, Ed noted, because he would as easily turn his rapier wit upon himself. In this way,

he always made sure that you knew he was laughing with you and not at you.

Everyone loved Master-Blood and everyone was there. His submissive, Sub-warmheart, now Bloods-heart (Ed wondered if they had thought about that before getting together) had all her friends around and everyone was laughing and joking.

Ed could feel the joviality of the room and laughed to himself. He could not imagine a real party being more fun, though the refreshments would be better. Ed laughed and drank some of the imported beer he kept handy.

He joked with the guys and congratulated heart. He gossiped with some of his friends and passed along six or seven juicy blonde jokes he had picked up on the net recently. In short, he had a great time.

He did keep his eye on the chatters list. He hoped against hope that Kit would show up. He knew she had some big assignment that she was working on, but he missed her. He was beginning to develop real feelings for her. He knew it was premature to even consider romantic possibilities, but he treasured her friendship. He was a little sad when he logged off for the night that Kit had not shown up.

3

The last thing on Kit's mind was a cyber party in the Bondage chateau. She had gotten back to her hiding place and was worried. She had come very close to killing that pathetic man and it scared her.

She felt her hunger again and wondered why. She had drunk more than her fill the night before. She should be able to go a long time on that drink. Her training had told her that

some vampires could go years without drinking. She was a complete novice, but she should be able to go a week or two.

She sat and meditated. She turned her mind inward and focussed on her hunger. In effect, she asked it why it was rising now. The answer bothered her and confirmed what she already suspected. She was hungry because she had put herself into a violent situation.

She hadn't intended to hurt the man, just rob him. There was something in the way he grabbed her, something in his cocky manner that burned her soul and demanded that she hurt the little man. He deserved all the pain she could give him. He deserved to die.

Kit stopped that line of thought and refocused. She reminded herself that she was no judge and jury. She was not an executioner. It was not for her to judge another's fitness for living. She reminded herself that he had a life and that it was not hers for taking, no matter how he wasted it.

She felt her hunger and her rage subside. She felt a sense of relief. She could control her hunger. She had the ability to assuage her thirst without drinking. This was good. This gave her hope. This gave her a goal.

She did, however, have one other goal. No matter what it took, no matter if it killed her to do so, no matter if it took her the eternity that she now seemed to have, no matter what it cost her, short of her soul; she knew, without a doubt, that she would have to kill that bastard James.

She reflected for a moment and wondered if perhaps this was no different than killing that worthless pimp. She concluded that it wasn't. The pimp was alive and James was

already dead. The pimp had some chance to salvage his soul whether he did or not, James' soul was beyond redemption. The pimp would have to be judged by mortals, James was going to be judged by her.

Kit turned her mind in on herself and dedicated every fiber of her being to the destruction of the monster that was responsible for the hell in which she now lived. Yes, revenge was a very good reason to survive.

Chapter 24

Kit's life had settled into a comfortable rhythm. Her basic survival needs were now satisfied and she knew she needed a plan. She still wasn't sure how to progress. She was certain however, that she must definitely move with caution. She was immortal now and she knew enough from her training that vampires basically got caught when they got careless. Kit was determined not to let that happen.

She had carefully staked out the Austin area and had driven a few times to San Antonio. She was taken aback by the beauty of this part of Texas. It was much more lush and green than she had expected.

Kit knew that there were BDSM clubs in the area, but also knew that the Committee would have these clubs staked out. It was clear that Jean and the Committee did not know where she was, but she also knew that they would have some ideas where to look. Kit was drawn to these clubs, but Jean and his agents would know that. They were the one place she could not go.

Kit also knew that she would have to leave sooner or later. There were a thousand things she could do to trip herself up. It was best that she kept moving. She remembered from her training that gypsy vampires were the hardest to hunt because of their nomadic lifestyles. She even thought she might head east for a while; maybe south into Mexico. She discarded that idea pretty quickly. The last thing she needed was to travel into a country where people were superstitious. One of the vampires' greatest weapons was that people in

progressive countries did not believe in them. This gave them wide latitude. In Mexico, she would call too much attention to herself just by virtue of the fact she never came out during the daylight hours.

There was always north back to Canada. She knew the country very well and would not be limited to the Toronto area. She knew her way around the western provinces pretty well and she could even brush up on her French and head to Quebec. That was also a possibility.

She was, however, succumbing to the loneliness of her existence. She gave serious consideration to going back and hooking up with the Banditos just because she liked having someone to talk to. They might also become suspicious of her, so she thought that wasn't a very good idea either.

As she was passing through the town of San Marcos one night, she had an idea. She had seen the signs for the University a number of times and pulled in on a whim. The campus was pretty in the early evening and there were swarms of students all over the place. It did not take her long to probe the location of what she was hunting.

She parked her bike and fell in behind a group headed into the library. She melded into the crowd. Libraries are generally easy to get into without identification. Most welcome the public and put their energies in keeping the clients from stealing the books. Most had computer clusters and this one was no exception.

Kit found a terminal that was off to the side and sat down. She looked around to make sure no one was watching and switched the computer on. It was a nice system and it

hummed to life quickly. It had a backbone connection to the internet, so she was automatically hooked in. All she had to do was launch the browser and off she went.

Kit knew better than to go into the Bondage Chateau under any of her usual names. The Committee would definitely have snoops on-line all the time looking for her. A lot of people lurked in chat rooms (watched the interactions without ever speaking themselves.) The Committee snoops would easily go unnoticed. She wondered if Ginger would be looking for her and knew she had to be careful whom she spoke to.

She could not believe that Ginger would turn on her, but she had to be cautious. She was married to Jean and Jean was her Master. She worked for the Committee and owed them her loyalty. It would be hard on Ginger and Kit was not going to make it harder by exposing herself to her friend. If the situations were reversed, Kit was not sure what she would do.

Kit surfed into the chat room under a new name that she did not intend to keep past tonight. For the excursion she made a vanilla name. Tonight she would be Janet465. Chatters who were not into BDSM often used their first names followed by a string of numbers to chat. The numbers were there because the system would allow only one person to use a name. It took Kit three tries to find a number associated with Janet that had not already been used.

Kit settled in and started reading the scroll and was totally overwhelmed. Within seconds Kit had lost all sense of where she was actually sitting and found her mind on another plane.

She had given her mind over to chat rooms in the past, but it had never been like this.

Kit found herself standing in a somewhat fluid environment with about thirty people in it. Some were sitting in comfortable chairs and some were kneeling on a fur rug. Some people were sitting on or kneeling by a worn couch in the center of the room. Some of the people in the chairs had others in their laps. Some just wandered in and out of the room and a few just hung out in the corners and watched the interactions. It was hard for Kit to make out their faces.

Most of the comfortable chairs seemed to be in corners somehow and all of the windows looked out over an ocean view. Kit wandered around the room and felt like she was in a dream. The bits and pieces all made sense, but it didn't add up to a complete picture.

Kit watched the people in the chairs for a while and they were all incredibly handsome and powerful looking. This was especially true of the women. Most were dressed in black leather and a few wore armor. Some carried swords or pistols, but they all seemed arrogant and aloof.

The submissives and slaves seemed soft and pretty. Again, this was true of the men and the women. Kit had an overpowering impulse to pick them up in her arms and cuddle them. She wanted to protect them, to watch over them. They all exuded incredible sex appeal and they wore scant silks, if they were dressed at all.

There was a bar and some of the submissives moved to it and fixed their Masters and Mistresses refreshments. Their movements were inhumanly fluid and beautiful to watch. Kit

wished there was some way she could take a picture of the scene, it was almost too much for her.

One of the Women stood up from her chair and made an announcement.

"May I have everyone's attention please?"

Most of the people in the room stopped what they were doing and turned to watch her. A few people continued their conversations oblivious to what she was saying or doing.

"I have a special treat for everyone. My sub, puppyboy has agreed to a public session. Any who would like to follow are welcome to join us."

"The Domme lead the beautiful young man on a leash to the wall. As they approached, a door appeared and they walked through it. Many in the room followed and Kit found herself being swept along with the crowd.

The new room was a small arena. There was a raised stage with many BDSM toys on a table and a bondage rack in the center. There were spotlights on the stage and everyone found seats to watch the action from all angles. Kit sat in a leather bound chair in the last row and watched the action.

The scene itself was not all that remarkable. The Domme strapped her submissive into the rack and proceeded to use many of the devises to torture his exposed flesh. The young man was naked and obviously aroused at what was happening. Kit could feel his joy at the public scene.

The Domme was obviously proud of her submissive and praised him often while she inflicted her punishments. She too was being aroused and finally stripped out of her clothing and made love to the man while he was still bound before the

audience. Kit looked around the audience and noticed that many of them were having sex or masturbating as well. The feeling of sexuality was overwhelming to Kit.

With great effort, Kit closed down the computer and rubbed her eyes. She wondered if she was losing her mind. She looked around the room and saw that she was back in the library with the college students moving quietly to their tasks set to them by their various professors.

Kit moved wordlessly back to her motorcycle and drove off into the night. As she drove back to one of the hiding places she had found, she had considered what had just happened. She realized why vampires had used the web to find victims. The sensation was incredible.

Vampires, she was learning, were gifted psychic creatures. Chatters gave their minds over to the collective fantasies that they created in the chat rooms. To a gifted psychic, these rooms took on a tangible reality. It was like they were opening their minds to whoever wanted to walk through them.

Kit knew she would return to the rooms soon.

Chapter 25

James had found his way to Denver. There were two things he did not like about his new home. The first was that he didn't know it very well. Whether he would admit it to himself or not, James was a leech. He was territorial by nature and felt comfortable in an area that he knew. He was somewhat unique in that he had staked a good bit of the wilds of the western states as his home, but he was familiar with most of the small towns in Oklahoma, Nebraska, Iowa and the Dakotas. The plains were his home.

Denver, with its towering building and mountain views was not what he was used to. His second problem was that Denver was a city. Though he had grown up south of Chicago and lived much of his mortal life there, James had no taste for cities. He enjoyed the emptiness of the plains. He was feeling claustrophobic.

James knew, however, that Denver was ideal for his purposes. It would not be a natural hunting ground for the Committee. They had done their research on him and he was sure they would be searching small towns and staking out biker bars as they had in the past. James might return to his old habits.

Denver provided ample opportunity for James to rebuild his resources. Because of that bitch, he had lost everything. He arrived in Denver riding a boxcar with nothing but the clothing on his back. Denver was a large sprawling city. This meant that it had its share of street people and runaways. This meant he would have food.

Denver also had its share of young professionals who hunted the nights for sex and drugs. These hapless fools would not only provide food, but money as well. If he was careful and didn't choose the same type of victim over and over again, he could live indefinitely in the large city in the clouds.

Denver also had exactly what James needed, a way to hurt that bitch and to draw her out into the open. He knew she had formidable power, but she would need time to learn how to use it. He intended to strike before she had a chance to grow. If he was lucky and drew her to him soon enough, he still might be able to enthrall her and salvage his original plan.

Kit had a vulnerability that she didn't know about but that he did. She was part of a community. The people who identified themselves as members of the BDSM community were very well connected to each other. While he roamed freely through her mind he had learned all about these people. He considered them to be sick and twisted, but he had learned nonetheless.

He learned that no matter where they lived, they identified strongly with each other. They used computers, mail, clubs, conventions, newsletters and publications to keep in touch with each other. They had rules of behavior and their own language. They were fiercely protective of each other.

James had his eye on the club for a long time. It was a private establishment and you needed an invitation to get admitted. The club was underground and did not serve any

alcohol. It was a place for the Dominants and submissives of the area to meet and mingle with each other.

James had learned about the club by loitering in sex shops and adult bookstores. He dipped into the minds of the patrons that bought cuffs or whips. Most of these patrons were not part of the community, but some were. It was an easy thing to pick out what he wanted. Within a few weeks he had the club completely staked out.

2

Mark was an auto mechanic and he was very prosperous. Years ago, he had worked for a Honda dealership and they had sent him to all the classes. When he had learned enough, he broke away and started his own shop. He was basically honest and actually performed the repairs he charged for. Soon his reputation got around and he was turning customers away. Mark was also a Dominant, known to his friends as Master Mark.

He was a little depressed because his long time girl friend and submissive, Gloria, had left him. He admitted to himself that they hadn't really loved each other, they just spent time together while she was in school. Now that she was graduating, it was time for her to move on, to find her own way in the world.

She was really something. She was playful and had a high tolerance for pain. She was what members of the community called a "pain slut". She was going to go live in Europe for a couple of years. He really wished her well, but he was going to miss her.

He had spent the night at the club, playing his bad luck for all it was worth. Many of the submissives fussed over him and flirted with him unabashedly. Lisa, a girl he had known for years was paying particularly close attention to him. By the end of the night, they decided that they should go back to his place and see what developed.

Mark led her back to his car and stopped and kissed her before opening the door and letting her in. He held her close and tasted her lips. Then he hugged her close and pressed her against the car a little bit. He leaned in and brushed his lips against her neck and she tilted her head back to give him clearer access.

He licked her soft and smooth flesh with his tongue. They both shivered as he did. Mark was getting very turned on. He could feel that she was too. He leaned into her and put his warm mouth over her neck and grazed her neck with his teeth. She moaned louder.

"Now for the test" Mark said to himself. He bit her just a little too hard. He hadn't broken the skin, but he knew he hurt her. She moaned and pressed into him

"Yesssssss" she hissed into his ear.

Mark was happy. It was clear that Lisa was going to enjoy pain as much as Gloria had. He pulled back and looked into her eyes.

"Marvelous." He whispered.

Mark reached for the car's handle but never finished the motion. He felt an iron hand grab his wrist and yank his hand away. The hand twisted quickly and viciously. Mark felt his arm bone snap and all he could see was a flash of bright

white as the pain cascaded through his body. Mark fell to his knees and fought to remain awake.

Lisa screamed and James enjoyed the moment. He considered her almost clinically for a second. She was not that pretty, somewhat overweight. Her makeup was a little garish. James thought he would be doing her a favor.

He grabbed her and felt her struggle against him. This aroused James beyond reason. All his hatred for women would come out in moments like this. He had her by the arms and squeezed powerfully feeling her bones shatter too. Lisa's eyes rolled up inside of her head as the pain overwhelmed her. James let her fall.

He turned his attention back to the man on the ground. He could feel his anger now; it was re-energizing him. It did him no good. James picked him up like a puppet and bit down on his throat. He drank for a second and then tore away the flesh and let the man bleed out on the asphalt.

James turned back to the girl and proceeded to tear her throat out as well. He left while there was the barest spark of life left in her. It dimmed and died before he was back on the motorcycle he had recently procured. James drove away very happy.

He would leave town immediately, but he had left a message that Kit could not ignore. Even if she did, he knew there were many such clubs he could visit. He'd smoke her out.

3

James' actions got someone else's attention as well. Within hours, the Denver police and press were all over the crime

scene. The police hated that they couldn't keep the press out of this. All they needed was a panic. This story was too good and they were helpless as the reporters circled like high-tech vultures.

The Committee sprung immediately into action. Jean was certain that the male vampire was behind this and he was certain he had chosen these two because of Kit. Jean saw the vampire's plan instantly. It was simple and diabolical. He would hit these clubs until Kit confronted him.

"Everyone, I mean everyone. You understand?" Jean asked his assistant.

"Yes, sir."

"I don't care who has what going on. I want every agent who speaks English in America in two days. Talk to Ginger. Start compiling a list of Dominance/submissive clubs in the western United States. I want dusk to dawn coverage on all of them. Understand?"

"Yes, sir."

Jean thought for a second. He knew the impossibility of the task before him. He didn't have the manpower to stake out all the clubs. He didn't know what to do, but he had to do something.

"This monster is going to kill again and kill soon. When he does, I want everyone on top of him."

"Yes, sir."

"That's all, get moving."

"Yes, sir." The man turned and was gone.

Jean sat and brooded. He hated being in such a reactive position, but the game was changing and moving too quickly

for Jean to get out in front. He hoped that would all change soon.

Chapter 26

Kit had been on-line three more times since her first encounter and was now becoming more comfortable with the experience. She realized that she was, in a sense, invading other people's dreams. While she was passively watching, she was essentially at the mercy of the chatters who were on at the time. This accounted for the horribly discordant feelings and images that she got. The chat room was a shared fantasy and she observed it.

Therefore, every piece she saw was created by one of the users. If she focused on one object, then everything was fine. She might see a handsome man sitting in a corner chair with a pretty girl in his lap, but if she pulled back and observed the whole room at once, then she would see everyone's shared view. She might see six or seven chairs, all in their own corner. Taken as a whole, it was a little like stepping into an Escher painting.

At first Kit, trained herself to avoid taking the long view of things. This helped her get comfortable with her new surroundings. After a short while, she could slowly pull back and take the room as a whole. If it bothered her too much, she would then focus back in on a small detail.

She also became aware of her dual existence. The first time she went into chat as a vampire she had psychically abandoned her physical body in favor of her cyber one. She quickly learned to be aware of both. Now she could be aware of her surroundings in the library and be in chat at the same

time. This allowed her to type commands and play a more active role in the interactions of the rooms.

As she got more comfortable, she was certain that she not only could influence what she saw in the room, she could influence what other people felt and experienced as well. The chatters had opened themselves so completely to the experience that she was certain that it would be a simple matter to just step in and be in their collective minds. She wondered how much control she would have and then remembered the control that had been exerted over David. She shuddered at the newfound power she could have here if she wanted it. It frightened more than just a little.

She had taken a Domme personae. She called herself Mistress Storm and had entered under the pretence that she had come from a different web service. There are literally hundreds of web servers and channels that cater to the D/s community. No one challenged her nor questioned her on the fact that she obviously knew the protocols of behavior.

She was welcomed into the rooms and was quickly taken as one of the family. She quickly learned two things that gave her pause. First, she learned that someone was indeed looking for her. Someone using Ginger's chat name had started a rumor that Kit was on the run from an abusive Dominant lover. Everyone was talking about her and constantly asked each other for information. As will happen in situations like this, rumors popped up every now and again.

Kit suspected that Ginger was behind the initial rumor, but she could not be certain. It would be an easy thing for the Committee or James to divine her chat name and come in

looking for Kit on the pretext of offering help. Once Kit surfaced, then they would pounce on her.

She was also positive that whoever was starting these rumors was also nursing them along. The chat community had a collectively short attention span. Yesterday's news was exactly that. Ginger, or whoever it was, had to be adding fuel to the fire. Kit had to be very careful. She knew that she would be kept in the forefront of everyone's consciousness for a long time.

She longed to reach out to Ginger. She knew, however, it would be a suicidal move. Even with her considerable psychic powers, the Committee employed much more talented psychics than her. These agents could completely fool Kit into thinking they were Ginger, or more likely, use Ginger as a front and pick up Kit through her. No, Kit had to be very careful.

The other big topic of discussion was the murder of two D/s people in Denver. They had been viciously attacked in a parking lot outside a D/s club. The rumors about their deaths were flying around the web like a virus. Fortunately, Kit did not have to rely on the hearsay accounts of her fellow chatters. She was in a library that carried the Denver Post. She easily found the articles and confirmed that the two had been murdered and that some sort of Satanist was suspected. The details were sketchy, but Kit suspected that it was a vampire attack.

She also feared that it was James who was making the attacks. He would certainly know that Kit had many friends in

the D/s community and would attack them to hurt her. Kit considered her next move.

2

Kit returned to cyberspace and could not help but become more amused at what she saw. As before, most of the chatters seemed incredibly beautiful and graceful. They exuded sexuality; the air was thick with it. Kit, however, was reminded of an old episode of the Twilight Zone. It was in the future and everyone was beautiful, but it wasn't the beauty that made you stand out then. Beauty was ordinary.

Kit found that some of the chatters did not present themselves as beautiful. A few projected an image that Kit believed was close to their actual appearance. She happily noted that many of these people were chatters that she felt were her friends from before. That they would project an honest image of themselves made Kit like them all the more.

One of these chatters was Ed. Kit saw him as he truly was: middle aged, potbelly, strong, kind eyes. Kit was immediately attracted to him. She had always liked Ed but seeing him like this made her admire him just a little bit. That he would project himself as he was, showed courage that she found quite stimulating.

As she noticed Ed, she felt that someone else was too. She couldn't tell whom and that worried her very much. It suddenly occurred to her that James was not only attacking people from the D/s community but might actually be selecting victims from her attentions. She got a little panicky. She made a quick decision.

—Mistress-Storm—Lord Sage may I have a private word with you please?

—Lord-Sage—Of course you may My Lady.

Kit set her computer for "private conversation". Now She and Ed could have a conversation that no one else could see.

—Mistress-Storm—Ed, I have something to tell you about your friend Kit. But you have to promise not to tell ANYONE! I mean you can't talk to another soul about his. If you can't promise me that then I can't tell you what I have to say.

There was a moment of silence while Ed was obviously hashing over the implications of his next move. One thing that Kit always liked about Ed was that he always thought before he spoke.

—Lord-Sage—Sure. I suppose I can promise that.

—Mistress-Storm—Ed, I'm kit.

—Lord-Sage—OMG (Oh my God). ~hugs you~

—Mistress-Storm—~hugs~

—Lord-Sage—Why are you hiding? What's wrong? I've heard so much about you. I thought this was going to be another stupid rumor.

—Mistress-Storm—Ed, this is important. Some of what you are hearing is true. Someone is trying to hurt me. In fact, he wants to kill me.

—Lord-Sage—MY GOD.

—Mistress-Storm—Ed, I need you to be calm and listen. I can't go to anyone for help. I've been accused of a crime I didn't commit, this guy did. It's serious Ed, I'm in big trouble.

—Lord-Sage—What can I do to help?

—Mistress-Storm—Ed, actually I want to help you. Ed this guy is a real psycho. He's threatened to kill my friends. I'm afraid he might come after you. Ed, can I come to you? We can help protect each other.

—Lord-Sage—Kit if this were anyone else, I'd think you were lying. But you've never lied before. Are you sure I can't call the police?

—Mistress-Storm—Please Ed, I know this sound impossible, but just wait for me to come. I will explain everything.

—Lord-Sage—Of course Kit. You know where I live.

—Mistress-Storm—Somewhere in Albuquerque, right?

—Lord-Sage—Right. Can I pick you up at your flight?—
Mistress-Storm—No Ed, I'm in Texas right now. I might be able to be there before dawn. If I have to stop, I'll be at your house around sundown.

—Lord-Sage—You keep funny hours, what are you? A vampire?

—Mistress-Storm—LOL, I've been told that. Actually, I'm allergic to sunlight. Proferia (This lie she had already worked out).

—Lord-Sage—Oh sure, sorry. I have a room in the basement that's dark. I'll put a bed down there for you.

—Mistress-Sage—Thanks, Ed. Now listen to me carefully. Don't tell anyone we've talked. Don't invite anyone, I mean *anyone* into your house until I get there. I don't care if it's a little old lady being attacked by wolves, don't open your door for anyone but me. Understand?

—Lord-Sage—Kit you're scaring me a little here.

—Mistress-Storm—Sorry Ed, but it's important. It's how this guy operates. He's a real piece of work. He won't go into anyone's house uninvited. For any reason.

—Lord-Sage—I understand.

—Mistress-Storm—You have my picture, right. You know what I look like?

—Lord-Sage—Right.

—Mistress-Storm—Good, now tell me how to get to your house, I need to get going.

Ed gave her the instructions to the house. She was happy that he lived in a gated community. She wondered if James would need to be invited into the neighborhood. She hoped she wouldn't have to test that.

She also wondered if she would need to be invited in. The saying was that "evil needed to be invited in." She wondered if she counted as an evil thing by being a vampire. She had not entered a private home since she was changed. As much as she knew about vampires, she realized there was so much more she needed to know. She would have to find some way to learn before she faced James.

She also knew that James would continue to strike the D/s community until one of them were dead. It tore at her guts that he was out there killing people just because of her. The longer she took to face him, the more people would die, but she couldn't let that panic her.

If James caught her and got control of her, he would use her to hurt and kill many, many good people. Kit could not live with that either. She had to learn and she had to learn fast. She just didn't know where.

Chapter 27

James was happy for a brief moment. He had watched the chat rooms knowing that Kit would eventually show up. He knew other vampires who walked the halls of cyber space and had ventured there once or twice before. It was not to his liking. He enjoyed the tangible world so much better, though he had to admit to its seductive qualities.

He had felt Kit and watched her since she first logged on. If he knew more about computers he supposed he could track her to her current location. Alas, he didn't, so he waited until she showed herself. He was angry at first because all she did was watch. She was easy enough to follow because she glowed like a beacon to him.

Her power was formidable and he knew more than ever that he had to control her or destroy her as quickly as possible. She was already a threat to him and grew more so each day. James' advantage was his skill and he would soon lose that to her. If she learned to use her powers, James was doomed.

He needed to distract her, to keep her off balance if he could. He was happy that the other chatters were talking about his attack of those two back in Denver. Not only would it disturb Kit and play into James' plans, but it also fed his ego. He had achieved a modicum of fame through his actions and he swelled with pride thinking about it. He considered making more attacks on these fools just to keep them talking about him.

Kit had finally talked and James zeroed in on her and more importantly on her companion. James started searching for the mortal with his mind. He was a long way away and somewhere south of his current location. James had fled to the west after the killings in Denver and had wound up in Salt Lake City.

James could not help himself, he gloated to Kit and at that moment lost track of the man she was talking to. James cursed his luck and wondered what Kit had done to block his probe. She had shielded herself but being able to shield someone else was tricky and James wondered how she had been able to pull it off so easily.

It didn't matter. He was sure she would head to this man and James now had a direction to travel. He could hit all the cities south of him in a month or two. He'd start in Las Vegas, move through Arizona and New Mexico, and scour southwest Texas and work back up to Oklahoma and then back to Denver. If he got close enough, he knew he'd be able to track her.

He also thought of the trail of blood he would leave behind him and it pleased him greatly.

2

David concentrated very hard. He had also been watching Kit and watched the encounter between the two vampires. He thought very hard for a moment and checked out various courses of action.

He considered informing Jean and the Committee about James' location. If they knew he was in Salt Lake City and headed for Las Vegas, they could head him off and destroy

him. This course of action would certainly reduce the body count that David knew was coming.

The down side of this action is that there was an almost certain probability that it would also destroy Kit. David considered this and concluded that the two vampires had some sort of shared destinies. David was certain that their paths would collide no matter what he did. He had to think of something else, find another way to help Kit.

He felt James' intention to harm Kit's friend. He also knew that Kit would race to help him. He chuckled at her folly. She didn't realize that she didn't have to actually go to this man to protect him. She didn't yet know, that her power was not bound by such mundane concerns as physical space. She didn't yet know these things and so she would follow her instincts and race to him.

David reached out with his mind and nudged Kit's personal shield over her friend. David's powers were very weak in comparison to Kit's but this was an easy trick. As he did this he whispered, "Forgive me, Mistress."

David then relaxed and sat down and continued to calculate probabilities and possibilities. The deaths of those that James would kill bothered him a little, but he wasn't sure what he could do about it. Every life he saved seemed to cost two or three more. So David did nothing more. For the time being.

3

As you walk the streets of Salt Lake City, two things strike you at the very same time. The first is that it is the most American City on the face of the planet. The buildings are tall

and straight and their designs are confident and hold no hint of apology in them. In many ways, it is a city that many dream about.

The second thing is that perhaps the city is too American. The place is almost too perfect. The air is too clean, the stone too washed. The streets are too safe. It is a city that has swept its dirt safely under a collective rug.

The over-arching thing about Salt Lake City is that it is a city of Mormons in a State of Mormons. The city was founded by Mormons fleeing religious persecution and they prospered on the shore of crystal blue Salt Lake. Mormon religion and philosophy permeate every aspect of the City and the State.

James would find no porno shop to loiter in here. He would find no bondage club listed in the yellow pages to stalk. This is not to say that these things did not exist. In fact, they prospered here. They did, however, prosper in the vibrant underground culture of the city.

The Mormons and other residents of the city needed their vices like any other city dweller in the country. As long as the hookers and other sin mongers kept to the red light districts, then the police generally turned a blind eye. If you arrested prostitutes, then you admitted that prostitutes existed in the city. You also ran the danger of catching a church elder in a raid. This could ruin a cop's career.

James prowled the red light district and scanned with his mind. As usual, he was careless as he scanned and found the mind of another vampire. He probed for a second and was probed as well. The other vampire was a gypsy and James easily scared him off. James laughed to himself, thinking that

the gypsy might get caught by the Committee while they tracked James' crimes.

James finally found what he wanted. A college student up from BYU was headed to the local bondage club. It wasn't officially a club. In fact, it was really someone's house. The owner was a professional Dominatrix and opened her home to her friends on weekends. She would typically have parties of ten to fifteen D/s practitioners. They would use her homemade dungeon and torture devises. She charged them nothing and in fact enjoyed the company. Most of her business was during the week, so it really cost her little or nothing to hold these parties.

James waited outside until almost dawn. He had watched the house most of the night and no one seemed interested in coming out. James was getting bored and restless and began probing the party goers with his mind. He realized that the revelers had no intention of going anywhere until well into the next day and he almost gave up. Then he found what he wanted.

The house was an old Victorian, built in the early explosive growth of the city. It had three stories and a finished basement. The basement had been converted into a makeshift dungeon and the attic also held many torture devices, but was decorated in a more brothel like décor.

Most of the partiers were in the dungeon, but a woman had taken a man up into the attic for some private training. James easily snuck into the attic while the two played their sex games.

James waited until the man was secured in a St. Andrews' Cross before making his move. Once the man was tied securely, James stepped from the shadows and killed the woman in a matter of moments. He held her trapped in his arms while he drank the hot blood from her neck. He kept eye contact with the man the entire time.

The man screamed for help while James fed. James knew that the other partygoers could hear him, but he also knew that his screams would go unheeded. He probed the others and they all thought the he and his Mistress were having the time of their lives.

James leisurely dropped the body of the leather clad woman and moved towards the man. He resumed his screaming and James was energized by the man's hysteria.

James took his time with the man. He wanted everyone to know just how much the man had suffered at his hands. James was an artist in his own sadism. The man finally lost consciousness from the pain and the sight of his own blood, which James made sure to spatter everywhere he could. James finally allowed the man to die.

4

The bodies of the two in the attic were not found until two hours later. One of the guests finally braved entry when repeated attempts to rouse the two had failed. The young woman who found them screamed and ran to get the woman who owned the house. It took her a while to calm the girl down and then went with four of the men to check out the sight.

She entered the attic and saw the grizzly sight in front of her. One of the men fainted and two of the other vomited on the spot. The fourth man ran down stairs hysterical. To her credit, she remained calm and walked straight to the phone and called the police. She did not for one second harbor any intention of trying to cover this up.

Within the hour, the house was swarming with police including two detectives who were regular clients of the owner (One was a man and the other a woman, they weren't partners and neither knew about the other's activities). The guests were all interviewed and it was decided that none would be held.

The evidence showed that there was some sort of break-in and everyone else was with the group when the crime was committed. The local police captain showed up and was briefed by one of the detectives.

"It looks like a real psycho did this, Captain."

The Captain nodded.

"We have a point of entry and exit. Looks like the woman was killed first and then the killer took his time with the man."

More nodding.

"That's really about it."

"We got anything on any of the guests?"

"No, sir. No money changed any hands that we can tell. Sick as they are, they're having a party. A private party. I'd be tempted to roust them a little, maybe scare them a little, you know to keep them quiet, but..." he hesitated.

"But what?" The Captain snapped.

"But one of the guests is a partner in one of the bigger law firms."

"Shit" hissed the Captain.

"And another is a reporter."

"Oh, you're really making my day, detective. We got the goddamn olympics coming up and we have a pyscho killing in front of an attorney AND a reporter. This is just great, just fucking great."

"Yes, sir." Was all the detective could think to say.

"Ok, well everything by the book. If we're lucky, this one will get tied to that killing in Denver the other night and our killer will hit the road. Let the F.B.I. worry about it.

Headaches like this I don't need. Not today, not any day."

"Yes, sir."

Chapter 28

Kit didn't get close to Albuquerque by dawn. For some reason the university she was chatting at was called South West Texas even though it turned out to be in the Eastern half of the state. What Kit didn't realize was that the reference was to the southwest corner of the INHABITED part of the state. The drive was long and would have been tiring if she was mortal. She could imagine the distance she was covering and that she had only crossed one state line.

She was a little south of Truth or Consequences, New Mexico when she decided to pull off the highway and look for cover. She was heading due north at this point and could smell the man-made lake in the small town. She wondered at the name of the town but shrugged it off. She would ask Bill about it if she remembered. It wasn't that important, though she thought the story would be a good one.

As she had in the past, she found a drainage pipe and filled it in. The air was dry and there was no hint of precipitation. She did wonder what would happen if it rained and the pipe filled with water while she slept.

She knew what would happen if she got swept out into the daylight, but she wondered if submerging her sleeping body would harm her in any way. She knew she had no vital signs while she slept, so she imagined that she wouldn't drown, but she wasn't sure. She did know she didn't want to test the hypothesis.

Before she knew it, it was evening again. The one thing she had learned about being a vampire was that she didn't

dream. One minute it was dawn and the next it was dusk. She experienced no transition between consciousness and unconsciousness. She realized how much she didn't know about being a vampire.

She had read everything that the Committee had on vampires as a trainee. She had thought it was a lot but now realized it was damn little. She knew that vampires could possess incredible psychic powers, but she never imagined what she now experienced. She knew that sunlight was deadly, but she had now learned that she didn't dream or have any consciousness during the day. The idea frightened her more than just a little. The thought of someone coming across her body was terrifying. She hated being that helpless.

She knew that vampires had some ability to change their appearance, but she didn't seem to be able to transform into a wolf or a bat. She could see her reflection. She cast a shadow and running water held no particular terror for her. The Committee files told her that crosses and garlic were of no concern to a vampire, but they did need to be invited into a dwelling.

She still didn't know if the threshold rule applied to her. Would she be bound by laws of evil, even if she was not evil? It made her mind hurt to think about it.

She headed northwards and passed through one desert into another. The land was barren and the darkness complete. The sky was moonless and filled with thousands upon thousands of stars. Kit made sure she stayed away from other vehicles, which wasn't a difficult task in this desolate country. She knew that the first European settlers had come this way

and had no idea how pre-industrial people could possibly have crossed this hostile land. The human part of her mind found the land ugly and frightening, but somewhere her vampire consciousness saw this as a savage and delightful place.

Arriving in Albuquerque was unsettling after she had spent so much time in the isolation of the desert. She approached from the south, past Indian and military reservations. Ed had given her perfect directions and she soon was pulling into his neighborhood.

Ed lived at the foot of the Sandia Mountains. Literally, that meant the "Water Melon" mountains. At sunset, the western slopes and cliffs of the mountains would turn blood red and the crescent shape made them look like a slice of water melon laying on it's side.

The mountains rose along a fault that Kit had been following since she had left El Paso. The entire line had gentle eastern slopes and severe western cliffs. The Rio Grand flowed through the valleys that were created by the mountains. Albuquerque had been founded along the river, but had sprawled to the east, finally reaching the foot of the Sandias, which rose five thousand feet and towered over the city.

Ed lived in a very upscale gated neighborhood at the very foot of the cliffs. Kit pressed the call box as required. When she identified herself, an automated wrought iron gate rolled to the side and then replaced itself as she rode past. The streets wound like a nest of snakes and were devoid of traffic. It was only about midnight, but Kit decided that these people

would think of this hour as late into the night. She chuckled to herself.

Ed had the house lit up like a ball park. Kit drove right to it and saw Ed standing in the driveway. He had obviously been able to see her since she pulled through the gate. Kit was impressed both by the man and by the house.

The house was more accurately called a mansion. The outer walls were stark white adobe that reflected beautifully in the floodlights. The style was a cross between the local Pueblo and European Mediterranean architecture. The combination was impressive.

Ed was impressive too. He was not at all what Kit would have found attractive in her youth, but there was something very attractive about the man to her now. He was large; tall and overweight, but he obviously had remarkable physical power. He radiated strength. Kit thought he would fit in well with the bikers she had been spending time with.

Kit decided it wasn't his appearance that she found attractive, but rather his bearing. He was exactly as he showed himself in cyberspace. This was a man who knew what he was and was comfortable with it. Of course as a vampire, she found Ed's general beefiness ... delicious.

Kit almost slapped herself at the last realization.

"Welcome." Ed said as Kit shut off the motorcycle. The machine was hot and she climbed off and stepped away from it. Ed smiled and offered her his hand.

Kit smiled and wrapped her arms around the large man. He really was big. 6' 4" at least. Kit barely got her arms

around him. She laid her head against his strong chest and almost cried.

"I'm so happy you're all right."

Ed laughed "As you can see, I'm not the smallest guy in the world. I think I might give your friend a run for his money."

"Don't even think that. He's an evil man and he knows ways to hurt people you could never imagine."

"Well, you're here to protect me now." His tone was a little mocking and it momentarily bothered Kit until she realized that there was no way for Ed to comprehend the danger they both were in. She was sure that Ed thought he was protecting her. Well, so be it.

"Yes" was all she could say.

Ed led her to the house and opened the door. Kit found that she couldn't order herself through the door until Ed said, "Go on, it's OK."

"Well that answers one question. I'm evil by design, not action." Kit sighed to herself and walked into the house.

The home was as beautiful inside as it had been outside, except for one thing. There was almost no furniture in the entire place. The home was huge with white plaster wall, brick floors and terracotta moldings and trim, but there was not dinning room table, only one couch and easy chair. He had an entertainment center, a desk shoved off in one corner and a computer desk with what appeared to be a state of the art system.

"Not that it matters, but you do have beds don't you?"

Ed laughed "Of course. It's just that after my family was killed, I just got rid of everything. I've enjoyed the minimalist approach ever since."

Ed led her down a flight of stairs that opened into a room with a pool table and ping-pong table. There was another T.V. and entertainment center. Ed opened a door and showed Kit her room.

It was very nice. As he had promised, it had no windows and it had a bed and a dresser.

"Home sweet home." Ed said.

Kit could tell from the small that the bed and the dresser were new. Ed had obviously bought them for her. She did not want to embarrass him by saying anything about it.

She reached up and kissed his cheek. "This is perfect. Thank you, but Ed there is something I have to tell you. A condition."

"Yes?" She heard the nervousness in his voice.

"Ed this is important, I can not be disturbed in here during the day for any reason whatsoever. I mean, nothing. I don't care if the house is on fire. Do you understand? If you can't agree to this, I'll have to leave."

Ed thought for a second, "Of course, anything you want. But why?"

Kit winced at the question. She had mulled this lie over in her mind for the last night and a half. She knew Ed would ask. She had worked out a lie about being phobic about being touched while she slept, That her mythical ex and traumatized so much that she would rather die than be disturbed during her daily sleep.

She looked at the big man and discovered that she could not form the words of the lie in her mouth. "I'll explain some day Ed, I promise. I just can't talk about it now."

"Okay, you're the boss."

Kit smiled thinly and a little sad.

Chapter 29

The three conspirators in the Committee were getting frustrated. Ginger had been spending all her free time on line. She lurked in phony identities, she went in under her usual chat name. She spoke with as many friends as she could. She even branched out to some of the smaller chat servers. She could not find a trace of Kit anywhere.

She was happy that her rumor of Kit's abuse had spread so widely. Many of her friends spoke to her in a conspiratorial tone and had reported that they were keeping their eyes out for Kit. No one had heard a peep out of her. At least the community was staying alert for Kit's presence and were all promising to keep any information to themselves or just share it with Ginger. Ginger was sure that this would provide some modicum of protection for Kit.

Everyone was very suspicious of newcomers. This, in large, measure was due to Ginger's efforts. She knew that Committee agents were also staking out the chat rooms and that some of them had attempted to infiltrate and milk information from the regulars. Ginger had discovered a few of these agents because anyone who asked any kind of a question about Kit was immediately iced out.

Pat had reported that many of the snoops were getting frustrated with their inability to make any substantial contact. Jean had pulled Ginger out of Pat's area and reassigned her to some very mundane tasks. Since most of the Committee's efforts were now dedicated to locating Kit or the other vampire, there really wasn't another case to assign Ginger to.

Ginger appreciated what her husband had done and felt more than a little guilty that she was undermining his efforts.

Ginger had given up trying to talk to Jean about Kit. He had respected her feelings. She knew there was little else she could do. As guilty and conflicted as she felt, she was sure Jean felt twice as bad. He had taken to spending long hours in his office. Ginger had no idea what he was doing. She hoped he was not just brooding.

The time difference between Europe and the United States was getting to Ginger. She was staying up later and later. She was trying to match up with the evening chatters and now wished she had started by rising earlier and earlier. It was four in the morning and she was just about to log on. Her mouth felt dry from all the coffee she had been drinking and she was feeling very discouraged and wrung out.

She had let herself into Pat and Julie's house and was sitting in front of the silent computer monitor. She kept the room dark so the only light came from the glow of the screen. Ginger was loosing touch with all her real life friends because of her nocturnal habits. It was bothering her very much. She had to go on however, she had to go on.

She robotically logged on and navigated to the Bondage Chateau. She was using her usual identity, Slayers-kitten, tonight. She was not interested in lurking or spying. She just wanted to know if any of her friends had heard or seen anything.

—Slayers-kitten—~Enters and bows to those who are Worthy.~

—Lord-Tanner—~Nods to kitten, wishing her a happy evening.~

—Tanners-gem—~Smiles at her sister and runs over to give her a big hug.~

—Sub-ice—~Pounces her sis.~

On it went for a little while. One thing chatters love to do is greet each other. Ginger was sure that some people just logged on and did nothing but say "hello" or "good bye" to people as they came and went.

—Sub-ice—A word in private, sis?

—Slayers-kitten—Of course, sis.

Ginger set her computer for private chat.

—Sub-ice—I have some news, kitten.

—Slayers-kitten—What is it, ice?

—Sub-ice—Well, you know those killings in Denver and in Salt Lake City?

—Slayers-kitten—~nods~

—Sub-ice—Well ... I don't know if I can believe it or not, but some people are saying that it's Kit's Ex who's doing the killing. That he's so mad at her that he's lost his mind and is now killing D/s people until he gets her.

—Slayers-kitten—You're kidding? I mean you don't really think it's the same guy? (Ginger prodded)

—Sub-ice—It's hard to imagine but that's what some are saying. I mean, you and I have known Kit a long time, and it's hard to imagine her getting mixed up with anyone THAT sick. You know, Kit always seemed to have a good head on her shoulders, have good instincts about these things.

—Slayers-kitten—I suppose. God I hope you're wrong. I'd hate to think of someone like that after Kit.

—Sub-ice—~Huggles you~ I know how much she means to you, sis.

—Slayers-kitten—Thanks, sis.

The two chatted for a few more minutes in private. Ginger then returned to the main room and chatted with more of her friends. Three of them took her aside and gave her the same bit of gossip. Ginger was certain something was up when she snapped off her computer.

It was now morning in France and Pat and Julie were up and stirring. Julie made a light breakfast and the three sat down and enjoyed it together. Ginger passed along what she had learned that night.

"So, what do you think it means?" Pat asked.

"Could mean a few things." Ginger responded and sat for a few moments chewing over the ones she could think about. There were people who thought best when they talked, Ginger was not one of them. The other two sat silently waiting for Ginger to form her thoughts. Both had learned long ago that it was best to let Ginger alone when she was thinking.

"I can only see three possibilities. One is that someone in the chat community put two and two together and came up with the rumor. I don't think this is very likely since everyone I talked to seemed to disbelieve the rumor. If it were one of them, it would have more supporters, I think.

"Second, someone here at the Committee planted the rumor. Pat says that the snoops are getting very frustrated

with all the dead ends. Someone may be trying to shake things up. I also find this unlikely since Pat doesn't know anything about it and given everyone's distrust of newcomers right now.

"Third, Kit planted the rumor to make everyone weary. I find this to be the most likely possibility. It fits Kit's way of doing things and tells me that she has retained her humanity so far and is trying to protect people. I am emboldened by this possibility, but we really need to find a way to help her. I am more convinced than ever that we have to find a way to help save her. Whatever that means. I just refuse to believe that the only way to save her is to destroy her."

"I know." Seconded Julie. Julie probably missed Kit more than any of them. She was feeling completely lost without her friend. Ginger reached across the table and took Julie's hand silently. A month ago, Ginger was certain that Julie would have pulled away. Ginger and Julie never really connected as friends. Julie didn't really understand Ginger's submissiveness and saw her friendship with Pat somewhat threatening, but that was then and this was now. Julie accepted Ginger's hand and gave it a gentle squeeze.

As usual, Pat was oblivious to the entire transaction.

2

David sat in his cell and schemed. He measured the possibilities and the probabilities and was guardedly optimistic. He knew that if Kit had any chance of survival then things had to unfold as they were. He also knew that his time to act was going to come soon. If only he could be sure.

3

Jean was not really spending his time in his office brooding. He had gotten out Rene's old papers and has reading them carefully. Rene had lived a fascinating life. Jean supposed that anyone involved with the Committee would lead a fascinating life and a Director more than most. In fact, Jean prayed for a less interesting life every day.

Rene, however, would have to be rated among the more fascinating of the bunch. This mainly had to do with the time in which he lived. World War II was the only time, including the French Revolution, where the Committee involved itself with politics and secular concerns.

In large measure, this had to do with Hitler's obsession with the occult and the supernatural. Jean read about the vampire hunt where Rene had made a name for himself; a hunt that had taken him into the heart of Germany. He read of the choices that Rene had to make.

Many of the choices could only be described as devil's choices. Rene had to make choices between degrees of evil. Rene's decision had had far reaching consequences. Any of the consequences were terrible and many people died.

Jean was remembering what Rene had said during his last minutes of life. The man's words ate at Jean as he poured over the man's diaries and journals. Jean was faced with a devil's choice of his own. He read hoping that Rene's voice would come back from the grave and tell him what to do.

Chapter 30

James liked Las Vegas. It was his kind of town; loud and garish, with many victims walking the streets. The city was a huge venus fly trap, luring its victims in with the promise of easy riches and hedonistic pleasures. James wandered the streets dipping into the minds of the tourists and players. Any of them would have ordinarily made a wonderful target, but James wanted something special.

Las Vegas was a special town and James wanted to perform a special act of horror. This was not the kind of place where you got attention by killing a pervert or two. No, this was a monument of greed and decadence. A special act of horror was called for. James was beginning to feel like an artist. He was enjoying this latest killing spree.

He had killed countless mortals before, but this was the first time he was doing it for an audience. He felt more alive than he had in a long time. His former plans now seemed so childish and unimaginative. He no longer cared about the Committee and those stupid hunters. This would make his statement. He could feel his power growing by leaps and bounds.

He could tell his power was growing. The minds of the mortals seemed so much weaker now, so much more feeble. He could also feel his power grow, relative to other vampires. He was not the only creature of the night who hunted in this town. Las Vegas attracted many vampires. Gypsies moved through regularly and a few leeches lurked in it's alleys and shadows. James felt the presence of a vampire lord that

oversaw everything and thought he was up to making his move against this lord when his current quest was over.

Yes, James felt flush with excitement and power. The world was opening up before him. It was now only a matter of time before he crushed that bitch under his heel.

James snapped himself out of his reverie. He needed to get his mind back to the task at hand. There were so many tourists and dabblers that it was hard to find just what he wanted, but he finally latched onto a mind that would lead him to just what he wanted, what he needed.

2

Jill has happy. She was happier than she had been in a very long time. She walked with a sure and confident step under the neon lights of the strip. It had taken her a long time to admit who she was and to make the move to his glorious city, but she finally had. She had left her drab existence and found love and friends in this eternally bustling city.

Jill had no interest in gambling. She had no interest in the garish shows. She was indifferent to the drugs and the mobsters that prospered here and she certainly could care less about the high priced hookers that decorated the bars and lounges. Not that she wasn't interested in women, she just wasn't interested in paying for them.

Besides, Jill had a woman. Jill had a delightful little plaything that was totally devoted to her. Jill had met her at a party a few months ago and they fell head over heels for each other. Her name was Grace and she was everything that Jill wanted. Grace has short, blonde, drop-dead gorgeous and

completely submissive. Grace was more of a pain slut than Jill imagined herself with. It wasn't the pain that attracted Jill to the world of Dominance/submission, but she was learning to enjoy giving her little pet a spanking every now and again.

Tall, angular and blonde, Jill caught more than a few stares as she strode through the lobby of the Sands Hotel. It also helped that she was dressed in her best Domme leathers that included her stiletto heels. She also carried a riding crop that she authoritatively tapped against her leg and she walked. She smiled knowing that in her hometown of Boise, she would never dare to dress like this in public. In Las Vegas, she fit right in.

She rode the elevator silently to the suites. She shared the car with a handful of tourists. A couple of the conventioners gave her an appreciative ogle as the car ascended. In the past such attention might have embarrassed her, but now she stood proud and straight and gave no hint that the men even existed. Jill was learning to use her sexuality as a weapon and a tool.

She rode to the top of the building and marched to the suite she had come to know so well. A quick knock and she was admitted. The room was decorated in the typical Las Vegas modern extravagant style. The suite had four bedrooms, a large living room, a kitchen, a bar and a game room complete with a tournament quality pool table. It was not the most opulent space that the hotel offered, but it was up there.

Jill had no idea how much a room like this rented for. All she knew is that the floating party she was attending would

spend one week a month in it. No one knew who had started this party, but it had easily lasted ten years or more. No one was really sure who was paying for it, but some of the richer patrons were often asked to kick in unspecified amounts of money. No one was really sure who was running the party, though there always seemed to be someone who was in charge.

Everyone in Las Vegas' D/s community knew about the party. Everyone went to it at some point. It was a good place to meet friends or make new ones. If you were lucky enough or rich enough, it was also a good way to be introduced into the world of Dominance and submission. Jill tried to attend at least two times a week.

Jill strode to the bar and a delightfully submissive man bowed his head and handed her a drink he had begun mixing when he saw her enter the room. Jill smiled sweetly and caressed his jaw with the business end of her riding crop. The man shivered as he gratefully accepted his tip.

Jill turned and faced the room. The view was spectacular, even by Las Vegas standards. She saw the diamond like lights of the city glowing up. It was a sight that never failed to take her breath away.

She finally turned her attention to Grace. Jill had phoned her forty-five minutes ago and told her to meet her at the party. Jill liked giving Grace last minute instructions like that. It kept the girl on her toes. Grace never knew exactly when the call would come from Jill, but she knew she would have to have herself in presentable condition to greet her Mistress when Jill arrived. Both women loved this game.

Jill always made it a point to notice Grace well after she had entered the room. She would always get her drink, make some small talk with some of the other Dom/me, maybe flirt with one or two of the submissives and then finally sit in the chair or couch where her darling Grace was waiting, kneeling. She would then pull Grace into a deep kiss that both women would lose themselves in. That she would keep her little sub waiting only made the moment more perfect.

As she sat down in the loveseat before her submissive, Jill's attention was momentarily drawn to someone she had never met before. He was obviously a Dom by his bearing, but he was very short and his features were very delicate and feminine. Jill thought she should make it a point to meet this newcomer sometime during the evening.

3

James sat and lounged in the love seat that overlooked the glimmering city below. He basked in the moment and let his eyes graze over the sight of the dead and dying at his feet. How delicious they had all been. He only regretted that his appetite was not endless. Their blood was so sweet and full of life. It was almost a shame to waste it.

He looked over the ghastly sight as a sculptor would look at a freshly chiseled statue or a writer might pour over a manuscript fresh out of the printer. He considered the bodies as they lay where he had dropped them, each a mask of pain and horror. The few that were still alive let out soft pathetic moans. He wished that he could preserve the sound somehow, wished that his audience would experience the depth of the horror he created.

James looked down at his feet and saw what was left of a leather clad blonde. She was one of the few victims who clinged desperately to her fading life. He considered a moment and thought about his work of art. He bent down and pulled her to his lips and kissed her tenderly. She struggled feebly against him with her waning strength and he drove his hand hard against her spine. Her back shattered and her spinal column shredded instantly. The woman convulsed in a blinding spasm of pain and then death. James let her fall at his feet, her body now hideously twisted.

James rose and slowly walked to the shower. He stripped off his clothing and let them fall. He washed the visible evidence from his body and then put on the clothing he had brought to wear out. He was tempted to call the police and report the crime, but discarded the thought knowing that it was more prudent to let someone else do it.

As he left the room, he knew that Las Vegas would soon be vampire free for a period of time. Even the current Lord would flee as the Committee descended upon the town. James walked happily to his hiding place.

4

Jean looked in horror at the report from his agents in Las Vegas. He read and reread it four times. Each time he hoped that there had been a mistake, that he had misread the numbers, but each time his eyes told him the grim truth: Twenty-two people had been killed in the latest bloody attack.

The mass killing had gotten the attention of every news service in the world. CNN had moved it to its top story and Headline News was leading it every half hour. Press

conferences with various law enforcement agencies and politicians were being held almost every hour.

The Committee's phone and computer lines had been jammed for hours as reports and requests for help had been flooding in from all sectors. Jean had, the night before, read something in Rene's journals that he felt was prophetic of this moment. It was after "The Night of the Long Knives." Rene had written:

I suppose I should not be so surprised. No one should. The monster in Berlin had shown the depths of his inhumanity many times. The attacks on the synagogues and schools, the beating and the murders, the book burning, all of this and more, should have told us what he was; shown us the evil that was rearing its hideous head.

I don't mourn the lives of the trash that he had killed. I do, however, fear for the rest of us. If that madman can unleash such ruthless cruelty upon his own, what hope is there for any of us?

Jean considered the passage and the history that surrounded it. This monster was revealing itself for what it truly was. Jean wondered what hope there was.

Chapter 31

Albuquerque sits nicely tucked in at the foot of the Sandia Mountains. It sprawls west across the Rio Grand valley and then creeps up the western mesa to the top of the valley's ridge. The western advance of the city is halted by this ridge because the water in the neighboring valley is so brackish that no one wants to drink in. The City is bounded to the south by military and Indian reservations and to the North by Indian reservations and pueblos. The view from Ed's exclusive home was breath taking to say the least.

"You have to be careful at night."

"Why is that?" Kit asked, secretly amused.

"We are at the foot of the mountains here. You can see the lights of the tram that will carry you to the top. The sharp cliffs and valleys are rugged and support a lot of wild life. There are big horn sheep and the animals that feed on them. Specifically, there are coyotes, bears and cougars. This isn't a good place to let your pets out."

"So the animals come this low?"

"Often. This is all newly developed. Many of the predators consider it their territory. If the conditions are too dry, some of the bears will march right into the city."

"Yeah, I remember that. So, have there been any attacks on people up here?"

"No, but you can't be too sure. I like the isolation up here. I like how in touch with the world I am. Sometimes you hear one of those cats roar and it will send chills up your spine."

"I'm sure." Kit considered Ed as he stared off into the dark wilderness behind his home. There was something very wild about this man. There was something primal and earthy that she found very attractive. It wasn't that he was a brute or that he was even rugged. It was that he was in tune, that his eyes saw things that most people missed.

Kit found herself running her tongue over her sharp fangs. She was being filled with emotions that she hadn't felt since she had joined the Committee. She was feeling lust. She was turned on. Maybe it was this strong gentle man who had taken her in, maybe it was the wild and savage lands this home was in, maybe it was her vampire lust rising, or maybe there was something in the air. Kit didn't know and she didn't care.

Kit had pushed her sexual feelings aside when she joined the Committee. Sex had always been such an important aspect of her life and now she could hardly remember it. Something broke inside and she turned and stared up into Ed's eyes.

"Maybe it was a mistake that I came here." She whispered.

"I can't see why." He said returning her stare with very wise and very sad eyes.

"I don't know, it's just that my life..." She never finished the sentence.

Ed leaned down and crushed his lips to hers. Like Kit, it had been beyond his memory since he buried his sexual desires. He thought they had been put into the ground with his wife and child. He hadn't even allowed himself the opportunity to see if he could be attracted to a woman again.

He had kept his heart and his life locked away in his stronghold on the mountain.

It all flooded back for both of them at once. The hunger, the pleasure, their skin burning, needing to tear their clothing off. A fire in their bellies that only could be sated by the other.

They tore clumsily and desperately at each other. Kit's supernatural strength gave her an advantage and she soon had torn, literally, the clothing from both of their bodies. She could have easily picked up the larger man and carried him wherever she wanted. She relaxed and allowed him that pleasure. She melted in his arms as he carried her to his bedroom and fell on top of her.

There was nothing artful or graceful about their lovemaking. This was not a time for control. Kit opened herself to Ed and he plunged in deeper and deeper. They both were breathing hard and Ed was sweating profusely. The sheets and their bodies grew wetter and wetter.

Kit's mind reeled. She had not felt this good in a very long time and all kind of emotions came flooding out of her. She had used her sex to get what she had wanted with the bikers in Texas, but it was nothing like this. She had even worried at her ability to separate her emotions from what she had done. She was afraid she had lost the ability to love when she changed.

She now knew she could love and she loved with all her heart. She opened herself up wider and wider and felt him fall deeper and deeper. She felt her heart beating on for him and felt his heart beating only for her.

She felt the strong muscles in his back tense as he approached his crisis and she let wave after wave of orgasm sweep through her taught form. She felt his salty skin in her mouth and heard him scream as he spilled his fluids into her. She felt her head spin as his blood pumped strongly into her mouth as she grew stronger and stronger with each passing moment. The large man's strength giving her one heady spasm after another.

Suddenly she tore her mouth away and saw what she had done. "Oh God! Oh my God!" She sobbed as she pushed the semiconscious man off of her.

Ed rolled onto his back and bled onto the bed for a moment. She didn't know why, but his bleeding soon stopped and his head rolled to the side and he passed out. Kit twisted desperately looking for a mirror and saw that Ed's thick blood was streaming down from her mouth.

"Oh God, how?" She was crying hysterically.

She quickly ran to the bathroom and splashed cold water on her face, then wrung a washcloth with the water and returned to Ed. "Please, please, please!" She muttered insistently as she caressed his head with the cool cloth.

She laid her ear against the large man's chest with great trepidation and sighed in relief when she felt the man's strong heart pounding in his chest. She sighed in relief and then looked in horror at the mess she had made.

Though he had not lost much blood, it was enough to soak the sheets red. Ed was covered with his own gore and so was Kit.

"Oh God, how? Why?" Kit continued to cry. She sobbed with her head against the big man for an eternity. She had no idea how long. When she finally got control of herself she looked in the mirror and saw the naked monster with her lover's drying blood covering her body staring back.

"Is this all my life is now?" Kit sobbed to the reflection. She got up and washed. She didn't bother to put on any clothing, she just paced to the kitchen and read the clock. It was 5:00 a.m., the sun would be up soon. Kit made up her mind.

Walking in her full nakedness, she walked out onto the front patio that faced over the city. She looked up and saw that the stars were already fading as the first tendrils of sunlight streaked over her head. It might take hours, but the sun would eventually crest the mountain and it would all be over. No more blood, no more James, no more running, no more Committee, no more Kit. The world would soon be less one vampire. The world would soon be a better place.

As the morning approached, Kit could feel the sun slowly creeping towards her. She would look up and see the color returning to the sky. It had been so long since she had seen a blue sky that it made her cry.

She dried a tear from her cheek and saw that it was full of blood, Ed's blood. She cried more and saw the first rays of the sun streak across the valley and touch three extinct volcanoes thirty miles away.

She felt her strength begin to leave her as the sky turned bluer and bluer and the shadow of the mountain took shape and began moving towards her. It wouldn't be long now she

thought; maybe an hour, maybe longer, maybe shorter. She didn't really know how, but she started to silently pray.

Suddenly, she heard a soft clink and she turned and looked at the small glass top table next to her. She saw a semiautomatic pistol that she knew was a Barretta nine-millimeter from her training. She rolled her head with all her might and looked up into Ed's eyes. "You won't need that. I won't hurt you anymore." She managed to say.

"I know. It's not to use on you, it's to show you."

Kit rolled her head back to the west and saw the shadow kiss the river below.

"I sat right here, you know. Sat right here and watched the sun fill the valley. It really is beautiful. I wanted it to be the last thing I saw."

Kit wanted to say something but couldn't get her mind to form the thought let alone the words.

"Yes, I though about the irony of it all. Finally getting everything I wanted and then losing my family at the same time. I decided to join them. The gun is loaded with Black Talons. You can't even buy those anymore. Would have torn the back of my head clean off."

"I suppose you're wondering what happened." Ed asked and Kit couldn't even nod her head.

"Well I'll tell you what happened. An angel happened. I'm not talking about some pretty girl in a bikini. I'm talking angel. You know, like Gabriel. I don't think it was Gabriel, but I suppose I'll never really know.

"Anyway, I was sitting there just about as light as it is now and I was ready to pull the trigger and this angel appears and

is looking really pissed. Well I was really pissed too, so I didn't care. He just stares at me and then says 'how dare you?' and then he left. He disappeared.

"Well, I'm not really all that religious a guy, but I thought about it and felt maybe there was something I was going to screw up if I died. Like someone had this plan and I had a part in it. I think that I fully believe that now. I never told anyone that story before, but it's true. Every word."

Kit flopped her head back towards Ed and with all her strength gasped, "Help me."

"Of course." He said and picked her up in strong arms and carried her to her basement room.

2

"So I guess the proferia story has a crock of shit?" Ed asked when Kit finally emerged from her room after sunset. Her strength had returned and she was now awake enough to be curious as to her host's reaction the following morning.

"Yes." She said as she sat across from him at his kitchen table.

"I suppose you won't be wanting any coffee."

"No thanks, never touch the stuff anymore."

"I would offer you something else, but I'm afraid you might take me up on it." He smiled and pointed at his neck.

Kit finally exploded. "How the fuck can you joke like this? I almost killed you last night! You have a vampire living in your house for Christ's sake and you're making *jokes*?"

Ed just sat there and stared at her. He was letting her run out of steam.

"Aren't you the *least* bit incredulous about me?"

"I suppose I should be, but when you get visited by an angel you just learn to accept that there's more to this world than they teach you in engineering school."

"No shit."

"Besides, I've hung out with the vampires on the net for a long time. I always wondered if some of it wasn't true."

"Well most of those guys are just kids playing, but there are vampires and werewolves and a lot of things that go bump in the night. All of them are scarier than any damn mountain lion."

"What makes you so different then?"

"I'm new. Maybe I'll turn as bad, I don't know. I was learning how to hunt vampires and one of them got me and changed me."

"Changed ... you?" Ed asked as he touched the scar on his neck. It was the first time Kit had heard any fear in his voice.

"Don't worry. You have to drink my blood to get changed. Think about it, there would be more vampires than people if it worked the other way around."

Ed exhaled audibly and relaxed.

"So what's your story?"

Kit told him everything. Everything since she had been living in Canada without a care in the world and her friend Debbie was horrible murdered up to her desperate run from James and the Committee.

"Sounds tough. But I'm glad you came here."

"Why would you say that? I've put you in danger."

"You didn't put me in danger Kit, we're all in danger already. This other vampire is on a killing spree. It sounds like you saved me somehow." Ed paused.

"There is one more thing you have to know, Kit."

"What?"

"It's bad, real bad."

"I'm used to it, what?"

Kit was wrong she wasn't used to it. She sobbed before Ed was halfway done telling her about the massacre in Las Vegas. "It happened last night. It's all over the t.v. I gotta believe that it's James."

"It is. Now I know I have to kill that fucker." She looked up "Ed I felt something this morning."

"What?"

"I don't know. Something drew me out to the western part of the house. Something was calling to me from the west."

"James?" Ed asked a little frightened.

"I don't think so. I know him. It was something else. It was something more powerful, something that wants to help me. I can feel it now, calling."

"Well what are we waiting for, an escort? Let's go."

Kit shrugged and they climbed into Ed's pickup truck and got on Highway 40 and drove west.

Chapter 32

Jean had his phones turned off. The Committee's switchboard had been lit up and clogged since the slayings in Las Vegas. His e-mail had over 600 messages waiting, he had called in every clerical worker he could spare to handle the mess. He was very afraid that the Committee's computer system would crash.

There were certain things that triggered a Committee investigation. This case had all of those elements covered. If the crime is particularly bloody, someone in the investigating team will contact the Committee. This crime was the bloodiest that the Committee had any record of. The carnage was beyond belief. Some of the crime photos had found their way to Jean's desk and they painted a horrifying picture. This vampire was making a statement and he wanted everyone to hear it loud and clear.

If the physical evidence ties to exceptionally old crimes the Committee will be notified. There were fingerprints that matched with a killing spree that took place in Chicago and the surrounding suburbs back in the fifties. The F.B.I. always got nervous when this happened and made contact. It was, in fact, this circumstance that got Jean his lead on his last kill.

One thing that surely triggers a call to the Committee is if the evidence points to a dead person. The fingerprints belonged to a James Majewski. He was considered a suspect in the earlier crimes, but when he went completely missing he was declared missing and presumed dead by the powers that

be. Jean was certain that he had the name of the vampire now, not that this information did him any good.

As he was pouring over the information for the umpteenth time, Jean heard a timid knock at his office door. Without asking, he knew it was his secretary. His assistant would have knocked boldly and his wife would be somewhere in the middle. It couldn't be anyone else. His orders were clear on the subject of his privacy.

"Come in." He yelled.

The door pushed open slowly. "Please Alice, come in" Jean called out.

"I'm sorry, sir. I know you don't want to be disturbed ... but," she was nervous and kept hesitating. In most circumstances Jean would have been patient with her, but not today.

"What is it Alice? I'm busy here." Immediately Jean kicked himself for saying the second part of that. Alice certainly didn't deserve it.

"I'm sorry Alice, you know how it's been. Please, what is it?"

"Sir, I just don't know if it's important enough, but it's the lunatic, David."

"David? Have you called Pat?"

"No, sir. He said he wanted to tell you something, that there was something you needed to know."

"Do I have to go down there?"

"No, sir. He gave us the message. He said you would understand."

"Okay, what is it?"

"Sir, he said the someone named Wilhelm was trying to contact you and that it's very important that you talk to him."

Jean remembered the name from Rene's journals. If it was the same Wilhelm it would be very important.

"Alice, is there any record of a call from a Wilhelm?"

"Yes, sir. There was one call, this morning, at about five a.m.. You were asleep and he wouldn't talk to anyone else. The message processed, but you've received so many and they all claim they are urgent and .."

Jean waved off the apology. "I understand Alice. If I'm right, you should get another call after six this evening. Notify me immediately and put the call through."

"Yes, sir. I will alert the switch board."

"Do your best to keep some lines open. This is very important."

2

As predicted, the call came between six and seven. The caller was terse and only said that he needed to speak with Jean, alone. They made arrangements and Jean left the complex for his meeting.

At Jean's insistence, it was in a semi public setting. They had settled on a train station not too far from the Committee's headquarters. Jean was told to sit and wait. If and when Wilhelm thought it was safe, he would approach. Jean waited 25 minutes.

An ordinary man walked up to Jean's table and sat down without introducing himself.

"Wilhelm?" Jean asked.

The man nodded, waited a moment and then spoke "I assume you know who I am?"

Jean nodded, "I've read Rene's books."

"Good, then I'll make this as quick as possible. Do you know the name of the one you hunt?"

Jean nodded, "James Majewski."

"Excellent. He is reckless and his actions have been noted by others. These others would prefer to remain in the shadows if you take my meaning, but will take action if you cannot stop him. They would prefer to see you have a successful hunt.

"The one you seek will turn east soon. The one you know as David will help you. Listen to him and do as he says."

Jean was about to ask one of the million questions that were buzzing around in his mind, but he blinked and the man was just gone. Jean sucked in his breath and realized that he might have well have set a meeting for the heart of the forest or downtown Paris. If Wilhelm had meant to harm him, no crowds would have stopped him. Jean made a note to emphasize the protocol of not confronting vampires at night.

Chapter 33

Ed and Kit drove west in his pick-up truck for a few hours. The sheer size of this place still overwhelmed Kit. That he could drive this long and only pass through a couple of small towns was amazing. She wondered how the early explorers and settlers managed to cross this barren country. She also wondered how the Indians had managed to live here.

"Sure is desolate." She said looking out into the inky night.

"I suppose it seems so, but I wish you could see it in the sunlight. There's a real beauty here. Of course, you have to take your time in finding it. It's an acquired taste."

"You mean like coffee?"

"Something like that." Ed chuckled. Kit smiled and continued to look out the window.

"So what are we looking for?" Ed finally asked.

"A feeling. Something really powerful is calling me. I can feel it like a hand on my neck."

"You're sure it's not that other vampire?"

"As sure as I can be. Sometimes I can feel him nibbling at the fringes of my psyche, but this is completely different. It's like James is trying to break his way in. This is an.... invitation. I don't think James can possibly be this polite."

"We're slipping to the south, it's coming from there." Kit pointed diagonally from the cab.

"Not real familiar with this part of the state, but most of the roads are a grid around here, so we'll keep going until it's directly north of us."

Kit nodded. She didn't tell Ed, but her eyes didn't see the world as mortals saw it. She could see very well in the limited light. She made out a million shades of gray and brown. She saw rocks and sand and dirt. "An acquired taste." She muttered under her breath.

"So ask." Kit finally told Ed.

"Excuse me?"

"Ask. Ask your questions. You must have a million of them. For Christ's sake I'm a Goddamn vampire! You **MUST** have a million questions. You can stop being polite, it isn't like I'm not aware of my particular condition."

Ed was not the direct type. He hesitated a minute. "Okay, sure thing. Well I've got to ask you, is blood all you eat ... drink?"

"Yup. It was all the daily nutrition that a growing young vampire like me needs."

She felt Ed tense up at her sarcasm.

"Sorry, you didn't deserve that. I did tell you to ask me after all. Yes blood, that's it."

"Human blood?" He asked a little tentative.

"I never tested it, but the file I studied when I worked for the Committee said it had to be human. Though I've never tested it, something tells me that's right."

"Well I survived your bite, so I guess you don't have to kill your ... um .. suppliers, but have you ... well ... you know?"

"Killed anyone? Nope. Well, I did help kill a vampire once, but I'm sure you weren't talking about that."

"No." He sighed in relief. "So tell me about this Committee."

"Well, it's pretty weird if you step back and look at it. I've been working with them so intensively that I forget that it represents a world that no one really believes in. Well, the Committee hunts vampires and such."

"And such?"

"Yea, werewolves, demons, ghosts, you know, that kind of thing."

Ed nodded and Kit chuckled because he didn't convince either of them.

"It's real James Bond stuff now. Lots of computers and weapons. Agents get all kinds of training, martial arts, investigations tactic, guns, computers, all kinds of stuff. Didn't used to be like that. It's an old, old group. Goes back to the Inquisition at least. Used to be some kind of order of religious knights. Since the last big war, the Directors have done a lot to bring it all up to date. It's pretty high tech now."

"You sure they can't help you?"

"Nope. It's killing Jean, I'm sure, but the rules are explicit. If an agent is turned, the agent is to be destroyed, period. They can't be too sure. They really have no way to control someone like me at night. In a stand up fight, a mortal doesn't stand one chance in a million against someone like me. Nope, the only good vampire is a dead vampire."

"They never break this rule?"

"Nope, you hear rumors, but I'm sure that's all it is. *there!*"

Kit pointed north and Ed pulled off on the next exit. "Chaco Canyon." Ed said.

"Who Canyon?"

"Chaco. It was home to a pretty thriving civilization. They went missing long before the Spanish got here. Many suspect that the local pueblos are descended from the people here. Some say that they all starved out when they grew too large and some believe that an ice age or famine got them. There are people in New Mexico that will tell you that aliens got them." Ed rolled his eyes and Kit chuckled again.

The road led due north and they finally came to a locked gate that Kit dispatched without any trouble. Ed said something about how handy it was to have a vampire in tow.

"You have no idea." Kit said "and neither do I for that matter" she added to herself.

They drove until Kit thought they should stop. Ed killed the truck and Kit hopped out. As soon as her feet touched the ground she screamed, "OH GOD!" and collapsed on the ground.

Ed rushed around to her side of the truck and cradled her in his arms. She was sobbing uncontrollably.

Ed rocked her for a time and she finally got her sobbing under control.

"What happened?" Ed asked.

"The sorrow, Oh God the sorrow. It's in the ground. Something awful happened here. As soon as my feet touched the ground I could feel the anguish of a thousand souls. It's oppressive. I hope whoever wants us is close, I don't know how long I can take this."

Ed picked up Kit and carried her in his strong arms. "Is this better?"

"Yes some, but you can't carry me forever."

"We'll see, which way?"

Kit pointed and Ed walked. Well, Kit pointed and Ed stumbled. They had only gone a few hundred yards before they would admit that they weren't going to make any progress like this. Ed found a large rock and sat down and eased Kit into his lap. Kit held onto him and cuddled. Ed was huffing and puffing.

They heard laughing from a short distance away. Kit scanned with her superior vision and finally saw what she believed to be an Indian on a horse slowly and silently (except for the laughing) approaching.

The man rode close and looked down at the two. "I would have gotten you sooner, but it was too funny. No one's gonna believe me when I tell them about it."

"Glad we're making your night, friend." Kit shot back. Ed would have said something but he was still too tired and let Kit do his arguing.

"Yeah, no one is gonna believe me." He got off his horse and approached the two on foot. Without any by-you-leave he scooped Kit up in his strong arms and lifted her out of Ed's lap. Ed was too fatigued to protest.

Kit, on the other hand, was all too ready for a scrap "Who the fuck are you anyway?" Though her anger, Kit still took note of the man's gentle strength.

"Shhhhh," was all he said as he set Kit into the saddle of his horse. "You ride?"

"Not really."

"Doesn't matter. He knows where to take you." With that, the man put the reins in Kit's hand and slapped the horse on

the rump. The horse started to trot away. "Don't worry about your fat friend!" the Indian called after her, "I'll take good care of him."

2

Kit wondered what the hell was going on as the horse trotted on. True to the man's word, the horse did seem to trot with purpose. Kit was beginning to worry about the time. It was late when they arrived in the truck. Ed had a load cover that she had planned to hide under if they were caught by sun up. Her shelter was getting further and further with every passing minute.

Finally, the horse made it's way to some old ruins. Kit could tell that this was a part of the canyon that didn't see many tourist or other intruders. When the voice finally stopped, Kit felt that the sun was going to pop above the horizon any minute now, she was very, very worried.

"You going to sit on that horse and watch the sunrise?" A voice called to her.

"Not if I can help it." She yelled in no particular direction.

"Well, then you better get your ass up here." She looked around and thought the voice was coming from the roof of the dwelling closest to her. She got off the horse with a tender step. She was afraid of the feeling flooding her again, but she felt nothing, thankfully.

"How do I get up there?"

"I would think that a vampire wouldn't have to ask a question like that."

Kit muttered to herself and knew the voice wasn't going to help. It would only waste time to argue. She looked at the

wall and found that she was strong enough to grab imperfections in the wall and scrabble up. Within seconds, she was standing on the roof. She looked around for the voice and only saw a gray dog looking at her with sad brown eyes.

Dog? Maybe it was a wolf. It was big enough and gray enough. The only wolf she had ever seen up close was a werewolf that was trying to kill her. This one seemed very calm and carried no menace in it at all.

Suddenly, as she blinked her eyes, the wolf was gone and a short dark skinned man was sitting with his legs crossed on the roof.

"You can hide down there." The man nodded to a hole in the roof.

Kit didn't have any time to ask questions or argue, she just let herself down through the hole and slinked into a corner before she lost consciousness. Her last thought was "Oh great, another werewolf."

3

When Kit awoke, she easily climbed back onto the roof. The man was exactly where she had left him the night before. His eyes were closed and she couldn't tell if he was breathing or not. "Oh great, I get called out here to meet some guy who up and dies on me when I get here."

"I'm not dead." He said as he opened his eyes "No more than you anyway." He smiles and she saw the long sharp fangs in his mouth.

"A vampire? I thought you were a werewolf."

"Nope, a vampire."

"You mean the old myths are true?"

"What myths are those?"

"You know, vampire being able to change into wolves and bats. Those myths."

"I suppose, but I've been able to do this long before I became a vampire."

He looked straight into her eyes. "Look, I'd love to play Yoda with you, but we really don't have the time. That other vampire will be here soon and you'd better be ready if you are going to survive. So I want you to sit there and listen to me and do what I tell you."

Kit sat and choked back the question burning in her mind.

"I'll answer that one." He said without being prompted. "I'm helping you for a lot of reasons. The main one is that you have potential that few have, but you need to take care of this maniac if you are going to survive. This is your test"

Kit took that at face value. Something about this man made her trust him, mainly because she was sure he could destroy her with an errant thought.

"Look, everything you know about vampires is wrong. That's okay, because everything you know about people is wrong too. Anyway, you think being a vampire is all about blood, but it's not." Kit opened her mouth to argue and the man shut her down with a glare.

"I used to think it was the blood." He continued, "I even thought that before I changed. I'm Aztec, you see. A priest to be specific. I was one of the high priests that would perform sacrifices to the Sun God. You see, we knew the value of blood and we would offer it to our God."

"The Gods looked happily at our sacrifice and we prospered. The ones sacrificed would become gods themselves and walk the halls of the immortals, free forever of their earthly bonds. It was a great honor to be sacrificed. We often held competitions where the winner would get the honor. We would also honor our valiant wartime opponents with this honor if they showed great courage against us on the battlefield.

"All was well and we grew and prospered year after year, age after age. Finally, when it was my time to be a priest, the Spanish came and everything changed.

"The Spanish brought death with them at every turn. They brought sickness with them. Fully one third of our people grew sick and died before any of us set eyes upon a European. The kingdom was in chaos and everyone turned to us to help.

"All we knew was blood, so all we could do was spill more for our Gods, but the more we spilled the less help we received. Then, one day, I had a plan. We had been praying to the Sun God for help, but his ear had turned deaf. I went to the temple of the Moon God, who was secondary to the Sun God in his beauty and power, but more powerful than any of the other Gods."

"Satan." Kit whispered.

The man nodded and continued "The Moon God would talk to me. I was filled with a revelation. I was to capture and sacrifice these outsiders. Their blood would solve our problems.

"I was going to commit a great abomination. The sacrifice was no longer to be an honor to a valiant foe, rather a tool of terror against a superior force. I was damned.

"As you know, the plan failed miserably. I cursed the Gods as our people died or were put into slavery. I cried as our wonderful treasures were melted and sent away on great ships to a barbarian King. Finally, the Moon God came to me and asked what I wanted of him. 'The power to kill my enemies.' Was all that I told him.

"At that moment, I became as you are. At first, my people welcomed me and I slew many of the accursed Spanish, but by now there were so many of them. They swarmed over our land like locusts. It was hopeless. My own people began to fear me and soon I was driven out.

"Driven by my hatred, I followed the Spanish north. I found allies among the Apache and we terrorized and murdered those we could. The Apache were so good, in fact, that the Spanish finally abandoned their northern colonies and the settlers had to fend for themselves. Most survived by making alliances among the northern pueblos. There was so much intermarrying going on that soon it was hard to tell the difference.

"Finally, I fled to this place and felt as you felt when you stepped foot up the sand, sadness and loss.

"The people in the Canyon did not die from anything that the anthropologists will tell you, they simply ceased to be.

"You see, all people were once tied into the energies of life. You literally never knew when one person stopped and another started. Memories were all collective and histories

were irrelevant because you simply knew what everyone else knew.

"You know the story of the Garden of Eden?"

"Yes. Here?"

"Yes and everywhere, but this was the last of Eden. It was here that people finally lost their contact with the life force and the memories of the ancestors. It was here that the rule of the individual finally came to pass. When the last of the collective people died, his blood spilled into the ground and it is here crying for any who will listen."

"It was his sorrow I felt?"

"His and everyone who came before him. You see the myths are true. It was Satan, the trickster, the Moon God, who hated the Sun God and his creations that tricked this power away from man.

"As we vampires were made, the irony is that we need this force to survive. We are fooled into thinking that we can only access it through blood. Just as I was fooled into thinking that the only way I could save my people was through blood. This is a lie. It is not, nor was it ever, the blood. It's the energies of life we feed on. It is this energy that is our salvation.

"How long has it been since you have fed?"

"Two days."

"How long do you think a vampire can live without blood?"

"I have heard that some can go a year or more."

"I have not drunk any blood in over three hundred years."

"My God."

"Exactly. Kit, it is the true power that you must learn to use. If you are to defeat this James, if you are to live, if you

are to become what you can be, you must. And you will, or you will die.

Chapter 34

When Jean returned to the complex he took a long slow walk down to David's apartments. He was waved through the various checkpoints, though to be honest the guards were very surprised to see him. Since David had arrived, Jean had only attempted to see him twice. Each visit had set David off into an incredible rage and Jean just gave up.

Truth be known, it relieved him that he had an excuse not to visit David. David gave Jean a serious case of the willies. Jean had never been calm around crazy people and David was as crazy as Jean had ever seen. He was also a little afraid of the young man. David had committed cold-blooded murder. Under the influence of a vampire, David had stabbed one of his own best friends and stood over him while he died.

Jean did not really blame David for this. Jean knew the psychic power of the monsters he fought. However, the fact the David had committed this act made him very dangerous. Jean knew that once you killed, subsequent killings were easier and easier. In a sense, it separates you from the social contract.

Jean also knew that David was a reflection of his own failures and self doubts. Jean had been hunting the vampire that had done this to David. She had been responsible for another murder in Canada, a good friend of Kit and Ginger's and other atrocities. Jean could not help but feel that he could have prevented these horrible things from happening. If he had acted sooner, done his job better, David would never have known her terrible kiss.

Jean hesitated at David's door. Though it was locked from Jean's side, it was still customary to knock. Jean took a deep breath and stared at his hand. He raised it slowly and heard the words "Come in, Jean." before he knocked.

"Damn him," Jean thought to himself, "He's probably been aware of me since, well forever. He's toying with me."

Jean unlocked the door and walked in.

"Glad to see you, Jean. It's been a very longtime."

"Yes, it has. You seem much more calm since the last time we talked."

"You mean sane, don't you? Yes, I suppose I am. Thank you for going to see Wilhelm. It was important that you listen to me."

"It funny, Wilhelm used you to speak with me and what he wanted to tell me was to listen to you."

"Ironic, isn't it? I knew you would listen to me, but I also knew you would never believe anything I told you. I knew you would listen to Wilhelm but he had no way to contact you without me. The circle, as they say, is complete."

"So, what do you want to tell me?"

"Tomorrow."

"What?" Jean was tired and his anger rose easily.

David looked up for a second and then turned his attention back to Jean. "It's not time; tomorrow."

Jean sighed and looked helpless. He knew better than to argue. "Fine, tomorrow. Good night David." Jean turned to go.

"Wait!" Jean stopped in mid turn. "I'm sorry, but the odds are long as it is. Listen Jean, things are going to be like you

never thought they would be. You HAVE to listen to your heart. You HAVE to remember what Rene told you."

"How the hell do you know what Rene told me?" David just smiled at Jean's ridiculous question.

"Tomorrow then, Good night David." He turned and left.

As Jean walked down the hall he muttered "I liked him better when he was crazy" to no one in particular.

"Who says he's not still crazy?" flashed into his mind. Jean was not sure if the thought was "he's" or "I'm". Jean quickened his pace and was sure he could hear David laughing in the distance behind him.

2

Ginger and the others had gone over their information a number of times. They stared at the notes and print outs scattered on the table.

"So, I guess that's it." Julie finally said to break the silence.

"Yup. I'm sure it's Ed White. Kit has to be with one of her friends on the net. She had four that have suddenly dropped out of circulation. Surprisingly, two of them live in the southwest United States, but one of them was killed in Las Vegas. If it was that one, then I suppose this is all fruitless and he has her again. If there's any hope, it's Ed."

They stared some more. They hadn't thought about what to do if they did find her. Now they had to find some way to help Kit. None of them had a clue.

"You're sure no one else can figure this out, Ginger?" Pat asked.

"Of course I can't be sure, but since I'm the only one who knows her chat friends and no one has asked me, then I can assume that no one else can follow the same path we did."

"Yeah, they're still staking out the chat rooms." Pat added to help answer his own question. "I don't suppose they would be doing that if they had a line on her."

More silence. They knew that Pat's point was monumental wishful thinking, but no one wanted to say that.

As they stared at each other, there was a knock on the cottage door. The three looked at each other guiltily. They had no reason to worry, of course, but the conspiratorial feeling had infected them all.

"You expecting someone, hun?" Pat asked his wife.

"Nope. Guess I'll go see who it is. You guys better clean this stuff up just in case."

They heard some conversation and then Julie returned and looked at the other two. "You both better come out here, I'm not sure what to make of this."

They walked into the living room and saw a trim average looking man sitting rail straight. He held a functional wooden cane in his hand. He struggled to his feet as the three walked in.

"Alex?" Pat had said in surprise. Of the three, he was the only one who actually met the man.

"Yes, I felt I had to talk to you three tonight. It's about Kit."

"Sure thing, Alex." Pat said and they all looked at each other like kids who were about to get caught skipping school. The four sat in unison.

"Look" Alex said breaking the ice "let me come right to the point. I want to help Kit."

"But we aren't..." Ginger started to say but Alex cut her off.

"Don't shit me, okay? I'm a cop. There are a few of us around here and it just doesn't pay to lie to us. The religious and military types here just don't come from worlds where people lie to them almost every minute of the day. I did, I can smell a lie a mile off."

The lying option closed off to them, the three could only sit in silence.

"Look, call it a hunch but I'm sure you three are up to something. I've been going through my therapy thinking about how I let Kit down and what I could do to help her.

"You know this is a nice gig for a guy like me. The money sucks, but it's better than a cop makes. I get room and board, I travel, they have first rate people top to bottom here. It's nice, real nice, but I'll walk if I have to. I don't care what anyone says, I let Kit down and by God I'm going to help her."

He sat and stared at the trio. Alex was a very smart man, but what he knew best was human nature. He knew that further arguments or explanations would be useless on the three. He had said his peace now it was up to them.

Ginger finally spoke, "Okay, I believe you." The others looked a little shocked.

"I don't know why, but I just have to believe you. Let me show you what we have."

Ginger and the others walked Alex through their information. Alex looked over the documents and finally said, "Not too bad. You've made a few inferences here that I think are reasonable, although open to other interpretations, but it's a case. So what's your next step?"

"We don't know. We've been so wrapped up in finding Kit, no one has given much thought as to what to do once we found her." Ginger replied.

"Well, I suppose I could go out there and try to contact her." Alex said exhaling softly. "Don't suppose I'll be needing this anymore." He took out his new I.D. and tossed it on the table.

The other three knew what it meant and how hard a decision he had made. In reply he said "I know, but some things are more important than the job. I can't keep that and do what I'm going to do."

"What will you do?" Asked Julie.

"Find her, help her. Whatever that means, and I do mean whatever. Look, I want to help Kit as much as you three but I also know that it might not be Kit anymore. If I find a monster in Kit's body, I'll have to kill it. Kit would want that."

Everyone looked to Ginger. She had known Kit the longest and everyone would respect her opinion. There was a very long and tense silence as Ginger turned the man's words over in her mind. "You're being open minded. You're giving her a chance. It's more than the damn Committee is doing. You're right. If she has lost her identity, Kit would want you to kill her. I hope you'll be able to make a good judgement."

"Me too. In fact, I suspect I'm the one in more danger if she has changed. If I get close enough to see, then I'll be an easy kill for her if she is truly a monster. Mind if I use your computer, I'd like to type my resignation?"

3

Jean sat and looked at Rene's journal on his desk. He had read the words over and over again. Jean found it hard to comprehend some of the difficult decisions that the man had to make. He had, on many occasions, had to choose on the path that violated one principle to uphold a greater one. "Is this what you meant old friend? Is this what you meant?" he muttered.

Finally, Jean made a decision. He hoped it was one in the name of a greater good and not one made out of weakness and sentimentality. He snapped his intercom and told his secretary, "Please find my wife, I need to speak with her. If she's with her friends, have them come too."

"Yes, sir." And the machine went silent.

Jean prayed he was doing the right thing.

Chapter 35

"What do you mean I am going to learn or die?"

"I mean you and I are going to sit here and watch the sunrise in a couple of hours. You will learn what I teach you and survive or you will die."

"You're crazy!" Kit screamed.

"Perhaps."

"How can you be serious! I've felt the power of the sun. My God, it almost killed me the other night."

"Of course it did. You would have ceased to exist if the sunlight hit you. I was there with you, remember? That's when you felt my call."

"So you know!" Kit was going to stand and leave, but her legs would not obey her.

"So you think I'm some crazy old man. You think I don't know the truth of things. You think a lot of things, but your legs won't work will they? You and I are going to greet the sun together. We will both feel it's pure and loving embrace. If you are right, we will both die."

Kit felt her panic rise. She was completely in this man's power and she hated it. He was going to kill them both and she had allowed herself to be drawn in.

"Please, I don't want to die."

"But you are already dead, aren't you?"

"What are you talking about? Yes, I am dead. That's why I can't see the sun."

"What will the sun do to you, Kit?" The old man asked peacefully.

"Are you fucking crazy? Let me go!" Kit screamed.

"If you don't let go of your fear and anger you aren't going to make it. Now, answer my question. Why will the sun kill you?"

Kit's mind swam. She heard the old man's words, but she couldn't focus. "It just does, Goddamn it. Everyone knows that."

"Okay, that's a start. Now listen to me. Tell me why the sun kills vampires. Didn't they teach you anything at the Committee?"

"The Committee, my training, Okay, Okay!" She thought to herself. She focused her mind on her training and she recited "The sun reveals the vampire for what it truly is, dead."

"Good, you're starting to focus. What do you suppose is so special about the sun?"

Kit breathed in deeply and tried to think, "Hell, I don't know. Maybe you were right, maybe there really is a sun God."

"That's good, and I suppose the Sun God is a God of truth?"

"Yes!"

"And that would make the Moon God what?"

"A God of lies damn it!"

"A what?"

"A God of lies!"

"Again?" he prodded

"Lies, damn you. Lies!" Kit's anger was swirling through her.

The old man just sat and watched her in silence. She looked back and then said "Lies?"

"Exactly."

"You mean this is all a lie?"

"All of it."

"You mean this whole vampire thing is a lie?"

"I mean *everything* is a lie. Don't you remember your Genesis? It was the serpent that tricked Adam and Eve out of the garden, right? The garden was truth, this is all a lie."

"But..."

"You studied philosophy in college." It was not a question, the old man knew. "What did Descartes say?"

"I think, therefore I am."

"Well, he was onto something but he had it backwards."

"I am, therefore I think?"

"Right. You know they almost got it. They almost tore the veil off and realized that none of this is true, but Aristotelian thought is hard to shake. It's just so pleasing to think that things are real."

"But what's real then?"

"You are. I am. We all are. We live for the glory of God, or life, or the Sun God or Jahova. Kit, it doesn't matter. It was Satan that cast us into this world. It was Satan that isolated us from each other. It was Satan that made vampires. Satan's power comes from lies. Only God can create reality, Satan can only create illusions."

Kit could feel the sun getting closer and closer. "But how...?"

"How do you live? You live by returning to the garden. That's why I live here. That's why I brought you here. You know the Mormons thought that the garden was somewhere in the American southwest. That's how they landed in Utah. Well, they were almost right. Kit, the garden was everywhere. It was everywhere that there were people. This is just the last place it was lost. That's the sorrow that you felt when you first came here. You felt the sorrow of being cast out."

The old man paused and let Kit chew on his words. After a time, he continued. "Now I've been protecting you from those feeling of sorrow, but I'm going to stop."

Suddenly, Kit felt an enormous sense of remorse and unhappiness fill her being.

"Don't fight it this time!" The old man yelled. "Embrace the feelings, embrace the voice."

"Sad, so sad."

"Yes, they are sad, just as you were sad when you were raped. Just as sad as when your friend was murdered. Just as sad as when you were changed. Do you want to forget all that?"

"Yes. No! My sadness is part of me. It makes me stronger."

"Good, so stop pushing our sadness away, this is all our sadness. Embrace it. Swim in it. Reach below it and find what we grieve for."

Kit opened her mind and let the feeling flood into her. At first, she was overcome by sadness and loss, but eventually she reached deeper and deeper and found the joy and the contentment. She felt the people.

The people had been so alone for so long. She felt them as they lived and died. As they planted their crops, hunted their game, laughed with their children and mourned their dead. She felt it all.

Soon, a new feeling of terror grip her as the memories seemed unstoppable. It was too much, there were to many of them.

"Don't fight them, Kit." She heard the old man say. "Don't try to make sense of the memories just let them feed you."

Kit relaxed and knew what he meant. The memories were feeding her. They were nourishing her as blood had not so long ago. She drank as a fawn would drink from a cold spring. She felt young and powerful. She felt alive and at peace. She lost all sense of time as she lived a thousand life times and walked the garden for an eternity.

"Stand up, Kit." The old man commanded. "Stand up and open your eyes."

Kit did so and saw that not only wasn't it night anymore, it was high noon. She had been out in the sun for hours and she had never felt stronger.

"Embrace the sun, Kit. Embrace God. Let Him know how happy you are to be home again."

Kit opened her arms and lay her head back and basked in the glory of creation. She felt so alive and so wonderful. She looked at the old man "You mean?"

"Yes." he said to her unspoken question."

"You mean this is what we were before?"

"Yes, Satan can't make anything, he can only make us believe things. First, he strips us of the garden by making us

believe we are individuals, then he makes vampires by making us as we were. He truly is evil."

Suddenly, the old man was gone and the wolf was back. Kit laughed and transformed herself, too. How simple a thing it was. How hard we make our lives.

She followed the other as he ran over the hills and mesas. It was a glorious chase and she laughed and laughed. Finally, he lead her back to their starting point and she saw the sun begin to set.

"Oh my God! Thank you!" she said to the old man.

"It's all in you, Kit."

"How many?"

"How many like us? Not many. So few come to this being through evil and never can open their minds to it. Some, like you, are victims but they lose their minds. Only a very few, a handful really, have awakened. This is why you were chosen.

"But you have to understand something. I have been giving you power to accelerate your growth. It won't last forever. You will have to rediscover much of what I've taught you on your own. Don't be sad. If you behave as you must, then you will have eternity to find it again."

"You mean the sun..." Kit was very sad the she might lose the sun yet again.

"No, Kit. You are a child of God again. You will never lose the sun again."

With that, the old man was gone. Kit stood and looked out over the canyon. She knew what she had to do. She opened her mind and found James in an instant. To her surprise, he had grown quite powerful since she had seen him last.

She wasn't sure she could beat him and then pushed the thought away, for she knew it didn't matter. Either he would die or she would. It didn't matter which.

"Come to me, James. Come let me give you my kiss." She felt him respond and knew she would soon face him.

Chapter 36

Kit sat and meditated in the hot sun. She felt renewed and liberated. She connected her mind to the forces that the old man had spoken to her about. At one point, it occurred to her that he had never told her his name. She pondered that and decided that it didn't matter. She could feel herself flooding full of energy and it made her feel giddy.

She continued to warn herself that that confrontation that was to follow was going to be difficult and there was no certainty that she would prevail. When she had touched James' mind she felt a dark and powerful force that was not there when she had been with him before. Like her, he had grown in power and unlike her, he was more skilled in using his power.

She wished she had more time to prepare. There were so many questions she had. She wished the old man was still here to talk to her, but she knew that both were futile wishes. The longer she waited to confront James, the longer he would spread pain and death. She could not suffer his existence any longer.

She also knew why the old man had left her. She needed to learn about her own powers and learn to connect to the life forces on her own. The answers to her questions could wait. If she survived, she would have a long time to find her own answers.

Another thing that buoyed Kit's spirits was a renewed sense of purpose. One of the things that had nagged her about her new existence was how aimless it had become. She

had been consumed with her basic survival and was feeling a growing sense of despair that her life was going to be reduced to nothing but a hunt. Now she had a quest for knowledge and understanding that could possibly take an eternity. This made her happy and content.

2

Jean felt remarkably better. He had slept for most of the long flight and had eaten a good bit after he woke up. There was little conversation on the plane as each occupant prepared for the coming battle in their own way. Jean had misgivings about taking Ginger, Pat and Julie to where Kit was. They were insistent, however, and David backed them up. He claimed that they had an important role to play in the coming night.

Jean had serious misgivings about giving so much control to David, but he couldn't argue with him. Only David could take them to where Kit was. David had hinted that a major confrontation was coming and that Alex and Jean should be prepared. Beyond that, he refused to say anything else.

Jean did, however, look forward to the coming action. One thing he realized is that he hated sending other people into harms way. He was more suited to field work than to administrative work.

3

James stood on the low mesa and looked at the star filled sky. His eyes were perfectly adapted to the night and he saw the barren landscape better than most mortals saw it during the day. He could feel the nocturnal predators stalking their prey and felt a special kindred with them. James loved the

night, he loved the barren desert, he loved the hard and vicious things that lived in it. This was his domain and he would soon reign unchallenged over it.

James mentally kicked his servants into action and the three fired up their motorcycles and started the journey that would take him to his ultimate prey. James knew in his heart that once he had defeated Kit, nothing could ever stand in his way again.

4

It was fully dark and Kit sat atop her cliff and watched the scene below. She supposed she should have been surprised when Jean and his small entourage arrived shortly before sunset but since David was in tow, it made perfect sense. Kit was confident that David had been manipulating Jean into position. She knew that David's role in all of this was still unknown to her and that she would have to sort it out eventually.

She watched carefully as David took complete charge of the small party. He had placed Jean and Alex into defensive positions and had taken the others a safe distance away in the ATV they were driving. Kit was happy that David seemed to be taking care of the noncombatants. She reached out with her mind and found that David was shielding them. She sat back down and waited.

Eventually, in what she would have once called the wee hours of the morning, James and his bugs roared into the canyon. Kit took a deep breath and prepared herself for battle.

James had sent his bugs ahead and they scouted the canyon. Jean was frightened that his or Alex's positions would be discovered, but the two vampires passed them by and swept the rest of the canyon. Jean had used his own meager shielding abilities to hide himself, but was sure he felt someone else fortify his mind. He wasn't sure if it was David or Kit who was helping him right now, but he took the help as it was offered.

Jean had never confronted a vampire at night before and it scared the living hell out of him. He was happy to have Alex along because he had some experience and had actually killed in a similar circumstance. Jean was sage enough to know that battle experience counted for everything in a situation like this.

David had been adamant that Jean and Alex take no action against James when he arrived. He assured Jean that if either agent took a direct action against the vampire that one or both of them would be instantly destroyed. David had tried to impress on Alex that James had grown in his power since their earlier confrontation.

Alex took David's warning seriously. He had been overpowered by the vampire in seconds before and considered himself lucky to have lived. If the monster had grown in power as David claimed, Alex was concerned with what they were up against.

The two bugs moved to the side of the canyon and James rode his motorcycle slowly into the middle of the open ground. He seemed to Jean to have the aura of a medieval

knight preparing for a joust. His manner was confident and imperious.

Kit saw James ride in and waited. James was making a show and Kit was happy enough to let him. She had been tracking him for hours and found his power to be truly remarkable. If he wanted to spend his psychic currency preening and strutting, Kit was happy to let him.

James dismounted and stood in the middle of the canyon like an old western gunfighter. The full moon above provided more than enough light for all to see the show. Kit stepped from the shadows and confronted the monster who had set her on her current course.

"Good to see you, my love." James told her. Kit heard the voice in her head. She was not even sure if James had spoken the words at all.

"You have no idea how much I have missed you." James continued. "What a glorious time I've had, but now that I have you with me again, it will be all so much better. I knew I chose wisely when I chose you. I have always had such wonderful taste in women."

Kit circled to her left as she watched her opponent. She was slowly closing the distance between them. She was slow to make her move, as she was sure that James was well prepared.

"So quiet, my dear. What a shame. Oh, I have missed you. Your ridiculous sensibilities have given me such amusement. That you showed such concern over that stupid biker back in Oklahoma is funny beyond my words. These sheep are all so

insignificant. It is only in death that they have any value at all and oh, how well they die."

James was taunting her and it was having its effect. Kit could not help but become distracted by the images of death that James was broadcasting at her. The images were hideous. Kit could not help but silently cry for the dead. Her own guilt in their suffering was becoming tangible.

James started to cover the distance between them. He was walking calmly and with purpose. "That's your great weakness, my dear" Kit heard in her mind "your guilt. You take responsibility for everyone around you. You felt guilty about your own rape. You felt guilty about Ginger's abuse. You felt guilty when Debbie was murdered. You feel guilty about your lunatic friend, David. You feel guilty about those sick fucks who I've been purging from the world."

Kit fell to one knee. The power that James was pouring into her mind was beyond her comprehension. He was cutting her like a surgeon. He had immediately exposed her weakness and was closing in on it. Deeper and deeper he cut. Kit felt more and more helpless.

"You pathetic bitch!" James spat as he closed in on her. "No wonder so much tragedy surrounds you. You're a magnet of death and suffering. I'm going to use you to spread such glorious pain across the world."

Kit's mind filled with horrible images of death and pain. James had opened his twisted psyche and was pouring his sickness into her. Kit fell to the ground.

Jean felt an urge to open fire on James. He saw Kit's distress and felt as if he had to act. "Not Yet!" he felt David's

mind scream in his head "Soon, soon!" Jean sat and watched helplessly.

As Kit lay on the ground, she let her own despair and guilt seep into the ground and mix with the sorrow that was already there. It was like a huge sponge and soon she was cleansed and she dug deeper and found her renewed strength.

Kit felt James' hands on her as he pulled her to her feet. She kept herself limp in his hands. James looked down at her and let his fangs gleam in the moonlight. Kit could feel his hunger and his power and she could feel his two mindless servants slowly start to move towards her from the side.

She knew the time was coming and suddenly she felt an old and familiar voice in her mind, "I love you, Kit. You have always been my strength." It was Ginger. "I love you, Kit. You saved my life." It was Pat. "I love you, Kit. You are my best friend." It was Julie.

That was all that Kit needed. She let her body spring to life and break James' grip. James may have been more psychically talented, but she was ultimately more powerful. She was also more physically adept than James was. Kit turned and swung her leg in a perfect and vicious arc. She shattered James' jaw and he fell, howling in pain.

James summoned the other two vampires to his aide and they both broke to rush Kit.

Jean heard the word "NOW!" in his head and he aimed and fired at the closest bug. He pumped his entire clip of ten-millimeter hollow points into the vampire and it more or less exploded on the spot. Jean noticed that Alex had been firing

too and that both bugs were now out of the game. Jean fell behind his rock and quickly reloaded his gun. When he returned to a firing stance, he saw that Kit and James were gone.

When the two vampires were shot. James was connected with them. Their pain shot through him and mixed with his own. He almost blacked out. Kit had him by the lapels now and dragged him instantly away from her friends.

Kit had James pinned and was now digging into his psyche with her mind. "Let's see what you're hiding, you maggot!"

She burrowed with her mind and began uncovering all his insecurities about his size. He relived all his defeats at the hands of bigger and more powerful bullies. The beatings his father had inflicted upon him.

"You know, if you didn't blame everyone else for your problems, I could almost feel sorry for you, you worthless piece of shit." Kit held him as he struggled helplessly in her grip. Her mind was channeling all the love of her friends and the strength of her new beliefs into this evil thing.

"You know what we're going to do?" she said in his shattered face. "You and I are going to watch the most beautiful sunrise since the dawn of creation together."

5

Jean had been in the business of vampire hunting so long that he thought that nothing could surprise him anymore. He was wrong.

He and Alex had covered the open ground quickly once Kit and James were gone. They stood guard over the remains of

the two vampires. Though they had torn the two to shreds, only the sun would truly kill them.

David quickly emerged with the others safely in tow. He was very calm but resolutely refused to talk to anyone. Jean kept a weary eye out for Kit and James and relaxed as the sun began to rise. He felt safe and secure for the first time in a while.

"James is gone." David said flatly.

"Good." Said Jean "I suppose Kit is hiding out there somewhere."

"No." David said and pointed.

Jean almost fainted at what he saw next.

Kit walked boldly to Jean. Jean could hardly speak, he was so shocked. The others just watched dumbfounded. Kit was bruised, dirty and a general mess but she possessed a calm that seemed to infect everyone with a long forgotten sense of well being.

She walked right up to Jean and snatched the loaded pistol from his holster faster than Jean could follow. She tested the gun to be sure it was loaded and then handed it back to Jean "I will never fight you. You have to do what you have to do."

Jean held the gun in his hand and slowly and surely uncocked it and returned it to its holster. With tears in his eyes, he took Kit in his arms and the two started crying like babies. Soon, Kit was swarmed by all her old friends.

THE END

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