

SUSAN RODRIGUEZ: THE
QUICKENING

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Eric B. Teepell

SUSAN'S REQUIEM SERIES PREQUEL

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*Dedicated to Dresden Files Readers, and L^AT_EX users
worldwide.*

PREFACE

Susan's story has its own unique character. She is her own woman now. Her story is raunchy, brutal and vulgar. I am a daemonolater in the real world, a practitioner of the actual left hand path. Think religion, like Wicca meets ACDC. I hope it adds a unique creative quality to her dark story.

Not specifically mentioned in Susan's background I see her as a quiet unassuming type, an innocent nature balanced by an overwhelming passion that couldn't be quenched.

Harry once said to her:

"I am pure of heart and mind," I told her.

"I cannot be corrupted."

I believe he meant her, while jovially saying it about himself. It helps show evidence

for her incorruptable soul. She dreams of peace and understanding between the human and vampire species and unsurpassed honor among vampires. She demands they take a share of her own nature. She has become an excellent soldier with courage to face and kill any enemy directly without guilt but she is a journalist and prefers more strategic approaches. She is extremely intelligent.

INTRODUCTION

Losing Susan Rodriguez hurt. As a result I decided to spinoff off the character. Susan returns full circle back to being the annoying journalist she was. She will struggle with her past, find healing, and adjust to the dark new world she is entering into. She will find ways to be there for her daughter while she navigates through her own existential crisis. Over time she will be unveiling the extraordinary and magickal (note the K at the end) of our own world under the guise of the ancient and forgotten.

BACKGROUND OF SUSAN

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.

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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 lighting 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, "Livyatan niis d ol nobloh tztvt 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 nonethe-

less. 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. It's 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 adamantite 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. As I 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. 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 and yet my change did not complete. Somehow I came back. I guess because I didn’t complete the change and the vampire part died so like other younger fellowship members I just got cured. Sort of.”

“Sort of?”

“I’m not quite the same. I’m still human by nature, I think human and not corrupted. 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 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 people!" 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, I might hurt.

Another one walked toward me and said, "Hi I'm Vinny." After which he seemed to mistake me for the tree beside

me. Attempting to shake hands to walked right into the tree with a grunt and them just stood there as if he was too embarrassed to pull his face away from it's bark.

Another guy came towards me skipping like a little girl and clapping his hands, "Oh you have such a wonderful complexion! Your outfit 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.

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's been!" to which I responded back, "Of course she knows, 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.

03

ETHERIC REVENANT

It seemed like such a long trip back to William's town. It's just time to rock and I want to get there like now, right now is a good time lets not drive and just be there now snap fingers and just be there. Oh well, no such luck. I kinda wish I had wings, but maybe I shouldn't wish with my luck I have a true form that can fly like a dragon breathing fire and everything. Gotta get me fixed somehow.

So I reviewed my case notes so far. One of the highest etheric content is found in sprouting seeds. Bang, there's where the seeds come in. Found nothing about thresholds so either the books just never mentioned it or this creature is unaffected by thresholds. I'm guessing the latter, I am in a sense my own example where I have

a component of vampire in me but I'm not effected by thresholds. I hope I don't have to go in Jorge's house again it took 3 fricking days for that full body itching to stop. 3 days. hells bells.

Aye and I'm dressed to kill at that, well actually I'm dressed to do a valve job. I have no clothes so I borrow what Carlos has since we are about the same size and he works with a railroad company. I'm Francisca's size too but the ankle long dresses she wears wouldn't do me much good for the life I lead. Further check of the case notes, my checklist. Need to ask William about running water for the innocent to run through if needed. Hopefully there's a stream. As for me there is that most gruesome red court vampire half that might help, garlic, and some steely knives so that I just might kill the beast.

So our first stop is going to be Miguel's to find out more about that shaman. We need to find him to find the body. There's nothing we can do to destroy the revenant unless we destroy the body. The most we could do is use our knowledge to assist the families in warding off the revenant indefinitely and that is not good enough for me. I would shame myself to submit such an article.

After we arrive at Miguel's house he answers that question, "I see the shaman at midnight to the north of the cemetery, over there,"

He points to the cemetery which is west of his house past Jorge who is directly east of the boneyard.

"He works some magic over himself and walks into the cemetery. Some nights I see him come out when I have trouble sleeping, usually around 3AM. I always assumed

he was blessing the dead of the ancestors to assist them home. It usually happens every night.”

Wierd. I haven’t a clue what this dude is doing out there. I’m guessing he ain’t no shaman. “I’m going to go meet this supposed shaman tonight, is it OK if my guys stay with you tonight Miguel?”

“Yes of course, they aren’t going with you?”

“Better not. Between the war experience and the journalistic experience I’ll be fine, more than one person could unsettle him or bring us attention we don’t need. I’ll go alone.” Besides I don’t want to vamp out or worse lose one or more fellows I need them to take care of me. I could see Carlos about to raise an objection. Miguel turned and I hopped, pointed to Miguel, pointed to my eyes, pointed to my fangs. Miguel coughed but he got the hint. Miguel or anyone else for that matter need not see me vamp out I’d be lynched in such a religious town fairly immediately.

“As a matter of fact Miguel, maybe we could get the preacher to advise residents to stay in tonight for the exact same reason” and all Carlos had to say was an agreeable “mmhmm” like what can you say really without letting the cat out of the bag?

I actually headed out about 1PM with a sandwich and fruit that Miguel prepared so that I could munch and get a look at the area alone from a journalist perspective. I need to find a roost to snap some photos, take notes, unobserved. Then I’ll move in all friendly and see if I can find out more about who this dude is and what he is doing. Hopefully it works out but if not I need to know

where cover is so I can dive and a route to get away fast. Done this stuff before no biggie for me, shown be cut and dry. The area is quite residential with midrise apartment buildings and homes on single acre lots. The homes aren't big but they are in good shape, the people that live here are working for a decent wage. The cemetery is unfenced. To the south side is a cliff with a single treacherous path leading down to more recent graves below. I went down and verified none of the graves are less than a year old, newest is about 50 years old. It makes a difference because my material indicates life as a revenant is hard and most don't live more than a year. Down here I see where a lot of garbage has been dumped over a long time, which is an abomination to have strewn across this section of graveyard. It seems to be an island though heavy equipment seems to roll through here often and I see a railway line not 50 feet away through overgrown brush. The machinery must be working on the line, this section is under constant use even up to present the ground is completely dug up. There are some coloured banners on the trees and brush in this area which I am presuming is due to the construction, power lines, gas lines, graves and so on. On the cliff face I see 2 or 3 tomb entrances but I don't see how on God's green earth one would gain access to them. Perhaps there was a way at one time but the path was washed away. Moving back up the cliff at the top is a caretakers shed. It's locked but a look in the windows says it's not worth the time having someone unopen it I see nothing of interest. There are pathways leading throughout the cemetery, this top area is a victorian garden style

which is very nice and maintained. I don't see anything more to say about it here. The church is actually on the cemetery property but is properly attached to the main street and not inside the cemetery. Assumably the church owns the boneyard but I have nothing actually saying that's true.

I looked in the area Miguel pointed out and I do see the remains of a ritual being worked. I can't tell if it's ancient magick or modern magic that uses the magical current such as wizards like Harry uses. I don't know enough about magick to see the difference. Of what I do see is the circle was made with salt given that it tastes salty. Don't judge me I was pretty sure it wasn't deadly poison. Well fairly sure. There are burn marks and the remains of unknown components. I guess suffice it to say *somun dun* magics 'ere.

OK so immediately north of me is a small park area, a home to the east and a midrise 6 story to the west. Searching the park I find nothing, well besides cut grass, trees and bushes. Which is where I found a nice roost, actually in one of the bushes there is a depression where I can lie below ground level completely eaten up by this bush. It's a glorious find.

The plan is then to do a full 7 hour meditation. It's longer than usual but it's 4PM now and that takes me to 11PM. I'll start my stakeout then in case he arrives early and go from there. I'm thinking since the cemetery is unused it's likely the lower area the the revenants body is resting. It looks like a jungle down there. This guy is probably doing some kind of residual magic and passing

not into the cemetery but through it and descending to the lower level to do whatever it is he is doing. When I confront him he should fumble through excuses but I know he will drop some manner of clue for me to follow up on. I have to try and wait for the right time. Before he finishes the ritual in case it is a protective one I may not get a chance to get near him then. I'll use my more sensitive half vampire hearing and write down what I can. Which reminds me I should put together a red or blue flashlight it doesn't look like there are any lights at all and it calls for a pitch black night tonight. Miguel should have something I can use for a stealth flashlight.

I went to miguels and scored big on the flashlight, got a military surplus flashlight with the detachable coloured filters. Absolutely perfect, clip and everything totally handsfree if I set it up right. When I was in the city I wondered about decking out in military gear to make stakeouts easier, but in the city it does just the opposite. Imagine a guy walking down the street or in the park in army fatigues and gear. Stick out much? yeah I think so. I've heard of journalists using the SEP method though. Dressing so insanely that people turn away and pay no notice of them. It stands for "Somebody Else's Problem" and aptly named.

Meditation was restful. I can't sleep as a matter of nature currently so until I can heal that part of myself I just simply meditate. It works very well for me so far breaking the day and creating the recharge time. Unfortunately meditation is when my visions come. And this night was no different. And I still can't be sure what they mean. Yet

I am still sure they are of a diabolical nature.

So again this night visions revisit her, this time more vivid than before, more detailed.

She sees a workshop, reds and humans alike. Alchemists and scribes working. The red king, and one ringwraith? That guy needs to reconsider his fashion sense that kind of thing is munchkinwear. They are discussing a spell. The bloodline curse.

“Good afternoon, it appears our spell is near completion. We certainly appreciate your interest in this matter”

“Certainly. It is in our best interest to see you win this war, You clearly will do so at any cost.”

“We won’t be shamed by our enemies, we engaged in our pursuit too soon and did not gain the momentum necessary for victory, that needs to be rectified. This is one step forward towards that goal.”

“And brilliant dear king, no matter what happens you win.”

“In my mind although his daughters sacrifice would bestow the power of Harry’s bloodline to her there would be few to be consumed by the spell.”

“But if Harry should save his daughter,”

The red king replies, “Irrelevant. A child inherits the power of a pitiful few. Ariana is pleased but our victory is still uncertain. Absolute world domination ever less so. The key is the one named Martin. His hate has consumed him. Although he assumed he has deceived me I am the master of deceit. He will throw himself down to be fed, his hatred is too great to choose to feed and to turn. He will make himself food. Even if he does feed we still have

victory with him as the heir to the red court. Truly any red court vampire sacrificed will ascend. Ariana would be most pleased to see his lover as the full red court heir of course, to see the subjugation of this world under her will and might. Imagine the distillation of the power of the entire red court upon the one, the vicious, ruthless, conqueror and true red court heir.”

“Yes king, the new red court will be vast. She will propagate quickly and be mighty indeed. And I will be pleased to have such an ally. I shall be the one who created the way to ascension of the ruler of the world”

Susan stirred conscious for a moment. “Heh, somebody really fricked up. I may not know what I am but I know ruthless conqueror does not fit the bill. I think these visions are closer to dreams. I guess I shouldn’t pay so much attention to them anymore. I’m just so self-conscious and unsure after my ordeal, I just need to give myself some time. Well a couple hours left I’ll go back into my meditation.

Multi-voice again, “The foolssss, it wasss too ssssoon. That which wasss human is asssscended human that which wasss vampire is asssscended vampire. You are who you are not, You are not who you are, fusion of human and vampire ass one. Our sssissster come. Our sssissster join usss.” Susan interjects unashamedly in her semi-conscious state, “Oh shutup I’m meditating here.” “Yesss, do enjoy” “I am thank you” How polite the demons are. Such a refreshing change seriously. I think I can get control of these visions just need to be firm but polite. No prob.

Soon enough along comes the shaman. I see the lights

coming from the distance and sweeping. He's coming straight toward me! Ah hell gotta move quick, if I wait it's all the more likely he'll notice me. I roll quick out of the hole I'm in and behind a tree. After waiting for the sweep of his flashlight to move to the other side I dive for a nearby tree large enough to stay hidden behind. After wiping the sweat from my brow I watch him slowly moving by. Once he gets to the street I see him cast a circle and place some food into a triangular "circle". I see a semi corporeal object that looks like a meat sack appear and descending on the food. Oh God ew, for an invisible entity it sure looks rather visible now. It must be growing stronger. Once the creature was feeding the shaman moved from the circle into the cemetery. I'm thinking to myself was he really so much feeding the creature as distracting it to avoid being it's meal himself? I wait until the shaman is well into the cemetery before I launch up and head for the cemetery behind him, checking I have my garlic secure on my person first of course. Once past the entity his flashlight flicks off. Damn. I move quick and fall twice to get closer. Closing the distance slower now I see a light shining below the cliff and I realize that the light didn't go out as much as the shaman is descending the cliff. I move quickly to just beyond the edge of the cliff to see when he fully descends and is occupied. I'll be damned if I'm gonna scare him off when he sees my light right behind him.

He descends slowly. I have no idea who figured it was a good idea to expand a graveyard off the edge of a cliff with little more than a goat trail going down. It makes me

wonder again about the crypts that poke out the middle of the cliff. Likely there were goat trails to those too before there wasn't.

When he reached bottom he shone the light back up again. I'm glad I didn't go down too soon he would've run for sure. I see the light flicker over the graves and then out past them into the rough area. He seems to have located what he was looking for there. I was about to head down when he turned around and shone the light at the cliff. He pulls something out and I see the glint of a shovel. Sure then, is he about to bury his troubles or pop open a cold one?

When he is back at the rough area I decide it's time for me to slip quietly down.

"Whoops, crap!" Susan slips on the edge of the cliff and the next thing she knows two balls of fire are heading her way. The first one slams loudly into the edge of the cliff where she is standing melting it into glass and the other hits her square in her left side. Involuntarily a low growl like a half ton tiger comes from her and she falls and lands soundlessly like a cat 50 feet away. Brutally injured she falls to the ground. half her torso is missing and her left arm is gone. "Jesus, why am i not dead?" Her wound is bloodless and her flesh black and necrotic. The sound of writhing black larva comes from her side and she sees herself quickly regenerating via what appears to be a massive larval mass. "eeeew" she exclaims.

The flashlight moves closer to her and she is thinking to herself still immobilized from injury, "egad I wish I could just make like smoke and float away". The flashlight

lands on her but with a hiss she dissipates into a light fog, glowing eyes show forth to the shaman for an instant and are gone. The same involuntary growl comes from her but now seeming to come from every direction. The shaman is terrified.

“Holy hells David, any other sorcerer on this planet would hit a mortal but you would have to hurl fire into some nasty ass demon you fricking idiot. What the hell were you thinking at least wait until you see what you’re aiming for. Now you’re dead you poor dumb bastard”

Susan ponders, “It hurt like hell but listen to this guy spill, almost worth it. Almost. Ouch.”

“Abram and his dumbass ideas, I can be a revenant and find divinity in myself through immortality. All you have to do is bring me the proper sustenance. Oh Abram you greedy bastard sustenance was not enough you needed the ethereal energy of human beings didn’t you? It was so unnecessary but you did it and brought attention to yourself and likely me too. Apparently also this nasty ass demon. Oh you bastard. I dug you a hole, a crypt for all time but screw you. You uninhibited S.O.B. figure it out yourself I’m outta here, see you in hell.”

He scrambles up the cliff and I let him go. To hell with it there is no earthly law that would convict him for what he did although I hope he repays this debt in the hereafter. I located the body in perfect preservation exactly where David the sorcerer was in the rough brush, covered in a tarp. The freshly dug crypt, earthen dug into the soft cliff face and lined with stone. Abrams organs were in a jar in the crypt already and his body mummified ready

to be placed. I reached for my journal out of instinct and my body solidified. Completely healed. I figured I will freak out over that later no time at the present. This is perfectly according to my research. So that's why the victims weren't killed, the revenant had no need of their energy. David executed the plan perfectly. Abram was just greedy. Too bad for him the townspeople are going to burn this corpse on a pire, no more revenant. I stayed and meditated in the brush until morning light for safety. That very morning the townspeople cremated that corpse and me and my boys were on our way home.

We passed by the cabin on the way through and I typed up the story from my journal and sent it to the arcanes securebox using tails. I also sent a bitcoin address hoping to get some payment for my work on the story. They came through in spades the payment was massive. As a matter of fact I yelled and did a nose to floor fistpump "yessssss!"

Finally, with permission of the diocese and a good word from the pastor the basilica got rebuilt and my home became what it should be. I have internet now! Life is good. My library has significantly expanded, magick temple, kitchen, living room, alchemy lab, awesomeness. Even the crypt was cleaned up and renovated. It's now accessible from outside cut off from the rest of the basilica. The women of the village place flowers at the tombs every Sunday after mass. It's good to see.

My heart got the better of me when I got back home and I called father Forthill in Chicago worried about Maggie and wondering how Harry is doing. Of course father

didn't believe it was me and all I got was that Maggie is safe and happy and Harry is at least still breathing. We both knew that's all we could ask of Harry. Poor bastard. He deserves a happy life. I left him father Antonio as a forwarding contact and wished him well before we hungup. I can't visit, but at least I know they are alive and Maggie is happy. I couldn't ask for anything more. I told father Antonio if father Forthill does ever call he is a family friend and to speak openly.

Well the demons have picked tomorrow morning for us to have our BBQ. It will be good to meet them. In as much as it is good to meet demons I guess. I certainly have a lot questions. The confrontation with David really emphasized how little I know about myself.

04

DÆMONS RISE

Back to the old tower I go up to the battlements to fire up the old BBQ. Got it going about 11PM and my fellas got themselves some fine burgers from me before heading to sleep in the towers spare rooms. Carlos at the very least sleeps light he will hear a knock on the door. I sit and go into meditation then rising to restart it and get some burgers on at about quarter to 3. So yes Jose does spend the odd night sleeping here, his family is getting to know me better now as time goes on. I'm getting to know the womenfolk better too and my baking skills are becoming passable at the parish functions. All good things.

My guests arrived but it wasn't through the front door. A thick mist came on to the battlements and one by one

they emerged. The first was a gentleman with translucent hair and pure white eyes. Nothing else special about him just an ordinary bloke. He spoke and said that his name is Eurynomous. He introduced his two friends the first had a robe and cowl that made him look like the grim reaper minus the scythe. The robe covered every part of him. Eurynomous stated this gentleman's name is Balberith. The last gentleman to emerge, if you could call him a gentleman by appearance was named Babeal. He was semi-corporeal, with long flowing robes.

My guests and me sat down to some burgers. I was fascinated by the fact Babeal, as ghostly as he seemed, packed burgers down quite well without any falling right out of his ghostly form.

Afterwards we talked at length about the war. I came to find out they fought in the war also, in a humanitarian manner. They tended to the dead, comforted those who suffered loss, and were companions for the dead or dying. I was thankful they did that work the fellowship were often too concerned with fighting the battle than to take time to care for those suffering because of it. The stories these guys had were incredible. It made me ashamed to say I seen the most horrible things in the war as they seen so much worse.

They were quite open as to how it effected them which helped me open up a little about how it is for me. It helped, I've been so self-conscious about who and what I am. I'm just so scared about being like the reds since I know there is some of that monster still in me. They told me that's not entirely true though and we'll talk about it

a little later.

We talked about the ancient magick for a long while. It just isn't the same, the mainstream wizardry today is based on the "power of creation". The same principles apply in general but ancient magick was (and is) based on "power of will". Mainstream wizardry is far more immediate, potent, and controllable. The ancient magick comes from the persons inherent divinity summoned forth through an act of will. The result is almost always unpredictable, indifferentiable from coincidence, and unrelated to effects stemming from the power of creation. The magick is entirely different. It also can be used where modern magick cannot be, such as to combat ancient monsters. Users of ancient magick are traditionally called magicians. Not to be confused with stage magicians who do illusions for entertainment, magicians who work with the ancient magic call these entertainers "illusionists" to differentiate themselves from the David Copperfields of the world. The word magick is also used to differentiate itself from both modern wizardry and stage magic. There are precious few practitioners of ancient magick in the world today but the art remains with us and will likely always remain with us as long as the human race continues. Or so I think anyway based on what I've heard.

One thing in the conversation that jumped out at me was ancient magick practitioners have no issues with anything electronic or electrical, so I could keep using computers to research and write stories. That's pretty big for me. I'm interested.

So they showed me How to cast a balancing circle that I

can use when meditating. They showed me the ancient methods of magickal meditation and trance. I learned how to train in visualization and the use of sigils. And finally they gave me basic knowledge that is sufficient to allow me to find my own learning material to continue advancing in this most singular of mystical arts.

They went on to explain the nature of red court vampirism, or at least to the best of their ability. It did in fact stem from the idea of the etheric revenant. Practitioners of ancient magick in an evil bid to achieve ultimate power and immortality went beyond what I had seen in their atrocities and created the abominations that would be the vampire courts. By tapping into some manner of evil power once a court was born. It only needed to happen once and the spirit of evil that consumed the human victim would continue its propagation for all time. It being now an entirely different and unnatural species, a creature not alive or of this world and yet at the same time somehow still a part of it.

Consider that the revenant is actually a natural part of the living human person. The ethereal body exists in the living and represents in a way the glue that binds the physical to the spiritual in the human person. That is a natural part of every person. That does not mean every person is part vampire. Yet that same part after the physical death, if that ethereal part of the person does not also die becomes the vampire of ancient legend. It is still part human but needs to feed somehow just like any human does.

The court vampire though is not human. It is the result

of an ethereal body corrupted into becoming a cancer that consumes the whole physical and ethereal human person. So for the red the creature injects a human host with a spawn that consumes the ethereal body of the host and exists in it's place. This is the half-vampire stage. The human person, spirit and body, is still functioning and true to form but the ethereal vampire is still fully functional at this stage although hampered by it's physical and spiritual limitations. The more it's powers are accessed the more it needs to be fed from it's host to do so and the more hunger comes of it. You already know how that side works.

What you don't know is that the vampire needs that first blood kill in order for it to have the strength to complete the consumption of it's host. It consumes the entire physical body of it's host releasing the human soul into the hereafter. What seems to be the person after the fact is the vampire having taken to itself the memories and personality of it's former host which it does when it consumes the host. That essence of the former host provides the new born full court vampire with it's distinctiveness and sense of self. What may seem like some to be a corrupt or perhaps redeemable human person is truly not human at all and this is why. The human that once was is in the hereafter, and it is highly unlikely that human will be judged for the final feeding which is far beyond their control. At least generally, living as a half vampire is like a teenager in a car race down city streets, a crash is fairly inevitable.

"OK so far so good. Sounds like I've been half eaten. I

guessed on that already but the hunger is disappeared so I fix that and what's the difference? I don't feel evil and I would think if I was somebody in this town would have called me up on it."

They continue. "You are much different than anything before Susan. The vampire was in the midst of it's consumption of you and if just a few moments longer your spirit would have been cast to the nevernever. The rite of ascension hit before you were released and the result is that the full force of a million full court vampire spirits infused their power to you upon their death. The feedback caused fusion rather than release. It hit your human soul head on with deifying power. The vampiric soul which would normally have consumed and taken for itself your former body was instead utterly destroyed and consumed by your existing human soul before it was able to depart. Snapped back in and fused by the new power of that human soul which in turn quickened every part of you. You are the first full court vampire in human history with a complete human soul, yet as a full court vampire you are still the last and greatest of your kind. In the nevernever you are called like by the tongue of the red king, "The great mother".

As my eyes were nearly falling out of my sockets at this point I decided to make an offer to them to force a brief recess, "smores?"

"That sounds wonderful thanks Susan. How are you doing this must be a bit difficult?"

"I think I may be going psychotic. I swear you just called me a God or something I'm just trying not to think about

it.”

“No don’t worry about it. It’s just a word. It doesn’t reflect who you are as a person or anything.”

“So the not being hungry and not effected by garlic and holy things... I’m not getting better?”

“You’re getting more powerful. Being effected by these things is beyond you.”

“Sunlight?”

“Beyond you. The greatest of the red court didn’t need to feed often. You wont need to feed at all ever in time. Just eat a balanced for the growing vampire meal. You remember about high etheric food sources, yes?”

“Christ”

“Too rich. Stick with plain humans or solid food. You need a break I can tell. Maggie really is happy, she is living with the carpenters right now.”

“Oh my God really? They are a wonderful family! She will be very happy! And Harry?”

“Need you ask? Oh he is in one trouble after the next but nothing has stopped him yet.”

“Does he get any time with Maggie?”

“Not really but he is going to try.”

“That’s so sad. Although I realize it was unexpected. I wish things could have been different.”

“I know you do Susan. Give things time they’ll work out ok. They always do.”

“They’re the only family I know. Can I call you Eury? I just don’t know if things will really be OK.”

“Sure Eury is fine. Just give things time Susan, there is a lot you need to learn about your self at the same time.

There are going to be ways you can contact them coming to you in the near future try not to worry.”

“Father Forthill seemed to not want to even talk to me. I think all this vampire stuff he has just forsaken me or something.”

“Father Forthill is going to very quickly be one of your most staunch supporters Susan just have patience. Your very existence to the man without understanding anything more makes his evil alarm go off. He has had dealings with very nasty things in his day.”

“That’s true. I could be a very nasty vampire for all he knows trying to trick him.”

“So Eury, you and the three wise men, what are you exactly.”

“Well, in ancient times we were the Gods of the world. In that time between the Great Old Ones and the modern pantheons. We were all known by different names. There are a precious few that follow us now we are mostly just working through energy conduits..”

“Just the three of you?”

“No there is more than you could count actually. The three of us just hang around each other a lot.”

“Sounds like an interesting life.”

“You’ll find out more as time goes on.”

“Well the sun will soon be rising, and I’ll be heading down for breakfast. Are you guys staying longer?”

“We will need to be getting back to where we were, there is only the matter of your true form.”

Susan’s stomach sunk to the ground. Their words of her being a full red just hit her hard enough to knock out

teeth. In a very small voice she pleaded, "Please no."

Eury responded, "Susan your true form is going to demonstrate to you more than we could ever in words. You need to see yourself as you are. After that we will leave and see you at times in meditation. Perhaps even meet for another BBQ someday soon. If it's alright I would like to come to you to help you make the change."

Susan nodded. She could feel his cool presence and he connected with her spirit. He showed her how to release her mask and in the process she learned how to manipulate her mask. As the layers of skin mask peeled away her eyes were closed and she was shaking unwilling to look at herself. Eury touched her spirit again and a very cool and calming sensation overtook her. In this kind spiritual embrace she opened her eyes. It was her standing there, ebony skinned and glistening from the vampiric secretion. She was muscled and athletic, the kind of body most people wish they had but could never achieve. Her hair was long and flowing and she had wings. Oh yeah she had wings. She was over 10 feet tall with black feather wings that were a hundred feet tip to tip fully extended. As big as she was she was both strong and very light, like she was partly buoyant in air. She was in all respects an angel, a dark angel.

"I, I'm beautiful", she stammered.

"Yes you are. Perhaps this will help you understand yourself better."

Susan smiled huge, threatening tears. "Do I fly?"

"You would be the first and last court vampire to truly command the skies. With practice you will fly better than

anything else out there.”

The smile broadened. She must be a magical creature because those 100 feet of wings tucked in behind her like they were hardly there. She can even wrap her wings around herself to stay warm.

She wished them well as they slid back into the mist and back to their world.

She slid back in and advised carlos her party was just breaking up now, and she is going to her chamber to meditate a few hours to catch up. She cast the balancing circle she was taught, and meditated inside for many hours. It was a lot to take all at once and she needed the rest. She could swear Eury’s cool presence was on that circle bringing peace to her troubled mind.

The following day brought magickal study, beginning with the material she was given she had sigil and dream magick on the curiculum. She also spent time shapeshifting now that she knew that she knew that she could. She found it to be a skill. She could change herself into any creature or change anything about herself including clothes. She needed to observe what she wanted to become long enough before it would be convincing. She stared at different fabrics to change her clothes colour. She could only change clothes that she shapeshifted of course ordinary clothes she could not change. She became Jose for a little while, then a little bird she seen on a wire. She snuck up to the battlements in true form in broad daylight and lived to tell the tale. She is rubbing some kind of unholy oliem on herself now she got from Eury because it gave her the worst sunburn ever. It wont

regenerate either. Live and learn.

She also did some battle training in the hall, hopping like a cat and skipping through mist. She was also trying to learn the different ways she sees which seem to be quite complex.

Outside she located a boulder that must have weighed in at 2 tons, raised it and lobbed it far into the forest. "OK, epic strength, let's move on then for sanities sake."

Marcos helped her quite a bit today with her dream workings. The doc leached him again and so he spent most of the day sleeping just from sheer exhaustion. Knowing that dream working is meant to be a solitary thing of course Susan just decided to bridge the gap and move into other peoples dreams, and learn more about her powers that way. She had near total control in a shared dream state, though Carlos did pick up on his own ability to control the shared dream. Shared dreaming could be dangerous she doesn't have the same control there as in the real world. A more powerful or even just any hostile being could do her real harm. Finding Marcos was hard, there had to be something unique. An item in the room that she is familiar with, a familiar room. Something intimately his like a drop of blood or a fingernail. Knowing him wasn't good enough she needed that physical link to get into that room where he slept. Even then it didnt tell her where that room was physically located.

Later she found she can shapeshift simple weapons and other items onto her person. Swords, bows, staves, and such. Firearms are too complex and items that leave her body become goo. So a bow is useless unless she has real

arrows. She cannot shapeshift with normal clothes and if she goes trueform the real clothes get torn to shreds.

Late afternoon she rooted some android devices to loop-mount kali linux. She apprenticed under a black hat network security enthusiast for a while (commonly known as an “evil hacker”). She tries not to let the knowledge get too fuzzy but she will always need to research howtos to make things happen it’s never been a big priority for her, always the journalist.

After a good meal she went to the battlements after the sun was well set. She proceeded to launch into the sky from there at first like a drunken jay bird slamming into the ground over and over again all night long but by the end of the week she was quick and skilled as a bird of prey.

She also took time to memorize different camouflage patterns and bdu uniforms, as well as practice shapeshifting them, for when she is “in the field”.

So much work taking away from her time with the community. With the renewal of the old basilica though the main hall is used often and she is able to spend time and join in the community and parishioners. It has been great for getting the community together the church building was too small to hold social events before or to meet after mass.

Time passed slowly. Then while Susan was at work in her alchemy lab a call came in.

“yo.”

“Susan it’s father Forthill.”

“Holy s@, sorry father just surprised”

"I understand you would be, I want to apologize for the way I treated you when you called."

"I understand father. I rose up from the grave asking about Harry and Maggie."

"Heh. Well I still could have been less abrasive. I spoke to father Antonio it's quite the story."

"Even more confusing living it than hearing about it."

"I can accept that. Something me and father Antonio agree on though is that tremendous grace has been flowing through you."

"I can't see that really I'm not all that catholic, or christian for that matter."

"Doesn't really matter though, anyone can be a conduit for Gods grace, and I think with your struggles it's important to see the forest through the trees."

"It seems to me you may have called for more than just to talk to me about trees."

"Yes well I do believe you now Susan and I'm going to send you work when I can, things in middle or south america. To help you out. I'm still going to keep quiet up here about you it just isn't a good time. Maggie needs the stability of a good home and should have at least one living parent to care for her."

"Uh oh, that sounds ominous. Harry is still a walking disaster?"

"Like you couldn't know Susan."

"I'll fight hard to do a better job at staying safe father."

"Dear God please do. Also I do actually have something for you."

"I'm listening."

"In San Jose, the east end, there have been sightings of hollywood style zombies wandering the street at night. Call father Gomez, here is his number."

"Thanks father I'll be all over it, quick question before you go, is there anything in Maggie's room from when she was with me?"

"A few, her favorite bear Mortie she always keeps in her room. Maybe you remember him?"

"Do I ever, thank you so much for that."

"Oh dear sweet child I wish I could do more than that to bring you together."

"You would be surprised what you have done just in that."

"Well if there is anything you need, anything at all please call Susan."

"I will thanks father."

I'll check with Jose and Carlos tomorrow but tonight I need to find my little girl.

Wherefore art thou Mortie.

I can sense you. Who is near you. I see it. That must be her.

Once upon a dream were we.

"Are you an angel? Those are such big wings."

"No child I am only Susan. Would you like to play with my tea set together? Then if you like we can fly up real high together and look for miles around."

"That sounds fun."

So almost every night from that point forward mother and daughter would play together as the little child dreams.

CORPORATE ZOMBIES

So I called father Gomez, It's in an industrial area noone is going through at night anymore, even by car. Nobody seems to be infected by these creatures (lucky bastards) but the unfortunate souls that meet them are torn to shreds. Like need dental records for ID kind of torn up. The police are investigating but the department is small and overwhelmed, the case is just not moving anywhere and the supernatural overtones makes it even worse for priority. It's been going on a year and the community has nowhere to turn. Well we pack up and head out. Jose needs to stay back for a family matter this time so it's me and Carlos to the rescue.

My ass is tenderized. Hell of a ride. We arrive at father Gomez's parish. He is going to keep us with him in the

rectory as he is a bit worried someone might lay a hand on us in this fairly rough neighbourhood. I'm worried I might lay my own hand too heavily on some poor thug so I too see the wisdom in being in a safe place. Father asked if we are under hire by rome. I said no but a dear priest said I'm under the unexpected employ of God's grace. He laughs.

"That was father Forthill I assume?"

"Of course."

"He accepts such strange characters to his company I suspect he sees grace where none other can."

"I suspect you're right. Myself considered I know he can."

"You want to know more about the zombie trouble."

"Read my mind I certainly do."

So from what was said they seem to be concentrated in particular around a warehouse marked as being owned by ACME inc. Well hell I thought that was only from looney tunes I didn't think it was an actual company. Anyway whether that was the actual owner anymore is yet to be known. He showed me on the map that location and the locations of sightings and bodies. About a dozen all in all. I made light of the shameful fact this is a low priority for police and father made a sorrowful pose.

The next day Susan shapeshifted herself into some average clothes with a KA-BAR in a concealed sheath. If she has to it's much better to poke a hole than blow some poor bastard into chunks with a left hook.

First stop town records. Lets see who owns that warehouse. Now if anyone has ever been to San Jose it is one

of the most backward national capitals I know of. No transit system in place and the streets have no names. I haven't spent a lot of time here so other than taking flight to see where I'm going I had to accept A.J. along with me, who was father Gomez's suggestion as a guide. A.J. lived here all his life and works as a taxi driver. We travelled when he was off shift.

So it looks like the warehouse was owned by a company called ACME boot. Checking the microfiche around the time of purchase in the late 1950's to early '60s the company was heavily promoting the first western boot store in central america. It never got any traction, was repurchased by a real estate company for lease or resale but fell to the bank in repossession. Nothing since. So dead end nobody has really owned that building since the 60's. I need to do some on site investigating. If I can find a safe spot a stakeout would be best.

I get A.J. to show me the route to that warehouse and drive me around it a little bit. It's got the crap beat out of it from years of not being used. The warehousing around it is not faring any better. It's the middle of the day so we decide to drive up. I walk around and pass through a 10 foot high barbed wire perimeter fence as mist. There are tire marks coming from the locked gate, looks like trucks. There is an old rusty chain and padlock on the ground cut off with bolt cutters. Somebody replaced the chain. The old padlock didn't seem in too bad shape so it seems to me someone either lost the key or just never had it to start with. I think we are dealing with trespassing unless the bank is doing something here. I

seriously doubt it though this place looks like it's ownership documents went through a shredder. Inside looks like a Freddy Krueger film. There is blood everywhere, small body parts deep scratched in the floors and walls. Some really solid looking steel tanks have deep indents in the forms of fists and steel girders have chunks bitten off them like they were taffy. Jesus, what the hell is going on in here? I look up and see an opening in the roof near a platform, maybe once used to oversee plant operations. I see signs where there has been people climbing up to this outpost recently, and often. Someone dropped a pen here, Monsanto Genetic Engineering LLC. MGEL for short I guess. Fascinating. There is some paperwork left behind also, it definitely looks like an engineers handiwork I can't make most of it out. What I can pick out are words like specimens, candidates, fit for deployment, unfit, weak. I just get the sense they are up to no good. I leap down the 50 feet and land quiet and graceful as a cat. I hear a crash outside and shapeshift into urban camo bdu, and hit the floor with the KA-BAR in my teeth. Moving silently from stair to tank to drum I get to the nearest exit to where I heard the crash. I peer quickly and nobody. Sticking to the wall like I was part of it I move around the corner to see a cat in a garbage pail. "reowww" and it was gone. Handpalm. Good enough then. I shift back to my normal clothes and scabbard the KA-BAR. After misting back through the fence A.J. takes me back to the rectory.

So it's really not much good yet staking out the location the research comes first. If I stake it out too soon they may

spook and take off to some location I don't know about. Or it turns out like last time at the cemetery they pick a fight and I pull my own version of Harry Dresden and end up leveling everything. Then come the inquiries on what happened and rumour of God knows what. Besides I promised father Forthill I would stay safe so no lets follow the leads I've found so far. We have a company name, and some engineering documents. Let's start with the company first.

We relax with some supper, Carlos helped father Gomez today with the caretaking of the parish. I let father know what I've found so far and it didn't mean too much to him but he thanked me for my work. That evening I borrowed fathers computer and booted tails. Let's see who this MGEL company is.

I found it. A biological engineering company working in the medical research field. Again fascinating. Was the mess in the warehouse something about medical waste or, sweet mercy, failed human experiments? It's got to be something that needed to take place in some remote warehouse so they are definately trying to hide something. As if I didn't already know that. I also see that they have a research location downtown so that looks like a good place to hang out.

I tell Maggie stories about the big bad zombies and how I beat them all up and sent them home without dinner.

Just as I intended I go to the location and find the entrance has a guard and is using a biometric entry system. The employees are the usual nerds with pocket protectors. I have a camera in some clothes on the table to snap

shots then bluetoothing them to the tablet. Using my superhuman ears I'm picking up names and information of employees as they enter and talk with the guard. I keep it up for a week and get quite a bit of intel, names, weekend activities, relationships, shift patterns, work area. Thank God for the outgoing and chatty guard he almost did the work for me.

Carlos headed home later in the week to care for his daily activities and I continued on in the rectory. This one is gonna make me work. I organised the pictures and practised shapeshifting them. I also studied the available data of the employees. Now how to get in. I need to bring a laptop to gather network info but this first venture I think it best to map out the floorplan and other details. Yet again how to get in.

I have a good profile of the guard. The night guard is likely best. The one named Peter is scheduled off Monday and Thursday the poor bastard. I say I wait around until the guard goes for a piss then sneak behind someone as the guard saying I need to grab keys or something. Who is going to suspect the guard of a security breach. I can shapeshift to Peter then and I guess it's just fast talking from there.

The day came and I was nervous as all hell. The moment came and I lucked out, Margo arrived while I posed as guard.

"Evening Margo how's Sparky is he feeling better?", sparky is her pomeranian.

"Much better yes, he must have been eating something he shouldn't have thanks for asking"

“Oh shit I left my keyring inside.” I slip behind her.

“Jesus Larry, Jacob will have your ass for that.”

“Who’s gonna take it Marg, like really?”

“Jacob, so he can shove them up your ass”

“point taken.”

I enter and quickly assess the area I entered. A long hallway ahead and a small alcove immediately to the right for a security desk. I dive for the alcove and switch to Peter under the desk. I see a camera at the door and I’m hoping the exact coming and going of employees isn’t tracked with it because security will be confused as hell.

So now I’m Peter. Time to wander.

Familiar faces in the labs. I’ve seen them enter and exit many times before at the front entrance. six labs on the left and a cafeteria to the right. Otherwise just one big long hall. Making note of who is in the labs for my next incursion. An elevator at the end of the hall. The second floor is empty, 9 to 5 people work here presumably. Assigned cubicles, I make note of the names the best I can. Nothing extraordinary here except computer access in privacy in the evening so bonus. I check out a workstation. Bios is locked and wont boot from cd. I expected that but it’s still annoying. I’ll need the laptop to clone the mac of the nic and hook up directly for a network mapping and recon of the network. That said I wonder where the IT offices are anyway?

Up to the third floor. Executive suites. Offices and conference rooms, secretarial pools where there are a couple people still working. At last the IT room. If I can get access to this area I’m in the game. Hmm, let’s see. I

try transitioning to the vampiric mist since there is nobody around and I get through the door no issue. Oh my God, morons. System passwords written down on all the equipment. Multiple Vpn tunnels for different department, connection information on a corkboard. A complete network map also. Good enough for now, I write it all down and take pictures then smoke my way out the door. Still nobody around. As i head toward the elevator the door opens, and I dive behind a wall. Oops. They would see my mist form, too far away to do a spidey thing and hang from the ceiling. I don't know enough about Peter to know if he is supposed to be on this floor. The guard! Why wouldn't a guard wander a facility if they think something isn't right.

"Hi Larry what are you up here for?"

"Somebody said they seen someone up here but I don't remember letting anyone in with access to this floor."

"Shit. Maybe I'll grab that paperwork another night."

"Could have been someone slipped in while I made water"

"Yeah could be, Or it could be Samantha she is always forgetting something. Most of these guys come in at the corporate entrance opposite Mindy's cafe"

"Yeah but not at 11 oclock at night."

"Agreed. Well good Larry stay safe."

"Much as I can take care."

I wait a few minutes and head for the elevator, switch back to Peter in the elevator and back out past Larry to the outside of the complex then to the public john. I shapeshift back to myself and head off an emergency

while I'm there. It's been a while since I've done an infiltration I need to get my sealegs back. That went without a hitch though. I don't think I need another infiltration, I may be able to make an attack from outside to gather evidence. Then also onsite photographic evidence at the warehouse I want to see the horrors that are unleashed out there.

Then back to the rectory for some meditation, back up in the morning.

Hmm, how to do this. I don't have to be onsite but I need to check the different components of their network to make sure I don't get detected. I have all my notes and references from back during the black hat work. I think top priority as always is to avoid detection. Best course of action is likely to create a GRE tunnel from the internet gateway server and I can redirect traffic through a box I control. Kind of a man in the middle. I probably won't get all of the internal traffic but if I get traffic to and from their headquarters that is likely going to be the most likely slam dunk anyway. I'll need to figure out where to find a location that has enough bandwidth to handle their traffic in and out reasonably, if I can find out how big a pipe ie. how fast their connection is, I can judge what I need on this end to make thing more transparent. Thinking about it I may be able to configure one or more of their internal routers to push all traffic to the internet gateway, then I could actually capture the internal communications. Hell if their routers are sophisticated enough I might be able to redirect only the E-Mail from the internal routers to the internet gateway

to save on traffic. That might make my head explode though I need to check through these books to see if I have enough step by steps to do what I want to do already.

I studied most of the day to see what I can accomplish. The GRE tunnel is doable. Might be able to do more like redirect only E-Mail traffic through the tunnel then there would likely be nearly negligible traffic which would make things easier from this end, I won't need much bandwidth for the redirection. Configuring internal routers? I haven't a frickin clue and no documentation on it so skip that.

Good then, I don't want to put father in a pickle so I'll do my snooping of the network at the little library on the next block assuming it has internet of some kind. My laptop is installed with Kali linux so I am about ready to go. I'll just put the laptop on the huge stack of books in the old rucksack and over I go. Nice thing is having a stack of books beside you in a library makes more sense than a hotel, coffee bar, or wherever else one may go.

My brain got a little fried so I sat down for coffee with father Gomez.

"So where did you meet father Forthill?"

"At seminary actually. We haven't kept in touch like I would like but we do try to help each other out"

"Sounds like me, Marcos and Jose."

"Perhaps so. I never heard about your background, what brought you to central america?"

"The war with the red court vampires. I assume you've heard about it."

"Yes, it was a little more low key here in the city but I

heard it was horrible in the rural areas.”

“I suppose there was a lot of denial up here.”

“between the victims who were controlled and the actual fervent disbelievers nobody could openly say the war existed.”

“They were called lunatics I imagine.”

“You bet. Say what group were you with in the war?”

“The fellowship of Saint Giles. I wish I...” father Gomez quickly grabs a sharp knife from the table and slices Susan’s arm open. A slime discharge erupts and the wound closes almost instantly. He leaps backwards knocking over his chair and stands back to the wall with the knife shaking like a leaf.

“The fellowship is dead! The reds are dead! They cannot be returning please Lord Jesus protect us!”

“Whoa, easy father. I’m sorry you had to see that. I’m not a vampire, I’m a human soul in possession of a vampire body. Please relax and ask your questions I have no plan to move from this chair. I have been and always will be with the fellowship, it’s in my heart.”

“What? How? How are you still alive?”

“First of all did father Forthill say anything about a sacrifice? About how the reds met their end?”

“Yes, the youngest full red vampire and some magical bloodline curse. I didn’t really understand”

“Well it is a magical ritual, it was designed to destroy a bloodline. Thing is though the reds made a rite of ascension. No one new but the king and one other as far as I know.”

“destroy a bloodline?”

“kill everyone that shares a bloodline with the victim. In that case sacrifice the red and only the reds die.”

“Jesus mercy, what a terrible black magic is that, most everyone shares ancestors from somewhere.”

“Well I’m pretty sure it only kills up a bloodline not back down again. I’m no wizard though it just makes sense to me.”

“OK I got that much”

“So it was a rite of ascension, which means others are killed in order to ascend one person to godhood.”

“You mean a really powerful person, there is only one God”

“The one who was sacrificed was the one who was resurrected as a God, problem is they did not have the human soul consumed yet so they are vampire with a human spirit.”

“What a sorrowful state. How many are left that have ascended like that, is there a danger? You haven’t explained yourself yet were there some fellowship members that escaped the cataclysm?”

“Just the sacrifice lives as far as I know. You will have to help me find another description of myself by the way. Calling myself a God makes me so self-conscious.”

“By Christ be mercy, oh Susan, Oh dear Susan. A full red?”

“Yes, but only physically. Everything. Except my soul. I still command my soul.

“What a sorrowful state though. My heart bleeds for you. The most blasphemous thing is the feeding, that is what makes you inhuman and I cannot accept you in

that. You are still inhuman and by that I stand”

“Actually I don’t feed. I’m given donations and I receive what is given and never take. My power is growing also and there is coming a time very soon when I will not need to feed any more. The reds honored those who were able to feed the least often as they were the most powerful. As a God it is only fitting I should not feed at all.”

“powerful enough to wander in the sun, survive easily in a parish or rectory, cross a threshold to no effect. Maybe more. Okay.”

“As it is I am more like spiderman, the superhero of journalists righting terrible wrongs by the pen, which has always been greater than the sword.”

“Which you are going to do here, like spiderman using superpowers to find the truth and report it for the world to see, and force change.”

“Same as all good journalists try to do.”

“OK I get it. does father Forthill know?”

“He knows all these things, well except for the magical stuff and sacrifice and being a God thing, and whatnot.”

“So he doesn’t know a hell, pardon my french, of a lot?”

“He knows things like being a dedicated member of the parish, mass every Sunday, funding the rebuilding of the town basilica.”

“Well shoot, that’s enough for me. I will not turn away one filled with God’s grace. I’m assuming I can call your parish priest and you haven’t put him under some mind control.”

“Gotta have some mercy father, I haven’t put you under a spell or sucked you dry. I’m a real good hearted vampire

if there ever was one.”

“God help us all.”

“Amen father.”

Phew, disaster averted. Oh opportunity, maybe he could be my confessor. I mean I’m not really catholic but I’m getting a lot of support from the church it could build a lot of trust with people if I can get good references from priests. Vampires need all the help they can get. In many more ways than one. “ Father would you be my confessor? It’s hard to go to father Antonio being part of my everyday life and all it would mean a lot.” father makes the sign of the cross three times, “Yes child, I will do that.”

The confession was hard. It was somewhat difficult for father but poor Susan fell to pieces. She had been trying to reconcile what she had done especially what she had done to Martin. That was by far the most vicious and horrible feeding she had done. She talked about her sense of loss for Harry and being torn away from her greatest love, being forced apart from her daughter that she loved so much. All of it. Father Gomez ended up holding her for a very long time. They agreed to meet every two weeks when possible to work through the guilt and shame of what seems like only yesterday to her.

“You have been carrying such a burden Susan. You are an extremely strong woman to have bore so much for so long. On lighter note I’ve never been confessor for a vampire before so thank you for the opportunity.”

“Your welcome father.”

Father also told Susan if she is ready she should check

with the diocese of Yucatán. It would be good for her to find his resting place to help her find closure by visiting him.

Susan took the rest of the day and took her meditation overnight.

OK continuing on. It was good to have the time with Father Gomez but now is the time to get to work and gather the goods on this company.

Now the first thing is to find a way in. The access is likely blocked from the outside via IP. I can't defeat that but looking at the map there is a VPN server on the same subnet as the main server farm. That is likely used for outside administration. That is likely the best entry point to gain access to the network. I can then setup the tunnel on the internet facing router and gather the data. That should complete the better part of my work I just need to run scripts on the packet data.

So time to head out to the library. I've been studying maps of the city so I'm getting more of a sense of where things are now so I'm starting to travel some on my own. It's damn near midnight and I'm stuck for any more research so I figured I would take a walk around, see where things are so I don't waste the time later trying to find things. I heard someone behind. I lean up on the wall james dean style, they are pretty far away and noone else is around so I just waited until they came by.

"Hey girl you working?"

"Yeah why?"

"shit, man I'm so sorry sweetheart I'm not cutting in on your business just meeting a client who wanted to meetup

at a motel near.” I wondered what the hell she was talking about before I realized I’m wearing my black leather pants and a high tied shirt, chillin’ out on a streetcorner. Heh, oops.

“Please don’t tell your daddy I don’t mean no harm, just passing through. Hey if it’s a deal I’ll sell you some protection. Girl can’t do without it, deal girl?” What the hell she selling me a box of condoms? I really don’t have a lot of use for that now I’m dealing with shit. Don’t even know if the equipment still functions in this body for Christ sake. Then she pulls out some serious protection. Goddamned Glock 19 with concealed holster. Damn girl I like your style.

“Got me something smaller this is hard to carry discretely. Sorry don’t have something better girl but yours for \$150 if it’s a deal.”

“]Oh fucking yeah sweetheart you got a deal. This will keep the bastards in line.”

“Yeah girl, pull a piece and they run like children every time. Be cool girl.”

She’s absolutely right. In the right circumstances pulling out a glock stops a fight before it happens. That’s my deal with this, deterrence. I got good experience with all manner of weapons through the fellowship I’ll get some common items tomorrow so I can strip apart the piece and conceal it for when I’m travelling. I’ve been looking for this. Next I get my beloved AK-47 back. Sweet Kalashnikov. The war is over though, I don’t see the point in obtaining much ordinance.

I slip into an alley, loosen off my shirt a little, and strap

on my peacemaker. I check out the neighbourhood some more then head back to the rectory. Then meditate until the morning light.

06

OoH RAH

Time to Rock. Get some items for pistol smuggling. Swing by the sporting goods store for firearms cleaning supplies, ammo and the like, then off to the library with a stack of hacking manuals. It seems so wrong. Maybe a hoodie and gangsta pants would make it right. Need a pocket protector for the hoodie to make the look complete.

OK laptop on lets go for a spin with wireless.

Checking the network map I scribbled down, `admin.mgel.us` good, now lets skip a risky port scan and just go with what we got here. a VPN tunnel is setup for remote administration on this box. Logged in perfectly. Debian linux system they are connecting using SSH, which is expected nowadays. Lets run some traces to check latency on the

network.

First to check the path from here to that office.

```
#traceroute admin.mgel.us
traceroute: admin.mgel.us has multiple
traceroute to admin.mgel.us (173.194.2
1  vl160-d2.acc.sea2.hopone.net (192.9
2  ge4-2.core1.sea2.hopone.net (209.16
3  xe5-0.core1.sea1.hopone.net (209.16
4  * * *
5  66.249.94.212 (66.249.94.212) 62.7
6  74.125.37.211 (74.125.37.211) 22.7
209.85.248.93 (209.85.248.93) 15.559
7  72.14.233.110 (72.14.233.110) 42.0
72.14.239.208 (72.14.239.208) 42.665
72.14.233.110 (72.14.233.110) 43.943
8  209.85.248.116 (209.85.248.116) 78
72.14.239.90 (72.14.239.90) 77.351 ms
9  209.85.143.193 (209.85.143.193) 76
209.85.254.105 (209.85.254.105) 88.90
10 admin.mgel.us (64.233.174.133) 80
```

All appears quite normal Latency is a good judge of health and the connection speed should be good too. At least until we know otherwise. Lets try the VPN and hope to hell the passwords I have actually work. Add a system connection name. Call it ruffles. Now please realize I did my research and I'm following steps from a couple books and more than a couple websites. I ain't no

hacker but I know enough by experience to find what I need and run like hell if I fuck up. Which happens more often than I dare to admit.

```
password-flags=0
[vpn-secrets]
password=booyukker
```

Moment of truth let's connect this thing.

```
sudo nmcli con up "ruffles"
Connection successfully activated (D-B
```

Oh sweeeet! The password information works! I'm right where I want to be now. Let's try root access. Got that password too. The thing with being able to log into a server with root is you have absolute control over that server. I mean absolute control. I'll have to use this guy mandeville's account. direct connection to root remotely is pretty much always blocked.

```
$ ssh mandeville@admin.mgel.us
mandeville@admin.mgel.us's password:
NetBSD 7.0.1_PATCH (GENERIC.2016072205
```

```
% su root
Password:
#
```

Not like in the movies really boring actually. Until you get done what you got to do. That "su" command escalated me to root from the mandeville account. Mission

accomplished. Now I need to check if I can access the internet firewall. The redirection will need to happen there. Secureshell otherwise known as SSH is the one and only way to connect for most administrative work on servers today. So lets give it the old college try. I only have a password listed so it seems like they got some dumbass consumer router on point. These guys are awful

```
ssh root@gateway.mgel.us
root@gateway.mgel.us's password:
Permission denied, please try again.
root@gateway.mgel.us's password:
Permission denied, please try again.
root@gateway.mgel.us's password:
Permission denied (publickey,password,
```

Well that was strike one. I don't know what the hell that box is, it's not on the network map. OK think Susan think, what did we use back in the day. Port scanner, sticky note here, nmap! right, It can read digital signatures for an idea of what this thing is. OK let's give it a whirl.

```
# nmap -O -v gateway.mgel.us
```

```
Starting Nmap ( http://nmap.org )
Nmap scan report for gateway.mgel.us
Not shown: 994 closed ports
PORT      STATE    SERVICE
22/tcp    open     ssh
80/tcp    open     http
```



```

646/tcp    filtered ldap
1720/tcp   filtered H.323/Q.931
9929/tcp   open      nping-echo
Device type: general purpose
Running: FreeBSD 10.2
OS CPE: unknown
OS details: unknown
Uptime guess: 1.674 days (since Fri Sep
Network Distance: 10 hops
TCP Sequence Prediction: Difficulty=205
IP ID Sequence Generation: All zeros

```

```

Read data files from: /usr/local/bin/..
Nmap done: 1 IP address (1 host up) sca
Raw packets sent: 1063 (47.432KB) | Rcv

```

I don't like port scanning tools, too easy to trigger a red alarm. I was actually very lucky the administrative machine had it installed. Normally there aren't any "offensive" tools resident on network servers. I wonder what the deal is here? I need to tread carefully.

What do we get? a FreeBSD box. This place is a BSD shop for sure. I have a password but it isn't working. Not a root password. The www port is open so there's a web page there. Let's see if we can surf the gateway.

Ohhh. The browser opened a pfsense administration page. Sticky note time. Default username is admin. Perhaps they only changed the password?

Yup, logged right in. OK now I know what I'm dealing with. Time to break away from this before I fuck something up and get caught. I need to create a rule to use in

order to redirect traffic now that I know what I'm dealing with. So I grab the Kali CD out and tuck in a hidden pocket. Let the laptop boot windows and flip it closed. I say the laptop runs kali linux because for all intents and purposes it does but windows is still on the computer with ditzy apps and official looking business documents. Basically to cover up any shady work I've been up to and stay out of trouble.

Bloody hell, just like from the US Marines that just burst through the door. What the hell are US Marines doing in the ghetto?

"Everyone will submit to search, any who do not submit will be taken into marine custody for questioning. We will start with you." The master sergeant proceeded to deploy his men in tactical positions when shortly two more men entered. The salutes were immediate and powerful. "General Lancaster! Sir! Area is secure to proceed with investigation Sir!" Oh my God, what the hell is a marine general doing in a ghetto! Christ Susan if you don't have a story here! Something is up, and unless angels fly out of Obama's ass this is hitting the front page of any paper! So the search proceeded specifically for electronic equipment. The general had with him an officer who seemed to be well trained in electronic warfare. Looks like perhaps black hat shit. One of the soldiers snatched my laptop rather forcefully and the black hat examined it fully. I was sweating bullets. Not literally thank God given the company I'm keeping at the moment but nonetheless I hoped I had enough training to not leave enough of a trace. "This thing is clear general, this couldn't have

generated the connections. Nothing in the logs, hardware MAC is incorrect and it looks like it was setup by a homemaker all cheesy games and recipe lists.” The general responded, “Goddamned MGEL admins, fricking off for a coffee and refuse to register out. We go out chasing some Goddamned shade midafternoon just to find he was doing his shit on a Goddamned park bench outside the motherfucking target address. Jesus fucking Christ pack it in boys we’re going back to assignment.” The military has their way with words. Anyway it’s time to get a hold of my teacher and see if he can draw up some rules for me. I could probably do it but I’m getting a headache just thinking about it. Mercy.

I head back to the rectory and lay down for a bit. I don’t actually lay down much. I should. It’s nice. When one has no need for sleep and uses meditation to break the days laying down is just something that gets forgotten as a pleasant and relaxing thing. Like a hot bath. People used to enjoy the relaxing heat of a hot bath then getting clean moved the way of the shower and relaxing heat moved toward the hot tub. Fascinating how things change. The next course of action I’m thinking of may be a bit dangerous. There are marines here and I need to find out more about that. Maybe the first thing is to find them physically. What is their assignment? I feel like I should do a real stakeout of the warehouse now, dollars to doughnuts that’s where the marines are going to be when things go down out there. I’ll send out the E-Mail request to my buddy first. If I don’t do a stakeout now I don’t see where it would be easy for me to sort the

captured data, I wouldn't have a point of reference to look for. Text queries makes things quick folks, either by the grep command or a more sophisticated keyword search if you have the right words it's easier to pull better stuff out of the muck. I think I will have that bath. I can't stop thinking about it.

Well I did a complete strip clean of my glock. Cleaned and oiled, completely serviced. Took that cloth holster and put it through the wash. Now it's clean with a spring blossoms scent. Got it patched and sewn. I believe I know exactly where the glock came from. This variant is standard issue with some marine units. I'll bet you one of the boys felt playful and one of the girls decided to take it as partial payment. That's my guess. So I might be seeing more of these out there tonight if there's any action.

Father Gomez has been looking at me kinda funny since the confession, I guess he doesn't know what to make of me. He asks, "Susan. I'm curious. Do you have a true form as they call it? I have been around vampires enough to know about it."

"Uh. Yes. That's a question I wasn't expecting what's your thought?"

"I won't know until I see. If it's ok, and not too awful Susan."

"Surprisingly not actually. Quite attractive as it goes. Sure, I'm a bit large though is there anyone in the main church right now?"

"No, all locked up, we can go there."

"Prefer if you looked around father, the dignity thing with the melting flesh mask and such."

“Mercy, OK no problem Susan”

I change over, very happy for the extra space. Wearing a blazing white tunica this time. Belted, sleeveless one strap and coming down to mid thigh. Ancient greek sandals laced to upper calf. I thought the look complemented the wings, which I proudly unfolded to a meager 20 feet tip to tip. I thought it a conservative and pleasing way to have my wings kept.

“mmhmm. I know you probably are holding back the wave of fear that would normally radiate from you so thank you. I believe you may have given me the answer I was looking for.”

“Pardon?”

“You gave me many answers of a very concrete, maybe even scientific nature but I am a priest in the end and I live through faith. I needed to find my own answer, or at least possibilities, by faith.”

“Gotcha.”

“I get you aren’t really catholic. That’s OK in the sense that all is on God’s own time. Would you like to hear my hypothesis anyway?”

“What the hell, err, sorry father.”

“Have you ever heard of the parable of the talents?”

“Father I don’t have the slightest clue.”

“Sit, I’ll read it.”

even as a man going into a far country, called
his servants, and delivered to them his goods;
And to one he gave five talents, and to another
two, and to another one, to every one accord-
ing to his proper ability: and immediately he

took his journey. And he that had received the five talents, went his way, and traded with the same, and gained other five. And in like manner he that had received the two, gained other two. But he that had received the one, going his way digged into the earth, and hid his lord's money. But after a long time the lord of those servants came, and reckoned with them. And he that had received the five talents coming, brought other five talents, saying: Lord, thou didst deliver to me five talents, behold I have gained other five over and above. His lord said to him: Well done, good and faithful servant, because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will place thee over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. And he also that had received the two talents came and said: Lord, thou deliveredst two talents to me: behold I have gained other two. His lord said to him: Well done, good and faithful servant: because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will place thee over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. But he that had received the one talent, came and said: Lord, I know that thou art a hard man; thou reapest where thou hast not sown, and gatherest where thou hast not strewed. And being afraid I went and hid thy talent in the earth: behold here thou hast that which is thine. And his lord answer-

ing, said to him: Wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sow not, and gather where I have not strewed: Thou oughtest therefore to have committed my money to the bankers, and at my coming I should have received my own with usury. Take ye away therefore the talent from him, and give it to him that hath ten talents. For to every one that hath shall be given, and he shall abound: but from him that hath not, that also which he seemeth to have shall be taken away. And the unprofitable servant cast ye out into the exterior darkness. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

“It’s all a matter of perspective perhaps, but that grace that was spoken of you I see. Of holy things and holy people I know far better than horrors and vampires. You are truly beautiful in true form Susan and it is a radiation of warmth, perhaps of love and tenderness. Of vampires there is fear, lust, addiction and all manner of vices which come from them which corrupt. I realize you are holding back from radiating that corruption but truth stands regardless. What I say is the reds, perhaps vampires in general, were given life and grace in proportion to their ability to do right with it. They never did right with it. All was taken from them in their greed, even their own lives, and was given to one worthy who will invest it in that which is right and good. That would be you. Hence you having been taken under the churches wings and gain favour of priests. We are seeing the grace you

cannot, we are protecting you as you grow. Again, just my perspective given all I have learned take it or leave it as you wish.”

“Best to leave it father. I’m taking it as it comes. So many conflicting perspectives for a woman who has hardly learned the first thing about who she is or who she is going to be. So much pain and sorrow from past guilt and experience. Yes father I’ve heard what you have said, and I agree there is sense, and I leave it for the day when I can accept such counsel.”

“So Susan, do you actually fly?”

“Like an eagle father, but my true wingspan is a hundred feet and my body weight is actually much lighter in true form.”

“Holy moly! a hundred feet? God bless you Susan you truly are a woman like no other.”

“Thank you father it means a lot.”

“Love the Tunica too by the way, very classical.”

“Thank you again father.”

I start getting ready. I shape shift into marine fatigues with full webbing and ruck and strap on the glock. I shape shift a KA-BAR under the other arm. Various little supplies I put in the webbing and make it real and ready for an infiltration. I include among other things my phone for photographic media and recording and a really boring brown colour trench coat to conceal the warrior underneath. Going on this little mission makes me think I should practice some unarmed combat when I get home. It’s not that I don’t know how just that in this new form it’s a toss-up if I punch people into chunks or a fine mist.

I don't want to find out. So I start to walk over to the warehouse. Nobody really pays me much attention even though I look like I must be hot. Really though I soak the heat right in. I seem to be a cold blooded creature I really enjoy hot and humid weather. It's approaching evening now when I get there. I look and listen and there is nobody here. Unless they're dead. In which case they won't notice me anyway. I would assume. I climb to the roof, using the ladder outside the building this time. I put away the cloak, finish my dress with things like putting on the boonie and finishing face paint as well as tying back my hair. I go over to the front edge of the roof and take out my scope to remain hidden and be able to see the truck assuming it's coming tonight. My ears can hear a pin drop from 50 paces as if it was a crash of thunder so it's not likely anyone is going to sneak up on me.

Sometime after midnight I see the lights of a military truck roll in. A fair size canvas top likely a couple long rows of benches inside. It stops snug to the buildings main door. I hear the sound of men exiting, a couple dozen I would say. I pick up pieces of conversation inside as I sit on the edge of the roof. Test subjects, ensuring their protective devices are functional. They are taking their "places" and the subjects are released. I hear hissing from below. Oh God tell me it isn't what I think. I hear commands going down to the creatures line up, spread out, take position, fight, relent, and so on. They are taking orders like soldiers and being commanded to fight. I get to the trapdoor and use my scope to look down. I am just over the top catwalk and see some men including the

general stationed in the control booth closest to the top of the structure. There are actually white coated scientists making notes up there with MGEL insignia on their coats. I look below and see the ugliest test subjects I have ever seen, black court vampires! What in the fricking hell are these people doing? Are they completely mad!

Extraordinarily enough the vampire are obedient. They are taking orders and fighting. There were 2 who broke free but the soldiers present took them down with conventional weapons, as well as holy water, garlic, holy symbols and such. The little bloodsuckers didn't have a chance. Maybe that's why they obey like they do. If they all united together though they could be able to break free. Why haven't they munched the other soldiers. There's what I see, what I hear, smells like putrifaction but also of garlic. Taking a closer look there is something hanging from the soldiers necks, and I see the item exposed on one soldier. They wear garlic. Probably other items as well so they are protected.

"How many of the subjects have been able to independently carry out orders?"

"We have released 6 subjects in the last 2 weeks general, 4 have returned and we have confirmed have met their objective. The two remaining have not returned."

"We need to carry back at least a 95 percent conformance ratio so we need to keep working. The DNA injections progressing well?"

"Satisfactorily sir. Ever since we started with the cream based application and applied the solar radiation the changes seem to be taking place. Some of the expected hu-

man characteristics in personality seem apparent allowing more control and more self discipline.”

“How much longer?”

“Months, on the outside, assuming progress continues at the current rate.”

“That’s excellent. The perfect super soldier. Scary as hell, tough, fast and strong. Able to raise dying enemies to fight alongside them. Incredible.”

My stomach turned. I’ve heard of monstrous experiments to create new and terrible weapons and even super-soldiers, but someone really didn’t think this one through. Vampires are organized you fools! Flooded with intrigue and backstabbing yes but united, their word being their bond like any of the supernatural beings. They could bring a war. Humans have no chance in such a war vampires are higher up the food chain.

As I pondered the ways of idiocy below I seen the creatures stop what they were doing. The were sniffing the air. Like dogs. Some of them climbed the walls ten feet sniffing. They all started orienting their eyes, and eye sockets as it were, directly at this hatch and let out a hiss. Oh hell I’m in some trouble, mmhmm some trouble yep. They lit a straight line directly for me. Soldiers opened fire the general and all the softie scientists hit the floor. The general opened fire with a pistol right through the window of the control booth. The creatures couldn’t have cared less they smelled me without the lovely aroma of garlic. Time to practise the art of pulling punches I guess.

I did a tuck and roll out of the way of the hatch and

at least a dozen black court vampires sprang out of it with a united hungry hiss. I heard below the call for all soldiers to hit the roof and make the attack. The test subjects are not to escape. The first three i avoid with a leap to the left and barrel roll. Two more come to the left i pull up hard on my hands and use the momentum from the roll to land a solid boot to the two knocking them down. I follow through punching through one of the next two. Grabbing my KA-BAR i come behind another and remove a head. One down. Four are advancing i holster the KA-BAR, then cartwheel back onto one knee and open fire with my glock those four go down. I leap high and force both steel toed combat boots down hard on two of the four destroying skulls. Three down.

The general and soldiers arrive as a trickle through the hatch on the roof, and the general has his holy shit face on. The soldiers are going to fire but he yells, "hold fire you morons, there's a soldier on the roof. You goddamned ballerinas take notes because that's how it's fricking done right there!"

The two remaining each grab an arm i leap my body behind them and crack their skulls together and they let go. I unsheathe my ka-bar and make a vicious swing. Off goes a head. Now 4 down. They rush in I tuck and roll knocking over one and plant the ka-bar through it's skull. 5 down and 7 left. They pile on me and I become a chew toy. Shit.

The general shouts, "fuck, she's gone. Hell of a soldier. Ready weapons to fire!"

I burst straight up through the pile and blast three rounds

straight down. 2 exploding skulls, 2 more down.

The general shouts, "hold fire! Jesus Christ what is this Die Hard? Who is this soldier?"

The soldiers shout in unison, "Hoo Rah!"

The third I crush under my boot 1 down 4 to go. Tuck and roll knock one down, grab my KA-BAR then plant my feet and reverse momentum. Launch at one and remove it's head. I land and turn ready to roll to the side but one decides to rush in and meet my KA-BAR, so off goes another head and 2 to go. Both rush in i leap forward and clothesline both to the ground. I tuck and roll come up with the glock and shatter a skull. The remainder made it to the 3dge of the roof in time and jumped. Somehow it landed in one piece. The soldier open fire on it but it leaped the fence and was gone.

The general walked up, "That was some bit of fighting soldier. I don't remember seeing you before you got ID?"

I check my pockets in a fake attempt to find ID, then I point to the pile of dead vampires, "on it's way to hell?".

The general responds, "well shit so it is, fuck it I seem to suddenly be getting my memory back I remember you just fine. Come on down have some whiskey on me. Men stand down lets get back to it."

I descend and notice a shit ton of juicy paperwork waiting for a pocket or a photo. Checking down below there seems not to be any more 'subjects' to work with. I seem to have destroyed them all. Aw shucks.

The general states, "I'm going to go down and help the boys clean up this mess. Well frick I wish I knew what the hell might have caused this shit." He gives me a devilish

smile.

So I'm left with a couple drunk scientists who tried to use liquid courage to bolster themselves earlier. Easy as pie my phone works so i snap some verifiable media with the camerav app, and other papers i just pocket. The scientists are too drunk to know. Then i go down and help clean up. The whole time snapping photos where i can. When it's time to go everyone boards the truck except me who holds on to the undercarriage. Down the road i tuck and roll out of the carriage and into an alley. I move into the rear area of a shop with spare garbage cans and a huge propane tank and take a breather. I meditate a couple hours then get up and make my way towards the parking lot to try and make sure the troop truck doesn't double back to find me.

As I walk out I find myself ambushed by the black court. They probably seen me while i was meditating. Should have waited until i was back to the rectory shit.

There's about 2 dozen maybe more. Although no people around now so i can let rip so not so bad. They spread out directly in front of me and about 3 walk out to face me closer than the rest. One speaks.

"The three of us are the elders of this district. You have killed a dozen of our brethren. You, a mere mortal, have embarrassed us in front of our court and all vampires. You have invited destruction to us and have dishonored us, you who are no more than food. You foolish pathetic creature did you think we would let you live after such insolence? You are going to wish you died on the roof for now your death will be slow and quite painful I assure

you.”

I spread my stance to get ready for what's coming, “OK, come give me a little. Don't be shy.”

One of the other elders shouts, “more insolence! Take her down! dont kill her I want her alive to play with later!”

Holy shit did they ever send in the troops! Not a couple dozen, many dozen. Oh yes many dozen rushed out from around the corner. OK, so i can use vampire strength but i do worry about using epic strength, like that little extra bit of juice that shows me up as an ascended creature to them. I dont want to get noticed by something even bigger than me. I want to get my life back not get into the superhero market battling super-villains the rest of my days. He wants me captured so i'll get captured and break away. Easiest thing. What happens next time though? They arent going to forget and thats what i want most.

So without a better plan i decided to just go with just chilling at the bottom of a football style pileup and getting driven back to the day spa they offered me.

Trouble was i didnt like how they were trying to feast on me anyway. It hurt real bad and i was getting really pissed. I noticed for lack of a better word i was smoking. Light black smoke was drifting off my body and i was getting real hungry. One of the vampires broke through my flesh mask and stood up quick, “My lord, we have a big problem here!”

The elder that he addressed said, “what the hell kind of problem could you have?”

Another vampire broke through and screamed, “She's

red court!”

“What! Impossible! The red court is dead! Kill her! Kill her! Do not let the red court return!”

Oh i lost it. I snapped. These guys are a liability now i need to wipe them out before I’m revealed! There were a dozen on me i burst straight up and some kind of speed do i have. I went down with a fist before they moved 4 slammed into a wall. Now the strangest thing happened. The smoke edged toward the 4 and a thick oily smoke rose from them. It flowed into me and they had what looked like a grand maul seizures, then they were still. Then they turned to dust. I turned to face the remaining vampires and my fangs were dripping what was in appearance hot tar, that same colour and consistency.

The elders hit the dirt in prostration so fast i thought they might have eaten gravel. “Spare us oh great mother, queen and empress we did not know have mercy on us!” The other vampires looked at each other then prostrated the same. Oh shit, what did i just do. Can i get out of this? I cant kill them now, as much as i hate vampires i cant hurt any being if it is begging mercy. I don’t think they will take it back because i have no idea what tipped them off. Oh this is not good, not good at all. I’ll play dumb.

“excuse me?”

“you are the long awaited great mother, the one prophesied to lead the vampire courts to world domination! You are her the devourer of souls! We are your servants great one, we are your children oh great mother lead us and guide us!”

Sounds like I'm Jesus Christ with boobs, should i speak parables? Cant bring them back to the rectory i wouldn't think. Their skin is falling off i'll call them lepers. Hah, no. I don't really want to go to their lair it would be horrible, bodies piled around people mind controlled and chained to be used for food i cant handle it. I need time to figure out what to do.

"meet me at the church cemetery 3 blocks west, in two days. Once it's dark. We will talk then. I have important tasks to perform."

"yes my queen it will be so"

Well, tomorrow I start the network redirect to check for useful E-Mail and gather the papers and photos. I'll also start my report. What I have now is damning enough alone but there is no such thing as too much evidence.

I spend the rest of the night in meditation. Me and Maggie fly together and i think her dream control may be getting to where she might have her own little wings soon! We also played with the tea-set we made together in our little dreamworld. I wonder if she is old enough for astral projection? Heh heh. Don't push it Susan.

I start the redirect of network traffic in the morning. I'll leave it going for at least a week and grab Wireshark and that book i got for it and run the data capture through a sieve to find juicy E-Mails.

I talk to father about the event and he recommends considering we both hate vampires but if a group of them look up to you in such a way then godless or not you could influence them in ways combat cant. He says try, the worst thing I could do is fail then I'm just back to not

being an influence having lost nothing for trying. Hell that seems ok to me.

I strip cleaned my glock and did that laying down thing again. I like it. Its very comfy.

I feel like this might be an important story for me, so I created an E-Mail address and a pen name. I also drew up a binding agreement so that the arcane has to publish my pen name and contact in the article so I can get feedback on this one. I have material of a high calibre in it and I can learn a lot about writing this kind of story in the future. I mean this is like the pelican brief of paranormal articles. The best i've done to date i think and the electronic surveillance is just started.

Another meditation tonight. Me and Maggie were making up stories with pictures on tarot cards which was fun. We chased a real live dreamworld polar bear then. We scratched it's belly and it's feet would twitch it was so cute. She hasnt got to grow her wings yet but i hold on to her and we fly all over. It was fun. I still hope to hug her in the real world someday soon.

Time does fly. I head over to the cemetery a bit early and sit on a tree stump. Best seat in the house. Over the course of an hour after sunset they begin to arrive. Five, then ten, fucking fifty then fuck me gently i think it was a hundred vampire souls came. It was like that loaves and fishes story in the bible they just kept coming.verily verily i say to thee the cemetery was alive with undead.

"tell us what we must do most glorious queen."

"take only the prey you need to live and no more. To be ruled by hunger is to be en-

slaved, to lose honour even to the point of being fit only for destruction. Have honour in all things, any to be shown gravely lacking are to be destroyed. Strength and honour are the greatest virtues of our kind let no one tell you otherwise. By strength we will take to battle. Only by honour though can an empire truly conquer and subject it's foes. The only way to have honor is to give it away, show honour and it will be increased in you. Honour is not a rule of law to be obeyed in rote, it burns in the heart of the vampire. The vampire is honour and from there it comes forth to illuminate others in it's righteousness. Honour your prey, they give their lives so that you may live. Remember this always. Do not offend the dignity of the prey, they are free we are not to bind them this is an offence to dignity. Protect the prey, just as the Sheppard would lay down his life for his sheep we must also for our own flock they are our food and our life. This is also how we honour our prey and one way how each coven's honour will be judged." Continuing, "Your duty now is that all will cleanse their house of the dishonourable. Every house will be judged by the honour of those who belong, a dishonourable house is destroyed, the honourable within banished upon their honour let them never forfeit the honour they have on pain of death. we will

be houses, the bloodline families or adopted kin. Clans, organised for each town or municipality of human law. principalities for the country and kingdom for the continent. I am great mother, empress or queen. There will be no other queen but me. The white court as is their will shall unite with us under their own houses and clans. We are one empire, one blood unites us. So speaks the last and greatest of her kind. I leave you now to speak among yourselves. Leave when you wish and no feeding in the cemetery please.”

a mass wave of prostration followed, visually appearing like a domino effect, “hail to our great mother, our philosopher queen!” Followed by a thundering “hail! Hail! Hail!” Then they disappeared into a non-corporeal state. They will hopefully come to understanding because with a single short speech i saved innumerable human lives and hopefully put an end to all the people in chains or tortured currently by these monsters. As I was walking away I missed Maggie. The talking of the great mother thing just made my heart bleed, I want to be with my baby. I turned back to the cemetery for no particular reason and my vampire vision went up. I could see all the vampires talking in their non-corporeal forms that humans cant see. The thing is I can bring up vampiric vision, the big black eyes, at will now and gain all the benefits. I would assume unique to me I have a nictitating membrane that protects the eyes in bright sunlight and during flight. It’s translucent so in the day i look not unlike someone blind

from some degenerative condition. Which is a help to me. I could hear the quiet telepathic chatter they were making. I just stood there a few minutes in awe of what i hope to be accomplishing from within this vampire society to help people. Help them from within the ranks of the oppressor. My mind started wandering through my fight and struggles against the red court for all that time, the hopeless frustration of what seemed so often to be a hopeless battle against hopeless odds. Like trying to bail out the ocean with a spoon. Now having been made a vampire if i could call it that I am looking at the best chance to finally make things right. Something i could never do before. Maybe even use my work to release them of this accursed hunger.

Then I felt something unexpected. Horribly shocking.

I felt love.

Not pity, not sympathy or empathy. No, a burning love ignited in me like a mother to her children. I'm falling in love with these wretched creatures very quickly and very powerfully after interacting with them as their great mother. Almost like they had tempted me to do something only to have triggered the catalyst to my own transformation without my warning. The second bite of the heart. I remember all the horrors i've seen these creatures do but all i can think now is to embrace them and heal the

twisted nature that commands them to do such horrible acts. I see them and they have become beautiful to me. Oh fuck me gently that is just so wrong on so many levels.

I arrive back at the rectory to see a complete skeleton standing beside the door. "Hello, I am He Who Dances With Wind." He prostrates. I bid him rise again.

That shit is so embarrassing. "Are you a skeleton?"

"I am a black court vampire"

"but you are no more than a skeleton"

"I am the most elder of the court. I have walked this earth from before the reckoning of time. Before civilization came upon the earth. Even upon all these years spoken record heralded your coming. I never thought I would see the day I would stand before you."

"So you are what would be called an ancient vampire then." I look at the door, then back to him, what the hell. Father has heard worse from me I'm sure he wont mind seeing worse also.

"Are you able to enter a holy place? Would you be hurt?"

"My power rivals your own Susan I'll be fine."

"How did you know my name? Never mind, ancient vampire, needn't ask more. Please come in."

We sit at the kitchen table to parley.

Father Gomez came in and fell flat on his ass.

He Who Dances With Wind stood and bowed low to father, "I am sorry to have startled you most honourable shaman, i am He Who Dances With Wind. I am the most ancient of vampires at your service oh king."

father rose, and coughed, "you presume i am a priest king like Melchizedek high priest and king. Truly ancient

you are, I am no shaman but the humble priest of the most high god. Um, my dear?”, he raises an eyebrow.

“he is very polite i didn’t think you would mind.”

Father makes a face-palm. Taking the seat across from us at the table he looks to He Who Dances With Wind and rubs his chin. We talked until morning and father agreed to allow he who dances with wind to stay if he can do penance by staying in the crypt to clean and maintain the tombs. He agreed. It continued that way and he would come up and father was fascinated with his experience and understanding. He stopped feeding millennia ago, he was tired of it. He left to become a hermit. And a legend of the vampires in the north east of the US. Only the elders would dare approach him and never did except on rare occasions.

I gathered the email transactions at the end of the week and found some rather juicy stuff. In particular the messages to and from the main office. If they actually used gpg for their confidential email I wouldn’t have been able to have snatched what I did. The story is done and sent.

My wise man who came from afar, He Who Dances With Wind, is going home. This time he is being granted permission by Rome to remain as a hermit on land governed by Rome. The native americans of new york state, the highest elders specifically, also became aware of him and he spends much more time sharing lodge on reservations sharing knowledge lost long ago of the history of his people which now is the history of all native people. Last i heard him say he is happier than he has been in a long time. Which to me means a very very long time.

MAJOR LEAGUE

Susan's heart stopped. Just completely stopped. Her newly chosen pseudonym is getting proposals from the New York Times, The Guardian, Globe and Mail, Washington Post and the Chicago Tribune. Yay for Justine Carpenter!

The Arcane couldn't refuse to publish my pseudonym and contact. I insisted and obtained a contract signed and sealed to that end. God help me I had to use my real name on the contract which I *know* is going to come back and bite me in the ass yet needed to be done. Glad I did the legwork on that. The verifiable media probably sank a three pointer with the feds as well. Holy shit Susan this is the big league! Unfricking believable which bloody major award winning news organization do you want to

work for next?

I spent the next few days staring at walls with spontaneous giggles from time to time. Carlos asked me why with such gifts do I not use them more to be a genuine real world super hero. I said to him, "I am and always will be a journalist Carlos. Private investigators are responsible to their clients alone. Police are responsible to serve and protect the people of their jurisdiction. Journalists though Carlos are responsible to all humanity. We may bend the law but we always maintain our integrity. We don't seek out to conquer villains with violence. We go forth with cameras and journals. We go forth with tools and skills to uncover the truth and reveal it to the world. We force proportionate legal action. We force changes of national and corporate policies. We bring down corruption in corporations, and destroy organized crime syndicates. We see to the collapse of dictatorships. We are changing the world one story at a time righting the wrongs of those who are untouchable and making the world a better place for generations to come. We are heroes of the greatest degree, and that's why I am a journalist Carlos."

"I may join, let me rephrase, I will join one of these major news organizations but I will continue to report on the supernatural too. People everywhere ignore or disbelieve what they cannot explain and it is one day going to harm or destroy us. My former lover Harry I fear will always be fighting on the edge of destruction attempting not only to serve his clients but also forestalling a very real Armageddon, the end of the world. Poor bastard. Look

at me too, I was lucky that I am still me despite being in the body of a vampire. We faced true destruction by the red court and it was only by the rite of ascension the scourge of the red court ended. This work in supernatural journalism is certainly uncelebrated but is competing as the most important field of journalism humanity has ever known. I'm going to fight to help the arcane get positive publicity even if my stories for them are only something I fight to do on the side."

I have to admit I favoured the Chicago Tribune the most but if I'm going to put more than one iron in the fire I don't want to put them all in Chicago. There is a greater chance I would be found out if I do. As far as security goes the Globe and Mail and The Guardian are the best having a securedrop. The other papers may have one it's just that I know those two do. Problem is between Canada and the UK, I would rather be working with a paper in the good ol' US of A. I ended up choosing the New York Times but among the worst for secure systems I put my foot down so hard I cracked concrete on insisting on dealing only with someone using GPG. I like being safe thank you very much. As it turns out the editor chose to adopt GPG for his E-Mail address just for my sake. I'll be submitting stories using the same throwaway Justine Carpenter E-Mail account and I can tor to it so I can maintain good anonymity that way. So good start. They want me on a VPN to work and submit articles but I'm raising thunder about anonymity so they are going to look at putting in Portal so I can VPN through tor. I would be happy with that.

They also want me to fly up to New York City for a meet and greet as well as basic orientation. I agreed to that. Well shit who wouldn't agree to that, I get to see New York City and tour the Times as a foreign correspondent. Wow, I can't believe this.

Then i hear Carlos screaming like a little girl. Light itself, even thought hadn't the speed as I did getting to where the sound came from. There is Carlos in a corner in the foetal position and very nicely mummified black court vampire standing unconcerned at my threshold. "you may enter" I state.

The creature enters and prostrates "my queen", and I bid him rise.

Carlos said "what the fuck."

"You missed a lot while you were gone Carlos"

"no shit. You trucking with the vampires now Susan?"

"No they hit me like a mac truck though. I cant avoid this Carlos they cant take me any way but as their queen. I'll need to work from the inside to make things right, as much as I can do. Please I hope you can understand."

"Susan i can't be your companion anymore. Not until i can understand this. Jose can decide for himself I suppose I just cant manage this"

"Carlos please don't"

"I'm not angry Susan, i just don't understand. Leave me alone and give me time."

Jose came out from another room, "I do understand Susan. I knew the day would come when you would join them you are one of them. You have fought alongside us as an infected with such courage I mourn your loss and

i wish you didn't have to change but that's the way it is. Me and Carlos will always keep your confidence and your belongings will always be here until you retrieve them. You must leave Susan."

I leapt for him and he hadn't the time to scream. Just a little squeak. He received the biggest hug he probably ever had. Must have been ten minutes. I'm pretty sure he was aware of the honesty of the embrace because he said, "please write me. I'll try and talk to Carlos."

Well after all that I asked our visitor his business.

"My business is the fulfilment of your will my queen. I am your assigned servant and will see your will done."

"Well 3 things, protect this village always and here none shall feed. Next remain in the crypt where it is dark and care for the tombs. Hide from mortals, if you must feed another is to relieve you so you may do so. Again, not to feed in the village. Last will be to await orders in the crypt. I will come to you, not you to me."

He prostrates again, "by your will my queen". Then he was gone.

Fuck!

Fuck!

I lost my boys. I should have said something before now I've lost my boys. I'll suffer their loss dearly. I've lost the need for feeding in that sense i don't really need them but the most important part of me is human and i need companionship. Not prey, or servants, just someone.

Everybody needs someone.

I go to the crypt and call my stinky servant. "Yes my queen?"

"Is there a place I can live in New York City, with these vast belongings?"

"We have a loyal mortal servant in the Red Hook. He is in corporate real estate and owns a large manufacturing facility where a large clan lives. Do you wish me to notify of your coming and the transport of your belongings?"

"Do that. How soon can I leave?"

"If you don't mind staying in our servants quarters you may leave post haste my queen."

"Then tonight I fly there in true form. Show me where I am to go and I'll be there."

"I shall, but even by the speed of a turboprop it would take you 16 hours my queen, shall I arrange stops that you may escape the sun?"

"hmm. No. The sun has no power over me. It's morning. I'll leave now hugging the terrain and arrive by night I expect. I will take information on shelter in the case I need it though."

"Yes my queen."

I had to get out of Costa Rica before I fell apart. Push it back I can fall apart when I get there. No time now. I climb the tower one last time and soar away, skimming the trees and confusing cattle.

The trip wasn't eventful. Most of the journey through the US was by night and I memorized that new york skyline in vivid detail for use later. The place was pretty rough looking but pretty large. The perfect place to com-

plete my evil plans of world domination, muahahaha. I can joke now, I'm not as afraid anymore. I think my dominion will be one of the heart, and change of the spirit rather than real world conquest. When I get the chance I'll disappear into obscurity though so I can push into my journalism career which is the most important thing to me.

I'm not tired even after a trip like that. I guess my cruising speed is about the equivalent of that turboprop the stinky one was talking about. It's good to know these things. I slip into a 24hour Mickey Dee's and work on a couple pots of coffee one cup at a time. I can't explain it but it feels right to be back in the US of A again. Feels like home. I feel like me, as if nothing had ever happened. Like it was all a dream and I'm still in Chicago working for the arcane. I'm excited about the move to the Times though it's really huge. I'm scared to death but I'm excited to be working beside some of the best in the business and learning from them. In maybe 30 minutes the NYPD comes into the restaurant and asks around to see if anyone seen anything out of the ordinary at all. No one seen anything thank God, not that the police report is going to read anything like angel come down from heaven.

I go on into the complex and go trueform to avoid any misunderstandings. I was met by patrol and led into guest quarters for the remainder of the night. The mortal is respected here and save I should demand it the vampires will not disturb his rest.

When morning came I went for a daylight walk in the yard to get a look around. It is going to take a while to get

my directions around this place it is so huge. I'm sure I have the time though. Hopefully all the time in the world while my career takes off. It is New York City after all and I do work for a very coveted company.

Me and Maggie play then in her dreams. She has developed enough dream control now to sprout her angel wings! We fly up in the sky over the New York skyline and play together there in the wee hours of the night. She said to me, "It is very beautiful mommy."

Morning comes and the vampires are sleeping in their lairs. Feels weird that my heart considers them my children. So very creepy. Anyway as the vampires sleep I knock on the door to the humans chambers. I heard his name is Phil.

"Who is it?"

"Susan, the guest from Costa Rica."

"You mean the great mother? The great mother's name is Susan. How quaint."

"Yes well I would like entry please so that I may settle in."

"Good timing, I'm off to work soon. Come in and I'll take you on a quick tour. Then after I'm gone if you wish you can settle in."

The place is absolutely huge! He has reserved the top four stories of a multistory industrial building for his own home. Think about having a four story apartment building all for your own to live in. It's like that. Much of it is completely open also because it was for industrial purposes so wow.

So bright in most areas. Much of it is still open space.

We decided that I will take the top floor he will take the one immediately below and the 2 floors below will be shared for a library, ritual area, alchemy lab and so on. I was so happy he is a wizard of some sort! Not likely a powerful wizard I don't think he said he isn't a part of the white council but it still seems cool he could be a resource for me in researching things of a magical nature. One of the reasons I picked the top floor is of course so I can fly when I want to. Hard to do around here with such a dense population but the option is there. I'm glad I took the time I did to practise hard at flying where it was safe for me to do so. I miss my boys thinking of Costa Rica.

So I decided to leave most of the area open and put in place a separate kitchen and dining room, master and guest bedroom with bath included. I also build a personal office and library in it's own enclosed space. The open space I chose to manage with various types of moveable room separators. Out in that large space I'm placing a ritual area with a smaller library nearby, an entertainment area and a playroom for Maggie as if she would ever see it. I will see fit that she will dream it as I can meditate on the toys to project them in meditation. Then me and Maggie can play with them. It's all I got right now. I haven't seen here face to face in so long.

More and more I seem to be drifting towards a grandmother like taste in things. The bedroom of mine now has floral print wallpaper, doilies and such. I continue to change but I would like to get out and have fun again as I'm really still a young woman after all with entirely too much burden on my shoulders in my opinion.

I told the kids (the stinky vampires) they are going to have to clean up their space so that I might visit and tour their part of the complex. They know the things that are important from my speech. Something I wasn't aware of though is that the vampires that attended my speech in the cemetery were actually the most influential elders from around the world not local vampires! Wow. I must have made waves in the vampire world somehow. This means fewer humans are going to be killed needlessly now and that makes my feel pretty good.

I also put a barbeque and gazebo on the roof. There's a tennis court (yes the roof is huge), astroturf and fountains. I need to give my humanity as much as I can otherwise the vampire body is very powerful and I could lose myself very easily in it. A large number of my stinky children came and finished the work in only 2 weeks. Phil's floor was also done according to his own tastes. I haven't seen it but I've heard he set his area up without the open area I do so all the rooms are permanent. I'm looking forward to seeing it later. I told him we can share the roof as well people need to get out and enjoy the sun when we can. I start my new job in less than a month and I just don't know if I am ready. I distracted myself in reading while I laid out in the sun on a beach towel. I don't need to use suntan lotion any more but I do anyway. It just seems wrong not to. Like personal hygiene I feel I need it and I'll be damned if I'm going to take the lazy way out. That would just be too disgusting.

I fired up the BBQ and cooked up some nice thick juicy steak. Oh thank God my tastebuds haven't changed that

is so heavenly! Had some hotdogs and potato salad to boot. I had some seed sprouts as a salad too in order to have that extra nourishment to satiate the bloodlust, even though I don't feed I'm still part vampire. I also work out even though my strength and fitness doesn't change. It pleases my human soul to do so and so I do.

Around 6:30PM Phil gets back. After his evening routine he meets me in my library so we could get to know each other better as neighbours.

"Good evening empress, may I enter?"

"Call me Susan, we're neighbours, and yes come on in."

"Was your day eventful?"

"Did nothing useful but it was a happy day nonetheless. How about you?"

"I work in realty. I had a good day but nothing is ever truly eventful. So I hear you are the most powerful vampire that ever was and a God in your own right?"

"Well I'm not sure about that. I have some juice yes but I don't feel like God material. I am definately full vampire but I have a human soul really."

"That is kind of you to say. The vampires are unlikely to speak of the kindness of a leader save they should doom them to the actions of their enemies. I overheard you saying you are a journalist? It doesn't seem to mesh with a powerful vampire."

"Like I said I have a human soul, that means I have a career, love BBQs especially steak. Look forward to a yankees game and hotdogs. I enjoy sunbathing reading and ancient magick. Some of this is different from when I was a full human but it all amounts to a very human

lifestyle. I need to find that balance between my vampire existence and my human spirit and I very rarely am able to truly do so.”

“It sounds like you’re serious, that you have a human soul. You realize that isn’t possible don’t you Susan.”

“I believe it only happened once. When the red court fell I was the sacrifice. The ritual was one of ascension but noone really knew it except the ones who developed it. They were suicidal and sacrificed the whole court and maybe more to raise up a vampire God to conquer all of existence. They made a mistake. My body and mind were transforming but my spirit was not yet touched and the human soul and vampire body was merged. So here I am adjusting to my new life and growing as I go.”

“Jesus Susan, that has got to be confusing.”

“I have to give my humanity the greater attention and you can see why.”

“So I am really in no danger then? Being that you have a human soul? How do you feed?”

“Same way you do. Because of the power I’ve gained and my red court heritage I have no need to feed anymore. The greater in the red court fed very little and I guess it just makes sense that I have no need to feed. Human food is sufficient.”

“Incredible, do you have innate magical power as well?”

“I knew a white counsel wizard once, I don’t think I can do what he does. I think as time goes on I’ll find I have more innate abilities than there are stars in the sky though.”

“What of the ritual space and arcane books?”

“All of it is for ancient magick, which is quite different the the life force based magic used today.”

“It was abandoned long long ago. It hasn’t the power associated with modern magic so nobody cared anymore. I don’t bother with it. Do you use it for health or something? Like some kind of transcendental meditation?”

“Well it is good for that but it is also the only thing that really works against ancient creatures like the ethereal revenant I encountered in Costa Rica. It is also the only arcane study I can undertake that still allows me to not worry about effecting electronics and electrical circuits.”

“True enough. I’ve never heard of an ethereal revenant before though. I don’t know what to say about that entity.”

“So you are some sort of wizard also?”

“Not exactly. My magical journey started in world war one. My parents were part of a very strict protestant faith and it was hard on me. I wanted to blaze my own trail and was very rebellious. I didn’t want faith I wanted magic where I could have control over my own destiny. Someone named Kemmler crossed my path and said to me I have great magical potential and that I could be a powerful apprentice to the true magic. I wanted to practice that true magic of which he spoke of even though I didn’t know anything about it. All I knew is that it was supposedly the true way and that’s what I wanted to follow was the true way to magic to fulfil my desires in the world.”

“Seems reasonable.”

“I found this true magic to be difficult to swallow. It just

seemed so evil. I believed in it though and believed that once past the rituals and learning I undertook I would get past my moral difficulties and find the true way to achieve my destiny.”

“Did you find that true way?”

“I had to learn all the horror and eventually I turned it in on itself so in that sense yes. I have control over life and death. I’m likely more powerful than most if not all of those on the white counsel. The council wants to execute me for my knowledge and previous crimes but as long as I am a servant of the black court with impeccable integrity the council dare not touch me or suffer war with the black court. So far the black court had fought with the reds as a matter of allegiance. If the council had to fight another war it would fall quickly. I doubt in the condition the council is in now that it would risk yet another vampire war.”

“They want you dead? why?”

“I am an extremely powerful necromancer and neuro-mancer among other things. a black magician. That’s what Kemmler was, the greatest of all black magicians. Now I guess that’s me. The council killed him so it would stand to reason it would do the same to me if it had the chance.”

“That’s awful.”

“It is. Even though power over life and death means I can raise the dead and do good it just doesn’t matter to them. I’m still conflicted over the nature of my magical specialty there is so much evil. I have to distance myself from the horrors of the past save I should think myself

to be evil as well. Kemmler taught us all how not to be overtaken by the dark energies which would drive us to madness but sadly of him and the other followers it seems I'm the only one to abide those teachings. Even he did not abide his own wisdom."

"Seriously? You can raise the dead?"

"Yeah. In addition the powers I have would come from the same death current that your vampire body would use for it's own innate powers. So I think we can likely be good study buddies together."

"I believe you're right. Would you be agreeable to being my new companion."

"What's that?"

"In Costa Rica I had two fellows that were with me constantly to care for my unusual needs. They were human companionship and caretakers for me to make sure I kept sailing a straight path. They were counsel for me and they kept in confidence everything we shared."

"I can try, no harm in that."

"Well excellent then. Lets peruse the library a while and you can teach me things. I don't wish to practise these things mind you to allow me to use computers but I do want to learn. Also is there a dance club nearby? It would be nice to get out to a club after all this time I've missed that. I'm still a youngish woman after all."

"Sure no problem. We need to wrap up the night early though I have work again tomorrow morning."

"Understood."

I did my meditation in the play room tonight, visualized the toys in Maggies dreamworld and we had a very good

time.

Well it's a week away from when I start work. I was taking a jog near the complex when I was thrown against the fence with visions.

"Mommy daddy help! Mommy daddy!" I am seeing through Maggie's eyes "Sam I'm scared." the girl with her seems to be a teen. probably a babysitter.

Sam is rifling through her purse and there is a young man with a pistol saying, "Come on come on give me what you got before I pop a cap on you!" She turns to run and the young man raises his pistol.

I kinda snap, instinct takes over. When instinct takes over with me I learn more about myself because my vampire mind just does things without the conscious intervention of my human spirit. That is the same as what happened here, I tore open a portal to the nevernever with a clawed hand and lept through the icy black energy. I appeared right behind the young man and threw him 30 feet into an alley as I flew right behind him. I fed him dry then tossed the husk of a body into a dumpster behind one of the apartment buildings. I never spilled a single drop. The whole thing happened in a few seconds. if the feeding alone was more than five to ten seconds I would be shocked.

"Mommie what happened to the bad man?" I had to think fast, "Mommie made him take a nap."

"Oh, ok mommie."

So now that I am consciously aware of how to travel through the nevernever I said to Maggie "We're going to go to church so be very quiet so bad guys don't find us."

“Ok mommie.”

A rift then opened in front of us and we walked through it like a door. We crawled out the other side on our knees under a pew.

“Maggie do you see anybody?”

“No mommie.”

“Perfect thanks baby. Lets run for the back door, then we’ll open it and see if there’s anyone there.” Fact is I’m in real hot water, Maggie needs to get back to the Carpenter’s but I absolutely can’t be seen. We get to the door. “I’m going to open the door Maggie you look out to see if anyone’s there.”

“Nobody mommie.”

“Ok quickly off to the rectory!” We waste no time getting to the rectory door but it’s locked. After lifting the doormat there was the key and we were in. I locked the door behind us and the two of us looked around but the rectory was completely empty. I remembered father Forthill’s number so I called.

“Hello father it’s Susan.”

“Well Susan how are you doing?”

“Shitty but more to the point Maggie and some young girl named Sam were attacked by a mugger. Sam ran away, the bad guys are gone and I’m in your rectory hoping nobody sees me.”

“I know Sam she does babysit Maggie, she is Molly’s friend. Ok, sit tight nobody is scheduled at the church today so you’re safe. make some tea and try to calm down there are some toys in the guest room near the woodstove you can play together. I’ll get ahold of Sam and make sure

everything is calm. I'm doing visitation at St. Joseph's hospital today I'll be back this evening."

So me and Maggie were able to spend some real life time together. Father Forthill did call back and caught me up on the fact the carpenters were travelling this weekend but Maggie had a dentist appointment today so Sam was supposed to watch her and get her to and from the appointment. They were on there way back when they were attacked. father said Maggie is safe and he's going to watch her while Sam goes back to her parents to settle down after the incident.

Me and Maggie played together for the first time in a couple years I would say. We had a tea party, read some books and Maggie played teacher for a while to me and some stuffed teddies. She put on a puppet show and we coloured together. We played dressup and searched for silly doras on father Forthill's computer. Oh did the silly pictures ever make her laugh. We played dressup together and made stories using picture cards. We went to play catch in the back. I thought her doggy mouse was going to tear me apart limb from limb but Maggie stood in front of me and said "mouse stop! This is my mommy." Mouse stopped, tilted his head at me and I offered my hand. He sniffed it backed up and growled. Again Maggie intervened, "Mouse!" He whined and sniffed my hand again. It got to where he made peace with me and we were rolling and laughing together all three of us. I gave mouse some belly rubs and scratches behind the ear and we got along great. We cooked hamburgers and hotdogs. We were all watching disney movies together when father

got home.

"I see you and mouse are getting along, I was quite worried about that when I was out. Sam was babysitting at her house and her parents don't allow dogs so mouse stayed here."

"Well he didn't like me much at first father but we are getting along ok now."

Just then the big old wooly mammoth of a dog jumped into my lap and I let out an "oof." Maggie laughed.

I said to Maggie, "ok little one time for bath."

"No way I want to stay and watch tv! I like snuggling up with mommie watching tv!"

"You have no idea what it means for me to hear that baby. We need to go upstairs for a bath though. Maybe father will let us all share some hot cocoa before you go sleepy?"

"Definitely Susan."

"Well ok." Maggie said. So then came bath, pajamas and hot cocoa. Off to bed then.

"Mommy are you coming back soon?"

"I hope so baby. Mommies just hiding right now from big bad guys so I don't want anyone to know I'm walking around."

"Wouldn't daddy want to know you're here though."

"Not yet baby. He wouldn't believe us, nobody would. The most that would happen is people you know and love would get scared and people would get hurt. You have a good family now baby with brothers and sisters and daddy lives close. I promise to try and play with you every night while you dream."

"That makes me so happy mommie I love playing with you. Why do we only have wings in my dreams mommie?"

"You never know what life might bring you baby, some day you might have wings like an angel. As for me, well" I bring forth a black fog and tear back my flesh mask. I come forth with the battle dress of a centurion, and flex ten feet of wings in front of Maggie then kneel down at her bed.

"Mommie! You really are an angel! My mommies an angel! My mommies an angel!"

"Noone would believe you if you told them baby, our time together needs to stay between us. You can talk to father though he protects me and I always watch over you while you are awake and while you sleep."

"Are you a great soldier like saint michael? Fighting monsters?"

"I am a queen sweetheart and I lead a great kingdom. I have many soldiers under my command and I am their mommy leading them, teaching them, and punishing them when they do bad things."

"So I have lots and lots of brothers and sisters, and if you're a queen that means I must be a princess!"

"Yes baby it would."

"Oh that's so awesome! I'm a princess to! Can I get to see my brothers and sisters?"

"No baby not until you're older. Your brothers and sisters are incredible soldiers and look like monsters. You would be so scared you would never sleep until you went to high school."

“Oh that’s bad. ok then maybe when I’m older. Can they enter dreams like you?”

“They certainly can and even more than that. I will not allow them into yours though so don’t be afraid.”

“I won’t mommy I believe you. You came from nowhere and saved me today so I know I’ll always be safe.”

“Always baby. Always.”

“Goodnight mommy.”

“Goodnight little one.”

Susan turned off the light and headed downstairs.

“Sweet mercy Susan what happened to you?”

“I changed to true form so Maggie could see I am really the mommie from her dreams.”

“So what I heard from the other pastors is true, you have the visage of an angel. The almighty has made of you a great force of his grace. A tremendous force. I will certainly protect you with all I am able. For all I know Maggie slept the whole time after the attack and by that I stand. it is no lie and by this I will stand.”

“Thank you father I know that is extraordinarily generous thank you.”

I lay the cloud about me again and return to the form of Susan.

“Truly incredible. Would you like some tea, more cocoa?”

“More cocoa father, it has been a long time since I’ve had hot cocoa.”

“Certainly. Let’s talk then it has been quite some time

you have been out there and I've never known of your life out there." I catch him up on everything from Bianca's ball to the present. I leave out the dæmons Eury and company though, and Phils particular specialties. Eury became a fairy and Phil a stereotypical wizard.

"Oh my. What a confusing mess. The lord works in mysterious ways, this I know, but I see where in leading these monsters as a human soul you can protect us from them in a powerful way."

"It does hurt though to hear you say it in such a way. Somehow in interacting with them it has sparked a deep love for them like a mother to her children. The title of great mother of the vampires is quite real to me and although it causes conflict with my human soul I love both people and vampires and want the best for all."

"I am convinced you will achieve it. What happened to the scoundrel that attacked poor Maggie?"

I stared at him blankly.

"Oh. That's not good."

"I'm sorry father. I don't need to feed and I don't but I'm still a predator of humans. He attacked my baby and I acted by instinct. I'm growing in wisdom and don't feel that condemnation of vampires for feeding is sensible. It's like condemning people for eating meat it's in our nature. I am trying to find alternatives and to teach them honour so hopefully future vampires will be able to choose their diet. It will always be my hope that sustenance could be gained by all vampires with normal foods but I know it's like feeding a dog grains and fruit in a sense not all will be willing to live on such a diet and I won't demand it of

them either. I will demand honor of them though father to treat people with dignity and not feed more than they need to.”

“It’s an interesting approach. It does seem sensible looking at it in a broad sense. I would think of them as monsters but what would a mouse think of a cat. We don’t want to admit it but looking at it that way we are just simply not at the top of the food chain. I will always think of them as monsters but I think I do acknowledge what you say that I would be expected to think that way.”

“I have to admit father I would have never expected to be accepted so readily by the black court they are the most inhuman of all but they just seemed to be ready for a messiah to come. The whites are out there and I don’t know what they are thinking right now. They have me worried I don’t want them to engage in a war there has been enough slaughter.”

“I agree with that, but you are not the red king Susan. You seem to be the noble ruler who cares about others. A philosopher and a queen I am confident you can avert a war and bring a lasting peace. Thank God it is you who rules these creatures and not another warmonger as you say the red king wished you would be.”

“Thanks for the encouragement father I often worry if I’m doing the right things.”

“I am no expert but I believe that worry is no vice, it will make of you a righteous queen.”

“Oh thank you so much father. So how is Harry and the others doing.”

“Nothing new really. Harry for a long time wasn’t spend-

ing too much time with Maggie but he is trying to put that effort in now.”

“What an ass. He is going to miss her best years.”

“Yes but you do know the extreme life he lives and how much the world needs him too.”

“You’re right father. It’s hard to lay blame on him for that but maybe I might pity him in a sense he really deserves a happy life not Bruce Mclean meets dragonballz”

“Hah! Yes that’s one way of putting it.”

“Maggie is happy with the Carpenters?”

“Happy as a clam. A stable home with lots of brothers and sisters. Life is well disciplined and orderly over there which iw exactly what a child needs.”

“I agree. I could only provide a disfunctional home all lonely with black court vampires for brothers and sisters. Some kids have it worse but that’s pretty bad.”

“Amen to that some kids do have it worse she has both parents in her life who really love her very much.”

“What a miracle that that should be true. Question father has there been any trouble with vampires around here that is definately something I might be able to help in.”

“Not that I know of child, I’ll see if I can get Harry to drop a clue. If something comes up I’ll let you know.”

“Thanks father. I think matters like that are becoming my responsibility.”

“I believe that’s true. Someone humans can petition.”

“Honor the prey for they give their lives that we may live. This is what I tell them.”

“I believe native americans teach that.”

“I don’t doubt it father. I hope we can live up to that, speaking of my vampiric side.”

“Me too child, me too.”

We talked well into the night, then I opened a portal and tunnelled home. I went into my meditation and flew with Maggie for a while over New York in her dream world.

SING SING OF DESIRE

First day of work! Woohoo! I'm dressed outstanding, a little pink android phone with top notch business attire and a gorgeous white trench coat. I feel like I'm absolutely glowing. It has always been a major dream of mine to work for a major news organization and as far as I'm concerned the Times is the best of the best. At least very prestigious. When I get there security takes me to a side room and snaps a photo. They have my ID ready right there in only a few minutes. It has my real name Susan Rodriguez rather than my pen name Justine Carpenter but I can only ask for so much anonymity this is my employer after all. They tell me at security how to get to my editors office, as he is going to be the one I report directly to.

“Oh my god, Justine Carpenter! How are you doing Susan my name is Joachim Jameson!” Spoken in a heavy gay lisp.

Oh boy. I say, “really? like as in J. Jameson?”

“Yeah yeah I’ve heard that before sweetheart, I know you ain’t no superhero and this ain’t the Bugle”

“Well speak for yourself I’m definately the next superhero.”

“Hah! I like that! Maybe I’ll be your gorgeous sidekick?”

I’m thinking yeah you might just fit the bill there Joe.

“I talked to IT and both of us have that GPG you talked about. You’re on the VPN now but they haven’t put that VPN over TOR like you mentioned. At least not yet. I think they want to talk to you I couldn’t explain it worth a damn.”

“Well that’s a start. We can communicate well and safe with E-Mail and GPG.”

“Well come on Susan lets do lunch. I’m starting you fast, let’s see how you do with this one. Nobody in the office could get any story from this. Over at the Sing Sing penitentiary the inmates have been acting very amorous toward each other. Now I know things happen in prison but this is the majority of inmates and even out in the open. There has been environmental testing, the water has been tested, the entire prison has been under 24 hour surveillance but no one can identify the cause. Even on release the inmates continue with this behaviour but at least as of yet it hasn’t spread through the normal population. No one knows what is causing it. Dig into this

one for me Susan see what you can get.”

“Before I forget I wanted to get a concealed weapon permit.”

“I’ll do it myself, I know people. It will be a state permit with New York City endorsement. Outside of the state you’re on your own. Look for it within a week.”

I get the orientation tour and get introduced to my office. An actual office, I’m not starting in a cubicle. Ooo nice. I didn’t set up too much stuff yet but I think a white noise generator might be in order my senses in an office are going to drive me crazy. Actually sitting in a cubicle next to people may not have been easy either, I may not be hungry but it still is hard sitting a small wall away from the vampire equivalent of frying bacon. It’s just cruel.

When I get back to the scourge I begin building a power structure based on the organization I started earlier. The first ranks gather intel and report, carrying orders down. The field marshall for reporting on the state of the empire, the generals for regions or continents as it were, and captains for the principalities or countries. direct authority is given to Lieutenants for the towns and cities, the clans. Also direct authority is given to the Sergeants for the governance of the houses, who is also invested with the power to cull the dishonorable and deal with other petty matters. I sent the order out and assigned Seth as my first marshal. I had his office and living area built permanent onto an area nearest the elevator. Close to me but unseen. He is an elder black court vampire and not pretty. At least he is too old to be too stinky. He’ll let me know our strategic position when I get back from Sing

Sing. That should take a load off my shoulders, my direct interaction with the vampires will be minimized and I can focus on being human again. I really need that.

Me and Phil get together to talk shop. Joachim said it will take at least a week to get the cover ready, and good news on the concealed carry permit is that it might be ready before I go on assignment. Awesome.

Phil teaches me about Psychomancy. He actually enters my spirit to help me find anything in me that is a natural ability that replicates Psychomancy magic. I appreciate that. Phil says that although my human spirit and vampiric body are perfectly fused my human spirit has no natural understanding of my native abilities so I need to learn them where a vampire with a vampire soul would know their abilities from their birth as vampires. It makes a lot of sense to me.

He teaches me, and learns a little himself about my ability to read auras. He advises me to be careful as auras can be manipulated. Working with him I know now I can read a soul, including vampire souls, quite well and I know it will get better over time. Their emotions, the kind of person they are, whether they are sick, the amount of life energy they contain for selection of prey (not high on my priority list but nice to know). It's extraordinary but as Phil says can't be absolutely trusted. I can also identify vampires from humans with the sight.

Phil took a while to talk about using death magic to heal a souldead person. The resurrection then quickening with ethereal energy to invoke self healing in a manner used by vampires but not leaving the soul in a vampiric

state if that is not the casters desire. Killing a human would almost instantly heal the soul otherwise following the above necromantic techniques some Psychomancy should be used to ease or to eliminate the psychic pain of the soul from the damage it suffers. I said to him his magic is bordering on the godlike. He agreed, the power of black magic is without measure, which is but one of the ways it can corrupt a soul.

I apprenticed to an ancient black court vampire named Guy also. I wont let him in my head for anything for fear of what he might see or do, but I'm learning. He taught me suggestion under cloak and cowl in manhattan at night. I call it my 'Jedi' move. I pretended to be a hypnotist and sent suggestions to peoples friends as a prank getting guys to sing I'm so pretty to the amusement of the girls they're with and other such silly things. My Jedi move might ultimately save lives. It's the same black court power that enthralls and renfields people though so I have to be careful. Having this power makes me wonder if I might be some sort of hybrid vampire. It's confusing.

Seth approaches me near the end of the week. "My queen your new protocols are established, the first reports from the field are coming in. There have been no signs of any red court activity globally. Our empire stands at about a quarter of the black court population and no know associations with the white court. No contacts have been made with white council wizards or any other entity. Our prey remains quite reduced in all locations especially in central and south america assumably due to the savage ways of the reds."

I ponder for a while. "OK, heavily culling of dishonorable in central and south america and remove the remaining scourge to more bountiful locations globally. leave only what is necessary in those areas for gathering intelligence. Release thralls and let the prey recover in peace and dignity."

"By your command my queen it will be so."

I think this was a good move to build heirarchy, I may have just saved those people terrible suffering and pain. They need to heal as much as my own soul.

I returned to work the following Monday, everything is in place. I have an apartment in town now too. I've been thinking about it and I think it will be good for me. found a nice place in hells kitchen for a song. I don't have a car right now but that should change within a month or two, I need to setup the apartment. I also need first and last months rent among other things. Yeah I could let the kids provide but I need to have my own life too. My own completely human life paid with my own earnings and friends I can then relate to. god help me for saying so but maybe even a playmate. I still think of Harry a lot though so maybe not. I don't want to think the red king has won afterall in making me the great mother, I don't want Harry to be hurt by what I am now. I don't know if he could ever understand the choices I have to make. Would he just reject me as a vampire and just say I'm not his Susan? That his Susan died and I could never be her again? I don't know if I could survive it. I still love him in a real way and what happened really wasn't either of our fault. Maybe I could blame myself for being too stubborn

and going to Biancas ball but if I had to do it again I think I would. I've never backed down from anything even now. If I backed down then I wouldn't be working at the times now. I'm working at the damn New York Times now, many a reporter would sell their soul for a chance here. So much was set in motion at that ball that is just being realized years later, and likely there is more to be seen yet. I would assume so. It transformed my life first for the worst and then to the incredible, and difficult. I live on 44th, the west end. I walked over to Broadway, then up into central park. I listened to the smells and sounds, looked at everything. Seen places I'd only ever heard of on tv or in written word. Times square, the theaters on broadway, Gershwin theater. It felt like I was in a dream, like I would wake up as an infected again tortured by the hunger. This can't be real. It isn't possible. I tried to push down the joy in fear of everything being a lie. I pushed it down in fear of being hurt. This is cruel it can't be real. The clouds were starting to gather soon after the sun set. I made it to central park and after a few minutes it started to rain. It was coming down hard and I felt it against my skin. It felt real. This cant be happening. I bit my arm and the pain was real. My fangs were real. I had no hunger anymore, somehow somewhere I had risen above it. It's gone. I took out my ID for the times and stared. The rain poured down and formed droplets on it immediately. There was my name. My picture. The new york times logo. I stared up at the sky to see the rain fall and felt like I was moving at lightspeed, like the droplets were stars and I was rocketing fast and far beyond the confines of

this world. My dreams are coming true, I need to let go of what was the time of suffering is gone. I am vampire but I am also human, my life has just begun and these little droplets show the course of things to come. My human life is blossoming at the same time as my vampiric. At this moment, as the rain fell, I felt that release in my heart. I could feel the pain of the past slipping away. I found peace with Martin and that which I held onto for so long. It is done, they are at peace so must I find peace with it also. My heart was moved with hope fulfilled and I boiled over with a primal scream. A human one, born of happiness. My happy life ended at Bianca's and now has begun again. I lifted my arms to the sky and shouted like my team just sunk the winning goal and danced. I skipped and wept and hollered through central park as the rain poured down. I was soaked and I didn't care. I defied all the odds, I was in the exact right place at the exact right moment. I have my human life back again, I've dealt with the childrens needs let them take care of themselves it's time for me to be human once again. After so many years just to be human once again! I sat in a small gazebo with the rain pouring down around me, my smile would not fade. Nor would the giggles that replaced my shouting. Nonstop giggling. I must have sat there an hour, just didn't want to move. I was still afraid it might all just disappear. Slowly my acceptance of my life settled into me but I don't think the giddiness will go away anytime soon. I headed home in the downpour not caring about being wet or not. I would still look up in the sky from time to time and laugh. I would just laugh. I

couldn't stop. I didn't want to either. Oh my god Susan. Oh my god.

I changed when I got home to my apartment. I loved it. It was an old victorian style apartment with a functioning wood fireplace. It is small. Honestly it makes me think of sherlock holmes and 221b baker st. It feels exactly like that. It's also buggy as all fuck so I sealed it up and put out for a heat remediator unit to use regularly. Things like that are what make it cheap. As long as I keep ahead of things all should be fine. I heard the landlord is a lazy ass. I still have that incessant need to make the place look like grandmas living room. floral print wallpaper and doilies and such. The bedroom is a complete rejection of the living area with solid bright colours, quite a bit of pink, and a bunk office. The space is small so my desk and work area is under my bed, with a steel ladder to climb up to my bed. There are some shelves for books and such above the bed. entertainment is through the computer playing movies, podcasts and such plus overtheair tv and radio. internet is with an unlimited cell phone plan. slow, crappy, but pretty damn cheap. Oh and music and movie posters scattered around of course. Beanbag in front of the tube or to hack around with a phone or tablet. Anyway, the rooms are contradictory. I'm still not comfortable with the need for a grandma environment it's just weird. Rocking chair and knitting yarn. It's calming I'll give you that. I think I've made plenty enough scarves though.

Back in to work tomorrow, I've heard everything is prepared. Even my concealed weapon permit went through. Joe must got some juice to make it happen that fast. I'll

pick it up tomorrow.

I am really extremely close to work. less than 10 mins walking. I like that. When I got there Joe had some time scheduled for me to talk with a reporter who worked the story before without getting anywhere. There's a better chance I might land it if I can learn from him and get a foot up on this thing.

"Hi I'm Susan."

"Patrick. So you're going to try to crack Sing Sing?"

"Seems that way."

"Good luck with that. I was the last one to try to crack this but I ended up just spinning my wheels."

"So why don't you get me up to speed."

"Sure. Here's the deal. You know what prison can be like, but at the same time depending on what day you get there there might be none or there might be 2 or 3 guys getting busy with each other. Completely in the open. Like roaches what you see in the open is a thousand times worse where it's hidden."

"eww, is that normal there?"

"hell no, sure as shit not in front of the guards. Those bastards gotta either have some big hairy gonads or something is driving them to it."

"I get the picture. Did you find anything out?"

"Well it seemed clear to me that some drug company is testing their newest formula on these clowns but I could never find a clear link. Right now there are three generic companies supplying the prison with it's prescription meds. There are numerous other sources for it's other drugs of need."

"Right, I hear ya. So no smoking gun."

"meds tested in the lab were what they said, a search of the cells turned up nothing. some contraband but it didn't test out incorrectly."

"Have you thought of drugs without any residual blood toxicology?"

"Definately. The prisoners receive regular blood testing and even running it through forensics got nothing. That's the only way but how is it getting to them?"

"Exactly. Anything environmental turn up?"

"Cells were tested, water supply, food, halls and yard. Everything really nothing turned up. mold, virii, bacteria, chemical nothing."

"Where were you left spinning your wheels?"

"Finding the source of the drugs, how was it being trafficked, I focused on the drug angle it was the only one I had."

"Is that what the previous guy or guys focused on too or did they cover other bases?"

"I think everybody went the same route but Jason was looking at the coming and going of people and personel at the end before he was pulled off."

"Was he on the story a long time?"

"Longer than the rest of us. He told me he figured if he can't track the drugs, and it is a problem with people, then he should track the people."

"I like that, it makes entirely too much sense. I think I'm going to follow Jason's idea when I get there and just skip what seems like a dead end. I'll be talking with the warden tomorrow."

“Sounds good hope I could help.”

“You definately helped thanks a lot man, I can hopefully skip past most of the dead ends.”

Interesting. That is definately some rather extreme behaviour. I would think drugs too like a newer and better viagra testing phase or something. No weird drugs were found anywhere. I like the people angle, I think I’m going to go for that. When I talk to the warden I think I’ll see if I can truck as an inmate. I’ll need to be careful not to get heavy handed though I need to blend in ans not look like some superhuman. Or worse some kind of rite 9f passage and end up fighting the whole yard. There’s no way I could hide my nature then.

I get back to my place. It’s late fall now and the building hasn’t fired the boilers that feed the hot water registers yet. I pull down some wood from the lumber room and atart up a fire. I kick back in my lounge chair and toss out the old miswak from the ashtray and cut a fresh one from the package. I don’t smoke but I kinda need something to chew on sometimes to think. After a ahort while the dire got going well. The snap and pop is rather nice as sure as the heat on a cool evening. The temperature dropped fast over the last day. It was quite warm until after the rain past.

What possible advantage could anyone have in this? The drug end of it was a dead end, and it nevee fails if there is trouble afoot it is either for the love of money, power or lust. Very little else motivates save maybe vengeance. Vengeance makes little sense unless it wqs against the zarden and there certainly are more effective ways to mews

with him. I think in chasing the drug angle we have nearly exhausted the money angle. As for lust well that would be the issue in itself, as a motivation I have yet to see it. For vengeance though I should check to see if only one segment of the inmate population is effected. It would definately be an embarrasment to a rival gang to have this brought on them. So there is that. The pozer factor, unless like I thought it was rival gangs and an attempt at shaming the other I would say there is no power grasp in the population. There could be blackmail against the warden maybe, or a higher political maneuvering to gain advantage over one or more people that govern corrections. Holding back that key evidence that would allow us journalists to print a story. The warden has not been threatened to silence that much I can see as he is helping me get placed inside. hmm. Also I need to examine administration at the prison to see if there are any inconsistencies. Jason was focused on people that would be the best place to start, to see if I can find any inconsistencies. I should take a look at the movements of inmates as well but I don't think I will spend a great time with that. All the work on tracking illicit drugs would have unearthed unusual activities of inmates I would think.

I got another chunk from the lumber room and fed the fire, then slipped off into meditation for the rest of the night, sitting in front of the fire in nightshirt and knitted shawl. lying restfully in my lounge chair. Having a tea party with Maggie in her little dream world.

Damned commute was over an hour and a half to Sing Sing. I'm going to need to bring work to do, or at least

books to read, making this pilgrimage to and from every day. I might lock up a bicycle at the train station to turn a twenty minute walk into a five minute bike ride though. That would help. I presented my ID and weapon permit, leaving my glock at the guard station. Another guard escorted me to the wardens office. I introduced myself.

“Hello, I’m Susan from the times.”

“Ah good, I hope you can finally come to a conclusion to what in the hell is going on in my prison. Goddamned embarrassing. You wouldn’t believe the wise cracks I get about the worlds biggest bathhouse and crap. Anyway that’s my trouble not yours what would you like to do to start?”

“Well it’s been made pretty clear what’s been going on and where we’ve already looked, may I start just working in the qdministration office? If possible checking out the different roles and historical paperwork over the next couple weeks.”

“Um. Yeah. Nobodies done that yet. Try not to fall asleep.”

“I do not sleep that I am aware of, but thank you. I will assume you will show me fresh coffee?”

“Oh yes, we have a commercial coffeemaker. It’s going all day long.”

“Heh, I’ll bet.”

So he introduced me to the office staff as a new hire in need of job shadowing before moving to another local prison. The staff looked about as boring and plain as their job. Friendly enough though. I had a quick runthrough of the different positions but the jumble of information

just fell out of my head, I'll get to learning it over the next couple weeks. I couldn't use vampire vision to check their auras with them looking right at me, the change of my eyes would scare the hell out of them. Again plenty of time over the next couple of weeks. Back home again, I'm taking a break from the evening work routine. Since I don't sleep I read at 24hour coffee pubs although I still need to eat a solid meal at night to stay firm and avoid needing to eat human prey. Talking about prey I've also been enjoying cruising bars and nightclubs. I haven't gotten more than a nice conversation yet. The odd one I've stayed with for the night but I can't go all the way. I'm afraid I might eat him. Eventually I'll lose it completely and either eat somebody, fuck somebody, or both. I hope I can recover some semblance of my original human sexuality, but I have little hope. I presume I may end up with a snuggle buddy like an asexual. If I was on a good old fashioned fuck-a-thon it really wouldn't matter but of the men I've met, at least the ones that approached me, they just aren't genuine or are really shallow. I think some of them are going to pull out a mirror just to look at themselves. So after kicking aside the players and aforementioned chaff, I did end up with some regular friends that may develop into something someday so at least there's that. I need something soon though, my pussy is starting to eat my leg.

Speaking of going out, after the first week of monumental boredom I went with the crew for the Friday night afterwork drinks. There's a little pub not too far away where we ordered some pitchers. I heard from them mem-

ories of times past and people they once worked with. Then came the frustrations of work. I really didn't get much from them but as they got more drunk I was able to use my vampire sight. I don't get drunk on alcohol by the way. It just comes out just as alcoholic as it went in. Weird. Anyway what I found is that these people are scoundrels, the whole lot of them. They are shallow and petty, ready to take any bribe and kiss any ass. They are so crooked they couldn't lie in bed straight. Lying, cheating, stealing and all with a perfect friendly demeanor that hides a thousand crimes. These people are exactly where this shit is coming from. Now I need to find out who or how many of these snakes have made a deal and for what.

The night degenerated into petty arguments and rumours so I left team slimy and saddled up to the bar. A nice looking fellow named Chuck bought me a drink. He was a writer who authored some works in current affairs, so we chatted a long time essentially talking shop. It went well into the night and broke up at a coffee shop. The guy was still shallow but I enjoyed our time. We exchanged E-Mail addresses as he wanted to keep in touch. I'm not sure whether to be angry with him or just disappointed in general that my hope of a romantic encounter turned into an exercise in business networking.

That weekend I kicked it up with my phone rolling through about a million messages from players in an online dating site. Looked like every guy in manhattan loved me except the same generic message came up many times and the same guys came up multiple times. Blanket bombing. Nice guys are buried in ten tons of horse-

shit. With the Tinder literally every guy likes me. Blanket bombing players again. Nice guys mailboxes are probably so empty there is the sound of a single cricket and I'll be damned if I know how to get to them. Some of the players are idiots, made me laugh, the line was, "I put the std in stud and all i need is u." Fuck.

So me, Eury and friends saddled up at my apartment for a game of french tarot. I used esoteric cards because they're so cool and it was a great afternoon. Except maybe when Eury said to me, "Love the modern mother hubbard theme Susan" when he got here. The only thing I could come back with at the time was, "Oh shut up." In good humor though it worked out just fine. Later that night I went out again and the bars seemed to be filled with people that came together and left together. No singles. I really fucking hate that, I wish there were signs outside the establishment that literally said, "singles bar." Sunday I did the church thing, where in the back of my mind even as poor a match as it would be I might find a good guy. Churches are the best place to find good guys I think if you can sift through the sea of grey hair and family men. I cruised through a library and a bookstore. More than one bookstore. Partly to get ideas to solve the mystery of my current assignment and partly to find men. I seem to have very quickly picked up another full time job in finding some man. I think I've heard it said a girl should establish herself first before looking for fresh meat, and I am solidly established so maybe that's why my interests are leaning this way. It my lifes next big challenge for personal success, not to sound shallow or

anything just a psychological theory. On an emotional level I lost my hukan sexuality at Chichén Itzá and it was imprisoned in an infected body around a decade earlier at Bianca's ball. I hope she's burning in hell for that. If not it seems to me Eury would know who to talk to in order to arrange it. Yes friends humour does help. It's still a horribly deep wound, and memories like Bianca especially burn deep. When I was in the fellowship I had a purpose and a mission. I was a hero of the people against the monsters who would devour them. Oh Harry I wish there was something I could have done, I would have taken your ring and married you in a second if I didn't pose a danger to you. It was the most painful thing I've ever had to do. To decline your ring and to leave for war. Even as much purpose as I had there I wanted so much for you to be with me, but I knew you couldn't, and I thought of you every single day. Every single day. Burn forever you fucking witch you ruined both our lives and I lost years of my humanity I will never get back. I'm only now catching up on building the happy life I could have had long ago. Thank God I consumed your species, and now the whole red court is gone. I pledge that I will never allow there to be another like you. I swear to it by my life.

All my infected life and since I was turned Bianca has been that representation to me of vampirism looking down in arrogance and patience. That voice that tells me it's only a matter of time and you will be exactly like us.

Especially if my vampiric instinct comes out Bianca's voice echos as if through time telling me I am or have become just like them. She laughs and tells me, "Child,

how did you think it was not going to be so? You cannot resist, you are to be our sister, give up this futile struggle and let death come to your feeble human spirit. Savour the sweet taste of your spiritual death. Complete your journey and be the true full red court vampire I know you are to be.”

This hatred I have for vampires in my human soul I think, as horrible as it is for me, has made Bianca like a conscience to me. Oh I wish I could forget Bianca and what she did to me but perhaps that arrogant, ridiculing voice is something I desperately need when I am living with a mind and body of an immeasurably powerful vampire. Without it I might just risk the loss of my humanity in the psychological sense.

Back to work on Monday. I try to observe the employees in various ways but I’m not seeing much. A lot of ass kissing and trying to one up their coworkers is all. I think maybe that’s all I’ll get for now. The warden gives me leave to check out the prison proper and warns me I must be crazy. I go with two guards and when we enter the cell block as I expected the prisoners were yelling and whistling pretty good. When my fist brought down two feet of a 6 foot concrete wall there was quiet. I yell back, “who wants some of this?” All the inmates return to the rear of their cells saying “Not worth it” “Not me” “No way” “The hell with you”.

The guards said, “How did you do that?”

I said to them, “Someone I knew once, his dad was an illusionist. You know like stage magician?”

“He must have been real fucking good.”

“Damn straight.”

“Were you looking for anything in particular?”

“I don’t think I’ll know until I find it.”

“This big brute has been effected for quite a while. It might be a good place to start.”

Big brute is right. The guards had to yell at him to stand back, as soon as they came in he pushed right into them, one reached for his nightstick. I took that son of a bitch by the throat and had him high on the wall with just a touch of vampiric speed. I had him there by one hand. Since this dude was being an ass I didn’t give it a second thought and pulled over my third eyelid and started my sight. I did a red court thing for good measure all with the guards getting their senses behind me I ruffled my skin mask. See I don’t really have skin as a vampire it is just a layer on top. A mask basically. I can’t say for what the red court could or could not do but I can move it around like you could move around your tongue against your cheek. For me though it looks a little like a nest of flesh eating grubs squirming around under my skin. It is quite visually appealing, truly sexy. So what I found besides this guy being a scumbucket is that I seen residue of vampirism on him. This shit just got real interesting.

“Get her off me! Get her off me! She’s a fucking alien man she’ll eat my fucking brains get her off!”

I toss him on the bed, “Buddy get off the cheap drugs and stay there. Don’t fucking move.”

The guards recovered themselves, “Where did you learn to do that miss?”

“I fought in a South American war for many years.”

“No shit? Maybe we’ll hire you to protect us in here, I ain’t never seen nothing like that from a girl.”

“Hey thanks. Well I think I may have found something. Let me search around I wont know what it is until I find it.”

I search around, using my sight when the guards weren’t looking. I feel life energy signatures and sniff around. I haven’t found anything strange though.

“Hey boys, this guy get it on with anybody in here? Do you know where it happened in here if he did?”

“Last week he was giving it to collins here over the sink.”

I sniff the area and I smell dispersed life force, quite a bit of it in fact, at that location.

“A month ago I seen him with O’Grady bent over the can here.”

I sniff, trying to set aside the other smell of the toilet. My vampiric senses picked up the life force signature not as strong as by the sink. To varying degrees I noted about a dozen points of abnormal static life force signatures. This dude was getting some business. I would like to shakedown this guy but I don’t have the questions for him to answer yet.

“Ok who’s next?”

“Well the latest party animal is Jackson over there on the second level. He started a week ago and his latest shag was yesterday.”

“No kidding? So the just seem to take a pill or something and start racing? Do the ever quit?”

“We’ve had half a dozen quit. Dead of a heart attack.”

“Christ, were they older?”

"Most were young as spring kittens, which is why we've been trying to find what kind of drug they're bringing in here."

"Man. Well ok you seen this latest one start a week ago. Do you remember anything else from a week ago, anything or any person coming to or from his cell?"

"No, same as when other cops and reporters came, nothing."

"Well lets go, I'll try to gumshoe it."

We arrive at the cell. This dude is more restrained. He's heard what went on outside and doesn't want any part of it. I sniff, same disturbances as before but only 3 distinctly rather than the shephards pie of disturbances from the guy below.

"He is this stuff like the kind enjoyed by both or not?"

"Don't say anyone I said it but I wish me and my wife had the joy these boneheads do when they're fucking in here."

Wow, I'm assuming the guards relations are chilly. The way he said it indicates that it's rather over the top in pleasure. That's actually even more indication of something vampiric. It might be a phage, a fae entity that feeds on emotion. With only three disturbances I sniffed a little deeper. The oldest signature seems to have some other energy around it. I think Phil might be able to help me with that later. I found a little wooden talisman under the bed near to that original signature. I use my senses on it but I get nothing. I'll take that to examine later. Good search.

"Say has there been anything normal that started around

the same time as these incidents?”

“Well thats quite the question. There has been a clinical trial for some vitamin supplements. We changed our medical supply contractor, food supplier has changed. Using different cleaning chemical supplier. Lady we are pretty much getting everything from somewhere else. Anything to try and resolve this problem.”

“Fascinating. Well good enough for now I better go finish some research on this.”

“Well have a good one.”

That was that. I’m going to put in extra time on research now that I got something to look into. I hate all this man chasing anyway I need a vacation from what is supposed to so much fun but isn’t. I can’t do too much without Phil but I can at least work through mine and Phils library to find this talisman. Then I’m going to meditate for a time to go play with Maggie.

what i found out was that the little talisman had symbols referring to the winter court and my knowledge of the ancient craft indicates it would be used as a spirit vessel. I’ll have to verify with Phil on that but I do believe some is carrying faery spirits around and dollars to donuts it is some kind of phage due to the fluctuations of Life energies.

So, perhaps the motive lies in the change of contracts? There is a whole hell of a lot of money changing hands in this than could have been seen by the original investigators. I should be able to check documentation at the prison office to see whose hand is on what. Someone has to push this stuff through and it needs to go through that

office. That administrative team are the Devil's own and if there is something foul going on in that prison I like them for it. There needs to be something supernatural or a practiced wizard involved to in order to know to capture and release phages with an intent.

I guess if for nothing else having supernatural senses is a great advantage in journalism and I appreciate being able to scare the bejesus out of the bad guys too.

The next day I'm back at the prison. Staying in the office today now that I know what to look for. I found the cabinet where the contractor documents are kept. Shit it's gonna take a month of Sundays to get through that cabinet of papers. Well one day at a time. Issues started happening about 2 years ago so I grabbed records going back to around that time. One year at a time. Supply requests, bills and receipts, even the most ridiculous items were kept in the folders and I was staying up every night to pour through it all. A change in a generic drug distributor to a company named goodtime pharmaceuticals. I was inspired to find out more about that one. The company specializes in the distribution of sexual and mood drugs for pharmatherapy as well as aphrodesiacs mostly of the herbal variety, and pharmaceuticals related to transgender needs. Otherwise they are a general needs distributor and even so I don't understand why the happy hell the New York state correctional authority would choose a company named goodtime pharmaceuticals as it's medical use drugs contractor. That went off in my head like an air raid siren. The sanitary contracting supply company it Red Toad sanitary supply. Nothing jumped out

as abnormal. I checked the website and looked at the promotional material. Based in San Francisco there were testimonials that offered a clue as to their client base at least. Three panties to the wind dance club, the Shiny Black Rubber garment manufacturing company, brothel house distribution of California, and you get the point. As a matter of fact the changes in contractors were pretty consistent in being linked to the sex industry which to me means the source of this phenomenon is originating with whoever has a common interest in these companies. Some kind of sex industry mogul seems to make the most sense and it links well to the nature of what is happening here.

I placed a hardware key-logger in-line with the wardens keyboard. I think the warden would have probably given up his password but I preferred to leave him with reasonable deniability since he has gone over and above in helping me with this story. I waited until after he punched out and grabbed some information on other institutions and printed it. This phenomenon is starting to branch out a little bit into other locations but as of yet the contractors in the other institutions haven't changed.

OK so it looks like the next stop is San Francisco. I gave Joe an update on the story so far and the Times got me the tickets to take a flight out there.

After a few hours of meditation and dreamworld play with Maggie. I have nothing to link these companies together yet so I need to do that. First thing is all of these locations have a physical address but not all are in the city proper so I found ownership and mortgage infor-

mation on the locations some on-line and some I had to the actual land records office of the county they were in. No slam dunk here the ownerships were sometimes different. That doesn't mean the company or individuals listed are the actual companies in residence at the locations. Granted some are in personal names like Mandeep Patel but one stood out pretty clearly. A leasing company called Osreal Land Holdings LLC. So the easiest place to start seems to be to find that company and sweet talk them into spilling something useful. I found the headquarters in Los Angeles proper. Land records were to no avail, it owns it's own land. Evaluating the board of directors was interesting though, they all have links into the porn industry. Fairly heavy links. To three separate companies.

The porn companies seem to be distinct, I can't link them together to any common people yet. That's not a dead end though even without a smoking gun the story so far is enough to bring up questions about integrity in the correctional system or possibly questions of fraud within this particular company. I don't need to draw perfect lines as long as I can dismiss coincidence and make people think. Nonetheless I want to find the smoking gun and I'm feeling like I'm close.

I took a few days to track the comings and goings of the board of directors, see who they are meeting and where they do lunch. They all live in exclusive parts of town, and I used camerav on my phone to snap some pictures of some of these meetings for later. I relaxed some distance from them as they had casual lunches and off-site

meetings just to listen, and get some names. I found most of these people fairly quickly, they are coordinating the supply, funding and operation of all these other organizations. At least one of the names on the land records was mentioned even though I couldn't find any record of the persons existence. I think the goods are all here.

As I was making notes I found the physical locations of many of the landowners listed in the land records, only the individuals in question seemed to have more than one name as I confronted them with their land records name on the street having allegedly met at a business function. Of course they responded as their alter ego and why shouldn't they? I asked them how their company was doing, intentionally forgetting the name, but they knew the name of their company everytime. This is getting more and more interesting all the time.

After about a week in a larger meeting at a local Starbucks there came an individual to the table that made the whole board rise and bow in a customary Japanese fashion. I think I just found the kingpin here! Everyone settled into their seats and I heard one name that made me turn away from the table save I should giggle right at them. Raith. They addressed him as mister Raith. This is a white court enterprise, oh most excellent!

OK, so what's left. Motive appears to be financial gain, the corrections contracts although I'm sure pale in comparison to the income through the porn industry are still decent enough and represent a very steady income. One thing that is nagging at me though is the fact that the money gain really doesn't fit, it isn't enough of a benefit

to warrant all the time and effort to establish this enterprise. The means does not make sense either, I still don't know what is really going on at the prison. I do know a hell of a lot more than the other reporters found out so far though. I'll need to try to use what I know to find the true means and motive behind this mystery, the very fact that the Raith's are involved lends itself well to the talisman I found in that prisoners cell. The Raith family, being white court vampires, would have the connections and the knowledge to assemble a scheme involving the supernatural like that.

I picked myself up and settled my bill pretty much right away, again being vampires they are much more aware of their surroundings and to the fact that I am entirely too interested in their conversation. I can learn more later, I made a very big leap forward in this story. I fired up tails on my laptop and sent to Joe the update via GPG E-Mail including photos and identities, sometimes multiple identities per person, of those involved that I seen so far. Joe is liking what I am telling him so far the implications could be far reaching. Now I need to think about where to go next in this.

What do I need? The true motive. I need a solid link to implicate the Raith's in this, and I need to identify the nature of the phenomenon at the prison, hard facts as to what is really happening there. Maybe it's time to start preparing for an infiltration, I'll need to gather intel on the location in general and identify what I really need to obtain from this place. I need to check to see if there is a possibility for an electronic approach as well. I have

some skill but if this location is setup too impressively my means of obtaining information electronically may be limited. I need to try though because such information is a journalistic bazooka.

I head to the building the next day for some preliminary recon. It isn't in a retail location like the last place, and is surrounded by small industry and a Wendy's. I love Frostys and I'm not ashamed to say it. So no sitting at a coffeeshop in a mall and observing the location. It isn't busy though, there is a security guard in the front who does little more than take mental note of who comes and goes. Like a scarecrow behind a desk to keep out the vagrants. I easily entered into the location and found the bottom floor to be composed of a small inhouse cafe and variety store and different departments setup as different suites. The hallway is huge and people are filtering back and forth constantly between departments. My quick passage in and out of the location went unnoticed although if I had to come back I'll need to get a stack of file folders to juggle with a bagel and a coffee as that is what I'm seeing the most of here. There is a small hallway leading to the back to supply the cafe and access to the garbage and recycling in the back. Note to self the back door there is one way only. The parking lot in the back is a pretty decent size. There are stairs and elevators to the second floor of this two story building. The hallways on the second floor are a little more of a labyrinth. The offices of all the senior staff are here as well as the secretarial pool. I think I can safely plan multiple incursions here, based on what I've heard from the employees no-

body seems to know anybody very well and nobody cares. The impression is strong enough I really don't need the sight to know. I'll come in here first to identify some key people if I can but mostly to identify other weaknesses of electronic and social structure. I'll take a look at the inside of the different departments and see basically what I can accomplish on my next turn in. I'm going to avoid the second floor for now it is much less chaotic making it a lot more dangerous for me to infiltrate.

So the day near closing I head to the back of the building and flip over the garbage bins. They are those huge plate steel bins with the plastic flip doors on the top. They do weigh hundreds of pounds if not a ton or more but I'm a strong girl and eat my sprouts every day so easy peasy. I gathered what I needed from the ground of the trash and recycling and flipped the bins back to their proper place for the sanitation truck to deal with in the morning. So I got a pile of unclassified documents to read through and use during my incursion as well as company pens and swag. A nice real leather company foundation briefcase was disposed of due to a broken clasp, so I'll fix that. I got some names and itineraries, that little trick gained me quite a lot actually. Even the IT team through a bunch of old scratch notes to the recycling rather than the shredder. I'm sure not on purpose, not like I haven't seen security incompetence before or anything. So now I have an incomplete network map and some passwords as well as physical locations of network equipment. Not bad. It has the credentials for the company top level DNS server. I fall on the ground laughing, anyone ever met the

man in the middle?

The next day I filter through the different departments, they are all laid out the same. A small departmental mail desk at the front passing paperwork and packages in and out, entering all the actions taken into a workstation, shooting the shit and drinking coffee. In behind are permanently assigned cubicles and a couple offices on one side for the assistant manager and manager of the department. Two meeting rooms are on the other side of the room currently unoccupied. There are half a dozen stand up workstations for brief use by the employees. There is a login but I have a few employee logins from the paperwork I snatched. There is an actual IT department that is just as busy as the rest of the office. From what I gather the existing IT staff has built the in house system with sufficient complexity and lack of automation as to assure their job security. I setup a postfix server at my own virtual hosted machine and took a moment at the stand up kiosk here to login and change the DNS MX record to point there. Now all company E-Mail is being sent to my own server, recorded, and relayed back to the company E-Mail server for normal delivery. That right there folks is called man in the middle. I'm going to go check what I got in a few days to see how badly I nailed these guys.

I made use of those good old social engineering skills while I was there and it worked out very well indeed. I obtained a clandestine recorded record of some of these conversations they were so sweet. The employees know very well the Raith family run this enterprise. Appar-

ently it was actually spearheaded by Madeline Raith but later adopted by the family through her father. I got the names of some other companies involved and the hint that there has been a new project underway for the last couple years to increase the market penetration of this group of companies products. The employees on the floor do not know much more than it's a government initiative and uses the appropriation of exclusive contracts in New York State. I asked how are we getting those contracts or is it the old fashioned song and dance of effective sales technique. Apparently the director in charge of the logistics department is operating the project and the nuts and bolts of it are run offsite and noone knows anything else about it. I checked in the logistics department but the staff didn't know any more than the others and there wasn't much more to be found. I walked my useless papers back and forth between departments all day long and snapped some quick photos of the odd documents that I took into the can and then placed back into the various departments they came from. I headed out of what seemed like the New York stock exchange at closing time and went back to my hotel to process the material I had obtained. It took me the better part of the week to organize the documents and learn how everything fit together. There were still pieces missing but I knew the road I needed to take to finish the puzzle. After a quick trip back at the end of the week to correct the MX record on that companies DNS server I logged into my cloud server and pulled down the email I had saved from the company. There was a risk of getting my IP address traced

but within the white court I would put a couple notches on my respect for executing an excellent intrigue. As far as the mortal world goes the cloud server belongs to a ghost, registered under the name of a dead woman named Susan Rodriguez and paid through a bank account of the same name via cash deposit. A dead end to any real world investigation, unless the investigators knew enough to dredge the Times employee records to find me.

As I expected, critically classified E-Mail was being exchanged without encryption the same as most companies do it. It was an absolute goldmine of incriminating correspondence. All roads lead to Rome of course and the E-Mail interchange showed headers that tracked back to the Chicago area. Somewhere I really really don't want to go. I'm going to have to though, to identify the location of the Raith office and finish the story by getting photographic records identifying them and linking them definitively to the operation.

First things first, I need to go to the lab. According to the E-Mails they are using magnetic manipulation of brain wave patterns to attempt to illicit a permanent increase in sexual desire that will lead to the Raith group of companies reaping increased profits upon success of the venture. I think it's a clever ruse, they are up to something that involves the nevernever and likely phage in some way.

I check out the location and find it is in a heavy industry location and is a sizeable property. Neighbouring buildings have the same design and are completely open warehouses sending and receiving shipments via big rig. Observing the outside I seen a touch pad security lock

and loitering near the gate I observed the numerical combination that was used to lock up. Odds are the same combination is used to open up and the next morning proved the point. That evening I used the combination to disable the alarm and passed through the door in mist form. With my vampiric sight the pitch black warehouse looked like twilight, and within 20 minutes I located the lights and flipped them on. This was magical not scientific, I have no fucking clue what in the hell is going on here. I take some camerav snaps of the equipment in an equal share of the magical and the mundane, the first for Phil to look at and tell me what's going on and the second for use with the Times article to show evidence of experimentation and confirm the scientific aspect of the operation alleged in the E-Mails I obtained. In the wee hours having scoured the location and finding what I could I passed through the door again and set the alarm. Then escaped into the night to organize the documentation I found and got it sent to Joe who at this point is losing his shit with excitement.

I postponed the trip to Chicago so I could get back to New York and identify what the Raiths are doing in California.

"What is all this Phil? What's the real motive here I know they're up to something but I can't put my finger on exactly what."

"Fucking genius that's what Susan. There's one dangerous motherfucker that has a serious mind to change the balance of power in the vampire world."

"Phil. Spill it."

"A lot of the magical theory is similar to the rite of ascension you underwent, it looks like whoever it was learned something, which means whoever it is knows what happened at Chichén Itzá."

"Great. A big nasty who knows I got the juju."

"Or at least knows that you came out a human vampiric crossbreed. This work is an attempt to allow the white vampires to spawn themselves in a manner similar to the red and black courts. We were correct for the most part the talisman is a spirit cage, they are obtaining compatible phage from the nevernever and caging them in talismans. Once a human touches the talisman with their skin the phage is transferred to them and is awakened in them in their first sexual act. Similar to the coming of age of white court vampires. The talisman concept is similar to a group of fallen angels I know called the denarians. The difference being once the talisman has transferred the phage to the host it can be discarded or reused but is of no further use to the victim."

"The white court is gaining an interest in conquest."

"They're looking to grow their numbers fast, for purposes known only to them."

"As far as I'm concerned it's conquest. Whether the Raith are intending to utterly conquer their own court or are looking at world domination it's still conquest. Why else would someone build an army?"

"Something else to be considered. It's generally accepted by you and me that the Red Court enlisted the aid of a very powerful wizard to write the spell that bid you to rise back in power and majesty, not to flatter you or anything."

They did it to gain favor with the court, it would seem, and likely gain favor from you. I don't know why they haven't approached you about it yet. I think there were other hands in the pie that day in Chichén Itzá, people this wizard would rather not cross. I think he is trying again with the white court to make them indebted to him in exchange for victory over their enemies."

"It sounds probable. I can't know until I can confirm it though. I'll head over to the Times for a debriefing of the mundane side of this. Then I need to head to Chicago to visit the address for the Raith enterprise mentioned in the E-Mail to put a bow on the package and complete the story."

"Godspeed Susan."

Time goes fast and in a couple days I'm off to Chicago. I called Father Forthill ahead of time to see if I could stay with him and catch up for the few days I was going to be there. He said it was OK but be careful to keep it under wraps about being there. I told him if someone does see me I'll go mist form faster than he can say pop, they'll think I was nothing but a memory. That would be fine by him. So I arrived with a litigation briefcase, you know the kind, a briefcase with wheels. I pour over the documents I have to determine a plan of action. The location is downtown in one of those office towers, unit 508. Lorriatt Enterprises. All I really want to do is get some verifiable evidence that the office location exists, and then if I can get some camerav verifiable media snaps of the location, the name on the door, maybe some paperwork at the location. I thought about it and rather than that

I think I will actually get a video recording of the place showing the people there and other nice things. I craft together a fake pocket protector and clip it near my shirt collar so my well endowed rack doesn't force the camera to take a video of the ceiling. I finally build a harness that works well with a powersuit I pick up downtown and keeps the cell phone camera pretty level. I practise with it to get a sense of it's frame rate and the optimal position to hold paperwork to get a reasonable facsimile in the recording. I sent a secure email to Joe to detail the plan I'm considering executing and so far he likes it. They might try to make the Chicago office vanish like the wind and this should nail them to the wall. Preparation takes a whole week and I think the carpenters were at the parish four score and ten by the time the week was up. That is while I hid in the guest bedroom in the manse of course. Well, to be honest I did peek outside the window to see Maggie. She was flying on angel wings most of the time when I seen her in front of the church. It's the supernatural hearing thing I caught every word. She said she is an angel princess flying on angel wings with mommie over New York city and all it's twinkling lights. My face went red, aw shucks. I love you too Maggie.

The day came to go to the Lorriatt Enterprises office. I timed it so that I arrived at about noon. I entered under the guise of an FBI investigator. I had the fake ID with my stuff from the Arcane that was sent to me a year ago after I had risen. As for the warrant I knew a guy in town that rolls immigration papers for illegal immigrants from across the border. It wasn't much of a problem for

him to roll me up a warrant. I got pretty much all the significant paperwork on video. It was just a matter of flip flip flip. I had my litigation briefcase with me so I filed a fair amount that was stamped or sealed. Through the resources of the Times I had documents, especially those signed or sealed, tested at a forensic facility and then returned to the Lorriatt office. The office manager took a moment with me and I explained we are investigating reports of organized crime locating an office front in the building but advised him that his office is in the clear. He breathed a sigh of relief, and shook my hand as he left. Well, job done.

Back at the manse I get myself all packed up and give father Forthill a hug before I leave. Father opens the door and bang there's Harry! Aw shit! Poof! I'm mist, and I float away on a breeze.

Harry said, "Hells bells father did you just see Susan? Was someone just there?" "No son, no-ones here I'm afraid. Do come in." "Give me a minute father, I think I just dropped something. I'll be in shortly." "Take your time son, it's a beautiful day today."

I looked as he put his head in his hands for a couple minutes. When he looked up his eyes were red and filled with tears. As I floated away I heard him say, "Pull yourself together Harry, she's gone, let her go."

If I had eyes at that moment, I would have wept too.

I considered the way things are now, again, so that I understood well why I haven't gone to him to explain

that I've returned with my spirit still intact. First thing he probably wouldn't believe me, or if he did he would never believe I was anything but a full red court vampire. Second, I have my own life now and I'm very happy. I'm where I want to be in my career, and have a chance to make a difference in the world both as a journalist and as a leader of the vampire courts. I can't re-enter a relationship with him all the way out here and he has his own place in the world right here and I don't think he would ever move. Third Maggie has an excellent home, more than I could ever give her, close to her daddy and her mommie plays with her every night in her dreams. She has both her parents in her life insomuch as it is possible. Lastly, although I know there are more reasons Harry lives his life on the edge, he walks on the edge of a sword and if he leans too far one way or the other he is sure to be killed. It would destroy me and Maggie both and I'm unwilling to go through that although I would be there for Maggie without hesitation. As father Forthill told me stay safe Susan, if the worst happens and Harry is gone at least Maggie will have one parent left in this world.

I fly back to New York city and played with Maggie in her dream world. Well I'm halfway there, just need to write up the story so I'm going to be commuting to the office for a while to get the story written up. It took me a week and a half working full days to get it all right. I passed it to Joe who worked it over and it was in the paper the next day.

You could hear the shit rolling all the way to the governors office. FBI investigations dug up even more than I

did writing the story. Mass corruption in the Sing Sing administrative pool triggered a mass firing and replacement of the existing staff, as well as placing New York state department of corrections under investigation for fraud in general. The negative publicity destroyed Lorriatt Enterprises and a significant part of the Raith power base with it. Executives went on trial for crimes against humanity, although there still didn't exist any causal link in the smoking gun sense there was massive evidence in documentation and email transactions that destroyed them.

I just executed an earth shaking power move that crippled house Raith and cemented a high degree of respect for me from the entire white court. The white king himself along with his daughter Lara declared their intention to parley and we met at Kenworth's pub to negotiate a private allegiance to the empire. So the matter won't be public, and the white king will remain the white king because he has access to the resources of the empire to protect the position of his house.

A small note, in the white court members of the empire are called imperialists and I plan on using that for colloquial reference to members of the empire internally just because I think it's rather cool, and a good definitive way for us to identify ourselves and each other.

Although the white court wasn't present when I returned to my house, at the news a scourge returned with a small gathering of prey picked from the murderers, rapists, predatory pedophiles and other wonderful fellows who were present in the city. There was a great feast

in celebration of the great victory and acquisition of a white court house into our glorious empire. I abstained from the blood-letting and joined Phil on the balcony that sits off the 2nd floor (due to a floor collapse) and observed the celebrations sharing a glass of wine with each other.

I BRUTALLY LOVE YOU

I went out tonight with my friends from the times. It is great to get out and party again, meet new people, and have some laughs. I see something mighty fine at the bar, I walk up, and offer him a drink. Hey, it's the 21st century women can walk up, grab them, and take them home now. Besides i'm about as courageous as they come. He accepts my company with a smile. He introduces himself as Steve and he is passing through town. This little pub is a rather classy one so I wasn't surprised that he is a neurologist by trade. This guy is pretty awesome I haven't laughed so much in a long time and oh my god he's gorgeous. I wanted to drag him to my place by his shirt collar but easy there Susan. We did dinally leave for some coffee where we could talk in a quieter more

comfortable environment. I made some little hints then went with taking his hands in mine and smiling ear to ear. He got the point. We leaned in for a kiss and it was wonderful. He doesn't look enthralled. I dropped a fork so I could check his aura and be sure. He has the heart of an angel, and is overflowing with life force. Oh yummy. I drooled, shook my head to pull back the romantic mood and he hands back my fork. I'm looking right into his eyes, into deep pools of passion, so masculine and strong. He radiates confidence and I don't need my sight to know it. I take him with my hands behind his head and draw him into a powerful deep kiss.

"Wow! Susan you have a real fire in you! Did you want leave for somewhere private? a casual walk in Central park?"

"Yeah, my place or yours?"

"Whoa, easy tiger, what about yours? I mean I'm staying in a hotel. It's kinda small and really hotels seem to invite a cheapness to any romantic rendezvous don't you think? I always want to make that real connection with someone."

"Well I only got an office desk slash bunkbed but I'm going to say this plainly. I'm starving to make that real connection so unless you have an objection I'm throwing down an exercise mat and my bearskin rug right in front of my crackling fireplace and declare it ready for lovin' "

"Holy crap!"

"Steve i work for one of the worlds most prestigious newspapers. I have an excellent salary and i work hard for every penny. I don't get much time to myself much less for romance and i think in your work you understand

what that means.”

“Yeah i do, it’s just that i’m not the kind of guy that can normally move that fast. I just don’t feel comfortable without that deeper connection.”

“Fine steve. Tell you what, I take you home. We get comfortable and we’ll keep right on getting to know each other. We do that while I eat you for supper figuratively speaking and whatever happens happens and what doesn’t happen is fine by me get it?”

“Yowzas, OK, I’m in.”

“Good let’s blow this place.”

The place we were at was right close to work and I live in hells kitchen. Steve’s in no rush so we walked, took us some time but it gives him a chance to make that connection with me. It’s been fucking years for me I’m gonna make a real connection with this guy in an entirely different kind of way. I’m needing him bad. Even the last time with Harry I was half turned and I was so sick with the hunger he had me tied up so i didn’t drink him dry. It was a release but i hope and pray this time the hunger doesn’t keep me from properly expressing my human sexuality.

We get to my place and there’s a bit of a chill. I move the two lounge chairs away from the fire and get it started. I go in the closet and practically hurl the exercise mats down, the bearskin rug and some cushions. In the same manner I practically hurl Steve down on the mat then vault into the air to land hard right beside him.

“Sooo travelling make you sore? Need some massaging maybe? If you just want to talk that’s ok too I got you here and we got all night all to ourselves.” I flick his nose

and giggle. He laughs hard, i don't think he's been in a situation like this before. I have to admit it's ridiculous, and enough to scare and intimidate a lot of men. Men are people, just like us women are, and i know how I'd feel. Well, players aside. He needs to get calm and comfortable, laugh, and have fun. I told him it didn't matter how much he's able to participate and from a self-confidence perspective it doesn't. There's nothing i need to prove to myself. From a human perspective though I want to give him every opportunity to be comfortable and express himself also when we play. It's just about decency to try to have an experience that can fully be shared, my last sexual encounter with Harry we had no choice but to restrain me, before that encounter I thought my sexuality would never find any release living infected with vampirism as I was just to dangerous to chance it.

"No no I'm ok, just maybe give me a few minutes"

I scared him.

"Steve, as in literally, if you're sore I'll massage you and I would enjoy doing that for you. For it's own sake."

"Oh I'm sorry i didn't mean to misread you."

Yup, scared. He has depth, a big heart, and deep respect for women. One of the elusive nice guys. I take his hands in mine.

"Ok steve, I'm about as forward as they come. I'm one of the good women though and I can see you're scared. You don't need to overthink that statement and presume it's an insult it's not. You're just human, a really decent guy and uncomfortable opening up very quickly. So this is what I think we should do. I have some massage oils

so I'm going to give you a massage all right? We can chat and anytime you like we can switch."

Yeah that's the trouble with nice guys. They could be army war heros strong and brave it's how they interact with women. They are suited well for marriage, family, sickness health and so on. These aren't girly men, maybe shy but not cowardly. When he finds love and marries he's going to love and abide his wife unfailingly to the grave. I think therefore it is lucky i found him now so i can enjoy fucking him before someone takes him off the market. So i go and get the oils leaving my clothes behind. I gently undress him, cuddle him and pretty soon he's returning the tenderness. I begin rubbing his shoulders, gently kissing his neck from time to time. It's quiet, we are just communicating by touch, and what we are saying to each other just seem much more understandable than with words. I massage his middle back and i can feel the tension subsiding. He sighs. I'm expressing patience and adoration to him. What i was trying to say in words he is finally understanding by touch. This is no hit and run sexual encounter I'm keeping him right here to enjoy. He turns to me and i can see he is much more comfortable. He takes my head into his hands and draws me closer. We share tender kisses together and look into each others eyes. We know the need in each other now. Sometimes you can see a soul through a persons eyes but it is no soulgaze. You see in the other yourself like through a hazy mirror. We are all the same beneath the flesh, every human soul and it's deepest part is the same as another. We both work difficult jobs and our need is the same. We

want and need to express ourselves sexually and at this moment in the unfathomable depths of his deep blue eyes I see him, and I see me, and I see we have found each other tonight. Almost instantly the fire of our needs ignite and he rolls me to the mat, he is on top of me and all i can think is let yourself go Steve, don't think just let it happen, dear god Steve let go. He goes down to suckle at my breast and i take a peek through my sight. I can see he's getting hot all right. Not fair to peek like this but i want to see if anything wrong is happening like a release of my venom into him. Still all clear thank god. I havent tasted that viscous venom so far I guess my body produces it as an emotional response. Dear god he's making me hot. I throw him passionately, but gently, onto the mat and start exploring his body with my lips. I can feel him quiver beneath me. Oh he tastes good. Working up i run my hands over that hairy chest and feel his pulse race. Oh i can smell that racing pulse smells good. Shit. Frick frick frick. I pull him right into me and I'm absolutely quivering with thirst, sucking my venom back in my mouth fangs hanging low as an indy car, eyes black as a coal mine. Christ what to do, what to do. He rolls me back down i close my eyes, pull my mouth closed and keep swallowing back venom like a glass of water. He goes down on me. Whoosh my reaction was immediate. He's the best i've ever known who have this skill. The bloodthirst converted back to raw passion and I was getting hot. Way hot. My vampiric senses were kicking in more the hotter i got giving even more sensual feedback sending me higher. To put it simply sex after

my change so far is many magnitudes better than it had been as a straight human.

Oh I need to taste those beautiful lips of his again, I rise up and kiss deeply and passionately I'm losing control and it feels so good. I draw back with his sweet taste on my lips my eyes closed. My heart is racing I look into his eyes.

His eyes have no iris and he is pale as a ghost. I'm inadvertently drawing life energy from him white court style.

Fuck fuck fuck Susan give it back holy christ!

During one of those knee jerk moments I do the impossible and start seeping the life energy back into him. I'm holding his mouth wide open to make sure he drinks deep. Using my vampire vision, now that i know i can do this reversal skill I top him back where he should be. I gasp hard and bring him into a gentle kiss, he pulls back from me and his eyes are back to normal. I push him gently back to the mat and resume kissing and nibbling on his neck. "oh my god susan after that last kiss my senses have come alive, i can feel everything magnitudes better, it's amazing, you're amazing!" Urk, I transferred my superhuman senses to him! Aargh! Without a word i come down beside him and just hold him.

"Susan are you ok?"

"steve i am, but i feel it too. I'm just taking a break, want a beer?"

"Yeah that was pretty powerful. You're shaking and your eyes look like saucers. You do need a break i can tell. sounds great."

Need a break? Oh Steve you have no idea thank god. That was like a movie, earnest goes to fuck. I tested him for increased sensory perception on our break and he was normal. I'm getting reschooled on how to fuck. Watch out for a sweet taste that's drawing life force directly like white court, stay focused and dont drift into blood hunger, my body reacts accordingly. stimulate stimulate is the answer. My increased senses take on a whole new meaning when it comes to sensitive. I can release his life energy back to him when we are intense we share our enhanced sensitivity sexually, maybe more. This makes one think about how i get cadaverous when i dont feed at all, solid or otherwise. That's Like a black court thing. I'm sharing aspects from different courts. Ok enough Susan you got a gorgeous guy here to play with so drink the beer with him and go play. Ain't nothing wrong when you're both having some good xlean fun.

So i experimmented. I don't know if it was fair to Steve. Rather dangerous in fact. A bit of a walk on the wild side. The white court propogates by normal human means. They fuck, conceive, then pop out babies. They don't turn. The aspect i have is blowing a kind of vampireform on Steve. The more i feed him the thicker the haze is on his aura. It disipates when i stop feeding him after a while or quickly if i get far enough away from him. The vampire form protects him from infection, sorry it was a huge risk but i took it and there you are. In a sense it protects him from vampiric death, if we do walk on the wild side neither one of us is going to kill the other. I mean talk about a mood breaker. It keeps me out of

bloodlust too, yay! That vampireform veils the human blood. Not to say the vampiric expression of passion done safely is anything but erotic it just means that expression is an erotic expression and not bloodlust. Oh, one other small thing. That mask prevents specific details from being memorable. He remembered bites and nibbles shared but the roars, black eyes and fangs, ferocity and bloodletting. I told him we were covered in naturopathic massage oil, i let the broken furniture stand though. He's got to have some stories to take back. Steve took me to school tonight, I learned about sex all over again. Gonna go get more of that. Nice guys only please.

"Thanks for cleaning up that massage oil Steve, that stuff can stain."

"Susan i swear that looks like blood. I don't remember any massage like this."

"Steve we've been pretty intense, I don't have any holes in me do you?"

"You're right. It's just been intense."

"Beer then round five?"

"Oh god yeah, i'm about ready for more now. So much energy and excitement!"

"Oh i know Steve, your my man tonight in ways you can't know."

Get that sweet ass on over here. I've not had any let it go and get it on sex in years. Haven't had any manly booty at all restrained or otherwise. I put a little more wood on the fire. He grabs me from behind and I laugh, I'm loving this. He draws in for a deep kiss. I pull him into my hips and he rolls down on me. I feel the penetration and squeal as

he goes at me hard. I roll over on top and tease him. Just slowly stimulating him to make him a little hungry. He rolls me forward with a ravenous kiss and teases me back with slow stimulation. I'm screaming, I'm going over the top, i land on him hard and begin kissing slow and deep. I'm stimulating him slowly and consistently. Then i take him deep. I'm navigating my passions well now. We're fucking slowly, I'm holding control while our hunger builds. I smile and purr. I think he's ready, we both are. I start the kiss and slowly continue our stimulation. I taste his sweetness and I draw him in deep. I break the kiss for a moment to savour the life energy while he enters a state of ecstasy and surrender. I gather up the sweetness in myself and return the kiss. I stimulate him more vigourously and drip the sweetness of my life essence onto his tongue. In his ecstatic state the sweetness of the lust I'm offering back he cannot refuse. The lustful energy I took from him was made mine and as he takes it all back he drinks my essence. I draw my lips away from his and look into his eyes. He is drinking deeply, that's right you take it all in, every drop. I see his eyes cloud over a little, and slowly grow black. He's drooling the fangs grow in and his fingernails lengthen. I can see him reacting to enhanced senses and his strength and speed are awesome. He hisses back at me and has me by the neck tearing me open. I'm aroused though. Arousal makes it feel really good, seriously, must be a vampire thing. The blood is kinda soaking us already. I tear him off by the hair, he growls, and it's my turn. I take his neck and plunge him to the floor. He moans in pleasure. He is,

well we are, soaked in each others blood and venom. As long as we have shared each others life energy though, we remain safe from hurting each other and the venom remains ineffective, other than being a natural body fluid and that's always something best shared. Heh. My wound has closed and is already healing over. His will soon too. I pull off him drenched in blood and gasp. I look down on him with his blood dripping down my chin. I'm purring looking into his eyes in absolute adoration. Yeah, I'm really taken by him, I can be freely sexual mind body and spirit with this man and that means a lot. I pull him into penetration again and I gasp, he is purring. My venom is pouring out we're covered. I roll and pull him on top of me and he throws me hard into the wall and roars and I roar right back. He leaps on me and throws me hard to the ground. I pull hard on his hair while his teeth are gnashing and smash his face to the floor. I pull him back and enter a deep kiss. We swap energy some more in the kiss. He tears my back open with his nails and I throw my head back screaming in pleasure. His venom starts to pour as he feels the release of blood from me and I'm licking the venom off his chest as it falls. I throw him to the floor in the process and ride him hard. It's his turn to scream in ecstasy now. He slams me to the ground and goes hard at me as his nails tear into my midsection, then he stimulates me while he licks slowly while his venom drips slowly into the wound. His venom is keeping the wound from sealing and that slow drinking is driving me wild, and the incredible texture of his venom on my skin. Get that, my human lovers venom

on my skin. I pull up from him panting in delight and take him into my arms kissing so deeply and lovingly I think he must be melting. It seemed like forever, pure heaven in his arms. I whisper to him, “slowly lover, gently enjoy.” And pull him to my neck. He plunged in and licked me up slowly. I pulled him slowly to the floor with me and rested, holding his hand while he slowly licked the bleeding. This is like a brief cooldown humans have holding each other with slow stimulation. Sharing is caring especially in this ultimate intimate act. God does that ever feel good. He lifts himself from my wound and we lay there in our blood holding our hands together looking into each others eyes quietly hissing. How much more romantic can you get? We bare our fangs to each other and he has such a beautiful set. He rolls back onto me and rides me slow, takes my hand in his and bites. As he’s slowly drinking I feel like I’m going to gush right there. I take his hand and do the same and now we are making love and drinking each other in deep. Slowly and deeply we continue until we can’t contain ourselves anymore and he rides hard to a finish. We go to the shower and clean ourselves up after and I pass him one of my bathrobes. Doesn’t fit right but it works. The effects of his drinking my life energy wear off quickly as I make some grilled cheese in the kitchen.

“Jesus Christ Susan it looks like we brutally murdered a blood bank in here!”

“I tripped on that massage oil, made quite the mess.”

“Susan the first time I thought I was dreaming. This was the fifth round and I remember clear as day what we

did.”

“Oops, welcome to the wonderful world of paraphilia?”

“Susan, I had fun, I enjoyed our time together. It’s only after the fact I kind of shudder and I don’t think this is paraphilia.”

“Well I’m sorry anyway.”

“Susan I don’t generally believe in spooks and monsters but you’re a vampire. Plain and simple.”

“No no I’m no vampire.”

“Susan just because I’ve never seen a camel doesn’t mean they don’t exist. If I seen a camel I would know it was a camel and tonight I met a vampire.”

“Well, ok. I get it. They tried to turn me once. I refused submit to the transformation. Until one day I got angry. But before I was fully transformed it went aury. Now I’m a human with, umm, benefits?”

“So you don’t feed on people is that what you’re saying.”

“Exactly. I could, realistically. But ew. No. I’m a little beyond that.”

“Beyond it?”

“Well yeah, I’m not half turned anymore I’m finally free, you know where I’m going?”

“Yeah I do. Everybody has their issues and my last three exgirlfriends were far worse off than you.”

“The nice guys always end up with the worst girls. Sad but true. I believe you.”

“How are you ever going to get this cleaned up? For that matter this is way too much blood and fluid to come from two people isn’t it? How could we suffer this much blood loss and not be in shock or something?”

“Steve, as for those last three questions, I have no fucking clue. If you find out tell me I want to know.”

“Susan, I really did have fun and if it’s OK I would like to see you again. I’m heading out tomorrow but I’ll be back in two weeks. Here’s my number please call.”

“I don’t know that country code Steve where is that?”

“It’s low earth orbit. I’m going to africa with doctors without borders. no cell service out there. It’s a satellite phone.”

“Oh, that sounds incredible!”

“I hope so, this is my first tour of duty with them.”

Wow, he is a really cool guy. Sounds like I might have made a boyfriend too even after all of this (I look at the floor. The walls. The ceiling.) How in gods green earth am I gonna clean up all this thick, drippy, goey, ichy blood and fluid? Oh god I’m just shutting myself in the bedroom tonight. I’ll take the day off tomorrow and figure it out. My god i haven’t felt this good, ever. period. Sorry harry I have loved you dearly but this is apples and oranges. I’m absolutely glowing and completely at peace. I just can’t stop smiling. It was a natural and mutually beneficial release for me and I feel united in body, mind and soul. I catch a drop of blood on my tongue as it fell from the ceiling, and lick my lips. Yummy. Bedtime. Next time Susan, now that I know how I party, let’s pick a better place than my living room.

I slept. For the first time since Chichén Itzá, I actually slept.

The next day I got up and had some breakfast trying not to drool. It smells great in here. I was about to start the cleanup when a realization hit me like a locomotive. I don't bleed. I'm a vampire I don't have blood. I'm not supposed to bleed human blood for sure I have a red court heritage. I go back to the kitchen and bite my lip and slice myself up like a slasher flick. long or short, wide or narrow, shallow or deep my wounds healed shut right away. I held a deeper wound open and it was like meat with a greased up innertube backing no living tissue. That's what I expected. That's normal as I know it. Well Steve is off for a couple weeks and I'm going to a conference tomorrow for a week in Vegas. "New Innovations in the field of Journalism." I'm kind of looking forward to it actually. OK, so I gather a ton of samples and samples of my DNA from when I was infected and human. I grab something of Steve too. I remember I guy from when I was in Chicago who works in forensics analysis. I E-Mail him and he said he should be able to isolate fluids and DNA within about a week, probably less. So then I finish a little more cleaning mostly involving throwing out anything that isn't nailed down. I got back and did some proofing and copy editing at work to burn some time while I stripped the walls, plastered and re pasted fresh wallpaper. I hand painted the ceiling nice and thick, sanded the floors, and other such minor cleaning tasks. It looked really nice and fresh when I was done. I got word back in E-Mail the materials I forwarded have male DNA matching Steve both blood and fluid samples including sexual fluids like semen. I expected that. What I did not

expect was the samples of the female matched the sample given and approximate age differs where the DNA sample given was from a woman in her 30's but sample of blood and fluid is consistent with an early 20 year old female and the fluids are consistent with healthy sexual fluids including vaginal. My DNA from when I was human was a perfect match to what I let loose last night and one other little tidbit. The fluid showed me to be in my fertile cycle. I haven't had any goddamned cycle since I completed the change, I don't know what the hell this is.

I let out a yell right where I stood "Eury! Holy shit I need you!" the most I can say is it wasn't like he bothered with a portal he was not there then in a moment he was just there, pop.

"Jesus, that was fast."

"You called. You don't normally call often."

"Eury I'm having female problems."

He chokes.

"Heh. I don't know much in that area. I'll get Unsere she's a nice lady."

"How long?"

"Hard to say, hopefully not long. I can always offer you moral support. Go get 'em tiger!"

"Oh for fuck sake. I understand though Eury women shit ain't your bag, just no experience with owning such equipment."

"Yes, that would be it."

"Steve's coming home tomorrow so I just hope he calls like he said."

"I do too, you need a man."

“Christ Eury that didn’t come out gentle, but I know where you’re going and yeah you’re right”

Then again I’m horrified that I may end up being some glittery twilight vampire. ew. I smile at the fact that we are going to need protection though. god, i remember the forest gump movie. the part where he said life is like a box of xhocolates, you never know what you’re g9nna get. for me since my saxrifice i’ve gone through a whole skid of choxolates and it looks like another one is on the wqy.

Steve called! holy sheep shit! I invite him over to my apartment. He seems in good spirits.

“Sorry I didn’t call while I was gone. We were in a war-zone and the casualties were high. I don’t think i slept until i was on the plane home. I called as soon as I hit the ground though I was thinking of you.”

“I was too, I thought this might be a good time to tell my whole story.”

So I tell her my entire life story. Or at least anything of value. He doesn’t react too much.

“Steve, I kinda expected more reaction. Are you ok with everything.”

“Yeah. Everyone has a history Susan, I’m glad I know now but to us right here right now it is of no consequence except to help bring us closer. I think that’s the story of a wonderful and decent person, I mean you fought in a war to save and defend people that aren’t your own.”

“You’re right, I’m very proud of that. Umm Steve there

is one other thing you should know that I found out while I was gone.”

“Sounds like your telling your test was positive.”

“Oh God don’t joke. I don’t have blood steve.”

“You need more iron in your diet.”

“Oh my god stop. what a buffoon. no i mean i have a red court vampire heritage.”

“The bastards you were fighting. I remember.”

“A red court vampire never had blood. zero. zilch. leather and slime.”

“Ew. So what was that a couple weeks ago? I tasted you, we bled together?”

“I sent our joy juices off for testing. nothing wrong with you. i came back with my original human preinfected dna apparently from when i was a 20 year old woman. vaginal and other sexual juices were present and i came back as being in my fertile cycle.”

“You poked a thumb and sent it off?”

“No i had to use what we left that night to send off. i still have no blood, no matter how i slice and dice myself it just heals over without blood. the event was absolutely singular in it’s nature.”

“So basically your telling me that the two of us...”

“If it is what it seems, it’s possible we might, remotely conceivable we could, have a family together.”

I don’t think I’ve ever seen a man glow like that. It’s like someone just gave him his whole life of hopes and dreams on a platter.

“Steve, are you ok? We don’t know ok don’t buy too much into it. We just met too, like I’m gonna keep you I

think you're the cat's meow but don't set yourself up for something only to be disappointed."

"Susan, I've wanted my whole life just to settle down with a nice girl. The sew your wild oats thing just isn't me. I hate dating and I have no idea how to go about finding a casual encounter. I work all the time and i have a high income, i just don't want to be alone anymore. Getting out more won't help i don't know what i'm doing out there. The women i have known were psychopaths and in a few cases i can only say i'm glad to have made it out alive. I've finally met a normal girl and i'm just completely swept away by you. I really don't give a damn about the vampire thing we've had a hell of a lot of fun together and my commitment was pending since high school waiting for the right girl for me so if you choose to take me off this God awful meat market i'll go with you without hesitation if you truly are the girl I see before me."

"Steve you should be in high demand, you're a choice grade A male. You're gorgeous as hell, loving and supportive. You have an incredible personality, and are hard working and pretend i didn't say high earning. What the fuck man what's going wrong? I was sure I was only going to get that one time to play before you met your queen of everything. everything about you screams winner. You're better than next years bachelor on the same named television reality show."

"Susan I don't know. maybe it's the INTJ personality type, but I'm sticking harder to you than a cop to Dunkin Donuts. I think you're going to make me happy and if you do, i'll make a home with you."

“Wow, take the foot off the gas pedal romeo lets get out together some more. if work doesn’t interfere we could fo everyday, if you want we could stay at each others place often or not. just don’t launch us too hard sweetie we might crash. We have my place here, your place wherever that is, and my other home in red hook.”

“Is your other place large?”

“Huge, Gargantuan, I share it with other people and I have exclusive use for part of it.”

“Could we maybe have somewhere to play there that’s safe? I can’t imagine how much work it must have been to get that much blood cleaned out of this apartment.”

“hmm, you’re right. Why didn’t I think of that. Let me make a call.” I contacted the sargeant for my scourge in red hook.

“When can we go Steve?”

“Well right now I guess. I just got back and I don’t start back at work until monday coming.”

“Sounds awesome, now here’s another challenge for you. There is a scourge of black court vampires there loyal to me. You’ve never actually met one of them yet. I’m having the sargeant meet me on the premises and the rest are to remain hidden. They are literally walking cadavers and the smell is horrific. Do you have a good strong cigar?”

“I don’t smoke, so no why?”

“You should grab a small one. a couple puffs of a strong cigar might keep you from hurling the days meals.”

“That bad?”

“You better believe it.”

Well he hurled. Right on the second floor of my living

area. What smells worse my stinky child or the half digested fish on the floor. I was literally weeping. Steve rested in my bedroom while we decided with sarg what we wanted to build. We decided on steel on 4 sides. We acquired some brothel ezclean vynal furnature, cushions and mats that can practically be hosed down. Got an old pressure washer from one of the adjacent buildings so we can clean up quickly. Me and the sargeant tested things tooth fang and claw and it held well. The sargeant asked what the structure was for in a submissive tone. I took Steve's hand and kissed it. Sarg broke his accent as he walked away, "Har har har, aye mine queen, thar be the way vampires play. And our queen takes her fine mate to play in a room of plate steel."

"Sarg really likes you Steve."

"I wish I could say the same. He's one of your own?"

"No completely different species. Well, still one of my kids though if that's what you mean."

I tell him of the vampire courts. He was fascinated by the white court, from our playtime experience. I said I'm curious about it too and left it at that. We retire to the main bedroom together to talk and watch tv. Much of the time we were falling all over ourselves talking and laughing. We ended up falling asleep together. It's Saturday and we both have the weekend. We play the next morning in a simple human way and it was very nice. He is such a very quiet, sensitive and sweet man. I just don't feel i deserve him, he should be with a ten out of ten woman settled with a picket fence and kids but I can't provide any of that. All he cares about is being with me though,

and I won't ever give him up. I just can't. I yearn to move beyond the human sexuality again, i need to bleed for him again, to tear each other apart. To, well, take a walk on the wild side again in our new love cage.

"Susan I want to set up practise in town, well, I know it's crazy fast but maybe I could move in with you here?"

"The stinky vampires aren't an issue?"

"Do they have to be?"

"I guess not. I'll make sure it's well known you're my mate they will give you great respect. I've taught them to have respect for the prey anyway but every little bit helps."

"You really love them don't you? You want vampires and humans to have a mutually beneficial relationship."

"Yeah I do. I'm both human and vampire and as much as I work to reconcile myself I try to reconcile the vampire with the prey and the world around us. To bring us vampires a better life for ourselves and bring about a positive change in our world. I love my children and I want the best for them, to teach them our own manner of goodness and to be faithful shephards of our prey. I think it might sound like madness but I have faith in them."

"Susan that sounds about as human as it gets, you really love them as their mother and trying to guide them and teach them to live a decent life. As a human I would have to say I am greatly in your debt for your manner of leadership. Also as a human I am humbled that my human mate, at least in spirit, is such a powerful and decent leader. Incredible."

"Oh my God thank you Steve! You really mean it?"

You're thankful I'm leading them?"

"I shudder to think if someone else were to take leadership what might happen in the world."

"Steve, as the days go by I find I'm more and more in danger of falling in love with you."

"I'm very nearly there already Susan, there truly can't be any other woman like you."

IO

THE DEVIL WENT DOWN TO GEORGIA

Steve wanted to go down for me to meet his folks. I think it might be a little soon but he says no they'll love me. He warns me that they're very devout Southern Baptists so I have to be on my best behaviour. I say, "Christ Steve how's this gonna work? Tell them I only eat catholics?"

"Probably best to keep the vampire identity under your hat. Remember it's not like I'm innocent either."

"Well..."

"Trust me, it wouldn't matter to them who we eat even if it's just that we eat each other when we fuck. Think

about it Susan.”

“Point taken, but the teeth?”

“Uncle Remy had grossly enlarged canines. He was born that way. I’ve been chatting with them ahead of time just in case. They think you’re completely normal. If I didn’t know better I would think you were completely normal.”

“Well shit thanks. I’ll see if I can trade off the story the Times has me on for something in the south and maybe we can work it in.”

“Sounds great!”

“Steve do they have ten thousand crosses, I’m allergic.”

“One or two in each room.”

“That I think I can handle.”

“Good start then. Lets see what we can do.”

“Your uncle had fangs?”

“Yup, the congregation wanted to put him out for being in league with the devil but my family worked hard to keep him in the church. There’s still rumors that goes around twenty years later though.”

“Jesus, nice place.”

“nothing perfect, and don’t forget to watch the language there.”

“Oh right. Gee, nice place.”

“Better.”

So I trade off a story for one about southern states and the modern day satanic-panic phenomenon. Actually sparks my interest anyway I’m glad to make the trade. Steve’s family would be a good source too by the sounds of it. I’ll bring my Daemonic paraphernalia along with my knitting and such one for a good impression and the

other to find the paranoid southerners. Well, and to be closer to Eury that helps.

Eury comes over the night before the trip. We are driving down in Steve's Caddy. We both make really good money and have some nice things but we also live simply and save most of it. Me and Phil try and support our own house, the black court scourge, which puts some use to it. Steve just puts it in the bank and invests in things he uses for travelling which has been his life. He wants to settle down into private practice in New York though so we can be together. I love him for that.

"Let me pass on some rites to protect you down there Susan, first off is the rite for the blessing of water. It's unholy water you can use for healing and protection."

"Well fucking eh, unholy water? Seriously?"

"yes quite. created by the blessing of the dæmon of water."

"Who is this dæmon of water?"

"Don't be upset, his name is in the bible but it gets slandered a bit. Well, a lot. Used as one of many as a representation of worldly evil. Leviathan."

"Jesus fucking christ on a stick the dæmon of water is the fucking chaos dragon? Jesus, Mary and Joseph that's troubling Eury."

"Don't be troubled, you've known me for a little while now and he's my brother and yours too. He looks a little goth if you ever meet him and he's ambiguous by nature so you may meet and work with his feminine aspect instead it's all according to how your soul resonates with him."

“Weird, but I trust you Eury. You, Balberith and Babeal have been good to me and we fought together.”

“That’s true, there are other names you know as well who you haven’t met. Lucifer is the dæmon governing air, he is not satan like the bible has referred to him. He has been an ancient light god and that is what the name translates to. The bringer of light. He brings wisdom too.”

“What about Satan?”

“Whose name translates to adversary. There is quite the history there. There is a satan that is our emperor, the ruler of all that is, but he channels energy from “The All” to sustain creation. depending on how your spirituality developed The All could be an unintelligent energy, an intelligent spirit like the spirit everywhere of the native peoples or just simply the Christian God. A basic understanding of him is that he is representative of the left hand path and so the lawful adversary of the right hand path. The right often uses him as a scapegoat because his ways lead followers of the right hand path astray of their path to salvation. the opposite is true as well.”

“I don’t think the concept of Satan serving God is a sane one.”

“Look at the dialogue of Job which is fairly accurate compared to the the figurative representation of the new testament. There’s a startling difference.”

“It still sounds like I’m allied with hell, satan, and all his minions.”

“Some of our followers don’t even have satan in their hierarchy at all, and just work with us dæmons. Everyone

follows their own path in life each of which is very different from the other. There is only one road to a happy afterlife, you either walk on the left or the right.”

“What are the core things about the left?”

“Well let’s compare, know that left hand path exists in all religions really just often in obscure more hidden traditions, Buddhism, hindu, muslim, and so on. release attachment to the things of this world by indulging and making them boring rather than on the right which uses avoidance. Break every social norm and taboo possible for the same reason. Know that you are a God from birth and perfect yourself through faith and sorcery versus we are made in Gods image and acting accordingly, both different views of the same road. It is a path of the self which means self worship, we love ourselves for who we are. The great work in life is to come to union with our higher self sometimes called the holy guardian angel and that is to be made perfect and whole and fully developed in our Godhood versus seeking union with God, the path to finding the holy guardian angel is to seek and gain personal power. Everyone seeks to find enlightenment and prepare for the life to come those are some of the ways it’s done on the left hand path.”

“I think I kind of get the idea, I’ve never been big on religion and philosophy stuff so I can go with that.”

“The faith is no different than you’ve been doing except to you we demonstrate theophany which kind of negates the faith aspect. Anyone can believe in something they see and know by their senses, like a kitchen table, it’s existence is obvious.”

“Eury who are you guys really, I’ve known you long enough to accept you for who you are and I want to know my brothers and sisters better.”

“Well your earthly dæmonolaters are scattered and few. Those few that have the numbers form covens like witches otherwise most our followers follow down through family lines.”

“You guys then?”

“We are the first ones. The first Gods to come to be after the passing of the old ones. Dæmon means replete with wisdom. My sister, the old ones were the darkness and we were born in the coming of the light. The Gods who are ancient only represent us, such as the Gods of life and death, or sea, or sky.”

He continues, “Among the Dæmons there are many. We are the death and life, light and darkness and wisdom and life of the world. We are healing, harm, hate, lust and love. These are not things we hold influence over. Please understand that we do not represent these but that we are these things. Do you understand?”

“So the Dæmon of the sea, since he in truth is the sea, without him there would be no sea?”

“Exactly. Then for me, Balberith and Babeal we are death, dying and the grave respectively. Balberith has been popularized as the grim reaper as of late but his place is to guide souls in their journey not to reap them.”

I felt, and probably looked, like I just seen someone punch a baby.

“Yes Susan you fought along side of us. You fought as a champion of death but you did not know it.”

“I don’t get it, you guys have been nothing but sweet and caring to me.”

“Right, that’s who we really are, the way death is. We are all very kind and look to embrace and comfort those who suffer loss, and bring loving guidance to those who have passed and are confused and frightened in the face of something they don’t know. Death is not an evil Susan, it is part of the natural life cycle. It exists alongside birth and parenthood. As death incarnate our influence is often corrupted in the world by those who wish to control the life cycle. The vampires take but do not return as they are immortal and disrupt the natural flow of the life cycle. It hurts us Susan when the natural balance is broken. For the three of us we hope you will continue to fight with us to keep your immortal children from harming the natural world. If they are born, and they eat, they also must die to release the energy back to the mortal world’s lifecycle. If they wish to live forever may they live upon the nevernever there is no place for permanence here. You are our hope to preserve the cycle of life Susan.”

“Good Lord Eury, I can’t say I follow exactly what you said but it sounds like you are asking me to preserve a balance in the human vampire dichotomy.”

“That’s exactly it. Don’t let there be many millenia of feedings of one vampire death should visit them also so the life cycle isn’t harmed.”

“So basically do what I’m doing, cull our numbers, manage our spawning, protect the prey and don’t overfeed.”

“Bang on Susan, you’re keeping the balance like we knew you would.”

I picked up a little reading on psychology to learn more about what Steve was referring to the other day, his INTJ personality type. I got a lot of Jung which I always thought was some chinese guy but actually he was European. I kinda feel like a ditz.



On the road trip down I started wondering about myself again. about the likelihood of having experienced the fusion of my soul to a vampiric body. I just don't think it was an unintentional event. I love Eury to pieces but I think all in all I may misunderstand him or he may just simply not be entirely correct. Like some part of what he says is not within his competence. What does death have to do with fertility? Oh sure it's part of the mortal life cycle I know that and maybe there is a little crossover but really I wouldn't expect Eury to know much about that field of expertise he isn't God with a capital 'G'.

I'm thinking too about the first ones, Eury and his ilk, the first of all ancient gods. Would they have more power than earth and the nevernever combined? I mean really earth and the nevernever both have air, water, earth and fire. The nevernever has all the things that might be expected on earth so the authority of the first ones would naturally extend throughout the whole of the nevernever right? I mean of course God himself is king and all that shit but I think Eury and all his brothers and sisters sure must have a lot of juju. I'm glad they are in my life to guide me in the power that has been given to me, I need

their experience and wisdom. For that matter while we're on the subject who are the great old ones? Eury has mentioned them and they seem to be epic bad news. It's just that me being what I am I will likely come to face them in some way and it would be nice some day soon to learn about them so I'm ready when that day does come.

Not that I'm looking to pick a fight, there is wisdom in the words that say no matter how strong you are there is always someone stronger out there. I think that little piece of advice is what I consider when I'm looking at doing superhero stuff. Like I said to, I think it was Jose, I bring big change in the world just by being a journalist. I don't need superpowers to topple corruption and end atrocities.

We took one break on the drive down for gas, food, and to switch from him to me driving. Another 4 hours or so we're going to pull into a motel for the night. We're probably going to be too tired to party though road trips can be exhausting. I still enjoy the time with him though we chat it up a bit on the way and I had time to read. Eury told me a good book on how to grow spiritually is called the hermetica. So I got a copy but personally I find it a hard read.

So we pull into Roanoke for the night and we are pretty beat. Neither one of us feels relaxed and our muscles are pulled tight as a fiddle. I mean like there are always some reservations in meeting the family-in-law for the first time but bringing home a vampire is a little difficult. Presuming a person is going to believe the fact that you're a vampire there is a certain stigma associated with meeting

someone higher up on the food chain than you are. Of meeting a creature that really should not be. Something that for all your worldly wisdom is beyond comprehension.

So that night I didn't sleep at all, I just meditated. For the first time I seen Steve not able to sleep at all either. Well maybe two or three hours but that's all. He read, watched TV, hacked away at his laptop, basically just burning time until morning in frustration.

The next day I offered to drive the rest of the way but Steve absolutely refused to. He was determined that we will share the driving. I don't really need sleep and I said to him, "Come on Steve I can run on no rest at all. I'm fine to drive you're not."

"Susan we need to be partners, it would be easy for me just to let you do everything you have been greatly gifted in many ways but that doesn't make for a good partnership. Yes I'm tired but let me be tired. I'll drive this leg of the journey if you keep me occupied or just keep talking to keep me alert that's all I would ask of you."

"Ok, deal. If you drive off on the shoulder of the road though I'm taking over no argument."

"Ok, I can agree to that too. So let's get going it's another days journey to get to my parents place."

So that was the end of it. He had a satellite radio so we switched off the music to go to talk radio and we just talked and, God help us, argued for quite a bit of the trip. At some point during his leg of the trip I brought up the personality type reading I've been doing.

"So you said you were INTJ Steve?"

“Yeah, why do you ask?”

“Oh I’ve just been reading up on the psychology of the thing. I mean, I’m not the brightest bulb on the subject but I also went to forums and it looks fascinating, and very painful.”

“Uh, painful? How?”

“Well, the social difficulties, inability to navigate or engage in smalltalk, that stuff.”

“Ungh, agreed. I spent years blaming myself for inadequacies in that area. The impact on my social life in general not the least of which finding a romantic partner has been horrific.”

“I know, you’ve been pretty open about your struggles. You’ve been spitting distance from having ass burgers.”

“Uh, Susan, that’s not exactly the pronunciation.”

“You’ll have to give me a break there Steve, I don’t know psych well and that’s the only way I can remember the condition.”

Steve chuckles, “I can see you’re point there.”

“So then, I’ve been thinking about how I can help you heal over that rocky past because I’ve seen how much you hurt when you’re reminded of other peoples normal social and romantic experiences. Especially in the casual encounter area. Not a big deal I can understand that I’ve just been lucky is all my social capacity has been good.”

Steve is starting to turn red, “Look Susan enough, I don’t need to know about anybodies awesome experiences or skills in ‘the game’. I’m not ever going to have the life that includes romantic partners outside of what few decide to pick me up and take me home. As far as

I'm concerned that's you and maybe a couple of batshit crazy psychos. I've just been lucky I didn't get stuck with some plain jane broad that borders on asexuality. I've just got to accept my life as it is and thank God almighty I have you in my life and I'm finally out of the single life permanently. I hated being single even from high school, I never met anyone or had any enjoyment of it but rather incessant loneliness and misery. I just wish you were around when I was leaving high school I could have done much better in my studies without the constant romantic preoccupation."

"Steve if I was there with you going into college I don't think you would have done better in your studies. I remember how I was at that age."

"Goddammit Susan that's what I'm talking about. I was sitting alone while you were enjoying your life meeting guys and getting laid. The fact that it's generally assumed all young guys want to do is fuck would seem to deliver you with every opportunity in the world as it would for any young girl who wants to get laid."

"Well if I went down that road I'd have some kind of reputation Steve, there would be little chance of having a decent relationship in college if I'm the campus cum bucket."

Steve is rather angry right now, not at me, but just at the way his life turned out romantically. I know why now and like I mentioned I feel bad but as awful as he is socially that particular personality type is also called the 'mastermind'. Steve is a borderline genius, his mind works in powerfully logical ways and anything related to learning he picks up

like a computer. He self-taught himself college material that in theory might have given him a bachelors degree in whatever given subject by default. He took final exams he obtained once and scored better than the average college student from self study alone. Like Christ Steve smart much?

“So anyway Steve this is how I’m going to work it out. I’m not going to let you quietly suffer and I would like to have you consider our relationship as a good match for it’s own sake and not divine salvation from the horrors of the single life. Not when you’re coming from where you are. So here’s what I’m arranging. I found a sex club named ‘freedom manor’ that we’re going to go to. You can have a chance for free sexual expression there to heal old wounds and we can come at our relationship from a more balanced perspective. It’s a really nice place, an actual edwardian mansion converted to a spa with a year round warm as bath water pool with toys like water noodles, beach balls and super soaker water guns. Seriously, they have water guns. They have a sauna, hot tub, showers and bar. There’s large playrooms, it’s safe and there are love gloves everywhere. It’s got normal lighting, modern rock music playing at a sane volume, open all day and well into the night. I’m planning for us to go out on a Thursday night soon there’s going to be an evening of spank and tickle school, as well as games for prizes like lick the melon and suck the banana. Oh and naked twister. You’ll like naked twister.”

“Jesus fucking Christ Susan! I know you’re trying to keep me awake but fuck me gently woman!”

"You bet I will sexy."

"Ah hell, I'm not gonna win am I?"

"No you're not. I'm gonna get you laid so much you'll be walking like John Wayne, then we can look each other in the eye and build a solid relationship together without you feeling like I'm an escape from a life you hate. It just isn't a good foundation to build from."

"Bloody hell Susan."

"Same to you sweetie."

"The problem is I'm never approached. I'm really not that good looking."

"I read the material Steve, you've been approached, you just didn't pick up on the non-verbal cues. You don't have that instinct. I know that pretty clearly Steve you look like a god-damned movie star, like a sexier version of Matthew McConaughey. You got the looks Steve you need somewhere safe with the greatest opportunity. It will happen, trust me."

"I seriously doubt that, you look like a sexier version of Rosario Dawson you could pull down serious booty if you wanted."

"Don't want it. I've had that time in my life when I was younger I just want a good man and a good solid relationship now. It's your time for booty and if I have to drag you kicking and screaming I'm gonna get you some. Rosario Dawson huh? Well aren't we the rich and sexy match made for Hollywood."

"You betcha."



Well Steve took over driving near Atlanta as his folks actually live in a rural area just outside of there. It was easier that way rather than him telling me to turn here or there or what did you go there for. You know the drill, relationships. It was like a rerun of the movie sweet home Alabama they were back country folk and there was definitely a cross in every room and bible verses on plaques mounted on the walls. They had brother Stair playing on the radio and I don't see a TV in any of the rooms in the house. There are the odd bookshelves which look like an evangelical theologians dream come true. I did find an awkward comfort in the floral print wallpaper, doilies, knitting basket and hand knitted items in the house. His dad was here, Peter. His mom, Mary, is due back tonight as she's picking raspberries on the fence-line behind the property. His dad said leave her be she has always needed alone time and picking berries is something he knows represents that alone time for her.

So I pick out my knitting supplies and sit down in a rocking chair. I'm working on an afghan for myself and I figured it was as good a time as any to get ahead on it. I'm wearing a vintage ankle length dress with floral print. Basically I have the spinster look. I wasn't sure what to expect so I decided to make a nod towards Amish fashion then turn it up a notch later. Steve's dad looked at me, then looked at him, and said in a very clear voice, "This ones a heck of a lot better Steve, where'd you pick her up?"

I made a chuckle which his dad took as being coy but I was actually thinking of the conversation on the way in.

"You don't want to know dad"

"Oh, she doesn't look like the type. She looks rather wholesome in fact. I guess one can't really tell now a days but she still is a heck of a lot better than you're past entanglements."

"There's no need bringing up the past dad it's all water under the bridge, I've moved on and found better."

"I'm glad you learn from your mistakes son."

"Enough dad, how are you and mom doing?"

"We all are fending ok here, nothing changes and that's the way we likes it."

"I know, stable and God-fearing makes for a good home."

"Darn right son. Darn right."

"Fishing been good?"

"Haven't hardly caught a blessed thing this year boy, been a bad year for that."

"That's too bad. What's going on around?"

"Been something out in them fields around here the last few weeks. I think it's the work of the devil out there but I can't prove it. It comes at night and smells like death out there. Ain't bothered nobody as of yet 'cept some mexican workers gone missing. No offence to you Ma'am."

"None taken, I'm American born in New York city so I'm really not Mexican by any stretch of the imagination."

"Ah, a yank born and raised. I won't hold it against you. Pay no mind to the colors of the south in 'ere."

I notice that indeed there is a very prominent confederate flag mounted on one wall in the room.

"We all are proud southerners miss, and God-fearing

folk to boot. We all are good people so don't you worry your pretty little head about nothing here. I promise you a safe stay on my word."

"Thank you sir, it does ease my mind."

"Steve your girl surely does have some fine canines. We all miss your uncle Remy he was a good and faithful servant to the Lord. I have no doubt the Lord Jesus took him on into his glory, no I have no doubt at all he was a good man."

Steve's people are definitely all about Jesus, but the house isn't adorned with crosses like wallpaper so really, I do feel safe here. People of faith can be good people if they live true to what they believe, sadly so often they lead themselves into hypocrisy and persecutory beliefs.

I blurt, "They're good with steak."

Steve's dad lets out a hearty belly laugh, "I'll bet they would be miss, makes me jealous 'cause I love steak. It's by far me favourite food."

I let out a chuckle.

Mary walks in through the back porch, "Have you seen our boy and his new girl yet Peter? I hope this one's better than the others he brought home. They all needed Jesus the whole lot of them."

"They're here now Mary, You're gonna like this one she's a might Godly in her dress and deportment love."

Mary came in and looked at me. She must like me because I rarely saw such a smile and glow come from a potential in-law before. I'm adored here.

"Knitting an afghan I see dear. Have you been practising for very long?"

“Only for the past year or so. Something drew me to taking it up.”

“Wisdom and maturity I imagine. It is a very calming and meditative thing for me, helps me ponder Godly wonders it does.”

“It certainly is something to help one clear the mind, I agree on that.”

Mary sits down in the lounge chair beside me. Her dress is strikingly similar to my own. The floral pattern is different but the style of the dress is indistinguishable. She’s knitting a sweater and she picks up her work and starts in on it.

Steve’s dad pipes up, “Look at that son, I never could have imagined. The good Lord Jesus guided your eye to find this one. His mercy is endless, perhaps you have found your way out of your ungodly fornication and will settle down. You’ve been too long on the prowl son and the Lord seeks to share his mercy with you.”

I couldn’t stop the laughter that threatened to erupt in me so I clasped my hands to my mouth, bent over, and fought with every part of me to smother the howling laughter that threatened to explode into the room. Once I got myself under control I came back up, wiped the tears from my eyes and resumed my knitting.

“Oh my God dear, Peter you pig you offended this young lady terribly. She doesn’t need to hear such things about her suitor.”

“Oh I do apologize miss I forget myself. You needn’t hear such vulgar things said of our boy. I am deeply ashamed of my behaviour.”

“Thank you, you’re right I, uh, reacted to your words. I am of a timid sort. You said something about a foul thing in the fields earlier?”

“Yes, oh I did hear you were a journalist of course you would be interested in the mysterious. It’s been every two or three days the animals howl and make a terrible racket and I for one can see some thing that looks like a person in the field out there. It’s there one minute the gone the next. It’s always the same, the animals get upset and most of the time if I watch long enough it appears. Sometimes it takes hours but it will be there. I do go tend to the animals as I really don’t know what may be happening and I surely cannot afford to lose livestock.”

“Have you ever gone out into the field to investigate.”

“I have reason to go out to meet the devil himself, well enough I should be sure my family and possessions are safe and I return to the safety of the house to let it pass. We have a good home and Christ in our hearts no evil would dare pass our threshold the Lord protects us here.”

“What about your neighbours, you suggested they have similar troubles?”

“Yes, the neighbours to either side plus pretty well everyone one the sideroad over there beyond our land. People on the other side of the woodlot tell of trouble as well.”

“I’m going to go talk to these people over the next couple days then to find out what they know.”

“I had better take some time to tell you about them. A lot of the ones around me I am on good terms with and as a matter of fact play cards with on the weekend. Perhaps I may ask if I can bring you in on the next game you may

learn more about what's happening. Also there are certain neighbours you want to be careful of or avoid. Be careful of the hermit there, he greets visitors with a shotgun and has been known to make use of it. There are 2 spinsters one is known to be a witch it may be one to avoid and the other one is mad, she is known to have kidnapped a man and the sherriff only found his remains years after his death laying on her couch. Even so she is still living there. The other ones to be careful of are extremists in the faith, they think we all are devils especially due to poor old Remy. They see you and you might come back with buckshot up you skirt."

"Thanks for the warning. I'll let you map these places out for me tomorrow."

"That's no trouble at all Susan, I keep a topographical map here of the area that should work perfectly."



Well me and Steve are settling in for the night. We are both exhausted, all the lost sleep and nerves are catching up with us. I do my meditation with a handful of fallen leaves for the balancing circle. I don't want to leave something odd on the carpet and have to explain what's happening. Steve just got out of the shower and I went in first. So as I'm meditating he got dressed in his room and shuffles in with a book. Yes, his parents insisted that we have our own rooms to avoid the temptation to Godless behaviour. It's ok I expected that from religious people in their own home. As he settles in with the book I feel

the steam from his shower on my skin. He is out of the shower sitting here though and the shower is down the other end of the hall. I open my eyes and there is mist all around me.

“Steve do you see that mist?”

“Uh, sorry I was reading, yeah what is that Susan is it smoke?”

“No it is mist, I can feel the wet warmth of it, there’s no smell.”

The mist coalesces into the form of a person, and she walks out. She looks kind of irish, with pale skin and long silky brown hair with streaks of silver. Her eyes are as deep and green as the plains of Ireland. She is giving off an energy I can’t see, but feels gentle and nurturing. She is wearing a brilliant white cloak with a cowl like what you might think a druid might wear.

She speaks, “I an Unsere, the dæmon of fertility and sorcery. I am that very life force that brings forth new life and powers the modern magic of all known realms. You were asking for greater knowledge and understanding of yourself?”

“Ah, Eury sent you. Thanks for coming.”

“Eury?”

“Oh, er, Euronymous.”

“I see you two are close, perhaps someday he may be your counterpart dæmon.”

“When I know what that is I’ll consider it.”

“Yes granted you are young to our ways be patient sister, you have all the time in the world.”

“Your were saying then?”

“Thank you, yes it is rather complicated and your Eury knows only part and I too know only some. The first thing is you are a fusion of the human and vampiric though I think you probably know that.”

“Right yes, know that.”

“OK, so the vampire soul and your human soul together form a whole and your vampiric counterpart expresses itself through your subconscious unless it chooses to manifest.”

My blood, figuratively or otherwise, just turned to ice, “Whoa, you mean my vampiric mind is influencing my human soul right? Please say I’m right?”

“Uh oh. Eury seems to have missed something. No dear you are whole body mind and spirit human and vampire coexistent.”

I literally felt something roll over in the depths of me. Swear to fuck just get up and roll over right inside my psyche.

“Oh God, it’s alive, sweet Jesus say it ain’t so that thing has life in me. Oh God please get it out, don’t let me be like this...”

Unsere grabbed me quickly and held me for quite a while. Steve came in beside me to lend support. I started settling down after a while and Unsere continued still remaining close to me in case I needed her.

She continued, “I think I had better bring this together with an example so you can understand me better. I feel it in both of you that you are mates and have mated often yes?”

“I only answer as it may help you help me. Yes we mate

quite often.”

“Ok and I can see that fertile energy in your counterpart vampire soul as well, which means she has taken part in mating with Steve.”

“How in the fuck do you figure that? With none of my senses was I aware of any vampire with us and Steve didn’t get eaten alive I would have noticed that.”

“Aw but he must have, you pulled something from him. He doesn’t show any loss of life energy but it was still drawn from him, and giving back. Exchanged.”

“Right, but no vampire would give it back, and the vampire was red court. I remember the exchange of energies but it was precisely that energy. I was red court infected the red court drinks blood.”

“I think you may be making excuses at the moment. I understand your point but a jersey cow is no less a cow than a holstein. You are the great mother of the vampires and have been sought out by the black court despite there being no red court left. It isn’t about the court, by now you should see that.”

I felt a little defeated. I always hoped that eith the death of the red court none would follow me and I could return to my normal life wihen all this great mother controversy went away with the remaining courts. I guess I was in denial, but who can blame me? I’ve always wanted this to be over. Yes I’ve done something important in my life in fighting with the fellowship I wont deny that and I’ll always be proud. It’s just that every soldier at some point is going to get tired of war and wants to return to the peace. I do. I feel like Churchill if at some point

in the war the nazi's suddenly declared him Furor and waited on his command. How does this all make any sense? Not that I don't understand the theory as much as I don't understand why me. I mutter, "It's just hard Unsere, that's all."

"Well snap out of it Susan, you are a very courageous woman and you have more than enough grit to handle this. Just get over yourself and do what needs to be done. You have your life back, you also have other responsibilities. "

"You're right, I've been doing a lot of whining. I want to get back to a life before I was infected and now I have that plus a lot more in every way. I can lead, I don't know how to lead this many but I am doing ok so far and I'm learning."

"Exactly, I shudder to think if someone who wanted to lead such a dark and terrible force were to take power."

"I get it, you're right. I remember what Eury said too that I keep the natural balance. I understand, I've had enough time."

"Good, I'll continue then fussy britches. So you normally present yourself, unintentionally, with a human spirit and a vampire body. That's your normal state of being. If you desire something that is within the competence of the vampiric soul or human body then part or all of it is brought forth to execute it's function. It is not coercion. In your sexual act the human body emerged in response to you desire to mate with the human. It is the most pleasing way to submit to the act. In addition you desired to express your whole self as a person

including the vampiric so your counterpart soul came out to execute the steps to make it possible, as well as to engage in the sexual act with you giving the feedback you needed to feel complete in your sexual expression. That was the sense of it having been pleasing to all of you and the extent of the release you experienced.

She continues, “Look, it’s going to result in your having greater strength than you have ever known. you just have to make peace with yourself and with her. You have the capacity to reproduce pure human offspring or hybrid, pure being human sexual act or hybrid the sexual act you and steve have explored, or any court vampire or fae you choose such as white which require sexual acts or the blacks where a successful feeding will do. I’ll let you learn about these things.”

“What do you mean hybrid?”

“Think born infected with manageable hunger, like a hunger for junk food, feeding wont harm them they stay the same. powers are the same as an infected. steve would nurse it with his own blood until it could eat solid food.”

“Lovely. Want to make babies steve?”

“I’ll have to think about that one.”

“So I’m heavy one whole full court vampire.”

“quite.”

“Wait, did you say fae?”

“I see in you a strong sidhe ancestry.”

“From where? Did tinkerbelle fly up my ass on the alter of Chichén Itzá ?”

“Susan there are more mysteries yet to unfold in your life from the moment of your sacrifice at Chichén Itzá .

There were many hands in the pie that made you who
you are today.”

“Amen sister.”

II

A ROSE AMONG THE THORNS

We rose the next morning having fallen asleep on each other in a lump. We were exhausted just from the emotional toll of Unsere's visit. There was so much I didn't know and the truth was a mixed bag of hope and terror. There is a lot me and Steve will need to talk about once everything settles in properly. Steve's mom woke us up but didn't say much, either thinking I'm repentant living on God's mercy or considered that it looked like the two of us were hit with a strong dose of ether and just dropped hard where we were. Which was about as close to the truth as it gets.

Steve's dad is taking me out to the neighbours today, and Steve is going to try and shim up the longwire antenna for the shortwave radio. Televangelism will never die on the shortwave dial. After breakfast me and Steve's dad checked out the field. There are some footprints I do see. Human footprints, not heavy at all though they must be from a very frail person. They are coming from the wooded area, and seem to be migrating in a straight line.

"Peter whats out there?"

"It would be that huge farm where the migrant workers are."

"Hmm. You said there were some gone missing?"

"Half a dozen maybe, just up and vanished."

"How many reside out there?"

"It's a tent city, about 10 men there altogether."

"How long has it been since the men went missing?"

"About a month. Everyone is assuming they took off to get illegal papers, not thinking anything of it really."

"Ok well these prints go to and from that direction. When did the last man go missing?"

"Three weeks."

"Whats happened in three weeks, and rain, wind, anything that would remove these prints."

"We had a downpour a week back, these prints should in no way be here now if it was one of those men Susan assuming he really did take off."

"What kind of footwear do they have?"

"Construction boots, the family that owns the farm just wears sneakers."

"They don't do the same kind of work?"

"Well leave the heavy stuff for the paid help I guess, it's what their paid for."

"Reasonable enough I guess, they get a decent wage?"

He raises an eyebrow at me.

"Right, migrant workers in a tent. Needing more coffee."

"I'll put some on when we get back."

"OK so these tracks are consistent with work boots so may be a migrant worker. the workers may not be forthcoming if their own are helping them forge papers to get out. This would be the logical solution. Nonetheless until I see with my own eyes I won't presume. What is there in that tree lot?"

"Well it's about a mile or two in circumference but more of a rectangle. Just young growth in there, from maybe the past hundred years or so. It used to be a farm before the owner vanished."

"Fascinating, just like these migrant workers?"

"In a sense yes, but there hadn't been any such disappearances in those hundred years."

"Tell me about that farm, anything left of it?"

"Well the buildings still stand in there. Theres a small woodframe house standing attached to a horse shed. the barn is gone but the silo is there. There's an old mine that's been boarded up since before the farm even stood."

"A mine? Good place to hide, and a house even better."

"Not that house, it stands but with little of the roof left and most of the second floor collapsed."

"Walls intact?"

"Well, yeah, it's ok otherwise."

“Could provide shelter from wind and downpours, put up a tarp inside and it would be cozy enough.”

“anywhere in the wood should prove sufficient.”

“Not if all you have is a colorful tarp, you would stick out like a sore thumb. inside an abandoned house noone would see you unless they were on top of you.”

“Actually I didn’t think of that.”

“It’s a nice bright day, I say we check out the woods before we knock on doors.”

“We’re going home for some coffee and breakfast first, we’re going to need some nourishment. You like canadian bacon?”

“Do I ever! Anything that can be described as ‘bacon’ is going to ring my bell.”

It’s so nice to be able to still eat and enjoy normal food. Not everything has the etheric value I need but it still tastes so good. I’m glad for my life really, everything is like a dream. Whatever isn’t does not seem to be effecting me terribly. I may be the great mother but I love my children so I don’t really mind it much. Oddly it helps me express a nurturing side and reinforces a sense of my leadership competency that is important to my worldly success. Things are really coming together well for me. I just wish the kids didn’t smell so bad. They need bombing when they are young it would help so much. Working on it.

“Well, we should head out soon.”

“Let’s head out now while the light is good. If we time it right it is going to be high noon while we are exploring out there so lots of light to see what we are doing. Susan,

I just feel like it may be some ungodly creature we find and it is best to be found in the light of day.”

“I agree. Let’s go.”

So we head out, it doesn’t take us long to get to where we are going, and first stop is the old homestead. Peter was right, although it looked in good shape from a distance once you got to it the other side had collapsed making it look like a barbie house I played with when I was a little girl. Most of the second floor was gone the remaining sagged precariously. The third floor was completely bowed with rotting floorboard. Graffiti covered the structure since time long forgotten. The wagon shelter was cool, open on two sides horse drawn wagons could enter on one side to be tied up then exit on the other side just going right through. I guess horses don’t like backing up and the drivers don’t like backing them up any less. Checking the ground were the same boot tracks we seen earlier, plus drag marks as if someone was knocked out cold and whoever it was couldn’t be bothered to carry them any longer. After we past the dusty dirt, or possibly concrete with dirt on top, floor the prints disappear into the brush of the wood.

I say, “Let me guess, that is the direction of the cave.”

“That would be accurate. About half a mile in that direction.”

“That’s a pretty sizeable wood Peter, The owners must have had quite a chunk of property here.”

“Hundreds of acres at least. The thing is though the further you go back the cheaper and more plentiful land was. It wasn’t that hard to own quite a piece of land back

then.”

“I can understand that. It wasn’t until land became more scarce the plots became smaller and more costly. People had to do more with less. I learned a little about it as a reporter. When I was in central and south America there were some huge plots of land, though many had to make do with less.”

“What were you doing in in that area Susan?”

“Looking for a story I guess you could say. There was a war happening and it was hellish down there.”

“There’s always a war happening in these foreign places. I don’t know what people have to fight about.”

“In this case people were fighting for their lives against monsters that liked nothing better than to kill.”

“Granted, but why would these monstrous people want to kill in the first place?”

“I agree with that. If only I had an answer for why they came to be Peter.”

“The influence of the devil is why. The destroyer always seeks to have us kill each other.”

“That’s as good an answer as any I say Peter. I don’t always agree to the devil’s influence but in this case it’s likely the best answer I’m going to find. So amen brother, well spoken.”

We chat as we carry on towards the cave. We quiet down as we approach. The opening is placed into a small hill in midst of the wood.

“You said they mined here Peter?”

“That’s right Susan, coal. I expect there is likely quite a bit more in there but as it was part of the farm, and it’s

owned by the kids, it's been unworked since the days the farm has fallen out of use. Sadly the kids have been in a legal dispute for years which is why the land has been sitting in such disuse for such a long time."

"Sounds like so many other inheritances Peter, all locked up in greed."

"We are such the fools to be caught up in such godlessness, if only people had the wisdom to know what they are doing."

I2

HOME COMING QUEEN

So I was brought before the white counsel in shackles. I could break out quick and easy but in the long run, standing before the counsel in peace, is much better. Ebenezar stood up fast when I entered counsel chambers exclaiming, “what the hell is this?” yet I remain silent. Ebenezer McCoy knew me before the sacrifice and has had no reason to question what he had seen that day. His fellow council member Listens-To-Wind calms him down. Damien brings his testimony of what he seen and his wardens under his command did the same. It all came down to wizard sight. Susan looked ascended, the sight alone killed damien when he looked at her. A warden under his command declared his spirit incapable of life after he gazed at Susan, and that it was reasonable to presume

Susan was suffering to endure for him. She commanded a mastery of psychomancy in fully healing a spirit and even more so through necromancy in bringing about a resurrection whether by will or instinct. Admittedly there were quite a few gasps in council during the course of presentation. The senior counsel made inquiries and odd events seemed to come from the area of costa rica including weather systems that were just plain wrong, unusual vampire activity, and reports of a dark angel flying in the skies at night in that area also. Her kills were tracked all the way back to Chichen Itza, presumably around the third day after her death. Ebenezer asks counsel if he could have private words with the person under inquiry. Senior counsel passes the request without much thought. He looks white as a sheet and is acting rather nauseous. I think in his wisdom he has connected the dots and knows exactly what happened. I still have remained silent.

I'm taken to a side chamber with Ebenezer. "who are you?" "I am one who appears as your sons lost love, and granddaughters mother. I can see in your composure that you have already made your decision. I deflect your inquiry then, who do you say that I am?"

"you tread carefully around a powerful wizard in the grips of powerful emotions. I understand. Allow me to discern what I have observed so far then including my own experience. In the end you were led to give in to hunger, you were sacrificed before fully transformed, and a conservative estimate says you consumed a quarter of a million immortal vampire souls in an instant. How long do you think you were in death?"

“best guess would be 3 days”

“precisely what I would expect for a certain rite of ascension. We’ve been duped. You were meant to be sacrificed all along to conquer everything from here to the outer gates in the form of Harry’s lost love. God that would kill him over and over again all his days to see you as a full court vampire brutally conquering all that is.”

“you arent angry, or saying im full of shit or wanting to kill me?”

“Oh my god no child, I’m a senior member of the white council and the blackstaff to boot. I think I looked at the signs of what was taking place but I didn’t really see them for what they were until tonight. I’m not angry child I feel like a fool for being caught up in emotion and seeing with blinders. We all were, and I imagine it’s what was expected of us. We were being manipulated.”

“If Harry stayed his hand just a moment longer...”

“We would have been doomed. Everything would have been doomed. He acted while you were still bearing a human soul though so I sit before a humble, confused little god. That’s all I know for sure, and I will ask no more of you today I doubt my heart could stand it. We do not have jurisdiction over any god, stay here Susan I’ll return to counsel for discussions. It shouldn’t be too hard to make an order to close with you throwing around signs and wonders like you Christ risen. I’ll have a warden sent if I am successful to take you for a meal and a chamber to wash and change. I’ll give you an hour then come knockin’”

Sure as shit a young warden came and thanked me for

my time, advising me I've been dismissed with apologies. He leads me to an evening buffet where I eat with other members of the senior council who are quite uncomfortable around me. I believe the word may be cowering. Ebenezer winks. The buffet is large enough to find some high etheric foods that works to help ease my tension. Afterwards a nice hot bath and a few minutes to rest and relax. There's no TV but after that I am thankful just to sit quietly in the safety of no longer being under inquiry.

An icy figure in cold mist appeared in my room, "Next time you travel our ways you will request permission before you embark."

"Huh what? Permission from whom?"

"Mab, queen of the sidhe winter court. You have trodden upon her lands without authority and she frowns on rival powers presuming she is not of significance enough to warrant the request of the right of passage. You will ask or face the real likelihood of our court facing your empire. You are still young, it is unlikely you would survive a free woman in such a confrontation of that you can rely." The figure disappeared as soon as it came. Fascinating.

Ebenezer did arrive at what I assume was an hour later and said "It is maybe four o'clock on the surface and I want to get the hell out of here. I hate the goddamned political maneuvering. Let's go to the surface and past the park there is a Starbucks, does that sound OK?"

It did. It sounded better than OK. I'm stressed out, and tired, and desperately need somewhere to unwind. I sure wasn't going to find that here in this headquarters, or maybe bunker is the better word.

We made it out to the coffee shop and I got something that looked like coffee and was very large. I figure how much difference could there be between all the strangely named brews? To his credit Ebenezer just asked for a big-ass coffee and they provided. Maybe I'll try that next time.

"So girl when are you getting around to tell Harry."

"Well I really wasn't going to, I mean we live in different cities and dangerous lives, Maggie has a good home with the carpenters and seeing me would upset Harry I couldn't stand to see him upset given that he has to live with killing me as well. We were apart for the better part of a decade, we don't even know each other anymore really and I can't stand to see him hurt I couldn't be close to him and risk that."

I don't think I've seen Ebenezer turn so red in all my life, I pissed him off a hell of a lot, "You listen to what I have to say missy, and you listen good. You ain't done right by the boy for all that time being infected. You presume too much, take away decisions from others and have caused much hurt. You rejected his engagement without discussion, left him so you can fight a war off in hell's half acre without returning or keeping in touch, bore his child and gave her for adoption when he didn't even know she existed. You are a malignant, callous, calculating, brazenly presumptuous thoughtlessly cold human being. Don't make me have to link the woman I see in front of me with the woman who died at chicken itza. Susan Rodriguez is dead and so it should be. She was loved but certainly didn't return love properly to those

who loved her for nearly half the years she existed upon this earth. No do not allow me to link you to her for you are a new woman by the same name. You have a chance to turn things around, to love and be loved, to be open and honest, and make decisions with other people not for them."

"Susan Rodriguez is dead, long live Susan Rodriguez?"

Ebenezer is calming down, a little, and chuckled, "I suppose you could say it that way. Harry done some of the same things, keeping things from others, we all have. Just not like what you've done."

"Like what she done, may she rest in peace you mean."

"Aye. Fresh slate then?"

"Fresh slate. As long as you tell me when I'm doing wrong. I didn't get a good teaching as a girl about right thinking"

"Oh I'm sorry lass, surely I will if ye ask me. It be no excuse for what, that woman, done but it does explain it some. Is tomorrow morning too soon"

"Umm, for what?"

"To go to Chicago and meet with Harry."

"Erk," Phew. "Should be fine." I breathe in, I breathe out.

"You're doing good lass, doing what's right this time around. I know you're nervous and it's ok, I'll go in first to smooth it over if he's not ready I'll come out to let you know."

"Ok, sounds ok. Are we walking the ways?"

"Yes, thats right. We'll be starting out at 2pm tomorrow be there by 8pm."

“Uh, Ebenezer, we need to kinda ask permission from Mab if we go through winter territory.”

“She tell you that? What the hell girl? She say why?”

“She dislikes a rival power who violates her borders without asking permission”

“Did she say that? Jesus I hardly think that you got that kinda mojo. She must be drunk on pixie dust.”

“Not so much what I am, as much as what I am to be, I should assume.”

“She wants to teach you now while you are young, so it’s habitual, before you grow equal or greater than herself. She is expecting great things from you if she’s thinking that. Well no problem I’ll open a channel so you may ask.”

“Thanks ebenezer.”

I ask mab for permission of passage and she granted it without hesitation, and thanked me for showing her the courtesy. I think Ebenezer was right. So we do arrive in Chicago at 8pm just like he said, all about time difference. We head over to Harry’s apartment by Ebenezer’s awesome redneck truck and I’m so nervous I could scream. I could have flung myself out the door but I held it down. I guess it’s soon after the events of Chichen Itza so at least there isn’t the worry of why did I wait so long. Ebenezer knows what I went through and understands that it can take up to a couple years for someone ascended the way I was to get adjusted to life again. So there’s also that. All told we arrived at about 9pm.

Ebenezer said to me, “There’s a 24 hour Mcdonalds three blocks down, and a movie theater 4 blocks away.

McAnally's isn't a heck of a long way that direction", he wrote out directions on some paper. "The thing is I want to take some time with Hoss, and have you meet back here in three hours. Kick the door when you get back and I'll kick it back. Then wait, and I'll open the door and usher you in or walk out depending on how I do with him"

"Sounds good, I'll go loiter in a professional capacity."

God, 3 hours is long enough but with my anxiety over this it seemed like a month.

I come back 3 hours on the dot feeling like I'm having a heart attack. I kick the door once. Almost immediately Ebenezer came to the door, "he's ready, but we need to talk out here first there are some things you need to know."

I didn't know a heart could stop that long before starting back up again.

Ebenezer speaks, "It is reminiscent of our conversation in Edenburg, he can't acknowledge that you are his Susan. He can't acknowledge anything but what he believes is true, that he killed Susan in a bloodline curse. He is willing to accept you as an aftereffect, a shadow, a ghost that sprung from the massive scale of the bloodline curse. Basically whether or not you carry any part of his Susan you are a different woman, a new Susan he is accepting into his life. It will do by my books, you will be spending most of your time exorcising his demons though the wounds are still fresh in his mind..."

"...to the point of madness, yet I don't blame him my being here is pretty fucked up even for me. Well I guess

Susan is dead, long live Susan.”

“Rightly so then. Susan is dead, long live Susan.”

So one year later plus an additional a couple months. Just short of christmas actually. I walk into Harry’s apartment for the first time since my sacrifice. Harry’s eyes grow wider than baseballs. My fleshmask is age appropriate, I look like Susan as I would actually look if I was the age I am. I prefer to live a normal life and looking my age is part of that. Harry’s eyes are absolutely filled with tears.

Harry could hardly cough out the words, “Oh my god you look so much like my Susan. You could be her twin sister.”

“Well I did come from the sacrifice perhaps Ebenezer helped you understanding that?”

“Hells bells, yeah and I disagree with him on major points. Susan is dead, and she isn’t coming back. I killed her and will have to bear that burden for the rest of my life. You are the result of the magnitude of life energy released when the curse was unleashed so you are the shadow of my Susan, a facsimile and no more. Yet I have born the shadow of a fallen angel in me and she was no less a person in her own right. This is what I believe you are. I accept you as a new woman, a different person, and you can build your own life anew separate from the wonderful lady you were born from.”

I lean over to Ebenezer, “On a symbolic level, I can’t disagree with him on anything he has said.”

“I know eh? He really makes an excellent argument and I can’t counter it.”



The man has demons. Sweet mercy. I've been sitting with him while he talks about his Susan, and weeps, on and on about how he killed me and didn't want to, dear Lord. I think Harry was the pin that broke and brought me here. I mean I could be wrong but with this much hurt I think the red king made his bet that I would be sitting on the table and complete the change long before the knife came down. Or at least he would have hesitated long enough that my human soul would be dislodged so that the plan would succeed. I owe Harry for getting it right so that I could live on, I told him as much. He just isn't ready to get off his bandwagon yet.

After a while he gets used to my face, which is different that the face he is used to. Before I was sacrificed I had the same 20 something appearance for over a decade. I just didn't grow older due to the infection. I could have lived hundreds of years and look the same. I can still wear the leather pants I had in my twenties though goddammit so there. Yes I did need to have them restitched to fit but that's not the point.

Father Forthill told me to give him a month, his is not pleased with me telling Harry about what happened and needs some time to return to being fatherly to me. How sweet.

I met Molly again, she is as sweet as ever. She believes what Harry believes, I guess that's just what any good apprentice should.

Karren Murphy believes as me and Ebenezer do, and is

damned and determined that I am the true blue Susan Rodriguez from before my sacrifice. That actually doesn't fare well for me because she has taken it personally that I didn't tell Harry about Maggie. She doesn't like me and is going to be watching me every chance she gets because Karrin and Harry are the best of best friends. I must tread carefully.

I didn't see the Carpenter family, yet. I'm just not ready for that. I'm a bit lacking in the holy department.

So for the next month or so I work on a fairly good, but not great, local story at the Times. Well actually I got two done, they didn't take much research and didn't involve any huge conspiracies. At night I desperately try to work on leads to where Steve ended up when I fled with my children for Phil. Really, I got nothing right now. I do have the world's only professional wizard within arms reach though so at least there's that.

Then on the weekends I take to the skies literally, after dark of course, to head to Chicago. Takes me overnight but because I don't need to sleep I arrive in the morning and as much as I'm able I spend the time with Harry. It's done me good, I was carrying my own demons over him. Me and Rose have been more tolerant as well, only beating the crap out of each other ten times this month, and only using our human strength capacities. That is rather than demigod tidal wave craters and earthquakes and such. I'm keeping some of my seed sprouts and other high in ethereal foods at Harry's which he finds fascinating in a kind of redneck way. I say to him don't bother me I'm looking after my health. Which is right, my other

potential diet wouldn't be too good for my health if someone sees me take prey. Very bad. I would hate myself for it too. Unless they were going to hurt Maggie then it's no holds barred, I would eat their souls just because I can.

I got to see Will and Georgia as well. Harry gave the spiel about who I am but they can smell something different. They talk to me like the real Susan, with a bit of an awkward kind of politeness. I think I'm going to talk to them privately sometime soon, they know something and I want to make sure they know the truth rather than getting misguided by what they picked up on.

Afterwards I decided to iron things out with Will and Georgia since it seems that if there is any outright misunderstandings it's going to kill my chances of ironing things out with the people I knew. I remember those two when I was younger here. They were only kids now they're all grown up. I think it's awesome. I called the number Harry had for them.

"Hey, Will and Georgia's, Will speaking"

"Hey Will I was just wondering if I could come over for some coffee?"

"Uh," I hear him whispering in the background. I intentionally didn't tune in with vampire senses. I wanted to give them the dignity of a private conversation.

"Could we go Burger King together? It's just that you... well it's just been a long time."

"You don't have to say it. I get it. It's the reason I'm calling in the first place."

"Oh, yeah well sure that makes sense. See you there at 7?"

“Sounds good, the one near your place?”

“Yuppers, sorry, yes that’s the one.”

Right there, that’s what I’m talking about. What’s wrong with Yuppies? I’m not their english teacher. I’ll figure this out. So I head over to the Burger King and sit down at a table, with a whopper. Doesn’t have any nutritional value for me at all, but it does taste good I’ll give you that. The two come in, ask if they can get food and then ask if they can sit down when they get back.

“ok what the hell you two? We’ve known each other a long time, granted I wish I could have spent more time with you over the years. My younger years were mercilessly stolen from me. To get the conversation back on track though why am I getting all this politeness?”

“I’m sorry we didn’t mean to offend you if there is something we can do to make it up...”

“Will stop stop! Enough! Talk to me, it’s Susan ok please talk?”

“Um. Susan, it’s just that you have some. Well. Spectacularly evil mojo happening. Off the charts awfulness. We can smell it both me and Georgia and prefer to not be around to cause you trouble or get ourselves hurt. That’s all. I’m sorry we have bothered you.”

They get up to leave and I sit them back down, “Oh no you don’t. Harry’s story notwithstanding the whole truth of it is different.” So I go ahead and tell them the story of what really happened, at least as far as I know it.

“Wow, ok, that makes sense. That would definitely make for a hell of a lot of really bad mojo. You’re definitely you, not some vampire spin and who you were?”

"It's me. Really me."

"So what was Harry going on about, it was like you weren't even there. Some kind of phantasm. Kept talking about how he killed you, but, ahem, you're here like hello?"

"Now you see my frustration. His friends are just letting it slide, my death was just too much I guess and his noodle slipped a little. Not a big deal I can't imagine anyone else thinking any different than me in that he will get better and I'll be there when he is able to see me with his understanding. If you know what I mean it's hard to explain."

"So everybody is treating Harry like he is a very special person when it comes to you. When he says how he killed you and you are standing right there beside him his friends say nothing except, Kind of, 'That's ok Harry, it's all going to be ok',"

"Right now that's about it. I've spent a lot of time with him, I wonder how much I help really when he doesn't acknowledge me but I firmly believe I'm making a difference somehow listening to him and comforting him."

"I know you do Susan, I know it. You've always loved him dearly."

"I do have a new bo now though, I don't think it interferes with the fact I still care for Harry. One problem with that though is my bo Steve disappeared on me like a fart in the wind and for all the research I've been doing I can't find him anywhere."

"We'll help Susan, were did you last see him?"

"Back in New York City, we ran into some really bad

dude named Phil. Me and the people I was with ran like hell from the guy but when I turned around Steve was gone. I understand the wardens went to nail the SOB but Steve was nowhere to be found.”

“What was he really?”

“An ancient black magician, a lich if that means anything.”

“It doesn’t really, but I know black magicians though. Well I don’t actually know any black magicians but I’m aware of their existence and power at least.”

“Well me too in some extent. Where does it help me to know where to look though? Everything has to go somewhere.”

“Say you guys, you got really good sniffers. Probably better than mine. Do you think you could see if you could smell out where he went?”

“Sure, do you want to travel there with us this weekend coming? We have some time then.”

“Sounds great, are you taking your car?”

“Planning on it yeah. Don’t know where we’re going though which is why we need you.”

“Well sure it only makes sense. I’m going to get back to Harry, then we’ll meet here next weekend.”

“Awesome.”

I’ve been good to Harry, even though he doesn’t see me I’ve stood by him and that did get Karrin Murphy’s attention. She come by Harry’s apartment on Saturday night.

“Evening Susan, mind if I come in?”

“No, come on in.”

"I'm not good at apologies, I am sorry for treating you bad. You are making a big effort to be with Harry in spite of him not seeing you as anything but a ghost. I've never seen a ghost take that much care in anybody before. Listen, Harry had a little problem once. We had fought the Denarians and they captured a little girl called the Archive. We made our way back to the Carpenters but something wasn't right with Harry. We weren't sure of ourselves but Molly checked him and by luck we found something wrong. Michael confronted Harry and broke the spell with an act of faith. He was missing memory and refused to see things he should have. I'm not saying it's the same here but it might be. Maybe somebody doesn't want him to know you are still alive for some reason. Nobody is going to risk hurting him to remedy the problem. We just don't know what it is but if it comes to a head some day, and steps need to be taken for the sake of his life or others, he may actually see you as you are then. None of his friends will push him on this and I just thought you should know. I don't think you should push him either Susan, do what you will just don't push him so see you as real if he can't. Can you follow me?"

"Actually, I think I do. I was afraid he had just gone mad. You think it might be magical manipulation?"

"Maybe. Harry called it neuromancy once. Or maybe psychomancy I don't know if it's the same or different. Either way it happened before and could happen again. He was alright when Michael helped him the first time so don't be too afraid he has broken something, he may have been manipulated. If it is that, like I said, if all things

hang in the balance and it is broken he will see you.”

“Karrin, one day when I cleaned up for him he thanked magical faeries for cleaning up his place. I didn’t see faeries. Does that mean anything?”

“With him being a wizard? No it really doesn’t mean much. He may have had honest-to-God faeries clean his apartment once it’s hard to say.”

“True enough. So you’re ok with me?”

“Look girl, as long as you do right by my friend you’re in my good graces. Hurt him again and I hurt you. Promise.”

“Heh, I’ll be good, scout’s honor.”

So that actually makes sense to me. It would match what I’m seeing. He has some sort of block. Well if that’s true it actually makes me feel better. Knowing that his friends won’t push him regarding me for his own sake is going to help me. I’ll know that they’re not rejecting me just thinking about his health. So I’ll keep an eye out for that. Thanks Karrin, for helping me understand.



“Susan,”

“Hi Karrin, wassup?”

“I have a case I’m on, a normal case against Marcone. There’s a witness and I’m on a team to provide protection. I could use more muscle but that’s not Harry’s bag really.”

“Is there a story in it Karrin? I’m a bit needy.”

“Oh fuck you, if you don’t want to do it spit it out.”

“Sorry, sorry, old habit. No problem. I’m pushing hard for a deadline this week.”

“It’s a transfer from witness protection to the courthouse, it’s on Saturday. Of all days you should be able to swing it.”

“Oh yeah no problem, I’d be coming up to see Harry anyway that works out great.”

“Thanks Susan.”

“Karrin, who is this guy? What’s it about really? It would help for me to know to do my job here.”

“

I3

EVEN STEVEN

How's it going with Harry so far Ebenezer asked me.
Heh.

"Do you mind if I called you Abe? I just think you deserve a pet name somehow."

"Damned women. I have no problem with that."

"I'm going to be away from Harry for a while Abe while I look for my boyfriend Steve, Will and Georgia are going to help me out. Not to make Harry sound like he's disabled or anything I just don't know if he can reasonably say whether I've been to visit or not you know?"

"Yeah I hear ya lass. No problems. Good luck on the search, let me know if I can do anything."

"Definitely will Abe."

So we go back to the old headquarters which is now a

smoking ruin. Will thinks it is doubtful he will be able to find anything but he is going to try. I give him and Georgia some of Steve's things and they're off. They sniff around for quite some time, narrow in on a patch of floor where I last seen him and "woof." me over to the location. Some dried blood on the floor. We follow it to one of the cross-building catwalks. It leads into one of the adjacent buildings that is nothing but undisturbed dust. Steve's footprints can be seen entering the area, and meeting another set of footprints that are seen exiting the same way. A cloth is seen on the ground, and what looks like a small skeleton key. Will and Georgia carefully check that area out and go human again.

"Well, the blood is definitely Steve's. He came here and the cloth had ether on it so he was knocked out. The key is probably from handcuffs or shackles I've seen it before. There is a little grey piece of cloth right there where something, maybe the shackles, had caught it. See there?"

"Yes, I do. Is that relevant?"

"Very much, I know that fabric from Harry, it's from a warden's cape."

"Oh fucking shit, wardens are involved somehow. I was taken in to an inquiry recently. I'll bet he was, or is, going to be under inquiry soon too. Thanks a million guys that's the start I needed I'll get a hold of Abe."

"Hey no problem Susan you're cool. We hope you can stop by for a visit again soon."

"Me too, I just need to try and stay out of the spotlight so I have a chance for a more normal life rather than being

some bent version of Clark Kent.”

“We’re werewolves. We can totally relate to the double life dramas girl.”

“Don’t I know it.”

So they were off. Big start there I love them dearly for that. I get hold of Abe and he has no idea what the fuck is going on, using milder words than he did. I ask Mab if I could travel the ways to Edinburgh again. She gave me an immediate yes. So off I go to meet Abe at main headquarters again. He seems mad as a hatter, which I think bodes well for him being on the up and up with me. We grab something to eat, I arrange for a room on the surface to stay in and we both go into his chambers at the white counsel headquarters.

“What do you think is happening Abe?”

“Somebody doesn’t like the regulation of respecting god entities. Somebody wants to use their lovers against them, likely interrogation. Just whatever they can get away with. Somebody wants to find what you aren’t telling.”

“Well I’m nervous they might find out about really kinky sex fetishes we have together but other than that I’ve got nothing to hide.”

Abe chokes, “Yeah, well, er, nothin’ I need to know lass.”

“So we’re here, where to?”

“The young ones. They be asked anything by their elders they should have a story to tell. Them that I know like Injun Joe should be open ’nuff too.”

I4

RETURN IN GLORY

Steve is with us now, and time is running short. The adversary is going to tend to the details, we are gathered in Saint Mary of the Angels for when the event takes place. The entire Carpenter family sits in eucharistic adoration and father is watching over the rest of us. Karrin, Will and Georgia. Maggie is playing with mouse and me. It was explained that Maggie will return to my being, and then be reborn at the appointed time. We will meet mouse at the appointed time as well. Apparently Rose was born at my turning, though she was in an incubation stage. I'm told because of the complexities involved she will manifest human at chicken itza. I can just hear the cursing now. I hope she finds Steve, everyone deserves to be happy.

I've done what I was meant to do, I've taken the mantle of godhood and no matter where I go even across realities it cannot be taken away from me. I am and ever will be the God of all vampires, the great mother. There can be no other but me.

We are returning to a turning point in Harry's life, a critical moment in my life also. The thread of reality we are creating is splitting from Bianca's Ball. The adversary explained I am returning human, with all the memories and skills I have learned up until this moment. I may unleash minor effects from time to time during emotional moments so be careful, stay hidden. Red forces will continue to gather one reality at a time at the outer walls of the nevernever as other realities reach the time of chichen itza. I will be quickened over and over by the immortal life forces of one reality after another. I'll feel the heaviness a day or two ahead. At the moment it comes down hard, I have time to sit, and a flurry of lightning will hammer me for up to 5 minutes. Noone else will see it though, only that I'm sitting disoriented wherever I am. Me and Karrin maintain the master/spawn link and she retains the increased speed and strength. That's all, we start fresh together, and help each other. Karrin couldn't help but let her lip curl into a smile realizing she is going to be Lieutenant again, and me and her grasped hands like soldiers swearing we will work together with our link to keep her from losing rank again.

The time ticked away so slowly. Michael went out to get us some Burger King. None of us ate that much. I hugged Maggie a lot because I knew I wouldn't see her

for quite a while after I get there. Mouse too for that matter. We're scared, all of us. Something bad is happening and one world after another is collapsing into emptiness around us but we have no awareness of it. As we look at each other we realize that I'm going to be filling up with the power of millions, perhaps billions, of immortal souls over the course of years. That makes it worse not better, what manner of horror is coming that any being needs to have that much strength to stand against it, and be one of many generals to do so. I imagine the staggering power of the elite vampire army that is amassing. One hundred and twenty thousand more every time I'm quickened, only six thousand of which were needed to bring Mab to her knees in one shot. The adversary isn't pulling any punches, he is going to fight with everything he's got to save his earthly empire.

Do not go gentle into that good night. Rage, rage against the dying of the light.



I remember this beach. I'm wearing a white bikini this day, I'm trying to ease the suffering of my hunger by time out in this sun. One of the last warm days of the year. I was still officially working for the Arcane but I've already got my apartment cleaned out. Everything dumped in long term storage. I was like the million dollar man all stronger, faster and whatever. Took no time at all. I hated

it. I was losing Harry. I sent him flowers and called him desperate not to allow myself to get close enough to eat him because the hunger can't sort through my passions properly.

This was that very moment when he gave me the ring, he proposed, he loved me that much that he was willing to get eaten rather than lose me. This is another moment where I didn't consider him. I made my own decision in spite of his feelings. This is something I'm going to change right fucking now. I hurt myself and other people when I don't pay attention to them.

I looked at my hand. It looks like he got the ring at a carnival. Neither of us had a lot of money back then though. It might as well have been worth a million dollars to me. He knew it too. Heh. He *knows* it too.

I leaned over and give him a slow kiss. A long sensual endless kiss. We broke away slowly and he has a big shit eating grin on him. Right now I feel like I'm with my knight in shining armour. I really love my Harry.

"Yes Harry! Oh my God yes! Thank you for taking the risk of being with me still."

"Oh thank God Susan, I was sure you were getting ready to leave and never come back."

"I was."

"Oh."

"I grew wise. If you love me so much you're willing to do everything possible to make it work, make me better, hell just live as happy as we can fuck it. I respect that you're willing to take the risk and I'll do my part to mitigate it."

"I love you Susan, Oh God I love you."

We flew into one of the most passionate kisses of our lives right there. Completely unbridled passion that made the passers by look out and take notice. Some cameras flashed. We didn't give a flying fuck. Especially me. I'm finally getting a chance to live my life the way it should have been. Yeah Bianca. Fuck. You. Bianca.

We broke it slowly a couple of times, only to throw ourselves at each other again. We both cut it short when our clothes were starting to come off.

"Harry could I stay at your place a little while? All my stuff is in long term storage. Besides I need to know if I'll be OK. Do you have restraints suitable for an up and coming vampire?"

"Pfft, hard to believe you're getting your humor back in spite of all this. God you're a strong woman. I definitely have some good restraints, good enough for trolls and ogres."

"Hmm. You'll have to tell me about trolls and ogres sometime."

This place makes me think of the hunger I once fought so hard. That same restraint worked when I went to visit Harry years afterward though, working together I think we could have had a happy life even if a rather unusual one.

"Let's get going Harry, I've had enough sun for today. Gotta get home and make sure you can find those restraints."

I'm quite human enough but I'm not going to confuse things. I came into this reality at the point I held the ring. Just before that I remember I was moaning about

how terrible my hunger was. It was awful but I know now if I just gave myself time my will would grow and things would be better. Of course then I was gone to fight with the fellowship where I found purpose in my life but fucked up again later with Maggie. Sigh.

"It's heading toward evening Harry, do you have those restraints? It would be a good time to hook them up."

"Hells bells. You're right. Better no than sorry. I'm going to find that cure Susan don't worry ok?"

"Not worried Harry. At least being restrained I'm no danger to you or anybody else for that matter. It's good to tie up your girlfriend."

Harry let out a snort of laughter, hung his head and shook it. I'm kinda liking this actually. Glad the powers that be allowed me to come back. Me and Harry can get kinky.

That night I woke up to hear Harry scream, I yell back into his bedroom, "Harry! Are you OK?"

"Susan, Oh my God Susan you're OK! They were everywhere! Thank God you stayed with me I was so afraid you would move away."

Fuck Susan you cruel heartless bitch. You never even thought that Harry really needed you, you were just thinking of yourself. You heartless bitch. Poor Harry is screaming with nightmares and you could have been there for him, even tied up you could have been there for him. I'm really starting to hate myself.

"Harry get some cards, we can play some crazy eights until you can settle down again. Just remember you're half vampire girlfriend can kick their ass with speed, strength,

wit and charm and of course a good nose for a story all monsters flee at the sight of the press.”

“I don’t know how you’re doing it, but glad you’re back Susan. I’m taking you up on that, cards it is.”

“Then try to sleep when you feel ready. Better keep me on the end of my leash so I don’t bite.”

I’m not sure if he was about to laugh or cry because all I heard was a cough. We sat down to play cards.

I heard Karrin communicate, “How is going Susan?”

“Karrin. I’m such an incredible inexcusable monstrous bitch.”

“I already knew that.”

“I suppose you seen a lot of the train wreck I left behind?”

“Duh. But you were gone so I had no more fucks left to give. Harry got better.”

“Jesus I’m a bitch. Shit is gonna change right now.”

“Back to my original question, how is it going?”

“Oh well Harry had a screaming nightmare assumably about vampires, I’m played cards with him until he can sleep. I’m all bound up in troll restraints.”

“Kinky.”

“That’s what I said. At least I got Harry to laugh.”

“Yeah you’re good for him. Just don’t fuck up this time because I swear to God I will kill you.”

“Sokath, his eyes uncovered. I know what I have done.”

“Who what now?”

“Tamarian language, star trek. I used to be a trekkie.”

“Well shit. Goodnight Uhura”

“Goodnight Bones.”

“How the fuck, ah whatever goodnight.”

I think we stayed up pretty well all night playing cards. He just needs me around. I think but I won't ask Karrin, that Harry may not have slept, worked, showered or even eaten after I left. That, would damn well have been my fault. I would have done that to the one I loved.

So I lived at Harry's, for now. As bad a shape as I'm supposed to be in he's worse. I should have realized that back in the day, but I was too selfish to understand. I'm considering letting my apartment go. I'll keep my things in storage and stay at Harry's. I think he'll feel better to have me near the same as anyone would want a sick loved one close so they know they're ok. If that means I dutifully submit to my nightly restraints so be it. I'm going to need some nice shiny black rubber accessories to wear at night though to complete the ensemble. The sad thing is I'm rocking a completely human body, I'm just not sure how to say to him that I'm actually quite fine. Well, health wise anyway.

Michael and Karrin came over with a care package. Soup and canned goods, charcoal and kerosene for winter. Also got some groceries and fruit for us. Harry volunteered to stay with me if Harry needed him too because of his fairly vampire proof self. Karrin tossed over a care item especially for me. A glock 18 machine pistol with varied accessories. I squealed, leapt up, and hugged her tight. I let her go when she gasped out the words,

“Get... Off... Me...”

I bellowed, “Thank you so much Karrin! I wish I had something to give you...”

“You didn’t run away this time. That’s enough.”

Harry said, “What do you mean run away?”

Karrin replied, “I came over before she left the apartment. That’s all.”

“Oh,” Harry is lost so just drops it.

I’m flipping and clicking the machine pistol over like a navy seal, with Harry staring in disbelief the whole time.

They stay for a game of Euchre and then are off, I start the fireplace and Harry makes a meal. Afterwards he readies the restraints for another nights rest. The couch is rolled close to the bedroom door so I can see into the bedroom by my request. I want to be able to talk or yell at him if he has another one of those horrible nightmares. We’re going to try to find a more permanent arrangement to I can have a normal bed to sleep in, or something more closely approximating it. I felt something heavy on me after the game and communicated Karrin about it. The next day at work it hit, I was sitting at my desk and after it was done seen that about 3 mins had past since the quickening began. I communicated back to Karrin it had past and everything was OK.

The vampires declared war on the council at this point. If Harry has to go out at night I’ve been going with him. It took me a while to convince him. He enchanted an army surplus ACU-UCP uniform as a shield and gave it to me to wear. It gave him peace of mind. He almost lost me before and he is determined not to lose me again. I’ve been taking down vampires like it’s going out of style. He doesn’t know about the decade of combat I endured in a previous life. He just keeps asking me when I got my

SEAL training. Michael is gathering tactical gear for me, MOLLE, IOTV armor, and ordinance. Harry in turn is blessing gear with spells, mostly protection. Charity made me a cloak-tent that I can wrap around to obscure myself if I'm going out armed. I'm told I should have a nice Christmas present. I can't wait. I spar with Karrin regularly. She is being kind since she was left with enhanced reflexes not me. She does let loose from time to time though because, after all, I will be engaging in combat with vampires.

I'm training hard. Really fucking hard. Rocky would tip his hat and bow. I've fought for over a decade with the fellowship. I'm proud of it and I won't lose what it has given me. Michael Carpenter is a carpenter by trade. Karrin is a part of Chicago PD's 'whitewash and spin' department, Thomas and the Raiths are sex industry moguls. Harry is a tough determined gumshoe and I'm a reporter. Michael is also a knight of the cross, Karrin is a tough and clued in cop. Thomas is a white court vampire. Harry is a wizard and I am a soldier. That's our team.



Halloween came and I was beside myself. In another life I was far from here and sent a blank postcard to Harry saying, 'I love you'. I didn't write or call. I cut him off. Just like that. Harry didn't understand why I was so miserable but Karrin did, she came to visit. We played some spontaneous Halloween games and some cards. Karrin brought beer and pizza which might as well have been

valium it helped me relax so much. Harry may be getting near to letting me out of my restraints at night, I asked him if he thought it was wise. He said at some point what we do to protect our lives starts to prevent us from living our life, He said he needs to make that choice at some point and that it's going to be soon. He said he is still looking for a cure, all I could say is, "Thank you."

That evening Harry said, "Susan, there's things you aren't telling me. I haven't seen signs of infection in you since I proposed. It doesn't just go away, and I know for a fact you were infected at Bianca's Ball there was no hiding it."

I sat there for what seemed like forever, staring at my jeans. I wasn't sure what to say and I couldn't lie. Eventually all I could say was, "I made a deal with the Devil Harry. If I tried to explain more you wouldn't understand. I'm gonna be called up to defend the world in the end-times my love, In exchange I live my human life as it was meant to be lived until my days are done. I am at peace with this, you should be too."

He nods at me, "We get to live our lives out together, and you will be a hero in the end of days. Those times when you seem despondent, that's part of this too?"

I nod back. Then he smiles. 'nough said. No more restraints tonight, I slept with Harry.



A message came by courier, sealed by white counsel. Harry opened it and said it specifically mentions I am to

read it with him. It said, "Wizard Dresden, this is written at the behest of the Merlin. The border of the nevernever is too turbulent and the Ways too dangerous for travel to hold a meeting in your area. Please investigate and resolve, the council will pay for successful service rendered. Please advise Susan also that I and Ebenezer have travelled the same road as she."

"Susan, do you know anything about that last part or is it worth asking."

"I can't explain what I can't understand Harry, what they have said, they have said."

Harry smiled, shook his head, and shrugged.

We decided I'll come along

I5

CHAPTER I5

Proin non sem. Donec nec erat. Proin libero. Aliquam viverra arcu. Donec vitae purus. Donec felis mi, semper id, scelerisque porta, sollicitudin sed, turpis. Nulla in urna. Integer varius wisi non elit. Etiam nec sem. Mauris consequat, risus nec congue condimentum, ligula ligula suscipit urna, vitae porta odio erat quis sapien. Proin luctus leo id erat. Etiam massa metus, accumsan pellen-tesque, sagittis sit amet, venenatis nec, mauris. Praesent urna eros, ornare nec, vulputate eget, cursus sed, justo. Phasellus nec lorem. Nullam ligula ligula, mollis sit amet, faucibus vel, eleifend ac, dui. Aliquam erat volutpat.

Fusce vehicula, tortor et gravida porttitor, metus nibh congue lorem, ut tempus purus mauris a pede. Integer tincidunt orci sit amet turpis. Aenean a metus. Aliquam

vestibulum lobortis felis. Donec gravida. Sed sed urna. Mauris et orci. Integer ultrices feugiat ligula. Sed dignissim nibh a massa. Donec orci dui, tempor sed, tincidunt nonummy, viverra sit amet, turpis. Quisque lobortis. Proin venenatis tortor nec wisi. Vestibulum placerat. In hac habitasse platea dictumst. Aliquam porta mi quis risus. Donec sagittis luctus diam. Nam ipsum elit, imperdiet vitae, faucibus nec, fringilla eget, leo. Etiam quis dolor in sapien porttitor imperdiet.

Cras pretium. Nulla malesuada ipsum ut libero. Suspendisse gravida hendrerit tellus. Maecenas quis lacus. Morbi fringilla. Vestibulum odio turpis, tempor vitae, scelerisque a, dictum non, massa. Praesent erat felis, porta sit amet, condimentum sit amet, placerat et, turpis. Praesent placerat lacus a enim. Vestibulum non eros. Ut congue. Donec tristique varius tortor. Pellentesque habitant morbi tristique senectus et netus et malesuada fames ac turpis egestas. Nam dictum dictum urna.

Phasellus vestibulum orci vel mauris. Fusce quam leo, adipiscing ac, pulvinar eget, molestie sit amet, erat. Sed diam. Suspendisse eros leo, tempus eget, dapibus sit amet, tempus eu, arcu. Vestibulum wisi metus, dapibus vel, luctus sit amet, condimentum quis, leo. Suspendisse molestie. Duis in ante. Ut sodales sem sit amet mauris. Suspendisse ornare pretium orci. Fusce tristique enim eget mi. Vestibulum eros elit, gravida ac, pharetra sed, lobortis in, massa. Proin at dolor. Duis accumsan accumsan pede. Nullam blandit elit in magna lacinia hendrerit. Ut nonummy luctus eros. Fusce eget tortor.

Ut sit amet magna. Cras a ligula eu urna dignissim

viverra. Nullam tempor leo porta ipsum. Praesent purus. Nullam consequat. Mauris dictum sagittis dui. Vestibulum sollicitudin consecetur wisi. In sit amet diam. Nullam malesuada pharetra risus. Proin lacus arcu, eleifend sed, vehicula at, congue sit amet, sem. Sed sagittis pede a nisl. Sed tincidunt odio a pede. Sed dui. Nam eu enim. Aliquam sagittis lacus eget libero. Pellentesque diam sem, sagittis molestie, tristique et, fermentum ornare, nibh. Nulla et tellus non felis imperdiet mattis. Aliquam erat volutpat.

Vestibulum sodales ipsum id augue. Integer ipsum pede, convallis sit amet, tristique vitae, tempor ut, nunc. Nam non ligula non lorem convallis hendrerit. Maecenas hendrerit. Sed magna odio, aliquam imperdiet, porta ac, aliquet eget, mi. Cum sociis natoque penatibus et magnis dis parturient montes, nascetur ridiculus mus. Vestibulum nisl sem, dignissim vel, euismod quis, egestas ut, orci. Nunc vitae risus vel metus euismod laoreet. Cras sit amet neque a turpis lobortis auctor. Sed aliquam sem ac elit. Cras velit lectus, facilisis id, dictum sed, porta rutrum, nisl. Nam hendrerit ipsum sed augue. Nullam scelerisque hendrerit wisi. Vivamus egestas arcu sed purus. Ut ornare lectus sed eros. Suspendisse potenti. Mauris sollicitudin pede vel velit. In hac habitasse platea dictumst.

Suspendisse erat mauris, nonummy eget, pretium eget, consequat vel, justo. Pellentesque consecetur erat sed lacus. Nullam egestas nulla ac dui. Donec cursus rhoncus ipsum. Nunc et sem eu magna egestas malesuada. Vivamus dictum massa at dolor. Morbi est nulla, faucibus ac, posuere in, interdum ut, sapien. Proin consecetur

pretium urna. Donec sit amet nibh nec purus dignissim mattis. Phasellus vehicula elit at lacus. Nulla facilisi. Cras ut arcu. Sed consectetur. Integer tristique elit quis felis consectetur eleifend. Cras et lectus.

Ut congue malesuada justo. Curabitur congue, felis at hendrerit faucibus, mauris lacus porttitor pede, nec aliquam turpis diam feugiat arcu. Nullam rhoncus ipsum at risus. Vestibulum a dolor sed dolor fermentum vulputate. Sed nec ipsum dapibus urna bibendum lobortis. Vestibulum elit. Nam ligula arcu, volutpat eget, lacinia eu, lobortis ac, urna. Nam mollis ultrices nulla. Cras vulputate. Suspendisse at risus at metus pulvinar malesuada. Nullam lacus. Aliquam tempus magna. Aliquam ut purus. Proin tellus.

Vestibulum ante ipsum primis in faucibus orci luctus et ultrices posuere cubilia Curae; Donec scelerisque metus. Maecenas non mi ut metus porta hendrerit. Nunc semper. Cras quis wisi ut lorem posuere tristique. Nunc vestibulum scelerisque nulla. Suspendisse pharetra sollicitudin ante. Praesent at augue sit amet ante interdum porta. Nunc bibendum augue luctus diam. Etiam nec sem. Sed eros turpis, facilisis nec, vehicula vitae, aliquam sed, nulla. Curabitur justo leo, vestibulum eget, tristique ut, tempus at, nisl.

Nulla venenatis lorem id arcu. Morbi cursus urna a ipsum. Donec porttitor. Integer eleifend, est non mattis malesuada, mi nulla convallis mi, et auctor lectus sapien ut purus. Aliquam nulla augue, pharetra sit amet, faucibus semper, molestie vel, nibh. Pellentesque vestibulum magna et mi. Sed fringilla dolor vel tellus. Nunc

libero nunc, venenatis eget, convallis hendrerit, iaculis elementum, mi. Nullam aliquam, felis et accumsan vehicula, magna justo vehicula diam, eu condimentum nisl felis et nunc. Quisque volutpat mauris a velit. Pellentesque massa. Integer at lorem. Nam metus erat, lacinia id, convallis ut, pulvinar non, wisi. Cras iaculis mauris ut neque. Cras sodales, sem vitae imperdiet consequat, pede purus sollicitudin urna, ac aliquam metus orci in leo. Ut molestie ultrices mauris. Vivamus vitae sem. Aliquam erat volutpat. Praesent commodo, nisl ac dapibus aliquet, tortor orci sodales lorem, non ornare nulla lorem quis nisl.

Sed at sem vitae purus ultrices vestibulum. Vestibulum tincidunt lacus et ligula. Pellentesque vitae elit. Vestibulum ante ipsum primis in faucibus orci luctus et ultrices posuere cubilia Curae; Duis ornare, erat eget laoreet vulputate, lacus ipsum suscipit turpis, et bibendum nisl orci non lectus. Vestibulum nec risus nec libero fermentum fringilla. Morbi non velit in magna gravida hendrerit. Pellentesque quis lectus. Vestibulum eleifend lobortis leo. Vestibulum non augue. Vivamus dictum tempor dui. Maecenas at ligula id felis congue porttitor. Nulla leo magna, egestas quis, vulputate sit amet, viverra id, velit.

Ut lectus lectus, ultricies sit amet, semper eget, laoreet non, ante. Proin at massa quis nunc rhoncus mattis. Aliquam lorem. Curabitur pharetra dui at neque. Aliquam eu tellus. Aenean tempus, felis vitae vulputate iaculis, est dolor faucibus urna, in viverra wisi neque non risus. Fusce vel dolor nec sapien pretium nonummy. Integer faucibus massa ac nulla ornare venenatis. Nulla quis sapien. Sed

tortor. Phasellus eget mi. Cras nunc. Cras a enim.

Quisque nisl. In dignissim dapibus massa. Aenean sem magna, scelerisque nec, ullamcorper quis, porttitor ut, lectus. Fusce dignissim facilisis tortor. Vivamus gravida felis sit amet nunc. Nam pulvinar odio vel enim. Pellentesque sit amet est. Vivamus pulvinar leo non sapien. Aliquam erat volutpat. Ut elementum auctor metus. Mauris vestibulum neque vitae eros. Pellentesque aliquam quam. Donec venenatis tristique purus. In nisl. Nulla velit libero, fermentum at, porta a, feugiat vitae, urna. Etiam aliquet ornare ipsum. Proin non dolor. Aenean nunc ligula, venenatis suscipit, porttitor sit amet, mattis suscipit, magna. Vivamus egestas viverra est. Morbi at risus sed sapien sodales pretium.

Morbi congue congue metus. Aenean sed purus. Nam pede magna, tristique nec, porta id, sollicitudin quis, sapien. Vestibulum blandit. Suspendisse ut augue ac nibh ullamcorper posuere. Integer euismod, neque at eleifend fringilla, augue elit ornare dolor, vel tincidunt purus est id lacus. Vivamus lorem dui, commodo quis, scelerisque eu, tincidunt non, magna. Cras sodales. Quisque vestibulum pulvinar diam. Phasellus tincidunt, leo vitae tristique facilisis, ipsum wisi interdum sem, dapibus semper nulla velit vel lectus. Cras dapibus mauris et augue. Quisque cursus nulla in libero. Suspendisse et lorem sit amet mauris malesuada mollis. Nullam id justo. Maecenas venenatis. Donec lacus arcu, egestas ac, fermentum consecutur, tempus eu, metus. Proin sodales, sem in pretium fermentum, arcu sapien commodo mauris, venenatis consequat augue urna in wisi. Quisque sapien nunc,

varius eget, condimentum quis, lacinia in, est. Fusce facil-
 isis. Praesent nec ipsum.

Suspendisse a dolor. Nam erat eros, congrue eget, sagit-
 tis a, lacinia in, pede. Maecenas in elit. Proin molestie
 varius nibh. Vivamus tristique purus sed augue. Proin
 egestas semper tortor. Vestibulum ante ipsum primis
 in faucibus orci luctus et ultrices posuere cubilia Curae;
 Class aptent taciti sociosqu ad litora torquent per conubia
 nostra, per inceptos hymenaeos. Vestibulum orci enim,
 sagittis ornare, eleifend ut, mattis at, ligula. Nulla mo-
 lestie convallis arcu. Ut eros tellus, condimentum at, so-
 dales in, ultrices vel, nulla.

Duis magna ante, bibendum eget, eleifend eget, suscipit
 sed, neque. Vestibulum in mi sed massa cursus cursus.
 Pellentesque pulvinar mollis neque. Fusce ut enim vitae
 mauris malesuada tincidunt. Vivamus a neque. Mauris
 pulvinar, sapien id condimentum dictum, quam arcu
 rhoncus dui, id tempor lacus justo et justo. Proin sit
 amet orci eu diam eleifend blandit. Nunc erat massa,
 luctus ac, fermentum lacinia, tincidunt ultrices, sapien.
 Praesent sed orci vitae dolor sollicitudin adipiscing. Cras
 a neque. Ut risus dui, interdum at, placerat id, tristique
 eu, enim. Vestibulum ante ipsum primis in faucibus orci
 luctus et ultrices posuere cubilia Curae; Etiam adipiscing
 eros vestibulum dolor. Pellentesque aliquam, diam eget
 eleifend posuere, augue eros porttitor lectus, ac dignissim
 dui metus nec felis. Quisque lacinia. Vestibulum tellus.
 Suspendisse nec wisi. Aenean ac felis. Aliquam ultrices
 metus et nulla.

Praesent sed est non nibh tempus venenatis. Praesent

rhoncus. Curabitur sagittis est sit amet neque. Sed commodo malesuada lectus. Phasellus enim tellus, tempor ut, tristique eu, aliquam eu, quam. Aenean quis quam quis wisi grvida vehicula. Pellentesque a massa a leo pretium rhoncus. Suspendisse ultrices. Donec lacinia malesuada massa. Class aptent taciti sociosqu ad litora torquent per conubia nostra, per inceptos hymenaeos. Donec pretium ornare mauris. Phasellus auctor erat eget enim. Integer scelerisque, felis eu consequat fringilla, lorem wisi ultricies velit, id vehicula purus nulla eget odio. Nullam mattis, diam a rutrum fermentum, odio sapien tristique quam, id mollis tellus quam in odio. Mauris eu sapien. Donec aliquam lorem sit amet lorem pharetra lobortis.

Donec ac velit. Sed convallis vestibulum sapien. Vivamus tempor lacus sed lacus. Nunc ut lorem. Ut et tortor. Nullam varius wisi at diam. Etiam ultricies, dolor sit amet fermentum vulputate, neque libero vestibulum orci, vitae fringilla neque arcu aliquet ante. Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Quisque venenatis lobortis augue. Sed tempor, tellus iaculis pellentesque pharetra, pede dui malesuada mauris, vel ultrices urna mauris ac nibh. Etiam nibh odio, ultricies vehicula, vestibulum vitae, feugiat eleifend, felis. Vivamus pulvinar. Aliquam erat volutpat. Nulla egestas venenatis metus. Nam feugiat nunc quis elit egestas sagittis. Sed vitae felis. In libero arcu, rhoncus in, commodo eget, auctor in, enim. Vivamus suscipit est. Nulla dapibus, magna vel aliquet egestas, massa massa hendrerit lacus, ac rutrum tellus tellus sit amet felis. Cras viverra.

Suspendisse eu nunc. Aliquam dignissim urna sit amet

mauris. Cras commodo, urna ut porttitor venenatis, arcu metus sodales risus, vitae gravida sapien ligula in est. Donec vulputate sollicitudin wisi. Donec vehicula, est id interdum ornare, nibh tellus consectetur justo, a ultrices felis erat at lectus. In est massa, malesuada non, suscipit at, ullamcorper eu, elit. Nam nulla lacus, bibendum sit amet, sagittis sed, tempor eget, libero. Praesent ligula. Suspendisse nulla. Etiam diam. Nulla ante diam, vestibulum et, aliquet ac, imperdiet vitae, urna. Fusce tincidunt lacus vel elit. Maecenas dictum, tortor non euismod bibendum, pede nibh pretium tellus, at dignissim leo eros eget pede. Nulla venenatis eleifend eros. Aenean ut odio dignissim augue rutrum faucibus. Fusce posuere, tellus eget viverra mattis, erat tellus porta mi, at facilisis sem nibh non urna. Phasellus quis turpis quis mauris suscipit vulputate. Sed interdum lacus non velit. Vestibulum ante ipsum primis in faucibus orci luctus et ultrices posuere cubilia Curae;

Vivamus vehicula leo a justo. Quisque nec augue. Morbi mauris wisi, aliquet vitae, dignissim eget, sollicitudin molestie, ligula. In dictum enim sit amet risus. Curabitur vitae velit eu diam rhoncus hendrerit. Vivamus ut elit. Praesent mattis ipsum quis turpis. Curabitur rhoncus neque eu dui. Etiam vitae magna. Nam ullamcorper. Praesent interdum bibendum magna. Quisque auctor aliquam dolor. Morbi eu lorem et est porttitor fermentum. Nunc egestas arcu at tortor varius viverra. Fusce eu nulla ut nulla interdum consectetur. Vestibulum gravida. Morbi mattis libero sed est.

I6

CHAPTER I6

Nam quis enim. Quisque ornare dui a tortor. Fusce consequat lacus pellentesque metus. Duis euismod. Duis non quam. Maecenas vitae dolor in ipsum auctor vehicula. Vivamus nec nibh eget wisi varius pulvinar. Cras a lacus. Etiam et massa. Donec in nisl sit amet dui imperdiet vestibulum. Duis porttitor nibh id eros.

Mauris consectetur, wisi eu lobortis scelerisque, urna nibh feugiat quam, id congue eros justo eget orci. Ut tellus. Maecenas mattis sapien sed eros. Aliquam quis lectus. Donec nec massa ac turpis semper cursus. Etiam consectetur ante vel odio. Aliquam tincidunt felis non dolor. Cras id augue ut nisl pretium placerat. Phasellus sapien sapien, pharetra sed, aliquam nec, suscipit a, nibh. Suspendisse risus. Nulla ut mi eget tellus sollicitudin

euismod. Vestibulum malesuada malesuada dui. Ut at est ac dui aliquam sagittis. Aliquam erat volutpat.

Curabitur ullamcorper est in mauris. Praesent ac massa. Quisque enim odio, lobortis nec, mattis ut, luctus et, mauris. Mauris eu risus. Cum sociis natoque penatibus et magnis dis parturient montes, nascetur ridiculus mus. Duis eu ligula. Nulla vehicula leo tincidunt erat. Maece-
nas et nunc. Sed ut sapien. Vestibulum in est. Vestibulum rhoncus.

Donec metus metus, condimentum eu, accumsan nec, vulputate non, purus. Vestibulum ullamcorper vehic-
ula sapien. Mauris risus odio, hendrerit ac, congue ac, ullamcorper at, odio. Aenean leo justo, commodo vi-
tae, placerat blandit, malesuada vel, sem. Donec sit amet ante eget mauris adipiscing sollicitudin. Curabitur po-
suere sem et leo. Nulla ultricies mauris. Vestibulum ante ipsum primis in faucibus orci luctus et ultrices posuere
cubilia Curae; Fusce sollicitudin augue vel tellus. Viva-
mus mauris eros, pharetra vel, lacinia pretium, egestas a,
nibh. Morbi a ligula.

Donec vitae turpis. Suspendisse porttitor. Mauris ali-
quam purus vitae tellus. Morbi metus diam, tempus ac, cursus ut, ultricies quis, nulla. Praesent nec justo. In lobortis. Donec nec lectus a neque laoreet rhoncus. Quisque in risus nec wisi lacinia ullamcorper. In placerat. Proin facilisis sollicitudin libero. Integer eget neque et pede placerat aliquet. Aliquam purus nulla, pulvinar ut, facilisis quis, sodales sed, magna. Curabitur nulla lectus, rutrum id, bibendum ut, sagittis eget, diam. Sed porta dolor eget est. Integer hendrerit orci. In hac habitasse

platea dictumst.

Ut facilisi. Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Sed pellentesque, turpis sit amet aliquet porta, risus odio venenatis felis, at porta tellus lacus vitae nisl. Donec augue. Quisque consequat, pede laoreet pellentesque posuere, urna sapien tempor justo, eu aliquam tortor nunc id mauris. Fusce pretium, purus facilisi consequat mattis, ligula leo pretium mauris, ac suscipit augue sapien sit amet ipsum. Praesent et ligula eget tortor dapibus blandit. Duis rutrum felis eget dolor. Vestibulum quis elit. Integer dignissim, velit at scelerisque congue, ipsum nulla dignissim dolor, lacinia scelerisque neque erat a mi. Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Quisque ipsum lectus, euismod et, lacinia eu, iaculis eu, pede. Etiam justo quam, cursus ut, vulputate vel, feugiat ut, eros. Fusce eleifend mollis ipsum.

Nulla facilisi. Nunc nec elit. Integer ornare convallis tortor. Proin ac diam. In est sapien, laoreet euismod, mattis a, tincidunt at, risus. Vivamus risus. Vestibulum aliquam, urna aliquam porttitor accumsan, nulla tortor ullamcorper elit, ut consequat augue purus sit amet libero. Vivamus nisl lacus, commodo vel, dignissim ut, vestibulum id, pede. Curabitur malesuada hendrerit libero. Mauris quis dolor in tellus varius posuere. Sed vulputate elit at wisi. Fusce vitae neque. Nulla consectetur, nunc ac eleifend laoreet, mi nulla commodo wisi, vel faucibus ligula lectus ut arcu. Vivamus hendrerit.

Sed varius, nulla vitae tincidunt lobortis, nibh ipsum sollicitudin libero, et commodo tellus massa in neque. Nulla facilisi. Aenean nec lectus. Aliquam fermentum. Duis

ut magna et augue interdum gravida. Morbi elit. Fusce malesuada tempus ipsum. Cum sociis natoque penatibus et magnis dis parturient montes, nascetur ridiculus mus. Mauris iaculis enim non metus. Nullam dui magna, congue et, suscipit sed, aliquam vel, turpis. Quisque ultricies.

Suspendisse feugiat sapien laoreet ante. Integer fringilla, erat eget adipiscing ultrices, nibh dui sollicitudin nunc, in lobortis arcu odio vitae erat. Fusce bibendum ultricies lacus. Mauris eleifend ligula a ante. Etiam faucibus cursus pede. Mauris enim eros, malesuada eu, mattis sit amet, blandit in, nulla. Fusce sit amet purus id mi posuere tincidunt. Mauris sit amet quam vitae quam semper accumsan. Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Nam a justo at quam accumsan euismod. Duis tincidunt tristique risus. Ut vel nibh vel libero varius malesuada. In hac habitasse platea dictumst. Morbi sagittis mattis lorem. Pellentesque metus tellus, rutrum vitae, malesuada et, pharetra accumsan, ante. Quisque ac metus ac nisl gravida pellentesque. Sed dapibus feugiat sapien. Vestibulum nec nunc eget sem aliquam lobortis. Suspendisse aliquam quam quis metus.

Suspendisse in odio. In elit diam, cursus vitae, venenatis in, molestie in, leo. Cras ornare. Nulla libero. Phasellus feugiat mattis libero. Sed vehicula aliquam ligula. Nullam lacinia, felis vel dignissim sodales, enim lectus lobortis diam, quis nonummy mauris odio auctor tortor. Integer in dui nec lacus bibendum ultrices. Etiam odio elit, aliquam et, porttitor id, interdum cursus, elit. Nulla eleifend tempor mauris. In vel arcu quis pede laoreet

vulputate.

Morbi pharetra magna a lorem. Cras sapien. Duis portitor vehicula urna. Phasellus iaculis, mi vitae varius consequat, purus nibh sollicitudin mauris, quis aliquam felis dolor vel elit. Quisque neque mi, bibendum non, tristique convallis, congue eu, quam. Etiam vel felis. Quisque ac ligula at orci pulvinar rutrum. Donec mi eros, sagittis eu, consectetur sed, sagittis sed, lorem. Nunc sed eros. Nullam pellentesque ante quis lectus. Vivamus lacinia, sapien vel fermentum placerat, purus nisl aliquet odio, et porta wisi dui nec nunc. Fusce porta cursus libero.

Quisque eu mi a augue mollis posuere. Donec tincidunt, lorem at vestibulum pulvinar, felis purus nonummy urna, at accumsan purus dui nec leo. Praesent tortor turpis, vehicula in, aliquet ut, dignissim ac, leo. Curabitur sagittis mi id eros. In magna. Sed vitae elit facilisis elit semper sollicitudin. Curabitur convallis tempor nulla. Nullam non turpis a pede sagittis ultrices. Etiam vulputate pede in ligula. Sed a ante id metus pellentesque suscipit. Sed adipiscing justo vitae sapien. Nunc posuere, pede ullamcorper gravida egestas, justo libero tincidunt arcu, vitae pellentesque arcu leo ut mauris. Pellentesque auctor mauris sit amet elit luctus fringilla. Cras sed wisi. Morbi luctus enim vitae tellus. Vivamus venenatis sodales libero.

In hac habitasse platea dictumst. Suspendisse potenti. Nulla pretium sem sit amet nisl. Nulla facilisi. Sed aliquam, turpis sed hendrerit gravida, nunc metus aliquam urna, eget pharetra nibh urna nec lectus. Duis in nisl a nisl commodo facilisis. Nunc placerat risus sed leo. Duis pellentesque porta libero. Praesent et enim. Aenean ul-

lamcorper, ante sit amet fermentum mollis, ligula metus laoreet magna, accumsan accumsan nibh wisi at wisi. Nam tincidunt tempor neque. Maecenas dolor. Donec interdum nisl. Aliquam quam libero, interdum quis, volutpat sed, semper ut, eros. Pellentesque sodales auctor quam. Nullam suscipit massa nec elit. Nullam vulputate.

Aliquam a nulla. Suspendisse suscipit. Etiam lectus ante, interdum sit amet, euismod venenatis, condimentum eu, urna. Etiam at turpis. Cras quis ligula. Cras varius, sapien non pellentesque bibendum, mauris wisi sodales sem, ac commodo mauris neque non felis. Sed sollicitudin tincidunt arcu. Nullam vel lectus sit amet magna tincidunt tempor. Phasellus a ante. Donec et diam.

Proin sit amet augue. Praesent lacus. Donec a leo. Ut turpis ante, condimentum sed, sagittis a, blandit sit amet, enim. Integer sed elit. In ultricies blandit libero. Proin molestie erat dignissim nulla convallis ultrices. Aliquam in magna. Etiam sollicitudin, eros a sagittis pellentesque, lacus odio volutpat elit, vel tincidunt felis dui vitae lorem. Etiam leo. Nulla et justo.

Integer interdum varius diam. Nam aliquam velit a pede. Vivamus dictum nulla et wisi. Vestibulum a massa. Donec vulputate nibh vitae risus dictum varius. Nunc suscipit, nunc nec facilisis convallis, lacus ligula bibendum nulla, ac sollicitudin sapien nisl fermentum velit. Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Nullam commodo dui ut augue molestie scelerisque. Sed aliquet rhoncus tortor. Fusce laoreet, turpis a facilisis tristique, leo mauris accumsan tellus, vitae ornare lacus pede sit amet purus. Sed dignissim velit vitae ligula. Sed sit

amet diam sit amet arcu luctus ullamcorper.

Duis quis velit id elit facilisis luctus. Donec nec elit. Quisque ullamcorper arcu ac felis. Phasellus leo. Pellentesque consequat consequat purus. Ut vel justo at pede facilisis tempor. Integer tempus blandit dolor. Donec eget neque sed elit ultricies molestie. Cras cursus viverra tortor. Cras commodo condimentum diam. Pellentesque interdum malesuada wisi. Suspendisse eu quam. Donec consecutetur. Suspendisse wisi purus, vestibulum at, vehicula vel, congue a, eros. Nulla vulputate dolor at purus.

Suspendisse ac diam sed dui adipiscing pretium. Donec ullamcorper, sapien nec tempor venenatis, enim felis euismod pede, ut auctor lacus lectus sit amet diam. Vestibulum rutrum sem ut ante. Nulla eros. Quisque vitae nisl eget tellus feugiat volutpat. Nam id neque eu quam sodales vehicula. Nam dapibus, nulla eu iaculis placerat, pede est volutpat purus, id iaculis elit elit vel mauris. Donec dui. In hac habitasse platea dictumst. Nunc non quam. Proin euismod egestas eros. Mauris nisl. Sed neque. Phasellus bibendum. Proin ut purus in eros faucibus auctor.

Fusce mollis dui eu leo. Sed sapien augue, porta at, posuere ut, ultrices molestie, est. Vivamus quis pede nec erat placerat tincidunt. Aenean odio dui, facilisis non, vehicula et, bibendum a, libero. Etiam leo turpis, venenatis eleifend, nonummy sit amet, aliquam non, mi. Maecenas eget mi. Sed nec diam. Integer orci tellus, pellentesque nec, bibendum quis, sodales ut, nibh. Duis laoreet aliquet orci. Curabitur sit amet sem sit amet nibh fermentum faucibus. Donec adipiscing, ipsum id fringilla convallis,

elit massa cursus augue, at lobortis massa augue nec ligula.
Proin ac lacus.

Nunc id nulla nec mauris iaculis rutrum. Nunc nisl.
Integer mi. Praesent lorem neque, egestas at, molestie in,
faucibus et, eros. Sed rutrum, ante vitae aliquet tincidunt,
diam elit auctor risus, eu elementum purus turpis eu elit.
Proin ac orci. Integer varius, urna non sollicitudin con-
sequat, massa libero pharetra erat, et venenatis dui orci
eget purus. Aliquam iaculis est eget ipsum. Ut volutpat
velit. Phasellus fringilla. Aliquam mollis tellus vel odio.
Vestibulum ante ipsum primis in faucibus orci luctus et
ultrices posuere cubilia Curae; Vestibulum gravida sapien
sed diam dictum pharetra. Nulla ac odio. Duis vitae me-
tus ut purus feugiat interdum. Duis eros enim, tincidunt
ac, venenatis et, dignissim id, lacus. Curabitur sagittis
dolor nec augue. Sed ultricies mauris. Donec semper,
enim eu vestibulum placerat, justo risus eleifend quam,
ac semper velit pede convallis arcu.

I7

CHAPTER I7

Pellentesque tempus. Fusce tempor euismod nulla. Integer metus quam, semper sit amet, pellentesque sed, ornare sit amet, pede. Sed viverra. Aliquam erat volutpat. Donec tristique. In ac pede ut tortor mattis blandit. Phasellus a nunc. Integer metus. Sed malesuada gravida arcu. Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit.

Phasellus suscipit placerat neque. Duis rutrum. Quisque enim. Proin et erat at augue aliquam aliquam. Mauris porttitor imperdiet lectus. Proin egestas faucibus risus. Praesent pharetra consequat odio. Fusce sed felis et nulla tempor elementum. Nulla eu turpis. Proin posuere. Nullam nonummy nulla sed nulla volutpat consectetur. Vivamus vehicula accumsan eros. Fusce ullamcorper.

Phasellus vehicula consequat mauris. Sed vitae purus. Sed accumsan, felis suscipit auctor fermentum, odio turpis vestibulum risus, vitae mattis metus neque non pede.

Suspendisse mollis erat et risus. Vestibulum et odio eu nisl malesuada dapibus. Morbi ac tortor et magna tincidunt ullamcorper. Ut pellentesque fermentum mi. Etiam sed neque sit amet leo consectetur sagittis. Nulla facilisi. Sed lobortis erat vitae nulla. Duis bibendum ipsum et mi scelerisque dapibus. Fusce nonummy vestibulum orci. Donec a nisl. Integer ac nibh. Pellentesque habitant morbi tristique senectus et netus et malesuada fames ac turpis egestas. Aenean nec nunc sed dui lobortis vestibulum. Praesent metus ligula, auctor vitae, lacinia sed, hendrerit a, felis. Etiam sapien. Proin et sem vitae dolor sodales venenatis. Integer luctus aliquam risus.

Maecenas mi massa, fermentum eu, venenatis et, cursus id, ipsum. Morbi vehicula justo faucibus mauris. Donec non neque. Fusce id mi ut neque tincidunt posuere. Suspendisse quis enim. Cras porttitor. Sed quis velit. Aliquam vel augue at wisi blandit suscipit. Duis ut justo. Class aptent taciti sociosqu ad litora torquent per conubia nostra, per inceptos hymenaeos. Etiam bibendum wisi quis augue. Nulla lorem odio, sollicitudin vitae, vehicula nec, dapibus ultricies, purus. In vitae tellus at odio cursus congue. Quisque tincidunt tempus metus. Aenean et nulla nec dolor dapibus ultricies. Phasellus commodo vulputate arcu. Sed enim. Phasellus quis leo. Aliquam iaculis, turpis nec aliquet rutrum, pede risus porta diam, id ullamcorper erat est sed eros. Fusce ornare.

Suspendisse porta, dolor sed fringilla ultrices, augue

mauris gravis dolor, vel sollicitudin magna dui sit amet nunc. Mauris mollis condimentum risus. Integer ipsum. Quisque malesuada, erat ac dictum pulvinar, magnanisl fermentum ligula, quis euismod mauris felis non diam. Nullam sapien turpis, rutrum vel, condimentum ac, bibendum vulputate, nulla. Vestibulum tortor ipsum, fermentum egestas, placerat ut, vulputate et, wisi. Aliquam erat volutpat. Donec consequat, ligula sit amet tincidunt aliquam, nunc lorem sagittis nunc, a ullamcorper erat ante ac felis. Donec eleifend. Nullam quam leo, lobortis non, condimentum at, tempus consectetur, orci. Quisque ut lorem. Donec nisl. Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Vestibulum ante ipsum primis in faucibus orci luctus et ultrices posuere cubilia Curae; Donec porta, libero eget feugiat posuere, felis arcu pulvinar odio, vel dapibus enim dui nec turpis.

Duis leo. Cras nec odio. Nullam pretium lacinia est. Fusce aliquet, metus et vestibulum lobortis, ante erat vestibulum eros, eu sodales eros turpis id massa. Quisque est. Vivamus eu lacus. Nulla nisl. Nam eros. Aliquam sit amet neque vel magna dictum ultricies. Praesent magna mauris, sollicitudin ac, commodo eu, bibendum sit amet, lectus. Suspendisse potenti. Fusce congue leo quis libero nonummy adipiscing. Vestibulum ante ipsum primis in faucibus orci luctus et ultrices posuere cubilia Curae; Nunc a orci. Ut at erat sit amet nunc scelerisque malesuada. Phasellus odio nisl, porta eget, laoreet nec, vehicula non, risus. Etiam dolor mauris, consectetur eget, tincidunt sed, egestas quis, neque. Ut egestas ante ac libero. Proin mattis volutpat metus.

Sed tempor metus eget wisi. Duis cursus. Nam nunc. Nulla placerat wisi sed est. Aenean risus. Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Proin erat dolor, ultricies a, rutrum sed, posuere eget, metus. Donec sagittis nunc ac tortor. Aliquam erat volutpat. Curabitur consectetur, augue nec viverra eleifend, dolor dolor volutpat orci, dapibus pellentesque eros pede a arcu. Nullam augue. Etiam eget nulla vel mi porta hendrerit. Phasellus cursus scelerisque tortor. Maecenas ut leo.

Donec libero. Quisque vitae est quis dui bibendum suscipit. Fusce leo felis, sagittis non, vehicula ac, ultricies vitae, diam. Aenean congue libero et metus. Nulla convallis libero a lacus. Donec hendrerit lorem sit amet leo. Mauris libero. Pellentesque pulvinar molestie dolor. Proin nibh mauris, ornare at, pretium sit amet, porttitor vel, mi. Pellentesque habitant morbi tristique senectus et netus et malesuada fames ac turpis egestas.

Vestibulum ante ipsum primis in faucibus orci luctus et ultrices posuere cubilia Curae; Aliquam interdum porttitor tortor. Donec ultricies justo eget sapien. Proin ac est. Aliquam erat volutpat. In tempus scelerisque ligula. Morbi scelerisque urna. Duis ac nisl. Donec sed leo. Fusce posuere orci mollis nunc. Sed arcu enim, pharetra nec, aliquam eu, consectetur sit amet, eros. Sed id enim. Etiam mattis est at elit. Pellentesque est risus, pellentesque nec, dignissim vitae, egestas vitae, sapien. Maecenas et eros non libero iaculis facilisis. Mauris porttitor tempor justo. Sed sollicitudin neque nec libero.

Mauris ac ipsum. Duis ultrices erat ac felis. Donec dignissim luctus orci. Fusce pede odio, feugiat sit amet,

aliquam eu, viverra eleifend, ipsum. Fusce arcu massa, posuere id, nonummy eu, pulvinar ut, wisi. Sed dui. Vestibulum nunc nisl, rutrum quis, pharetra eget, congue sed, dui. Donec justo neque, euismod eget, nonummy adipiscing, iaculis eu, leo. Duis lectus. Morbi pellentesque nonummy dui.

Aenean sem dolor, fermentum nec, gravida hendrerit, mattis eget, felis. Nullam non diam vitae mi lacinia consectetur. Fusce non massa eget quam luctus posuere. Aenean vulputate velit. Quisque et dolor. Donec ipsum tortor, rutrum quis, mollis eu, mollis a, pede. Donec nulla. Duis molestie. Duis lobortis commodo purus. Pellentesque vel quam. Ut congue congue risus. Sed ligula. Aenean dictum pede vitae felis. Donec sit amet nibh. Maecenas eu orci. Quisque gravida quam sed massa.

Nunc euismod, mauris luctus adipiscing pellentesque, augue ligula pellentesque lectus, vitae posuere purus velit a pede. Phasellus leo mi, egestas imperdiet, blandit non, sollicitudin pharetra, enim. Nullam faucibus tellus non enim. Sed egestas nunc eu eros. Nunc euismod venenatis urna. Phasellus ullamcorper. Vivamus varius est ac lorem. In id pede eleifend nibh consectetur faucibus. Phasellus accumsan euismod elit. Etiam vitae elit. Integer imperdiet nibh. Morbi imperdiet orci euismod mi.

Donec tincidunt tempor metus. Aenean egestas cursus nulla. Fusce ac metus at enim viverra lacinia. Vestibulum in magna non eros varius suscipit. Nullam cursus nibh. Mauris neque. In nunc quam, convallis vitae, posuere in, consequat sed, wisi. Phasellus bibendum consectetur massa. Curabitur quis urna. Pellentesque a justo.

In sit amet dui eget lacus rutrum accumsan. Phasellus ac metus sed massa varius auctor. Curabitur velit elit, pel-
lentesque eget, molestie nec, congue at, pede. Maecenas
quis tellus non lorem vulputate ornare. Vestibulum ante
ipsum primis in faucibus orci luctus et ultrices posuere
cubilia Curae; Etiam magna arcu, vulputate egestas, ali-
quet ut, facilisis ut, nisl. Donec vulputate wisi ac dolor.
Aliquam feugiat nibh id tellus. Morbi eget massa sit amet
purus accumsan dictum. Aenean a lorem. Fusce semper
porta sapien.

Curabitur sit amet libero eget enim eleifend lacinia. Vi-
vamus sagittis volutpat dui. Suspendisse potenti. Morbi a
nibh eu augue fermentum posuere. Curabitur elit augue,
porta quis, congue aliquam, rutrum non, massa. Integer
mattis mollis ipsum. Sed tellus enim, mattis id, feugiat
sed, eleifend in, elit. Phasellus non purus sed elit viverra
rhoncus. Vestibulum id tellus vel sem imperdiet congue.
Aenean in arcu. Nullam urna justo, imperdiet eget, volut-
pat vitae, semper eu, quam. Sed turpis dui, porttitor ut,
egestas ac, condimentum non, wisi. Fusce iaculis turpis
eget dui. Quisque pulvinar est pellentesque leo. Ut nulla
elit, mattis vel, scelerisque vel, blandit ut, justo. Nulla
feugiat risus in erat.

Curabitur hendrerit. Morbi fringilla enim quis nunc.
Phasellus at dui. Donec commodo augue at nunc. Nunc
in sapien et magna mollis sagittis. Morbi eu elit. Phasellus
lacus. Donec a quam. Etiam pulvinar sapien. Sed nibh
magna, viverra vitae, auctor eget, eleifend nec, lorem. Cur-
abitur fringilla dui a odio. Nunc semper condimentum
arcu. Curabitur vitae lectus sit amet turpis pretium condi-

mentum. Nullam imperdiet mattis neque. Proin eget magna porta erat rhoncus consectetur. Aenean pulvinar erat vitae mi.

In eget turpis non tortor iaculis tincidunt. Ut egestas feugiat magna. Duis enim nibh, gravida vel, nonummy non, sollicitudin ac, enim. Sed in tortor sed tellus eleifend cursus. Morbi a dolor at nibh molestie faucibus. Duis sed wisi. Duis fringilla, dui et malesuada dignissim, elit eros dictum lacus, rhoncus imperdiet pede elit nec tellus. Aenean at ligula eget nulla imperdiet faucibus. Quisque vestibulum lorem ac leo. Sed laoreet neque ut magna.

Aenean eget justo id lorem congue tristique. Maecenas sit amet nunc. Aenean bibendum risus. Nam convallis, mi sed ultrices sodales, metus nibh placerat dui, eu hendrerit erat enim vel libero. Duis placerat sem vitae wisi imperdiet condimentum. Aliquam pellentesque dui ac diam eleifend venenatis. Nulla facilisis posuere sapien. Cras euismod. Praesent ut enim. Aliquam ut ipsum quis urna interdum vehicula. Fusce eget sem. Nullam accumsan ullamcorper turpis.

Integer posuere, metus ac rhoncus auctor, mi tellus scelerisque nunc, venenatis elementum tortor lorem eu erat. Sed consectetur risus vitae orci. Nullam tortor mauris, interdum at, imperdiet in, convallis eget, massa. Aliquam suscipit, magna nec blandit volutpat, lectus neque suscipit nunc, sit amet cursus nisl erat eget risus. Vestibulum leo lectus, accumsan ut, pharetra vel, elementum sed, quam. Maecenas condimentum orci at enim. Maecenas ut nunc. Vivamus pede. Integer vel purus vel mi mollis vestibulum. Sed laoreet ultricies nibh. Suspendisse non

nisl quis ligula fermentum facilisis. Vestibulum sem nibh, porttitor et, fermentum a, ultricies id, augue.

In accumsan convallis metus. Aenean est. Donec pharetra porta odio. Duis nunc nisl, imperdiet ac, tincidunt vitae, varius sit amet, felis. Curabitur wisi. Ut iaculis, nunc in lacinia egestas, elit enim tincidunt turpis, at luctus ipsum augue condimentum metus. Aenean lorem wisi, cursus sit amet, mollis nec, porta ac, augue. Vivamus massa. Praesent rhoncus imperdiet orci. Aenean pharetra dolor ut sapien. Maecenas egestas augue semper dolor.

18

CHAPTER 18

Vestibulum at lectus. Vestibulum dapibus placerat magna. Suspendisse dolor urna, condimentum sit amet, euismod a, adipiscing a, enim. Aliquam erat volutpat. Donec imperdiet dolor non mi. Phasellus magna metus, dictum sit amet, laoreet non, dictum vel, dui. Suspendisse potenti. Nunc turpis risus, porta vel, pharetra id, eleifend vitae, justo. Duis pulvinar dolor sit amet urna. Integer eu eros. Nulla facilisi. Duis dui. Nullam vitae quam. Morbi a nunc in elit sodales euismod. Nunc sed orci. Etiam malesuada metus vitae felis. Suspendisse imperdiet velit in tellus.

Nullam elit orci, condimentum vitae, accumsan quis, gravida non, velit. Morbi pellentesque accumsan elit. Aenean est purus, eleifend ac, dictum at, dignissim sed,

dolor. Vestibulum volutpat sapien quis augue. Maecenas vulputate accumsan sapien. Nam mattis, lacus non iaculis aliquet, mi elit varius lectus, eu malesuada dolor nunc at wisi. Aliquam ligula. Mauris nisl elit, molestie vitae, gravida sit amet, facilisis convallis, enim. Sed urna. Praesent et augue. Fusce pellentesque. Maecenas varius orci eget nisl. Donec tempor rhoncus turpis. Integer nibh. Cras metus erat, tincidunt et, scelerisque quis, bibendum sed, dui. Suspendisse potenti.

Integer ac diam. Nullam porttitor dolor eget metus. Nulla sed metus quis tortor lacinia tempor. Mauris mauris dui, faucibus vitae, aliquet sit amet, placerat a, ante. Nunc placerat tincidunt neque. Mauris egestas dolor ut ipsum cursus malesuada. Curabitur odio. Nunc lobortis. Sed mattis tempor felis. Mauris dolor quam, facilisis at, bibendum sit amet, rutrum ornare, pede. Suspendisse accumsan sagittis velit. Pellentesque varius laoreet lorem. Vivamus egestas sapien id diam.

Integer viverra, felis ac tempus cursus, neque risus interdum turpis, eget venenatis tellus velit in neque. Nulla feugiat luctus tellus. Nam pulvinar lacus id leo. Vestibulum at ligula. Duis laoreet tincidunt enim. Suspendisse at nisl molestie est laoreet laoreet. Suspendisse euismod metus vel nisl. Aenean ullamcorper imperdiet massa. Aliquam nibh. Donec quis erat. Nunc sodales auctor ante.

Nam quis ante. Nullam interdum quam in eros. Sed eleifend libero eu tellus consequat fermentum. Nullam pellentesque risus ut augue. Vestibulum eu tellus. Integer eleifend suscipit urna. Fusce porttitor leo et odio. Vivamus vehicula justo a nisl. In rutrum, purus ut dictum

auctor, dolor velit accumsan dolor, eu convallis augue dui ac lectus. Nullam eleifend pellentesque ligula. Nam quis magna. Donec elementum dapibus erat. Pellentesque vel ipsum nec orci fermentum accumsan. Nunc porta magna eu neque. Nam id erat eu mi aliquet cursus. Morbi ut felis. Vestibulum in ipsum.

Donec vel augue. Morbi a turpis sed libero consequat porta. Quisque lacinia consequat odio. Sed vehicula sollicitudin purus. Vestibulum eget est. In hac habitasse platea dictumst. Sed blandit, tortor a auctor imperdiet, wisi nibh ornare leo, ac dictum nibh enim eu orci. Pellentesque habitant morbi tristique senectus et netus et malesuada fames ac turpis egestas. Aliquam tincidunt ullamcorper justo. Etiam accumsan lacus nec ante. Ut dictum luctus mauris. Ut metus. Maecenas gravida. Proin iaculis. Integer convallis, justo iaculis ullamcorper sollicitudin, lectus neque tincidunt mi, at condimentum sem quam vel diam. Aenean sit amet purus.

Sed justo. Maecenas lacinia, turpis sed commodo congue, odio urna elementum nunc, vitae molestie velit nunc eu sem. Maecenas enim. Proin quis neque nec tortor sollicitudin volutpat. Sed at ante. Sed vitae mauris non ante egestas hendrerit. Cum sociis natoque penatibus et magnis dis parturient montes, nascetur ridiculus mus. In venenatis facilisis magna. Phasellus purus. Cras quis mauris. Aliquam eget magna. Donec rutrum sagittis mi. Morbi elementum, est sit amet sollicitudin feugiat, orci magna semper risus, eu congue nulla metus vel elit. Nunc tempor ornare mi. Integer justo odio, suscipit tincidunt, fermentum eu, tincidunt et, libero. Vestibulum vestibulum

lum, urna et suscipit imperdiet, nulla ante fermentum erat, at laoreet lorem lectus sed metus. Fusce ante sem, posuere in, vehicula a, posuere sed, ante. Phasellus magna. Maecenas sit amet diam. Nunc at nibh sit amet augue tristique grvida.

Aenean adipiscing auctor est. Morbi quam arcu, malesuada sed, volutpat et, elementum sit amet, libero. Duis accumsan. Curabitur urna. In sed ipsum. Donec lobortis nibh. Duis mattis. Sed cursus lectus quis odio. Phasellus arcu. Praesent imperdiet dui in sapien. Vestibulum tellus pede, auctor a, pellentesque sit amet, vulputate sed, purus. Nunc pulvinar, dui at eleifend adipiscing, tellus nulla placerat massa, sed condimentum nulla tellus sed ligula. Nulla vitae odio sit amet leo imperdiet blandit. In vel massa. Maecenas varius dui at turpis. Sed odio.

Quisque aliquam ipsum sed turpis. Pellentesque laoreet velit nec justo. Nam sed augue. Maecenas rutrum quam eu dolor. Fusce consetetuer. Proin tellus est, luctus vitae, molestie a, mattis et, mauris. Donec tempor. Pellentesque habitant morbi tristique senectus et netus et malesuada fames ac turpis egestas. Duis ante felis, dignissim id, blandit in, suscipit vel, dolor. Pellentesque tincidunt cursus felis. Proin rhoncus semper nulla. Ut et est. Vivamus ipsum erat, grvida in, venenatis ac, fringilla in, quam. Nunc ac augue. Fusce pede erat, ultrices non, consequat et, semper sit amet, urna.

Fusce adipiscing justo nec ante. Nullam in enim. Pellentesque felis orci, sagittis ac, malesuada et, facilisis in, ligula. Nunc non magna sit amet mi aliquam dictum. In mi. Curabitur sollicitudin justo sed quam. Aenean im-

perdiet. Vestibulum ante ipsum primis in faucibus orci
luctus et ultrices posuere cubilia Curae; Donec lacinia
nonummy lectus. Proin vel urna. Fusce sit amet orci
ac magna iaculis pharetra. Duis sagittis massa in tellus.
Aenean vel velit vel felis consectetuer pharetra.

19

CHAPTER 19

Morbi sem. Nulla facilisi. Vestibulum ante ipsum primis in faucibus orci luctus et ultrices posuere cubilia Curae; Nulla facilisi. Morbi sagittis ultrices libero. Praesent eu ligula sed sapien auctor sagittis. Class aptent taciti sociosqu ad litora torquent per conubia nostra, per inceptos hymenaeos. Donec vel nunc. Nunc fermentum, lacus id aliquam porta, dui tortor euismod eros, vel molestie ipsum purus eu lacus. Vivamus pede arcu, euismod ac, tempus id, pretium et, lacus. Curabitur sodales dapibus urna. Nunc eu sapien. Donec eget nunc a pede dictum pretium. Proin mauris. Vivamus luctus libero vel nibh.

Fusce tristique risus id wisi. Integer molestie massa id sem. Vestibulum vel dolor. Pellentesque vel urna vel risus ultricies elementum. Quisque sapien urna, blandit

nec, iaculis ac, viverra in, odio. In hac habitasse platea dictumst. Morbi neque lacus, convallis vitae, commodo ac, fermentum eu, velit. Sed in orci. In fringilla turpis non arcu. Donec in ante. Phasellus tempor feugiat velit. Aenean varius massa non turpis. Vestibulum ante ipsum primis in faucibus orci luctus et ultrices posuere cubilia Curae;

Aliquam tortor. Morbi ipsum massa, imperdiet non, consectetur vel, feugiat vel, lorem. Quisque eget lorem nec elit malesuada vestibulum. Quisque sollicitudin ipsum vel sem. Nulla enim. Proin nonummy felis vitae felis. Nullam pellentesque. Duis rutrum feugiat felis. Mauris vel pede sed libero tincidunt mollis. Phasellus sed urna rhoncus diam euismod bibendum. Phasellus sed nisl. Integer condimentum justo id orci iaculis varius. Quisque et lacus. Phasellus elementum, justo at dignissim auctor, wisi odio lobortis arcu, sed sollicitudin felis felis eu neque. Praesent at lacus.

Vivamus sit amet pede. Duis interdum, nunc eget rutrum dignissim, nisl diam luctus leo, et tincidunt velit nisl id tellus. In lorem tellus, aliquet vitae, porta in, aliquet sed, lectus. Phasellus sodales. Ut varius scelerisque erat. In vel nibh eu eros imperdiet rutrum. Donec ac odio nec neque vulputate suscipit. Nam nec magna. Pellentesque habitant morbi tristique senectus et netus et malesuada fames ac turpis egestas. Nullam porta, odio et sagittis iaculis, wisi neque fringilla sapien, vel commodo lorem lorem id elit. Ut sem lectus, scelerisque eget, placerat et, tincidunt scelerisque, ligula. Pellentesque non orci.

Etiam vel ipsum. Morbi facilisis vestibulum nisl. Prae-

sent cursus laoreet felis. Integer adipiscing pretium orci. Nulla facilisi. Quisque posuere bibendum purus. Nulla quam mauris, cursus eget, convallis ac, molestie non, enim. Aliquam congue. Quisque sagittis nonummy sapien. Proin molestie sem vitae urna. Maecenas lorem. Vivamus viverra consequat enim.

Nunc sed pede. Praesent vitae lectus. Praesent neque justo, vehicula eget, interdum id, facilisis et, nibh. Phasellus at purus et libero lacinia dictum. Fusce aliquet. Nulla eu ante placerat leo semper dictum. Mauris metus. Curabitur lobortis. Curabitur sollicitudin hendrerit nunc. Donec ultrices lacus id ipsum.

Donec a nibh ut elit vestibulum tristique. Integer at pede. Cras volutpat varius magna. Phasellus eu wisi. Praesent risus justo, lobortis eget, scelerisque ac, aliquet in, dolor. Proin id leo. Nunc iaculis, mi vitae accumsan commodo, neque sem lacinia nulla, quis vestibulum justo sem in eros. Quisque sed massa. Morbi lectus ipsum, vulputate a, mollis ut, accumsan placerat, tellus. Nullam in wisi. Vivamus eu ligula a nunc accumsan congue. Suspendisse ac libero. Aliquam erat volutpat. Donec augue. Nunc venenatis fringilla nibh. Fusce accumsan pulvinar justo. Nullam semper, dui ut dignissim auctor, orci libero fringilla massa, blandit pulvinar pede tortor id magna. Nunc adipiscing justo sed velit tincidunt fermentum.

Integer placerat. Pellentesque habitant morbi tristique senectus et netus et malesuada fames ac turpis egestas. Sed in massa. Class aptent taciti sociosqu ad litora torquent per conubia nostra, per inceptos hymenaeos. Phasellus tempus aliquam risus. Aliquam rutrum purus at metus.

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CHAPTER 20

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