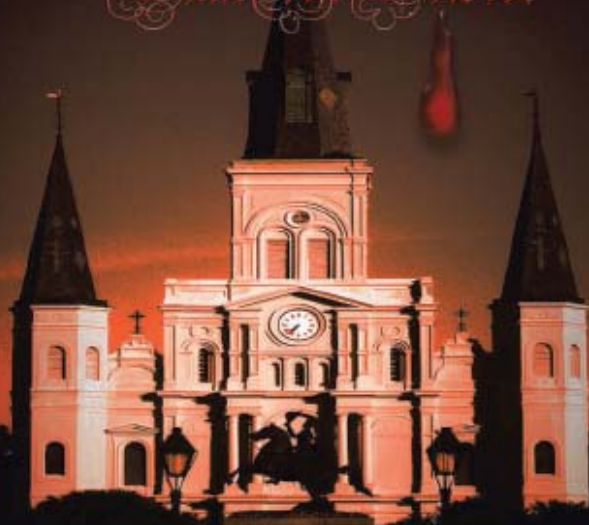




Season of the Dead



by
Paul R. Seibert



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Dedication

*To God, my heavenly father; who makes all things possible...
And to my mother and father; I am so truly blessed to have you both as my parents.*

ALSO

*In memory of my very dear friend, you are sorely missed...
Richard W. Fenn; AKA "Rock-Out Rick"
May 16 1960 - July 24, 2011*

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To my chief editor, Charles Barbosa; your incredible talents as a wordsmith, knowledge of mythology and the supernatural, along with an unyielding perseverance through what seemed to be never-ending revisions to this manuscript have helped me to take this book from a diamond in the rough into as polished of a gem as I could ever have hoped for.

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And last but most certainly not least, to everyone else... to my brothers and sisters, to all my friends both old and new, many of which acted as tireless proof readers providing honest feedback, semi-professional editing suggestions as well as everyone else and who has ever helped, supported or promoted me in this undertaking over the years. You all have helped to keep me focused, motivated and inspired. You have my sincerest gratitude for your belief in me and your faith in this storyline. I am truly blessed to have the opportunity to know all of you. I thank you all from the bottom of my heart and may God bless you...

*Walk while ye have light, lest the darkness come upon
you...*

John XII; 35

Introduction

Every year there is a brief moment when all of mankind unknowingly stands at the edge of the Gates of the Underworld. This timeline runs from midnight on the Wiccan New Year of O'Hallows Eve on October 31st, through midnight of the Day of the Dead on November 2nd.

For these few days the veil that separates the plane between the Physical World and Supernatural Realm is at its most diminished and can be breached; allowing the spirits of the dead and the damned to cross over into our world. The name of this period of time is known as the...

“Season of the Dead”

Prologue

**Wednesday, Oct 31 - O'Hallows Eve
2 days before the Day of the Dead...**

Turning and heading back into the cemetery, Jon swiftly searches for an available crypt large enough to dump all of the dead bodies and their assorted severed parts. Finding one, he twists on the handle of its huge iron door and causes the lock to break free. He then begins gathering up the corpses and their respective various body parts. Once they are all inside, he opens up the individual vaults and starts stuffing the sorted pieces into each one. For a brief moment, his mind drifts off as he is reminded of that fateful morning when he performed a very similar act on the remains of his fallen comrades, before quickly regaining focus and exiting the tomb. He then closes the door behind him, twists the handle in the opposite direction until it imbeds into the door latch, and jams it as if it were locked again.

“This should hide them for at least a little while,” he says out loud to himself. “The last thing we need right now is more police snooping around over this.”

Looking down, he has now become very aware that he is covered in blood from the night's events. Spying a faucet poking up from the ground that appears to be used

to water the sparse patches of grass, he removes his shirt, soaks it, and then hastily proceeds to wipe his torso down as best as he can. Exiting the cemetery with the shirt still in his hands, he sees a dumpster down the road next to a business that is closed for the night. He jumps onto his motorcycle, rides towards it, and slows down just enough to toss the shirt into the partially open side slide door as he passes by. Satisfied with its safe disposal, he then twists the accelerator hard and quickly speeds off to avoid being seen.

He travels over the necessary back streets until he reaches the French Quarter, staying off the regularly traversed paths of the tourists to reduce opportunities for detection until he reaches his loft. Once at the loft gate, he presses a button to simultaneously open both it and his garage, and then swiftly disappears behind them. He then parks his bike, jumps off, and proceeds onto the elevator, taking it all the way up to his bedroom on the top floor. As he gets out, he sees Jennifer's clothes lying in a scattered trail all the way to the bathroom. Hearing the running water of the shower, he removes the few clothes he himself has left on, and heads towards the noise.

"Jennifer..." he calls as he walks into the bathroom.

Opening the steam covered glass door, he finds Jennifer sitting in the corner, motionless, with the water still running over her. As he steps inside, she immediately springs up and jumps into his arms. Jon catches her as she leaves the ground. She hangs onto his neck like a scared child with her feet dangling only inches from the floor.

"Jennifer, are you alright? Did anyone see you or stop you on the way back here?" he asks, but Jennifer simply continues her hold, never speaking a word.

He returns the affection, knowing that she is still in shock from the night's events and decides to let his questions remain unanswered, resigning himself to the fact that she obviously had no problems; for if so, she would not be there. She continues to increase her embrace as they both stand there in silence holding onto each other; the diluted red colored water swirling around the drain at their feet, as the multiple showerheads wash the remaining remnants of the night's blood from their exhausted bodies.

5 days ago...

Chapter

Dre

**Friday, Oct 26 – Exactly 1 week before the
Day of the Dead**

Another evening commences as the sun starts to set on the New Orleans' infamous French Quarter, where night begins to fall on the city just as it has every weekend. Within the last few moments of daylight, the streets slowly change and the scenery transforms from the mundane routine of daily traffic and delivery-trucks, to a flurry of tourists and locals alike. Among the many on their way is a homeless man, looking in appearance to be in his mid to late forties. He walks the city streets making his rounds, stopping from time to time to refill his weathered plastic cup out of the trashcans of the local bars left with the numerous discarded beverages from the annual tourists. He has become a local of sorts now, just one amongst the many of the nameless lost souls that end up on Bourbon Street to partake in their nightly rituals.

Such as the many before it, tonight would be the same, a routine that he has been performing for months; another listless evening wasted away in the catacombs of

the New Orleans ally walkways. Though unbeknown to him, a deeper fate has been prepared in place of his typical evening pleasures, as he is soon to learn that there are other even more dissolute creatures that troll the shadows of these streets; that he is far from alone in his never-ending trek to quench his vapid thirsts and lingering hunger.

He arrives in front of a nearby smaller pub and immediately begins to survey his surroundings, checking to see if there is some sort of club security who might intervene with his evening entertainment. With a few quick glances from side to side, he feels content that any doorman on duty must have stepped away for a few moments. Seeing that no one else is watching his movements, he peers down into the thirty-gallon trash can to look over at what has been left behind for his much needed nightly libation.

Spying a cup of blood red liquid, he thinks to himself, *Ab yes...a Hurricane*, a personal favorite of the man's, as well as the drink for which had helped New Orleans obtain both its fame and infamy. He excitedly reaches into the container and barely grasps the rim of the waxy paper cup when out walks the doorman.

"Get outta here, ya old bum!" he yells gruffly. The young doorman, a college kid in his early twenties, has been working to make a little extra money while attending school; a situation not uncommon for many of the people in the New Orleans hospitality industry. As he readies himself to dispatch the vagabond, he looks into the man's eyes, and can see the bareness of his soul... and for a moment, feels a little compassion.

“Okay... shit, go ahead... take it. Just hurry up and get it, then get moving before the manager comes back...”

With his hands shaking from the relentless alcohol abuse, the tattered man fumbles to pour the red sedimentous liquid from the semi-soggy wax coated paper cup into his own weathered plastic one. Nodding appreciatively, he heads on his way, sipping his semi-fresh drink, floating remnants and all.

Once he is out of earshot of the doorman, he scoffs resentfully at the audacity of such a simpleton taking pity. He remembers a time not so long ago, when he could have owned ten places like that for fun; a time back when, arrogant-ass college kids would have been working for him. A time, when he never would have been caught dead digging inside of trash cans for a drink.

In his past life, he was an executive of a fortune 500 company, who drank five-hundred dollar single-malt scotch, and owned a vacation home in New Orleans’ garden district. A wealthy business man, who owed none to no one, and paved his own path with gold, built from the sacrifice of all who surrounded him, stained indifferently across his own hands.

Then came the crash after 911, and in a blink of an eye, it was all gone. No money, no hope, and especially no future; only the tattered threads of the hundred dollar shirts that used to line his back as a constant reminder of the errors of his own ways. Now here he was, living on the streets with no wife, no job, and no way back...

He takes another swig, “Ah shit...” he mummurs

under the cheap strawberry swill of his breath, “The bitch never did like New Orleans. Every time she and the kids came here, all she did was bitch and complain about how the humidity always messed up her hair...”

Replete with his own memories, he continues onward up the street in pursuit of his routine quest for alcohol and the temporary amnesia that it brings. After a while, he begins looking for tonight’s temporary home. He spots a recessed area by an ATM machine that appears to be dimly lit, which he chooses for his make-shift lodgings, knowing that it will receive very little if any foot traffic because of the recent robberies.

“Besides, all I got are my clothes and a few bucks from cleaning up a couple of restrooms at that bar the other day, who the hell would steal that?” he grumbles to himself. He then proceeds to walk towards the shadowed area to lay claim to the temporary patch of concrete real-estate, confident that no one would bother his sleep here. With a few staggering final adjustments, he plops himself down in the corner and spills part of his drink.

“Shit,” he exclaims gruffly, as he continues to finish off the last salvageable drops. Now damp from the remnants of his accident and long tired from the evening’s events, he proceeds to curl up and wraps himself as best he can within his old soiled coat. He then slips off into a peaceful coma, unsuspecting to the fact, that this will be a night from which he will never wake up from.

Hours pass, and a young man glides up on a skateboard, stopping just past the little alcove to survey the

street for any possible onlookers. Seeing nobody in the vicinity, he picks it up, walks over towards the old man, and then kneels down in front of him as if to tie his boots. He starts to gently shake him, and tests to see if he can disturb his slumber. Without any response of a flinch or a change in breathing pattern, he ultimately concludes to himself that, *this bum is definitely out for the count.*

Checking for any valuables belongings, the young man continues to gently pat him down and discovers a lump in the old military style coat. *There must be an inner pocket...*, he thinks to himself, and begins to reach deeper inside. He retrieves a tattered leather wallet and quickly opens it, making sure to keep an eye on his victim still fast asleep.

As he empties the contents, a picture falls out of what appears to be his family. He can see a nicely dressed woman leaning up against some sort of sports utility vehicle, with two kids looking to be in their teens; one a boy and the other a girl. He picks up the weathered photograph, stares for a second, and then discards it; carelessly tossing it to the ground.

He continues on with his more detailed inspection, and looks in the main compartment to find a few bills; a meager ten and a few ones.

“Oh screw it,” he says to himself. “This will help get me in some place later.” He places the pittance in the front pocket of his jeans, and then looks down at his newest larceny victim. “Well, old man...” he growls with a smile, “It looks like this ain’t your lucky night, especially since me

and my crew haven't even eaten yet. Hell... with all the alcohol in your blood, I might even catch a little buzz on before going out tonight," he chuckles to himself.

Slowly and methodically, he once again surveys the area to see if anyone is near. On confirmation to himself that he is now alone, he jumps up, and with a single bound, breaks out the light in the center of the fifteen foot awning with a grace and ease that would make any basketball coach drool, only to float nimbly back to the earth like a whispering breath, making virtually no sound as his feet meet the concrete.

With the light extinguished, more figures begin to appear in the opening of the little recession, and only the soft glow from the teller machine gives shape to their forms. As they all begin to gather around the old man, the young one who had first found him looks over at the others; his fangs now bore with his reddish eyes aglow.

"Dinner is now served," he announces with a grimace on his lips.

He then spins around and gestures with his arms as one would over a banquet table dinner party towards the still comatose man. Still unaware that he is the main course in tonight's feast, he continues to sleep soundly as the figures begin attacking. He finally opens his eyes, waking to find himself being ravaged by a merciless barrage of razor like teeth, biting and tearing at his flesh like a pack of wild dogs.

The numbing effect of the night's alcohol disappears as the adrenaline kicks in, and his fear begins to quickly

sober him. In desperation, he attempts to struggle, but is easily subdued and is once again pinned to the ground by the flurry of his attackers. He tries to scream, but the air never reaches his throat, as the first one's attack rips completely through, severing his Adam's apple and removing his windpipe. The breath which was intended to vocalize his cries for help, now only escapes through the gaping hole in his neck, exiting his body with a muffled gurgle, much like an encumbered yelp for mercy deep under water.

With the blood profusely draining from the gaping wound in his body during the feeding frenzy, some of the attackers even regress to licking at the concrete. A new numbness then begins to set in as he starts to go into shock from the loss of blood. He attempts to claw at the ground, and inadvertently manages to grasp the discarded sliver of filament; the only physical remnant of the family and life he once possessed before tonight's fatal events, and before his wasted career as another nameless vagabond.

Amongst his blurred and disoriented vision, the semi-conscious old man witnesses the extricated pieces of his throat dangling in the mouth of the hell-spawned youth, and dies with his eyes transfixed in horror; his gaze, one that could only be understood by a person who had been viciously attacked by wild animals who met their own demise with the final unsettling realization that, Mankind, is not always at the top of the food chain.

Once the frenzy begins, it never ends until all are satisfied. With six quarts of blood in the human body,

almost none are wasted in a feeding. As the attack finishes, his body lays still, shredded to pieces... much like the life he had left behind, depicted in the photograph he had kept for years, now so desperately clutched in his hand; where both he and his family will remain ignorant to the bitter sweet irony that they were there with him until the very end.

Suddenly at some stage in the commotion, there is a noise; the sounds of footsteps coming down the street and the barely audible mumblings of a slurred conversation. It is two men, utterly intoxicated and completely oblivious to anything around them besides one another. As they grow closer, most of the figures who were feeding just a short time before, scurry like rats out into the street and return to the darkness from which they came.

The first assailant however, opts to stay. He decides that the two men have gotten too close, and that he would draw too much attention with his skateboard if he attempted to leave now. Once again, he leaps into the air, this time landing on a ledge about ten feet up that runs the inner perimeter of the confined area.

He sticks close to the wall, and blends into the darkness just out of sight, save for the red glow of his eyes. The men pass by the opening at a distance, a little too far to notice the young man's skateboard or that the victim on the ground is anything more than another harmless street person who had passed out for the night.

The older of the two men then turns to say, "I need to get some money."

He starts to walk over towards the automatic teller machine. The younger of the two stops him by grabbing first the arm, then the butt of his friend, just a few feet from the entrance.

“Why? You’re already paid up for the night,” he says jokingly. “Can’t you just wait and do that tomorrow? What you should need to be getting some of is me... like right now. Let’s go home.”

They kiss and walk off holding hands, neither one aware of how close they had just come to death. At their pass, the young man still lurking in the shadows jumps back down to the ground. He grabs up his skateboard and rides off back towards Bourbon Street for one of his favorite Friday night hunting grounds, a popular gothic style nightclub in the area, the Underground Dungeon.

Chapter

Two

While the fated old man was looking for his meaning amongst the garbage cans and discarded drinks of the relentless city streets, elsewhere in town was another searching for his lost soul as well. He looks on aimlessly from the vantage point of his balcony. As he stands lost in thought, he barely gives notice to the faint echoes of the energetic bustling of Bourbon Street, just two blocks over.

His expressionless gaze is that of a man who had seen centuries pass and many an empire come and go, much like the very heart of the old French Quarter of New Orleans itself; timeless and never changing.

A city rich with a history of the occult and black magic, he is aware that New Orleans is the perfect place for this newly formed army of the undead to converge. Now with a full moon to come to pass on the Day of the Dead in the year of the true millennium, the ancient prophecies were at hand foretelling of the opening of the gates of Hell to usher in a new age, as well as the welcoming of one of the purist forms of evil the world has ever known.

An evil so tainted, it could start as a ripple in a pond

and spread until it consumed everything without the slightest respite. With the streets running rich with tourists and unknown transients, the Crescent City boasting more hotels at maximum capacity than ever before, along with the grand opening of a new casino, this year's celebration is expected to be one of the biggest Halloweens in the history of the city. And this is the kind of celebration he knows that they wait for, a perfect situation that provides the proclivity for unbridled feeding frenzies for the forsaken creatures of the night. With only one week at their disposal for such a malevolent feat to take place, his evil benefactor would be there preparing, readying the armies of the fallen into untold amounts of never ending darkness.

He watches the sun begin to set, as his memories drift back to a time when his body was alive with a mortal soul; a time when he was a fierce warrior, a son of a Viking King forged from birth, who roamed the lands with the freedom associated with being the leader of a band of well-seasoned soldiers. He reminisces contently on the battles he fought, the riches he plundered, and the women he conquered; the entire world his to explore, and life his for the living, giving, or taking whenever he so desired. At times for him, it seemed like this was only yesterday, still yet again, sometimes far away and lost as if in the mist of the cold Norse fog. However, the only thing that ever remained truly clear was the night that it all ended.

His psyche delves deeper; his jaw beginning to tighten and his fists clenching the balcony's rail, as he remembers the attack that had come out of nowhere.

Having been in battles before and seen death hundreds of times, he was no stranger to all of its brutality; but nothing was ever quite like this. No living creature, man, or beast in the wild could have ever perpetrated such a horror against his men, at least none that he knew of before that solemn night. He watched on as his men were slaughtered like animals; falling one by one, limbs ripped from their bodies, torsos strewn about like scattered decks of cards, and blood sprayed across the fields like droplets in the wind, carried from the waters of the cool Nordic beaches. Even worse, there was only one way to stop his enemies from committing such horrific atrocities; a beheading, but they were great in numbers, and inhumanely strong.

His mind clears momentarily, and returns back to the present as he watches the last remaining light in the sky from the sun disappear. He feels its warmth, and basks in its rays almost reverently, as he wonders if this element of his curse was the best or worst part. He begins to feel as if God himself is taunting him, reminding him of his everlasting penitence for all that he has done as one of the eternally cursed, laughing in his face at what he used to be and at what he could never truly be again; a man with a mortal soul. Only the few of purest descent have the strength to endure sunshine, a gift that would be unknowingly bestowed on him by his creator, christening him a direct sire of an original pure blood.

Though this indulgence at times can be draining, it is worth the pain, as he knows not to make this an everyday habit, aware of the vulnerability the sun's rays impart on

him. It is one of the very few remaining human pleasures that has kept him from enveloping his entirety into darkness, thus allowing him to retain the faint slivers of his once mortality and humanity, and perhaps... his fragmented soul. Copiously aware of his fate and the price he pays each time, he remains resolute, watching on as the dusk slowly replaces the sunlight, ushering in the evening shadows to fall across his beloved Crescent City once again.

He then lifts his glass to take the final sips that will finish off the blood and wine mixture, and his nostalgia retreats again, far into the past, involuntarily causing him to completely lose his conscious grasp of contemporary reality. It is almost as if he is stuck in a surreal nightmare, reliving the massacre over and over. His mind carries him back to the moment when he was the last one standing, exhausted and barely upright, wearily looking around, and watching in disgust and mortal horror as the mangled bodies of his fallen friends and comrades are fed upon as cattle for the slaughter. He hears the popping of tendons and cartilage above the barely audible screams as the beasts tear into the human flesh, peeling it away from their bones, and looks on in dismay as the seemingly never-ending carnage finally concludes with the final drops of blood being sucked out of the very few who remained alive.

His head diverts upwards into the glaring eyes of yet another beast, now standing right before him. Scarcely having the strength to hold the sword of his father, he attempts to attack, but is no match for the inhuman creature that he now must face. Suddenly, a hand that

resembles nothing of a human, but more so a demon from legends past, reaches out from the cloak draped across the beast and snatches the heavy sword mid swing. With ease and a fluid grace, the unholy monstrosity snaps the stout blade into two.

At the sight of this exhibition, he falls to his knees from exhaustion and horrified amazement, as the large beast drops the broken blade and steps aside. All mutilations then abruptly cease, when out of the mist walks the leader of the hellish band, causing the others to part their ranks and clear a path for the scantily robed figure that appears to be considerably smaller in size. As it approaches, he thinks he hears a woman's voice; but it is not like the sound of spoken words carried on breath and air, but more like a thought echoing in his mind...

You are strong, Northman. I have waited many years for one such as you. You are the one who will lead my legions and serve only me until the time of the Master's return.

With this proclamation, the others raise him like a sacrifice to a god. The last thing that he feels is a sharp pain in his chest right above his heart, like that of two daggers, piercing and draining him of his life-force.

Just before his consciousness has left, he hears the voice again, burrowing through his brain, "Now you are one of us..." it says, consequently ending the mortal life of Jon Erik Garneau, and subsequently, beginning his life of eternal death.

As Jon's awareness continues to withdraw backwards into time, his grip reactively increases on the glass, which

causes it to shatter and embed the shards into his hands, clearing these mental abstractions and causing his coherent reflections to return to the present. As he regains his grasp on his current surroundings, he hears laughter from a small band of festive tourists passing under his balcony on the street below. A small child wearing a Halloween mask sitting on the shoulders of a person, who appears to be her father, looks up.

Seeing Jon she yells, "Trick or treat. Throw me something mister!" as she stretches out her arms in expectation of a reward, "Do you have any candy?"

He replies by spreading his arms in a gesture that implies he does not.

"How 'bout some beads?" she inquires further.

"My apologies little one, but I have none to give," he replies.

"Thanks anyway, mister. Happy Halloween...!" The child then waves as the merry band of revelers continue on their way.

A slight trickle of blood seeps from his wounds as he pulls the pieces of the broken glass from his hand, watching it heal nearly instantaneously. With a heavy sigh, he cleans up the remaining pieces scattered on the terrace's wooden decking by his feet, and turns to walk in through the enormous window of his lavish loft style apartment where he stays when visiting New Orleans. Formerly a multitenant residence he had decided to purchase the three-story building years back, with plans to completely renovate what was once an establishment of ten separate lofts, into a

singularly magnificent, six thousand square foot, two-story establishment, with his own living quarters located on the second and third floor, keeping the ground for a garage.

The second floor of the loft resembles a lavish style hotel rather than an apartment. It has an enormous open foyer-like area with a fully stocked wet bar that is used as the living room, while attached at the far end of this is the guest bedroom. There is an elevator, which travels to all three levels and is situated behind a spiral staircase that leads to the third floor.

The third floor is a huge loft area that functions as a combination of both his bedroom and office, significantly more contemporary in appearance and décor. It houses the latest state-of-the-art home electronics and ultra-modern furniture including a California style king-size bed. Jon bought the building because one of his very few friends over the years had lived in it during the Civil War until he was reassigned. He had later been killed in the battle at Gettysburg; a loss in which he always thought was a wasteful death. Jon, also being very well versed in the art of warfare, had seen many great conflicts come and go with many a person dispatched in his almost twelve hundred years of death, and was all too familiar with the loss of life; being none too innocent in the demise of many an individual himself.

Complacent with his brief but satisfactory reminisce, he walks across the room to place the remaining collected pieces of broken glass on his bar's counter top. He then picks up a black leather jacket that had been draped across

the back of his chair, and makes his way over to the elevator, conveniently tucked nicely behind the spiral staircase. Closing the gate-like door, he pushes the button and starts his descent to the first floor garage, where a few of the many examples of his collection of cars and motorcycles resides. He had always been fascinated by such things, still owning one of the first cars to roll off the assembly line of the Ford Motor Company.

He keeps the car in storage, along with most of the rest of his collection in a private garage in upper Manhattan. Only a few paragons of his collection remain here, consisting mostly of his all-time favorites. Out of this, his most prized of these includes a black and white striped authentic racing style convertible 1967 AC Cobra 427, custom built and signed specially for him by Carol Shelby himself, a solid black convertible Dodge Viper R/T, and a solid pearl black radically chromed and customized Big Dog Ridgeback motorcycle that he had specially built, with a slightly longer rake in the front forks than a typical motorcycles of this style, but just shy of being considered a full chopper; all of which having been kept in showroom floor condition.

He steps out of the elevator, walks over to the Viper, and admires the incredible custom pearl black paint glistening under the fluorescent light. Opening the door, he gets into the car, reaches over to remove a CD case from his glove box, and then presses a button to raise the garage. He then presses another to open the gate of his eight-foot wall surrounding the building, removes the CD from its

case, and inserts it into the player. Music erupts from the speakers as the powerful 550 horse-power V10 begins to turn over.

He decides that he will tour uptown tonight, as he drives the car onto the street and out of the French Quarter. Exiting onto the highway ramp, he punches the accelerator and launches the car from its quiescent 30 mph to an invigorating 80 within seconds. As the wind races by his head, he flies past other cars on his way towards St. Charles Avenue and to his first of many destinations for the night, the historical Garden District area.

Reaching the new location, he parks his car and enters a restaurant. Upon his entrance, the hostess, a young college student of about twenty two, gawks for a second, obviously taken in by his appearance. Jon, who looks to be in his early to mid thirties, removes his coat and runs his hands through his long, thick, dark hair, which falls just over his broad shoulders. With piercing steel blue eyes, his face is ruggedly handsome and coupled with a finely trimmed mustache and goatee.

His frame is solid with a better than average build and draped in a black t-shirt that easily displays the tone of his muscular form. His jeans are a deep blue, and fastened with a simple but elegant black belt that keeps the length of his cut falling perfectly at heel length of worn, but well-kept black shark-skin roper styled cowboy boots. The hostess quickly regains her composure, then smiles and speaks.

“Only one tonight, sir...?”

He nods affirmatively.

“Would you like a table or would you prefer to sit at a booth by the bar?”

Jon thinks for a second, “The bar will be fine.”

The hostess then gestures for him to follow, “Right this way, sir.”

He picks a small booth in the back corner where the light is slightly dimmer. She leaves a menu, smiles, and returns to her station by the door. He looks intently at the menu thinking about how long it has been since he has eaten and enjoyed real food. This was strictly a ritual for his own personal bit of sanity, not out of any need for nourishment, as real food could not accommodate him any form of sustenance. It was a forced ritual he kept to maintain a more, human appearance... one in which that had helped him over the years to avoid any unwanted scrutiny.

Another figure then appears by the table, “Have you decided on anything yet...?”

Jon looks up to see what appears to be the bartender. She is an extremely attractive girl about five feet four inches tall, with reddish auburn hair, and blue-green eyes. She has a very nice petite figure, the outline of which being accented by the tight Polo style shirt that she is wearing.

“Yes...” Jon replies. “A steak... very rare, please.”

“Baked potato or salad with that?” she asks, as she writes on her pad.

“No... neither,” Jon replies, “just the steak.”

“Are you sure? It is included with the meal.”

“No... thank you. I have to maintain a special diet.”

“What would you like to drink?”

“Wine... something red please,” he replies.

She continues to write the order down and looks up from her pad one more time, “Anything else?”

Jon shakes his head, “Not at the moment. Thank you.”

“Alright then, my name is Jennifer, and I am the waitress and bartender, so if you need anything else just let me know. I’ll be right back with your drink.” She then turns and heads back to the bar.

Jon’s steely blue eyes follow her the entire way. It is not often that anyone catches his attention in such an intriguing way; the last time having been quite a few years back, hundreds to be exact. He finds it uncanny as to how much this waitress’s resemblance is to her. Ultimately, he chooses to dismiss this to coincidence or his heightened senses, which perhaps being this close in proximity to his creator, is most certainly dredging up old memories of which must be causing his imagination to play tricks and draw similarities where obviously none could ever possibly exist.

Jennifer returns with the wine quickly; “Here’s your wine sir. Your steak will be ready shortly...”

Jennifer stares at Jon also as if she has seen him before, with an unusual sense of déjà-vu that she cannot quite place a finger on. She begins to place the glass on the table just as Jon simultaneously reaches up to retrieve it from her, and in doing so, accidentally brushes against her hand, causing a shiver to run up her spine. She loses focus

on the glass of wine, and fails to spot that it is currently flush to the table top, causing it to tilt slightly off balance. As the glass begins to tip, Jon's reflexes allow him to respond and stabilize the vessel before a single drop can spill.

Startled by the near catastrophe, she expounds, "Oh my God, I am so sorry. I don't know what I was thinking. I can't believe I just did that... Did anything get on you? Please tell me I didn't just spill red wine on you..."

"No I am fine... I do not believe that anything was spilt, everything is fine..." he says reassuringly.

Without pause and in disbelief, she retorts, "Wow... I don't know what came over me. I am never this clumsy regardless of how good looking the guy is..." She pauses for a second, "*Holy crap...* did I really just say that out loud?" she says embarrassed over both the near mishap and her unintentional comment.

Jon smiles, "Say what out loud, all I heard was something about being clumsy... but thank you for the sentiment just the same."

Jennifer relieved of her mortification, responds, "Thank you for being so understanding," her face still slightly red. "On both accounts... and as a reward for your chivalry, I promise not to drop the steak in your lap or make a fool of myself by verbalizing any other embarrassing compliments over you for the rest of the night..." she says smiling, and then turns to head back towards the bar.

"Smooth move Jennifer... *real smooth...*" she utters under her breath, "Get your head on straight and pay

attention to what you're doing..." she remarks, continuing to scold herself for her inattention as she walks away.

Jon sips the wine and thinks about how he wishes that he could again be intoxicated. A seemingly meaningless wish to a human, but to one whose senses are so acutely attuned, the numbness that alcohol brings would be more than comforting. Unfortunately, now was not the time. Not the least of which that the amount of alcohol that it would require to accomplish this with one of his stature would certainly draw unfavorable attentions from the wait staff and patrons alike, but most particularly and importantly, Jennifer. For reasons that escape him, her disapproval would be distressful.

She returns once more with the steak, places it on the table, smiles, and then leaves again. Glaring at the food, he thinks of a time many years ago when he would have killed for a meal such as this; now all he can do is stare, for the animal flesh, especially when cooked, is very unsatisfying even when it is as rare as this. Nevertheless, Jon continues to cut into it and watch on as the part that does offer a small amount of sustenance, the bloody broth, runs onto his plate. He is forced to both chew and swallow every individual bite that is taken. The taste is bitter, but there is enough blood in the meat to make it almost palatable, if even in only minor amounts, abating his never ending thirst, as he stomachs a few more final pieces.

Jennifer returns, "Is everything alright sir? Is your food okay? I can take it back and bring you something else if you want."

“Yes... it is fine, I suppose that I was not as hungry as I had originally thought,” Jon replies.

“Are you sure... I don’t mind. I mean it’s the least I could after your being so understanding about the wine and all...”

“No I am fine... You can take the plate.”

“Okay...” she says, and takes the dish.

“Would you at least like some more wine?”

He looks down at his near empty glass, “Not at this time thank you, perhaps in a moment.”

He now moves to the bar to free up the table, and Jennifer chooses to follow, “The crowd is picking up in here,” he says, seating himself on a nearby bar stool.

She steps back behind the bar, “Yes, it is. People are getting in early before hitting the bars I guess.

She surveys the counter and notices a few people in need of a refill. She turns to Jon and smiles, “I’ll be right back...” then she leaves to go take care of the other patrons.

Jon finishes his wine and after a few moments she returns, “Ready for another?” she asks, pointing to his momentarily empty glass.

“Yes... please.” he replies.

She fills another glass and places it in front of him, but before removing her hand, she asks him if he is driving.

“Yes... I am,” he replies. “However, I can assure that there is no need to worry though... It takes a great deal more than this to impair me.”

“You sure... you didn’t eat very much. And after the

way you handled my whole wine faux pas and all... you just seem like a really nice guy. I'm just saying, I would really hate for you to get into an accident or something," she retorts.

"I will be fine... I can assure you. But thank you for your genuine concern over my well-being."

"Okay... just checking," she says, removing her hand from the glass. "By the way, if you don't mind me asking... you have a curious accent; you're not from around here are you?" Jennifer asks.

"No... I own property and have business investments here, so from time to time I visit to attend to things," Jon replies as he sipping his wine.

"But this trip is strictly for personal business."

"Well... be careful while you're here this time. Being that this is the Halloween party weekend, and almost a full moon to boot... all the crazies are certainly going to be out tonight. Seems like this city gets more and more weird every year," she warns, with a genuine earnestness in her voice.

"I will remember that, and thank you... but I can usually take care of myself," he says, and then sips his wine again. "Do you work here all of the time?" Jon asks.

"Yeah... when I'm not in class or studying for a test I'm here," she replies. "Seems like all I see anymore is school, this bar, and my bed. So much for the exciting life of a college student, huh?"

She rings up a bill from one of the other waitresses.

"I do not mean to sound presumptuous, but you just seem like one who would have already graduated..."

“I did,” she replies. “I had a double Major... a four year degree in Liberal Arts and a five year degree in marriage. Neither proved to be what they were cracked up to be, so I left the man and went back to school.”

“What are you studying now?” Jon asks.

“Nursing... at Tulane,” she replies.

About that time, three slightly drunken college students fumble up to the bar. All of them are obviously some sort of athlete with height and weight exceeding even Jon’s solid frame of five feet, eleven inches, two hundred and ten pounds; and well above six feet, weighing closer to the two hundred and fifty pound range.

“Hey, sweetheart, how about us?” the first one blurts out.

Jennifer rolls her eyes while looking at Jon, “And now the fun really begins... Excuse me, sir.” She walks over to the end of the bar where the three have rested themselves. “Can I get you gentlemen anything?” she asks, just short of being sarcastic, attempting to hold back the already building annoyance that is vaguely apparent in her voice.

“Yeah... let’s keep this party rolling... What do you say guys,” the first one who was to sit belts out obnoxiously. The other two echo the sentiment collectively.

“Three drafts... of whatever you have on tap that’s lite,” they reply, with a slight but slurring undertone.

“All we have by way of draft beer is domestic. Is this fine for you gentlemen....?” Jennifer asks obligatorily, but polite.

“*Abso-freaking-lutely...*” the biggest one boasts.

“Great... but please watch the language. This is a family restaurant, not one of those college bars on Bourbon Street,” Jennifer replies, trying to contain her contempt.

She leaves to grab three clean beer mugs and places them one at a time under the tap, then pulls the unusually large lever that dispenses the liquid into the three large beer glasses.

“Damn... I would love to hit that ass,” the smaller one of the three comments garishly about Jennifer as she fills the large schooners.

Jon hears the comment, and although he disapproves of it, he knows that Jennifer did not hear it. He decides to try to ignore their impertinence, knowing that if he speaks in her defense, it will very possibly only escalate into a situation and attention that he would prefer to avoid. So for the moment at least, he attempts to ignore his natural inclinations to protect Jennifer’s honor. Over by the beer tap, Jennifer has finished filling the glasses and walks back over, placing a coaster under each glass as they are served.

“That’ll be Twelve seventy-five,” she says, slightly annoyed with the typical commotion.

They each pull out a five dollar bill and Jennifer quickly collects the money before leaving to make change. As she walks away, the first guy again makes a comment to his friends about her. His voice is still too faint for Jennifer to hear it, but just as before, Jon hears him perfectly. This time, despite the consequences; his twelve-hundred year old conditioned Viking warrior nature is not capable of

ignoring their comments any further, regardless of the idiocy of their youth, pass without some sort of rebuttal.

“I would appreciate you boys watching your mouths,” he says, directing his comment towards the one who had made the off color remark.

Turning away from his buddies, the larger of the group replies, “What’s that you say there long hair? You gotta a problem with me... or just a problem with real men who like women?”

“Are you one of them sissy French Quarter faggots?” another one of the three takes the opportunity to chime in on the exchange.

“Yeah... maybe he’s just mad because he wants to suck our dicks as much as she does. Ain’t that right...?” the last one chooses to remark, sneeringly.

Jennifer hears the last comment, and quickly turns to address the group of boys, displaying her obviously displeasure, “Alright boys, that’s it... get out... *All of you*... Now!” she exclaims, as she snatches their glasses and pours them into the sink, then peers hard at them with fire in her eyes. “You boys hard of hearing or do I need to call the cops?”

“What about our change, bitch?” the biggest one asks.

“Thanks for the tip...” she replies sarcastically.

“Wait a minute. That’s our money, bitch!”

“Boys, this is your last chance... you have exactly sixty seconds before I grab my cell and call NOPD, and I guarantee that after I get done telling them the story I will

make up, you three degenerates will all end up in Central Lockup for the entire weekend..." she threatens, as she points at the door forcefully.

"What... Shit... You can't do that... We didn't do nothing!!!!. It was this asshole..."

"Try me... Now what's it going to be boys? You going to take the party somewhere else, or do you want to take your chances that the cops will believe the three of you over me?" She points to her watch, "Clocks tickin' boys... You have about thirty seconds left!"

The three get up very disgruntled, "We'll be outside, long hair..." the larger one proclaims as they leave the premise.

Jennifer is still pointing her finger at the door obviously more than a little shaken up by the incident.

"That's exactly the kind of mentality I was married to... a football jock in college that couldn't make the pros... with a no account degree, and a dead end job." She takes a deep breath to calm down then looks over at Jon, "So much for true love and happily-ever-after, *right*...? What did they say anyway?"

"It is not really important now... is it?" Jon replies. He stands and leaves two one-hundred dollar bills on the table.

Jennifer looks down at the money, "This is too much...I can't take this. Your bill was only thirty at most."

"For you," Jon says, "For your continuing education fund and making your own happily-ever-after..."

"I don't know what else to say then, except... *thank*

you, thank you very much.” She then picks up the money with obvious gratitude in her eyes.

“By the way, what’s your name? I think I should know the name of such a kind sponsor.”

“Jon... *Jon Erik*,” he replies.

“Well Mister Jon... Jon Erik, thank you again and please do be careful. Those guys might have been serious.”

“I will...” he says, “Thank you for the company. Maybe I will run into you again before I leave the city.”

“I hope so,” she replies and smiles as he leaves.

Jon then makes his way towards the parking lot to his car. There is a light breeze blowing in his direction when his acute sense of smell detects the alcohol off of the three drunken athletes that he knows are waiting for him in the parking lot. As he reaches to open the car’s door, they step out from behind a truck.

“Nice car, long hair,” the first one says mockingly.

“Yeah...I bet that must have taken a few blow jobs to get,” jeers the other.

“And since you drive such a nice car, maybe you have enough money to pay for those beers you just cost us, plus some extra for getting us thrown out.” says the third one of the bunch.

“How ‘bout it, long hair... You got some money for us to keep us from whippin’ your ass?” the last of the three young men asks before turning towards his two friends.

“Hell... he’s probably used to paying for that anyway.”

Jon turns to face his contemptible group of admirers,

but with all three being taller and having longer arm reach, the closest one has the false confidence to attempt to throw a punch. Jon watches the blow in amusement, executed with relative quickness by human standards, but compared to a twelve-hundred year old vampire, it still remains pitifully slow.

He waits until the boy's fist is mere inches from his face before catching it in his left hand with such flawless precision and speed, that even a blur would not be visible to the human eye. All three of his would be attackers are taken off guard by the display. The hand has some of the largest concentration of nerves and bones of almost any other place within the human body, and as Jon starts to squeeze his captive's still ensnared hand with his inhuman strength, it sends an immense searing pain to the assailant's brain causing him to drop to his knees in agony.

"*OW SHIT...* Let go of my hand, you son-of-a-bitch! Dammit...! You're crushing my freaking hand, *LET ME GO...!*" the boy exclaims, as he tries to pry his hand loose from Jon's grip while squirming in pain on the pavement.

The other two look on for a split second with indecision before attempting a rush. Jon reacts to this with an evasive side step that causes the largest of the group to miss, then grabs the back of his shirt in a horse-collar fashion and delivers a hip thrusting front kick to the back of his thigh, taking him completely off his feet, and landing him hard on the ground on his back, nearly knocking him out.

The fallen athlete fixates his eyes helplessly upwards towards Jon, who now appears to tower ominously over him. The last of the group, frozen in fear from having seen Jon effortlessly dispense of both of his other two comrades, wisely forgoes his attack. It is at this point, that Jon begins to calmly address the three failed combatants.

“Well now...*gentlemen*...and believe me I use that term with extreme prejudice in your cases... I assume that I have your undivided attention now...” he says, pausing to wait for any comments from his now subdued and intently captive audience before continuing, “Outstanding...! You know... there was once a time that I would have killed you all without hesitation.”

“Fortunately for you three idiots... at the present moment, I am pressed for time. However, if you continue to pursue your present course of actions, I will happily make an exception, and with intense gratification, dispense with all of your pathetic lives. So unless you want me to right now, end your pitiful existences before they have begun... I suggest you leave this one alone...”

He squeezes the first boy’s hand a little harder, until there is an audible popping sound from the fracturing bones, sending him into a squall of tears.

“*Enough said...*” He gestures with his other hand in a manner to indicate their need for departure, and then releases the first one’s hand.

The three gather themselves together with the last one standing to help his two friends get back on their feet before eagerly departing, never realizing how closely

they had just looked death in the eyes and been given a rare reprieve.

Damn, I must be getting mellow in my old age... Jon thinks morosely to himself, shaking his head in a slight disbelief that he actually let them leave standing, much less alive.

He opens the car door and gets in thinking of a simpler time, when a group such as that would have been merely a source of sustenance, with no worry of consequence or conscience. Inserting the key into the ignition, he decides to head back into the city to investigate some of the more gothic style rock and roll bars that he knew the more youthful undead liked to frequent.

First I will stop by the Howling Moon; then I will head over to the Underground Dungeon once it starts to open at midnight, he thinks to himself.

He turns the key and brings the monstrous engine to life, very aware of the urgency of time involved, and that this would be no pub crawl for pleasure, for he is becoming more and more aware that his maker is here somewhere. He has felt the evil rising in his own veins, confirming that the undead are growing in numbers. Knowing that the bars are the perfect places where they can blend in and look for unsuspecting food, he would only need to find a few in order to lead him back to the nest and the one that he wants. He then puts the car into gear, peels out onto the street, and then heads back to the city.

Chapter

Three

After leaving the Howling Moon, Jon drives through the Warehouse District towards Decatur Street and crosses over into the French Quarter. Pulling off onto a side road, he wheels the Viper up to a hotel parking garage that he knows has a valet service. He stops at the gate as an attendant walks over, a young man of barely twenty; a local college student. He then gets out of the car and hands the young man half of a torn one hundred dollar bill.

“Take good care of my car and keep it close; you will get the other half when I return,” he instructs.

The attendant sees the bill and smiles, “Yes sir.” He then hands Jon a parking receipt ticket. “No problem sir, just look for me, I’m Steve. She’ll be parked right here beside the booth. I’ll watch out for her personally.”

Jon thanks the young man and turns to walk out of the lot, then heads up the street. Steve cranks the car and rubs his hands over the steering wheel in a caressing manor as he thinks out loud, “Man, I’m gonna have me one of these after I get out of law school.” He then puts the car into gear and parks it gingerly beside the booth, taking up

two spots. Another attendant sees his parking job and yells out to him.

“Hey, Steve, what gives here?”

Steve holds up his half of the torn hundred, “This is what gives. I’ll pay for the second spot myself if I have to, but we never end up needing it anyway. So don’t sweat it. I’m keeping my eye on this baby...”

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Jon continues walking up Bourbon Street until he reaches his destination, the Underground Dungeon, where he stops to check his watch to see that it is now about 1:30 a.m.

*The club should be starting to fill up by now*, he concludes to himself.

Turning into the alley, he walks towards the courtyard where there is a line around the corner. He waits a few minutes before making his way to the front of the club.

The doorman, a larger fellow, looks down towards him, “Ten dollar cover,” he informs assertively.

Jon hands him a twenty dollar bill, which the doorman takes and gives Jon back the difference of a ten dollar bill before allowing him to proceed on. Walking through the door, he stands at the first floor bar and surveys the crowd; some appear to be in costume, while still others are in clothes that are most likely their everyday garb that could still pass as festive dress. The bartender sees him and yells over the music across the counter.

“Want something, bud?” he asks.

Shaking his head as an indication to decline the offer, Jon heads towards the stairs for the second floor. Making his way up, the lines are chaotic and energetic, many pushing their way in a hurry to get back down to the bar. He attempts to utilize one of his many innate vampire abilities, that of psychic attunement, in an attempt to determine if he can feel the presence of another amongst all of the crowd and noise. He heads upstairs where a dense crowd is pushing and pulling others around them. He then feels it; a creature of the damned in his proximity, a recognizable presence that is similar to his own, much younger yet nonetheless a pure blood the same as he, though he is unable to obtain a connection clear enough to keep track of the potential prospect. Amongst the flurry of the many chaotic patrons’ minds with their chemically induced openness from all of the distilled alcohol and recreational pharmaceuticals consumed, he becomes almost overwhelmed with imagery, and barely manages to turn in time to catch a glimpse of the back of a young man’s head heading down the stairs that vaguely matches what he felt.

Making his way back through the crowd, he is forced to pause a half dozen times as the flow of people push their way back down the congested narrow stairway, causing him to lose partial sight of the young man’s silhouette, only just salvaging a glimpse before he finally completely vanishes from his sight at the base of the staircase. Pushing more aggressively now, he tries to make his way through the ever-increasing flow of bodies.

He eventually reaches the bottom of the steps, but now feels nothing. He decides that whomever it was that he was sensing must have already left, and heads out of the bar back towards Bourbon Street, knowing that his quarry could be easily lost amongst the vast throng of tourists. Nevertheless, once onto the street, he starts to feel it again; an unmistakable element of evil. Using his supernatural acuity, he once again searches the crowd.

“So many people... but I know that you are here somewhere,” he remarks to himself resolutely.

Pushing his way up the street a few more blocks, he continues to follow his instincts until he reaches a gentlemen’s club, The Bourbon Cabaret. Sensing the same sort of strong evil presence, he walks up the steps through the open double doors and into the welcoming foyer. Once inside, an attractive girl waits to greet him. Sitting behind the counter, she is dressed festively in a low cut semi-sheer black cat suit that leaves every

contour of her youthful and bountiful figure silhouetted in the faintly lit room.

“It’s a twenty dollar cover tonight sir...,” she says with a smile, while ardently looking Jon over.

He pays her and she thanks him. Walking into the club, he observes that this establishment appears to be near capacity, following suit with just about every other bar on Bourbon Street tonight. He takes a careful look around the club, and makes his way towards the VIP area located in the very back. He decides that this section of the building will provide a better vantage point to view the crowd due to its

higher relative elevation. As he walks, a motion catches his attention and causes him to glance up at the stage, stopping him for a second.

He looks on... and although the dancer on stage has her back to him, he cannot help but notice that she seems familiar; the hair, the silhouette, or maybe something in the graceful way that she moves. He tries to see who she is, but is unable to obtain an adequate look at her face from his current perspective with the crowd of people in front of him obstructing his view.

She continues her dance, playing to the front row of men seated, as she works the pole expertly at the center of the stage. Spinning seductively, she drops into a split and crawls in a feline fashion across the iridescent floor. Just as he is about to possibly get a better look at her; a man bumps into him, pushing his way through the crowd to get closer to the attractions, with the waitress trailing in tow close behind.

Jon decides to step to the side, clearing a more accessible temporary path from which they may navigate. Nevertheless, this brief distraction has caused him to miss the final part of the entertainers show, and by the time he refocuses his attentions back to the stage, he notices that the girl is now gathering up her things to begin her exit off the platform.

The DJ employs his microphone and commences to talk as he moderately lowers the volume of the music, "Let's give a big round of applause for these two fine ladies up here dancing for you. That's Princess on the main

stage... and Cherie on the front stage. And in just about one minute, these two lovely ladies will be coming back down there to party with all you guys,” he proclaims, pointing at the crowd enticingly.

“And don’t forget about our dance specials... like the two-for-one table dances we have coming up here for you in just a few minutes. Just because they’re not on the stage, doesn’t mean you can’t keep these fine little ladies up here dancing for you!” he assures, pointing over to two girls on the side stages, who then begin to dance a little more enthusiastically to show their approval of their MC’s bantering.

“And make sure that you show them your appreciation and tip these girls. Because they’re out there lookin’ good... and workin’ hard... to make sure you guys have a good time...” he continues, as he looks down momentarily to review the list of names for the next two dancers. “And speaking of time...” he prepares with proud emphasis on his word play,” It’s time to bring out our next two lovely ladies.”

“So without further a-do... appearing for your viewing pleasure, on the front stage is Debbiel!” he announces, and a rupture of applause breaks through over the faint hissing of the cheap microphone. “And on the main stage, we have Jezebel!” he continues, and the crowd expresses its approval, being emphasized by extensive amounts of clapping and wolf whistles.

“So let’s all give a big ole’ Cabaret welcome to your next two entertainers, Jezebel and Debbie...” he concludes

completing his announcement. As the music volume increases and the girls strut their way out onto their respective stages, the crowd goes wild in response with a resounding display of their approval.

*Princess...*, Jon thinks, as he proceeds towards the back of the VIP area, completely toning out the music, which is now merely a faint reverberation to him. He reaches his destination, and walks up the steps towards another hostess who is dressed ironically in a festively appropriate sexy cop uniform, since it is her job to control the access to the VIP section. She can tell by the confident stride and the way that he carries himself that he is a man of affluence.

She is drawn instinctively towards him and is just about to ask for his VIP card, when Jon looks up and stares back directly into her eyes, sending her a precognitive subliminal suggestion that she should allow him to pass through unencumbered, breaking her concentration. This causes her to become flustered and forget about the ID, as well as allow him through the ropes.

“Enjoy yourself sir,” she says coyly, admiring his frame as he passes.

“Thank you...,” he replies, and then stops to turn back towards her, “Where is Princess?” he asks.

“Oh... She just finished a set on the main stage so she should be coming out in a minute. She’s probably in the back still getting dressed since she just got off. I can get one of the waitresses to tell her to stop by and see you...”

“Yes, please do,” Jon replies.

He continues moving inward, finding what appears to be an unoccupied table in a slightly secluded spot close enough to the rail to provide him an angle to see the entire club. The waitress comes over, and Jon orders a glass of wine. She heads to the bar, then returns promptly with his drink.

Jon retrieves a roll of money from his pocket and pulls out a twenty dollar bill. He hands it to her, and before she has a chance to give him any change, “Keep it...” he instructs.

She thanks him, and returns to making her rounds. Jon continues to sip the Merlot and looks out into the crowd, feeling the presence of another Vampire that he is still unable to pinpoint the location of. He can tell that the source of this feeling is in the lower section of the club, but also that this, although similar, is not the same presence he felt before at the Underground Dungeon, as the previously detected individual was significantly younger and considerably less formidable. He continues to sip his wine while looking out into the crowd when the hostess walks up. Jon turns to see her with another girl behind her; her face just out of sight.

“This is Princess, the girl you asked about who was on the main stage earlier.” The VIP hostess then steps to the side and leaves. The dim light is more than enough for Jon’s enhanced eyesight to now illuminate the other girl’s face.

“Oh shit...!” she says, obviously taken off guard.

Jon can now see why he had such a strong feeling

from her before, “Hello Jennif... *uhm*... excuse me, I mean Princess...” he says, quickly correcting himself.

She’s dressed in a cobalt blue leather mini-skirt with two zippers that run the length of the front, both unzipped about halfway revealing most of her upper thighs. This is paired with a matching blue leather halter-top, also with a zipper in the middle, unzipped about halfway down revealing the outline of her 32 inch; full C-cup sized breasts, restrained only by a sheer lacy black pushup bra.

“Very nice outfit...” Jon cannot help but remark.

Still a little startled, Jennifer takes a quick deep breath to calm herself before sitting down, “*Well*... fancy meeting you here,” she says jokingly, trying to ease the tension that she is feeling at the moment.

He can tell that she is somewhat uneasy by his presence, as he makes notice of the slight differentiations contained within her vocal fluctuations, as well as the less obscure fidgetiness of her body language. He then attempts to lighten the situation by playing it off like this is nothing unusual to him, although he is somewhat surprised of his own feelings of awkwardness and how taken he seems to be with her.

“Would you like a drink?” he asks.

“Yes... *most definitely*... thank you,” she replies, almost sighing as she releases her breath, prompting her body posture to start to relax a little. “Sorry about my reaction. It’s nothing personal, I guess you were the last person that I figured I’d run into here tonight...”

“I understand, no offense was taken...,” he replies.

“I must confess to being a little bit caught off guard myself... although pleasantly so,” Jon assures, as he motions over towards the waitress to try to get her attention, for which he is successful, and she then walks over.

“Yes... how can I help you?” she asks.

Jon gestures to Jennifer, “I believe the lady needs a drink.”

The waitress then looks in her direction, “I’ll have a glass of Merlot, please,” she says.

The waitress writes Jennifer’s order down on a napkin and turns back towards Jon, “Would you like me to start a tab for you sir?”

“Certainly...,” Jon replies, and then pulls out a Corporate American Express Black credit card, handing it to the waitress.

“I’ll be right back,” the waitress says, then leaves.

“Thank you for the drink... and thank you for correcting yourself on the whole name thing. Most people here... even most of the other girls don’t know my real name. I try to keep this part of my life separate from my so-called *normal* one... if you know what I mean,” she says with a blush.

“Of course,” Jon replies. “I completely understand... We all have parts of ourselves that we keep isolated from other people and the pious eyes of scrutiny.”

The waitress returns with the glass of Merlot and places it on the table by Jennifer, then leaves again. Jennifer picks it up and takes a sip to help calm her anxiety before

reengaging Jon, “So, have you ever been here before?” she asks.

“I have not...,” he replies, “Though it appears to be quite nice.”

Jennifer takes a few sips of her wine, still trying to relax a bit, “Yes... it is... especially when compared to most of the other gentlemen’s clubs in the Quarter.”

She then looks casually off to the side towards the crowd down in the lower section. “I work here off and on when I need extra money or when there’s a special event or holiday type thing going on down here.”

Jon continues to listen while surreptitiously surveying the crowd in an inconspicuous manner so that he doesn’t appear ill-mannered in front of Jennifer, “Well... it would appear that you have a generously sized crowd tonight,” he remarks.

“Yeah...but looks can be deceiving sometimes..., especially on the generous part. There seems to be a weird group in here tonight, especially this one guy who was watching me while I was on stage. It is the weekend before Halloween though... So I guess that gives all the weirdoes an extra excuse to come out.”

Jon looks at her, trying to show his interest without showing her his genuine apprehension, “Which guy was that?” he asks, with a hint of concern.

“Oh... just some guy who’s been coming in the past couple of weeks,” she replies, adjusting her sitting posture as she starts to feel more at ease now. “As I said before, I don’t work here that often so I don’t typically get the kind

that anyone would call *regulars*... I'm just trying to pick up some extra money for my son's Christmas, so I've been working extra shifts for the past two weeks at the restaurant and here, trying to get ahead on some bills."

She pauses to take a few more sips of her wine, then continues, "Anyway, this guy has been coming in a lot lately and the other night one of the waitresses told me that he had asked about me. I'm thinking OK, fine... it was a slow night, so I figured that I would go over and talk to him. But when I got there he had already left, so I just forgot about it." She looks down for a moment.

"I mean it's not like he does anything wrong, but sometimes I get a really weird feeling when he's around. Like the other night for example, I saw him sitting at the bar by himself as usual, before I left that night. It was late and I was walking back to the garage where I park my car. On the way, I kept having this feeling that I was being followed, but you know how creepy the Quarter can be late at night, especially when you're a girl by yourself with cash money in your pocket. So I kind of blew it off figuring it was just my imagination," she explains, as her words begin to grow Jon's ever increasing interest.

Taking another sip of wine, she pauses before continuing her dialogue, "But then, when I got to the parking garage, there he was, almost like he knew where I parked or had followed me. Anyway, after that, the guy gives me the creeps. Plus, he never really spends any money that I can tell... at least not with any of the dancers anyway," she says, finishing her explanation.

She leans back in her chair and takes another sip.

“Where is he now?” Jon asks. “Is he still here?”

Jennifer looks out into the crowd until she spots the man, “There he is....” she says, while pointing covertly, trying not to be too obvious as Jon follows her finger’s direction, “The kind of heavy set guy over there... see him... he’s sitting alone over there at that table on the middle floor by the front stage.”

As she finishes her sentence, the stranger looks up and right towards her, almost as though he can hear her. Jon also sees the man realizing without a doubt that this is definitely not the same one he was following earlier. The husky built man looks intently at her for a moment, and then makes eye contact with Jon.

Even though he is not as old nor at the same hierarchical level amongst the undead that Jon is, he is still able to sense him. For a moment, Jon can hear his thoughts, but it is only a very brief contact and the pathway to his mind is severed quickly. He looks at the man more intently now, trying to determine why he feels that they have a connection.

Noticing the intensity of both the other man and Jon’s stare, Jennifer can’t help but comment, “Well that was weird... It was almost like he could hear us talking about him by the way he looked up here... Do you recognize him?”

Jon quickly returns his attentions back towards her, “No... But I recognize his kind...” he comments, with an intensity that takes Jennifer slightly aback.

“What do you mean...*his kind?*”

“Oh nothing... I just wanted to try and get a better look at him...You know... just in case I end up having someone else who might want to wait for me outside of the bar...,” he teases lightly, trying to dilute the unintentional fervor with which he had delivered his previous statement.

She looks concerned for a second, “You know... I’m really so very sorry about getting you in the middle of all that earlier tonight.”

“I was fine... *really*... I had no problems with those boys when I left. None what so ever...” he says, as he hides a slight grin of satisfaction over the memory of his earlier altercation.

Jennifer ponders this comment briefly, unsure of its meaning. Was it that he had no problems because the boys had not waited or because they had... and he had handled them? She decides she’s probably better off not knowing as they continue to talk.

A few more drinks and a couple of more hours pass when the DJ calls last call for alcohol. Jennifer looks at her watch and realizes she has been talking to Jon for almost two and half-hours.

“Well look... we’re about to close up. But I’m really glad you came in tonight...” she remarks, a bit embarrassed at the time that has transpired.

“Me too...” Jon replies, reaching into his jeans pocket to pull out three one hundred dollar bills, as he then extends the currency to Jennifer.

“No...” she says, “I can’t let you do this again.”

“Yes you can, you must...” Jon says, “Please, I insist.... You were working and you spent the entire evening sitting with me.” He then takes the money and places it in her hand.

“It’s not like I didn’t enjoy myself,” she assures. “You really don’t have to do this...”

Jon smiles, something he very rarely does. “I know, but I want to... So please take it,” he persists, then jokingly follows up, “Do not force me to ploy you with further guilt tactics...”

“Oh... Okay... you win,” she says, as she smiles and puts the money in her garter belt before standing up, “Hey... since you are feeling so exceedingly generous tonight, would you mind hanging out a few minutes while I get changed, and then maybe afterwards I could get you to walk me to my car? You know with that guy in here tonight I would really appreciate it...”

Jon nods his head, “*Certainly*, I would be happy to do that... I will be right here waiting.”

The waitress comes over and asks if Jon wants anything else before she has to close his tab.

“No... Nothing... but thank you for asking,” he informs.

Jennifer looks at the waitress, “Hey... He’s gonna hang out a few more minutes to wait for me, okay? So don’t put him out with everyone else. Make sure to tell Mike for me...”

The waitress agrees, then hands Jon his bill. He signs the credit card slip and takes the receipt with his card. The

waitress then thanks him for his generous tip and leaves. Walking away, she passes a man in his late thirties wearing a suit and tie who looks to be one of the managers of the club. She stops for a second, and the two converse. She points over towards Jon while the man nods in agreement, and then she walks off back towards the VIP bar. He then walks over to Jon and introduces himself.

“Hi... I’m Mike, I’m the night manager here,” he says, extending his hand. Jon stands, and correspondingly extends his hand back to meet Mike’s.

“The waitress told me that you are waiting on Princess,” he continues.

“Yes...” Jon replies. “I was lead to believe that this would be alright. Is this not acceptable?” he asks.

“Oh yeah... Sure... it’s fine.” Mike says. “I just need to ask you to wait downstairs by the front bar so we can close this section down.” He then gestures with his other hand in the direction of the steps while Jon proceeds on.

“Princess should be out in a few minutes. Feel free to get yourself another drink at the front bar on me while you wait,” he says, and then reaches in his suit pocket to retrieve a business card. “Here’s my card, just hand it to the bartender and tell him to get you whatever you want.”

Jon takes the card and thanks him.

“I don’t believe I caught your name, sir...” Mike inquires, with a noticeable yet casual air of mistrust since he knows that this was a big night and there is a lot of cash in the registers. It is also out of character for Jennifer to have anyone wait after, and having a stranger in the club while

they close up that he doesn't know and has never seen before, he feels the need for a bit more caution than usual when it comes to people staying behind.

Jon senses his apprehension and politely replies, "It is Jon... Jon Erik..." he says, and Mike extends his hand once again.

"Alright Jon... well it was nice to meet you. And you feel free to come back to see us again anytime."

"Thank you..." Jon replies.

He shakes his hand one more time before heading down the steps towards the bar. Once he arrives, he sees that there are only a few people left in the club, mostly workers cleaning their stations and a few customers obviously waiting on someone who works there, just the same as him. The bartender sees Jon and asks him if he would like anything.

He replies, "Yes... A glass of Merlot please."

The bartender reaches for a glass, then a bottle. He pours the dark red liquid out into the wineglass and sets it on the bar.

"Who are you waiting for if you don't mind me asking?" he inquires.

Jon picks up the glass and replies, "Princess..."

The bartender looks back at Jon, "That's pretty amazing... She *never* leaves with anyone. Well I'm sure you won't have to wait too long." He pauses, turning back toward the register, and then back around to face Jon, "That'll be nine dollars for the wine sir."

Jon hands him the card that Mike had given him and

then hands him a ten-dollar bill as a gratuity for the service.

“Hey, thanks bud...” the bartender says, “Most people think because the drink is free that our time is also. It’s nice to see that there are some people who still know the difference. My name is Jay. Next time you come in, your first one is on me.”

Jon extends the glass in a toasting type manner and thanks him. He continues to sip his wine with his mind focused on trying to think of how he knows the man he saw earlier, when Jennifer walks up with her bag over her arm. She is now wearing a tight pair of leather looking spandex pants and a pair of boots that make her stand a few inches taller.

An off white silk halter-top in a shorter semi crop style fashion accompanies this, with a ribbon type band at the bottom, and two one inch wide silk straps that tie in the back allowing it to be held in place and secured just past her ribs, revealing her midriff. It has an open back, and a circular collar that snaps around her neck, with a keyhole style V-shaped opening that starts under the front part of her collar just wide enough to reveal a liberal amount of her cleavage, with a fitted, contoured tapering, that clings snugly enough to clearly reveal the outline of her erect areolas atop her firm, braless chest.

Jon turns in his chair to greet her, and is once again amazed at how significantly he continues to be captivated by her, a reaction that appears to come from more than just her obvious beauty and charm; a feeling that it’s almost as if he is drawn to her soul. As he stands up, he notices a

necklace that she is wearing, hanging just inside the V of her halter in-between her breasts. It is a silvery pendant, looking to be very old, with an image engraved on it similar in appearance to that of a rune. He cannot help but comment on the accessory.

“That’s a very unusual piece,” he says, as he tries to not so obviously look at her chest. Jennifer looks down and holds the necklace up closer for him to inspect.

“Yes... it was given to me by my grandmother years ago. It’s supposed to a family heirloom or something. She always told me it would protect me and that it is what keeps me connected to my family and our power, or something like that... I always just liked it because I love silver and Gothic type things. I took some courses in college on religion, and two of the things we studied were witchcraft and magic. I think this is what is called a Rune Stone, but when I tried to look it up I couldn’t find any reference to it.”

She continues to look at the stone, and then releases it from her grasp as it falls back to its original resting place, “Anyway... it goes well with the outfit, don’t you think...?” she remarks as she drops her outfit bag to the floor and steps back as if to give Jon a better look.

She extends her arms in both directions from her sides in a joking manner, and then playfully laughs. Jon nods in approval.

“Yes... it most definitely does... quite enchantingly,” he retorts, while thinking to himself, *There is no way that could be the same necklace... her necklace. That was centuries ago.*

He resigns himself to the idea that he is just imagining things. Jennifer starts to bend down to retrieve her garment bag once again, but Jon politely intercedes.

Here, let me get that for you,” he says, and then reaches down to retrieve the bag for her.

They both begin to walk towards the front exit of the club, with Jennifer telling her co-workers good night on their way out. Heading to the front door, Mike is there to unlock it and let them out. She hugs him goodbye and Jon shakes his hand again, thanking him for his hospitality. They both then walk out the door and down the front steps. Once out on Bourbon Street, Jon sees that the crowd from before has now dwindled to the few bar and hotel people who are just now getting off work.

“Which way...?” he asks.

Jennifer promptly points towards Canal Street, “This way,” she replies, and they start to walk down the road.

“So, how old is your son?” he asks inquisitively.

“Eight going on thirty...” she replies proudly, smiling and chuckling at first, until her face turns more serious, “He’s with my Ex this weekend, which means I’m sure to get plenty of attitude on Monday. He gets that way every time he goes and sees his father,” she says sighing.

“I really hate that too... Every other week it takes me days to get him back to normal routine. His father always lets him do whatever he wants... They stay up late, watching all kind of action and horror movies, and eating junk that get’s him all jacked up. And then when he gets home, I’m the mean ole’ Mommy. I swear the son-of-a-

bitch does it on purpose just to piss me off...” with that statement, she stops walking for a second and looks up at Jon with a serious look on her face.

“Hey... I’m sorry... I’m sure that you really don’t want to hear about my dysfunctional relationship with my ex. I apologize...”

Jon looks at her empathetically, “There is no need for an apology... I am sure that with the pressure and responsibility of being a single mother, you justifiably need to let off some steam sometimes.”

Jon’s words of comfort puts her at ease, and they both begin to walk again, “Thanks...,” she says, “I guess those assholes from earlier tonight, pardon my French... just got me thinking about it a little more than usual. And who knows, it might not be that bad this week because he wants to get all dressed up and go Trick-or-Treating for Halloween.... It’s our favorite holiday...”

“We both do the whole costume, dress up thing, and he wants to be a vampire this year. I even went and got him fitted for some really cool fangs. His dentist is an old friend of the family, and he made a special mold for him... These things are so cool I almost got a pair for me... I mean hey, I could pull off the mysteriously sexy Vampire look don’t you think?” she asks, slowing her pace and turning sideways to face him for effect.

“*Absolutely...*” Jon replies.

“Yeah, who knows... maybe I’ll do the Vampire thing for next year. This year though, I’m dressing up as a witch, but not too sexy mind you. I mean most of my

neighbors are older retired people. I don't need to cause heart attacks around there," she says, laughing at the thought.

"Anyway my son absolutely loves his." She smiles as she thinks about her next statement. "Yeah... The little brat took them to school the other day and tried to bite some little girl on the neck."

They turn down a side street towards the garage, and Jennifer reaches into her pocket for her ticket as she continues her story.

"Let me tell you... those nuns at school were none too amused at the incident. I had to go talk to his teacher. Man... I still hate facing those evil penguin-looking women. They just kind of freak me out. I went to Catholic school also," she says shaking her head. "Unfortunately it's the only way to get a good education and keep your kids halfway safe. I swear the public schools here are becoming a zoo with all the drugs and gangs..."

They walk up to the parking garage, and it is the same one Jon had parked at earlier.

"It would seem that our paths have come to intersect yet again," he says, slightly surprised that while walking Jennifer to her car, fate has, for the third time tonight, brought them together at the same place.

"So it seems..." she replies.

The parking attendant walks up and recognizes Jon, "Oh... it's you. I'll be right back with your car," but Jon stops him before he turns around to leave.

"Steve, right...?" Jon asks as the young man nods.

“Please retrieve the lady’s vehicle first.” He then hands him the other half of the one hundred dollar bill he promised earlier that night.

“Sure... no problem... whatever you say sir.” Steve says, as he turns to Jennifer and holds out his hand.

“Your ticket ma’am...” She hands him the ticket and the boy leaves.

Jennifer then turns back toward Jon, smiles, and picks up their earlier conversation back to where they were before the parking attendant interrupted them.

“Alright... you busted me, I admit it... I’ve been following you... this is all just a cover. I’m really a spy for the CIA...” she says in a teasing manner slightly laughing, causing Jon to smile at her flirtatious comment.

“A spy... I should have known. Now it all makes complete sense,” he replies jokingly.

Both are silently enjoying the irony of the moment as Steve goes to retrieve the vehicle. Steve returns a few moments later with Jennifer’s car, a burgundy SUV style sport coupe. He then walks over to the parking attendant’s booth to punch the ticket so that he can get an accurate reading to inform her of what she owes for the night. Returning, he hands her the ticket.

“That’ll be fifteen dollars please,” he says. Jennifer starts to reach in her bag when Jon touches her hand to stop her. He then hands Steve a twenty-dollar bill and tells him to keep it.

Steve thanks him and asks, “Are you ready, sir?”

Jon nods affirmatively in response to his question.

“OK, I’ll be right back.”

Jennifer looks back at Jon, “You really didn’t have to do that, you know... Thank you again,” she says, pausing for a brief moment as she contemplates her next words.

“Look... I don’t usually do this... but well, would you like to go with me to get a drink? There’s this after-hours bar called The Hideout, it’s kind of a locals get-away that all the service industry people usually hit up after they get off...”

“If you want... I thought maybe you could follow me there. I mean, I’ve really been enjoying our conversation, and since my son is gone for the weekend, I really don’t feel like going home to an empty house just yet.” She searches his face for a sign of a positive response before he replies.

“Certainly... Thank you, I would like that.”

“Great... so you’re going to need to follow me, I’m awful at giving directions. And I’m buying the first round when we get there... no arguments, it’s the least I can do after all of your generosity today.” she says, and Jon nods in agreement.

Steve pulls up behind her truck in Jon’s black Viper. She looks at the car and then back up at Jon, “Nice car!” she says, as Steve gets out and walks over to him.

Jon hands Steve his ticket which he takes, and then tears it up.

“No charge, mister,” he says. “Thanks for the tips.”

“You ever need a place to park, and I don’t care if it’s during Mardi Gras, just ask for Steve and I’ll hook you

up. You two have a good night now,” and then he turns and walks away.

Jon turns back to Jennifer to see that she has already seated herself in her vehicle. He shuts the door for her as she continues to adjust the seat back to a position more comfortable for her to operate while wearing her boots. She then looks over at him.

“I’ll try not to drive too fast for you,” she says, smiling and almost laughing.

He smiles back, walks over to his car, and then they both exit the garage. Jon follows Jennifer a few blocks and crosses Canal Street onto another side road. She parks next to a curb where Jon pulls in directly behind her, and then they both get out. She walks up to him as a slightly cool breeze blows down the street, causing her to shudder slightly, and a chill to run up her spine. Grabbing his hand, she points to an unassuming glass door that would go completely unnoticed by anyone not familiar with the establishment.

“It’s over there...” she says, as they start to walk towards the entrance. The wind blows again and there is a faint sound of a voice calling to her, “*Jennifer, I am with you...*”

Thinking she heard her name, she turns to Jon, “Did you say something?”

“No...” he replies.

“Oh well, I guess I’ve just had a long day. I definitely need a drink... come on.”

As they get to the entrance of the bar, Jon reaches

out and opens the door for her. She thanks him for his continued gentlemanly and chivalrous manners and they enter the foyer. The entranceway opens up to a large room with high ceilings and a second floor balcony area that encompasses all but the front side of the building. The room is dimly lit with soft neon lighting that adds a subtle color and ambience in its illumination.

The paintings and photographs, which adorn the walls all around, are mostly by local artists and appear to be for sale. The rest of the room is adorned with brass track lighting and wall fixtures positioned in ways to accent the artwork on the walls. The furniture in the room is made up of brushed metal framed leather sofas, and high back chairs with foot rests in front, all of which that sit around matching glass-topped coffee tables. The rest of the room is filled with a mix of bar and entertainment industry people who frequent the club, seeking refuge from the normal Bourbon Street tourist crowd.

As Jon and Jennifer walk through the crowd, men are shaking each other's hands and women are hugging and kissing each other in greeting. He then feels a presence again, but he's not sure from where. He looks around and searches the crowd for a feeling, but he can't place its origin. Jennifer recognizes one of her friends from another club and hugs her affectionately. She introduces Jon, and they continue to walk towards the bar.

"Remember... I'm buying the first round, no arguments," Jennifer says, reminding Jon insistently.

He gestures towards the bar in agreement.

“I would never argue with a government spy.”

She smiles at his comment, and then reaches into her purse to pull out a twenty-dollar bill as they reach the bar, “Do you want to sit here or find a table?”

“Whichever is your preference...” he replies, “Being that you are the one buying and all? However, the bar is fine with me for now... that is if it alright with you.”

She agrees, and Jon pulls a chair out for her so that she can sit. As she becomes comfortable, he follows suit behind her, taking a moment to look for any mirrors that he might be directly in line with. Jon knows, as all Vampires do, that they don’t cast a true reflection in a mirror that mortals can see clearly. Their faces never seem to be in focus. Vampires can see themselves and each other, but must project that image into the mind of mortals, much like a hypnotic suggestion for their reflection to be seen by a non-immortal; an ability that typically only the older and stronger Vampires can maintain.

Although knowing the amount of concentration this would require, especially in such a crowded location, he would usually try to place himself behind some sort of structure, or at least at an odd angle if he was adjacent to any overly reflective object. This time however, he positions his chair to be slightly behind the oversized cash register, partially hiding himself from the large sheet of polished stainless steel against the wall behind the bar where all the liquor bottles sit on glass shelves.

The bar itself is made of all glass blocks along its length, including the footrest with neon lights shining

upwards from inside of them. The counter top is made of polished copper with a brass lip that rims its entire edge. The door that lifts up to allow passage to and from behind the bar is located on the far end. The chairs blend with the styling of the rest of the furniture, with high back leather cushions in a cross between a pub and an executive style chair.

Also behind the counter, two upright stainless steel coolers with glass doors stand at opposite ends displaying the imported style beers and champagnes sold. The beer cooler has thick glass lids, running the full length of the full thirty-feet. The draft beer taps are a combination of polished brass and copper piping, and fittings with the tap handles being made of clear crystal style glass, each with a different color neon light imbedded. The soda and juice guns are a combination of interwoven braids of stainless steel and brass with glass-ended nozzles and stainless tipped spouts. Each one has a flashing LED where the color changes depending on the juice or soda being dispensed.

A cleanly dressed bartender wearing a casual dress short-sleeve shirt with black jeans and boots walks over to wait on them, “Hey baby-girl...” he says in a deep baritone voice.

Jennifer stands up on the foot rail and leans in, kissing him on the cheek. She returns to a sitting position and proceeds to introduce Jon.

“Rick, this is my friend Jon,” she says, then turns to him. “Jon, this is one of my oldest and dearest friends, Rick, AKA *Rock out Rick*, to his fans. He is one half of the

dynamic duo team of my two most favorite dispensers of alcohol in all the world. Not to mention that he lives just down the road from me with his roommate, Marcus, and both have gotten me home from here a few times.”

Rick, who is already standing on a piece of rubber meshed matting which slightly raises the floor behind the bar, stands about six-feet three-inches tall. He has a deep raspy voice, and is a huskily built mountain of a man. He has slightly graying shoulder length hair that he has pulled into a pony-tail with a lightly receding hairline at the forehead, and a salt and pepper goatee. He takes a moment to wash and wipe off his right hand before extending it towards Jon. Shaking hands, they begin to exchange polite greetings.

“Well...what can I get you two fine people tonight?” he asks, looking back and forth between both of them.

Jennifer speaks first, “I need a shot Rick... Can you fix us up something special? I’ve had a really long day.” She then turns to Jon. “Sorry... I guess I should have checked to see if shots were okay with you.”

“*Sure...* why not, whatever you suggest,” he replies.

“I got just the drink,” Rick says, as he proceeds to pour the various liquors into a shaker. After all the ingredients have been added he begins to shake the metal canister vigorously before tapping it on the edge of the counter cracking it open like an egg.

She turns to Jon, “Well... while we wait on our shots, and since you now know all about me, it’s my turn.”

“So what is it that you do Jon?” she asks.

“Real Estate mostly... some here, but most commonly in New York, London and Paris,” he says.

“Very nice, so you must’ve traveled a lot, I guess?” she asks inquisitively.

“A fair amount...” he nods, “Although I have always had an affectionate spot in my heart for New Orleans... I have a lot of good memories here.”

Rick returns with their drinks; two glasses filled up about four ounces each.

“Alright, Rick, that a pretty big glass you have there. What new concoction are you feeding me this time?” she asks, looking down at the two, five and half ounce rocks glasses filled almost all of the way up with a chilled blue liquid.

“I call this elixir, *a Blue Valium...*” he replies, pausing for effect, “It’s guaranteed to calm your nerves and is just what the doctor ordered.” He pushes the glasses towards them, “Drink up... unless you’re scared.” He laughs.

“You know me... I’ll try almost anything once,” she says, as she raises the glass to smell its contents. “There’s no tequila in it is there...? You know how I get when I drink that stuff.”

“*Oh Hell NO...*” Rick persists. “Believe me, I remember that night. I’ll never do that again.” he says jokingly.

“Okay then,” she says, and holds up her glass toward Jon in the manner of a toast.

He follows her lead and holds up his as well.

“To what do we drink?” he asks.

“I don’t know, you pick something,” she replies.

“Very well, just give me a moment to think,” he retorts, while deliberating a few seconds.

“Alright, how about this for a toast... *It is never too late to be what you might have been.*”

Jennifer ponders the meaning of the words inference.

“Hey, that’s really good...”

They then both turn up their glasses and drink until all of the blue elixir is gone. As they put down their glasses, Jennifer looks up at Jon.

“I really liked that, did you make that up?” she asks.

“No...” Jon says, “It was a quote by George Eliot. I just always liked the implication of the possibility that it is never too late to realize one’s true destiny. Anyway, it was all I could think of at the moment... and world peace is a bit too cliché in my opinion. Especially with this president in office...”

She laughs, and they order another round of drinks. The conversation flows effortlessly between them amongst a few more drinks until she then stands up.

“Okay... hold that thought. I need to run to the ladies room. I’ll be back in a minute.” Jennifer says, before turning to head off toward the restrooms.

Having been so focused on Jennifer and her company, Jon has now become conscious to the fact that he has not been watching the crowd or paying attention to this feeling of an evil eminence that still resides within him. He watches Jennifer as she disappears around the corner into the ladies restroom, and then refocuses his full

attention on the other patrons. He searches their eyes, looking for the familiar emptiness, the kind that one has when he has forsaken his mortal soul, an emptiness that he is all too familiar with. He looks up at the balcony area and still sees nothing. He continues looking around when all of the sudden the feeling gets much stronger. At the same time, Jennifer comes walking out of the restroom only to run right into the man that she had pointed out to him earlier at the Bourbon Cabaret.

“Who are you, and why are you following me...” she boldly inquires, the alcohol and knowing that Jon is around the corner giving her a little more brazenness than she would normally have.

“Hello Princess... or should I say, Jennifer?” the man says menacingly. She is standing just out of the main view of the rest of the patrons, and most significantly, just out of sight from Jon. She tries to act as if his presence or the fact that he knows her real name does not startle her.

“I’m sorry, but how do you know me?” she asks, “What’s your name?”

“My name...” he pauses threateningly, “Oh, my name here is not important. On the other hand... *what is*, Ms. Devauraux... is you. Or should I say more specifically, your son... Chayse. Now you need to come with me, and it is in his best interest that you do so without you making a scene...” he assures.

He looks intently into her eyes, attempting to compel her into a quiet submission. However, there is something about her that prevents this, and in his confusion, he resorts

to his only other viable alternative, one more physical in nature. But before he can move in to grab her arms, her demeanor quickly changes from one of being a startled female, to the ferociously enraged protectiveness of a mother with this most unsettling mentioning of her son by this stranger.

“Who in the Hell do you think you are...!? Let me go you son-of-a-bitch! You’d better get the fuck away from me and you better stay the hell away from my son or I swear I’ll kill you!”

Jon hears her over the music in the bar and jumps up to see what is happening around the corner. At the same time, the man with Jennifer now realizes that he senses the presence of another... an older master immortal, and is able to quickly deduce that it can’t be a coincidence that they are both here at the same time as Jennifer.

Recognizing that this may be the same one he sensed earlier, he decides that it would be better to try and avoid a confrontation until he knows more about this immortal. He then abruptly turns, and hastily retreats towards the front door exit. Jon is rushing towards Jennifer as the two men run into each other, but Jon never deviates from his path, causing the other man to be deflected off of him into a pole after their collision.

Now realizing that his preoccupations with Jennifer have distracted him from his usually heightened focus of detecting another, this collision inadvertently forces Jon into direct contact with him. When he sees the man’s face, he immediately recognizes him as the one he had seen at

the Bourbon Cabaret earlier, with no doubt in his mind for what he truly is, another immortal.

Jennifer comes from around the corner still swearing and pointing at her would be assailant. Jon manages to grab his arm and pull him off the floor away from her, with the ease of a man that should have been many times his size. He starts to struggle as Jon attempts to restrain him, but the loose fitting coat that he is wearing allows him to slide free from Jon's grasp, leaving Jon holding the garment as he narrowly escapes. Jon knows he could catch him, but to do so would require the use of a vampire's speed, which would potentially result in far too much unwanted attention from the other patrons in this, crowded of a bar.

Suddenly, a smell that obtrudes from the escaped man's coat permeates Jon's keen senses, causing him to realize that the escaped immortal serves his own creator; her scent of death being all too familiar to him. Likewise, he knows that it will not be long before she will become aware that he is also currently in New Orleans. He becomes slightly concerned.

He is not quite sure as to what all Jennifer's involvement in this is, but it has become obvious with the man's appearance at both the club and now here, that there is definitely a connection between these two events. Suspecting that his time is growing short in trying to find out what the link is, he can see that it now appears that the stakes are becoming much higher than he had previously ever anticipated.

Jennifer runs over and he stops her from trying to

chase the fleeing man, “That bastard who’s been following me! He knows my name... that I have a son, and God only knows what else!” she exclaims hysterically.

Jon then hastily drops the coat across another chair and puts his arms around her, “Jennifer... Hey... it is over, you are safe now. Whoever he was... he is gone now. Nothing is going to happen to you or your son... I promise. Do you hear me...? You are safe with me and everything will be alright.”

He holds her for a minute letting her calm down, and then they begin to walk back towards the bar. He leaves the coat behind, being distracted by his attention to Jennifer’s distress. Rick had started from behind the bar, but was too far away to intervene when everything began to escalate. He now walks over to Jennifer and tries to console her along with Jon. She is almost in tears when she runs up to him, jumping up as he leans down to meet her embrace, then standing back up erect again, picking her up slightly in the process. They stand motionless for a second, and then he places her back onto the floor.

“Are you all right?” he asks with an earnest concern in his voice as he places one arm around her, giving her one more hug.

“Hell NO, I’m not all right,” she exclaims. “I am very *freakin’* far from alright at the moment. That crazy asshole has been coming into the club, and he knows my name and everything about me...”

He relinquishes his embrace and then looks over at Jon, nodding in a gesture that lets him know to come over

beside her as he heads back behind the bar. Once there, he walks over to the telephone mounted on the column near the cash register and places his hand on the receiver.

“Do you want me to call the cops or something?” he asks.

“What are the cops gonna do?” Jennifer asks, still very noticeably rattled by the experience. “All they would do is fill out a complaint for some idiot stalking me who I can barely describe or give any pertinent information about,” she continues, as she gets back into her chair. “Then they’d just blow it off once I tell them I work at the Cabaret. I can hear them now... just another dumb stripper Ho...”

Rick takes his hand off the phone and looks over at Jon, then back at Jennifer, “Do you think maybe he might know you from somewhere else?”

“I don’t know...maybe he’s seen me at the restaurant,” she says, while she situates herself in the tall chair, “But I don’t ever remember talking to him before tonight though. And I don’t recognize him from anywhere that I can think of except the few times at the club, and one time in the parking garage.” She looks over at Jon, “I’m sorry, but I really need to get drunk.” She then looks back towards Rick, “Give me a shot of the 1800 Silver... now!” she demands immediately.

“Are you sure you want to go there...?” Rick asks..

“Rick, dammit, I love you and I appreciate the concern, and I know that you are just looking out for me like the good friend you are... But I’ve had to deal with all

kinds of assholes today and my baby is off with my ex asshole for the weekend, so just cut me a little slack and give me what I asked for... *okay*....” she replies insistently.

“I just need something to give the rest of these drinks a little kick in the ass so I can relax a bit... I promise that I won’t get out of hand like before... and you can cut me off at just this one,” she says pleadingly.

“Okay... you win...,” he says, acquiescing to her request, “One shot of the 1800 Silver coming up.” Rick retrieves the desired bottle of Tequila and a regular shot glass from the bar, but before he can begin to pour, Jennifer chimes in again.

“Rick, hold it... I changed my mind...,” Jennifer says.”

Rick stops mid pour, “Whew... that was close. You had me worried there for a second, baby-girl...”

“No... what I mean is that, I think you’re going to need to make that glass bigger ‘cause I’m feeling the need for a double...” she says.

Rick hesitates for a moment, and then looks over at Jon. “Watch out for her, okay... She’s special to a lot of people around here,” he says, with slight apprehension.

Replacing the standard sized one ounce shot glass with a rocks glass, he proceeds to pour the double shot. He then opens the plastic lid to a small container of fruit that sits in a metal ice tray adjacent to her, and retrieves several fresh cut lemons, placing them both on the bar in front of her.

Jennifer reaches out her arm and takes Rick’s hand

squeezing it affectionately, “Rick loves me...” Jennifer says, as she looks over at Jon, “And that asshole’s comment before... I hope you know that had nothing to do with you...” she states.

She holds her nose and grabs the over poured rocks glass, turning it up quickly. She empties the glass and slams it resolutely back onto the counter. Swallowing hard, she grabs a lemon wedge and bites into it; her facial expression showing her palpable dislike for the taste of the tequila.

She then puts the lemon down and looks over at Jon, “That’s twice tonight you’ve been there for me... Thank you. *Really...*” she says, as she leans over and kisses him on the cheek, and then places her head on his shoulder. He then puts his arm around her like a protective wing.

After the double Tequila shot has combined with the other previous drinks that she had from before, Jennifer is beginning to display the anesthetizing effects of the alcohol and becomes quite noticeably more relaxed as Jon now thinks she is a bit too intoxicated to safely drive. He offers her a ride or to pay for a hotel room that is close by, but she declines his offer, insisting that she does not want to stay alone at home, or in some French Quarter hotel.

“Look...” she says, “I know we just met and all... but for some reason I feel like I can trust you. And I really don’t want to go home tonight to an empty house... or be by myself in some strange hotel room with some weirdo stalking me just to have the maid find me dead in the morning or God forbid worse. You think maybe I could crash at your place for a few hours? Just until the sun

comes up... I'd really appreciate it..."

"Sure..." he replies with a hidden concern.

"Thanks... I'm feeling a little better now. By the way, what did you do with that guy's coat anyway?" she asks.

"Oh... I suppose with all the excitement that I just left it draped over that chair," he says admittedly, surprised by how uncharacteristically focused his mind continues to be with Jennifer. He gets up and walks over to the chair close to where the man fell. Recovering the coat, he walks back over to the bar.

"Check the pockets... maybe he left a wallet or phone or something that might tell us who this asshole was," she says, still quite visibly bothered by the whole event.

Jon checks the pockets for any contents but finds only a box of matches with the logo from the Bourbon Cabaret on the front. He tosses the matches on the bar and extends his arm to hand the coat to Rick.

"Here Rick, perhaps you should hold on to this in case someone comes back later to claim it, then maybe you could get a name or something that she could give to the police for a restraining order or something."

"Sure, no problem," Rick says taking the coat from him.

"Well, he's for damn sure barred from the Cabaret for life. I'll see to that tomorrow," Jennifer says sternly.

Jon looks at Rick, "How much do we owe?"

Rick takes the ticket from behind the bar and tears it up, "You're taking care of my girl there... So you don't owe

me nothin'... Thanks for looking out for her tonight. You're welcome here any time," Rick says, shaking Jon's hand as Jennifer leans across the bar again to kiss him goodbye.

"Looks like you found a good one this time," Rick whispers in her ear.

"Yeah... I was beginning to think they were either all dead or mythological creatures," she replies softly, not knowing about Jon's exceptional hearing.

Jon thinks to himself how ironic it is that she would use that expression, considering that in reality he has been dead from a mortal's point of existence for a very long time; that in fact his kind has been the subject of mythology and folklore for thousands of years.

Jennifer pulls out a set of keys attached to a car remote and removes hers from the ring, "Look, I don't think I should be driving anywhere. Rick, do you think you and Marcus could drop my truck off by my house on your way home when he shows up to get you?"

"Sure sweetie, whatever you want..." Rick replies.

"Just hit the lock on the inside door panel and then throw the key under the driver's side floor mat. I have my house keys, and this is the remote so I'll still be able to get into the truck." She then hands her car key to Rick, "Thanks, you're the best..."

"No problem, just call me tomorrow before you go to work to let me know you're okay. No offense meant," he says, looking over to Jon.

"None taken..." he replies.

They exit the bar and walk over to Jennifer's vehicle, so that she can retrieve her outfit bag before they walk over to Jon's car. Jennifer wobbles slightly as she walks around to the passenger side, where Jon steps up to open the door for her.

"You know, you could spoil a girl like this," she says, still a little intoxicated. "I really hope you're as nice as you seem." He opens the passenger door as she gets in, and then closes it behind her once she has her seat belt on.

"Well..." he pauses, "I will not assert that I am a saint or anything, but you can rest assured that I will not let any harm come to you."

He walks around to the driver's side and gets in, then pulls out his keys and cranks up the car. As it starts, the little side street echoes with the power that emanates from the car's large engine. He pulls away from the curb and drives off up the road, heading back towards the French Quarter.

"Where do you live?" she asks as they cross the Canal Street.

"On the corner of Chartres Street and Governor Nichols," he replies. "A few years back, I renovated one of the old Civil War militia barracks..." he continues, and then he notices Jennifer's lethargy sneaking in, with her head starting to tilt forward and her breathing pattern grows softer. So he decides to stop talking. A few minutes later, they arrive outside the loft. He looks over to Jennifer to begin waking her.

“Jennifer... Hey,” he says. Jennifer revives, and then he continues, “Would you mind opening the glove box and pressing the red button?” She does as requested, and the eight-foot front gate begins to open.

“Now the green one, please...” he requests, and once again she does as he asks which causes a successive motion to begin and open his massive garage door.

“What did you say you did for a living, Real Estate...?” she asks, now wide awake and a little awed.

“Yes...” he replies.

“I’m guessing that you do all right, huh....?” she responds sarcastically.

“I suppose one could say that...”

“How long have you been in the business, a couple of hundred years or something?”

“Give or take a few, it is kind of a family thing.” Jon says, smiling as he drives the car into the garage and parks.

Once they get out, Jennifer looks around with amazement at the collection of vehicles in the garage. He walks around the car, opens the door, and then helps her out of the passenger seat. He then grabs her outfit bag from the floor mat in the front. Reaching back inside the glove box, he presses both buttons to close the gate and garage door behind them. Turning and gesturing towards the elevator at the far end on the garage, she walks inside, still in awe of the magnitude of the room.

“Wow... I would never have guessed all of this was in here. I bet I’ve walked by here a hundred times on my way to the French Market or something...”

‘How long have you owned this place?’ she asks still awe struck.

“Oh... it’s been in my family for years. I had it redone a while back though, to be more suitable for my needs while I’m here. It used to be an apartment building that had become quite run down when my family’s company bought it several years ago. It had remained empty for a few years, and eventually I turned it into a single unit commercial penthouse to function as my private residence, as well as a second office for when I am here in New Orleans.”

“No brother or sisters?” she inquires.

“Yes... one brother and three sisters, but they all passed away when I was younger,” He replies. “So it is just me now...”

“I’m Sorry...” she responds sympathetically.

“No need... it was a long time ago,” he assures her.

Even with his sincere reassurance, she detects a sense of pain and loneliness from his remaining tone, and decides not to mention it further. Jon opens the early nineteen twenties style cage door to the elevator, and pushes the middle button on the control panel, causing the elevator to begin ascending.

“Man... this would definitely be handy for if you ever bring home some slightly drunk girl,” Jennifer says, laughing.

“So it would seem...,” he replies, smiling back at her. Once they reach the first floor of the apartment, the elevator stops. Jon opens the gate, and they both exit into

the living room, “Would you like some water or coffee, something else possibly?” he inquires as he steps behind the counter of an old style fully stocked wet bar, and places the outfit bag on top of the counter.

“Water would be nice, thank you” she nods, and then looks around, standing in the middle of the room almost afraid to touch anything. She looks up to the vaulted ceiling and fans, then back around at the rest of the room. She begins to feel like she is in the main room of a very classy historical hotel.

Jon walks over with a glass full of ice and a bottle of water, “I thought that you might be more comfortable opening the bottle yourself,” he says.

“I appreciate the thought, but I think I can trust you by now...” Jennifer replies.

“Very well...” Jon says, and then opens the bottle, pours the liquid into the glass, and hands it to her.

Jennifer takes the glass from him and begins to sip slowly. “So how big is this place?” she asks.

“Somewhere around five thousand square feet I believe... about seventy-five hundred if you count the garage. I have never really taken the measurements though, he replies. “The guest room is right over here,” he mentions, pointing in its general direction. He walks back over to the bar, picks up her bag, and then heads over to the other end of the living room with Jennifer following close behind. He then opens the door to a lavish chamber.

“Over here is a bathroom, and there is a small refrigerator in the corner with sodas and bottled water. I am

assuming that you do not want any more alcoholic type beverages for the night.”

“*Oh... No... I’ve had quite enough for one night,*” Jennifer replies assuredly.

“Well there is a remote beside the bed,” he says, as he walks over and puts her bag on top of the comforter, then bends over to pick up the device, “and the entertainment center is right behind there.”

He presses a button and a panel in the wall slides open, revealing a state-of-the-art entertainment center complete with a flat style, seventy-inch wide screen television.

“Do not worry about the noise; the walls are sound proof, so you will not disturb me if you want to leave it on. I know that some people sleep better that way,” he says, leaving the panel open, and placing the remote back on the table beside the king-size bed.

Jennifer looks around in shock, “Wow, this is your *guest* bedroom...?” she asks, pausing a moment to reflect on its enormity. “Man, this is bigger than my whole living room... So where do you sleep?” she asks coyly.

“The third floor is where I have my room.”

“Oh... you have a couple of more bedrooms upstairs?” she asks.

“No... Just the one...” he replies. He starts to walk back towards the door. Once reaching the entrance, he turns back to face her, “Do you need anything else?”

“No... I believe I’ll manage all right.”

“Very well... if you do decide you need anything, just

call me. There is a video intercom by the bed and I have one upstairs also. However, again do not worry that you will disturb me; I am more of what one might refer to as... a creature of the night, and only require a minimal amount of sleep by most peoples' standards."

"Then you will definitely fit in here with all the rest of the Vampires in New Orleans," she comments jokingly.

"So I have been told..." he says smiling in his response at the irony of her comment, "A few last things... over there is the climate control thermostat that adjusts the temperature for this room. The door only locks or unlocks from the inside, so there is no external key slot. If you feel a little uncomfortable, please... feel free to use it. I will take no offense... believe me," he states matter-of-factly. "So unless you have any other questions, I shall take my leave and bid you a good night, Jennifer." He finishes, and then turns to begin exiting the room.

"Good night Jon," she replies. "Oh... and Jon..."

He stops, turning once again to face her.

"Thanks, for everything... *really*..."

"You are quite welcome Jennifer, it has sincerely been my pleasure" he assures, then nods and closes the door behind him.

Jennifer explores her surroundings a little bit more as she walks into the bathroom. At the far end, sits a huge sunk-in style tub that is big enough to fit two people very comfortably. At the other end, there is a gas log fireplace with a thirty-six inch flat screen TV above it, along with a small recessed wet-bar and video telephone at the side.

Each of the four corners has a candle in a polished silver holder on the outside edge. In the middle directly in front of the doorway, is a huge marble counter top with two sinks and a lighted mirror that runs its full length. Beside the mirror on the wall is a blow dryer. In the cabinet drawers are towels, washcloths and a complete man's shaving kit.

At the other of the end of the bathroom, is a large glass enclosed shower, also big enough for two people. It has six showerheads, two on bottom, two in the middle, and two up high, all with multiple dial settings. Each has a long, adjustable, angled nozzle, and its own hot and cold knob for individual temperature and water pressure settings.

She leaves the bathroom, undresses to her underwear, and then throws her clothes on top of the bed before grabbing a small white cutoff t-shirt out of her garment bag to sleep in and cover her naked top. She then walks towards the front of the room and opens the curtain to reveal a balcony overlooking the street. Moving the slide interlock mechanism that secures the windows, she raises the huge lower part of the fourteen-foot pane and steps out onto the balcony.

It feels nice as the cool early morning breeze blows across her semi-nude body. She stares for a moment, trying to take in all of the events she has had since she met Jon. Still, she can't understand why she feels this bond to him. She convinces herself that she must just be making the feeling up in her head, being as it had been so long since she was treated so well with a genuine, gentlemanly respect

by any man, much less someone with all of this at his disposal.

She concludes with the notion that tomorrow is another day, and the magic of the night always seems to disappear with the coming of a new dawn. She turns to go back inside, when out of the corner of her eye she thinks she sees someone; a man in the shadows just nearly out of sight watching her from out of the darkness. The wind seems to pick up for a second, and a somber breeze blows through her hair once again when she hears her name in the wind.

*“Jennifer, I am with you...”*

She hurries off the balcony, closing the window and curtains behind her. A little shaken up, she walks over and picks up her glass of water and gulps it down quickly. She then walks over to engage the dead bolt on the bedroom door, but as she hears it start to slide into place, she changes her mind, thinking that she sees no reason not to trust Jon.

“Besides... maybe it might not be so bad if he were to just happen to walk in on me while I’m half naked and have his way with me,” she thinks to herself out loud, smiling.

Walking into the bathroom, she turns off the light before heading back towards the bed. Crawling across the thick comforter, she pushes her outfit bag and clothes on to the floor. She then picks up the remote and turns on the TV, keeping the volume at a minimum, and then turns off the lamp beside the bed as she tries to relax and fall sleep.

Jon ascends the spiral staircase to the third floor of the loft. At the top, he pauses to hear the door to the guestroom's dead bolt start to move and slide back to be left undone. His mind starts to wonder as he starts to think about Jennifer dancing on stage when he came in to the Cabaret, and the unusual attraction he has been feeling towards her, before quickly trying to refocus his thoughts elsewhere. He begins to think about the necklace again and wonders why it seems familiar to him, knowing that he has seen a symbol similar to that once before.

He walks across the large open room towards the office area of the upstairs room, and sits down behind a large polished metal-framed desk with a lead crystal top. On it, sits four, thirty-two inch wide computers screens, each with their own connections back to a server class style top of the line workstation, complete with a 100Mbps high-speed access line to the Internet, a multi-line executive style conference phone with separately mounted video cameras, and accompanying top of the line speakers with a commercial grade quality microphone that ties in to his intercom system; all managed via a remote control.

He picks up the remote and presses a sequence of buttons that causes a section of the wall to open, where his enormous eighty-inch video screen home theater and the rest of his entertainment center conceals what looks like a bank vault door. As it finishes opening, a light comes on automatically within its chambers. Jon gets up, and walks over to the edge of the opening where he stops for a moment just to look inside; for within these walls, holds the

full story behind Jon's existence. On one side of the vault, there sits a large upright commercial style refrigerator, its thick stainless steel walls and glass-encased doors housing a complete supply of blood. In the center of the large room, sits a large ornate coffin. On the opposite side of the vault, there is a wall with shelves holding many objects reminding him of his past; from antique weaponry, to personal effects, such as master piece works of art, and hundred year old photographs of places and friends long since gone.

He steps into the room and walks over to the coffin. Reaching the sarcophagus, he lifts the lid to reveal Jon's most prized possessions, his father's sword... lying broken in two pieces, a constant reminder of the night he was unwillingly initiated into the life of the damned; while beside it, rests another sword, a very special one, alleged to have been carried by Alexander the Great. Somewhat similar in length to that of his father's Viking sword, its double-edged blade was forged with the watery damask like pattern common to the Damascus style metallurgical forging process from ancient Persia as well as other areas in the middle-east that was renowned for its supernatural like indestructible properties.

It has an ornate script carved along the length of the blade and hilt, with a hand guard resembling the wings of Angels or winged goddesses that extend out from both sides. At its base, is a large rounded pommel with four faces; each facing a different direction. It is a magical Sword known by many mythical names; the most common being the Sword of Methuselah, mentioned in the pre-biblical text

from the Book of Enoch, and another being the Sword of Laertes, as it was depicted in Homer's epic poem, *The Odyssey*; but for Jon and all other immortals, it is simply known as the Vampire Slayer.

Whether it is from the Judea biblical God of Abraham, or from the pagan god's of ancient Persia and Greece, nobody knows for sure. The one thing that is known, is that this legendary Sword holds within it the supernatural power to dispatch all manners of demons, immortals, and the undead alike. It is the only known weapon powerful enough to inflict a mortal wound to any Vampire regardless of age; even one as old and powerful as Jon's creator.

He looks down at the two blades; one a reminder of his life before death, now ended, shattered, and decayed. The other, his life after death, much like him, the same as it was the day it was forged; timeless and never changing. He thinks of his comrades and that fateful never-ending night, wondering if they look down on him from Valhalla; if they forgive him for not being there with them, and that if his immortality were to be ended in the coming battle with his creator, would he even be allowed to return to them. And if so, would it make up for his past enough for the Valkerie to take him.

On his reflection, he reaches into the coffin and picks up the handle of his father's sword in his left hand and the Vampire Slayer sword in his right. The blades feel good in his hands, this feeling being one of the many things he had missed most of all, the power of the blade when he

was the master of his destiny with his band of warriors by his side in battle.

*Well...he thinks to himself, the time of the gathering is once again at hand.*

He knows that this time it will be finished between him and his creator, one way or the other. In a prayer-like manner, he raises both blades high into the air, and his body starts to levitate, rising high above the floor. He then speaks aloud,

“Watch over me, my brothers, from your seats in Valhalla. I petition you to send me your strength so that I may avenge your deaths, and one day be allowed to return to you my brethren... as your comrade in arms... and as your King!” He lowers the blades, and his body descends back to the floor. As his feet touch, he places them both back in the coffin, walks out of the room, and then presses a button to seal the entrance behind him.

He then walks over to the bed and pulls off his black shirt, laying it neatly across the back of a chair in front of his desk, and proceeds to unzip his pants. He sits on the edge of the bed, prying off his boots and stripping off his jeans, then stands back up, folds them in half, and lays them neatly across the chair.

Now fully undressed, he turns and lays back on the bed from his waist up, leaving his feet still on the floor, and thinks about Jennifer and this unusual attraction he has to her, sensing feelings rising in him that have been dormant for centuries. It wasn't as if he hadn't had mortal women over the years, but most of these were little more than

meaningless distractions. With Jennifer however, he can feel a rush as he looks into her eyes, the kind that makes him feel like he is almost alive again; a sensation that he has not known for more centuries than he wants or cares to remember. He stares up at the ceiling blankly, watching the blades of the fan above his bed; its steady hum and continuous spinning taking his mind into an almost hypnotic state with his eyes open and engrossed on the fixture, as he then drifts off into the closest thing he knows to peace and sleep.



# Chapter

## Four

As Jon lies there in bed, his thoughts of the day clear and are replaced by ones of his very distant past, drifting back to the morning after and the shores of Britannia where it all began. Deeper... back in time, his mind regresses, as he remembers peering through the thick and unavailing fog that fateful morning, only to have it regrettably fade to reveal the night's horror. He recalls calling out to see if anyone else was alive, crawling over their bodies to get to his father's sword, only to find it snapped in pieces like so many of the shredded and mutilated corpses of his warrior brothers. His mind is wholly immersed in the past now, and his body begins to slowly levitate a few inches off the bed, completely separating all of his senses from everything within the physical plane apart from for the very air that he breathes, and fully severing his consciousness of anything in the present.

Floating along in his mind's eye, he finds himself once again standing on the beach again amidst the aftermath of all of the carnage. As he looks around at his

fallen comrades, he collapses to his knees, closes his eyes, and continues to hope that this is all just a horrible dream; one that he would wake from and it would be just as it had been every time they landed here previously for the past many months. He had never told anyone of the dreams, but he always awoke to find that none of the previous evening's nightmarish events ever happened. His men were all there, hung over from drinking as always; but this time it was not meant to be... This time, when he opened his eyes, his world would be as vivid as the morning sun; and he hung his head woefully at the sight before him.

When he was able to move again, he set about collecting the bodies of his comrades, dragging whatever was left into the hull of one of the great boats, where he then assembled their remains into separate characterizations of their former selves. He took great care to gather all the pieces of this mangled puzzle of human flesh and bone, carefully placing each part with its respective former host as best he could, concerned that if he missed even the smallest detail, or even worse, made a mistake, they would be left disfigured or incomplete in the afterlife.

After the vestiges were fashioned, he set about collecting each man's personal effects and placed their weapons on top of them. Once all that could be found was collected, he walked over to one of the fires just barely burning from the night before, and pulled from it a large piece of wood that still held a flame. With the torch in hand, he walked back over to the great long boat and tossed the burning wood in on top of the funeral pyre, igniting the

stack of flesh and bone that was previously piled. He then gathered up what final reserve of strength he could muster, and launched the boat out to the sea knowing that the morning tide would then takeover and carry them on their final journey to Valhalla. With all preparations complete, he finally fell to his knees, exhausted, and watched the boat drift out; the flames burning high as the smoke billowed up against the backdrop of the ominous morning ocean sky, leading the way to its final voyage.

Jon then looked around again to see still a few more scattered corpses and the fallen remains of his enemy; their headless remains resembling nothing of humans, but more like crossings between beasts and men. Gathering up their final remains, he tossed them into a pile and set them too ablaze, but not in a mournful or reverent way that was meant for his soldiers; but more of a ritual cleanse one does to a diseased corpse that had died from a plague. He looked on, hoping the flames would send them back to whatever Hell that they had come from.

The fires burned bright on both the ship and the shore all the while Jon stood silent and alone...watching on, never realizing that he too was truly just as dead as any of the other corpses cast to the flame. He knew that alone, he had no way of navigating the remaining hulking ship back across the channel to Gaul, so he picked up the two pieces of his once mighty sword, and started to walk off the beach in search of some sort of shelter to rest and regain his thoughts. He traveled over dunes of the marsh that were becoming heavily doused with dew from the incoming

night fog, and continued heading in a northerly direction, yet not knowing why; never shaking the feeling that this was the way he needed to travel, almost as if being willed towards the unknown.

Hours passed, and he uncharacteristically lost complete track of time. There was no light from the stars or even the moon, as the fog continued to hold them at bay. He began to question his sanity, wondering if he too was merely a shambling spirit, and that his body was in fact just one of the many corpses that lie on the beach killed in the previous night's battle, now destined to walk an eternity beyond death.

Was he on the road to Valhalla, and if so, where were the Valkerie; or for the son of a Viking Chief, the goddess Freya herself, to take him there? Or could it be that he was in Hifhel, and he was to be tormented for all eternity? Either way, alive or dead, he felt that he had no choice but to continue on to whatever the gods and fate had destined for him.

He started to regain his strength, but now with this new found energy, an unfamiliar craving started to arise; a hunger for something he could not comprehend. His body started to feel hot even though the air was cool, and his blood fevered with an almost burning feeling throughout his veins. He decided that his body must be reacting to some sort of venom that had been secreted from the beast that bit him last night, so he looked down at his chest where the wounds had been inflicted. To his amazement, there remained almost no sign of an attack at all. There

were but two small punctures marks above his heart, now diminished, like old scars that had previously healed. Confused, he knew he must find shelter, food, and hopefully, a wise-woman to stop whatever poison was running through his veins before he died; or worse, caused him to go insane from the infernal burning of his insides.

He continued on until he saw off in the distance atop a high cliff, a looming castle rising above the mist just above the sea's shoreline. The angle of the ground started to gradually increase in steepness as he lumbered towards the lone structure. He began to hear the howl of what he thought should be a dog or a wolf, but having heard both before, neither sounded like this. Jon gripped tighter onto the hilt of the broken sword he still carried in his right hand. As he got closer to the castle, an unusual calm came over him and the burning of his blood started to subside.

He didn't know why, but in his mind, he felt this was where he was being led the whole time. As he reached the castle's enormous doors, the wound in his chest opened up again as if it was fresh, and he started to bleed. Bewildered why the wound had broken, he quickly pressed his hand over the gaping holes in an attempt to slow down the blood loss, knowing that only a scant of time had passed before it had been all but completely healed. He pulled a rope hanging to the side of the door which caused the ringing of a bell. A moment later, a servant showed up, peering through an opening in the door to see who was there, before the creaking faltering voice of an aged woman bellowed through the opening.

“State your business here, vagabond...”

“I have been attacked by a beast just on the other side of the marsh a half days walk from here, and I seek shelter and help for my wounds,” he informed her of his position.

Wearily, the old woman responded, “You are but a stranger to these parts.”

“Yes... I am,” he replied. “Though I mean you no harm,” he assured the old woman. “There is a beast or something roaming the marsh, and I would ask for shelter. I have gold to pay.”

Just then, the small opening in the door closed and there was a moment of silence before it swung backwards, ominously creaking with age itself until it was fully opened. Jon, who had been expecting the old crone to be standing in the open doorway, was taken quite off guard by the sight before him. For now, in the entranceway, there stood an elegantly beautiful woman in a long flowing red silk robe open in front, revealing a great deal of her breasts, and just shy of exposing her more sensual parts. Her hair was shoulder length, meticulously maintained, and black enough that light seemed to disappear into it as if it were a bottomless hole. Her eyes were a deep crystal blue; a darker and more vivid blue than Jon had ever seen in any ocean he had ever sailed.

Then the silence was broken as the woman spoke, “Who might you be, sir?” she inquired in an accent Jon did not recognize.

“I am Jon Erik, and I would be in your debt if you

were to grant me shelter.”

The woman glanced down toward the two halves of the broken blade, “Do you request shelter or are you demanding it of me?”

Jon looked down at the two sword pieces in his hands. He had forgotten that he was still carrying them.

“If you mean us no harm then why the sword?” she inquired untrusting.

“I assure you my Lady, I have seen more than enough death for this day. I seek only shelter...” he said, gesturing in a way that indicated the blades were of no threat. “How may I address the fair lady of the castle?” he asked.

“I am known by many names,” she replied, “but you may address me as Nestasia.” The woman then stepped aside and allowed Jon to enter, all the while staring at the wounds on his chest.

“How did you come by these?” she asked.

“A beast attacked me earlier,” he replied.

She then took him by his arm and led him into a large dining room. Seating him in a chair, she grabbed a pitcher of liquid and poured some onto a cloth from the table. She then started to wipe the wounds on his chest, causing them to burn slightly. Strangely enough, the punctures stopped bleeding immediately and quickly disappeared, leaving not even a scar. Jon now thought he was losing his mind; unsure whether he was alive, dead, or bewitched, only knowing for certain that his broken blade was still in his hands. He then started to get light headed,

almost intoxicated, as she poured some of the liquid into a chalice and told to him to drink; and he did so as she instructed.

Standing him up, she led him into a large bedroom ornately decorated in gold, filled with statues and artwork from faraway lands like the ones Jon's father had described from his many adventures and travels that he used to tell him about as a boy. Two were statues of big black cats trimmed in gold that sat at the foot of the bed, along with golden serpents encircling the pillars donning each of its four corners.

The cloth covering the large bed was made of black and gold silk with matching pillows all around. Nestasia then opened her robe to reveal all of her ample figure, and walked towards the bed, dropping the robe to the floor along the way. Crawling onto the top sheets, she turned back towards Jon and called out to him.

"Come Jon Erik, join me..." she said cunningly.

Jon, with his mind somewhat spinning from the drink, questioned her in his mind as he thought to himself, *How is it that she calls me by my name in such tone as if she know me?*

*But of course I know you,* she replied, hearing his thoughts, *I know everything about you,* she stated matter-of-factly back to him in his mind, before motioning for him to come to her.

His feet began to move against his will even though he attempted to stand-fast. *How is it that I hear her...?*, he thought to himself before openly accusing her, *She has*

*bewitched me or poisoned me,”* he said, still trying to resist her pull as he looked down for his sword, only to find his hands empty.

*No Northman, I am no witch, nor have I poisoned you, only cleansed...* she retorted smugly in his mind, *You had to be prepared before I could bestow on to you one of the greatest of all gifts. For this night, you will get to lie down in a place that only a few emperors and kings have ever been privileged enough to know.”*

With his mind clouded and body weak, Jon could only just reach the bed and Nestasia before she effortlessly pulled him onto his back, and began to lower her head until her lips met his. She then crawled on top of him, slowly working her mouth over his body, loosening and removing his clothes as she went. Her mouth continued downward, until she reached his fully erect length. Jon’s mind was now swimming from Nestasia’s rhythmic stroking, as his passion finally rose to the point that he could no longer resist his own urges.

Sensing that his blood was boiling now, she raised her head from between his legs and rolled over onto her back. With that, Jon quickly, almost forcefully, penetrated her. Nestasia looked into his eyes as she watched them turn red with desire.

“Drink of me now, Jon. I have tasted you, now you must taste me. Then the bond will be complete...”

No longer in control, with his passion and lust boiling over, he now possessed a thirst for her in a way he had never known before. Completely unaware of his transformation, his teeth were now fangs, sharp and poised,

ready to strike. Nestasia arched her back ever so slowly, and heaved her chest upward, almost pressing her breast to his mouth. He could hear her heart; and with each beat, he felt the rush of her blood coursing through her veins just as if it were his own.

She then reached towards her breast, and with one of her long fingernails, cut deep into her chest above her heart. As the blood started to flow, Jon could no longer deny his hunger. He lowered his head and suckled the blood from her wounded breast, drinking with the thirst of a man doomed to die in a wilderness as she moaned in pleasure. After a few moments of feeding, he fell back with his body convulsing and jerking. Nestasia then got up and stood over the bed, watching on as the last of Jon's mortality was extinguished forever.

"Not to worry my love..." she said, picking up her robe, "You are being reborn. Death is only the beginning..." With those final words, the last of Jon's human soul died, and his body lay lifeless on the bed, forever soiled in the blood of his creator and eternal damnation.

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Jon's body is still floating above the bed, when Jennifer's voice comes across the intercom speaker.

"Jon, hello... Hey Jon... are you there?"

His pensive state is interrupted by her words amplified reverberation, returning his mind immediately to the present, and his body drops to the bed like a stone. He jumps up in a semi-aroused state from the hallucination,

uncertain of where he is, almost gasping for air. He is also completely unaware that he is in full view of the camera. She is now looking on at his totally nude body from below.

“*Very nice,*” she says to herself, and then speaks into the intercom again. “Jon... can you hear me. Are you awake?”

He promptly gets his bearings, and suddenly realizes that he has just flashed Jennifer a fully nude frontal shot of his torso. Turning hastily and walking over to the chair where he had tossed his jeans earlier, he picks them up quickly and puts them on, turning once again to face the camera.

“Yes...” he says. “I am up...”

“Yep, I’d say you are...” Jennifer says smiling to herself, “Are you hungry?” she asks. “I thought maybe I would cook you breakfast, but I can’t seem to find the kitchen.”

Jon hesitates for a moment, “I do not have one... This place is sort of like a private corporate hotel. I am not sure, but I believe it has something to do with the Vieux Carré Commission and rules for historical property renovations from when I had this place converted from an apartment house. Anyway, I always just eat out when I am here.”

Jennifer thinks for a second to herself that this seems a little odd, but quickly dismisses the notion since ultimately he is rich bachelor, determining that this sort of makes sense, “Okay... well, at least let me take you out somewhere then since I can’t cook for you.”

“Alright...” he agrees, “Just let me get dressed.”

“Well...” she pauses for a second, “Don’t go to any extra trouble on my account,” she retorts, and then laughs to herself, knowing that he knows she had gotten a good look at him earlier. “However if you must... then hurry, I’m hungry...” she says still smiling. “Who knows, this may just turn out to be a pretty good weekend after all,” she whispers quietly to herself.

Forgetting that the camera is still on, she leans over to unzip her garment bag and begins to change out of the t-shirt that she had put on before she went looking for the kitchen. She pulls off her shirt and removes her panties, all the while standing directly in front of the camera. Jon, who is still upstairs, starts watching her now, never saying a word. He never really saw her dance the night before, and can’t help himself as he drinks in her beauty, watching all the while as she undresses.

Now completely nude, she then leans over and pulls out a matching black silk thong and push-up bra, then tosses them onto the bed. She also grabs a pair of jeans and a black V-Neck stretch t-shirt that has the name of a local bar on the front, and throws them beside the underwear garments. Standing up straight, she now proceeds to get dressed, still in full view of the camera with Jon watching, frozen the whole time, unable to avert his gaze away from the monitor.

Jennifer, now fully dressed, throws her clothes from the previous night into a little plastic bag she keeps for dirty clothes. She then tosses everything back into her outfit bag.

At this point, Jon walks over to his closet and gets a clean t-shirt and puts it on. Walking back over, he then hits the button on the intercom to talk, and his voice startles Jennifer, causing her to jump slightly.

“Are you ready?” he asks, acting as if he doesn’t already know that she is dressed.

“Yes...” she replies. She then realizes that she too has been in front of the camera the whole time and wonders if Jon had seen her. “Hey,” she says, “This thing hasn’t been on the whole time has it?”

Jon, in a convincing voice replies, “I don’t believe so...But I would not know; I was getting dressed,” as he smiles in plain view.

She writes it off thinking that she really doesn’t care if it was, she was just curious as to whether he watched her or not, sort of hoping inside that maybe he had.

“I’ll meet you by the elevator,” he states, and the little red light above the camera goes off. Jennifer quickly makes up the bed and grabs her bag. After looking around to make sure she hasn’t forgotten anything, she walks out into the living room where Jon is sitting, waiting on her.

“Where do you want to go eat?” she asks.

Jon stands up, “I don’t know. Where would you suggest?”

“Well... I know of a little restaurant over on Royal Street that I’ve heard has a great breakfast. If you want, we can go there.”

“That sounds fine...” he replies, and then they both head towards the elevator.”How did you sleep?” he asks,

and then opens the elevator door. They both step in and he closes it behind them.

“Quite well thank you... that bed is really comfortable and I was definitely tired. How about you...?”

Jon presses the button on the panel as the elevator starts to descend towards the garage, “The same...” he replies politely, knowing that in truth his night was quite the opposite, “I do not require very much sleep anyway.” The elevator stops and they exit, then walk back over to Jon’s car.

As they arrive, Jennifer looks over to Jon and asks coyly, “Can I drive? I know how to use a stick and since I know where we’re going and all...”

Jon looks at her, and she smiles up at him with her most innocent look. “I suppose so.... Just be very careful, this thing is no toy. It can get away from you really quick.”

He reluctantly extends her the keys and she quickly grabs them, as if to not give Jon a chance to rethink his answer. She hands him her purse and bag then runs around to the other side to unlock the driver’s door. Once open she jumps into the seat immediately adjusting it to fit her stature while he gets in on the passenger side.

Once situated, he buckles his seatbelt, opens the glove box, and then presses the corresponding buttons to open the garage door and outside gate. The doors start to open, and Jennifer cranks the car, buckles her seatbelt, then sits back in the driver’s seat grinning, as the powerful engine begins to warm up.

Jon looks over at her and can’t help but smile at her

enthusiasm; as she anxiously awaits for all of the doors to completely open.

“Do you always get your way?” he asks.

Jennifer turns and smiles, then cutely shrugs her shoulders slightly, “But of course...I’m the Princess,” she replies, and then laughs as she presses down on the accelerator, causing the car to ease out of its parked position.

He closes the gates behind them and pulls out a pair of sunglasses, knowing that his eyes are sensitive to direct sunlight, and then closes the glove box and puts them on.

“Now where are we going again?” he asks, “Somewhere on Royal Street, right?”

Jennifer just turns and smiles her little smile again, “I’ve changed my mind. Let’s go to this place I know uptown and get an early lunch. We can sit outside and enjoy the day. That is, unless you have something else you need to do?” she asks hesitantly. “Of course, what else could you possibly need to do that is more important than hanging out with me today?”

Jon looks at her and laughs an unconscious reaction that he has not experienced for many years, “Do you always get your way?” he asks again.

“Of course... no one can refuse my charms, there’s no point in even trying. Everyone surrenders in the end,” she answers again in her completely convinced voice while smiling, “It’s like magic, besides I told you... I’m the Princess. At least that’s what my grandmother used to tell me all the time. I guess the attitude stuck.”

She then pauses the conversation, and pulls the car out of the garage onto Chartres, then turns the corner towards Decatur Street before heading towards Canal Street and continuing her story. Jon is listening in complete silence to her words.

“When she gave me this necklace, she told me that the women in my family were supposed to be very powerful magicians or something like that, but that every seventh generation, the first girl born to the line inherits all the combined sight and knowledge from the previous seven generations,” she explains while driving, as Jon listens on with an ever-growing interest.

“It used to scare my mother when she talked about this kind of stuff. So when she told me that I was the seventh generation girl, and not to tell my mother that she had given me the necklace, it always made me feel special, like a real magical princess in a fairy tale. As I got a little older, I never really believed in all the magic stuff, but like I said... I guess the princess idea part kind of stuck.”

Jon is now starting to see why he feels so drawn to her; it was because of her bloodline being of royalty in the way of the craft. He should have seen it before, but maybe because she herself is so completely unaware of her own potential that the obvious has remained hidden from his senses as well. She is not projecting the gift because she doesn't really believe in it or really know anything about it, except from stories told to her by the old woman.

Could she really be the one that the wise woman foretold to me, he thinks intensely to himself. *If so... how does she come into*

having all of this power and knowledge?

“Did you say something?” Jennifer asks.

“No, just listening attentively to you,” Jon replies quickly, pondering if she did actually pick up on his thoughts.

“Oh... I’m sorry I thought I heard you say something. I do that sometimes. It’s like I hear someone talking but it’s just in my head suppose... anyway my Grandmother used to say it was awakened in a person only after a great tragedy or something dire happened in her life where she would need to call upon it.”

She slows the car and stops as they approach the light at Canal Street before continuing. “I used to wish all the time that I had some kind of special power. Then I could use it on some of the assholes that have been in my life, especially my ex when he pisses me off over my son.”

The light changes to green and she slowly accelerates before she carries on, “But I figured that after the hell I went through over my divorce, if that didn’t do it... nothing would. I suppose I never really believed in it anyway. I just loved my grandmother and liked her stories. Besides, I got this really cool necklace to remember her by.”

They pull up to another red light at the end of the road, and then go under the Mississippi River Bridge before turning right again to head towards St. Charles Avenue.

“Is your grandmother still alive? She sounds interesting” Jon asks curiously, wondering if she might be able to enlighten him on all of this.

“No...” she replies, “She died a month after giving

me this necklace.”

Jon breathes out a slight sigh of disappointment. He was hoping the old woman would be around, and perhaps be able to enlighten him on all of this by possibly providing him with some information about the history of their bloodline.

Jennifer turns on to St. Charles Avenue and heads away from the city, “You know my son would really like this car... He loves convertibles,” she explains. “He has a game today. I usually go, but my ex is filling in for one of the coaches who have been out sick, and I just hate the way he gets when his father is coaching him. Anyway, that’s enough of that. I don’t want to think about my screwed up life anymore today.”

Jon looks at her and can see that she genuinely misses her son and tries to change the subject, “So where are you taking me anyway?”

“A little restaurant I know about down here close to the Loyola campus. They have some of the best hangover food in the city.”

They arrive at the restaurant and Jennifer parks the car on the street across from the building. They both get out and head toward the steps leading to the entrance. Jennifer turns and tosses Jon his keys.

“Now see... I didn’t kill you.”

Jon catches them and retorts, “I never had the slightest concern that you would...”

They walk in, and a young waitress leads them to the side deck.

As they walk outside, Jon requests a table situated more in the shade, “My skin is a little sensitive to direct sunlight,” he says. “It is a family genetic trait; that is why I am predominately a night person.”

Jennifer looks at him, “So... a creature of the night, huh? You aren’t going to burst into flames on me or anything like that are you?” she questions jokingly.

“No...” Jon says, “Nothing quite to that extreme. I just burn easily. Besides, the sun makes you age prematurely, and believe me when I say that I really do not need anything to make me feel any older than I already am...,” he continues, attempting to make light of his needs.

“Okay...” she replies.

They follow behind the waitress as she finds them a shaded table in the corner, “How is this?”

“This is fine...” Jon replies.

“Do you know what you would like to drink?” the waitress asks.

Jon looks at Jennifer and she replies first, “Bottled water, please...”

“And for you sir?” the young girl asks.

“The same for me also, please, thank you.”

“Okay then, I’ll be right back with your drinks and menus,” the waitress says, before turning to walk off.

They continue to carry on more light conversation and after a few minutes pass, the waitress returns with their water and menus, “I’ll give you a minute to look them over and I’ll be right back.”

Both nod in agreement and the waitress leaves.

“What do you recommend?” he asks Jennifer.

“What kind of foods do you like?” she queries.

“Usually just rare meats, so I would not even begin to guess at half of this stuff.”

“Well then, how would you like for me to pick you out something?”

“Sure...” he replies, “Just not too large of a portion, I do not usually eat this early in the day.”

She then orders for both of them, getting a traditional southern breakfast complete with eggs, harmony grits and bacon for herself, along with steak and eggs for Jon. They continue to talk as they finish eating, with Jon only consuming about half of his meal, leaving the rest on the plate. This causes Jennifer to look over at him, concerned.

“Is the food alright?” she asks. “You’ve barely eaten anything. I would have taken you for a bigger eater.”

He stares down at the plate and tries to play off the situation, “I used to eat more, but I have been trying to watch myself over the last few years. I rarely eat before dusk anyway; I told you that I am more of a night person.”

The waitress returns to their table, “Was everything okay?”

They both answer in tune, “Yes... everything was just fine.”

The waitress then picks up Jennifer’s plate, “Is there anything else I can take for you to give you some more room?”

He reaches over and hands her his plate as well.

“I believe we are all through here. Just bring us the check please.”

The waitress leaves with the dirty plates and returns with the bill. Jennifer reaches for it, but Jon obtains it first.

“I was planning to pay for that,” she says.

Jon pulls out two twenty-dollar bills and leaves them with the bill, “I know, but you need to hold on to your money for other more important things,” he replies. “Besides, you bought the drinks last night.”

They both stand and start to walk out. Once at the car, he looks over at her, “Oh yeah... you can drive this time,” she says jokingly.

“*Thank you...*” he replies, and then walks around the car to open her door.

Jennifer gets seated and reaches over to open the driver’s side, and Jon comes back around and gets in, “Where to now?” she asks.

He hesitates for a second and readjusts the seat back to where it will allow him to operate the pedals, “I’ve been thinking about what you said about your grandmother and the necklace she gave you. I am fairly skilled in research on antiquities. I was wondering if you might want to know more about it?”

He looks on at her as she holds up the necklace, “Sure... why not,” she replies with a slight pause, “We’re close to the campus library. We could run by there, they have a large collection of research material and they have free access to the Internet also.”

“Great...you can navigate,” he says cranking the car.

Chapter

Five

They spend hours at the library looking through books, as well as on the Internet for information on runes, religions, and the history of the lands where Jennifer's family originated. She eventually comes across a particular religious based one with an odd looking rune-like symbol on the front. Quickly thumbing through it, she looks at the illustrations and footnotes, sees that it does not contain anything of real interest, and decides to place it back on the shelf. Reaching for another book close to the one that was just put back, she pulls it from its spot and dislodges a few others beside it. They immediately fall to the floor, and Jennifer bends down to pick them back up, a little embarrassed by the noise that resulted from the clumsy act. Interrupted by the commotion, a few of the students studying look over in her direction with annoyed expressions.

"Sorry..." she mouths silently, and then places them back on the shelf. As she does so, she notices that one of the books had opened to a page with a diagram of three symbols that looked similar to hers. Now realizing that this

was the same book she was just previously looking through, she continues to read the caption at the bottom of the diagrams, and walks back over to Jon. She sits down, placing the book on the table about halfway between them.

She then points at the page, “Look at this...” she says in a low whispery voice, “These symbols, they sort of look like mine, yet different.”

Jon studies the picture, then looks back at Jennifer’s necklace, “I think that you may have found something here...” he replies, making sure to also speak in a similarly low tone.

She then starts to read the pages immediately following the picture. As she continues, she discovers that each diagram corresponds to a name.

“These are the names of Angels,” she mentions, while looking up at Jon and pointing at the page. “Apparently, these have something to do with Adam’s first wife,” she says, and then turns the page before continuing to read more.

“It says here, Adam had a wife before Eve. Her name was Lilith and that when God made Adam and Lilith; she was created as an equal to Adam. God gave her charge over all new born life, and she was supposed to be the mother of all mankind. However, Adam would not accept her as his equal, so she left the Garden of Eden after refusing to be subservient to him.”

“While away by the Red Sea, she took up with a demon named Samael, as well as other demon lovers, and gave birth to hundreds of demonic children. God then sent

three Angels: Sanvi, Sansanvi and Semangelaf, to bring her back, but she refused to return, so God eventually created Eve from one of Adams ribs to ensure that Eve would be more compliant to him. Then, God further punished Lilith for her disobedience by sending the Angels again to kill her children.”

“However, because God had already given her charge over all new born life, she in turn took revenge for this act by killing the descendants of Adam and Eve... usually newborn children and predominantly males. This would go on until she went to the Angels to make a deal with them. She promised not to harm any child that bore the seal or amulet with one of the Angels’ names, if the Angels promised not to kill any more of her children. Believing that Lilith could bring about the end of all newborn life for the rest of time, the Angels agreed.”

She pauses again to look at the diagrams on the preceding page, “This is odd... my necklace is a combination of all of these symbols... all three names forming into one symbol.”

Jon looks at the pages and then again at the necklace. It was as she had said; all three symbols melded into one.

“I am familiar with some of the stories behind Lilith. She has continued to be feared in various cultures across many lands for hundreds of years, even in my time,” he says.

“What do you mean, *even in your time*...? Jennifer inquires curiously.

Instantaneously conscious of the uncharacteristically

recklessness of his previous statement, Jon immediately tries to recover, “Oh, I meant that when I was a child growing up in Europe, my mother was of Christian faith, and she told us stories about the one who is called the Mother of Demons.”

He then immediately makes sure to change the subject back to the topic before Jennifer catches on, “...It is also believed by some that Lilith seduced Cain in his sleep, corrupting his mind to kill Able to get back at Adam and Eve, and then drank the blood of Abel after he was stabbed by Cain; before he would have been completely dead, and before his soul would have departed from his body.”

“You mean... like some sort of a vampire or something?” she asks, making a disgusted face.

“Exactly like that. It was this murderous revenge and the subsequent drinking of Abel’s blood that transformed her into an immortal demon, cursed... ultimately making her the very first or as some might refer to her, the Mother of all Vampires,” he retorts, then briefly pauses before continuing, According to legend, after Cain killed Abel, he was cursed by God and banished from his estate, branding Cain with a mark so that he would not be able to be killed. He was then exiled from Eden, and forced to be a restless wanderer of the earth. After he left Eden, he went to the land of Nod. There he encountered Lilith once again, where it was said that he was *awakened* by her....”

“You mean he was turned into a Vampire?” Jennifer asks.

“Yes, so the legend goes... Lilith increased his anger and resentment towards God, fully corrupting and seducing him while showing him the power of drinking human blood. Then, from their semi-incestuous union, came a host of demons, and the creation of the very first vampires, according to myths,” he concludes.

“So... you don’t really believe in all this stuff, *do you...*?” Jennifer asks as she reaches up to hold her necklace. “I mean you don’t think that this necklace could be part of some horrible family curse or something like that, do you?”

Jon pauses for a second and looks at Jennifer. He can see the concern in her eyes as she holds the necklace up again, inspecting it closer, “No... of course not...my apologies....I did not mean to upset you. I just find certain types of folklore interesting... and perhaps I got a bit too carried away with my delivery. There is no need to worry about all of that stuff... Things such as Demons and Vampires are nothing more than myth and legend. It perhaps makes for entertaining books and movies, but nothing more...” he says reassuringly, trying to play down the situation.

“Yeah... I guess you’re right,” she replies, a little more at ease now, “I mean everyone loves a good Vampire story right...”

“Absolutely... besides how sinister could it be, really? I mean... it was given to you by your grandmother, and besides it looks completely amazing on you,” Jon comments.

Jennifer now smiles slightly.

“Of course, absolutely... right...? I mean..., I am the Princess...” she replies, throwing her hair over her shoulder in a display of confidence as she laughs. “Let’s get out of here okay? I’ve had enough of all this creepy stuff for one day.”

“Sure...” he replies, “I will just put the book back for you. Where did you get it?”

“Over there... in the religion section,” Jennifer says, pointing in the general direction of where she had previously found it.

Jon picks up the book and walks back down the aisle. He first looks back at Jennifer, and then carefully surveys his immediate surroundings to retain his bearings and check for any other possible on lookers. Seeing no one, he jumps up, quickly and high enough to set the book on the top of the twelve foot tall bookshelf, and lays it sideways on the top board. Now it wouldn’t be seen by anyone, eliminating any chance of it being checked out before he can come back to retrieve it tonight. He lands softly back on the floor without anyone being the wiser, and then quickly grabs a book off the shelf. Now, when Jennifer turns to see him, it will look as if he is returning the first book back to its original location.

He then walks back over to her, “Are you ready?”

“Yes..., Wow, look at the time. Did you realize that we have been in here for six hours?”

She points at her watch He looks down at his also, “No... I did not.”

“Well I’ve had fun, but, I really need to get cleaned up for work tonight. Would you mind if we went back to your place so I could do it there?” she asks, looking up at him.

“Of course you can,” he replies, “Although, what are you going to do for clothes?”

“That’s not a problem,” she assures him, “There’s a great little alternative clothing store just around the corner from your place. I mean I do have a little extra money since this really nice man came in the club to see me last night... And besides, I’ve been looking for an excuse to go shopping there anyway,” she says smiling again. He looks at her, shakes his head, and smiles back at her.

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They arrive back at Jon’s loft after going shopping. The elevator doors open and they both get out, each carrying a bag. Jennifer takes the one from Jon’s hands, heads back towards the guestroom, and then tosses everything onto the bed.

“I’m going to get a bath now,” she says loudly enough for Jon to hear her.

He then walks back towards the bar, “Would you like a drink or something before you start?” he asks, his voice also elevated.

“Sure, a glass of wine... That would be nice...” she replies then walks back into the bathroom and heads towards the shelves where she sees a collection of bath-beads. Turning and walking back over to the large raised tub, she starts the water, holds her hand under the faucet,

and adjusts the knobs until the temperature is suitable. She then pulls off her shirt, and has her pants already unbuttoned and unzipped when Jon walks into the bedroom looking for her, holding her wine.

“Jennifer,” he calls out, as he looks over at the bathroom. The door is wide open, and Jennifer is standing there in plain sight, still removing her pants. They are halfway down when she looks over to see Jon standing motionless with a glass of wine in his hands.

“Oh...” she says, acting a little startled as she starts to pull her pants back up over her hips, “I forgot I left the door open, sorry...” she says mischievously, with her pants still open and only a bra covering her top, knowing all the while that she had done so intentionally.

He continues to stare at her, as she then walks over to take the wine from his hand, “Excuse me,” he says, still gawking a little, caught off guard by the sight, “I did not realize that you were undressing.”

Jennifer casually takes the glass from his hand and takes a sip, “That’s okay... No harm done,” she replies. “I mean I still have most of my clothes on... and anyway you saw more of me than this last night at the club I’m sure.” she says, still feeling a bit surprised at how at ease she is around Jon; as normally she would be much more modest around such a new acquaintance. “Speaking of which,” she mentions, while walking over to the bed to pull a clean pair of panties out of her garment bag, “Are you coming by tonight?”

“I was thinking about it, maybe later. That is... if you

are sure that you would not mind.”

“No... That would be great if you did. I really enjoyed you hanging out with me last night,” she remarks, before taking another sip of her wine.

“Very well then, I will definitely try to make it by later...” He pauses as he watches her walk around, trying not to make it too obvious that he feels an attraction for her. “I suppose I should leave and let you continue with your bath,” he concludes, and then heads out of the room, closing the door behind him.

Jennifer sips her wine again, and walks back into the bathroom. She places the glass on the edge of the tub, and then resumes removing her pants and the rest of her clothing; smiling, totally aware of her seductive charms and the attraction that Jon has for her.

*For once, she thinks to herself, this one seems to be a good guy, easy on the eyes, and he definitely isn't a bum with no money.*

He stands outside the door for a second and shakes his head as if to clear his mind from the thoughts of Jennifer's half-naked body. She was correct, he had seen more of her last night, but for some reason seeing her here... outside of the club setting, was so much more intimate than he would have anticipated, and was definitely resonating deeper in his consciousness. He then walks over to the stairway that leads to his room and climbs the steps.

Once at the top, he grabs the remote and opens his private vault. He decides that this is a perfect opportunity to quench his thirst with his supply of blood. The vault door swings open as he walks inside, and then quickly heads

towards the refrigerator. After removing a previously opened bottle, he pours the last of the contents into a large glass, and then walks over to a microwave to heat it up. Once it has been thinned, he removes it quickly, and consumes about half of the liquid in the glass, barely waiting between gulps. He lowers the glass from his mouth and wipes the excess from his lips.

Holding the glass up to the light, he thinks about what he used to be, about the library, and the book. How absurdly ironic it is, that *He*... of all people, was trying to tell Jennifer that there are no such things as Demons or Vampires... *He*, who for hundreds of years has fed off the life's blood of humans. He wonders how she would react if she ever knew the truth... that he is a Vampire, and by all accounts, a physical manifestation of a Demon. He also wonders about Jennifer's bloodline and how this all fits together. Turning up the glass, he then finishes the rest of the blood. Getting up to leave, he sets the glass in a sink by the small bar in his room and rinses it out so that there is no remaining excess at the bottom. Afterwards, he walks back over, picks up the remote, and presses the button to seal the room; keeping his secret safe behind the wall. He then turns and heads back downstairs to pour another glass of wine. But before doing so, he walks out on the balcony to once again watch the sun disappear and feel the night's gentle breeze against his skin.

As the darkness of night engulfs the city, he realizes he has spent more time in the sunlight in the last two days than he has in a long time; that he also has spent more time

with Jennifer than any woman he has known in an even longer time. She has most certainly aroused his interest on many levels, but, there is something more there than just his attraction; it is like a surreal connection... as if he recognizes her soul, almost like he has known her before in his past. He can't help but feel that she is somehow a key part of what is going on down here, and knows that he needs to remain close.

He continues to sip his wine, just as the light turns on in the guestroom. Jennifer walks in after her bath with her hair in a towel, and another wrapped around her torso up to her underarms. He turns to see her through the window as she reaches up to remove the towel that covers her hair, but the upward movement of her arms is so abrupt that it results in the towel wrapped around her torso to loosen and fall to the floor at the same time, exposing her beautiful body fully into his view. Once again, he finds himself entranced, staring intently at the alluring sight of her naked form. However, he quickly regains his composure and walks off the balcony before she knows he was there.

Just before exiting, he stops and turns to look down at the street, sensing another presence like he had last night at the Underground Dungeon. He stands for a minute to survey the situation. Seeing nothing, he resolves that it must be his mind playing with him and that he is just being overly guarded because of Jennifer. The conscious revelation of his feelings of attraction for her troubles him,

and he tries to ignore the thought. He then proceeds to walk off the balcony and go back inside to clean up.

Across the road, a shape peers out of the new darkness of the night. The figure watches from the rooftop of the two-story building across the street from Jon's loft, looking on as Jennifer dries herself off with her body glistening from the moisture of her bath. Jennifer wraps the towel back around her waist, and then walks back into the bathroom to finish drying her hair and putting on her makeup. With her departure from view, the form leaps to the building directly beside the one he was on, and disappears into the night.

Jennifer emerges about forty-five minutes later wearing a pair of jeans and a white taut fitting v-neck tee shirt with her outfit bag slung around her shoulder, "Alright... I guess I'm as ready as I'm going to be," she says perkily.

Jon stands up from the couch, his long dark hair falling over his shoulders, wearing black leather pants, boots and a snug fitting off-white Henley style short sleeve tee-style shirt that is unbuttoned except for the bottom one, that forms perfectly to his torso, "Very well, we should get going then..."

They walk over to the elevator and Jon opens the gate. Jennifer then inquires hopefully, "So... you are for sure coming by the club later tonight, right?"

"I have to go take care of a few things first, but yes. It is my full intension to stop by afterwards," he replies reassuringly.

“Good, I would like that,” she says obviously pleased.

The elevator stops and they both walk over to Jon’s car to get in. She presses the buttons to open the doors and he pulls the car out onto the street. They then start to head towards the Bourbon Cabaret. As they get closer to their destination, he turns onto Bourbon Street just before the city blocks it off for the night. Once they arrive, he pulls up in front of the club so that Jennifer can get just hop out. She opens her door, but before she gets out she leans over, and kisses Jon on the cheek.

“By the way... I really enjoyed today, thanks,” she says.

“Likewise... and you are very welcome.” he replies.

“So I guess I’ll see you later on tonight then...?”

“Without a doubt...” he replies assuredly.

She then kisses him again and gets out of the car. Jon pulls off and she walks up the steps. The girl at the front counter sees Jon and the car, and then looks at Jennifer.

“*Very nice...!*” the hostess says when Jennifer walks past.

“Oh... *yeah...*and then some...” she agrees, smiling as she walks into the club.

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Jon drives up Bourbon Street until he gets to a side road where he can turn back towards the interstate. Heading out of the French Quarter, he takes the on-ramp towards the Uptown area, exits onto St. Charles Avenue,

and then heads back towards the university library. He continues on until he reaches the campus, and then enters through the large archway and metal gates. He parks in the visitor's parking lot by the main entrance, and then walks across the campus to the library. A few minutes later, he is at the building. He walks up the huge steps and goes inside. There is an older lady working the desk now when Jon passes by.

"We'll be closing in few minutes, so you better hurry," she says indignantly, thinking Jon is one of the many of the twenty-something students who belong to the campus, and not wanting to have to stay late herself.

He looks at his watch and sees that it's five minutes until closing, "Thank you," he replies. "I will only be a minute."

He looks around to get his bearings, and then walks down the aisle, heading towards the religion section where he had hidden the book earlier. He walks up to the spot below where the book lay. Once again, he looks to see if anyone is nearby, and then jumps up and retrieves the book from the top of the shelf. Floating gently back down to the floor, he then heads back towards the exit.

As he is about to leave, the librarian at the desk stops him, "You will need to check that out, sir."

He looks down at the book, and then walks over to the desk.

"I'll need to see a student ID please," she requests. "Oh, I am not a student here, but a friend of mine is... and I am checking this out for her," he replies.

“I’m sorry young man, but no student ID... no book,” the woman says. She then reaches over, takes it from him hands, and places it back onto the counter next to her.

Jon looks around again carefully. He then stares directly into the old woman’s eyes, *“I look like an honest fellow. So you are going to let me check this book out and not worry about the ID this time.”*

Without saying a word, she reaches over, stamps the book checked out, and then slides it back to Jon, “You look like an honest young man. You can just show me your ID next time you come in. You have a nice weekend now,” she says with an empty but complacent stare, as Jon picks the book back up and heads out the door.

The old woman starts to close out her station for the night, never aware of what had just transpired. Jon then starts his walk back across the campus. As he approaches his car, he sees a group of fair-sized men standing around it. Once he gets closer, he starts to recognize a few of them as the boys he had dealt with at the bar the night before, along with a few extra bodies for reinforcement.

He continues to walk towards them knowing this is not going to end well. The group starts to spread as Jon approaches, already raising their voices.

“There he is... that’s the bastard who broke my hand,” says the one leading the group. “I knew I recognized this car.”

“Watch him,” another one says, “He’s wicked fast.”

Jon continues to walk towards the group, holding the

book in his hand and keeping in the shadows, “What seems to be the problem here, gentlemen...and do not mistake that I use the term *gentlemen* loosely.”

“This is the problem, asshole,” the leader says, holding up his arm with a cast on it up to his elbow.

“You freaking broke my hand last night and I couldn’t play in the game today.”

“Yeah... and we lost because of you,” says another, off to the side, tapping a baseball bat in his hands.

“So we figured we would work you and your car over as payment for costing us the game and hurting our team captain,” says the third, also holding a bat.

Jon looks around shaking his head, “I told you boys last night that you really did not want to do this. Though it appears that even for you college educated types, there is still no better substitute for higher learning than the road of hard knocks.”

“Screw you! You long haired faggot!” the boy with the cast says. “Bust up his car first. After that, we’ll work on him.” He finishes barking out his commands just as the boy closest to Jon’s car raises his bat and prepares to deliver the first strike.

Jon takes the thick book he has in his hand and throws it like a Frisbee, catching the boy in the temple, and dropping him like a stone to his knees. This immediately causes a free-for-all to ensue. Forgetting the car, the boys then move towards him to attack.

The closest boy swings his bat at Jon’s head. Jon catches it with his left hand and punches clear through its

center, splintering the bat like a toothpick. He then turns towards the attacker and hits him with the thick piece of the bat across his face, sending the boy off his feet backwards with blood spewing from his nose and mouth.

The leader swings at Jon with his cast-covered arm, which he immediately ducks, and it catches another boy to his right square in the jaw, knocking him out cold. There are still four boys left standing, and they all now decide to rush. Running out of patience and keenly awaiting to meet their aggression, Jon now takes the offensive and leaps straight at them with his eyes beginning to glow a deep crimson red.

“You Fools...” he says in a hellish voice, “I told you to walk away!”

He lands right in front of them. Moving with unbelievable speed, he leans forward and extends his arms to clotheslines two of them, one with each arm, nearly breaking each of their necks, and sending them flat on their backs. Their heads hit the ground hard enough to knock both of them unconscious. With only the leader and one other boy remaining, Jon grabs the boy with the cast by his throat and lifts him off the ground while looking over at his attacker’s last standing accomplice.

“Boy, if you want to live to see another day, you had better get the out of here right now, or I swear by all that is unholy, I will rip out your still beating heart right where you stand, and feast on it before your very eyes while you take in the last breaths of life.”

The boy sees Jon’s unholy vampiric features now

fully formed with his blood red eyes aglow, fangs bore, and his demonic looking face now in full view. The boy freezes in total fear as the bat slips from his hand. Too frightened to scream, he turns to run and trips over the bat. He scrambles on all fours until he can get to his feet again, and never looks back as he runs for his life. Jon now turns to the boy with the cast who is now so scared he has urinated himself, consequently soaking the front of his pants.

“I warned you boys, but I only warn once... I told you that you did not want to push me. Nevertheless, you just could not leave well enough alone.” Jon now holds the boy’s head between his hands with their faces only inches apart, “You think because you go out on a field and play a child’s game where you bang heads in plastic armor and padded helmets that you know what it is like to do battle. Not even close, you fool...!”

“You know nothing of seeing a comrade next to you cut down in battle while his blood soaks the ground beneath your very feet, or what it is like to open a man with your own sword and watch him struggle to contain his own bowels from spilling out; or what is it to stare into the eyes of almost certain death before a man tries to split your skull with a battle axe!” he exclaims, as he pauses to reflect on these very real events in his former mortal life.

“Your hand would have healed in time,” he expounds with an unsettling grimace. “But what I do now, will not...” The boy is too afraid to move as Jon beings to stare into his eyes projecting the brutal images of his past victims into the boy’s subconscious mind. “I could kill you

right here... I could pull your arms and legs from your body as simply as one would the wings off of an insect, though I will not inflict the physical pain that you rightly deserve. Instead, I will simply leave you with an impression of what it feels like to be one of a many victim completely helpless along with the knowledge of the atrocities that I could have perpetrated on you had I not chosen a long time ago to follow a different path.”

The boy’s face goes blank and his eyes begin to water as the images are burned deep into his cerebral cortex. Having received a multitude of images delivered in a manner far too unreserved for his simple human consciousness to fully comprehend, he now sees the flesh as it was peeled back from the bones of previous unfortunates, the terror as it was devoured before them, and their life’s blood all but completely drained; all the while still completely conscious and mentally aware of the brutality that is being unleashed upon them. With the boy’s muscles now twitching from strain, his eyes half way roll back, and drool drips down his collar as he nearly goes into shock.

Jon continues to infuse these horrific images into his mind until he decides that it has been enough, and leaves the boy with these final words, “You will now remember this every time you decide to be an arrogant, self-absorbed, little bastard and try to beat up on someone for no reason other than your need to reassure yourself that you are worthy of being called a man. *Happy Halloween...* You impudent little wretch...”

He then drops the boy, who is still shaking in horror as he hits the ground. Walking back over to his car, he picks up the book lying beside the boy it had hit earlier, who is still unconscious from the blow. He brushes it off, and then walks around to get in.

“The hell with this, I have no patience for the ignorance and arrogance of these overindulgent modern day false warriors,” he says to himself, cranking the car. Tossing the book behind the passenger seat, he then backs out quickly, and does not turn on his lights until he gets well out of sight of the parking lot.

Once back on St. Charles Avenue, he heads back towards the French Quarter. As he nears Lee Circle, so named for the statue of the General Lee standing tall in the center, he glances up at the statue. He had met the man once. Then, for some reason, his mind turns to Jennifer and how impressed he has been with her.

She continues to seep into his thoughts at the oddest of times and it troubles him that he could feel something for her; knowing that attachments for immortals can be costly on many levels. He had learned this lesson more than once, and had not repeated this foolishness in many, many years. Yet here he was, still unable to get her out of his head. He looks at his watch.

It is still early, he thinks to himself. He makes a decision to head back to the loft, deciding that it would be best to clean himself up from his trivial scuffle, before going to see Jennifer alter. And perhaps while there, maybe try to see if he can find out more about the symbols on the

necklace, as well any information on Lilith from the book he had procured at the library. He drives goes past the casino, crosses Canal Street, makes his way up Decatur, and heads towards his loft.

Chapter

Six

He arrives at his loft and quickly heads upstairs to his bedroom. Walking over to his desk, he turns on one of his state-of-the-art computers connected to a secure high data Internet connection, and sits down to start entering commands to access the Web. Thumbing through the book from the library, he finds the page where Jennifer had found the diagrams of the Angels' names, and performs a search for each with no returns.

Typing in the name of Lilith, multiple sites come up, and he continues to scroll through the information, looking for something, yet not quite sure of what. He goes back to the book, reading past where he and Jennifer had earlier, and comes across the name of a sorcerer from Egypt who lived in the time of Cleopatra. The book goes on to tell the story of how a powerful magician was the High Priest to Cleopatra's brother, Ptolemy XIII, and how the brother had instructed the priest to create a likeness of Cleopatra; a familiar, as it was called.

Ptolemy's plan was to kill his sister, have the familiar take her place, and not contest his rule; he would then have

control of the familiar with no one left to challenge him. When Ptolemy exiled Cleopatra and took the throne, he sent the magician with her. When Cleopatra tried to raise an army against him in Syria, the magician was ordered to kill her and replace her with an imposter. By then however, too much time had passed and the priest had grown bitter from being in exile. He had also fallen in love with her and chose to join with Cleopatra instead to take back the throne from the unsuspecting Ptolemy. They were successful in timing their coup with the arrival of Caesar in Alexandria.

The plan backfired against the sorcerer however, because even though Caesar proclaimed Cleopatra Queen of Egypt after killing Ptolemy in 47 BC, she took Caesar as her lover and left for Rome. When Caesar was assassinated in 44 BC, she returned to Egypt and forsook her previous affair with the High Priest, causing him to be enraged and jealous for the years that he lost, leading him to plot her demise. By then, she had become too smart and powerful, and in realizing her former lover's plan, she attempted to have him killed. Using his magic, he was able to evade his assassins and left Egypt.

The queen would have pursued him, but had become too busy trying to avoid being caught up in the chaos of Roman politics. When she hesitated to take sides in Rome's civil war following Caesar's death, Mark Antony summoned her to explain her conduct. Realizing her opportunity to regain power in Rome and Egypt, she aligned with Mark Anthony in opposition to Caesar's legal heir, Gaius Julius Caesar Octavius, who would later be known as Augustus

Caesar. She then cast a spell on Anthony, causing him to fall madly in love with her.

They lived together until Antony was forced to return to Rome and marry Octavia, sister of the Emperor Octavius. Later while Antony was on campaign to the east and still bewitched by her spell, he sent for Cleopatra. When she came to him in Antioch, they married. This went on until Augustus declared war against Egypt. Mark Antony and Cleopatra were defeated after losing the Battle of Actium to Octavian's forces In 31 BC. Mark Antony then committed suicide after hearing a false report of Cleopatra's death. Cleopatra, having realized her throne had been lost to Rome, and knowing that Augustus would humiliate her as a trophy, then decided to kill herself as well.

She chose her demise to be from the bite of an asp in accordance with old tradition, but at the moment before her death; Lilith, known as ISIS by the Egyptians, visited her. Lilith, who had always favored strong women, gave her the opportunity of eternal life in exchange for her soul. She accepted the pact and became one of Lilith's demon children, a Vampire created from the source of the undead. The book goes on to explain how she changed her name from Cleopatra to Nestasia taking the 'Ne' part from the Egyptian word meaning, '*To Curse or Damn*' and '*Stasia*'; from the Greek meaning '*Reborn*', all together indirectly translating to the meaning; '*the Damned Reborn*'.

Jon stops and thinks of how Nestasia must have left Egypt and traveled on the back of Rome as it expanded its power and reached across the known world; after centuries,

ending up on the furthest outer reaches of the Empire, the shores of Brittany, where she took his life and soul almost twelve hundred years ago. He never really knew all of her story, only that she was from Egypt and very old. He can feel that the pieces are starting to come together as he remembers where he has seen the symbols on Jennifer's necklace before; the same which were worn by the newborn children and expectant mothers of the clans in the adjoining villages that tended the lands around Nestasia's castle.

He continues to read on, and discovers a reference to a passage of an ancient text which was supposed to have been translated from an old black magic spell book known as a Grimoire, describing a spell for the invocation of a very powerful spirit who would plunge the world into darkness. The reign of terror would last a thousand years; essentially turning the earth into Dante's worst depiction of Hell, where upon the creatures of the damned would feed upon the newborn children of mortal man like animals bred for slaughter; and in turn one day, bring about the end of all life. The book also tells of an ancient coven of witches that holds guard over a talisman that will protect all newborn life when wielded by the chosen guardian, holding the key to drive back the demon head to the land of the damned.

He continues to read more about the ceremony and the preparation for the Invocation; that the only time it can take place is during the three days of the Season of the Dead. This starts at midnight on the Witches' New Year, and cumulates at the peak of the full moon on the Day of the Dead. A High Priestess would need to successfully take

in the spirit to complete the Invocation, where a sacrifice would be needed for the Priestess to feed upon the life force of an innocent male child to make the bonding of their souls permanent. The child would then remain at the side of the Demon mother as a twisted abomination; an eternally living reminder of mans' innocence stolen, mocking all of the heavenly hosts and their father in their defeat.

Jon now sits from the reading of this book of revelations. He knew of the ancient prophecies foretelling of the coming of Lilith, the Demon Mother of all Vampires, his mother in essence, and the prophecies telling of her reign of terror on man; but what he had not known for sure before now, was that somehow the key in stopping all of this was the talisman of the Angels.

Could Jennifer be the guardian, with her necklace being the talisman of which the book spoke? If so, she had been told that she would only realize her power with a great tragedy. What could possibly happen, and when... he begins to wonder. *The time of the Season of the Dead is only days away.* He closes the book, presses a button on the underside of his desk to open his vault, and then walks over to it and places the book in the casket alongside his two swords.

"She doesn't need to see this." he thinks out loud to himself, and presses the button again to close the huge door, then turns to walk out of the vault back to his desk. Looking over at the clock, he sees that hours have passed while he was doing his research, and decides to head back downstairs to the bar and pour himself a glass of wine. As

he sips from the glass, he walks over to open the window and decides to go out onto the balcony. Staring out at the city, he listens to the muffled noises of Bourbon Street; being only mere blocks away.

He thinks about Jennifer and the man from last night. He knows that the man is one of Nestasia's, as he could smell her unmistakable scent on the coat he retrieved. He was a pure blood, the same as Jon, but not anywhere near as old... his skills being too unseasoned. An older Vampire would have been able to detect Jon while they were in the bar. However, it was obvious that this minion was there by no accident, and how seemingly coincidental that everything keeps coming back to Jennifer.

Why...? Jon wonders. *Is there more to this than just her necklace?*

As he finishes his wine, he now looks down at his watch, which shows to be about 10:45, and walks back in off the balcony, closing the window behind him. Heading over to the bar, he deposits the glass in the sink behind it, then walks over to the elevator and presses the button to go down. As the elevator stops, he opens the gated door to exit and heads over to his car. He gets in, cranks up the engine, and thinks on about Jennifer from earlier today doing the very same thing.

He can feel his mind constantly drawn to thoughts of her more and more the longer he is around her and knows that he must be careful, admitting to himself that he can't seem to escape her sweet, innocently seductive look and her interminable charm, as she manages to arouse a passion in

him that he has not known in centuries. At the close of this thought, he opens the garage door and steers the Viper out onto the road, then heads back towards the parking lot where he had been the night before. He drives down Decatur until he sees the side street that he needs to turn on, and pulls into the valet station where Steve again runs out to greet him.

“Back again, sir?” he asks, slightly winded from his abrupt approach.

Yes...” Jon replies, and exits the driver’s seat. “Same deal as last night, Steve. Okay...?” he explains, and hands the young man half of a fifty.

“Yes sir. She’ll be right here waiting for you when you get back.” Steve confirms, and then takes the torn bill from Jon’s hand.

“Steve,” Jon says, stopping for a second.

“Yes sir,” he replies.

“You are in college right?”

“Yes sir... I’m planning on going to go to law school,” he reports enthusiastically.

“That is a fairly bloodthirsty profession, don’t you think?”

“Yeah... maybe a little, but you gotta go where the money is, you know...” Steve replies, as he looks around in thoughts of his own situation.

“I suppose,” Jon says in quiet disagreement. “How late are you here?”

“Til six a.m.”

Jon nods, and then walks out of the garage. He starts

off towards Bourbon Street, just as Steve begins to park his car in the same spot from the night before. There is still quite a crowd as Jon arrives, and attempts his way through the sea of people towards the gentlemen's club where Jennifer works. He walks up the steps, and the hostess recognizes him from earlier when he dropped Jennifer off. He stops and starts to pull out his money.

"You're the guy who dropped off Princess earlier, right?"

"Yes..." Jon replies.

"Go on in then... no charge for you."

He then deposits the twenty-dollar bill which he had initially intended to use to pay the door fee in a tip jar by the register.

"Thanks!" the hostess says, smiling and looking him over. He proceeds into the club, and the hostess follows his walk with her eyes all the way through the door. "Yes indeed... and then some!" she says aloud, fanning herself in a motion suggestive of being in heat.

He walks into the club where Jennifer happens to be on the front stage right by the door. The sight of her provocative moves in her little thong sends Jon's mind racing. He catches glimpses of her form, and it becomes very apparent to him that even he, who is typically not easily aroused, is susceptible to its effect.

Walking over to the stage to say hello, Jennifer immediately spots him and heads in his direction. He stops at the edge and stands with her now directly in front of him, her body moving with the heavy rock beat of the

music, as she proceeds to put her hands on his broad shoulders and arch her body, thrusting her breasts out, and slightly brushing them in his face. She then drops to her knees while still holding on, and is now at an even eye level. She leans in as if about to kiss him, teasingly stopping just short of his mouth, and instead, rubs her nose against his affectionately.

“Hey you, I’m glad you made it.”

He pulls out another twenty-dollar bill and offers it to her.

She pulls out her garter, “Thank you,” she mouths, then kisses him lightly on his lips. “Go get a table in the VIP area and

I’ll find you when I get off stage.”

“Okay...” he replies. With that, she springs up and continues to work the crowd with her dance. His thoughts still race as he watches her for another moment, struggling with a desire that is starting to conjure sexual positions of Jennifer in his mind. She turns to catch him still staring and smiles back at him. He regains his composure and goes to find a table, and then heads back towards the VIP area. The girl at the steps recognizes him from the night before and lets him through without hesitation.

“How are you tonight sir?” she asks politely.

“Very well... thank you,” he replies as he walks past, and then continues to head towards a table in the corner that appears to be vacant, close to where he had sat the previous evening. He sits down, right as an attractive waitress shows up and offers to take his order. He asks for

a drink and then hands her an American Express Black credit card to open a tab. She takes it and walks away.

The DJ starts talking and winding up the set for the dancers on stage as he announces the next group, pitching to the crowd for tips and applause for the girls leaving. The next set of dancers comes out, and Jon begins studying the crowd and his surroundings; a warrior trait that had never died no matter how many he had been both alive... and dead. Satisfied of the neutrality of his immediate surroundings for the time being, he then begins to watch the new girl on the main stage start her performance.

The girl's music bangs out a hard rock beat as fog comes up from the floor. The dancer emerges through the smoke wearing thigh high black leather boots with a three and a half inch heel, accompanied by a black silk cape draped over her body that she immediately drops to the floor. The satiny wrap glides off her body like water to reveal a very skimpy red slingshot style Vampirella Halloween costume underneath, that has only a small triangle with a gold bat symbol covering the lower half of the garment. Thin spaghetti string style strips of material are pulled high over her hips that converge into a thong style bikini bottom on the back side, which also loops through to connect to two more thin red strips of material about two inches wide, each running upwards across her torso and chest. These two modest, tightly stretched red pieces of fabric do very little to encase her conspicuously firm, surgically enhanced 34DD chest, while unsuccessfully managing to shroud the outline of her silver dollar sized

areolas that rest at their peak. The two red strips of material finally connect to a white o-ring that sits directly in the middle of her clavicle where her collar bones meet, with a three inch, white satin, triangular halter style collar that snaps behind her neck. She has fake blood dripping from her fangs and running down the front of her chest, causing the front crowd to react in wild approval, whistling and screaming as she swings around the pole.

Jon cannot help but look on as he senses an evil about her. She is not an immortal, but does seem to have the air of the undead about her. The dancer spins off the pole and then leans down as if to bite a well-dressed customer. The crowd beside her stage then starts to get into the dance, and a few men begin to throw money on the stage. Right then, Jennifer walks up. He turns and stands politely as she sits in a chair next to his, and then leans over to give him a hug.

“Nice crowd tonight,” he says, looking over the bar.

“Yeah... I’ve been doing pretty well tonight; but that new girl, the feature... *she’s killing it*... the stage has been raining money every time she dances,” she says pointing to the main stage.

“Oh... so she is not a regular here?” he asks in a passing sort of way so as not to draw attention to his concern.

“No, she just showed up for the first time the other night. She was gone by the time you got here though... Features are usually out early,” she replies, as she continues to watch the stage.

“She’s great though, isn’t she... with the whole vampire thing?”

He then turns to Jennifer, “She is okay, but not nearly as impressive as you.”

“Yeah right..., you’re full of it. I even think she’s smokin’ hot. And that costume... *holy crap*, it’s amazing on her. But nice suck up there anyway, you definitely get an ‘A’ for effort on that one,” she says smiling, then leans over and kisses him on the cheek.

The waitress then walks back up with Jon’s drink. He directs her attention to Jennifer and instructs her to get her something.

“Just a bottle of water at the moment, thank you...” Jennifer replies. With that, the waitress leaves through the maze of chairs, makes her rounds through the crowd, and heads back to the bar.

“People have been buying me drinks all night and I need to slow down some,” she says, her speech showing slight signs of the effect from the alcohol.

He picks up his drink and sips it, finding it hard not to stare. She is wearing a very short plaid schoolgirl skirt with a white blouse that has little skulls across it, completely open and revealing a sexy black bra, all the while sucking on a candy sucker.

With her inhibitions slightly lessened, she smiles to herself, as she catches Jon trying not to make it too obvious in his admiring of her little outfit. She continues to suck on the candy in an innocently seductive way, staring out at the stage, when the waitress returns with her water.

Oh... thank you,” she replies, and twists off the top.

She drinks the liquid quickly, purposely letting a little bit trickle down her neck to her chest, “So what do you think of my outfit?” she asks, semi-posing for his inspection, knowing how hard he had been trying not to stare. “If I showed up at your house, would you give me a trick or a treat?” She then puts the sucker back in her mouth, and pretends at innocence as she rolls it around on her tongue.

Jon picks up his drink and takes a slightly larger than usual sip, “I believe you have an unfair advantage here,” he replies, and takes yet another swallow.

She stands and puts her hands on her hips seductively, “Now just whatever do you mean sir...?”

She then bends over as if to pick up something from the floor, revealing her nicely rounded bottom and thin black thong. Still bent over, she cocks her head around the side seductively, and catches Jon staring at her ass as she laughs mischievously.

“Oh... I just cannot imagine,” he replies, as she falls back into his lap and throws her arms around his neck.

“Mike told me if I wanted I can leave early tonight since we have so many girls. That is, if you want me to?” she asks, looking into his eyes.

He looks back at her with his desire for her increasing, “Alright...I mean, yes... That would be great.”

She hops up from his lap, “Good... I have to do one more set before midnight; then I can take off. I’ll go tell Mike now that I am leaving early.”

She then leaves just as the waitress comes back over to Jon's table.

"Close me out please," he instructs. The waitress leaves quickly and returns with his receipt. He signs it, leaves a generous tip as he always does, and then returns the signed slip of paper back to the young girl.

"Thank you very much, sir," she says eagerly as she sees the amount. "Please come back again..."

"I am sure that I will," he replies, and then picks up the remainder of his drink.

He heads down to the main area over to the stage area where Jennifer is about to perform as the DJ announces her set.

She comes out on stage to the beat of another rock song, skipping onto the stage like a school girl. Grabbing the pole, she throws herself into a hard spin around it, wrapping one of her legs around and turning herself completely upside down, letting her skirt fly up to bring her scantily clad buttocks into full view.

A couple of guys in the front row whistle, and the DJ continues to make a few comments as she slowly spins herself to a stop before sliding back down the pole to the stage. Her upper back touches first, and she rolls over backwards into a split with her sucker still in her mouth. Turning seductively, she looks over the crowd to see if Jon is off to one of the sides.

She then pops back up, dancing and spinning so that the skirt flies out, giving another display of her thong. Working her way around, she twirls until she is directly in

front of Jon. The DJ is still talking, but Jon is focused on Jennifer when she stops spinning and turns her back towards him. Pulling up her skirt and slowly exposing her beautiful bottom, she then bends over and looks at him through her legs, smiling.

She stands back upright and turns around, now facing Jon, as she drops to her knees and slowly begins to remove her shirt, leaving only her black bra to cover her breasts. She tosses her shirt to the side, and then turns to look at Jon directly in his eyes while placing one finger in the corner of her mouth, smiling sweetly, teasing him with her make-believe innocence.

Leaning over and placing both hands on Jon's shoulders, she positions her chest in direct line with his eyes, and gently brushes his face with her bra. She repeats this movement a couple of times as she moves her body to the rhythm of the music, and then plops down in front of him. Spreading her legs, she hikes up her skirt to her waist, and slightly traces her index finger over the top very small shiny black material that covers what everyone at the stage right then is dying to get a glimpse of; even Jon.

She then slides forward and places a leg on either side of Jon. Entranced as much as everyone else is at the stage at that moment, Jon and everyone else are now wondering what is about to happen next. Jennifer then, in a caressing motion, unhooks the clasp holding her bra together and lets it open, partially exposing her breasts. Smiling and still sucking on the candy in her mouth.

She removes the sucker seductively, leans over, and

whispers in Jon's ear, "Now that I have your undivided attention, would you mind holding this for me? I'll be back to get it later," she says, as she slowly places the still wet sucker directly into his mouth.

"You are bad and you definitely have an unfair advantage here," he speaks reticently, slightly breaking his poise.

"Oh really, do you want to spank me?" she says teasingly. She then leans back into an arch, removes her bra, and places it around his neck.

He pulls out two twenties as she pulls her garter out to allow him to place the money under it, and snaps it back down with a popping sound. She smiles and thanks him, kissing him lightly on the cheek, and then rolls backwards away from him into another split.

Grabbing the pole, she pulls herself back up in a spinning motion, and removes her skirt as she continues to dance for the rest of the crowd. He continues to watch her, captivated by her beauty and the dance, so much so that he has not noticed the feature dancer watching both of them as well. She stands nonchalantly over by the bar, in the shadows out of direct line of the stage lights.

Recognizing him for what he is, she knows that he is not with the ones she serves. So she he watches, studying him and his reactions towards Jennifer. She can tell he is an older one, and although she is unfamiliar with him except for the stories told about him by the others. She is however completely aware of his power, *With him next to her it will be difficult to get the necklace*, she thinks to herself.

Jon continues to watch Jennifer dance until she finishes. Before she walks off stage, she walks back over to him and retrieves her bra. He stands up to meet her as she takes her hands to both sides of the bra and pulls his face close, leaning down to lift the garment from his neck, and then pulls the candy from his mouth before kissing him again on the cheek.

“Just give me a few minutes and I’ll meet you by the bar.”

Jon now turns and heads over to the front bar where the feature dancer is standing. Seeing that he is coming towards her, she tries to move away when another customer stops her and tries to buy her a drink. She refuses politely and attempts to leave again, this time avoiding anyone that might impair her departure.

He moves quicker now, trying to get closer to see what he might discover, knowing that he will be able to smell her master once he is close enough. Hastening his steps, he moves more aggressively through the crowd, where he passes and bumps her slightly, causing her to spin and face him.

“Excuse me...,” he says apologetically, “I am sorry. I did not mean to bump you.”

She nods, “That’s alright...” she replies, as she continues to try to walk through the crowd before he attempts to detain her with more conversation.

“I really enjoyed your performance earlier.”

“Thank you,” she says responding quickly, still making her way away from the bar and especially Jon.

The bartender calls out across the bar, “Hey... Angel, your cab is here.”

She turns back to face Jon, “I’m sorry... what is your name?” she asks.

“Jon Erik,” he replies, extending his hand towards her.

She returns the gesture and shakes his hand. “Well, I’m sorry Jon, but I really must be going, I have a cab waiting.”

In that brief encounter, Jon detects the scent of the man from last night on her and also retrieves a name from her thoughts; an ability that works best on those who consort with the undead as minions, a sometime necessity for certain Vampires who are unable to go out in the light of day. Minions’ minds are more open to control, and thus sometimes can be read by one as advanced in age and experience as Jon. He releases her hand, and she disappears quickly through the crowd out the door to meet her cab.

Just then, Jennifer pops up from the crowd and grabs his arm, “Hey you... ready to get out of here?” she asks.

He turns to see her wearing a skirt similar and not much longer than the one she had worn on stage earlier as his attention quickly diverts back to her. She steps up to him and kisses him this time on the lips.

“Certainly...” Jon says. He picks up her garment bag, and they walk out of the club.

Once they are in the lobby, he turns to her. “Any place particular...?”

Jennifer looks at Jon and she kisses him again, this

time with more passion, “Does that give you any ideas?” she says now with a lustful look in her eye. “I wore this dress thinking you would like it. You do like it, don’t you...?” she asks, and then spins around as she had done on stage, teasing him further with her seductive innocence.

“I think you know that I do,” he replies, as he drinks in her beauty.

“I knew it,” she says laughing, “You are just a rich dirty old man aren’t you?”

“Some days it seems... much older than you might think,” he agrees. “Besides, everybody needs to have a purpose in life..., do you not agree?” he says jokingly.

“You’re bad,” Jennifer says, kissing him again.

“Yes, and then some...” he retorts playfully.

“I like the sound of that,” she replies coyly, and they then walk out onto the street.

Arriving at the parking lot, Steve sees Jon walking up and immediately gets his car to pull it around. He opens the door for Jennifer to get in, and then Jon quickly follows suit. He gives Steve his other half of the torn bill as a tip, and drives off with Jennifer holding on to his arm. He drives through the French Quarter side streets and heads back to his loft.

As they arrive, where Jon quickly parks the car, and closes the gate and garage door behind them. She grabs her bag, jumps out of the car, and then races over to the lift, beating Jon, before closing the door behind her.

“I’ll see you upstairs,” she says coyly, blowing him a kiss through the grating, as the elevator disappears to the

top floor towards Jon's bedroom.

The elevator returns moments later, empty, and Jon gets in with his mind racing with thoughts of Jennifer. He feels his desire starting to mount, knowing that for him it is a very fine line between a Vampire's lust for physical passion and lust for blood. He also knows that he has not felt this way with any one mortal or Vampire in ages.

The elevator stops on the third floor and he gets out. Jennifer already has one of her favorite CDs playing in the stereo, and is sitting in one of the chairs that partially fills Jon's enormous room with her legs crossed seductively, causing her skirt to climb dangerously high up her thigh. This part of the room is set in a den-sort of atmosphere with a large Persian-style rug covering the hardwood floor in front of his entertainment center, and his custom-made bed which is about one and half times the size of a traditional king size, sitting off to the side with an unobstructed view of the entire room. Jon's office of sorts, is across the room with a fully stocked wet bar, sink, and small refrigerator, sitting against the wall opposite of his desk.

"I wondered what this floor would look like, especially when you said that this was all just your bedroom," she says, spinning the chair in a circle. "I mean, you really can't see much of the room from the video screen. This is huge." She brings the chair to a stop. "It seems to suit you though. Sort of a whole bigger than life kind of thing I guess..." she says as Jon walks over to the bar and picks up two wineglasses.

“Thank you, I think. Drink...?” he asks, lifting them up in gesture.

“Yes... please, some wine would be nice,” she replies, still looking around the room and staring at Jon from behind. Her eyes stare at his broad shoulders, move down past his wide v-shaped back to his toned waist, and then focus on his body below the belt line.

“You know, you really do have a nice ass,” she says with her head tilted slightly, as if to get a better perspective from an angle.

He finishes filling their glasses, and then turns to walk over to her, “Thank you, again,” he replies, as he hands her a glass. “Also I would just like to return the compliment by saying that I think yours is perfect.”

“Thank you, yourself,” she replies properly, and then takes up the glass, taking a sip of her wine.

He then walks over to an end table, picks up a lighter from underneath it, and lights a large glass candle that is sitting on top. He does this a few more times, lighting three more candles on another end table, and two more on the coffee table.

Taking a seat on the footstool directly in front of where Jennifer is sitting, he takes a sip of his own wine now. Jennifer has been watching him this whole time, and feels his eyes upon her body like hands caressing her skin. The sexual tension is mounting, and she takes a larger than usual sip, deliberately spilling a few drops on her shirt.

“Oh crap,” she says quickly, handing her glass to Jon. “Here, hold this please.”

She then jumps up, unbuttons her shirt, and takes it off. Jon looks on, still holding the two glasses, as Jennifer tosses it to the floor. He is now just below eye level with Jennifer's chest, close enough to count the stitching in the seams of her lacy black bra. He looks up at her, obviously pulled in by her seduction.

"I didn't want to get anything on you," she says, smiling devilishly.

She then slowly leans over and takes her wine from Jon's hand, and places her breasts directly in his face. This is all he can take. He takes both of their glasses and sets them on the floor, then places his other hand in the small of Jennifer's back, catching her body as she tries to sit back in the chair.

Now that his other hand is free of the wine glass, he slowly caresses his way up her beautifully sculpted legs, watching his hand as it slides along her satin-like skin, up under her skirt until it reaches the top of her upper thigh. At the same time, his other hand moves downward, following the curve of her perfectly tight ass, until he slides that hand under her skirt as well. Now both hands are on her hips.

Jennifer's breath starts to quicken, as he leans in and starts to kiss her stomach, working his way down the front of her skirt. He can smell the excitement in her scent as he undoes the little metal buckles on the front of the skirt, causing it to fall to the floor. This leaves her wearing nothing but her lacy black bra and a very small black silk g-string panty.

He moves to the floor from the chair, and eases Jennifer back into it as he starts to kiss her pubic area through the silk of the front of her panties; leaning her back, and spreading her legs. He then kisses her flat, taut stomach, and begins to move upward towards her breasts. Jennifer sets her glass down, and then unhooks and removes her bra, staring downward into Jon's eyes, as he starts to suck gently on her full round nipples.

He alternates his attentions back and forth, caressing one of Jennifer's firm breasts while kissing the other. He continues to kiss them as he slowly starts to move his mouth again southward across her stomach over her silk panties to the inner sides of her thighs. Placing his hands back on her hips, he slowly starts to pull her panties down, at first with his teeth, and then letting his hands assist the rest of the way.

By this time, Jennifer is starting to work her fingers through Jon's long hair, pulling at him and spreading her legs even more, allowing Jon to have full view of her closely trimmed beauty. Her panties are on the floor now, and Jennifer starts to moan with pleasure as Jon kisses her inner thighs, working his tongue inside of her.

He then slides one hand from her hip to her stomach, and maneuvers it back down next to his mouth, alternating pleasuring her with his fingers and his tongue. His other hand moves from her hips to behind her, cradling her bottom gently, as he pushes her forward to meet his mouth, playing with her from behind. He continues with this licking and probing her with his tongue and fingers

until she arches her back and body as she starts to shudder in a climax.

Once she gradually comes back to her senses, she sits up in the chair and pulls Jon's head and arms away from her. She removes his shirt quickly, running her hand over Jon's smooth muscled chest, and kisses him passionately. Jon picks her up and carries her over to his bed, setting her on the edge gently while still kissing her. With Jon standing in front of her, Jennifer unbuckles his belt and begins to unbutton his top button, now returning the favor and kissing Jon on the front of his pants. She quickly unzips him and pulls his pants down to his knees, freeing Jon from the constraint of his leather jeans. Now very aroused, she takes him in her mouth and brings his erection to its fullest.

She lays him back on the bed and pulls off his boots and pants, pausing in between to keep his passion up with the sweet caressing of her hands and mouth. Once his pants are off, she crawls on top of him and kisses him, starting from where she has him in her mouth, and then moving higher, kissing his stomach, before moving on further upward. Jon's hands are gently running through her hair, caressing it and brushing it away from her face.

As Jennifer climbs his midsection, his hands glide downwards over her delicate skin to the small of her back, and then lower to caress her bottom, massaging and probing her tenderly between the softness of her inner thighs. Moaning slightly, she continues upward slowly, moving her mouth and tongue around the nipples of Jon's well developed chest, sucking and lightly biting on each as

she moves onto his neck, kissing and licking it, running her tongue up over his chin until finally reaching his mouth.

They engage in a long passionate kiss, exploring each other's mouths with their tongues, while Jennifer sits straddling his mid-section and rubbing her moist mound up and down against his throbbing member. She doesn't quite let him inside of her; only teasing him as her lips massage him, sliding up and down with her pelvic grinding.

Then, when Jennifer can no longer control her desire to have him, she rises up slightly and eases down on Jon, pushing him deep inside of her. Leaning over to meet his lips again, they kiss wildly as they move to get into rhythm. Their passion runs high, and Jennifer climaxes a few more times until finally Jon is at his peak of tolerance and can no longer hold himself back. He then grabs Jennifer's hips and rolls her over on to her back.

She flows with his movement and Jon climbs on top; her legs now spread wide, with one leg over his shoulder and the other in his hand. He continues his thrust with an increasing intensity until Jennifer is peaking again. She then brings her legs down and wraps them around his waist as they both start to climax, locking her legs around Jon's midsection and squeezing as her orgasm intensifies.

His eyes begin to glow red and he falls forward, hiding his face while he thrusts deeper and longer until his passion reaches the point of no return. He continues his momentum until they are both drained of strength, lying motionless in the pool of their bodies' passions. While Jon's body convulses slightly as his orgasmic shudder slowly

subsides, he keeps his face hidden, buried in the pillow beside Jennifer's head until he knows there is no danger of revealing himself to her.

Once he is able to show his face again, he rises up his head and meets Jennifer's lips once again in a long affectionate kiss, caressing her beautiful face as he stares into her eyes. They lie there in silence for a moment until Jennifer finally breaks the quiet air.

"I knew you were a dirty old man," she says, laughing softly.

"Yes, and then some..." Jon replies, smiling back at her, and then rolls off from atop of her as she adjusts into him, placing her head over his arm and on his chest.

"Are you always like that in bed?" she asks.

"I would not know. It has been a very long time since I have been with anyone," he replies reflectively.

"Well..." she says, "We'll just have to keep that condition from happening again then, won't we?" She then playfully kisses his chest. "You use your mouth very well for an out of practice dirty old man," she says blissfully.

"You would be amazed at what I can do with my mouth," Jon replies, knowing that pain and pleasure sometimes run hand in hand for him.

"Hmm, I'll have to take you up on that challenge," she replies coyly. In the quiet moments of the after-glow of passion, Jennifer starts to nod off. Jon slides out from under her and she curls up on one of the huge pillows that are now scattered all over the bed. He then gets up and goes behind the bar to pour himself a mixture of blood and

wine, hoping that it will help to calm his other lust. He walks back over to the bed and lightly glides across the floor so as not to disturb Jennifer in her slumber.

Jumping up, he floats onto the back of a high-backed chair, and perfectly balances himself in a perched position, resembling a human gargoyle on the side of a building. Looking down on Jennifer and sipping the glass of blood-wine, he sits there watching her sleep, still breathing in the aroma of her body on his. He has known many women before, both mortal and immortal, but none have ever had this kind of effect on him. He continues to sip his wine, wondering where this will take both of them, admitting to himself that his fascination with her has grown far beyond what it ever should have been.

Chapter

Seven

Sunday arrives to find Jennifer calmly sleeping in Jon's bed, with him still roosted at the end on the footboard, perfectly balanced and motionless, watching over her like a figure from Heaven's twisted perversion of a Guardian Angel. Her breathing has a steady contented rhythm now as he moves nimbly, jumping down and landing like a feather without a sound. Walking over to his enormous bathroom, he turns on the water and steps inside the shower, where the noise of the water wakes Jennifer. She sits up in the bed smiling and stretching her arms, raising them high in the air while arching her back and yawning, and then looks around the room for signs of Jon. The splashing sound of the shower now registers his probable location, and she slides out of the sheets and heads towards the bathroom.

She pokes her head around the corner to see a shower similar to the one in the guestroom, but twice the size. With his back turned to her, she stops and watches the water run over his body, causing his skin to glisten from under the recessed lighting of the shower. She then creeps

over nimbly, trying as to not alert him of her presence; which unbeknown to her is almost impossible. Very aware of her presence but never turning, he lets her think she has caught him off guard. Reaching for the handle of the glass door for the shower, she opens it quickly and pokes her head inside.

“Hey, you...” she says, as Jon turns abruptly, almost as if taken by surprise, “Want some company?” she continues to ask with a devious look in her eye like a schoolgirl whose parents would be away for the weekend.

He smiles slightly at her sight, “Good morning,” he replies as she steps inside and walks over to him, and then gives him an affectionate hug and a light kiss on the lips.

“How did you sleep?” he asks.

“Like a rock... I feel great. I love your bed,” she says while stepping into one of the many streams of the six showerheads.

With her back turned, the water caresses her petite frame and Jon, still quite taken in by her beauty, is almost unaware of how hard he is staring. She turns and starts to soap her body, working it into a foamy lather, and catches Jon semi-aroused in an entranced state.

“How ‘bout you... Did you sleep well?” she asks, smiling to herself.

Still looking in her direction, he then catches on and replies quickly as to divert any attention to the affect that she is currently having on him.

“Very well, thank you...” he replies, and then steps under a stream of water in an attempt to cool the desire that

is starting to rise within him again. She smiles and continues to soap her body as he watches her out of the corner of his eyes. She turns again, her front now facing Jon, and finishes rinsing off. He turns his face slightly and shakes his head, now realizing that the attraction he feels for her is nearly more than he can contain.

He then faces her, "I'll see you when you get out," he says, and then kisses her on the top of her head and exits the shower. He then walks over to pick up a towel to dry himself off with while she continues washing.

She now talks to him through the glass, "Are you hungry? I'm starving..." she asks, while he finishes wrapping the towel around his waist.

"Sure... Do you have any place in particular in mind?" he replies.

Finishing her shower, she then turns off the water and exits the glass enclosure, "I don't know... You pick this time," she replies, and then walks over towards the shim and towel rack and picks out a larger one to dry herself off with.

"Where do you keep your hair dryer?" she asks, still drying off her back.

"I don't have one," he replies. "I just keep the one for guests in the bathroom downstairs."

"You mean you have this long beautiful hair and it's all natural, and you do nothing to it?" she asks in a slightly annoyed tone at the possibility.

"I have never really needed one, my hair dries quickly," he replies.

Wrapping her body in the oversized towel, she turns to Jon and makes a playfully childish miffed sort of face, “Well... I guess the rest of us *mere mortals* will have to go downstairs to finish,” she says jokingly, sticking her tongue out, and then walks out of the bathroom to head down to the guest one downstairs.

After she leaves, Jon reaches for a smaller towel to finish drying his own hair. He massages it briskly over his head a few times, and then like magic, his hair is dry and perfectly straight. He tosses both towels into an old style large chute in the back of the bathroom closet that causes them to drop into the basket located in the laundry room at the back corner of the garage. He then walks into the bedroom. As he heads over towards his own closet, he sees Jennifer’s clothes from the night before partially strewn around on the furniture. He walks over to gather them up, and stops for a second; with his heightened Vampire senses, he can still smell her scent on the articles in his hands.

He lays them in a pile on the bed, and then walks over and into his spacious closet. Turning on the light, he looks around and grabs a pair of black jeans and a plain white v-neck T-shirt, and then tosses them both onto the unmade bed. He then grabs a pair of black leather Biker style riding boots and some ordinary black socks. He dresses quickly, and then heads downstairs, gathering Jennifer’s things as he goes.

With Jennifer still in the bathroom drying her hair, he enters the guestroom and walks over to the bed and places her clothes down next to her outfit bag. As he does, he

notices that she has laid out her necklace on the table beside the bed. Walking over, he picks it up... and studies the engravings more closely. As he places it back on the table, the blow dryer in the bathroom cuts off and Jennifer enters the bedroom startled.

“Oh shit!” she says, almost dropping her towel.

“I was just bringing your things down,” he explains while pointing to the bed.

“Oh... yeah, thanks... I guess I forgot about those,” she replies, and now walks towards the bed to catch her breath.

“My apologies... I did not mean to scare you,” he assures.

“No... No, that’s okay. I just didn’t hear you come in with the hair dryer and all. It’s okay, really...” she replies.

Jon starts to walk towards the door, “I will leave so you can get dressed.”

“Okay...” she says, “I’ll be out in a minute.”

He exits the room, and closes the door behind him while Jennifer packs up her clothes from the previous night in a little bag. She then removes her towel and drops it on the floor. A few minutes go by, and she emerges garment bag in hand, wearing jeans and a thin purple sweater style crop top that exposes her midriff, unbuttoned and also slightly revealing her

cleavage and a red lace bra.

“All ready...” she says, and Jon stands up from the chair where he was sitting.

“Very well then...” he replies.

They both head over to the elevator. They enter, and Jon presses the button to descend. Once it reaches the basement, they walk over to the car, and he walks around to open the passenger side door for Jennifer to get in. She then leans over to open his door and he walks around the front of the car with her watching him the entire way.

“You know, you really do have a nice ass,” she says.

“Thank you?,” he replies, a little taken off balance at the comment.

“No... Really... I mean like seriously, at the club a couple of the girls made a comment after seeing you the other night, and they really liked it.”

Jon gets in the car, “Well... I guess tell them that I extend my appreciation from you to them as well then.”

She smiles; “You’re not used to compliments are you?” she asks playfully.

“Not from someone as esoterically beautiful as you...,” he replies reassuringly.

“Whoa... another really good suck up there... You’re getting really good at this,” she replies, laughing, and then kisses him on the cheek.

“Hey, you know me... I am just a rich dirty old man, remember,” he retorts, joking along with her.

“With a nice ass...” she remarks coyly, adding to Jon’s sentence. She then wraps her arm around his and leans over on his shoulder as he pulls the car out of the garage onto the street. “After we eat, do you mind taking me home?” she asks to be polite, already knowing that Jon will not have any problem doing so.

“Sure, no problem...” he replies.

“You know I get my baby back today. I can’t wait to see him. I sure hope that asshole ex of mine hasn’t got him in a pissy mood,” she says, sitting back upright again in the seat. “Do you mind if we stop and get a paper somewhere? He loves the comics and I thought maybe I’d take him to see a movie tonight.”

“Sure,” Jon says, as he turns onto Decatur.

“Mind if I play some music?” she asks.

“Boy, you sure do ask a lot of questions...” he replies, smiling at her, “The CDs are behind the seat.”

Jennifer playfully sticks out her tongue and then leans over, pulls out the case, and selects one. She inserts it into the player and turns up the volume of the stereo.

“Sorry... I guess I’m a little more anxious than usual about Chayse coming back today. I mean I always seem to have a confrontation with his father lately when he brings him back... But today I just have even more of a bad feeling about it. I don’t know why... I guess that guy at the bar the other night still has me a little weirded out, you know...”

“I understand... I did not mean to make you self-conscious or anything. I was just trying to give you a hard time since you were teasing me earlier,” Jon replies, “I am quite sure that you have nothing to worry about...” He remarks, currently trying to ease his own mind about the situation as much as he is Jennifer’s.

“Thanks for that... and for this weekend... I really needed something to keep my mind off all of that...”

“I am happy to be of service, your highness...” he replies teasingly, while at the same time reaching over to affectionately hold her hand and giving it a gentle squeeze.

“That’s right... and don’t you forget it...” she says smiling, as she returns his affection by leaning over and kissing him on the cheek.

They arrive at the restaurant and retrieve a paper out of a newspaper vending machine before going in. Once inside, they are seated by the waitress who then takes their order. Jennifer is thumbing through the paper when she comes across an article about a mugging at the college.

“Hey... listen to this,” she says in a slightly excited tone. “Remember the library we went to yesterday? Well, apparently some guys got attacked close to around there last night.”

Jon looks up from his water with some interest as Jennifer continues to read.

“It says here that some students from the college were badly beaten near the campus library somewhere between eight and nine last night. The victims, mostly members of the football team, were all beaten pretty severely, with the toll leaving one in a medically induced coma to help relieve swelling on the brain.”

“Two were admitted to emergency care, and two more with fractured jaws, both of which had to be wired shut... one of which needed prior surgery to remove teeth that had been shattered, and some with foreign objects believed to be wood from the end of a baseball bat that may have been used to cause the injury. It says that only

two were semi-conscious when campus security arrived...”

Jennifer continues to read, “One boy, who had a cast for a broken hand from what appeared to be from a completely unrelated injury from the night before, was the quarterback of the team. He was found totally untouched physically by all accounts, even though he was found initially unconscious. When the security tried to ask him what happened, he became hysterical.”

“He kept screaming about some monster and visions of people dying with flesh being ripped from their bodies and blood being sucked out. He had to be restrained and sedated. The other more conscious boy sustained some sort of head trauma that caused swelling in the temple region. Although they believe he will recover, he is presently still experiencing slurred speech and amnesia from the blow.”

“All of the victims are under police surveillance at New Orleans General Hospital. It is believed that at least one more student was involved, but cannot be located at this time. The New Orleans Police Department believes this may have been gang related and are still looking for the boy who is believed to have fled the scene.”

“The police and Crime Stoppers are asking for anyone who knows of his whereabouts or saw anything to please call in. There has been a reward posted by the school for any information related to the incident...” Jennifer puts the paper down.

“Sweet Mother Mary ... what a freakin’ mess,” she says. “Can you believe that we were just there only a few hours before this happened? What in the hell is going on

around here lately?” she expounds in amazement of the news. “Has the whole freaking world gone crazy or what?”

Jon puts down his water and reaches over, grasping Jennifer’s hand, “It will be alright... I am sure the police will find whoever did this,” he says with a note of genuine concern for Jennifer’s feelings.

However, as for himself, he feels no remorse in the knowledge that it was he who had beaten these boys within inches of their pitiful lives. As far as he was concerned, he had let most of them off easy.

That one stupid kid just had to push it to the limit... If I were not so preoccupied with the things at hand, I would have slaughtered and fed on all of them like the stupid brainless beasts they were. Fortunately for them however, mutilated corpses would draw far more attention than I need right now, he thinks on to himself silently, never alerting Jennifer to the truth of the scenario.

The waitress returns with their food and they both start to eat when Jennifer shows obvious signs of still being bothered by the news in the article.

“It seems that things just keep getting worse around here all the time. It’s like there’s an evil just waiting to descend on the whole of mankind,” she remarks, with uneasiness in her voice. “I guess when I read things like this; it makes me wonder what kind of world my son is going to grow up in...”

Jon looks on; sensing Jennifer’s feelings of helplessness, “You know, you never told me your son’s name,” he says, trying to lighten the mood of the

conversation and take Jennifer's mind off the previous night's events.

"No... I guess I never did. Its Chayse... his name is Chayse, spelled with a Y. I wanted his name to be unique," she says as she starts to smile. "And boy does it ever fit him. I think I cursed myself with that one..."

She carries on, laughing slightly, "I swear it seems I have to chase his little ass everywhere we go. When he was a baby, he was notorious for crawling off, and then when he started walking... Oh my God... The little shit damn near killed me trying to keep up with him. It seems I am forever chasing him..."

Jennifer continues to eat and go on about her son, now in a much better state of mind, and completely forgets about the newspaper article.

"I mean... it's like he can be such a little shit sometimes, but then he'll go and do something so cute. Like the other week, I had to get onto him about staying outside after dark." She smiles even bigger as she leads into her story, "Then a few days later he was out playing with some of his little friends, and around dusk he comes flying in the house apologizing because the sun had just started to go down and he thought I meant for him to be home right then."

She now sits up straight, beaming with pride, "He comes running in, breathing all hard and saying, I'm sorry, Mommy, I tried to hurry home before it got dark... When I looked outside, there was still a good fifteen to twenty minutes of light left, and I told him he could go back out

and play some more but to be back when it was really dark. The whole time I just kept thinking, he does love me! He does listen to me! I really am a Mommy and he does pay attention to me,” she says almost glowing, and then sighs slightly.

“I swear I love that kid so much sometimes I think my heart will burst. He’s my whole world... I wish he would never grow up,” she finishes, then sits there for a moment, obviously reflecting on her story as she looks at her watch, “Speaking of which, the little devil will be home in a few hours.”

Jon looks at his watch as well, “Okay... let me pay for the check and I will get you home.” He reaches over for the ticket, reviews the total, and leaves ample cash for the meal and a gratuity for the waitress. “By the way, you never told me where you live either...”

She starts to laugh, “I guess that would help, huh...? I live across the lake. I’ll show you... We just need to get onto the highway. Once you get across the I-10 Bridge, it’s pretty easy to get to.”

They both stand up and Jennifer looks over at Jon, “Well if it’s any consolation, I did tell you my real name right off, and believe me; that is typically much more than I usually do with anyone. Of course, staying all weekend at your house is something that I have not done with anyone since before I was married, which again I enjoyed and appreciated immensely...” she says.

She leans in and gives Jon an affectionate kiss. He stands there for a moment, looking into her eyes, and then

raises his hand and gently brushes through her hair down the side of her face.

“Well if it is any consolation to you, I have not ever let anyone stay the weekend with me, and I cannot remember the last time that I enjoyed anyone’s company nearly this much, in what seems like... centuries,” he replies. Unknowingly to Jennifer, for Jon this is no exaggeration in regards to enjoyment, as it truly had been centuries.

They leave the restaurant with the waitress thanking him and make their way down to the street where Jennifer has previously parked the car. He then walks around the car and opens the door for her.

“Your carriage awaits my Princess...” he says jokingly, as he feigns a bow and waves his arm like a servant.

“Thank you, kind sir...” she retorts with a fake upper-crust style accent.

He then goes back around, gets in the car, and starts up the powerful engine. She leans over and wraps her arm around his as they head off down the road. They near the highway, and Jennifer instructs Jon to head towards the lake.

She turns up the stereo in the car loud enough to counter the wind rushing by their heads as they head back through the city out towards Lake Pontchartrain. Once they traverse the eight mile long pylon bridge that travels the eastern side of the lake’s length, she gives him further directions on how to reach her home. They arrive in front

of her house a short while later.

Jon pulls up in front of a modestly sized home with Jennifer's SUV in the driveway where Rick and Marcus had left it per her instructions. She gets out, grabs her bag and digs through it, looking for her keyless remote for the vehicle. In the process, she pulls out a few pieces of clothing and unknowingly drops her necklace from the bag onto the floor of Jon's car.

"Here it is," she says, as she holds up the device like a prize she has just won, and lays it on the seat beside her. After stuffing the clothes back into her bag, she picks the remote up and lifts it from the seat, and then she and Jon both walk over to her truck.

"I sure hope Rick left my car key under the floor mat like I asked. I lost my spare set the other weekend and I still haven't found them." She clicks the button, and the vehicle chirps as the doors unlock. Jennifer opens the driver's door to find the key exactly where it should be.

"Great," she says, picking it up. "Want to come in for a minute? Chayse won't be home for at least another forty-five minutes or so." She closes the vehicle's door, and then locks it again with her remote.

"Sure," he replies, and then they walk over towards the house.

"Excuse the mess... but I stayed at a friend's house all weekend and didn't get a chance to clean up," she says facetiously as they walk inside. "I'm just going to start a load of clothes real quick." She then heads off to the back of the house towards her room to drop off her laundry,

when she yells from the end of the hallway. “Have a seat and make yourself at home. I’ll only be a minute.”

Jon looks around the room and sees pictures of Chayse everywhere. He is a cute little boy, small-framed like his mother, with dirty blonde hair. He picks up one picture in particular that catches his eye. It is of both Jennifer and Chayse together at what appears to be some kind of school outing. She is holding him with both of her arms wrapped around him, smiling with her head tilted, slightly leaning over and just barely touching his.

Chayse is wearing his school uniform and sitting in her lap with his eyes squinted from the sunlight that is glistening in his blonde hair. Jon can see the love Jennifer has for the child, and for a moment, feels a little emptiness knowing that he has never known such a feeling for anyone.

She returns and sees Jon standing there holding the picture in his hands, “Oh my God, don’t look at that one... I didn’t even have any makeup on that day,” she says, quickly crossing the room like she wants to take it away. He turns slightly as if to block her attempts and continues to stare at the picture.

“I like it...” he says earnestly, “I think you look beautiful here.” He then places it back in its previous resting-place above the mantel.

“I tried to talk the nuns out of making me take that picture. I was running late that morning, and I just threw on some clothes, but they wouldn’t hear of it.”

She pauses for a second, “So there I am in all my radiant glory...” she says gesturing towards the photograph.

“Where did he get all the blonde hair; his father?” he asks.

“No, from me... I am really a natural blonde. I just got tired of everyone thinking I was stupid, so I dyed it and just never went back. I like the red better anyway.”

“Well you have a good looking boy...” he replies.

Jennifer looks up at the picture and touches the glass above Chayse’s image, “Yep, I sure do make pretty babies, don’t I?” she says matter-of-factly.

Jon turns towards her, “Well I suppose I should be going. I imagine that it would not be a good thing for me to be here when your husband brings him home,” he says, as he leans down to kiss her.

“Ex-husband with the emphasis on the ‘X’ part, and the only *dependable* thing about my Ex is that he’s never on time,” she retorts as she leans in to meet his lips.

They kiss for a moment, and then Jon turns to head towards the door. Jennifer follows, and walks with him all the way to his car. He turns to her, and she hugs and kisses him one more time soulfully.

“When can I see you again?” he asks.

“I work again on Tuesday at the restaurant. If you want to you can come by and see me there,” she replies anxiously. “But you don’t have to wait; if you like, you can call me before then.”

He looks at her, “I would like to, but you never gave me your phone number either...” he says.

They both start to laugh, “Well...I guess I’d better fix that right now then, hadn’t I?” she retorts, smiling.

Jon walks around the car and opens the glove box, retrieving his cell phone from inside, and then walks back over to her.

He enters the code to unlock it, "Okay, what is it?"

Jennifer recites a number to him and he programs it into his phone.

"Now that number is to my cell phone and it's always on me, but it does have voice mail if for some reason I don't get to answer it. So just leave me a message and I will call you back."

They kiss again, and Jon gets into his car to leave. She closes his door for him and leans over one last time to kiss him and say goodbye.

"Call me or come see me on 'Tuesday,'" she says, looking down at her watch, as she notices the lateness of the time and the sun now starting to set in the sky.

Jon cranks the car, "I will do both..." he replies.

As he starts to drive off, another vehicle pulls up and a little boy gets out, who then runs over towards Jennifer with his arms outstretched.

"Mommy, Mommy, look what I got!" the boy yells out to her, as she bends down to meet him with her own arms out wide which he leaps up into. "Look what Daddy got me. Isn't it cool? It's a new game." The boy proceeds to show her his new toy.

On the other side of the vehicle, a man is gathering up a small suitcase and a pillow from behind the seat of his pickup truck. He walks around the front of the vehicle towards them.

“Who’s that in the fancy sports car leaving?” he asks in an obnoxious voice. Jennifer’s face changes expressions quickly as her attention is refocused to the man standing before her.

“A friend... as if it’s any of your business,” she retorts, with an obvious annoyance in her tone at the question presented.

“Chayse, take your toy and go in the house. Mommy will be right there,” she instructs, and kisses him on the forehead, as the little boy goes running towards the house, oblivious to the hostile mood that exists between the two adults.

“Can I have his bag and pillow?” she asks, reaching for them.

“No...” the man says, as he withdraws the objects from her grasp and backs away from her slightly. “I asked you a question before and I expect an answer. Who the hell was that?” he exclaims, now with a raised voice.

“Come on Danny... Do we really have to do this now?” Jennifer asks, holding out her hand and trying to remain calm.

The man reluctantly hands her the pillow and places the child’s overnight case on the ground while continuing to interrogate her.

“I think I have a right to know who is hanging around my son,” he states sternly. With that comment, Jennifer starts to lose her temper.

“Look... you ass! You gave up any rights to ask me anything when you cheated. So don’t even start to lecture

me on anything about your rights, you understand?!”

“Are you sleeping with him?” he asks in an even angrier tone.

Jennifer snatches up Chayse’s bag and starts towards the front door of the house. He reaches out to grab her arm and she looks down at his hand.

“Danny, first thing... you’d better get your freaking hands off me before I call the cops. Second, it’s none of your damn business, and third, this discussion is over.”

He loosens his grip and Jennifer jerks free, “Now, if you

want to tell your son goodbye, you better straighten your ass up and drop this stupid nonsense before you really piss me off,” she threatens, as they both walk towards the house. Jennifer then places the bag on the step and opens the door to yell inside,

“Chayse honey, your Dad’s leaving, come tell him bye.”

Chayse emerges from his room and runs to the front door. She picks up his bag once again, and sets both it and the pillow on the floor by the door while Danny bends down to meet the boy’s stride.

“See ya buddy...” he tells the little boy, hugging him. He then releases as he stands back up, and then proceeds to grab hold of Jennifer’s hand.

“Look Jen....” Danny starts to talk, but Jennifer cuts him off in mid-sentence.

“Danny, I think you’ve said enough for one evening, now goodbye.”

“Alright... but this discussion is not over yet,” he retorts with an elevated tone, unsuccessfully trying to assert authority over her.

“Danny... don’t make me go off on you in front of him. Now go. He’ll see you in two weeks.”

With that said, he reluctantly leaves. Jennifer looks down at her son watching his father leave. She really hates to put him through this kind of thing and knows he is starting to notice the subtleties of his parent’s discourse.

“Mommy, can I go out and play some?” he asks, looking up at her.

She looks down at him, “Now you know it is too late for you to be out playing.”

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At that moment, Jon is just short of reaching the other side of the bridge when he accidentally looks down at the light reflecting off a shiny object in the passenger seat. He reaches over to discover that it is Jennifer’s necklace, which must have fallen out of her bag when she was looking for her keyless remote.

He leans across and retrieves his cell phone, and then locates Jennifer’s number before pressing the button to dial. Her phone rings and rings before her voice mailbox answers, and her voicemail greeting starts to talk, “Hey, it’s me... I can’t answer the phone right now... so leave a message. And if you’re *lucky*, maybe I’ll call you back...”

He ends the call.

“I have never been known for being very lucky,” he says out loud, and exits the first place he can past the bridge.

It is dark now, and an unsettling feeling of urgency comes over him. He guns the accelerator, hastening his pace, and decides to turn the car around and head back across the eight mile long I-10 bridge that traverses the lake. He arrives in front of Jennifer’s place, with a pickup truck sitting in almost the same spot his car had been just a short time before, and parks the car quickly, looking around as he gets out. Walking around the truck, he sees the passenger door open and a mutilated body lying just inside.

The glove box is open, and a pistol is clenched in the fist of the dead man. Jon knows immediately that this was Jennifer’s ex-husband, and moves across the front lawn in a blur of speed no human eye would detect. At the front door, he sees the living room in shambles, with Jennifer on the floor lying in a massive pool of her own blood. Jon bends down to check on her. She is still alive and trying to scream, fighting to stay conscious and protect her son.

“Jennifer!” Jon says, as he looks around, quickly searching for signs of her son or his body. Finding neither, He decides that Chayse is obviously not in the house.

He hears her voice, just barely audible, and leans down over to her, “Chayse...! They took my baby. Oh God... Chayse!” she expounds in desperation, completely unaware of who it is over her, only that it is not one of her attackers. “Help my baby. Don’t let them hurt my son. Please... Oh dear God, please don’t let them hurt my

son..." She then lets a final distraught cry with all that she can muster, "Chaayyssee!!"

He lifts her head, "Jennifer, it is Jon. I can help you but I need you to tell me that you want to live. That you are willing to do *anything*... Make *any sacrifice* to get your son back. I need to hear you say the words before I can help you."

Jennifer then looks back in Jon's eyes and recognizes her savior, "Jon, oh God, they got my baby. *Please*... I'll do anything. Please help me... please help me get him back."

He now has her head in his lap, and looks directly into her eyes so that she will understand, "Jennifer, I can save you, but you will need to do exactly what I tell you, alright? Alright?! Jennifer?! Can you hear me?!"

Jennifer nods as he extends his arm with a finger that has now grown a significantly extended nail. He draws it across his wrist like a blade a few inches. It slices through his flesh opening it up immediately, causing his blood to flow quickly and freely from the opening. He then holds the wound directly over Jennifer's mouth letting the drops of blood flow from his arm into her mouth.

"Jennifer, if you want to ever see your son again, you must drink this; it will stop the bleeding and keep you alive until I can get you back to my home."

Jennifer's eyes start to roll back into her head and Jon slaps her face to keep her conscious.

"*DAMMIT JENNIFER!*" he screams at her. "*WAKE UP...YOU HAVE TO LISTEN TO ME... DO AS I TELL YOU OR YOU WILL DIE AND SO WILL YOUR SON...*"

NOW DRINK...!”

Jennifer struggles to open her eyes. Her vision is blurred, but she can still see well enough to recognize Jon’s face. She fights to maintain consciousness as she opens her mouth, and presses his bleeding arm against her lips, letting his life force drip into her. Having so much of her own blood in her mouth, she chokes slightly as she attempts to swallow the dark red fluid, completely unaware of what she is ingesting. She only knows that Jon says this will keep her alive, and as she consumes, the bleeding from the tear in her neck stops, and the wound slowly starts to heal.

She continues to drink until she at last passes out from the trauma of her wounds, just as the transformation starts to take place. He leans down, kisses her forehead, and strokes her blood soaked hair as he starts to feel an emotion foreign to him even when he was mortal; a genuine pain and regret, partly from the sight of her torn body, but even more from the knowledge of what he had just begun.

“Oh my dear Jennifer, I am truly sorry. Please forgive me for what I have done, but I did not see that there was any other choice.”

He then lifts his head up. With blood red tears in his eyes, he looks to the sky as if searching for redemption from any Deity that might grant it, knowing that there is not one who would absolve him. He then lets out a deep blood-curdling howl so powerful; its percussion starts to shatter all the glass in the room; the windows, the mirror above the mantle, and every piece of glass on every picture frame. When it subsides, the room looks like there was an

explosion from inside. One of the pictures that broke falls directly besides Jon just missing Jennifer's head, which is still on his lap.

He looks down; it is the one that caught his eye earlier with Jennifer and Chayse at the school function. He picks it up and stuffs it under his arm as he scoops up the still unconscious Jennifer. Cradling her like a baby, he covers the length of the front yard quickly. As he reaches the car, he places her in the passenger seat, secures her with the safety belts, and then places the picture in her lap under her hands. Leaping up, he floats over her head and into the front of the car, seats himself, and then quickly cranks the engine.

He takes a last quick glance around to be sure no else is watching. Fortunately, the houses are a fair distance apart in the rural area and there are no witnesses to see the car and their getaway; or so Jon thinks. Having been so preoccupied with Jennifer's condition earlier, he did not notice the man who had been hiding in the back of the house who has now worked his way around to the side in the shadows. Nailing the accelerator, Jon wheels the car around in the street and heads out back towards the highway. Once he reaches the bridge, he slows the car back to an acceptable speed so as not draw any unwanted attention.

Jennifer fades in and out still mumbling, "Chayse! Run Chayse! Oh God... baby run...." She then passes out completely, clutching the picture frame tightly. He runs his hand through her hair as it blows in the breeze and touches

*Season of the Dead*

her face, gently, with the tips of his fingers. He then turns his attention back to the road as the car races across the bridge back to his loft.



# Chapter

## Eight

A man wearing an unassuming style suit walks into the large parlor style room and bows low, kneeling on one knee. There is a beautiful woman with long black hair at the far end of the room petting one of two large Rottweiler dogs, as she stops and turns to see the man's face no longer pleased by his expression.

"My lady... I regretfully have bad news," he says, still on his knees.

"What, tell me quickly!" she commands, gesturing for him to rise.

"The girl and her necklace..." The man hesitates.

"Yes... go on. What of them? Is she dead? Do you have it?" the woman asks with anticipation in her voice.

"No... Highness," the man answers.

"No to which, you stupid fool...? Am I to be forced to read your mind for your answer detective?"

"No Highness...."

"Then cease with this mystery and tell me... to which question it is that you answer?!" she bellows at him.

"Both Highness," the man replies.

He can see that her irritation is growing and begins to carefully weigh his next set of responses.

“What do you mean both...?” she says, roaring her voice loudly. “Are telling me that... *not only* did you completely fail to retrieve the talisman of the Angels, but that you also failed to eliminate the girl as well...?”

“Yes Highness, that is correct on both accounts, but we did not walk away empty handed,” he replies, as he tries to compensate with more information, hoping this will divert her anger from him and maybe cause it to lessen slightly.

“What is it pray tell... my bumbling detective, have you to compensate for the incompetent mishandling of this simple singular responsibility?” she says, her mood still unfazed.

“The child... Highness, the girl’s son... We were able to retrieve him,” the man replies, hoping the news will have a positive effect on this dark situation.

“Hum... that does shed a slightly different light on things,” she responds as her tone lessens slightly. “Still, this does not explain why you have failed in every other aspect of your task.”

“She did not have the necklace on her nor was it in any of her bags. Angel assured me it was with her the other night and I assumed she would still have it but it was not to be found,” the man continues humbly.

“Well... that explains the necklace. If I need to I will deal with Angel for such a mistake.”

“Yes... Highness...”

“So tell me then... Why is it, that the girl is not dead?” she asks in a disgruntled tone.

“I had left her for dead but...well...” the man stammers with his words as she cuts him off.

“What...? Say it, or I swear Detective I will undo what I did that night in the hospital by killing you right here and now.”

“Well after everyone else had gone, I stayed behind to look through the house a second time for the necklace. But before I could go back in, a stranger showed up and saved her.”

“What stranger... Do not tell me that Angel left out this stranger also?”

“No... Highness... She did mention him but she was not aware of his identity at that time. Only that he was an immortal,” the man professes.

“So then who is he, or am I to continue this guessing game until I have no more patience left for you at all?”

“I am not sure... but I believe it was the Northman... Highness,” the man says, searching her face for some hope of understanding.

The woman pauses as she ponders his words extensively, knowing this new information could upset things drastically, fully aware of Jon’s strengths and powers, being the one responsible for making him into what he is. The woman stands from her chair and walks over to the man.

“Are you certain, or are you grasping for straws to save your own hide from this mess you have made?”

“I can’t say with absolutely certainty, Highness... but when I bumped into him the other night with the girl, I could feel his power. I could tell immediately that he was one of royal blood. So if it is not him, then who else..?”

“If it was Jon Erik, then you were wise to stay hidden. You would not have stood a chance in a direct confrontation. He was... *is*... one of the strongest warriors I’ve ever known. A more deadly adversary one could not hope meet within a hundred lifetimes; and yes, he is most definitely of royal blood... *Mine*.”

“He was to lead my armies, and now... regrettably I fear that I may have to finally destroy my most prized creation. After all of these years..., I had still hoped that he might...” she pauses with a sigh, “Never mind... I suppose what is done is done. Bring me the child,” she commands.

The Detective exits quickly, returning a few moments later with a small male child carrying an electronic game dressed in blue jeans and a t-shirt. The man leads him into the big room, and the little boy brushes the bangs of his slightly long straight blonde hair out of his eyes as he walks forward. The child is a little scared by the size of the animals and his unfamiliar surroundings, but manages to maintain his manners as he was taught. The woman looks at the child, and then back to the man.

“Does the child remember anything?” she asks.

“No... Highness, we blocked his mind immediately so he remembers nothing from the house.”

“Good. So this is the witch’s offspring. What is your name, child?”

“Chayse,” he replies matter-of-factly.

“Well... Chayse, what is it that you have in your hand?” she continues.

“A new game my daddy bought me.” He holds the toy out so she can see it better. “He gave me this for Halloween since he can’t go with me trick-or-treating.”

“Oh really... what a shame. So what are you dressing up as this year?” she asks with feigned curiosity.

“A Vampire... My mommy got me some fangs and everything. I’d show them to you, but she took them from me when I got in trouble at school,” Chayse replies, looking down at the ground as he scuffs his feet nervously.

“Why... Chayse, what did you do?”

“I bit Misty on the neck with them. I didn’t mean to make her bleed... but the nuns called my mom anyway. She was some kind’a mad and said I couldn’t have them back until Halloween.”

“Well... do not fret yourself in the least over a little spilt blood, it happens to me all the time... furthermore, I think you have made an excellent costume choice there, little man.” the woman responds with a grimace.

“Thank you,” the boy says politely. “What’s your name?”

“You may call me Nestasia.” the woman replies.

“Are those your dogs? They sure have big teeth.” he says, looking on in amazement at the two enormous sized hellhounds.

“The better to eat you with my dear...” Nestasia replies, in an almost serious tone as one of the dogs begins

licking its mouth. She then looks at the man standing beside Chayse.

“Okay, I have seen enough... Take him to his room.”

The Detective tugs at the boys arm, and they both turn towards the door. As they walk away, Chayse turns his head back in Nestasia’s direction.

“Bye,” he says waving, and they leave the room.

Nestasia nods her head coolly and the door closes behind them. She walks around the room, almost pacing, with her dogs following her every move, when the door opens again and another man walks in.

“Highness,” he says as he kneels.

“Yes... what now...? Do not dare tell me about some other kind of screw-up or I swear by all the gods... I will surely have to kill someone right this very minute...,” she expounds.

“No... Highness, nothing of the kind..., in fact we have just confirmed that the immortal is the Northman.”

Nestasia stops in her tracks and turns towards the man, “You are certain of this information without a doubt?” she asks pointedly.

“Yes Highness,” he replies.

She stands motionless deep in thought, then instructs the man to stand, “Go and get me Antonius,” she commands.

The man hastily leaves to comply with her wishes and she resumes her pacing and the door opens yet again. This time a muscularly large, very tall man walks into the

chamber and, as did the other men previously, kneels before his queen.

“You sent for me, Highness?”

“Yes Antonius, I did,” she says, waving him to his feet.

The man stands and she walks over to him, “How would you like the chance to settle your old debt with Jon Erik?” she asks, staring into his face and reading the hatred in his eyes at the mention of the name.

“I know how you still harbor hatred for Jon Erik since he took your spot as commander, later to kill your brother and take the prized Slayer Sword. You and your brother were my two best captains. Mark Antony did well when he chose you two to lead our army.” She pauses a moment, and then continues, “You know the Northman is here?”

“Yes Highness, I have heard,” the man grunts, doing his best to keep his anger inside.

“Well... I want you to be there the next time he shows his face. Do you understand?”

“Yes Highness,” the large man replies.

“I trust this will not be a problem for you,” she responds.

“No Highness, if you allow me, I will kill him this time.

“Good... See that you do. Now get with that idiot Detective and see that he finds me the necklace and kills the girl. If he fails me for either task, then you are to kill him...”

“Yes Highness... gladly,” Antonius says.

Nestasia then gestures for him to leave her, and in doing so, closes the door behind him. Walking back over to her dogs, she strokes the top of each one’s head, and then snaps her fingers for them both of them to stand. She then walks over to another door at the opposite side of the room that leads to a small bed chamber and opens a door to reveal a middle-aged priest kneeling beside a modest sized single bed praying with a bible in his hand.

“Thank you for the use of your cathedral, Father,” she states, and then looks back at her dogs as the two huge animals run across the room and into the bedchamber. “I hope that you have had enough time to make your peace with the Jew God of my father’s slaves, because the next time you speak to him, it shall be in person.”

She shuts the doors, and the man begins praying even more frantically than before, as the two animals start to growl and their eyes begin to glow red. Once the door is sealed, the man begins to scream as the dogs tear him apart in an unrestrained feeding frenzy.

# Chapter

## Nine

Jon is still watching over Jennifer sleeping as he perches atop of the back of a chair close to the bed, perfectly balanced and motionless like a Gargoyle statue. As she awakens, he quickly drops to the floor before she can see him in his preferred supernatural position, and quickly moves over to a chair near his desk before she can detect his presence. Slowly raising herself up in the bed, she immediately feels an intense throbbing in her head.

“Jeez, ow...!” she proclaims, grabbing her head at the temples, pressing on them to relieve some of the pressure. “Wow, I don’t remember drinking that much last night. My head is pounding.”

Jon looks over at her, “Jennifer, do you know what day this is?” he asks.

“Yeah... sure... it’s Sunday,” she replies, now running her hands through her hair before pulling the satin sheet back up and covering her exposed breasts.

“What’s the last thing you remember?” He continues, as his mind reflects over the recent events; how he found her at the house near death, the guilt he felt for

how he was forced to save her mortal life by sacrificing her immortal soul, and how she suffered through her transformation into the life of the undead.

He then remembers how he brought her back to his loft semiconscious, only to remove her clothes and bathe her, washing the blood from her body and hair; then afterwards, how he had to bag up her blood soaked clothes.

“You met me at the club and we came back here and had a great time, I might add. I had been drinking at the club some, but man, I didn’t think I had enough to feel like this,” she says, still a little hazy.

“Anything else...?” Jon questions further.

“No... I fell asleep and had a bad dream, and now I’m awake. So what’s with all the questions?” she ask, confused at this badgering.

“Tell me what you dreamed...”

Jon’s tone begins to feel like an interrogation, which begins to concern her as she thinks that maybe she made a mistake trusting Jon and spending the night.

“I don’t really remember much. It’s pretty much like a blur... What I do remember scared the hell out me. Someone took my baby and then you showed up. My ex, he was there, dropping off Chayse. We argued some, nothing unusual about that,” she says sarcastically. “Then Danny said goodbye to Chayse and that’s when things got weird.”

She sits up a little straighter in bed now and holds the sheet above her chest with one hand while using the other to help expand on her story.

“Danny was getting ready to leave and then someone

drove up in a car. It was dark by then so I couldn't see who it was. The next thing I know, Danny is fighting someone, and I turn to Chayse to tell him to run to his room and lock the door. But I no sooner get the words out of my mouth when someone is standing in the doorway grabbing at his arm even before Chayse has a chance to move. I started swinging at him, but I couldn't do anything," she says, swinging her arm to illustrate the struggle.

"Then out of nowhere, you showed up. The rest I can't remember at all. Everything's a total blur from that point on. Then I woke up," she says a little uneasy, but still maintaining a calmness due to her belief that what she had just told him was only a dream.

He gets out of the chair and walks over to the bed, sitting on its far edge, and turns his torso slightly to angle himself in such a way as to face her. Jennifer now slides a little closer to him. Releasing the sheet from her hand, she affectionately wraps her arms around his neck and attempts to give Jon a kiss, but he pulls back from her lips and gently removes her arms from his neck. She pulls the sheet back up to cover herself again and slides back slightly from him.

"Jon... you're starting to freak me out a little," she says with a hesitation in her voice.

His head bows down a little, his eyes no longer looking at Jennifer as his voice becomes chillingly relaxed.

"Jennifer, I am about to tell you something, but you need to stay calm and let me finish completely before you say or do anything, alright...?" he says as he raises his head, and then returns his line of sight directly into her eyes in

such an ominous way that he appears to look right through her. Her expression is now a mixture of confusion, fear, and concern at what is transpiring when she looks back at him.

“Oh shit...! You’re married right...? I knew it... money, looks and a nice guy... Really Jennifer, how could you have *NOT* seen this coming? This was all just way too good to be true... This whole business thing you had down here was really just a convenient excuse to get a weekend away from the little woman so you could get laid,” she says, with a slight pain in her voice.

“No... Jennifer, I am not married and it has nothing to do with my feelings for you or what we have shared these past few days,” he replies quickly. “Although I do want to predicate what I am about to say to you, with the assurance that I have come to care for you very deeply Jennifer... much more deeply than I have for anyone in so incredibly long that I cannot remember. I know this probably is not the right time now to tell you all of that, but I really needed you to know before I continue...”

“So what is it Jon...? I know you’re not gay... And well, I mean don’t get me wrong... I think you’re a great guy so far and I admit that I’m starting to care for you also. But I had a really nasty divorce and I’m not sure if I am really ready to jump right into any long-term type commitments right now. I hope you understand...”

He extends his hands as Jennifer reaches out one of hers to meet his, which he takes and gently kisses, “For what I am about to say I am truly sorry,” he says still holding her hand close with his gaze fixed directly on her.

She looks on still confused but sympathetic, "It's okay Jon... Whatever it is you have to say to me, I'm sure everything will be fine."

His gaze now softens as he looks directly into her eyes, "Jennifer..." he pauses, "Today is not Sunday... you have been asleep for three days. Today is Wednesday...."

She pulls back her hand, completely unsettled now.

"What do you mean Wednesday? It can't be Wednesday," she responds, her voice now exerting her denial at the possibility. "Well dammit say something. What do you mean... it's *Wednesday*? What happened to Sunday, Monday and Tuesday?"

Her voice is now trembling as she starts to get very defensive. She looks into Jon's eyes and searches his face for any sign of insincerity, but finds none at that moment and realizes that he may be telling her the truth. He tries to hold her hand again and she slaps it away.

"What the hell kind of drugs have you given to me!?" she yells, now standing in the bed, while holding the sheet to cover her.

"I have given you no drugs Jennifer, and I would never hurt you intentionally, ever... in any way for any reason. I swear... you have to believe me!"

She then jumps to the floor still holding the sheet to cover her naked body and begins backing slowly away from him until the wall close to the bed stops her.

"Okay then... but how... How can this be true Jon!? I don't understand... I can't have been asleep for three days, my baby comes home today!" she says in denial.

Jon is still sitting on the bed with an expression in his eyes that reflects he is truly feeling her pain.

“No this can’t be right... it’s just not possible. I must be dreaming. I need to wake myself up! My name is Jennifer... I have an eight year old son named Chayse. He is staying with his father and he is coming home today!” She is now in tears, and the pitch of her voice has become high as it is starting to crack under the stress.

“No, tell me the truth... This is all just a bad dream.... *right? Right...? Well... say something DAMN you...!!!*”

He looks at her without saying a word, his silence now confirming her worst fears have now come to life. As the strain of this horrible reality comes crashing down, her knees start to buckle and she drops to the floor like a stone, sliding against the wall behind her as she starts to scream.

“NO... this can’t be right...! It was just a dream. Please... *OH DEAR GOD! CHHAAAYYYSSEE!!!*”

He moves forward attempting to comfort her, but Jennifer is now completely hysterical, swinging and kicking at him while she is still sitting on the floor. He stops short and backs away from her. Her emotions now turn quickly from pain to fierce motherly anger.

“So what the hell happened then?” she says, in a tone indicating that she is now more in control of herself.

“You were attacked. For what purpose I am not quite sure, but I think it has something to do with this,” he says, holding out his hand and extending his fingers as Jennifer’s necklace falls through. It twists and spins as the

light from Jon's desk refracts off of it, causing the necklace to sparkle like a diamond.

"On the way home I saw this in the passenger seat. I knew how important it was to you so I tried to call you, but you did not answer, so I turned around. By the time I made it back to your house, your ex-husband was dead and you were near death on your living room floor."

Hearing Jon's words causes the event to flashback in Jennifer's mind, and she grabs at her neck where the fatal wound had been inflicted.

"If that was true, then why isn't there a wound now? Why am I not dead!?" she replies, still disbelieving Jon's words.

He starts towards her and Jennifer once again moves away avoiding him, "Because... I saved you."

She makes a face of disbelief, "Yeah sure... you saved me... with what... how? How could you heal such a wound? This is freaking crazy! I have no stitches, no pain... no nothing! What are you some kind of miracle worker? I suppose next you're going to tell me that you're Jesus or an Angel of God or something. What do you think I am, just some stupid stripper you can get all drugged up, fuck, and then play some twisted sick joke on? Is that what this is to you... a freaking sick joke? Is that what gets you off... screwing with peoples' heads...?" she exclaims, her voice cracking from the stress.

"Jennifer, I can assure you that I claim no such divinity and I am not trying to confuse your mind. I wish more than anything that this were all untrue, but it is not...

I swear. Look Jennifer... I need you to trust me. We do not have much time,” he says, continuing to try to appeal to Jennifer’s sense of reason, but the shock of her situation has thrown out all sense of rationality for her as she continues to rant.

“I need to *TRUST* you...?!?” she says, screaming. “Are you freaking crazy? I wake up in your bed and it’s three days later... And this is your best explanation... *REALLY*...? Dude you are so completely screwed in the head... Right now, what I *NEED* is for you to just stay *WAY* the *HELL* away from me!”

She jumps up and tries to run towards the elevator, but Jon moves with Vampire speed and cuts her off before she can reach the door where she runs full force into him. Taken completely by surprise, she instinctively goes to hit him. Her reflexes are faster than a normal mortal now, increased by her new blood, but her swing is still much too slow for Jon as he effortlessly catches it inches from his face. She now releases the sheet and tries to hit him with her other hand but Jon catches that one just as easily.

“*STOP, LET ME GO, YOU CRAZY FREAK...! STOP IT YOU’RE HURTING ME...!!*” she screams hysterically, still struggling, playing up her exaggerated discomfort, and hoping that her feigned pain from Jon’s grasp will cause him to loosen it enough for her to break free and get away.

“Jennifer, *STOP!*” he commands, as this more forceful unfamiliar tone in his voice causes her to discontinue her current struggling immediately. “Now listen to me closely...” he says in a slow even tone, attempting to

get her to calm down, “I will not, nor would I ever... hurt you. Do you understand me?”

He pauses and waits for her to acknowledge his words as she slowly nods her head yes, only starting to respond to his voice. He releases her, and she jumps into his arms, wrapping around his neck with her eyes tearing up, feet dangling, and her chin tucked tightly over his shoulder; while clutching onto him as if her life depended on it.

“Oh Jon, I’m sorry... I know you wouldn’t hurt me...,” she says trying not to cry, “Just please tell me what’s going on because I am really scared.”

He returns the affection, hugging her in return as he then loosens his embrace, and allows her body to slide down until her feet touch the ground once again. She stands there silently and Jon kisses her on the top of the head. He then takes his right hand and places it gently beneath her chin, raising it up so her eyes can meet his.

“Jennifer... I know that what I have been saying is very disconcerting to you, but you have to believe me.”

Jennifer’s breathing now starts to return to a more normal state. Regaining her composure, she completely releases her embrace and takes a step back, squatting down in the process to retrieve the sheet from the floor so that she can cover herself once again. He reaches out and touches the side of her face softly with his fingertips before pulling one of her hands around so that he can place her necklace in it. He then releases, and backs away as his eyes begin to glow blood red.

“Jennifer, do not be afraid,” he says in an even deeper voice than normal. With those words, his fingers and nails start to grow. “I really wish I knew another way of doing this, but we do not have the time, and you have to know the truth, all of the truth... Please believe me when I say that I wish it could have been any other way than this. Nevertheless, what is done is done and I know of no way to return things back to where they were before.”

His face starts to transform, and his teeth become elongated, as they start to grow until they become long, full, and sharp. Jon’s body has now completely transformed into its Vampiristic form and Jennifer starts to scream, but is too frightened to utter any noise.

“Jennifer, this is how I saved you,” he says, with her still in a state of shock. “I am an immortal, one of the undead, A Vampire, and now Jennifer... to my very deepest of regrets...so are you...”

Her knees once again buckle, and she drops to the floor, passing out from the shocking sight before her as well as the news that she is of a similar condition. He quickly moves to pick her up, and places her back in his bed. A few minutes later when Jennifer comes to, she sits up to find Jon back in his human form by her side holding her hand. She pulls away quickly, and he slides his hand back to his side.

“Okay... so if you are really a Vampire, why can you go out in the sunlight? I thought that was supposed to kill Vampires,” Jennifer asks, thinking she has him cornered, while still trying to deny to herself what she had just seen.

“Most Vampires are of tarnished blood, and these impure lines of immortals are not immune; but one with pure lines from the original source conceived my birth into this life. Years after I was created, I decided to try to learn more about what it was that I had become. I made it my quest to become more educated and knowledgeable about this curse that had befallen me, so I began to research in books and follow the old legends. Over the years I learned a lot, but it was not until we found that last book in the library the other day that I started putting certain parts of this information together.”

“So what does this have to do with how you can survive in the sunlight? I mean, this still doesn’t explain anything,” Jennifer retorts, slightly annoyed.

“Just wait, there is more,” he replies, and then gets up to walk over to the bar where he removes a bottle of water for Jennifer, and then brings it back to her.

“How did you know I was thirsty?” she asks.

“We share the same blood now, Jennifer; our minds are sensitive to one another now. Once you let yourself tap into your new powers, you will be able to do the same.”

She opens the water bottle and sips it slowly, “Holy crap, this is awful,” she says, making a face. “What on earth is this anyway?”

“It is plain bottled water. I had to see how far along you were in your transformation. Your tastes for human things are already starting to disappear. You will experience this a lot more as your body changes to its new Vampiric state.”

She hesitates, and then asks Jon another question almost as if one would ask a doctor if they were terminally ill. “Are you... So am I... really a Vampire now, Jon?”

He bows his head in a gesture of regret again, “Yes Jennifer, you are, but I had no other choice. It was the only way to save you and allow us to save your son.” He raises his head as he looks into her eyes. “If you had... I mean...”

Considerably calmer now, she reaches out to touch Jon’s face. She is now beginning to understand the rational logic in Jon’s actions considering the circumstances; something that would have been a completely unimaginable situation to her only three short days before.

“Please forgive me...” he says.

“Jon, I would have surely died if you had not saved me, and without your help now, so will my son. There is nothing to forgive... Chayse is my whole world and I would crawl through Hell to protect him.”

Jon reaches up and pulls down the hand she has to his face, kissing it inside her palm, “I hope you mean that, Jennifer, because... if I am right, we may have to do just that,” he replies, with no hesitation in his voice as he releases her hand.

“Why... what do you know, Jon? Who or what are we dealing with?” she asks. “What happened to my son? Jon... I need to know, is he... dead? Please tell me he is not dead,” she says, half pleading with him as if he could dictate her son’s fate with just his words.

he replies calmly and with high regard for her feelings, “I do not believe that he is dead, but whomever it

was that attacked you, I also believe abducted him as well...”

“Who Jon... Who would have taken him and why?” she says, now sitting up again in the bed.

“I have an idea of *who* took him, but I was hoping maybe after the initial shock had passed, you would recall something more that might help lead us to the *why*, which would possibly help lead us to him.”

She ponders his words and then shakes her head as to indicate that she does not have any such answers, “I don’t really remember much of anything at all.”

“Do you remember the guy you had the problem with at that bar on Friday night?”

Jennifer nods.

“As I said before,” he explains, “I think it has to do with this necklace of yours and what your grandmother told you about your power. I believe that man is the one who attacked you.” He looks around for a minute as if to give air to their current surroundings, “He has apparently been following you; I was not sure if there was a connection before, but I am now. I smelled him on you at your home. He also put that girl Angel in the club to watch you. He learned your patterns so that he could find the right time to get you and Chayse, but I also think he was after your necklace.”

Jennifer is now perplexed at how these two things tie together, and she looks down in observation of the mystery around her neck, “So how do my son and this old necklace have anything to do with each other?”

Jon looks at her, “That book... at the library... do you remember how it talked about the Angels on your necklace and the legends about Lilith?” He asks, peaking Jennifer’s attention.

“Yeah... sure, so what...? What does this have to do with this necklace, and more importantly, my son?” she asks as her interest and confusion are now growing equally high.

“Today is Halloween. It is the Wiccan New Year and the first day of the Season of the Dead. This is the one time of the year that the spirits from the other realms can cross over to this plane of existence.”

Jon continues to explain, “More importantly though, is that this is the year that marks the true millennium, making it more supernaturally significant. I believe Nestasia is going to try to invoke the spirit of Lilith this cycle, and that they need an innocent male child to complete the ceremony. I also believe that you are a descendent of a line of Witches that have helped to prevent this type of thing from happening in the past.”

He pauses for a second to let Jennifer catch up, “This is where I suspect the necklace comes into play. I think that Chayse’s involvement is more motivated by some sort of past revenge against your line, and even more so, you.” Jennifer continues to listen quietly, as he continues, “I think this has all happened once before in the past to some degree, and your predecessor foiled the attempt before, thus evoking the wrath of Nestasia on your bloodline, and eventually leading up to you.”

Jennifer looks on, amazed at Jon’s story, but still she

is still unsure whether to believe it or not so she continues to press him, “So who is this Nestasia bitch then...?” she asks, still acting as if she is going along with everything.

“She is my Maker, just as I am yours. Only she took my soul under the pretext of controlling me to lead her legion, where as I turned you to save your life, and hopefully that of your son’s.” He sits back on the bed and starts to finish his story, “Anyway, I had heard of Lilith and stories of her children, but there is one story that comes to mind of a Queen that came out of Egypt who had been born of supernatural means. The story tells that in her final hour before death, she had made a pact with Isis.”

Jennifer looks puzzled now as Jon answers her question before she can speak. “Isis is believed to be the most powerful female Egyptian Goddesses; she and Horus, according to the Egyptian legends, are the ones who created mankind... somewhat similar to the Judea/Christian story of Adam and Eve. However, according to some pre Christian Jewish text, Lilith was Adam’s first wife before Eve, and according to Jewish legends, she became a demon and eventually the mother of all Vampires due to her own betrayal and continued bloodlust on all of her victims.

“However... an Egyptian Queen would never have recognized her as a Jewish supernatural being, but she might have seen her as a physical manifestation of her Egyptian Goddess, Isis...” he explains as he continues on. “Now, after extensive reading from the book that we found, I am beginning to believe that my creator was that very Egyptian Queen... Which if I am correct; this would

make her one of Lilith's true daughters, thus making her and her directly sired line very special... and very strong."

"So... what does this have to do with anything?" Jennifer asks, as she puts down the bottle.

"Well... to answer your first question, since Lilith was the first Vampire who could walk in the sunlight, so could any one of direct lineage to her. I believe there are only a few direct Clan lines that are bestowed this power; possibly only one. The majority of the Vampires' were created from impure origins such as beasts, dogs, and wolves, which had been created by higher-level Vampires, and used to help acquire victims, spreading their control."

"The animals could infect their victims without drawing attention to the masters. If one was ever caught, it was simply put down and thought to be rabid or mad. These vampiric animals, their victims, and all of their line, are weaker by comparison than those of pure blood. This makes them easier to control and less of a potential threat to the Master Vampire; and, added to this, these lower echelon Vampires are all limited to only basking in the darkness."

"However, they do have their own special gift from being of an impure origin. They are able to transform back and forth between human and beast since being conceived of both. This trait was an unexpected offshoot of their creation that eventually led some of them to break away from the pure bloods and to form their own clans. After centuries of fighting amongst themselves, there was a council eventually formed to control the onslaught,

consisting of twelve principal houses formed with a political hierarchy that was agreed upon dividing territories and wealth up throughout the world.”

“All other things being equal, a Vampire sired from a pure bloodline is considerably stronger and possesses the gift to walk in the sunlight, but they do not have the ability to fully metamorphose into another creature. However, if you will notice... I have no windows up here either. Remember always that even though sunlight will not kill you, by comparison... it will make you weaker and more vulnerable than you are at night.”

She then interrupts Jon, “So then, what made *you* so special as to be made by this Nestasia herself?”

He stops for a second, “I am not exactly sure; though she once said something to me... she told me that I was the first true warrior she had encountered since her days in Rome.”

Jennifer butts in again, “Egypt, Rome, right... So then how old are you supposed to be anyway? I personally don’t think you look a day over two hundred,” she says very sarcastically. “Jon, I’m just not sure I am buying into this whole thing,” she says in disbelief.

He looks over to her, and in a very convincing voice replies, “More like around twelve hundred. I was born the son of a Viking Chief on the shores of Gaul. In my mortal life, I was a leader of a fierce band of warriors leading many raids to the shores of Brittany. At least I was, until that last raid, in the year 872 AD.”

Jennifer again questions Jon’s story, “Okay... so...

That's another thing, I thought all Vikings were blondes from Sweden or Norway or something like that. You have dark hair and your last name is French."

"Vikings raided Gaul, or more accurately Paris, in 845 AD. My father was one of the leaders of that raid who eventually decided to stay and take a wife of that origin; my mother. Later I took her family name to help me conceal my origins," he says, and then begins the horrible tale of his rebirth into darkness, as Jennifer's eyes open wide during his vivid continuation.

"My men and I were returning from a raid on a small town as we had done many times before. That last night before we launched to go home, we decided to camp on a beach. We drank and celebrated our good fortune by the light of the full moon. Then sometime during the night, we were attacked."

Jon's voice now begins to fill with hatred as he tells Jennifer the story of how Nestasia's beast-like creatures had killed and fed on all of his men, leaving him alone to watch in horror. She listens on, looking into his eyes as she sees his memories as if they were her own. As he gets to the part of when he was offered up to his Maker like a sacrifice, she feels the puncture wounds in his chest from Nestasia's bite and can feel his soul slip away in herself as Nestasia drinks in his life force. He stops talking, and Jennifer jumps like she is coming out of a trance, for the first time truly understanding that this is now her reality.

"So how do you know she was from Egypt?" she asks inquisitively. "Did she tell you like you are telling me?"

“Not directly...” he replies. “Just as I told you that you would eventually be more in tune with my thoughts, I was for a time... in tune to hers... so yes, I knew of her origins and Lilith, but only just so much. As for the connection between, her, Lilith and your family, I only recently started putting the final pieces of this together from the book in the library.”

Jennifer now starts putting a few things together for herself as well, “You went back for the book that night, and it was you who messed up those kids, wasn’t it?” she says in a very accusing voice.

“Yes...” he retorts, with no remorse in his voice for his act, “Those impudent bastards got off much easier than they deserved as far as I’m concerned.” Jennifer sees the conviction in his face and hears it in his voice; as such, she decides that this is something better left alone.

“So, what did you find in this *book*?” she asks, trying to change the subject.

“A good deal more history behind your necklace, Lilith and Nestasia,” Jon replies. “I believe it holds the answers on how we need to get your son back.”

“How can this book help us find my son...?” she asks, doubting his judgment.

“It contains references to an old spell for the invocation of Lilith. It describes in detail the materials, preparations and the time line needed for performing the spell,” he replies.

“So what is this time line? How long do we have to find Chayse?” she asks now with more concern.

Jon stands and starts to walk over towards his desk, “We have until Friday night... November the second, at midnight on the Day of the Dead. This will be the end of the Season of the Dead and the peak of the full moon. At that exact moment of time, the blood offering must be consummated for the spirit of Lilith to be invoked into Nestasia.”

She now gets up out of bed and starts to follow behind him, “Please don’t refer to Chayse in such an ambiguous manner, Jon. That’s my son you are talking about, not some sort of sacrificial animal, and don’t you forget that!” she expounds, as she heads towards him and his desk.

“I apologize; I never meant to seem insensitive. I was only quoting the book... I suppose that there are still some levels of social interaction where I could use some refinement. I will try to pay closer attention to this fact in the future” he replies earnestly, seeing that the unintended insensitivity of his remark has upset Jennifer even further.

She now stands in front of his desk still wrapped in the sheet. “By the way, where are my clothes?”

Jon points to the trash can against the wall, “They were soaked with your blood and could not be salvaged. I saved them for you just in case you still did not believe me. I knew that this would be a lot of information to take in at one time.”

She walks over to the chair and sits down, “Well... crap... just what the hell am I supposed to use for clothes, then?”

Jon presses a button on the remote of his desk and a partition opens in the wall. Behind it, is a closet full of his own clothes at one end, and on the other a rack full of women's clothing.

"I called one of my board members in New York and had his secretary arrange for a personal shopper down here to pick you out some things. I knew we would not be able to go back to your house to get any of your clothes. I told her a little about you, your age and checked some of your clothes for sizing. I also mentioned a few of the stores where you shopped so she could get a better idea for the type of clothing you might feel comfortable with. I also had her pick up plenty of pairs of shoes and undergarments. She has a daughter about your age and size who helped coordinate everything."

Jennifer walks over to the open closet completely amazed, "Wow, tell your secretary and her daughter they did a great job," she says, as she opens the drawer to a dresser that holds an ample supply of bras, panties and socks. There on the racks are jeans, shirts, t-shirts, tank tops, short skirts, and dresses.

"Man! They must have cleaned out every high end lingerie and Goth store in the area...!" she exclaims, getting out some underwear and socks.

She then grabs a pair of black jeans and a T-shirt off the rack. Dropping the sheet, she proceeds to get dressed, never minding Jon is standing there watching.

"I will be sure to convey your compliments," Jon replies, attempting a stoic profile at the sight before him.

Once she is dressed, he presses another button and opens his vault door. Jennifer is dumbfounded at the sight she sees inside; a room filled with antiques like a museum with a huge coffin in its center. She walks over as Jon walks from behind his desk.

“Don’t tell me you, I mean... that I..., we don’t really have to sleep in that thing do we...?”

Jon almost laughs, “No... We no longer require that.”

“That’s good... because that thing really kind’a makes me feel a bit creeped out... and besides, I *really* like your bed,” Jennifer says sarcastically.

They walk inside and she looks inside the coffin as Jon retrieves the book he had taken from the library.

“What is that?” she asks, pointing at the large ornately decorated Sword, as well as the broken one currently in two pieces laid end to end with its two halves touching.

“The broken one is my sword. It was given to me by my father. It shattered in battle on the night of my death. The other is the Slayer Sword... It is one of the few weapons in existence that can permanently kill a Master Vampire, even one of pure blood.”

“So why is this Sword so special?” she asks as she lifts the heavy blade easily with one hand, and playfully points it at Jon, a feat that would have been impossible just a few days prior.

As she stands there poised, she is almost frozen and for some unknown reason she feels an immediately sense of

déjà vu, almost like this has happened before in another life, where she has held this same weapon and encountered Jon while doing so. Slightly disorientated, she remains steadfast listening to Jon's voice, although she is lethargic, almost incomprehensive.

"When attacked with regular weapons, unless a Vampire is beheaded, he, or she, as the case may be..." he pauses, gesturing towards her, "will heal themselves... even regenerating an entire limb if necessary. Even a blessed wooden stake or silver spike that has been run through the heart if later removed, can allow the vampire to be fully revived."

"With this Sword, they will not heal as completely. If a limb were to be severed with a blow from the Slayer Sword, such as if an arm were cut off above the elbow, any part still attached may stop bleeding and heal, but it will never regenerate. Just as any other sword would be to a mortal, to an immortal, a stabbing blow or cut in the appropriate place could prove fatal from this blade," Jon concludes. Once he finishes his explanation, he notices that Jennifer has not moved and has remain motionless with the blade still in her hand pointing in his direction, staring straight through him as if she were in a trance.

"Jennifer are you alright...? Can you hear me?"

She jerks as if she were coming out of a day dream, "Huh, Yes what..." she says, now looking as if she is more fully aware of her surroundings.

"I was talking about the sword and you just kind of faded away it seemed... Are you alright?"

“I’m fine... weird super sword... kills Vampires... got it!” she replies, speaking hastily, attempting to over compensate for her mental vagueness of what had just happened.

“But what I want to know, is if it will it kill one as old as Nestasia or Lilith?” she asks, cautiously returning the weapon back to its original location.

“Nestasia, yes... as for Lilith I cannot be sure,” he replies. “However, we will get your son back before the invocation can be completed. So we will have no need to find out if it has power over Lilith or not...” he proclaims, trying not to sound negative to prevent upsetting Jennifer further and her hopes of getting back her son in time.

As they walk out of the vault, she asks about the large commercial grade subzero refrigerator which looks oddly out of place in comparison to everything else in the room, especially since Jon doesn’t even have a kitchen or any other culinary appliances anywhere else in the loft.

“What’s that for? Don’t tell me you keep dead bodies in there?” she asks, jokingly trying to take her mind off the sword and the vault.

“No... Not exactly; that holds my supply of blood.”

“Oh...that, yeah of course... What else would you possibly have use with an oversized refrigerator for...” Jennifer remarks facetiously, as they approach his desk before her tone turns more ominous, “Do you... I mean do *we*... really have to drink blood, also?”

Jon presses the remote and closes the massive door sealing the room behind them.

“Yes...” he states matter-of-factly.

“Do you ever kill people for their blood?” she asks, afraid of what she knows already to be true.

“Not in a very long time... however there was a time out of necessity when I had no choice... though fortunately this is not so anymore... As I have for the most part eliminated that as a necessity for myself. It is not that I have ever had a problem with the act of killing for food, and as a mortal, I loved to hunt larger game.”

“However, now if I am forced to kill a mortal, it is for a reason, and not merely survival, such as it would be for a beast hunting indiscriminately for sustenance. Although there are those occasions where the two do sometimes conveniently find their way into the same purpose... Which when that happens, I must admit, can be most rewarding and enjoyable.”

Jennifer looks almost appalled at this statement, “How could you possibly do or even say such things?”

He quickly turns to her, “You do not want to sit in judgment of me until you yourself have known the thrill of the hunt or pleasure of a fresh kill. It can be intoxicating, addicting even, if you were not careful... This lust for the pleasure of the kill is a very powerful aphrodisiac and can be very hard to control, especially for newer Vampires whose wills are generally weaker and more animalistic in nature. If this is left unchecked, then it can, and will, consume you. So when, and if, you do learn of these things, then you will understand... and I promise you will never forget,” he explains, trying his best to not be defensive.

“I’m sorry, Jon... I did not mean to accuse you like that. I guess the sound of this all just makes me think of my son and what they did to me, and well... I just get mad,” she says apologetically. “If you don’t have to kill now, then how do you get blood?”

He walks around behind his bar and opens his small refrigerator. From inside, he pulls out a glass bottle of red liquid that appears to have come from a hospital or a near blood bank.

“By these,” he says, as he places the bottle on the counter.

“Is that what I think it is?” Jennifer asks.

“Yes...” Jon replies. “A long time ago I started to acquire these from medical facilities periodically. I considered it a much more humane method than the alternative, don’t you?”

Jennifer almost smelling the contents inside, walks over, and picks it up as if one would a bottle of juice.

“Why do I feel this craving?” she asks, inspecting the contents.

“You are a new Vampire, and have not eaten in almost four days now. Were you not hungry when you woke up?” he asks.

“Sure I was, but when I thought about eating, my stomach started to turn like it did when I was pregnant with Chayse, but I just assumed it was because I had too much to drink last night.”

He looks at her, “You mean Saturday night, as in four days ago.”

Jennifer places the jar back on the counter, “Yeah... well... I didn’t know that at the time. Am I ever going to be able to eat real food again?” she asks, somewhat concerned.

“You will need to learn to acquire a tolerance for it. It is a good thing to be able to do in certain social situations in order to help maintain a more convincing appearance of normalcy.”

Jennifer now realizes that what he is saying refers in part to their few outings involving food, “Like you did with me when we got food... right?”

Jon nods, “It has helped me on numerous occasions in the past.”

Jennifer continues to stare at the glass jar of blood, “Well... I guess I won’t have to worry anymore about watching my weight...” she says, laughing sarcastically.

“Or gray hair, or sickness, or being tired, or dying as far as that goes; at least not from any traditional human point of perspective, anyway,” he adds to her statement.

“So... what do we do now...?” Jennifer asks apprehensively.

“Well... first off we need to see if that girl Angel is working at the club tonight,” he replies.

“Yeah... sure, I could go to work and ...”

Jon quickly cuts her off, “Jennifer you cannot possibly go back to work or go anywhere right now, for that matter. You are not to talk to anyone you know or show yourself in any of your usual places,” he says.

“Why the hell not?” she expounds angrily, not liking Jon telling her what to do. “My son’s out there somewhere

being held by these freaks of Hell and that Bitch had something to do with it!”

He then tries to explain, “Jennifer, as far as anyone knows right now, you and your son are missing, with you presumed most likely to be dead,” he says as he continues to describe the severity of her situation, “The police found your ex-husband brutally murdered in your front yard and your blood soaked in the carpet of your living room.

If you show up somewhere right now acting like nothing happened; do you not suppose that this would set off a few alarms around here? At the very least, the police would hold you for questioning and ask you about a lot of things that you really would not be able to give any answers for, such as how is it that you are alive without a single scratch on you and where your son is.”

“Then if you did really answer them, well, let’s see. If you did not end up in a padded room, you would most likely end up being charged with your ex-husband’s murder as well as conspiracy to the kidnapping of your son. Since this state does not have the death penalty, you would probably get life in prison. For an immortal, confinement plus the lack of a blood source for any length of time can be painful for years on end, trust me... that would be a very excruciatingly long time. Not to mention the fact that while all of this interrogation is going on, *WE*, and I do mean *you and me*, because it will take us both at best to pull this off, would miss the opportunity to save your son, which he only has, as of midnight tonight, forty-eight hours before he is Nestasia’s sacrifice to Lilith.”

Jennifer now stops to think of the implications of Jon's remarks and realizes how foolhardy her previous statements were, "Well dammit... then what am I supposed to do? Sit on my ass and wait?" she replies, now starting to lose control of her emotions a little. Jon walks over and puts his arms around her as she responds in kind, squeezing him hard.

"Oh Jon, if anything happens to my baby..." she says, tearing up.

He then kisses her on top of her head and gently brushes her hair from her face with his hand so that he can see her eyes, "Jennifer, I swear to you that I will stop at nothing to get your son back for you." He kisses her head again.

As he continues to speak, his eyes start to glow red and his voice begins to change, getting more guttural and menacing with every word, "We will get Chayse back, and I promise that every godless son-of-that-bitch involved in this, be it mortal or beast, will pray for Hell's mercy before I am through with them."



# Chapter

## Ten

Jon walks into the foyer outside of the club just as he had done all weekend. The girl working the door is the same one from Saturday, and recognizes him immediately.

“Hey, back again, huh?” she asks politely, as he pulls out money to pay the door cover charge and hands her a twenty-dollar bill.

“Aren’t you the guy who was hanging out with Princess all weekend?” she asks while making his change, and then gives him back a ten.

He takes the bill while looking directly at her, and begins to make stern eye contact, “*No, I do not believe that I have ever been here before and I do not know anyone that works here named Princess.*”

In an instant, the girl’s mind is clouded; forgetting having ever seen Jon before.

“First time here sir?” she now asks.

“Yes...” He replies.

“Well, tonight should be a good night; we have a new feature dancer in for Halloween named Angel. She puts on a really good vampire themed show; you look like you

would go for that kind... She's all Gothic and mysterious like you.

He folds the ten around the rest of his money, "Really, I will have to check her out then, thank you..." He is amused at the irony of the girl's presumptions.

"Enjoy the show," she says as he enters the club through the double doors.

Walking in and inspecting the crowd, more aptly the wait staff, he tries to see if he can spot anyone else who might be a threat by placing him with Jennifer all weekend. Further aware of the current circumstance, he begins to consider the fact that Jennifer has almost never let anyone of the staff members know her real name.

Being that this is a predominantly cash business with the daily girls in general transient, and even the managers known for not typically keeping up with anyone that is not a regular dancer, he knows that even though the news has been constantly talking about the incident at her house, most of the employees here would never realize that the Jennifer Black on TV, and her exotic dancer alter ego, Princess, are one and the same.

He makes his way through the crowd to the back of the room where the VIP area is located and walks up the short flight of steps where a girl lets him through. He finds a table off to the side close to the wall, but still near enough to the railing to have a clear overview of the main stage area, which he decides will provide him the best possible vantage point to view the crowd and multiple stages, but also a decent cover of darkness with the lighting that comes

from the stage area accentuating the already dimly lit VIP section behind it.

He feels that this should provide ample concealment from anyone who may possibly remember him from this last weekend, and positions his chair with his back against the wall for the optimum view of his surroundings, before sitting down. The waitress waits until he is completely settled, and then immediately comes over. He orders a glass of wine and asks her when the feature dancer, Angel, is going to be on stage.

"I believe she is up right after the next few sets," the waitress replies, and then hurries off to get his drink.

The next few songs run their courses and complete, just as the music in the club changes into a more ceremonious, coming of attractions theme style of music, queuing up all of the other dancers to exit their respective stages. The DJ starts to introduce Angel as the feature dancer for the evening, and continues on by announcing some of the men's magazines she has appeared in and some of the various contest titles she has won to help promote her entrance.

Finishing his endorsements, smoke starts to come up from the edge of the stage, completely engulfing it in a white fog, when the lights in the club dim a few more levels where the spot lights are all now directed only at the main attraction. The music starts and slowly builds in intensity from a very soft melodic tone to a harder rock beat, when just as the tempo makes a drastic change.

Angel bursts onto the stage, fangs bared, through the thick cloud of smoke. She comes out wearing the same skimpy red slingshot style Vampirella Halloween costume from the other night, with the fake blood dripping from her fangs and running down the front of her chest. The front crowd reacts in their usual wild approval, whistling and screaming as she swings around the pole. Jon watches her dance as the waitress returns with his wine.

“Here you are sir,” she says, placing a napkin on the table in front of him. She then sets his drink on top of the make-shift coaster. “Would you like to run a tab sir?” she asks. Jon nods negatively, half watching the stage.

He reaches in his pocket and pulls out the cache of money he had brought with him, handing her a twenty in the process.

“Keep the change,” he instructs her. She thanks him and quickly turns to leave, right before Jon reaches out to get her attention again.

“Excuse me...” he says trying to talk over the loud music.

“Yes sir?” the waitress replies, pivoting on one foot and turning around quickly.

“Could you possibly do one more thing for me?” he asks. The waitress is now giving him her undivided attention. “That girl on stage... *Angel*.... Would you get her to come over by me when she finishes her set so I could meet her?”

The waitress looks towards the stage, “I’m sorry, sir, but Angel doesn’t do table dances or anything.”

He pulls out a second stack of money. This reserve is folded neatly, held together by an ornately engraved silver money-clip, containing multiple one hundred-dollar bills. He counts out ten of them and holds them up for the waitress to see.

“Tell her I have one thousand reasons for her to stop by here, and that all I want to do is to meet and talk to her.”

He pulls out one more hundred-dollar bill from the clip and lays it on the waitress’s tray, “This is for you taking the time to deliver my message. If you convince her to come, I’ll give you another one,” he instructs, as he puts the original stack of bills back in the clip.

“Yes sir, no problem. I’ll be right back...,” she says, and then turns quickly again and heads towards the back area to the dancers’ dressing room. The waitress enters the dressing area and bumps into her roommate, who is also a dancer at the club.

“Shannon! When Angel gets off stage tell her to come find me,” the girl says in fervor.

“Why? What’s up?” she inquires over the unusual sense of urgency in her request.

“You’ll never believe what just happened. A guy in the VIP area just gave me a hundred dollars just to come ask Angel to come sit with him after her set, and he’s going to give me another hundred if she does,” she continues ecstatically.

“Crap, I’m not even doing that well tonight dancing,”

“Yeah well, and get this, he’s going to pay her a cool

grand just for sitting and talking to him,” the waitress bellows, almost out of breath from her excitement.

“Okay that’s it, I’ve gotta see this guy.” Both girls exit the dressing room, “So what is he, some old pervert who’s fat and half bald?” Shannon asks, as they peek around the corner of the VIP bar.

The waitress points over to the table where Jon is sitting and says, “Nope, there he is right there.”

Shannon’s eyes follow her friend’s finger across the room to Jon’s location, “*Holy Shit!*” she says in a disgusted tone, “He’s paying a thousand dollars just to talk and he’s good looking... *Damn...*! I’d do him for that; hell..., with the way he looks I’d do him for free. But for a hard grand, he could have me any he wanted and then some.”

Both girls head back to the dressing room, “Now you see why you have to give Angel my message. That’s two hundred more for us for rent, which by the way is due this week, and we can’t be late two months in a row.”

Shannon shakes her head in an agitated manner, “Yeah... yeah... I got this covered. Man, I knew I should’ve never quit waitressing.”

As Angel finishes her set, she walks off stage towards the dressing room where Shannon catches up to her, “Angel,” she says, and Angel spins around at the sound of her name.

“Yes...” she replies.

“You know my roommate Cassie right...? You know... she’s the girl who works the VIP area?” Shannon proceeds.

“Yeah... I guess so... why?” she replies.

“She says a guy up there that wants to meet you, really bad,” Shannon says, while rubbing her thumb and index finger together in a gesturing to indicate large amounts of money.

“I don’t do table dances, I already told the management that,” Angel snips back.

“No, you don’t understand... he just wants to meet you and he’s willing to pay a solid grand for the privilege,” she says insistently.

“Oh... what the hell, since you put it that way... I guess I could meet the old geezer,” Angel says quickly, changing from her prima-donna attitude to one a bit greedier.

She quickly changes out of her stage costume into a long-sleeve, sheer, black, mesh style pull over, and a black leather mini-skirt, leaving her boots from the stage still on. Both girls head up to the VIP area to find the waitress, Cassie. When they get there, Shannon waves her over to them.

“Okay here she is... I need to get back on stage here in a minute so I will catch up to you later Cassie,” she says, and then turns to head back towards the dressing room.

Angel looks over at Cassie, “Okay, So...where is this old dude that wants to meet me?” she asks.

Cassie looks at Angel and shakes her head, “Boy... Are you in for a surprise...”

She walks Angel over to Jon’s table where he currently has his back turned to the bar watching the stage,

but even more intently examining the crowd, as he carefully watches for any signs of another immortal. Cassie speaks to the back of Jon's head, trying to get his attention.

"Excuse me... sir," she says. "I have Angel here, the girl you requested to meet..."

Jon's long hair hides his face until he spins around in his chair to see Angel and the waitress he had spoken to earlier. Angel is taken off guard as she recognizes him for what he is, and even more so for whom he is; the one with Princess only a few nights before.

"Thank you," he says.

He reaches into his pocket and pulls out the hundred-dollar bill he promised Cassie earlier and places it on her tray.

"No..., thank you!" she retorts. "Do you need anything else?" she asks, and Jon looks toward Angel in a way to suggest she could order a drink if she desired.

"I'd like a shot of Grey Goose chilled, with a soda back please," she says, and Jon holds up his glass indicating he would like another glass of wine.

"Okay... I'll be back in a minute," Cassie replies, and then turns and heads towards the bar.

He stands and politely gestures towards a chair, "Please sit down," he says.

Angel reluctantly sits, "The waitress said you offered a thousand dollars to meet me," she remarks, leaning back in the chair.

"She did?" he replies. "Yes well... she told you correctly." He pulls the clip of money again from his pocket

and counts out ten, one hundred-dollar bills, “Here, as promised...” he states, and then hands them to Angel.

“Why all the money...? I mean... don’t get me wrong... It’s not like I’m complaining or anything, but I’m assuming Cassie told you I don’t do table dances?” Angel questions Jon, obviously playing a bit coy, but still uneasy about her situation as she attempts to never let on that she knows he is a Vampire.

“Yes... she did,” he replies.” I was hoping that maybe you would be available to help me out with something else though,” he continues. He knows that she, in all probability, is aware of what he is, but still chooses to play along, acting as if he were a regular type of guy just looking for a good time.

“I have a friend who is getting married this weekend and I am responsible for organizing his bachelor party. I realize this is short notice, but my original option appears to be missing, and I was hoping that perhaps you would consider entertaining for such an event?” he asks, somewhat eluding to his relationship with Jennifer’s alter ego, Princess; as being one of a more monetary type arrangement than a personal involvement with her.

The waitress returns with their drinks before Angel has a chance to reply, “Here you are sir,” she says, placing the drinks on the table between Jon and Angel.

He starts to reach into his pocket to pay her, but she holds out her hand indicating he does not need to do so, “I have this round sir,” she says. Jon thanks her and she returns to making her rounds to the other customers.

Angel picks up her shot, “I don’t know... I’m pretty expensive for things like that. And as you said, this is pretty short notice...” She then turns the shot up and quickly downs the frigid liquid inside.

“I believe I can cover your cost and make it worth your while for any inconveniences you might incur over the terseness of the scheduling,” he assures.

“Look mister...” Angel waves her hand in a rolling motion, as to try to get Jon to fill in the blank and tell her his name.

“Jon Erik,” he says as she continues.

“Well look... *Jon*... this sounds kind’a weird at the end of the day and I don’t really know you... and well... we both know you’re not here trying to hire me for some private party. So why don’t you just cut to the chase and tell me what you really want with me? I mean... you did just pay a grand to get me here and I don’t have all night to play games.”

With that comment, Jon drops the charade and proceeds on with his real purpose.

“Very well then... As you say, let us cut to the chase. I believe that you may have some information that could help me with a situation that I am involved in. If you should be so inclined to assist me with this information, I would be more than willing to compensate you for your assistance.”

Angel looks at the money in her hands and tucks it into her garter belt. “Look buddy, I’m not the Internet and I don’t need the trouble. So I think I’m just going to get off

this bus ride here... okay?” Angel retorts, as she braces herself on the arms of the oversized chair and begins to stand.

Jon quickly catches one of her hands and pins it to the armrest of her chair, “Sit!” he commands, in a stern but controlled tone, with for a split second, his eyes beginning to glow red.

“Now, I am sure that you know what I am. I am quite certain of this because I know that you reek with the smell of another immortal fuming off of you. You are some immortal’s familiar...So, before we begin to draw any unwanted attention from the club security; you should return to your seat and calm down. Then, we may continue to move forward with the true nature of my intentions and this encounter.”

Angel reluctantly sits back into the chair and he continues, “First off, let me assure you that if you can provide me with any information as I stated earlier, I will gladly compensate you generously. Conversely, if I find that you can provide me with information and you do not, I will personally see to it that you wish you were never born, and I can assure you, that I can be very creative when it comes to dealing with persons who test my resolve.”

His eyes glow slightly in a smoldering red hue like flames, adding an unspoken emphasis to his smirking grimace at this very statement.

Angel adjusts her position in the chair, “Okay... I get it. So what exactly is it you want to know?” she asks, now even more concerned.

“Do you remember a young girl in here this past weekend who danced by the name of Princess?” he continues to inquire.

“I don’t know... maybe, so what’s your point?” she answers, evasively, looking around as to not make eye contact.

“Well, I am interested in any information about what happened to her, her son, and why. I thought perhaps that maybe you would have some thoughts on the matter or possibly know someone who does.”

“Look, I deliberately make it a point to not get up into any of the other girls businesses, you know...? Besides, what makes you think that I..., or for that matter anyone I’d know, would even slightly care about, or have any idea regarding the whereabouts of some boring dead stripper chick or her missing kid...?” she replies quickly, with Jon immediately picking up on Angel’s choice of words.

“Who said that she was dead?” he says matter-of-factly.

Angel quickly replies to cover her remark, “The news... That’s all they’ve talked about since Sunday. So... are you going to answer *my* question now...?” she retorts circumspectly, her eyes now no longer concealing her concern. She knows that her lesbian vampire lover’s master would kill her if she thought she had betrayed them.

“*Really*... I find that quite curious; since I know for a fact that I did not ever mention her real name. Also at no time do I recall the news media ever mentioning her working as a dancer either...” Jon retorts quickly, as he

reclines back in his chair and picks up his wine. He then begins to swirl the contents of the glass and take another sip, staring off towards the stage in indifferent confidence.

“Nevertheless, if you are going to contend that you know nothing, then I suppose that we have no further business here to discuss. I thought maybe you could assist me, but regrettably it has become apparent that I was mistaken. Since I am confident that you have more acumen than to lie to me when you know what I am capable of,” he states matter-of-a-factly, as he continues to sip his wine, acting as if he has no further interest in her. “So in light of this inopportune turn of events, I will bid a good evening to you...”

“Wait!” Angel says, trying to steer him back into engaging her, “Why is someone like you so interested in this?”

“My motivations are none of your concern... all that you should need to consider is that I am willing to pay generously for this information. However, since you have so emphatically stated that you possess no such knowledge on the matter, then whatever my reasons may be, they are currently mute, meaning that you and this conversation have no further purpose to me. You are free to take your immediate compensation for your time and cooperation and go,” he instructs calmly.

“Okay then... just suppose that we say that I do know something?” Angel says, now more engaged into his request, “Would you be interested enough to pay ten times the amount that you just gave me?”

Jon now returns his attentions to her, “Yes... that is if you truly do know something. I would gladly pay that amount, but do not attempt to play me for a fool, or I can assure you that you will live to regret it for what will become the rest of your painfully short life...”

Angel picks up a napkin, scribbles a phone number onto it, and then hands the sliver of paper to Jon as she stands, “This is my cell phone number. Call me at midnight and I will tell you where and when to meet me. Don’t be late... and come alone with the money,” she says, and then turns to walk away.

Jon stares down at the napkin for a moment while at the same time the waitress returns.

“Did everything go alright for you?” she asks, having seen Angel give Jon a number, assuming a much different scenario to his and Angel’s conversation.

“Yes, everything went quite well... I greatly appreciate your invaluable assistance,” he replies, and gets up from his seat while folding the napkin, and then neatly tucking it into his front pants pocket.

“Great... well then, you have a very nice night sir. And be careful, the freaks always come out on Halloween.”

Jon nods, “So I have been told... although I thank you for your concern. I will try to be mindful of my surroundings,” he replies, and then heads towards the front of the club to exit the building.

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Angel is now in the back packing her belongings and talking to her female vampire lover on her cell phone, “I really think he knows more about this than he is letting on,” she says into the small flip phone. “He is supposed to be calling me at midnight, so I need you to get Antonius and a couple of your other Vamp buddies and meet me at the old cemetery on Canal at 12:30, sharp.”

The voice on the other end talks back and Angels replies to it.

“Yes... he is the same one, but he is only one and he knows something more than he is saying about the girl. Besides... that’s why you are bringing help. And in the mean time, make sure that you don’t screw this up and be late or I swear that we are all dead here. Do you understand me?”

The female voice acknowledges her instructions, and Angel feels satisfied that everything is under control, “Good then. I’ll call you shortly to check on things. Now get moving, we don’t have much time.” She hangs up the phone and continues to clean out her locker and pack her bag. Just then, a man walks into the dressing room. Seeing her activities, he starts to question her.

“Where do you think you are going?” he says, more than a little aggravated.

Angel looks up and notices it is the night manager of the club, “Oh hey Mike, yeah look..., something came up and I have to go.

“What about your last set?” he asks posturing.

“I can’t, I have a Family emergency,” she replies.

“Shannon... she can do it. She’s got dark hair. Give her my money for the set too... and tell her I said thanks for everything. She’ll understand,” Angel instructs with no hesitation, as she zips up her bag and stands to walk out.

“But...” the manger tries to speak, though Angel has already walked by, not stopping long enough to give him any opportunity to even finish his protest.

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Back at Jon’s loft during the unfolding of these events, Jennifer has been pacing the floors partly from anticipation of Jon’s return and news of what he has found out, but also partly because she hasn’t fed yet and the hunger is starting to creep up on her senses. The thirst for a newborn Vampire is relentless, and simply ignoring this could have untold consequences. She is still in partial denial, so she has been putting off thinking about it, hoping that this may yet still be bad a dream; and that if she can ignore the new feeling now growing inside of her, that it will simply vanish.

Unfortunately, the reality is quite the opposite, and Jennifer’s appetite for blood is starting to grow. She walks around the third floor pacing, her body temperature starting to rise as she remembers that Jon has a mixture of blood and wine in his refrigerator behind the bar. She quickly walks over to it and removes a bottle. Pulling the cork, she turns it up, never bothering to get a glass, and continues to drink insatiably until the bottle has been reduced by a third of its contents.

She removes the bottle from her lips and notices a remote on the bar. It is the one Jon used earlier to open the vault behind the wall. Jennifer, filled with curiosity, picks it up. Still holding the bottle in her hand, she takes another drink from it; then places it on the bar's counter top. She looks at the remote's buttons for a moment, and then starts to press a few. With the first one, the TV comes on to the ten o'clock news. The next one turns on the stereo. She presses the last one, and the wall starts to open as it had done for Jon earlier.

She then re-presses the second button, turning off the stereo, but before she can turn off the television, a reporter comes on. He is talking about a missing child, an eight-year-old boy and his mother who have been missing since Sunday. She stops moving, her attention glued to the words of the reporter still never quite registering that it is her house that they are talking about. The TV reporter then flashes a couple of pictures of the boy recovered from the child's home, and Jennifer unconsciously releases the remote causing it to drop onto floor in front of the bar, ejecting the batteries as it impacts.

She then runs over towards the television, "Chayse... Oh dear God, my baby..." she says as she reaches up, touching the screen gently with both hands as if she could touch her child or put her arms around him. The pictures then disappear and the reporter moves on to the next story. Her eyes start to tear up again, but just as quickly fill with anger and began to glow red as her fists clench over the reporters face.

“You demon sons-of-bitches, if you hurt my baby, I swear... there is nothing in Heaven or Hell that will be able to save you from me. I will make it my life’s mission to kill every last mother’s son of you, so help me God...” She proclaims, as she removes her hands from the TV screen and steps back slowly, almost in a dazed state.

Turning to see the vault door and having forgotten it was open; she walks inside, and heads straight for Jon’s casket containing his two weapons. Once inside, she throws open the lid, revealing the two swords, and reaches inside to grab the unbroken one as if she was drawn to it. Lifting the heavy blade easily with one arm, she then slowly begins to wield it in a manner that almost appears natural, gradually adding her other hand to grasp the hilt firmly between them. Although, as soon as her second hand makes contact with the sword, it violently triggers a flash of light in her mind, causing her knees to buckle, and her to drop to the floor, as she still tightly clutches the Sword in her hands, unable to release it.

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At the same time that Jennifer has entered the vault, Jon is pulling off the street after opening the gates to the courtyard and garage. He eases the car in, and then backs it into its regular parking slot. Exiting the car, he walks over to the elevator, and closes the antique gate style door behind him, before pressing the button to begin his ascent to the top floor. The elevator passes the main floor with

him looking around for Jennifer, as it continues to makes its way upward to his bedroom. Once it stops, Jon opens the gate and exits.

Looking around the vast room, he sees the television still on, but no signs of Jennifer. He then notices both the bathroom and vault door wide open along with the near half empty container of blood on the bar. He walks over to the bar and almost steps on the remote. Looking down, he retrieves the device, its battery housing cover, the two dislodged AAA batteries, and puts the device back together before turning off the TV.

He reaches over to the bottle and places his hand on it, determining that he can still feel that it has some chill left from previously being in the refrigerator, and concludes that it could not have been out too long on the counter. He then walks over to the bathroom and knocks politely on the door. Hearing nothing, he calls out Jennifer's name before entering. Seeing that she is not there, he exits and makes his way towards the open vault.

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Jennifer has been inside the vault since before Jon returned; her mind racing with images of a place she has never seen before in a time many years prior to this one. She sees a child, one that looks like Chayse, playing and frolicking in a field close to a small village. He is close near a seaside castle, sitting high and foreboding, all alone next to a cliff where the oceans waters are crashing relentlessly

against the rocks beneath it. She then sees another face; a woman, who looks very much like herself.

The woman is off performing her duties as a midwife for a young girl in the village who is about to give birth. As she brings the newborn baby into the world, she holds above its head an amulet inscribed with symbols, and says a blessing over the baby. Jennifer's mind flashes again, as the pictures continue to stream into her consciousness at a rate that she can barely process nor withstand. The next set of images are of men on horses, riding through the dead of night to a house with the same woman returning from the childbirth to find her boy gone and her husband slain.

Afterwards, she sees the woman retrieving the same sword as the one in her hands from under the bed, and making her way to a castle where she continues to cut down multiple hellish looking creatures, fighting her way to the ritual's altar where her son lay bound and unconscious. As she reaches the altar, a raven haired woman stands behind the pillar in a trance like state completely unaware of the woman's presence; her hands raised high with a ceremonial dagger clutched tightly poised to plunge the blade into the heart of the helpless boy.

Jennifer feels the woman's fatigue from having fought her way through to the altar, and her sense of resolve as she musters all of her might to swing the blade once again. However, just as she does, a man tackles her, with now both of them sailing into the raven haired woman, breaking her trance and causing them all to tumble into a pile of swinging appendages. The blow forces both

the sword and the dagger from each of the women's hands, and as everyone works to untangle themselves, both the man and the female assailant grab for a weapon reaching the sword at the same time, with their hands touching, causing them to look directly into each other's eyes.

"Jon...!" Jennifer gasps, as she drops the sword, and then breaks the connection to whatever force had instilled these visions into her head.

She is in a sitting position, and starts to crawl back away from the blade, which now lies at her feet. With her breathing excited and uncontrolled, she slides along the floor until she bumps into a large chest a few feet from the coffin. Staring at the blade, she is almost panting as she becomes transfixed at all of its ornate numinous construction.

Her eyes cannot help but trace its details in a trance, moving from the elaborate script engravings of the blade, all the way to the Gothic style wings of the Angels that make their way up the hand guard to the top of the hilt and back down to the pommel where they converge with four Angels' faces. Completely constrained, she has become utterly spellbound and unable to divert her gaze, when she then witnesses one of the face's eyes open and look directly at her as if the sword were alive; peering into her thoughts. She immediately reacts to the unsettling sight, and jumps to her feet, quickly running out of the vault, where she then crashes into Jon.

He immediately reacts and grabs onto her as they collide into each other, "Holy Shit!" she says frantically.

“Where the hell did you get that thing?” She points to the Sword that is still lying on the floor beside the coffin. He takes his hands and gently helps Jennifer walk over to a chair to sit and catch her breath.

“Why... what happened...?” He asks, already guessing the answer somewhat.

“I’m not sure...,” Jennifer responds, her rapid breathing now slowing a bit as she is starting to regain some composure. “I was playing with the remote and I ended up opening the door to the vault. I saw something on the news about Chayse and I got upset. Then it was as if I was being drawn in. The next thing I know, I was picking up that winged Sword and having the weirdest visions. I saw this woman, but it was like it was me. I was dressed in these weird clothes... like I was at some sort of renaissance faire. There was a man dead and a little boy was taken. It was like they were Danny and Chayse. But then I was at some castle and some kind of ritual, fighting these evil things... killing them with that sword in your closet,” she continues pointing towards the open door of the hidden room.

He sits in the chair across from her and listens quietly, almost ominously as Jennifer continues to describe her ordeal, “Then I saw this little boy, Chayse... or at least somebody that looked just like him. He was on an altar, and this woman was about to stab him with this huge knife. Then I saw you... You attacked me... or her... this woman... the one in my vision.”

“It was like we didn’t even know each other and you were defending this other crazy knife bitch; helping her kill

my baby... I mean this other boy... Oh my God Jon... it was all just so real! Like it was happening to me... but not really...What in the hell is going on with me, Jon? Am I losing my mind or what...?"

He reaches over and touches her hand gently, "No, Jennifer. You are not losing your mind. I think you are just getting in touch with the powers that your grandmother told you about. All of this is starting to make more sense now," he says as he releases her hand and stands up from his chair.

"What do you mean this makes more sense? Nothing about any of this is making any damn sense to me. First I lose my son to some bloodsucking freaks," she looks at Jon quickly.

"No offense intended," she says and Jon shakes his head.

"None taken," he says as she continues to rant.

"Then my ex is killed, and even though I wanted to kill him myself most of the time, I really didn't want Chayse to lose his father. Then after all that, I wake up three days later to find that *not only* have I been hanging out with a twelve hundred year old Vampire all weekend, but that I myself have also become one. *SO PLEASE* Jon enlighten me... Please do explain to me how any of this mess is making the least bit of sense to you, because right now, I am completely lost to yours, or any other thing that could possibly be applied to this situation as logic."

Jon sits back down and begins to try to explain why he has said what he did, "Alright, as I said before, I think

that somehow you and your family line have been intertwined with this kind of thing for a long time. Let me tell you why I think this. First off there is the necklace. Your necklace is mentioned in the book we found in the library as a powerful amulet against evil. More specifically, I believe one that protects against Lilith and any followers of hers that try to harm children. Secondly..., there are the stories that your grandmother told you.”

Jennifer jumps in interrupting Jon, “But she was just an old woman telling a little girl fairytales to make her feel special,” she replies.

Jon shakes his head negatively and continues, “I do not think so. I believe she was an old witch herself who knew the history of the necklace and its powers; maybe even your family line... Now let us presuppose that I am correct..., and what happened the other day finally awakened you to these powers she talked about. Now that you are a Vampire, you would be even more sensitive to the elements and spirits from past lives. This would also explain why you are continually drawn to the Slayer Sword. There is a legend about a family of mortals who had used it to kill Vampires.”

“In any case, this woman you saw used the sword and amulet to save her son, thus unwittingly stopping a very powerful Master Vampire from performing a heinous religious ceremony. I believe this is the same thing that was described in the book, like some sort of incantation for hell on earth. Anyway, the woman and her son survived, and the legend of the sword and this amulet were passed down over

time through his line, of which I believe you are directly descended.”

Jennifer sits back and ponders all of this information before speaking up, “Well where did she, this woman... get the Sword to begin with? Did she just magically create it or what...?”

Jon gets up again and walks into the vault, which is still open and picks up the Sword, and then brings it back into the room and places it across the top of his desk in front of both of them.

“No...it was originally passed down to the woman’s husband by the way of his great, great grandfather. However, after acquiring and seeing its power, I began a quest to track down the complete history to try to understand its true origins. What I found, was that according to legends, the earliest mentioning’s places the sword’s first appearance just a few generations after the fall of Adam and Eve.”

“The Book of Enoch; a Jewish text that predates the Jewish Torah and the Christian Bible, states that after Lilith left Adam, she proceeded to produce lots of demonic offspring who spread and terrorized the world. It then speaks of a man named Methuselah who was a descendent of one of Adam’s sons; Seth. At that time, Methuselah was the king of the ancient world and had seen the demons and their evil deeds.

Concerned for his lands... he decided that for three days, he would choose to pray and fast for a solution from his creator. On the third day, God spoke and instructed him

to forge a mighty sword, one that God himself then infused with inscriptions on the blade believed by some to be a kind of holy Angelic script that contained magical symbols, spelling out the secret holy name for the Jewish God himself; and ultimately imbuing it with a heavenly supernatural power. He was also instructed to have the hilt adorned with a hand guard cast to resemble Angel's wings out stretched to stop an opponent's blade, and four Angels' faces carved into the round pommel like one head but with four faces, each looking outward from the center in all directions ever vigilant to watch over the person who wielded it."

"Methuselah would then go on to use the sword to kill countless demons, until one day, a more powerful demon leader, Agrimus, one of the first generation created by the union of Lilith and Cain, groveled at his feet to stop the slaughter. Methuselah accepted his petition and stopped, but not before he locked the demon-king in chains, banishing the rest of the hell spawns into the far corners of the earth."

"Then somewhere after the time of the great flood of Noah, the sword essentially disappeared from history until curiously; another supernatural sword is mentioned by Homer in the epic of the Odyssey. The story tells that the Greek King Laertes, father of Odysseus, had given this very sword to his son. After the Trojan wars during his ten years of travel back home, Odysseus needed to seek council that he could only get from a long-dead sage named Teiresias. However, in order to summon the Teiresias's ghost,

Odysseus had to dig a pit and fill it with blood. The blood was used to draw Teiresias's ghost out, and by drinking it, he would regain a few minutes of physical life, allowing Odysseus time to communicate with Teiresias and ask his questions."

"However the problem was that the blood would not only draw out Teiresias's ghost, but it would also attract all manners of other spirits and demons from the underworld. In order to keep all of the other ghosts from reaching the blood until Teiresias arrived, Odysseus had to stand guard over the pit with his father's sword."

"No one has ever known how this sword came to be possessed by Laertes, but it contained the power to hold the blood-thirsty demons at bay, allowing Odysseus to complete his contact with Teiresias. Because of its unique ability to banish the undead, the sword later came to be known as the Slayer Sword; a powerful weapon against all sorts of supernatural spirits and demons, including Vampires."

"At some point, the blade again disappeared from history and then reappeared, making its way into the hands of a Knights Templar named Longinus during one of the first Crusades. The Knight purportedly lost the blade in the heat of fierce battle, in which no one else but he survived on either side. The battlefield was littered with bodies and a dense cache of weaponry, so much so, that he was never able to find it."

"Eventually, scavengers and looters picking through the bodies and looking for things of value, found the sword

and sold it to a merchant in Jerusalem, who in turn sold it to yet another Crusader who was returning home. The merchant swore to him it was a holy weapon because of the winged Angel looking figures on its hilt and the magical symbols engraved on the blade, which the merchant declared was a Heavenly Script that would protect him in his travels and battle.”

“The Crusader promptly purchased it and brought it back home with him. There was a story about him coming across a traveling band of Vampires that masqueraded as a Gypsy circus. When they came to the Crusaders village, he used it to eradicate them. Realizing its power, it was passed to the eldest son in this family in each subsequent generation.”

Jon then pauses and holds up the Sword as he looks at the figures of the Angels’ faces, almost as if they are helping him recount the tale, while they look out from the pommel with outstretched wings along the hilt of the Damascus like style swirl of the perfectly tempered steel.

“The woman..., who I believe to be your great-great-great, grandmother, was also a local midwife and herbalist not unlike most of the women in her family before her. These women were also knowledgeable of nature and medicines. They understood the seasons, equinoxes, and were frequently sought out for their council for matter of the heart and knowledge of a woman’s sexuality.”

“They were typically respected as leaders in their local communities, and were generally referred to as wise-women. The term Wise-woman is an old English name, but

another common name for them today is a bit more familiar... *Witch*.”

Jennifer’s eyes begin to grow a bit wider with increasing interest as Jon continues.

“Anyway, she and her husband had migrated to a small port village in Great Britain from somewhere in Eastern Europe to escape the persecution of the Moslem Turks. As they made their way across Central Europe, they were also attempting to avoid contact with that of another powerful immortal Romanian ruler, named Vlad Tepes; who also sought the sword and its supernatural power to help keep the Turks from using it against him; though he was never able to acquire it.”

“Vlad would later more commonly become known as Vlad Dracul; or as you may know him, just Dracula... What they eventually came to realize, was that they had merely escaped one terrible circumstance only to befall victims to another more sinister one... a Vampire that was older and more powerful than any other Vampire that anyone had ever encountered before...”

He shifts his gaze now from the hilt to the center fullers of the blade and the divinely etched symbols, “The village was near a shore line that had a large castle nearby, where the villagers had rumored for years that in this castle, lived a raven haired woman who never aged. They would pay tribute to her, and generally speaking, would typically be left alone; but the port was also known as a mysterious place where occasionally sailors, strangers, and newly settled families and the like would disappear, leading to more

whispered suspicions. While the wise-woman from before was out one night delivering the baby of another local villager, her family was attacked by Vampires who then took her son and killed her husband.”

“At the time, I do not think she fully believed the stories her husband had told her about the true power this weapon held over my kind, but she was however, knowledgeable of the protection that her amulet provided. And while the details are never clear according to the legends, it is said that she was able to retrieve her son and save his life. That very amulet Jennifer, I believe is the same one that you now possess.”

Jennifer touches the necklace, and then looks up at Jon, “So how do you know so much about this...” she asks, as she points at the sword, “and how did you end up with the sword, and why would I see your face in this vision if what I saw was through the eyes of this other woman?”

Jon pauses a long moment debating on whether to divulge this part of his past to her. He had been under Nestasia’s control for so many centuries; but that all changed on that fateful night when he stood over Jennifer’s ancestor... his mind replaying the scene as if it were yesterday. There he was, staring down at the young woman screaming.

He had been the one to tackle her, thwarting her attack against his Master, but the resulting tumble had caused Nestasia’s dagger to ultimately find its mark, even if not by her hand. As Jon got to his feet, he grabbed the sword from the woman just moments before she had a

chance to reclaim it, and positioned himself for the final strike against his master's assailant. The woman was still on the ground lying on her back when she looked over to see the dagger still sticking out from her son's chest, never even noticing Jon poised to strike. Her only thought was the singular focus of a protective mother, as she got to her feet and quickly ran over to her son lying motionless on the altar.

She grabbed her necklace, and let out a scream so soulfully distraught and emotionally charged, that it still resonates in Jon's mind to this day. The scream released a supernatural energy powerful enough to cause Jon to lower his blade and walk over to her, with his intensions changing from one of the aggressor, to now that of a protector. Now filled with an inexplicable need to save from harm the woman he had just only moments before would have killed for his master, he then turned his attention to Nestasia who was still dazed, coming out of her trance like state to finally realize what had happened.

"NO!!!!.... That witch, she has ruined everything... Kill her! Finish her and the boy *NOW*!" she screamed in desperate attempt to regain control.

However, Jon was unable to move. He was locked in a trance like state himself; the woman's screams of pain unlocking the memories of his own past, as he remembered standing over the body of his fallen comrades, and most notably his brother. With Jon still entranced, another Vampire then attempted to attack which he instinctively moved to counter with his newly acquired Slayer sword,

and caught the other vampire's sword in mid air, deflecting the blow away from the woman who was still kneeling and sobbing over her son.

"Move Barbarian...you heard the Master! Now get out of the way." the Vampire attacker bellowed at him.

"No Roman, I no longer serve a master; and I will kill anyone who tries to harm this woman!" He retorted.

"So be it Viking... I have long waited for this time. I will put you down like the mongrel dog you are, and then I will finally be her General!"

With those words, the Roman lunged at Jon, who maneuvered out of his way, narrowly escaping the skillfulness of his opponent's blade. He countered the strike with one of his own, and the supernatural blade found its mark, severing the Vampires hand cleanly off from the upper wrist halfway up his forearm, and causing it to drop to the floor still clutching his own sword. The vampire then picked up his severed hand and tried to reattach it, but with it not grafting itself back to his body, became hysterical as he watched his blood continue to flow out, not healing as it normally would have from a blow from any other mortal means.

Confused and angered, he clumsily tried with his remaining good hand to wrench the sword loose from the severed ones frozen grasp. Unable to break it free, he grabbed the arm with his remaining hand, and attempted to strike at the woman with what would turn out to be his final blow. The woman then looked up just in time to see Jon strike her attacker's blade with such a force that it

shattered the Roman's weapon, causing it to continue unimpeded into his opponent's neck and cleanly separate his head from his shoulders.

The Roman's head hit the ground beside the woman as his body slumped down, buckling at the knees, falling forward in her direction and causing the hand that previously clutched his sword so tightly, to open and release the broken blade as it fell to the floor, just narrowly missing its intended target.

The woman then looked down at the blade and back up at Jon, "Why...are you not one like them... *a Vampire?*?" she asked bewildered.

"I may be a Vampire, but I am no longer like them, thanks to you", he responded. "Is the boy dead...?"

"Yes... but I can save him if you help me get him back up to my cottage."

Jon's mind then returns to the present, but his having been silent for a few minutes now, has allowed Jennifer to realize she has touched on something deep, as he then re-engages his reality and comes back into their present conversation.

"Jennifer, I was not always as I am now." He speaks with great reservation in his tone.

"What do you mean Jon...? You mean about being human. I understand that..."

"No Jennifer. I mean the kind of Vampire I am now. There was a time when I was under the control of my maker, and at her bidding, I inflicted unthinkable acts of cruelty on her behalf for over half of a millennia."

“But you had no choice, she controlled you?”

“Perhaps, the sire bound of a master vampire is very strong; but these things were still perpetrated by me, and that blood will forever stain my hands. Regardless it suffices to say that I am no longer that kind of Vampire. I do not kill for food nor do I submit to anyone or anything’s command; and for that, I owe your ancestor. She freed me from the grasp of my maker. She saved me...”

“What do you mean Jon...? I’m confused. How did she save you?”

“I was there Jennifer. That night... in your vision... it was me, I was there... That is why you saw my face,” Jon says solemnly. “I thwarted her attack on Nestasia. But somehow you... *she*...freed me from Nestasia’s power to control me, so I protected her and helped her save her son. As a reward, she gave me the sword to keep it from ever being used on me, but under one condition.”

“She said she was born the seventh generation girl in a family line of witches that were entrusted with the sacred symbols on the necklace you possess to hold off a great evil from coming into this world; that there would come a time when this all would be repeated again, and that I would have to protect that person from the same fate that I had just protected her.”

“She then made me swear a blood oath on the souls of my men to the Valkerie. She told me the sword and your necklace...,” he says as he gestures to her pendant, “would identify who this person was. This sword... it belonged to your family, the same as the necklace. I now know why I

was drawn here at this time... and to you when we first met. I was fated to protect you and your son; to help you finish what your ancestor started so many years ago.”

“Oh my God... This would explain my vision then when I touched the blade. I was seeing the past.”

Jon turns back around to face her, “Yes... I believe that this is why you see what you do, and also why the Sword looked so natural in your hands earlier. You and it have a shared history from its past.”

Jennifer stares at the blade as she slowly stands and walks back towards the desk. She then bends down and extends her arm once she gets closer to the Sword. Just before she touches it, she stops short and stares at it, still a little afraid.

“I don’t know what all this means, but do you think it will help us get Chayse back?”

Jon sees her hesitation and reaches past her to retrieve the blade momentarily, holding it by his side, “Yes I believe you have the gift of sight, just as your ancestor... that it will let you see through planes of realities, past and future. So yes, I believe this will help us find your son.”

There is a moment of silence, then Jennifer’s tone changes from one of solemn nature to one of agitation, “Speaking of which, what did you find out at the club? Was that Angel bitch there? Did you see her?” she asks angrily.

“Yes...” Jon replies. “I am to call her at midnight for a location where we can meet,” he says, and then walks back into the vault to return the sword to its previous resting place.



# Chapter

## Seven

Silence fills the room as Jennifer anxiously looks again at the clock on the wall; however unlike previous instances, it now registers the anticipated twelve o'clock. Jon picks up his phone and dials the number from the napkin that Angel had given him earlier. The phone rings and a woman's voice answers on the other end.

"Hello," the voice says.

"Angel...?" Jon questions.

"Yes... Jon?" she replies.

"Yes... Where do you want to meet?" he asks.

Angel hesitates for a second and then answers, "Do you know the old cemetery on Canal?"

Jon replies that he does.

"Bring the cash and meet me there at 12:30 sharp by Marie Leveaux's grave. Don't be late because at 12:31 sharp, I'm gone. If I see that you're not alone, I'm gone. If you do anything that gives me the slightest hesitation, I'm gone. If you do not stick to all of these conditions to the letter, there will be no second chances. Do you understand...? You will never see me or hear from me

again! I will disappear... and you will never get any of the information you want!”

Jon acknowledges her conditions, “I understand... I will be there... alone... and with the money... in cash, as agreed.”

The phone line goes dead and Jon hangs up. Jennifer has been quietly sitting, hanging onto every word, surprised that she could hear both sides of the conversation, “So, what do we do now?” she asks, looking at Jon.

“Well... *WE*, are going to get some cash from my vault, and then *I*... am going to go meet her.”

At the solemn evasiveness of Jon’s plans to include her, Jennifer gets defensive, “What about me? What do I do? Don’t even think you’re going to try to change your mind on me or talk me out of this. *I AM* going with you,” she says insistently.

Jon knows that it is pointless to try to dissuade her to even possibly consider otherwise... and as such, he concedes to her demand, “Alright... however if you come, you have to do exactly as I say, though... I am confident she is not coming alone, and will undoubtedly have a few Vampire friends of her own there to try and find out more about what I know and where you are.”

“So the last thing that either of us can afford right now is for you to cause me to lose my focus worrying about you if things go badly.” He pauses, taking a breath to emphasize his unyielding control of the situation at hand before continuing to explain his plan, “So here is what *we* are going to do. I am going to take my bike, and you can

drive the Viper. However, once we get there, you have to stay in the car. That part is non-negotiable... Do you understand?"

Jennifer looks into Jon's face and can see that he is completely disinclined to let her be there at all, so she begrudgingly agrees to his condition, "Okay... okay...", she says.

"Also, keep your phone on, I will call once the exchange has taken place and I have what we need," he instructs before walking back into the vault. He gets the required amount of cash, then exits, closing the vault's door behind him.

Jennifer looks over at him and Jon can see in her anxious expression that she needs some reassuring, "Chayse is still safe, Jennifer... They will not dare harm him before midnight on the Day of the Dead. That gives us two days exactly from now. I will get him back before then, but you have to trust me and do exactly what I say... okay?"

Jennifer's expression shows that she is still obviously quite concerned, but now exhibits a slight appearance of relief from Jon's optimistic words as a strained smile crosses her face.

"I do trust you, Jon... if it weren't for you, I would be dead already and so would my baby in two days. So if for some reason I forget to tell you this later... thank you Jon... Thank you for everything. I know that we would have had no chance to survive this if not for you."

She reaches up touching his face, gently emphasizing her gratitude and acknowledging her belief in his genuine

concern for her feelings and her son's safety. They then both turn and head for the elevator. As they step inside, Jon closes the door and turns to her.

"I assume that you heard where we are going?" he responds, more stating the fact than posing a question.

"Yes I did... How is that? I mean, I could hear every word as clear as if I were on the phone with you."

Jon presses the button for the elevator to descend and it begins to move, "Because you are a Vampire now," he says calmly, as if this is everyday conversation.

"Wow... what else will I be able to do?" she asks as the elevator stops and Jon opens the door.

"You have to be especially careful right now, Jennifer. All of your faculties have been extremely heightened... your senses, your physical capabilities, and most importantly your emotions. You will feel... hear...and see more keenly. You are stronger and faster than you could have previously ever imagined. However the one ability that is most notable is that everything... every emotion that you feel... you will experience with far more intensity than you ever have before."

She listens on, but doesn't respond as he continues to explain, "You need be ever vigilant and consciously aware of these facts. This heightened state of existence can help you in times of danger if you pay attention to your instincts, but likewise, these new sensations can also overwhelm you if you are not careful."

"So basically, it is like being pregnant and on steroids at the same time... got it," she responds matter-of-factly.

“You know though it’s really ironic, but I feel better more alive now than I ever have. It’s sad that I guess I had to literally die before I could truly appreciate living... kind’a philosophical, don’t you think?” she questions earnestly, though Jon is far too focused on the dire situation at hand to placate her any further at this time.

“Jennifer, you are transitioning right now, and you are still too new to your powers to be able to differentiate between this life and the life you once had. Please be mindful of what I tell you about your emotions. This is a very delicate time for you.”

“I will, Jon... Don’t worry. I just want to get my son back, that’s all... nothing else matters” she responds understandingly.

The elevator stops, and Jon walks over to his motorcycle. He turns the lever to start the gas flow to the engine, and next the key to the on position for the ignition. He then presses the electric starter button on the handlebars, and the S&S outfitted 2000cc V-Twin engine begins to turn over. The exhaust rumbles from the pipes now, and Jon revs it a few times to warm up the remaining internals. Once a steady idle is received, Jennifer walks over to him. She hands him a leather jacket that was draped on a wall hanger by the elevator. He puts on the coat and stuffs the bank-banded, secured stack of hundreds, in his inner pocket.

“Look, give me a few minutes before you leave, okay?”

“Okay...” she replies; then kisses him on the cheek.

“You be careful,” she says with a concerned tone in her voice.

“I will... You, as well...” he says returning the sentiment. “Remember... do not leave the car... for any reason. Not until I call you. Is that Understood?”

“Understood...”

Jon presses a small button on the side of the bike, and the garage door begins to open. He presses it a second time and the main gate opens, “See you shortly,” he says, revs the engine again, and then wheels out of the garage onto the street.

Jennifer waits a few minutes until she can no longer hear the rumble from the motorcycle’s engine, before she too gets ready to leave. She walks around to the driver’s side of the Viper, opens the door, and then sits in the seat; adjusting it to fit her shorter stature so that she can better reach the pedals. She then turns the key, and the powerful V-10 engine fires up without hesitation.

Once on the street, she pulls over momentarily so that she can stretch to the glove box and close the gates back again. As soon as she is satisfied that all gates are secured, she heads off towards Decatur Street. She drives down through the French Quarter and heads toward Canal Street. When she reaches it, she turns and heads toward her destination.

Jon, a good few minutes ahead of her, is already arriving at the gates of the cemetery. He pulls the motorcycle onto the sidewalk by the main gate and turns off the engine. Easing out of the seat, he surveys his

surroundings carefully for any signs of extra company that might be waiting just inside for him. With all of his senses finely tuned, he slowly walks up to the gate.

He looks down and can see that the lock has been picked, but left hooked to give the appearance of still being latched from any potential passerby. He presses it back together again, locking it. The girl in question is a mortal, so he knows this will slow any unperceived exits on her part greatly. These obstacles however, do not burden him.

Once the gate is secured, he takes a step back and easily traverses its height with a single bound. Landing gently on the other side, he touches down without leaving so much as an impression on the grass. He then gets his bearing and heads across the grass towards the spot Angel had directed him to meet her. As he walks, he continues to examine his surroundings. Angel has not disappointed him; he can already sense the presence of other immortals just as he had expected he would. Reaching the appointed gravesite which he can tell is newly vacant, he can smell the perfume Angel was wearing at the club, and knows she is still very close by.

“Angel,” Jon calls out, but not too loudly.

With that, a figure appears out of the darkness, “Did you bring the cash...?” a female voice asks him, with an obvious air of nervousness in her tone.

“It is all right here...,” he replies, patting the front of his leather jacket.

“Pull it out... I want to see it.”

He pulls out the money and holds it up to where the

light of an almost full moon just slightly illuminating the area can shine on it, “Satisfied...?” he asks.

“Toss it over here first,” the figure instructs, and Jon does as requested. The figure bends to pick up the pack of bills and quickly counts it.

“Okay... it’s all here,” the voice replies. With that, her eyes begin to glow red and three more figures come out from behind different crypts, all of which who are Vampires. Jon knew this would be a trap, and immediately leaps towards the closest figure, catching the intended attacker off guard with his lack of hesitation. He lands directly in front of the would-be assailant, who is now in full view from the light of a distant street lamp. Jon can see this is a longhaired, very young Vampire, of less than twenty years of being undead.

The younger one lunges at Jon, and he steps to the side slightly. The attacker misses his target just narrowly passing, allowing Jon to wield a slashing blow with his now elongated fingernail, much as one would a large knife blade, and slices deeply through the side of the Vampire’s throat. He then lands on the ground and tumbles, holding his neck desperately, as his precious life force flows quickly from the massive gash. Jon walks over towards him, and without hesitation, twists the wounded Vampire’s head until it snaps.

Then, placing one foot on the subdued victims back, he pulls on it with both hands and causes the distressed muscle and flesh to pop like an over extended rubber band. The skull separates from the neck and spinal column at the

brain stem, leaving the head completely detached from his assailant's shoulders; exposing parts of the top vertebrae and bloody shredded muscle fiber and tendons dangling like loosely gathered red tattered liquorish sticks. The decapitated body convulses momentarily, and then all life ceases.

Jon now holds his former assailant's head by its long hair, as he lunges for his next closest attacker who has a weapon of his own; a Japanese sword. Seeing the flash of the blade in the moonlight, He jumps into the air, and turns a flip just over the top of the second attacker's swing, rolling over the blade of the new hostile and landing right behind him.

As soon as he touches the ground, Jon spins, swinging the first dead Vampire's head like a Mace, and furiously catches the second one in the back of his skull. This causes the attacker to lose grip on his blade, which is now falling from his grasp, and knocks the unskilled attacker off balance, sending him flying hard onto the ground.

Jon releases the hair of the severed head, dropping it to the ground, and moves with unparalleled speed to retrieve the sword just before the second assailant can get to his feet. He then swings the blade, and with a powerful blow, catches his attacker at the midsection precisely as he attempts to jump to his feet, cutting his body completely in half. The two parts of the attacker's body fall in opposite directions of each other, but the victim of the blow is still alive, squalling from the pain. Jon again moves hastily and

jams the blade into the open mouth of the second Vampire with a force strong enough that it penetrates the back of his skull and drives the tip into the ground. This partially severs the spinal column and the neurological links to all of his motor skills, rendering the Vampire instantly silent while still leaving his brain and eye sight functional, twitching frantically at the trauma of the onslaught as the final remains of his undead existence drains from his once again deceased corpse.

He now lays on the ground, essentially reduced to a quadriplegic. His last moments of neural function are spent in trauma and horror, watching on transfixed, as Jon withdraws the blade from his open mouth. Once the blade is removed, his neck is no longer strong enough to support its weight due to the severed muscles around the partially severed spinal cord, and causes it to roll slightly like a deflated ball flat to one side. Out of the corner of his twitching eye, he sees Jon elevate his arm and rear back for one final deadly strike that he delivers above his chin at his jaw line, severing the top half of his head, and almost completely leaving his lower jaw dangling and flaccid.

With its few remaining un-severed tendons and muscles, it just barely retains enough connective tissue from his lower jaw to anchor the top half of his head, leaving his mouth gaping unnaturally wide open like a broken PEZ dispenser with a gaping hole that was once his throat at the top of his neck, acting as a disturbing representation of the dispenser's opening for the candy insert. Jon now turns to face the last two; the female and the one remaining male.

Both are in possession of swords, with the last male considerably larger than himself by at least eight inches and one hundred pounds. Also obviously the most senior of the group, he displays a demeanor that demonstrates that he is far more accomplished in his battle skills than the two expeditiously subdued predecessors were, with his choice of blade being one more like the ones that were used by legionary soldiers from the armies of ancient Rome. At this view, Jon is almost sure he has faced this one before.

The large one begins his attack ferociously, and Jon's sword meets his blade in mid-swing. Knocked back slightly from the blow and almost losing his footing, Jon drops from the raised level of grass over the curb to the paved pathway between the tombs. His attacker is right behind him and swings again, this time knocking the blade from his grip. Now without a weapon, he jumps up into the air, avoiding yet another powerful blow from the hulking Vampire.

As his attacker lunges through his swing, Jon lands behind him and lands a back-kick, sending the large attacker off balance into the grass. Using this as a chance to regain momentum, Jon moves quickly to reclaim his sword. Momentarily preoccupied with his large male attacker, Jon's back is turned to the remaining female assailant, who seeing her opportunity to strike, does so.

Her blow catches him off guard, and she slices down the middle of his back, splitting his leather coat from between the shoulder blades down. However, this attempt has not gone deep enough to cause any real damage, leaving

only a surface wound, which allows him to spin and catch her square in the neck with his own sword, severing her head cleanly off with a single blow. He then sheds his coat and turns his attention back to his greatest threat...the last and eldest Vampire still standing.

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Angel, who had been present the entire time watching this massacre from behind a crypt, now, decides that this is the most opportune time to retreat. It is obvious to her that the immediate conflict is probably not going to end in her favor as she had planned. As such, she decides to depart while Jon is still occupied and before he can turn his attentions to her.

She hastily takes off across the grass and heads towards the front gate. Once she gets there, she reaches through the steel bars only to find that the padlock has been locked back and starts to panic.

“Shit! Shit! Shit...!” she screams in a worried voice, shaking the gates.

Jennifer is sitting parked in a dark spot just across the street from the gate as Angel’s desperate outbursts catch her attention. Never so much as opening the door, she lunges from the car’s driver seat and quickly crosses the street to meet her. She gets to it just as Angel is starting to climb up in an attempt to escape over the top.

“Fancy meeting you here... Need some help?” Jennifer asks facetiously.

“Oh shit! Princess, you’re alive, thank God...” she says, trying to cover her obvious concern to this fact.

“Help me please, there is a crazy man back there trying to kill me.”

“I can’t possibly imagine why...” she replies, continuing her sarcasm, “Sure, I’ll help you.” With that, Jennifer grabs the lock and pulls down on it hard, causing it to snap open as her eyes start to glow red from her building anger.

“Oh shit, you’re one of them... a Vampire,” Angel responds, pointing out at her in a state of shock.

“Yes... I am, thanks to you and your friends.”

Jennifer then throws open the gate and the power of the thrust causes Angel to lose her grip, and hurls her to the ground.

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Jon hears the loud creaking noise of the old rusted metal as the gates swing wildly open and slams against the stone block walls that hold them in place. He allows his attention to be diverted only for a split second though, as the last remaining of his immortal adversaries comes at him again.

“Now you will pay for your past sins, barbarian scum,” the huge Vampire says, rushing towards Jon. “This is for my brother!”

Jon’s eyes are glowing bright red now, and he is completely transformed into the hellish creature of his

creator with all of his senses and abilities heightened to their maximum potential.

“Your brother got what he deserved, Antonius. Neither of you were ever my better, nor even near my equal... and now you will die as proof of that.”

“You will eat my Roman steel as I ram it down your throat, Northman!”

The larger Vampire raises his blade high in preparation for his attack as Jon stands fast, his blade held low pointing down, waiting for his opponent to rush in for their final clash. The huge Vampire lunges at Jon with his blade held high, swinging it diagonally down from right to left as he attempts to cut across Jon from shoulder to hip.

The blow is powerful, skilled, and fast, but not fast enough to catch Jon, who had already started to spin away from it in the same direction causing the blade to miss its mark. The momentum of the swing carries the larger Vampire forward as Jon continues to spin, gaining more force and a momentum of his own. His blade finds its mark and hacks off the arm of his foe. With his arm now gone and his blade still clutched in its severed grasp, the Roman Vampire turns to face Jon.

“I was there when she was Queen of Egypt, and she chose me to help command one of the greatest armies in the world. She has outlived Rome, and she will not be stopped by the likes of a barbarian such as you.”

“You forget yourself, Roman. You feed off my scraps; it was I she sought out and chose to lead her armies; not you. You are... and always were just a foot soldier, a

follower, a mindless eunuch to be led but never to lead. I am a leader, the son of Viking royalty, a King in my land; but most of all, I will always be a true warrior, and a commander of warriors. Now... Join your brother in Hell...!”

With these words, Jon quickly lunges and strikes his fatal blow, causing the older Vampire’s body to go limp, and his head to fall to the ground. He then stands over the body of his fallen enemy, knowing that if this one was here, then Nestasia had to be very close by indeed; undoubtedly knowing that he was here as well. His attention now returns to the purpose for which he came here in the first place; Angel. She would also surely have to know something about Chayse if she could get one so close to Nestasia to aid her in tonight’s events.

*So just where the hell is she*, he thinks on to himself. He then remembers the crashing sound of the gates, which he now hears voices and a woman screaming from the same direction.

“Jennifer!” Jon says out loud, and rushes across the grass back towards the entrance of the cemetery. He reaches the gate to find Angel looking quite bloody and beaten up, being held up in the air by the throat from a single hand belonging to Jennifer.

“*WHERE’S MY SON, YOU FUCKING BITCH?*” Jennifer screams, as she interrogates her captive.

Angel has tears streaming down her face and can barely reply due to Jennifer’s grip cutting off her airflow, “I don’t know...” she replies in a muffled voice, as she coughs

and gasps, struggling to breathe through Jennifer's enraged grasp.

"*YOU'RE LYING!*" she yells.

Jennifer throws Angel into the stone block wall. She hits the wall with considerable force and knocks her almost unconscious before falling to the ground. Jon stands quietly and watches, not quite ready to intervene. He knows better than to try and stop an enraged mother who is protecting her child, especially one that carries the same blood as his own.

Jennifer walks over to the girl as she lies balled up, crying on the ground, and then yanks her up by her left arm like a rag doll. Angel's shoulder makes a popping noise as it dislocates, sending her into another squall of pain and tears.

"*AAAYYYHHH!!!*" she cries out, screaming in agony.

"*OH...I'm sorry... Does this hurt...?*" Jennifer retorts sarcastically, showing no remorse or pity for the continued infliction of agony as Angel's body dangles freely above the ground, suspended by the single arm which only adds to her already excruciating level of pain.

"Please God... please don't kill me," the girl begs as her pleadings fall on deaf ears, while Jennifer continues to dangle her by the one arm like a puppet on a string.

"Believe me... if you don't tell me what I want to know, before I am through with you, you will beg me for death. Now I will ask you again, *WHERE IS MY SON?*"

Angel tries to talk through her pain and tears, "I swear I don't know where he is..." she expounds, pausing

to take a protracted breath due to the levitated state of her flaccid body to cause the downward force of her full body weight to exert pressure on her chest and lungs.

“All I know is that some woman named Nestasia has him downtown somewhere. She’s holding him for some type of freaky ceremony that is supposed to happen at midnight on Friday... at the height of the full moon.”

“Jennifer...,” Jon calls out now, distracting her for a second.

She drops Angel to the ground like a stone, and then spins around to the sound of his voice, “Jon...?”

“I think that’s enough for now, Jennifer,” he says, trying to calm her. It works slightly, but only for a second.

With Jon and Jennifer both distracted, Angel manages to crawl over to her purse which is still in the grass where she landed when thrown from the gate. She frantically fumbles with her one good arm reaching inside, and attempts to retrieve a .38 caliber revolver that she keeps for protection. She grabs the weapon, and points it directly at the back of Jennifer’s head. Both Jon and Jennifer hear the cocking noise of the hammer as Angel pulls it back into a firing position.

“*Alright...* you crazy bitch, now it’s time for you to die, just like your son will in two days.”

At the mention of her son, Jennifer becomes blindly enraged, and before Angel can pull the trigger, she turns and covers the distance between them with the supernatural speed of a Vampire, leaving only a blur for a target. She grabs hold of the butt of the gun, and breaks the hammer

like a matchstick, disabling it from firing. She then pulls Angel to her feet. With fangs now bared and her fingernails like claws, she punches Angel in the chest, breaking her sternum. The force of the blow is so great that it does not stop at the bone, and her arm continues pushing through until it exits clear through Angel's back. Her expression is one more of pure terror than pain as Jennifer pulls her arm and hand back through her body to reveal her still beating heart firmly clutched in her grasp.

Jennifer's rage now turns to hunger, and Angel helplessly watches petrified in horror as Jennifer digs her fangs into the meaty lump of flesh, tearing at the muscle to extract the precious reservoir of blood contained inside. In a matter of seconds, it is drained, and Jennifer, still enraged, discards the heart like a piece of trash, throwing it against the stone wall where it bursts like a ripe tomato from the impact of the explosion.

Angel, who due to the shock and small reserve of prior oxygenated blood still within her brain, manages to remain conscious and mentally coherent. Conversely her physical strength rapidly dissipates from the loss of circulating blood and she is frozen and unable to move as the muscles she uses to remain upright and standing deplete their final reserves of oxygen immediately causing her to buckle at the knees.

Jennifer's anger and lust for blood has now become insatiable, and she quickly returns her attention back to her prey catching Angel before she can fall. Wasting no time she attacks, ripping through the side of Angel's neck like a

feral animal, attempting to satiate her uncontrollable thirst. She feeds until the body of her victim has been almost completely depleted of blood; leaving it limp and lifeless, before releasing it to fall to the ground... discarding it with now more regard than one would the trash remains of an empty juice box.

As Angel's withered shell lies motionless, her face of death accentuates the mortal horror in her eyes, with both wide open and transfixed, still staring at the wall and the red wet spot of what was once her beating heart. Jennifer and Jon, now both back in human form, walk over to each other as she turns to Jon in somewhat of a state of shock at her ability to commit such a grisly and merciless act.

"Oh my God, Jon... *did*... did I really just do that?"

She quickly grabs hold of him, turning away from the sight of Angel's mutilated body. He stares down at her handiwork and personally regards to himself that Angel neither deserves her remorse nor should either of them surrender to any sentiment of culpability for any of the lives that were taken here this night.

However he also recognizes that he is from a different age when killing was more up close and brutal, and having been an immortal for over a thousand years, death is second nature to him. Jennifer however has been one for only a few short days, and she has grown up in a more civilized world where the deliberate infliction of pain and death is typically far less personal. As such he can empathize with her turmoil and does his best to ease her conscious.

“She gave you no choice, Jennifer. You reacted on instinct,” he says, trying to comfort her, knowing that a direct shot to the head from Angel’s pistol could have killed her especially since she is still in an infantile state with respect to her new vampire form.

“I didn’t kill her because of the gun, Jon... I killed her because of what she said about Chayse!” she responds, still burying her face in his chest and clutching onto his arms.

“Nevertheless...if the bullet struck you in the right spot, you still could have been killed or wounded severely. A well placed gunshot can separate your head just as surely a blade can, and if you had been hurt... your son might very well die, just as she said, in two days. Do not let this night’s events cause you to lose sight of why we are here.”

“I know Jon, but... it was like all the hate and anger I ever felt... just came rushing to the surface and I couldn’t control it. What if this happens around Chayse?” she says almost tearing up, “What if I lost control and hurt him or someone else by accident, what would I possible say...?”

Jon then pulls her head up from his chest and looks into her eyes, “Jennifer, you are still transitioning, but you will learn to control these feelings soon enough and I will help you through this, I promise,” he assures her, stroking her hair.

“Now we need to get out of here before anyone sees the mess we have made, and you badly need to get cleaned up. So get in the car and head straight back to the loft. I am right behind you on the bike.”

“Okay...” she says, “Thank you Jon, really...”

Jon hands her what is left of his leather jacket and instructs her to put it on to help cover up the blood that she is partially covered in. Putting on the coat, she quickly crosses the street and gets into the Viper as instructed. She then starts the engine, and speeds off down the road.

Jon then turns and goes back into the cemetery, where he swiftly searches for an available crypt to dump all of the dead bodies and their assorted severed parts. He finds one that has a huge iron door that is locked, and twists on the handle, causing the lock to break free, and then starts to gather up all of the corpses. Once they are all inside, he opens the individual vaults and starts stuffing parts into each one. For a brief moment, he is reminded of that fateful morning when he performed a similar act on the remains of his fallen comrades. He quickly his regains focus and exits the tomb, closing the door behind him. He then twists the handle in the opposite direction until it imbeds into the door latch, jamming it as if it were locked again.

“This should hide them for at least a little while,” he says out loud to himself. “The last thing we need right now is more police snooping around over this.”

Looking down at himself, he now becomes very aware that he too, is covered in blood. He finds a water faucet poking up from the ground used to water the sparse patches of grass, and removes his shirt. Soaking it with water, he hastily proceeds to wipe his upper body down as best as he can. He then exits the cemetery with his shirt still in his hands. Seeing a dumpster down the road next to a

business that is closed for the night, he jumps on his motorcycle and rides towards it, slowing down enough to toss the shirt into it as he passes. He then twists the accelerator hard, and quickly speeds up to avoid being seen.

Jon travels over the necessary back streets until he reaches the French Quarter, then stays off the regularly traversed paths of the tourists until he reaches his loft. He then presses the button to open up the gate and garage, and swiftly disappears behind them. Parking his bike, he jumps off and proceeds onto the elevator, then takes it all the way up to the top floor of his bedroom. As he gets out, he sees Jennifer's clothes lying in a scattered trail all the way to the bathroom and hears the running water of the shower. He removes the few clothes he himself has left on, and heads towards the noise.

"Jennifer..." he calls as he walks into the bathroom.

He opens the door to the shower to find Jennifer sitting in the corner motionless with the water running over her. He steps inside and she immediately springs back to life, jumping into his arms, and literally leaving the ground with her feet dangling inches from the floor, as she hangs onto Jon's neck like a scared child.

"Jennifer, are you alright? Did anyone see you or stop you on the way back here?" he asks, but Jennifer simply continues her hold, never speaking a word.

He returns the affection, knowing that she is still in shock from the night's events. He decides that she obviously had no problems; if so she would not be there, so he lets his questions remain unanswered. Jennifer increases

*Season of the Dead*

her embrace while they both stand there in silence holding each other with the diluted red colored water swirling around the drain at their feet; as the multiple showerheads continue to wash the night's blood from their exhausted bodies.

