

SUSAN RODRIGUEZ: THE  
QUICKENING



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*Eric B. Teepell*

SUSAN'S REQUIEM SERIES PREQUEL

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*Dedicated to queen Lilith, Dresden Files Readers, and  
L<sup>A</sup>T<sub>E</sub>X users worldwide.*

# PROLOGUE

Not everyone is a Dresden Files fan so not everyone is going to know who Susan is or what she's been through. This series is going to be an independent endeavour from the Dresden Files proper so once her background is explained here it will be easier to get into the following story. She was very much a main character in the first three books, then disappeared until death masks skipping a book. There were six books before she had a major role in changes only to die at the end by Harry's own hand. Her hopes ended.

So here goes:

Susan and Harry met when she arranged an interview on the opening of his business as a professional wizard in Chicago. It was a couple years before the Storm Front novel. She was a reporter for the Midwest Arcane at

the time which was a supernatural version of today's tabloid with stories like "JFK's Mutant Ghost Abducts Shapeshifting Girl Scout." Little did people know from time to time the stories were real! Susan even went into syndication.

She had a tendency to hound Harry for a good story although she had an ulterior romantic motive, and made no attempt to hide it. Of course her romantic expression served her well in getting information as well.

She was attractive, bright, appealing, her motivations were clear and simple, and she was honest in pursuing them. She was absolutely relentless. She was charming, gorgeous, funny, and sexy as hell. She used her sexuality in pursuit of information. She is very aggressive and was the one to ask Harry to dinner. Yes Susan took Harry out for their first date and treated him. She had a smile all her own, sultry, sexy, intelligent, and appealing. She had a patent smirk with her lips quirking up at the corners. Her hair was midnight black, with dark eyes and a deeply tan complexion.

The first three books were completely Susan. She could easily have been the other primary protagonist as far as I was concerned.

In *Storm Front* she asked Harry out for dinner. Well, kinda tricked him into dinner in a playful way. She wants what and who she wants and works hard to get it. After she and Harry ran into a demon they needed to combat. A toad creature. They did it but barely, Susan vomiting most of the time from potions Harry had her drink. The date turned out to be the worst night of Susan's life. As



well as the best story she had written so far. End of story.

In *Fool Moon*, the second book in the series, her appearances gained speed until about half way through the book she took the drivers seat. Literally. Getting Harry out of the mess he got himself in as well as being the driver for him and those he needed her to drive for. Including some young werewolves. Susan saved the day in this novel and Harry was along for the ride.

In *Grave Peril* Harry was about to marry Susan though it wasn't apparent until near the end. They are still dating heavily and very serious. She had her first sight of vampires in this book, but not her last. Harry got an invitation to a ball by a local vampire that just got promoted to the nobility. Susan forged an invitation to get in with Harry. Harry had protection under the accords but she didn't because she was never really invited. This particular vampire held him accountable for the deaths of two people she loved. Vampires being what they are in the Dresden series she swore to dedicate her life to exacting vengeance against Harry in one way or another. She found a perfect way. She knew about him and Susan so she stole Susan away and "turned" her. Basically this ended their relationship because Susan was walking a tight rope from that point on, she hungered but if she ever fed she would complete her change and become something else. No more Susan. For now, denying her hunger, she could survive and live as a human but arousal, exhaustion, or the smell of blood, or a number of other things might cause her to lose it and make a kill then game over.

That was the last we seen Susan, she did not have a

part in the next novel but in the following one she did reappear briefly. She had been fighting the vampires in south america and doing humanitarian aid to the residents there. They followed a high ranking vampire back to Chicago (where the novels take place). She gathered her belongings from the city to take back home and intervened against the plans of the vampires while there. Harry and Susan got to fight again and went to a ball together. They even had a dance together. Then she left to rejoin the fight in central and south america.

It was seven novels of wondering what happened to Susan and when she was going to find the cure for her vampirism. In that final novel "Changes" she fights with Harry to save the daughter they had together (that he didn't even know existed). In the end of the novel Susan makes that first kill and begins to change. Their daughter was saved from being killed in a sacrifice and Susan was killed in her place.

That is where the Dresden files story ends and the Susan's Requiem story begins. Her life will never be the same.

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OI

## SUSAN RISING

“Martin,” I said, my voice low and very quiet.  
“Did you tell them about Maggie?” He closed  
his eyes, but his voice was steady. “Yes.”

At that moment I was beyond saving. I’ve been on the edge ever since my daughter Maggie went missing, and now here we are at the altar of Chichén Itzá surrounded by vampires and their many minions determined to sacrifice my baby girl on the altar. I need to save her. My emotions are on high, I’ve been far too close to losing it and now dumbass Martin tells me he led my only daughter to the slaughter. I couldn’t see through my rage, I was so far beyond control I don’t even think an immortal could have stopped me. My vampiric part

foreseen it's victory over my will and poured it's power into me and drove me quickly and irreversibly to my kill. It shackled me to it's purpose and terror came from my soul to intermix with the rage. My humanity foreseen it's own death but was unable to pull back, the vampire in me had stolen control to ensure it takes the life it needs to fully emerge. Quick as lightning and lithe as a snake, I took Martin down hard and made the kill with complete abandon.

I knew what was going to happen to me but Martin was calling the shots, using the one thing that would be successful in causing me to lose it. To really really lose it. I just didn't care. I desperately wanted to care. I could do nothing but devour his life blood. I tore out his throat the feeding was so vicious. When he was dead I was changing. It was too late, I couldn't take it back. I had control of myself but only for a few moments. Oh my God the pain, horrible intimate euphoric pain. Searing with power and pleasure as I experience the wretched agony of my flesh tearing from the inside out. I started to feel the pain give way to a new mass, a new body not my own was devouring me and emerging in my place. The monster has been set loose in me, in my loss of control I sacrificed a life to the slumbering vampire and brought it forth to consume me. I think my hands came first as they were elongated and clawed, breaking through my skin. I seen the new being crawling beneath my skin like a snake or worm, a ghastly sight to behold.

She is coming, the vampire that I am to be, she is not me. I could feel the others coming, other vampires. I heard

the memory of the Red Kings call to battle. I hear them, I feel them. My vampire half is becoming whole in me, while I live it now coexists with me but I will not be here long. My soul is soon to be consumed. Harry reminds me I am the youngest of the red court now, I can destroy them all by my sacrifice. I can take every last one of the red court. I scream to Harry to save our daughter Maggie. Maggie was all I could think about, I have to save Maggie.

Harry took Maggie from the altar as gently as he could, and laid me down. I am still being consumed, I haven't much longer for my humanity to live. Harry promised me Maggie will be safe, I felt confident in his words. That didn't completely absolve my worry, and it did nothing to absolve the sheer terror I felt over what is happening to me. Harry was going to sacrifice me. I've never been so scared in my life but I still knew it would preserve me from the completion of my transition, and destroy the monsters that have caused so much suffering. Oh I was so scared. He closed my eyes with his hand, and kissed me. It was a sharing of our blood and our tears. I cried out to Maggie, perhaps just to tell her everything will be ok, but I don't think it came out as more than a whisper.

*Then Harry cut my throat, and I was dying.*

All was black, but for less than a moment. Lighting came down from the heavens and struck me in the darkness, maybe it was a dream, but it kept frying me for what seems like forever. I felt the consumption of my body, well, come to completion. Bye bye human me. After a

time I felt myself floating up and seen myself, my blood flowing out from all over the altar. My body glowing and sparking with energy repeatedly, like when lightning hits a large transformer in the street. The energy slowly being absorbed. The vampires were gone, my friends survived. I am dead. The whole red court is gone including myself the youngest of their kind. Thank God for that. Soon enough I know that sweet chariot is going to swing low and come to carry me home.

Harry was in such pain. I could see it. I rested my hand on his shoulder and tried to talk to him. He neither felt it nor heard it but I could do no less. Harry is standing there, in shock, not moving. The vampires all fell leaving nothing but black sludge. The infected were mostly killed except the younger ones, since the vampire part was killed and it was what was keeping many young, even alive.

Walking toward the altar is the Erlking and I take my place beside Harry.

“Huntress, Sir knight, well met.”

I had to check but yes, I’m still a ghost. I turn to Harry with a tear. Yes ghosts have tears, apparently.

“To you as well.” I said.

“I hope thou wilt be pleased with the strength of thine new nature huntress. Nay, I played no small part in bringing it to you. I was most certainly pleased that thou wert the first to have been my guest. Thou art honorable and wise my dear, such cannot be hidden in you. Thou likely thinkest that thine visit to mine realm twas coincidence? Be not a fool I willed it so. I was needful that you could be



near me, that I might know that thou wert pureborne.”

The Erlking smashed Maggies shackles and placed her in Harry’s hands. “Thou art the greatest hunter of thine kind, I cleared thine path for you. I ensured that thou wert slain. Your life has been hideous child, thou wert pitted against thyself like thou wert thine own prey, to live thou wouldst needfully refrain from the kill and blaspheme thine own nature. It is now abolished in you. May you and yours now hunt in freedom and rejoice in the kill. Thou hast redeemed thine species in the shedding of thine own blood. Thou art now free to join your hunt without fear of destruction. Thou canst replace these dishonourable wretches with thine own children as thee see fit. A pity I could not get the chance to hunt the red king and his ilk myself.”

I don’t see where I can enjoy the hunt as a spook, or how me and Harry can make little spooks together. Bloody Markov chains I’m gonna have to wait out the answer.

“Perhaps you might elaborate more and explain what you mean?”, I said while arching an eyebrow.

“Thou art always welcome as mine guest o’ queen, then shall we speak together by the fire enjoying our kill.” The Erlking bows low to me. He looks at Harry with a sort of piteous eye, “I promise that by my hand thine mate shall not be slain. I know thine mate twas torn from thee in a most hideous way.”

Then at that he swiftly left on his way. Harry seemed to come to his senses after what seemed like forever. I couldn’t help but smirk. It was just as well he would

have been confused as fuck. I sure I am. As a matter of fact a helicopter came in and landed taking in a couple people, then left. Harry still stood there with a thousand mile stare, holding Maggie. I stayed with him, I wouldn't leave him, even if he couldn't see me. I hear our friends conversations with my enhanced hearing. I sat there with Ebenezer and Harry while they chatted, they were none the wiser. It's amazing he is actually Harry's grandpa, I wonder what other wizards are in Harry's line. I wonder if my Maggie will be a wizard when she grows up? I'm not sure how to feel about that. I still sat there with Harry as Karrin came over to chat. Harry was determined he was going to give up Maggie for adoption. Oh my God I was scared, but then I realized what I did but giving her up to a familiar family was pretty close. I hope he decides against it but if he does let her go for a better life I would understand. The rest escaped into a portal and Harry's Faerie Godmother remained. I felt my purpose accomplished and as I heard the sound of a vehicle approaching I begun to feel light and being pulled somewhere. Well this is it then, I'm going home to the family I've never known. I get to see the hereafter and Godwilling enter into paradise. I was being pulled toward the altar. My body was melting into the same black sludge as all the reds had, mingling with my blood and seemingly seeping into the stone of the altar. As it did I was drawn into it rather than being released like I expected. I was terrified that my soul was meant to be trapped in Chichén Itzá forever.

Fuck.

Then I was sucked into the alter.

I guess that chariot isn't swinging low for me after all.

As I lay there some words I heard earlier that day keep repeating in my mind.

"You son of a bitch," I said, "You fucking traitor."

Martin's expression flickered at my words. But his eyes never left the Red King. "I give you the Fellowship of St. Giles, my lord," he said. "And I beg you to grant me my reward."

"Reward," I said, blind with rage, "What could they possibly give you, Martin, to make it worth what you've done..."

"And what do you get?" I said to Martin. The Red King states, "Ascension."

I hear him say ascension over and over again in my head. What is happening?

I did lie in the alter many days. My eyes could see the sun rise and set upon that altar, the surface of my solid tomb. I could feel the warm sun and hear the breeze and chattering tourists. I thought to myself that it's not so bad being stuck here. I have company, I'll get used to it.

I'm dead. The silence of this altar allowed reality to catch up with me. My life has been wasted. Ever since I was half

turned life has been nothing but a struggle and getting killed has been my only release from it. I knew it would be that way though, deep in my heart I knew the only escape was death. The fellowship had been working on a cure for a vampires turning ever since the fellowship came to be hundreds of years ago. They never found it. Either I must die, or make a kill and allow the vampire part to consume me and take over. I think Harry is going to be ruined, the man is going to need full time therapy when he gets back. Sure he's tough but this is too much. On top of that if Maggie were aware of anything going on she will be scarred for life. I want to just hide in this altar indefinitely, just hide away from the reality of what happened outside of here in that world outside. Hide from the hereafter and from what other transitioned souls might say in my afterlife. What am I really? Innocent or guilty of making a kill? Depends on who you ask I guess. I place no blame on Harry I climbed right up on the altar and waited on him. The question is am I culpable of something?

What an odd word to use when Martin would perhaps be promoted within the court, raised to an office of a position, ascension is like to a king ascending to a throne of Christ ascending to heaven or a lesser being ascending to Godhood. Would the Red King really want Martin, being of a traitorous nature, to take power to himself in a worldly way much less a supernatural way? Really, who is Martin to raise him up to any position when any given responsibility would be poorly invested in anyone who could have executed such a grievous betrayal as he had done. The red king is mad but I don't see how he could be

that mad. So if it was intentional it may be something the king was going to inflict him with, ascended and enslaved. Given significant power. Or something Martin was to cause, his actions are to cause and ascension of something or someone else. Everything is speculation right now. I need to find out, something big is going on I feel it. I need to understand it and what role I'm playing in this game. who is the mastermind and what are his intentions? I'm in danger even as a ghost. Since I got sucked into this altar it's pretty clear to me something is weird and why would the Erlking have said that weirdness that he did? I'm all questions and no answers, very few clues either. I need clues. I need answers.

It's midnight, on the fifth day. I feel my body rise, the next thing I know I'm lying on my back on top of the altar. My arms are crossed fists on shoulders, my head laying to the side. It made me think of a song, "walk like an egyptian".



I look at myself and shudder.

Oh God, I'm not human. This is the true form of the red court vampire. I really did complete my change. I feel normal though. I seem to be physically a typical red court vampire except maybe the odd thing, like talons rather than claws that resemble razor sharp scythes. I'm hungry. I'm very hungry. Oh my God sweet Jesus mercy and pass me an artery hungry. I have control for now.

I catch the scent of human on the breeze and crouched low in a tiger's purr. The sound catches me by surprise as the red court never made such cat sounds that I'm aware of. I'm a little different somehow. I concentrate a little while and manage to put on a flesh mask, a convincing one, but being naked I decide to forego the flesh mask and go with the xenomorph look. A xenomorph born of a man sized vampire bat host is the essence of what a red court vampire true form looks like. H. R. Giger never goes out of style.

All around, throughout the countryside, it sounds like popcorn. Anarchy has descended in the land and armed conflict is everywhere. People and paranormals are struggling in the power vacuum and damage caused by the destruction of the red court. No good deed goes unpunished.

So here's what I need to do then, find the nearest town and investigate more of what happened. I would look around here but I'm hungry. I've held my hunger as an infected I should be fine now, but not for long. Maybe I could take a couple sips while I'm there, I'm not that bad off right? A little nibble, that's all.

I leapt to the edge of the temple, onto the stairs of the pyramid. I'm smelling the air, I can't help it, my vision goes from black of midnight to the shadows of twilight as my eyes see through the darkness. I smell life-blood and I see the glow of human life off in one direction, at line of sight. With a growl I'm off. A growl, like a great cat. Not a shriek, wail or hiss as would be expected of my kind. Heh, my kind. Shoot me now. I laid tracks fast for

the source of the radiance and I see someone driving a truck down the road and I hit the windshield at a speed faster than the truck was moving and smashed the bloody carcass out through the back window onto the road. I utterly destroyed the man tearing flesh from limb with my claws, chewing, sucking, lapping and gulping every last bit of the poor victim. They wont even be able to identify him with dental records. I'm too hungry to have any control. I genuinely hope someone just shoots me.

A black court vampire appears. He seems to be quite unusual, like from the Sherlock Holmes era, except for the chainmail gambeson draped over him and the combat boots he wears a very upper class Edwardian suit. God he looks cold as ice even for a vampire. He throws down a child he just consumed, a little 4 year old boy, blonde hair and freckles. dead and gone. He pops his collapsible top hat, and bows to me with a flourish of his hat. Then fills a pipe and speaks.

“Has anyone ever told you of natural selection? Foolish morsel decided upon himself to go forth into the night and deep forest I know not why. Most certainly I can say of him that he quite simply is a feeble-minded child. It is well that I had found him that he might be most effectatiously culled from the local herd. Alas it nearly came to pass that the noble vampire society might have been deprived of this most delicious morsel should he have perished in and of himself. Do you not agree dear lady? Yet as you are a most grievous poacher, oh what shall I do?”

“You fucking monster!”

“Ah yes, this I have heard many a time. ’Tis rare though that I should hear it from a kindred species, ’twould seem like to the pot calling the kettle black as they say. Let it be agreed then that I am a monster. So what of you dear? I cannot accuse you of wasting a single drop of that kill all chopped up and wrung dry so don’t you dare be hypocritical. At least my kill is in one piece. I’m proud of who and what I am. Are you? I don’t think you are.”

At that he withdraws something from his gambeson, damn. He’s got a jar. Like as in “A Jar” trademark pending, a weapon I’m sure was first devised by the fellowship against the red court. Although not really used for anything but vampires, they may work on other supernatural entities or powers. They have no effect on humans. On vampires we used them as grenades and mines, hard as hell to get them triggered but when they do it’s a guaranteed capture and the vampire is trapped in the jar which acts as a spirit container. We would then bury it deep, if we could drop it down with a post-hole digger we would. That way, just as Damian said, the creature would sit and rot until the second coming.

Problem is, now the shoe is on the other foot. I have no idea how he could be so confident that he won’t get trapped but being I’m of the vulnerable species now I’m in hot water. He must be either crazy or stupid. My money is on crazy.

He casually taps the pipe empty on his gambeson and replaces it in his pocket, then drops his walking stick aside. He holds up his right hand and with a few words a slow moving black and purple ball slowly forms in his palm,



the size of a basketball. I understood the words though I shouldn't have. I've never known such a language.

He said, "Livytan niis d ol nobloh tzrvt ollor adin zerimah"

Instinctively I know it means, "Leviathan come, into my hand forms a gentle flow." Although I have no idea of the implications of the words. I repeat the words in english out of curiosity and see black and purple mist, unfocused energy flowing around me.

He said, "Most singular indeed you are. It was best that I should have a jar in hand."

Without much warning he said, "Lhtchl" and the ball hurtles at me, I throw myself and roll. The ball curves toward me, I vault behind a tree and the ball crashes into the tree. The tree makes a low moan like it was being subjected to an immense weight then is still. Even the leaves flutter far too slowly given the force of the wind today.

Then he said, "Flereus niis lishloach mad setani prg lehashlich forth, pon in oyev" and a ball of flame hurtled from his hand directly at me. Fire is not good, I'm particularly vulnerable to it.

It burnt straight through that same tree and the tree fell to the earth. Of course the ball of flame caught me off guard and I hurled myself just in time, it grazed my left bicep burning it off straight to the bone and I wailed, the shoulder on my other side hit a rock hard on the ground where I fell and I wailed again. I leapt backwards and came up to stand with two useless arms.

He leaps to tackle me and I dodge, he lands where I was

just a split second ago.

No he predicted it. His walking stick is special I see, he wielded it as a sword stick and sliced open my belly. I figured I was done for but the wound stuck and I managed to bear through the pain and land a hard kick on him. I break his neck, which heals itself before he falls to the ground. I really hate vampires. Myself included.

He grabs for the jar but I'm already on the road ready to speed away. he throws the swordcane hard and in crunches into my hip. I sorely miss my firearms. I had an automatic pistol once I really loved. Snap out of it Susan, don't drop now, fight.

I'm on the ground. I can't move. He is throwing the jar for the final attack. I'm at the rear quarter of the truck. My arms are working again. I throw a rebar off the truck which goes right through his side but it only redirects the jar slightly from my head to the steel quarter panel where it triggers.

It was right where it needed to be. Right in the sweet spot. Inky black smoke licked out of the jar and just as I was afraid of it enveloped me. It felt like being on the scariest rollercoaster ever. I shrieked. After that, I was a jar. Good job Susan, I hope you like being a jar. It is surprisingly spacious for a vampire in a jar. I never knew that. Rather than infinitely small it's infinitely spacious. Must have something to do with the magic used. A rebar sails into the truck and it starts to roll backward crushing the jar. I'm released with a pop to land on the road with a plop. I return an insolent smirk at him. My body feels like jello and I yank myself to my feet by grabbing the

truck and hurling myself to the other side.

I hear a familiar word of power, damian says, “Fuego” and a laser beam of fire pierces the body of the truck and wings me on the way to the ground on the other side. I howl and wonder what can I possibly do to overcome someone proficient in magic. I tear off the back quarter panel and narrowly block a rebar yet it still shreds through and narrowly missed my right arm on the way down. Split in two I swung the one side of the quarter panel at him knocking him to the ground and head to the side of the road. An unfocused ball of fire burns toward me and I turn what’s left of the quarter panel and deflect it skyward. the impact sears my hands as the metal turns molten and throws me into the treeline. I break into a run deeper into the treeline and hear an animal behind me. It closes on me as I run then it’s jaws tear at my ankles. I fall. Damian appears ahead of me and I roll as he hits the earth with his fist and around me the earth begins to buckle and split. It splits deep and my hands grasp the other side of the fissure to catch myself from falling in but it is still splitting and soon I won’t be able to reach the other side.

Damian says, “Wonderful my lady, ’tis most suitable that you should perish for all the trouble you seem to cause me. I do forsake the chance of casting you into the jar you are hardly the willing maiden with such a spectacle you have displayed.”

I fall into the crevasse, grabbing into the rock face and landing on a small outcropping on the way down. Holding onto a couple awkward handholds my feet are hardly wide enough to span the size of the outcropping. Soon

I'll be heading into the lava pool at the bottom with the shaking of the ground as the ground continues to split.

Damian says, "Well adieu then dear lady, may I suggest that you should refrain from holding onto false hope and embrace the fires below. I assure you your destruction will be quick then there shall be no more pain nor suffering of this most noble vampire existence. I wish you could have embraced your nature and come to be my comrade and not mine enemy."

At which point he heartlessly walks away. I expected such heartless behaviour of course from a creature who could make a kill of an innocent child. I have a rather perplexing situation now though, I can't reach the top I'm too far down. Another quake causes part of the face of the cliff to fall and I grab new handholds just in time as the old ones give way. I'm leaning farther and farther over though I'm going over. I pull hard on the handholds and manage to get myself back against the rock face. Oh God what the hell is going to get me out of this. I look around but only see sheer rock face with handholds I cannot reach. Another quake causes more erosion of the cliff face. I try using my talons but it just erodes the rock face faster rather than grabbing hold. Too much earth mixed into the rock. Another quake and the outcropping I'm standing on falls. I'm holding desperately onto the handholds and I scream this is freaking crazy I'm going to die right here. No matter how much I can regenerate a lava pool is permanent. A handhold crumbles then another quake causes the other to crumble and I'm in freefall. I slash my talons into the rock face and manage

to slow my descent but there is no other outcropping to save me. The lava pool is getting closer then my talons hit something substantial, solid rock, the impact jars me and my feet don't seem to feel the rock face anymore. It seems to be some sort of tunnel. Oh thank you Odin. I rock my body like a pendulum and throw myself into the tunnel. This is something that looks untouched by man, stalactites and stalagmites, dust on the floor of the tunnel undisturbed by any creature.

I fall on my ass, shaking with adrenaline. OK I just need to figure out how to get back up the fissure. What's around here. Is there at least some vine? The ground rumbles again. I look out into the ravine and see the walls closing back together. Oh man I gotta find something. My heart is in my throat, I'm scrambling around in the pitch darkness with vampiric vision to find something to get me out of here and back to the surface. Nothing. Absolutely nothing. Another rumble. I grab a stalactite and place it between the two walls. Another rumble, the stalactite shatters. The walls are sealed. My fate is sealed.

I can see in here with vampire vision. The tunnel is wide open. A room essentially. No way out.

I sit down on the floor of the room. Now what. There must have been something I could have done to stop this. Harry would have found a way. He gets in this sort of thing all the time. This really isn't my bag. Clandestine strikes. In and out. Fellowship style. I can do that. I have no right to be in a battle with an entity like Damian. I was outclassed. I should have ran, found a way to hide. Just let him jar me maybe someone would find me. What

if he buried me though? Noone would ever find me. What was I to do? Now I die here. Maybe this is going to be my jar. I'll just go crazy in bloodlust and fade away. Hidden beneath the earth, noone will find me and I can harm noone. He was right, I should have saved myself the pain and just thrown myself into the lava pool. I want to die anyway. I don't want to live as a monster. I don't want to be this creature. Why do I feel this way though? I've never known a vampire to display such self loathing. They are narcissistic, maybe even psychopathic. What am I? I am so terrified. I want to die but I don't. I want to live. Somehow. To find a cure, to refrain from the feeding somehow. To stop killing. To stop hunting. Should I even attempt to find a way out of this. It's futile. Why should I?

To stop the vampires that's why. To find a way to defend people against the supernatural forces. I am the only one with the strength of a vampire, the speed, the invulnerability against their hunger. They can't feed on me, we're made of the same stuff. I represent a hope for mankind. Despite being a human predator. Is that what they call an anti-hero? I guess that's me.

Right then, time to get the frick out of here. I need to feed and I need to get somewhere to find out what happened to me. I have a purpose. I'm like the only vampire with a human soul. I don't know how but I'm important, I don't know how but I came to be for a reason. Some mysterious reason. I need to learn my purpose and fulfil it. I need to get out and back to the road.

I look along the walls of the room to see if there is a

break into a further tunnel or chamber. In the twilight sight of my vampiric eyes I look as deep as I can but see nothing. On the floor of the chamber is nothing. Some dust but no footprints. Every once in a while I trip on something I should know is there. I look and see nothing. I must be exhausted. I lay down for a few minutes. What am I missing? Please don't tell me I was meant to die in some cavern. I was never a big cave explorer, although I can see how beautiful it is in these deep places.

I feel bad for messing it up. Walking all around scuffing up the floor of the cave and leaving it disturbed somehow. Like it's unclean in a way, having been touched by a person it's like it lost it's virginity leaving footprints all around. Hey wait a minute, I didn't leave footprints? Such a fine dust on the floor I should have left footprints. Something isn't right in this place. I swipe the floor with my hand, I don't feel dust. I look at where the rock face was and I see there once was a tunnel. The spell closed it off though. OK there once was a way out. Now there isn't. To hell with it I'm laying down, this is making me tired.

As I lay down I see on the ceiling what looks like a switch. A silver switch embedded in a green jewel. I had to smirk from the irony. I get it now. Tripping on things not here. Not leaving footprints. Some kind a veil. It has to be. I feel around the walls and find many discrepancies, and something in particular I was looking for. I find what looks like a ramp along the wall. The creator of the veil would have been able to see through it and climb to the switch to disable the veil so others could see. I blindly

climb up the ramp and sure enough it takes me to the switch. I move it over and the veil disperses. I find myself in a ritual chamber. Skeletons are scattered on the floor, wearing ritual cloaks. Wizards, warlocks, something like that. Something killed them, a very long time ago. That was what I was tripping on were these bones. I jump down and look around. Magical ingredients many of which have long expired. A gold ritual circle embedded in the floor. An alchemy alcove and bookshelves along the walls. The floors and ceiling are perfectly flat and polished to a sheen. I check along the walls to see what's behind books and I find one bookshelf opens to reveal a tunnel, well hewn with carbide lamps along the length.

Time to move out of here, Travelling along the tunnel I find it slopes up. It continues on forever. I come to the end to find a door which opens up into a basement. Stairs lead to a cabin via a secret door in the floor, under a rug no less. Everywhere is long unused, but still functional. The cabin still holds some useful supplies, it seems it was enchanted against decay even if dust and spiderwebs still accumulated. I found some nice post-vietnam gear, olive drab combats and alic webbing. An M-16 rifle. A 20mm vulcan sniper rifle fitted to breakdown for 2 to 3 man carry, various loadouts mostly HEI. An M1911 semi-auto pistol. Jars and grenades, a mix of anti-paranormal and conventional loadout. Goldmine. Now I have a better chance against paranormals. I shrink into a skinmask and don the equipment. I feel a little more normal now, and a lot relieved. There were some notes in the basement though, it is a furnished basement and the way to the



cabin was through a trap door. Somebody wanted to hide something.

I arch an eyebrow. It looks like the papers indicate wizards stayed here. I came from their ritual room. They were hidden down here away from a significant contingent of red court vampires in the wilderness. A smirk slipped out as I see the unusual skeletal remains of reds. The wizards sent some of the monsters to hell before they were killed themselves. It must have been a fast kill as usually they dissolve. It was a covert mission to find more about a legend within the higher echelon of the red court. An archaeological mission in a sense. The queen to come, the great mother. I copy down some notes of the material for use later. I think this is what I was looking for, I may not need to go to the town after all. As I search through I see some personal letters of the team of wizards who were researchers here. Letters from wives, kids, mothers, the odd incomplete letter that was going home to sweethearts, sons and daughters.

I need air, I need to get outta here. The wizards deserved better, they were husbands and fathers on a scientific quest, they were not of any threat to the reds. Why were they killed? The reds were monsters, that's all I can say, and the world is better off now that they're gone. I race up the ladder and can't open the door. I yank and beat the door I can't get out. I let out a shriek and the trap door glows. Now it's locked. My skin is burning, it tastes like cool mist but burns me. Holy water. I'm going to be burnt up by this mist. I triggered a defensive trap that the wizards set in the cabin in case any reds came into the

door. I need out now.

I look up and see the mist is descending from the ceiling, I grab a table and hold it above me. It helps but the mist is still swirling up and under the table and I don't know how long it is going to be coming down. I look at the notes I scribbled down but I only wrote the information I needed, not any words of power that might be useful here. How was I to know this was going to happen? I scan around the room, displays of taxidermy, a fireplace, wooden floor and ceiling with mist pouring out between the boards. I try to get into the fireplace, no go. There's a window, but a wall of force holds it safe. I swipe at the ceiling and the force sparks off my talons. I'm showing the equivalent of 3rd degree burns and not regenerating. I shriek again, this time in pain, I'm at a loss, how can I stop this slow death?

How would the reds have gotten in? Of course, turn a wizard and they have his knowledge and skills. An age old trick. That only means there is a way to bypass this trap but it doesn't tell how. Only that it isn't something particular to reds that triggers this, I can get past it. Somehow. Words, if it isn't detecting reds it must be controlled by magical words. If I was a wizard would I have placed the words somewhere in this cabin? Where? I don't have much time I'm melting away.

Under the carpet, I check, nothing there. I lifted the table up there wasn't anything under it, no note. It would have to be accessible when triggered somehow. Either that or it just stops sometime after I'm melted away and there is no failsafe. No there would have to be the wizards

may have taken red court samples in here if there wasn't a failsafe their efforts would melt away in their hands. There has to be a failsafe. Hey wait a minute, maybe I did write what I need down, but it isn't instructions it is a word sequence to deactivate this trap.

I'm reading my notes to see if I wrote something odd verbatim to check later. The letters are english, spanish, portegese, italian, latin, russian. When I was alive I could speak and write english and spanish. Now I can read, write and speak them all. Am i panlingual now?

"We're not in the cabin anymore sweetheart, we're safe now they can't find us. If they do though we only need to refrain from cease the mist and all will be fine –"

Huh? Oh. As in if they do find us, double negative? No, refrain from then grammatical disaster. What if I'm looking for "cease the mist"? the all will be fine is declared as a double negative so it seems to affirm the possibility. Of course pseudo-latin. Here goes, I say, "cessare in caligine!" And– nothing. I don't know that cockney latin, at least not for spell work. Maybe I resonate with enochian. I heard Harry say once magic works not by rite but by self. If I believe something is powerful and works for me that's what really will work for me. This time I say, "lehafsik oiad arafel!". I hear a moan from above, then drops fall and I dive under the table. My bones are showing through now, I'm cadaverous. The dripping slows, then stops. As soon as it seems safe I dive for the trap door, it opens, and I close it behind me. I am in so much pain. I wrap myself up in some blankets that I find in the basement area and rest inside a closet to try to conserve

heat. After a while I drift off to sleep. I'm not going to be leaving this little cabin. At least not today.

I remain sleeping on and off for a couple days, healing less quickly than I normally would but I healed nonetheless. My clothes are fine since the attack was just using water. I'm rather hungry now though. So here we go again. This is what pisses me off, if I would consider myself some sort of anti-hero considering whenever I put myself, or get caught in, the fray I get hurt. When I get hurt I get hungry. When I get hungry I hunt, and I kill. I don't want thralls to sip off of I could kill them if I get hungry enough whether I want to or not. I would addict them to my venom. There has to be an answer. There has to be a way out of this existence. I dare not call it a life. Is this equipment I have going to help keep me from getting injured? Is there a way I could just randomly sip, no killing, no addicting? At least until I can take full control of feeding. Just stop feeding. Or go vegan or something.

All that aside I need out. I should kit up and get out of this basement. If I trigger the trap again I know how to get out. It probably just got triggered as a combination of my presence and pounding on the front door. So move around normally.

I go upstairs without trouble. I raise my brows and smirk as I find a front door key under the mat. As I left the door locked behind me and the key works fine to open the door from the outside as well. It is a proximity key, a magical one, the mechanical lock on the outside is a ruse. I go back inside and kick my feet up on the couch and burn my ass. It's still wet from the holy water. I go

back into the basement.

So what now? I can get out, but then what? Where should I actually go? I can't stay here, I have a little information now there isn't a need to find a village except to feed. No matter which direction I go I'll find food. Eventually. Maybe I can link up with some former fellowship people, people I've fought with. I can find out news about what's going on and decide where to go and what to do. Again it doesn't tell me which direction to go. Maybe going outside there might be an easier way to figure out where best to go. The sniper rifle has extremely long range sights. The roof, a tree, I need to find a high vantage point to see far around and decide what to do. When I was outside I could see I am at the top of a cliff face, I'll take a reading off the compass I have in my kit. OK, let's check things out.

The road is to the west, a mile out. Not much but forest around. Can't see south I'm partway up a mountain. There is a path down from here so I think that's my next move. The discharge of weapons in the distant countryside looks like twinkling stars in the night. It looks like the black court are getting a foothold I see them moving amongst the trees in many places. I see slavers are active, many bodies hanging in trees. A nearby river is filled with bloated corpses. Its Armageddon out here sweet mercy.

I see near to the road black court are approaching a fellowship fire-team about two and a half to three miles from me. It doesn't look good for the fire-team. Looking around me I see I can sight in better to the south east of the cabin. I gotta get off the roof, recoil could damage it.

I leap down to the ground and setup the sniper rifle.

I understand this is normally not a man portable weapon at nearly two hundred pounds and two yards in length. Luckily the weight is negligible to me and it was modified to be broken down into smaller pieces for transport.

I setup the rifle normally on the ground supported by bipod stands. I load contact trigger HEI rounds, then load and lock the bolt action. I got the targets located again. Nothing too hard down there so I bide time until the central vampire walks abreast a rather hard looking boulder. I squeeze the trigger and a massive explosion erupts from the muzzle. A muzzle flash five or six feet in diameter of smoke and flame. I have only a moment to see some faces turn thinking im a panzer that just fired a shell. Then the round hit, the target vampire was vapourized shrapnel and incendiary sprayed back off the rock as the impact shattered it. Two more vampires were incapacitated. Not knowing a high powered sniper rifle from a small artillery piece the remaining vampires ran one way and the fireteam ran the other.

I made a fistpump, Yesss! I really like this piece! I raised a smirk, put a hand on my hip and flipped the bird in the direction of the vampires with the other. Nobody messes with Susan. I took a moment to dedicate my rifle by an old fellowship sniper creed. A variant is used in the usa military but which motto came first I may never know.

I hold the rifle high in both hands, facing it, as I kneel on both knees.

This is my rifle. There are many like it, but  
this one is mine.

My rifle is my best friend. It is my life. I must master it as I must master my life.

Without me, my rifle is useless. Without my rifle, I am useless. I must fire my rifle true. I must shoot straighter than my enemy who is trying to kill me. I must shoot him before he shoots me, and I will.

My rifle and I have love knowing that what counts in war is not the rounds we fire, the noise of our burst, nor the smoke we make. We know that it is the hits that count, and we will fire true.

My rifle is loved, even as I, because it is my life. Thus, I will learn it as a sister. I will learn its weaknesses, its strength, its parts, its accessories, its sights and its barrel.

I will keep my rifle clean and ready, even as I am clean and ready. We will become part of each other, we will be one.

Before God, I swear this creed. My rifle and myself are the defenders of good. We are the masters of our enemy. We are the saviors of my life.

So be it, until there is no enemy, but peace.  
Amen.

I lower my rifle to my lap and lower my head in solemn contemplation. My weapon is now dedicated. I grab the assault rifle in my hands and start my descent.

I missed the chance to contact that fellowship fire-team, but there will be others. I'll need to get down from this place to find more fellowship fire-teams and find my way out.

I feel like I'm descending into hell. Gunfire is erupting all around me and I just seen the horror of what's happening with my own eyes. The m16 assault rifle is leaning over my shoulder. The gravel of the trail is crunching under my feet and I hear the sounds of nature scatter and gather avoiding stray bullets from fire-fights below. I take out miswak and chew to try to give myself something other than impending doom to think about. No use hitting the dirt to avoid any fire I don't think it would help. It would only postpone my inevitable destruction. Yet the road ahead looks quite inviting and safe. If only it were true.

Conveniently the road exited close to the road. I considered whether I should stick to the road or track south through wilderness. I decided just to take the road, as long as the number of enemy encounters isn't ludicrous i can make better time and there is nothing safe out here. Getting out fast is the only way.

If I can get stories published in America about what is going on down here in south america, anything at all, then I can get interest focused down here and get aid coming this way. Otherwise I'm just a sitting duck. Get the facts, fly north. Those stories should get me work, work gets me the money to get back to Harry and Maggie. Easy right? Heh, best laid plans.

The road was quiet for quite a while which I was glad



for. I'll be able to make good time to the airport.

I hear the most terrifying roar coming from the east, I check with binoculars and see a soldier in a canvas cloak tent facing some civilians. About a dozen it looks like. He throws off the cloak and he's revealed to be a man-sized insect, a mantis. I can assume a nevernever creature. Likely fae, likely demon. A mile and a half away I wont get there in time. The creature rears up and extends its raptorial arms to grasp its meal. I slap together the sniper rifle but by the time i do it has skewed two of the hapless people. It didn't have a chance to finish the meal though my rifle was up and I did something only a supernatural creature could do, fire that massive weapon off my shoulder like it was a target rifle. The recoil caused my rear leg to plow a row into the road. A massive muzzle flare and the creatures thorax exploded in a mess of ectoplasm. The remaining people ran and the creature seemed dead. Yet started regenerating. Oh God. Whether its me or those poor people that creature is going to chase us down. I strap my rifle to my back and sprint straight for it. I open up a clip of the assault rifle on it when i get close enough but it only slowed the regeneration down slightly. It rolls toward me and roars like a dinosaur.

So what the hell am i supposed to do when I get there? Roll over and die? If I hurt it then it just heals itself. I have steel which its vulnerable to but only a kabar and what little steel is in the bullets i fire. This thing is all meat, its huge.

Well, its a good day to die i guess. Stars are bright and barely a cloud in the sky tonight. The wounds heal to

the very tracks of the rounds i fired at this thing. So yes it  
is vulnerable to steel. I grab my kabar and head in. Lets  
dance Jiminy.

## O2

# JIMINY THE DEMON

Jiminy the cricket from hell only just turned slightly by the time I threw aside my firearms. I was in the air at full speed. I threw my arms apart and extended my scythe like talons. I kinda felt like the female wolverine Laura Kinney. My talons aren't adamantine and yet I had a shit eating smirk thinking about that as I pounced.

It was only a brief thought though I had some serious ass kicking to attend to. One of his raptorial arms came up toward me and I made like an olympic high jumper and bent over his swing slashing at his arm. The creature roared but my hit was quickly healed over. I need to keep it busy but the kabar is the tool that is going to get the job done here. He can't heal iron or steel. My talons are neither iron nor steel.

I land on it's thorax talons first, plunging both my arms into each side of it. Another roar and it thrashes around like a wild stallion. I'm holding strong to it's back as I'm thrown about, my legs thrown skyward and my hair twirling about me. Part of it's thorax tears loose and I sail into a tree as it roars in pain. I use my talons to spin around a strong branch and into the air, coming down gently using foot talons to grab and suspend myself inversely on the same branch. I shed my skin and go true form to allow me to fight better although my new clothes may never forgive me. My boots for one will be cool and breezy after today.

The creature skitters around on the ground peering up and making chirping noises. I think this is my chance. I grab my kabar in my right hand and ready talons in the left. The creature loses interest. As it starts cleaning itself I have a break in the action. I'm getting rather hot in this uniform. I haven't worn anything since my change so for now I take off the uniform keeping my weapons close. A get myself closer and grabbing my kabar I release from the branch and land the blow above the thorax but not quite to the brain as I wanted.

Suddenly the creature leaps to the treetops taking me with it, the thorax parts revealing wings and it flies straight up. I hold on rather than fall but after a few hundred feet have come between me and the ground I'm thinking maybe falling a hundred feet may have been the best option after all.

Only a fool fights in a burning house, I can't kill this thing if it means I'm going to fall hundreds of feet to the

ground. Oh sure I might just heal up from it but I'll still feel it and at this height the force of the fall might sent me straight to hell whole and in person. It is still bucking against my presence so I stash the kabar and strike talons hand and foot into the creature. I'm rolling side to side and upside down this creature can't get enough G forces on me to throw me off.

It dives hard and cruises through treetops. I'm getting hit by leaves and branches. One solid hit knocks my grip loose and makes the creature scream as my talons tear into it more. Then another branch knocks all but one arm free of the creature and it pulls up hard loosening my grip again.

I plunge in more talons and it dives again throwing them loose, it plunges back into the treetops and up again, my grip on the creature is slipping. It climbs very high up in the air again and it dives. My grip fails, and the creature is flying away.

I'm falling full speed to the ground, and there's not a damned thing I can do to stop it. What happens when I hit? I would presume I spatter and start regenerating but the question is for how long? A very long time indeed. The sun would likely end me when it rises unless a footsoldier ended me with paranormal munitions like a jar. There isn't anything absolute about being immortal, just because I can heal anything doesn't mean I can't be doomed. I'm learning that quickly enough.

The dawn is starting to erupt on the horizon, I can feel myself burning. I hate what I am. I want this existence to end I tried to save my world but I only led it to disaster.

I gave my life for nothing. I shouldn't be here. As the ground became closer I could picture it as paradise. A final escape to a senseless existence. What am I even doing here? I could convince myself I was some kind of hero but everywhere I go is death and who's to say I might not cause just as much death as lives I save? I think I likely will if my every encounter is like this. It never ends.

Yet I've always made it out somehow. I think it might in fact be futile to believe that I can just let go and die and be done with it. I did that once to kill myself and destroy an evil empire just to become like them. I think dying is a bad idea here. I don't know what I might become.

OK, so try to live we shall. How to not go schmuck, that is the question. I have only a few seconds here. There is some dense foliage off to my left I just need to get over there somehow. I've never done freefalling, I have no idea how to navigate. I'm kicking my legs and swinging my arms and the only thing I'm heading towards is a clearing.

Bloody hell, I'm thrashing trying to figure out how to move.

I'm thrashing and swinging my arms.

I'm kicking. I'm feeling numb. I'm feeling funny.

I'm flying. What the fuck. The pressure I was in forced a new change on me. I got within seconds of the treetops and felt myself pull up like I grew a second set of legs. Not legs, wings. I can feel the rhythm of wings now, working involuntarily like any person might breath. Controllable but automatic.

I flutter in to land at my belongings. Screw the insectoid, I wouldn't get anything out of that fight anyway. If others

got in the way they would get hurt. I'll splatter the bug later if I can. I use a mirror from my pack to look at myself. I must be damn near ten feet tall this way. I'm me, literally. I look older than my previous form which is a snapshot of the way I looked a decade ago. My skin has a slick sheen to it. I have wings, feathered and black. With my normal complexion I'm dark anyway so it all matches well. All in all I look like some kind of fallen angel, beautiful and muscular and naked as the day I was born.

I grabbed the cloak-tent the insectoid was wearing and used it as a kind of olive drab tunica.

Ok then I came into this actually not to beat up a random insect demon but rather to save some people who were under attack by them. I need to see if they got away OK. I need to change back human again so I don't freak anybody out. I'm not hungry so I won't need to worry about that. So I change back to human, and throw the cloak over myself to protect me from the morning sun. Oh God I'm so hungry. I need to feed right now, then I'll save the rest. My nose is in the air, smelling out prey. I see in the area immediately ahead where I first seen the demon there are two live humans. I dash in and make the kill. Being satisfied enough I shake off the need and go to save the other one. She is smiling and stroking a necklace with a set of red court fangs on it, whispering something profound. I say, "Are you all right?"

"Is Daniel OK? My friend over there? He's going to make it I know it. He's so strong."

I shake my head sadly.

"Oh no! Oh Daniel. You've been so brave."

She proceeded to describe how she was being stupid in her curiosity and made the creature take notice. Daniel was the one who tried to fight off the creature and save her. I feel like a real asshole. I change the subject.

“Are there any more of you?”

“There are six of us left altogether. My name is Jill.”

“Who are the others?”

“Jack, he is a big guy with a flat top haircut. Don’t go to him, let him come to you. Vinny, the italian guy. He was with the fellowship once, but became lost. George, he’s a gay stereotype. Craig, he is tall, lanky and unkept. He’s also very awkward and clumsy with a stutter. Veronica, who is a real princess, terrified of everything. She would wash her hands all day long to keep germs off. Finally there is Laura, she has no hair. She is always in pain, it’s so sad. I hope she finds someone it would make it so much better for her.”

I say “Oh. Cool.” Then begin a little smirk that ended in a smile. I’ve found some company on my quest. I say, “Do you think they will accept me?”

She said, “absolutely! You are a very strong and good soldier, and we could use a soldier. The closest we have is Jack and he is more of a suicidal berserker.”

“Well done deal then, are we able to catch up and find them?”

“We have an emergency rendezvous. We are travelling south to a large fellowship encampment. It moves around a lot but I hope it is still hidden away there, some fellowship soldiers we moving that way a couple days ago and said where it was. The rendezvous point is due north,



about a kilometer. Are you OK to travel?”

“I think the question is are you OK to travel. You are a fright girl, with your clothes torn up.”

“Sadly that’s the way it is for me. It wasn’t the encounter but rather that I’m a hobo like the rest of us. We work long enough for food but then need to move on. All of us are disabled or ill in some way and can’t hold down a job much less be accepted by any town.”

Now I really feel like an evil bastard. I ate one of these poor people. I say, “Well off we go then I guess.”

“For sure lets get going. They will probably be heading this way in a day anyway so we will probably meet up. That tent cloak, can we use it?”

“Yeah, it’s a glorified tarp, blocks light and likely will hold up to wind and rain quite well. I figure it’s a two man size.”

“Great! Let’s rest the day out of the sun and start tonight. We can just throw it over us so you can stay out of the sun. Er, I mean, get some rest you must be exhausted after that fight.”

“Umm, yeah. Tired. Ok.” How does she know about the sun? Does she know something about me? She doesn’t seem afraid so I guess not.

I say, “Jill, what is that odd necklace you wear?”

“Oh, please don’t be offended, I used to be a red court thrall. My last master was slaughtered by the fellowship by fire, and I harvested his fangs and wore them under my clothes. After the cataclysm when the reds were destroyed I wore them exposed to remember. I have had two masters, the first beat and tortured me, many of my

fellow thralls died needlessly in his service. He traded me to my second master in exchange for some service. My second master was cruel but did no more than beat us, and only for reasons he seen fit to do so. I suffered under him but not like the first and he provided me the venom I needed to stay well even as I provided him my own lifeblood that kept him nourished. It is a symbiotic relationship really.”

My stomach turned at her words, but I tried not to show it. “You are addicted though, that’s why you revere him right?”

“I’ve been through my withdrawal, I revere him because he was my medicine. I have a mental illness and no medicine helped me. His essence kept me in balance. You cannot possibly comprehend the suffering I endured before I was enthralled, everything I’ve endured with the reds pales in comparison to the suffering of my sickness. I am indebted to them, and since the cataclysm long for their return that I may find wellness again. I hope it doesn’t offend you. All of us were enthralled, all of us survived the withdrawal, and all of us are becoming sick again. Do you understand?”

“Honestly I can’t understand. I can accept what you say though in the deepest sadness.”

“Let’s rest then until sunset.”

So we did. She was out in the sunrise without burning so I believe her. I’m worried about the fact she wants to keep me from the sun. Did she see me kill Daniel? As we rested she spooned me. It was a little uncomfortable that she wanted to get so close. I was worried that she

was some manner of phobophage that I didn't know so I looked at her with vampire sight. This is something I had even as an infected. I learned to gain control of it back then and it turns darkness to a kind of twilight. The sight has a number of additional features since my change, uncountable features that I don't understand. I know what a human looks like with this new sight though and she is definitely human. I can feel the warmth of human lifeforce from a distance as well and that lifeforce is definitely in her. I get the feeling she may be trying to tempt me. Either she is lesbian or she wants me to drink. I won't make assumptions.

"A little close there Jill, I appreciate the comfort you are giving me and I sure don't want to put you off but I really would only like to be friends. Out here though a person could use deep friendships to deal with this post-apocalyptic nightmare. Are you OK with that?"

"Uh, sorry I didn't mean to—oooOOOOooo right gotcha sorry, my mistake. Of course I'll be a friend."

"What did you do before coming here, I mean, like before getting enthralled."

"I was a lifecoach. I worked with some of the greatest people in hollywood. I inspired them, listened to their woes and gave sage advice. When I started getting sick I started falling into psychosis and my sage advice started getting more and more profound. The trust my clients had in me leant them to believe me when I spoke of aliens, pending invasions, hidden knowledge in physics research being held from the world by corrupt governments. They were wearing talismans I made for them, drinking potions

and burning odd incense. It was only after I was picked up wandering the streets spewing word salad that they took me to the hospital for treatment. No drug worked. I was in there a couple years crying, screaming, sedated, in electroshock therapies. Yet what was going on inside was far worse than what could be seen, unless someone lived it they could never know. A kind hearted nurse was infected and made her first kill in there. She changed, she became the opposite of what she was, cruel, heartless, powerhungry. She took me as a thrall because I was convenient and travelled south to her new people. I guess everything else was history. I was well as a thrall as I said before and even with my addiction broken I would give my life for that medicine again.”

“My story is rather different. I was a journalist writing stories about the paranormal. I snuck into a vampire ball with the love of my life, a wizard. The ball was for the promotion of a female vampire to nobility. She had a grudge with my wizard and infected me to tear us apart. It did. I was afraid I might kill him so I joined the fellowship down here. My daughter was abducted by the reds and I came to set her free before she was sacrificed. I lost control and made my first kill. I started changing, my lover killed me as a sacrifice and since it was a bloodline curse the reds, all of them, died. It worked because I was the youngest full red court vampire yet my change did not complete. The vampire part died so like other younger fellowship members I just got cured. Then I just came back to life. Sort of. I guess. I really don’t know, so sue me.”

“Sort of?”

“I’m not quite the same. I’m still human by nature, I think like a human. I’m not corrupted I don’t think. Honestly I’m still learning. I’m not a red, and I’m figuring out what I actually am.”

She seemed to deflate somehow. Not being a true red court vampire she figures I’m no cure for her ills and I just don’t know about myself. I don’t know if I could help her. I sure don’t want to enthrall her out of chance, I abhor the practise.

She said, “That’s lucky for you. I hope you find your path in life and use your new nature to help people who most need it.” I think that was a poke at me to give it a try just on the chance I might help her. I just won’t do it.

She said, “Well, if I ever do find my vampire despite all facts to the contrary I would be a loyal and caring thrall for them. They would not need for anything if I could provide it to them.” She kissed me on the cheek, rolled over and went to sleep. She slept like a baby and I just laid there. I’m conflicted.

I guess I could try. It’s just for me, it’s almost like euthanasia. It’s horrible. I’ve seen so much down here, I’ve seen the horrors of enthrallment and the treatment of thralls. Based on what I’ve encountered so far though I really need help. I could mislead myself in believing I’m a one woman panzer and ready to plow through all enemies to get to my destination, but if fate hadn’t intervened I would be dead now. I’m not an island. If there were others with me they could have distracted that thing and I could have had a chance to sink in my kabar where it mattered. So I need to move north with Jill and meet

these new comrades, assuming they will take me on. Jill to her credit is really snuggling up to me. Literally. She thinks I may be her salvation and the others may think the same. I would say I'm a shoein. The trouble is they may do exactly as Jill and snuggle in to entice me. Jill will undoubtedly reveal to them I may have the old red court juice they feel the need so much. So I would need to make kills. I would have to avoid enthralling them by staying fed some other way. If there were enough encounters I might not even need to make a kill just sip as I go along. I would not addict anyone. Jill told of her suffering though, I'm not sure if that's fair. I guess the only thing is to try. Honestly try to avoid feeding at all. It could work, just push my boundaries, maybe I can break the cycle of feeding somehow. I need to try refraining from feeding as much as I can, the need to feed covertly will help. So feed only if I have to then. Night comes, I make sure my bag is packed and fold the cloak tent to wear. I give Jill a hug and she purrs. The two of us head north to meet her people.

Death is everywhere now. We seem not to hardly travel a half mile without seeing one corpse if not more. I hope they aren't black court victims but even if they aren't these people are still dead. Some are suicides, others killings, some have been eaten by things natural and unnatural. Things unearthly show the signs of their passing raising the hair on our heads. There are things in this part of the world now that can only be said to be wrong. Just wrong in the sense that there are things that simply should not be walking these fields of slaughter.

I may not feel that I can morally provide them the venom they feel they need but that doesn't mean I can't be part of their group. Why would they even know about the vampiric part of me anyway, not unless they see me feed.

Jill said, "We always pick a place to meet every mile or so. We found this old abandoned hunting cabin as a waypoint so we could flee back to it and meetup." We passed out of the underbrush and found the cabin some twenty to thirty feet away. Jill went first and her crew turned around to greet her and I came right behind her. The last thing I remember is coming out of the brush and hearing a low powerful roar from what looked like a real life rambo, "mugger!" Then I heard Jill yell back, "No Jack! She's OK it's our new friend Susan!" Too late. Just to illustrate how goddamned powerful Jack is he had a tree up by it's roots and thrown towards me before Jill's words registered. I leaped backwards as the tree flew within inches of my nose. I felt like I was in the movie matrix, the adrenaline slowed everything down to the point it felt like an hour for me to hit the ground on my back. I rolled over to face Jill's people, most of whom with their eyes wide as saucers were asking me, "My God are you OK?"

I walked toward them carefully, and said, "Jesus Christ!" without meeting Jack's gaze. I was thinking about wolves and how meeting the alpha male gaze is considered a challenge. I don't want to challenge Jack, It might hurt.

Another one walked toward me and said, "Hi I'm Vinny." He extended his hand in order to shake mine but somehow walked right into a tree along the way. He smacked

it with a grunt and then just stood there as if he was too embarrassed to pull his face away from it's bark. Giving the impression his faceplant was somehow a necessary and intentional action. I felt that I should faceplant on my side of that tree to properly return the greeting.

Another guy came towards me skipping like a little girl and clapping his hands, "Oh you have such a wonderful complexion! Your outfit is sooo embarrassing but that hair is to die for! Where do you get it done girl? My name is George" He came right up bypassing the handshake and hugged me tight, kicking up one leg.

One girl wouldn't look at me but rather asked Jill, "Oh my God Jill, did you wash her before you decided to take her home? You don't know where she came from!" to which I responded back, "I flew out her ass." The girl turned back to me and said, "You bitch, who invited you here?" Jill looked at me and said, "Here is Veronica. I realize she is difficult but she is a tad paranoid." I said, "I can tell."

One girl ran at a sprint saying, "Oh my God, Oh my God, I just know you are such a wonderful caring person because I know Jill is such a wonderful caring person. You're going to be one of my bestest friends in the world!" After which she lands on me like a predator hugging like a vice and throwing me backward off my feet. She kisses me on both cheeks and the mouth then hugs tight again. She then gets up and pulls me up off the ground. Jill said, "That was Laura. She can be a bit of an airhead but she is sweet as sugar."

Then finally a tall lanky fellow walks clumsily toward



me. He trips, his rifle goes off, the bullet hits a tree limb above his head which then falls. Then it hits him on the head knocking him flat to the ground. The rest of us dive for the ground not realizing at first where the gunshot came from. Once we perceived what happened Jill said to him, "Oh Craig, always the same with you isn't it dear." All I could say was, "Oh Christ." What a motley crew Jill's people are.

Introductions done, Jill said, "Well it's getting towards sunrise so why don't we go into the cabin and rest today. We can head out tonight where are you going Susan we'll tag along and keep each other safe?"

"Well the best I can figure I'm going to head south, I want to get the hell out of here to somewhere that's safer. I or we can do a lot more to help here from outside, if we stay the only thing we can do is die. If not today, eventually, and soon."

"Agreed then. Veronica I want you to put sheets up on the windows to keep the sun out so we can rest. Make sure not a ray of sun enters in on us."

Veronica said, "Why would you bother to block the windows none of us have ever cared one way or the other..." Jill looked unwaveringly at Veronica and her eyes lit up. She said, "OOOooo, really? Well damn you're right we never sleep right in sunlight do we. Excellent idea."

The rest of the people looked at each other unsure of what that exchange was about and then I could then see the slow realization in their faces like a man having walked through a desert discovering a babbling brook. Nobody let me in on the wonderful news though. Maybe it's better

I just didn't know. Way down I feel like I already know the creepy truth.

That first day everyone talked to me like I was the cool kid in school, wanting me to like them and working hard at it. It gave me a chance for us to get to know each other and I considered it a good thing.

The next day I was walking with Laura as we were heading south. The first thing she did of course is throw a merciless hug. between her and George it's going to be a very affectionate journey.

# 03

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